Challenges for The Second Term of the Bush Administration: A View from Russia

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The Second Term: Continuity or Correction?

Inherited Challenges

When the Bush administration came into power in 2001, it faced a number of main foreign and security challenges. For a decade since the end of the Cold War the United States failed to adapt to new threats, and its international behavior was considerably motivated by traditional Cold War paradigms. That led to continuing U.S. excessive military deployments in Europe, and its military planning and force structure were still aimed at conducting a large-scale war on the European theater. In terms of foreign policy, the Clinton administration neglected emerging new threats for American security originating primarily from the Greater Middle East, and paid too much attention to preventing reemergence of the Soviet Union. Sometimes the United States tended to promote projects in cooperation with sources of new threats to themselves in order to reduce Russia's influence. For instance, in the mid-1990s Washington debated the construction of a pipeline from Turkmenistan through a Taliban-controlled part of Afghanistan in order to break the Russian monopoly on exporting natural gas from that country. In this context, September 11, 2001 has dramatically demonstrated a failure of the U.S. foreign and security policy in 1990s.

The United States has faced gradual erosion of its key transatlantic alliance relationship. Several leading European powers, while seeking to maintain allied relations with Washington, have consistently developed their own separate European identity and sought equal partnership in global leadership, which the United States wanted to perform unilaterally or, at best, with conceding junior partners. Enlarging NATO was not able to prevent widening of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as emerging cooperative/competitive security relations between the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union.

In East Asia, Washington was also challenged by eroding alliances. To the contrary to Europe the erosion was not a result of an accomplished mission of defeating the opponent. Much worse, it was stimulated by reducing confidence in the credibility of the U.S. security umbrellas in times of tectonic geoeconomic and geopolitical changes in the region. Moreover, relative weakening of the U.S. positions took place in a time of rapid elevation of a power that somebody in the United States sees as potential key global competitor.

Finally, the United States had to find the right balance between unilateral actions, loose coalitions, and formal international institutions and legal regimes. Difficulties in gaining consensus in negotiating multilateral legal arrangements, acting through established formal institutions and within inadequately flexible, imperfect and sometimes outdated legal regimes, moved the United States towards more unilateral and active policies. It seemed that the unchallengeable United States might have allowed the luxury to act whenever necessary and as it desires, without taking into account the complaints of friends and the empty threats of enemies.

Were the Challenges Adequately Addressed During the First Term?

The first term of the Bush administration gave answers on some challenges, kept some difficulties unsolved, and made other problems potentially even more complicated. After September 11 the administration has rightly realized that it faces very new phenomena, which require both a different response and attention to a different region than during the Cold War. Washington has commenced a comprehensive reevaluation of its military presence overseas, retreating from focusing on a large-scale war in Europe and deciding to move its forces closer to the region of the new primary security concern. This was, probably, the major achievement of the administration, which moved the U.S. policy towards better realism and fighting with real new security challenges.

At the same time, the first Bush administration overreacted on what the Republicans perceived as the impotence of multilateral institutions and legal norms. During its first year of power, the Bush administration destroyed several important international regimes. It withdrew the U.S. signature under the Roman Statute outlining responsibilities of the UN International Criminal Court, refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and torpedoed talks on concluding a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. After short notice, Washington also unilaterally withdrew from the U.S.-Russian ABM Treaty. It prevented the entry into force of another important bilateral arms control agreement—the START II. Its replacement, the 2002 U.S.-Russian Moscow Treaty, in fact, is no more than a fig leaf aimed at camouflaging a lack of willingness of the Bush administration to pursue deep strategic nuclear reductions and continuing a substantive strategic arms control process with Russia at all.

The new U.S. unilateralism has affected even such long-term pillars of the American security policy as NATO. During the war in Afghanistan the United States did not make any attempt to involve the Alliance as an institution in the operation. Here, Washington probably learned lessons from the 1999 air campaign against Yugoslavia. “The war by committee,” which required approval for hitting any target by all 19 (at that time) NATO ambassadors,

had significantly restrained freedom of action for the U.S. military, who played the leading role during the raids. To that extent, the 2002 "big bang" expansion of NATO became possible due to marginalisation of its primary mission in U.S. eyes. Concerns about difficulties in defending territories of several new members, like the Baltic states, which self-deterred the enlargement before, became not very relevant anymore since Russia has no longer been perceived as a primary threat to the security of the United States and its allies, and NATO was not considered as a primary tool of U.S. military involvement overseas.

