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DÉJÀ VU: A SOCIOLOGICAL LOOK AT THE CURRENT STATE OF RUSSIA-US RELATIONS*

Summary

The author presents a sociological look on a current state of Russia-US relations focusing on rhetoric of prominent political figures, a dual interpretation of a new chill in the relationship between former rivals, views of modern Russian Slavophiles and Westernizers on Russian politics during the Putin reign. The short period of US-Russia rapprochement started after the tragedy of 11 September 2001 in the USA seems coming to the end. There is a feeling of “déjà vu”, as we witness how a certain way of using pressure in international affairs can still be considered legitimate; how political disputes pertaining to foreign policy and international relations are stirring up, how they are covered by media, and how they are settled.

Key Words: Sociology of Foreign Affairs, Russia, the USA, the US-Russia Relations, Rhetoric, Media, Slavophiles, Westernizers, Democracy, War, Future, Coexistence.

Introduction

In the former basically bipolar world the core reality that most affects the international system was the state of the Russian-American relations. This corollary is not valid today, though Russia with its nuclear might is still a major actor of international relations. But it is fair enough to say that, being a member of G-8 group and a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, possessing a substantial potential and resources in all spheres of the activity and maintaining intensive relations with the leading states of the world, the Russian Federation today exert a significant influence on the formation of the world order of the 21st century.

The aggravation of the Iranian nuclear problem alongside the active preparations for the G8 summit in Saint Petersburg in the end of July, 2006 makes us to start with a media coverage of Russia's foreign policy and contradictions in Russia-US relations that became visible in this spring season.

Season of Discontent

The attentive reader of mainstream western newspapers can easily detect the growth of doubts about whether Russia ever may be an ally for the US in the

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global struggle against the international terrorism and a reliable supplier of oil and natural gas for Europe occurred in last two years. This campaign is unfolding on the background noise of non-stop criticism of Russia's foreign policy and her ambitious strategic priorities together with concerns over the situation with democracy development in Russia.

There are two important episodes that should be mentioned in this context. On May 4, 2006, speaking at the forum of leaders of Baltic and Black Sea region's countries, US Vice-president Dick Cheney stressed that the Russian authorities infringe upon human rights, freedom of the press, and use energy resources to press neighboring countries³¹. In fact there was nothing new in Mr. Cheney's words, because and US President G. W. Bush, US Secretary of Defense Donald Ramsfeld, US Secretary of State Dr. Condoleezza Rice and other members of his administration often used their visits to Russia's neighbors for criticism of Russia's politics. The US official documents expressed similar concerns³².

In his turn, Russian president Vladimir Putin in the latest state-of-the-nation address on May 10, 2006 harshly rebuked Washington for its criticism although he did not point on Dick Cheney's speech directly. Putin's words ignited the new explosion of criticism of US policy in Russian media. His strong anti-American rhetoric was met well by the half of Russian public with a perception of the US as a "threat to global security"³³.

³¹ Editorial of "Financial Times" with a self-speaking title of "Cheney's Cold War" explained to readers the essence of Cheney position in following words: "The vice-president exaggerated, as one would expect from someone with a richly deserved reputation as the current Bush administration's Lord Voldemort. But his message contained some plain truths that Moscow should heed. One is the widespread nervousness about Russia abusing its energy supplies for political ends. Moscow may, in general, just be following the current worldwide wave of resource nationalism in adjusting its energy policy to higher world market prices and to rising alternative demand from Asia. But it needs to know that in some western quarters, this is seen, as Mr. Cheney bluntly put it, as using oil and gas as "tools of intimidation or blackmail". Another foreign concern is about the creep by Vladimir Putin, Russian president, towards "a soft dictatorship" with progressive suppression of civil society and its outlets through non-governmental organisations and the independent media. Having awarded Russia membership of the Council of Europe, and this year the presidency as well as membership of the Group of Eight leading industrial nations, the west has grounds for complaint. Finally, there is the worry that Mr Putin remains unreconciled to the emergence of democratic movements in Russia's "near abroad", once part of a Soviet Union whose disappearance he laments" (cited from FT.com, May 6, 2006).

³² For instance, the White House National Security Strategy, a policy blueprint released in mid-March 2006, warned that "efforts to prevent democratic development at home and abroad will hamper the development of Russia's relations with the US, Europe, and its neighbors." A US State Department human rights report accused the Kremlin of sidelining parliament, straitjacketing the media, pressuring the judiciary, and harassing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

³³ In a January 2006 poll, conducted by the independent Levada Center in Moscow, 57 percent of Russians regarded the US as a 'threat to global security', while just 33 percent thought it wasn't (See more about the public mood on this issue in the April 17, 2006 edition of *The Christian Science Monitor* - F.Weir. Russia, US slipping into familiar 'chill'? *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 17, 58

The Guardian wrote on May 11, 2006 that “relations between the US and Russia sank to the lowest point in a decade”³⁴. And that “the war of words is a long way from the optimism with which George Bush said, after his first face-to-face meeting with Mr Putin in 2001, that he had looked into the Russian president's soul and liked what he saw” (ibid.).

Dick Cheney said that Russia *should be afraid* that the USA, encouraging democratic development in countries neighboring to Russia, acquires influence in these countries. Then he added that Russia “will only win, if it borders with strong democratic countries”. The question is, however, why had democratic development in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan a specific form of so-called “colored revolutions”, which allegedly were sponsored directly or indirectly by the US?