A smooth initial phase of the U.S.-led operation in Afghanistan together with willingness of the U.S. public to accept relatively significant American human war-time losses after September 11, created an illusion of almost unlimited U.S. might. It was accompanied by fanfares, where the United States was characterized as the modern Roman Empire, obliged to bring democracy to underdeveloped parts of the world, and benevolent superpower, not seeking dominance and occupation of the others. That created a favorable domestic environment for invading Iraq with the proclaimed goal to remove Saddam Hussein from power. This intervention was made in circumvention of the UN Security Council, where in March 2003 the United States and its allies failed to gain support of a simple majority of the Council members for the draft resolution authorizing the war.

As is now clear, the war in Iraq has aggravated all four challenges the Bush administration inherited from its predecessor. Iraq has not only ceased to represent a source of threat, but has become a new front of the war on terror. This, together with torpedoing several important international regimes, has also demonstrated that the administration failed to find the right balance between unilateral and legal approaches, and moved too far on the road towards unilateralism, likely to the detriment of its own interests. As a result, while the U.S. enjoyed broad international support in Afghanistan, in Iraq the U.S.-led coalition is represented by less than three dozen nations, some of whom have already deserted or are ready to do so at the first face-saving occasion. It is worth mentioning that a similar number of states supported the Soviet invasion to Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Moving the U.S. priorities to the Greater Middle East has objectively affected the second challenge, which developed due to internal dynamics and was not under U.S. control. Since the end of the Cold War, European security has lost its central role for global security, and downsizing and redeployment of the U.S. troops in Europe—and from it—was inevitable and simply a matter of time. The United States, facing a lack of personnel for missions in the Greater Middle East, had to reduce its involvement in European peacekeeping and, albeit reluctantly, transferred these missions from NATO under the command of the European Union (as happened with missions in Macedonia and Bosnia). Through this, Washington had to accept the increasing role of the EU military and political wing, despite its coming into

certain competition with NATO.

This was accompanied by other developments, which were beyond the control of the Bush administration. Successful introduction of the euro currency in 2002 probably had the most important long-lasting effect. Emergence of the second global hard currency might mean the near end of the U.S. dominance in international financial markets. Secondly, the EU enlargement, synchronized with NATO's, in the longer run will also have a greater effect on the attitudes of the new members. Recently pro-American, they would have to harmonize their political and security preferences with their economic interests, which would be increasingly associated with their EU partners. The integration into the EU is deeper than the integration into NATO, since the former affects nearly all aspects of economic, financial, legal and social life, and increasingly involves political, military and cultural sectors of the member-states.

To that extent, the transatlantic disagreements over Iraq and international regimes represented a symptom of the decease, rather than the decease itself. They only triggered underwater changes, which were in place for years anyway. The disagreements inflicted damage to NATO, but they accelerated consolidation of the EU military institutions separate from the North Atlantic Alliance. In order to heal the cracks emerged inside the EU, the pro-U.S. member-states had to accept the establishment of a small EU military headquarter, separate from NATO, as well as to agree with the draft European Constitution, containing provisions on the independent and common EU foreign, defense, and security policies.

In East Asia the developments were more complicated and, potentially, more challenging. When the Republicans returned to power, some observers expected that China might quickly occupy a vacant place as the chief competitor to the United States. This is why, like Moscow, Beijing was likely not unhappy to see that instead the U.S. attention has shifted away to the Greater Middle East. That shift provoked a lack of attention to the region by the Bush administration, which, to the contrary to Europe, might become a source of traditional military and geopolitical threat to the United States and its allies.

The first Bush administration has a mixed record on its commitment to strengthening the U.S. alliances in the Western Pacific. By promoting missile defense cooperation with Japan, it probably partially alleviated concerns in Tokyo on the credibility of the U.S. security umbrella in the case of the threat of a missile attack from the continent. However, it remains unclear whether this cooperation was motivated primarily by a desire to consolidate the U.S.-Japanese security alliance, or by attempts to gain international support for the U.S.'s own missile defense program, which still faces criticism both internationally and domestically.

In relations with South Korea the record of the Bush administration was negative. The

United States not only withdrew approximately one tenth of the overall U.S. military contingency deployed on the Korean Peninsula for their redeployment to Iraq, but the Pentagon initiated potentially divisive talks with Seoul on further considerable reductions of the U.S. troops in the midst of the unresolved North Korean nuclear crisis. That not only sent the wrong message to Pyongyang, but also put in question the credibility of the U.S. security guarantees to South Korea, irrespective of whether the actions of the Bush administration were motivated by a mistake or by a fundamentally reduced interest in involvement in East Asian security.

More Homogeneous Administration?

It might be too early to make final judgments on the foreign and security policy of the Bush administration during its second term. New appointments for top positions have not been completed, and debates on new nominations are not over. The personalities would not change the political course radically, but they might contribute important nuances. So far, it seems that some people's hopes that the second Bush administration would be more moderate than the first one were likely premature. During the 2004 elections Mr. Bush received a much more solid mandate from the American people than four years before. He outflanked his challenger by several million votes, while in 2000, due to peculiarities of the U.S. electoral system, he received less votes than his Democratic opponent. The Republicans confirmed a comfortable majority in both houses of the Congress, too. In other words, the administration has all the grounds to believe that its political course, including the war on terror, gained wide approval during the elections, and there are no reasons to correct it, at least until after the interim congressional elections to be held in 2006.

Personnel changes in the administration might be indicative of that. Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, who was considered as the main highly positioned dove in Washington, has resigned and will be replaced by more hawkish Presidential National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. As for two other major hawks, Vice President Dick Cheney and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, the former, it seems, remains the strongest Vice President in modern U.S. history, and the latter will keep his position for the time being. The balance of power around the President could be affected by the weak health of the Vice President, which in turn might undermine bureaucratic support for Mr. Rumsfeld, who was the former boss of Mr. Cheney and is very close to him. However, this option deserves medical rather than political analysis.

Still, the intriguing question is who will replace Ms. Rice as National Security Advisor, and who will be nominated as Deputy Secretary of State. If the positions are filled by hawkish

figures, the doves' defeat will be complete. If moderates are nominated to these posts, they might play a role similar to that played by Mr. Powell during the administration's first term. Together with the split between traditional conservatives and neo-cons that option could hypothetically lead to certain corrections, although they might be not very likely and significant anyway.

Challenges for the Second Term

At the same time, a more homogeneous and hawkish administration will have to operate in a much less favorable international environment than it faced four years ago. Considerable U.S. political, financial and military commitment to Iraq without any visible— and feasible— short term exit strategy would keep the issue central for the administration, at least for the coming months, if not years. U.S. foreign and security policy decision-making has traditionally concentrated on solving a single major task. Other goals have been either subordinated to the main one, or insufficient attention has been paid for them. For example, during the first term of the Bush administration, this might be seen in the straightforward and rather uncreative approach to solving North Korea's nuclear problem.

The situation is aggravated by the physical inability of the United States to perform any other large-scale military operations as long as its forces remain engaged in missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Developments in both countries require significant foreign military presence there in the foreseeable future. So far, no other nation or coalition of nations is capable or willing to replace the Americans in those failed states. Internal disagreements prevented NATO from showing its flag in Iraq. In Afghanistan, the NATO-led mission demonstrated the inability of that alliance to conduct large-scale counter–guerilla operations. While NATO-commanded forces are concentrated in the capital city of Kabul and a few other major and relatively safe towns, the U.S. forces under American national command, in quantities significantly larger than ISAF, bear almost the whole burden of fighting against pro-Taliban guerillas in rural areas.

U.S. withdrawal without a certain degree of stability in Iraq and Afghanistan, which could be portrayed as a success, and establishing governments strong enough to survive a reasonable period of time after withdrawal of U.S. forces, would send the wrong message to anti-American actors all over the world. They might come to the conclusion that the United States has surrendered and victory over Washington is achievable. That could trigger more violence on a wider scale aimed at the U.S., its allies and interests. In the worst case of U.S. withdrawal, which would give the impression of defeat, a new version of post-Vietnam syndrome might emerge. A traumatized superpower would retreat to the fortress of North

America to adopt isolationist foreign and security policy attitudes. As a result, the whole international security system could be dramatically shaken.

Therefore, in the absence of dramatic events, one can expect a significant degree of inertia in the policy of the second Bush administration in the coming months and, perhaps the next couple of years. Being incapable of large-scale military actions, the administration, even if it still had an appetite for military action after the nightmare in Iraq, would have to limit itself by inflicting surgical strikes against targets in problematic countries, for example, in order to destroy facilities used by terrorists, or related to programs on developing weapons of mass destruction. In the cases of North Korea and Iran, the United States would keep significant self-deterrence against even such limited attacks. Reportedly, when the Bush administration decided to invade Iraq, it simultaneously intended to solve North Korean and Iranian nuclear problems by non-military methods. Inflicting surgical strikes against potential WMD-related targets in those two countries might lack military sense, since the United States obviously does not possess a complete targeting list as it had in Iraq. Under those circumstances, there would be no confidence in the successful destruction of the facilities causing concern. At the same time, the scale of retaliation might be unpredictable. The North Koreans may already possess crude untested nuclear device(s), and the Iranians are capable of making life for the U.S.-led coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan even more difficult than it is now.

Regarding the major U.S. political initiative aimed at solving the Iranian nuclear issue, the Bush administration would be pressed to do so only if European mediation collapses. Looking at European efforts from a distance would help Washington to avoid making difficult decisions, which might provoke divisive debates inside the administration between neo-conservatives and proponents of a more moderate approach. But if the Europeans fail and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue, the United States might come to the forefront with some political initiative. It could be an offer for multilateral talks, as in the case of North Korea, or the U.S. might propose substantive bilateral dialogue. Relative weakening of the neo-cons in Washington's corridors of power, together with the need to involve Iran in political settlement in Iraq and Afghanistan would not completely exclude such a scenario.

Conversely, in the case of North Korea the Bush administration cannot achieve an effective roll back of the North Korea nuclear program unless it possesses sufficient political will to offer Pyongyang a structured choice: what specifically North Korea could gain in exchange for its concessions in the nuclear and missile fields. It is necessary since Washington lacks military clout against North Korea as long as wars in the Middle East continue. Likewise, the Chinese are perhaps not ready to repeat their pressure on Pyongyang without the prospect of an incentive provided for the North by the U.S. Beijing's pressure did

not change the DPRK's tough position, but opened prospects for China to lose its influence over the North.

In theory, the United States might threaten to increase pressure against North Korea by intercepting its ships and airplanes in international waters and airspace under the umbrella of the Proliferation Security Initiative. However, it would be easier if the North Koreans carried out some dramatic action that met with broad international condemnation. If U.S. action was seen as unprovoked by Pyongyang, Washington itself might face widespread disappointment in the region, with several important regional actors possibly refusing to cooperate.

Therefore, the likely option for the Bush administration would be to maintain its recent, fragile modus vivendi—North Korea continues negotiating and refraining from nuclear and long-range missiles tests, the United States participates in non-substantive talks, and other countries separate development of their bilateral relations with Pyongyang from the nuclear issue. But the price of that "do little" policy might be rather high —further losing credibility in the eyes of some important regional headquarters.

Generally speaking, the U.S. return to East Asia is quite realistic. New traditional threats to the U.S. security might come from there. However, it requires understanding from the U.S. security establishment. So far, it remains too committed to the war on terror originating in the Greater Middle East. The understanding depends upon the balance of forces between the neo-cons, who are too committed to Greater Middle East priorities, and traditional conservatives, some of whom have been traditionally bound up in Taiwan's interests. So far, despite a certain split in Washington between the groups, a more homogeneous second Bush administration would try to solve the Iraqi issue initially, and then start to deal with other problems. East Asia would probably become the next area of U.S. concern if the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan come to a reasonable conclusion.

However, the European dimension is more problematic. It could determine future U.S. global status far more than any developments in other regions. But that would be made through peaceful, non-violent means. It seems that European institutions and the United States have found a provisional modus vivendi. The EU needs time to consolidate its post-enlargement power after gaining internal consensus over its independent defense policy. It also needs some time to teach new members about European values, which do not necessarily coincide with U.S. goals. In turn, the United States feels a responsibility to heal wounds inflicted by the disagreements over Iraq. That would motivate the second Bush administration to launch an initiative aimed at appeasing European concerns. That could be a "multilateralist" initiative delivered to the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, which remains popular among European politicians. At the same time, Washington might be tempted to punish the Europeans for their search for independence.

Russia's Perspective on the Second Term

Why the Kremlin Prefers Republicans

Re-election of U.S. President George W. Bush was expected and desired by the Kremlin. On several occasions, Russia's President Vladimir V. Putin expressed his support for Mr. Bush. At the last moment before the U.S. election he went so far as to say that if President Bush was not be re-elected it would be a victory "for the terrorists." It is unlikely that Mr. Putin's support brought any significant additional votes for Mr. Bush, but his position was quite indicative and demonstrated the fact that Moscow was traditionally enjoyed better relations with U.S. Republican administrations than with Democratic ones.

Indeed, if one looks at history one finds that since the end of World War II, the Kremlin has had better relations with Republicans than with Democrats. Under the presidency of Democrat Harry Truman U.S.-Soviet relations rapidly slid into the Cold War. Conversely, under Republican Dwight Eisenhower they slowly thawed and for the first time a Soviet leader stepped on U.S. soil. Again, under Democrat John Kennedy, the U.S. and the Soviet Union came closer to nuclear war than ever before, and although relations recovered somewhat under Lyndon Johnson, they still remained overshadowed by Vietnam. In contrast, Republican Richard Nixon achieved a real breakthrough and détente between East and West flourished for several years. During his presidency, a U.S. leader for the first time in history paid an official visit to Moscow. Under Jimmy Carter, once again relations seriously deteriorated, détente ceased to flourish and the two powers permitted hostile rhetoric to dominate their agenda. At the same time, under three consecutive Republican administrations in the 1980s and early 1990s, U.S.-Soviet relations reached their peak during the whole post-World War II period.

After the Soviet collapse the trend continued. A brief honeymoon, which both countries enjoyed in 1992 under the presidency of George Bush Sr., quickly evaporated during the initial years of the Democratic Clinton administration. When the Democrats left office in 2000, U.S.-Russian relations were still deeply affected by disagreements over the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. Moreover, some experts believed that the West and Russia were very close to direct military conflict, when Russia's paratroopers set off on a march from Bosnia to Kosovo's Pristina airport in June 1999 and seized it before NATO forces reached it. To the surprise of many observers, relations rapidly improved when Republicans returned to power in 2001. For the first time since World War II, Moscow and Washington have characterized their relationship as allies in certain areas, such as the war on terror.

Certainly, these historical parallels could be mere coincidence. However, there are

important nuances in the foreign policies adopted by U.S. Republicans and Democrats, which are important for the Russians. First, the Democrats rely more than the Republicans on lower-middle class and minority voters. This makes them more sensitive to human rights: for relatively poor people and U.S.-based minorities, including intellectuals, defending human rights abroad means demonstration of solidarity with their foreign counterparts. After Carter, the subject became one the most important foreign policy priorities of Democratic administrations. For Soviets and, after a short break, for Russians, human rights remain a sensitive issue. In the modern context, the Kremlin worries that after a return to power the Democrats will increase pressure on Russia on such delicate issues as Chechnya, freedom of the media and relations between the authorities and Russian business.

Secondly, minorities of Central and Eastern European origin are relatively more represented among the Democrats. Many of them maintain historical prejudices toward Russia, since lands of their ancestors' origin suffered over many long centuries of interacting with that country. Many of them emotionally perceive Russia as an endemically repressive and expansionist power, which should be thrown as far as possible from Europe, and her recovery should not be permitted. Under Clinton, these attitudes have contributed to specific accents in U.S. policy. For instance, they can be seen in the policy "Ukraine first" in the post-Soviet space. In Moscow it was perceived as an attempt to keep Ukraine as far as possible from Russia, and using it as a leading force in building up anti-Russian groups among post-Soviet states. Generally, the Clinton administration has devoted a lot of energy to prevent even modest trends towards increasing economic, political and military cooperation between Russia and other former Soviet republics.

In contrast, for the Bush administration Ukraine was not as important as it was for the Democrats. During the recent crisis in the Ukrainian presidential elections, Mr. Bush himself refrained from making tough statements and clearly distanced himself from taking too intrusive a line towards Ukraine. Also, during his first term the U.S. came to the conclusion that further weakening of Russia would be counter-productive and contradictory to U.S. interests because of concerns about Moscow's continuing ability to manage its still huge stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, their materials and delivery vehicles, and due to worries of a geopolitical nature. Among other things, this has led to alleviating U.S. pressure on Russia's policy in the "near abroad" and policies of other post-Soviet states towards cooperation with Russia.

Thirdly, Democrats tend to pursue more multilateralist foreign and security policies, while Republicans do not hesitate to use unilateralist options whenever they think they are more expedient. Moscow took into account the fact that U.S. debates on NATO eastward expansion started in 1993, immediately after the Democrats came to power. In contrast, the

Bush administration has marginalized NATO in U.S.-led overseas military operations and preferred to rely on more easily managed coalitions with willing nations. For Russia, whose prospects of entering NATO remain almost zero, there are no reasons to regret such changes in U.S. priorities. Indeed, under Mr. Bush the North Atlantic Alliance has expanded far to the East and absorbed Baltic states, once a part of an inner Soviet empire. But that enlargement did not camouflage the overall weakening of the Alliance.

It also did not go unnoticed in the Kremlin that while the Republican President campaigned under the slogan of continuing war on terror, his Democratic counterpart stressed other needs and obviously did not believe that fighting with terror should be characterized as the "war." It was probably the largest difference between the two candidates during the campaign, and maybe the most important for the Russians. Since 2001 the United States and Russia have had a common enemy—terrorists, primarily represented by Islamic fundamentalists and originating from the Greater Middle East. Fighting with them has become the most important common ground for the bilateral relationship, and the primary source of recent rapprochement between Moscow and Washington. Should U.S. policy change priorities and downgrade the role of the war on terror, Russia would lose the main common interest with the United States, and relations might quickly slide back to where they were under the Clinton administration.

On a tactical level, the Kremlin respected the consistency of Bush administration policy. Russian leaders admitted that Mr. Bush has always fulfilled his promises, even when the Russians did not like them. For instance, in 2001 the administration consistently informed Moscow that the U.S.-Russian Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty would survive for months, not years. At that time, Moscow did not believe that, hoping that the phraseology was a part of poker diplomacy, and that in practice the Bush administration would not be brave enough to withdraw from the Treaty unilaterally in the midst of international irritation. Despite Russia's objection to certain U.S. actions, at least under the Republicans it faced more consistent and predictable U.S. policy. It was in sharp—and positive—contrast with the foreign policy zigzags of the previous Clinton Presidency.

Under Clinton, Washington's attitude towards the ABM Treaty changed several times. Initially, it scrapped the Strategic Defense Initiative, a beloved child of the Republicans in the 1980s and early 1990s and placed emphasis on non-strategic missile defenses. When the Russians accepted, not without problems, the U.S. approach on demarcation between strategic and non-strategic defenses, Clintonians let the Russians know that they would not submit agreements for U.S. ratification. In 1999 the administration made a volte-face, and approached Russia with a proposal to modify the ABM Treaty in order to permit the United States to deploy larger scale defenses than were permitted by the Treaty. In 2000, after

unsuccessful bilateral consultations and flight tests of missile interceptors, Clinton refused to sanction developing missile defenses beyond the Treaty limits. Although that decision was welcomed by Treaty supporters, it sent the wrong message to Moscow: all threats to withdraw from the Treaty, should Russia disagree to modify the document, appeared to be no more than bluff. What was even more important, the zigzags did not provide any opportunity for achieving long-lasting negotiated deals. The agreements would either face criticism in Congress and would fail to come into force, or the administration itself could change its policy shortly after the deal was concluded.

Like many other Europeans, Russia is concerned by the eagerness of the Bush administration to use unilateral military force for achieving its goals. Its willingness to sideline some international institutions where Moscow plays a role, like the United Nations, also provokes disappointment. The Russians also do not share a simplistic—as they perceive it—approach to world affairs demonstrated by an artificial and straightforward vision of the "axis of evil." However, on balance, the Kremlin probably thinks that continuation of Bush administration policy for another four years would better suit Moscow's interests. The United States would continue its war on terror, which would mean less American criticism of the Russian operation in Chechnya and continued fighting against remnant Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

The U.S.-Russian Agenda For The Second Term

After "civilizing" the Central and Eastern European geopolitical space, which might have become a vacuum following the Soviet collapse, Western institutions have come to exert an influence on the immediate vicinity of the post-Soviet area. Russia still perceives the area as key to its vital security interests. Although the United States and other Western nations are trying to avoid demonstrating the area as their sphere of influence, they actively promote their values and interests there. Recent elections in Ukraine demonstrated the clash of Russian and Western interests in that country. It seems that the final defeat of the pro-Russian presidential candidate in Ukraine might have long-term consequences for relations between Moscow and Western capitals, including Washington.

The Russians did not hide their disappointment at the U.S. and other Western countries' penetration into the post-Soviet space. For instance, they complained, that U.S. military presence in Central Asia will continue indefinitely. However, so far Moscow has done everything possible in order to avoid direct confrontation with the United States. This has permitted relatively smooth U.S.-Russian cooperation in other areas, including managing several regional conflicts and global governance.

Attempts to incorporate some former republics into NATO, starting with Ukraine, might change the existing status quo. Even if Moscow tries to close its eyes to further enlargement, the Ukrainian accession could meet fierce resistance from a considerable section of the population of that divided nation. According to public opinion polls, for the majority of Ukrainians, relations with Russia are more important than the accession of their country to NATO and even the EU. If broad public protests occur, it would be very difficult for Moscow to pretend that nothing is happening.

Another potential trouble spot is Moldova—a small state squeezed between Ukraine and Romania. Its Russophone eastern province bordering Ukraine, the Dniester Republic, has enjoyed de facto independence since the Soviet collapse. Until recently, both Russia and Ukraine resisted attempts by the central government in Chisinau to return the rebel republic by use of force. There are concerns in Moscow that the new pro-Western president in Kiev will change Ukrainian policy towards Moldova and could participate in pressuring the Dniester Republic to accept Moldovan unification under conditions of the Moldovan central authorities. Such pressure might provoke hostilities, which will most likely negatively affect relations between Moscow and the West, including the United States.

Another challenge to U.S.-Russia relations could result from the planned redeployment of U.S. forces in Europe. Moscow would understand if the troops were redeployed to Romania and Bulgaria, closer to the Greater Middle East. But the appearance of U.S. military outposts in Poland, and especially Baltic states, could trigger a nervous reaction and even countermeasures, possibly including a change in the deployment mode of tactical nuclear weapons.

The feeling of inevitable clash between Russia and the West over the post-Soviet space has already stimulated some Russian analysts to speculate on the need to elaborate a long-term strategy aimed at resisting what is perceived as Western expansionism into Russia's backyard. So far, the basic elements of that strategy remain unclear, but every time relations between Russia and the West deteriorate, Moscow starts looking at Beijing. Although Russia tends to use its links with China as a diplomatic chip in its dialogue with Washington, one has to admit that there has been unprecedented rapprochement between Russia and China since the Soviet collapse. Relations are developing in all fields. In 2004 China became Russia's second largest foreign trade partner, and for more than decade it has absorbed the majority of Russian arms sales. In 2005 joint Sino-Russian military maneuvers are planned, and they will be held on Chinese territory. Until recently, Moscow demonstrated restraint in its energy export to China. However, if relations with the EU also deteriorate because of competition for the Soviet legacy, Russia might be more interested in diversifying its energy export, which now primarily goes to the EU countries.

Another possible element of the strategy might be to refuse to cooperate with the United States. It would probably have little effect on such areas of common interest as the war on terror and countering proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. But it could include several regional issues, like Iraq, Iran, North Korea and, if things go too far, even Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the worst-case scenario is not inevitable. Since the Soviet collapse Moscow has gained considerable experience in managing working relations with the United States despite all existing disagreements. It is also likely that the Bush administration would not be a frontrunner in competition with Russia over Ukraine and Moldova. The recent Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that Washington permitted European institutions, like the EU, NATO, and OSCE to play a leading role in promoting Western interests in that newly independent state. If the policy continues, and that is not unlikely, Russia's anger would be directed at Europe, and not the United States.

Although disagreements over the post-Soviet space might determine the U.S.-Russian agenda during the second term of the Bush administration, both countries face several other difficult issues. In 2009 the START I Treaty will expire. This remains the only effective agreement which provides verification and accounting procedures in a strategic nuclear area. The 2002 Moscow Treaty is based on the START I procedures and without it the document will become non-verifiable. Recently, the Bush administration has not shown interest in strategic nuclear dialogue with the Russians. But sometime in 2006 or 2007 it will have to decide on whether it needs to negotiate new transparency arrangements with Moscow, or whether it is not interested in them anymore. In their turn, the Russians will have to reach a conclusion on whether they can permit themselves the luxury of accepting U.S. inspectors in their strategic nuclear bases. Usually, the country with inferior forces is less inclined to accept intrusive transparency regimes, because it perceives that they might increase their vulnerability.

In 2006 the U.S.-Russian 1999 Umbrella Agreement will expire. The document regulates U.S. assistance for disarmament and non-proliferation in Russia, which is known as the Nunn-Lugar program. So far, the sides have not even started negotiating it. Although it is expected that the talks will commence later this year, they will not necessarily bring results. The Russians want to change some provisions they have accepted in previous agreements. One of them is immunity of foreign contractors from damage liability. Moscow insisted on limited liability since it worries that complete immunity would encourage the contractors to neglect safety measures. The United States wants to maintain the provision. The disagreement was so strong that two smaller agreements in the area have not been re-negotiated in 2003 due to the sides not reaching a deal on the liability issue. Probably because of this, the 1999 document still remains non-ratified by the Russian parliament. If Russia and the United States fail to negotiate the new agreement, the future of the whole

Nunn-Lugar program, which is the biggest element of the G-8 Global Partnership initiative, will come under question.

During the first Bush administration, cooperation in energy issues was considered as one of the most promising aspects of bilateral relations. Plans were discussed on delivering Russian crude oil or liquefied natural gas to the United States by sea. For that, a new terminal should be built on the Kola peninsula in the Russian North. The LUKOIL giant oil company was one of the primary driving forces of the projects. It owns a chain of gas stations in the United States, and deliveries of Russian hydrocarbons would permit it to expand its business there. Gazprom—the state owned Russian natural gas monopoly—also expressed an interest in such exports. However, because of considerable costs the project would be feasible only if oil prices are kept at a stable high level, which is not guaranteed by volatile oil markets.

The second Bush administration faces serious challenges, emerging from the Greater Middle East, Western Pacific and the post-Soviet space. During its first term it made a historic review of U.S. security policy and tried to adapt it to new security challenges. However, it made several mistakes. One of them, in Iraq, brought immediate consequences by binding U.S. forces to post-conflict management of that country. It significantly limited the freedom of action of the Bush administration during at least the beginning of its second term. The United States does not possess sufficient forces, which might be required for exerting pressure on certain worrying international actors. The other mistake is still reversible, but in the long run it might bring even more serious consequences. In East Asia, the first Bush administration's policy on the Korean peninsula forced same people to question the U.S. role as a responsible and credible security guarantor for the regional allies. Although during its second term the administration has an opportunity to correct its Korean policy and reconstitute U.S. credibility in some regional eyes, its continuing involvement in Iraq might prevent Washington from mobilizing adequate resources and the political will necessary for settling North Korea's nuclear issue. The administration might face additional problems if it is involved in non-cooperative competition with Russia in the post-Soviet space. An alienated Moscow might be forced to move closer to Beijing, which could further complicate the environment for the U.S. system of alliances in the Western Pacific.