It is no secret that the Russian legislators often express feelings of outrage at what they view as Western incursions into the post-Soviet republics through pro-democracy revolts. One of explanations of this reaction that is rather popular amongst western observers sounds as follows: “They (Russians) cannot accept that someone else can control these (neighboring) states, which they still feel as parts of their great motherland, the former USSR”. Though this version contains a part of truth, it is oversimplification, in our view, at least.

Many political and business interests clashed in what emerged as ‘colored revolutions’; in Ukraine, for example, Russia’s president unskilled intervention was clearly a factor that impacted on the final outcome. And, perhaps, the threat of loosing influence is a real reason for the Russian leadership to fear a growth of American presence in Russia’s near abroad.

Being pro-western does not mean neglecting the relations with the East. Therefore the *who-benefits-from-it* explanation of recent ‘colored revolutions’ is also too dangerously simple, because the geo-political orientation of current leaders in those states is still a more declared than settled matter.

There is a feeling of “déjà vu”, as we witness how a certain way of using pressure in international affairs can still be considered legitimate; how political disputes pertaining to foreign policy and international relations are stirring up, how they are covered by media, and how they are settled.

Although Russia’s President Putin insisted: "We should not repeat the Soviet Union's mistakes, the mistakes of the Cold War years, neither in the political sphere nor in the defense strategy," he at the same time also strongly emphasized the urgent need to increase Russia’s defense expenses and to speed modernization of the Russian armed forces.

2006 - <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0417/p06s02-woeu.html>). According to Harris poll in June 2006, Europeans now also claim the United States is a greater threat to global stability than Iran (from Editorial of *The Los Angeles Times* published on June 21, 2005 - <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/editorials/la-ed-europe21jun21,0,1865279.story?coll=la-news-comment-editorials>).

³⁴ Walsh N.P., MacAskill E. Putin lashes out at 'wolf-like' America. *The Guardian*, May 11, 2006.

There is an impression that the United States under the Bush administration and Russia under Putin seem to be backsliding toward the competitive calculus of the arms-race era and familiar postures of belligerent mistrust. Having noted that US military spending was 25 times higher than Russia's in last year, the Russian president in the state-of-nation address went on to say the effect of this was that "Comrade Wolf knows whom to eat, and he swallows without listening to anyone, and he is clearly not going to listen to anyone".

Although he refrained from mentioning the US by name, it was clear for everyone that the word "wolf" referred to Washington. Moreover he asked the audience in the Kremlin in the same manner like all late Soviet leaders did: "Just where does all the rhetoric on the need for human rights and democracy disappear to when it comes to the need to realize one's own interests? It turns out that everything is permitted. There are no restrictions whatsoever".

We'll not discuss here, why and where the Bush administration behaves like that or to talk about US self-interest in energy-rich countries. The US and Russian national interests are different. An emphasis on a difference of values of these two great nations should not overshadow this point. Interests are driving forces of politics. Values are only a part of the basis for national strategic policies.

It is little wonder that since coming to office in 2000 Vladimir Putin has admitted that, although there is no immanent external enemy for Russia, there are numerous threats to its interests that are impacted by the outside world. The assertion of no external threats refers to how the outside world is perceived in Russian foreign and security policy. In this context, Russian relations with China, India, and, of course, Iran are not merely about trading but basically for influence at the international arena. International trading – even arms trade, which Russia does rather well, – is also an important engine for internal economic growth, for sustaining and modernizing Russia's military-industrial complex.

In Russian eyes, American permanent pressure to Iran – to limit sales to Iran in the year of 2001, to stop Tehran's nuclear enrichment programme in 2005-2006 - is not just about the loss of Russian revenues linked with Iranian contracts, but about undermining Russia's re-emerging international status, and, – let me repeat, – indirectly, about Russia's efforts to establish a sound market economy on the path of enlarging its international trading and economic co-operation, and so on. Clearly referring to the talk in Washington about a possible military strike on Iran, Mr. Putin in the mentioned address warned that "the use of force ... could be more disastrous than the initial threat" it supposed to deal with.

The current Russian leadership views American hegemony and unilateralism as obstacles to Russian national interests and its fight for inclusion into the most influential political and economic circles in the international system. We have to agree with Celeste A. Wallander, who wrote in 2001, that "it is impossible to escape the reality that one of the main features of the international system in all its

dimensions – military, political, and economic – is that American unipolarity coexists with a system of multilateral institutions (such as the World Trade Organization or WTO), regimes (such as nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction) and groupings (such as the G-8) that are overwhelmingly influenced, if not quite determined, by American power and preferences (Wallander, 2001). Given the link between the economy, national power, and security, Russian access to the international system is a *security* matter (ibid.).

Piling on it, President Putin in his latest state-of-nation address complained that Russia's bid to join WTO has been used as "a bargaining chip" on unrelated issues: the US is the last big WTO member holding out against Russian entry³⁵. The Bush administration demonstrates, at best, indifference to Russian national interests, or, at worst, a deliberate policy to confront them.

Let me be clear here: I do not for one second believe that the Russian President counter-attacked Washington (probably with the US Vice-president Cheney in mind³⁶) because he wished to make an impression that "Russia wants to be another wolf" (as one analyst told *The Moscow Times*) or because Putin's Russia is America's potential rival (as *Newsweek* wrote)³⁷. The current foreign policy of the Russian Federation doesn't present plausible cases for such a conclusion, only a collection of innuendoes. Today's Russia has neither military, nor economic potential to become again a superstate which can be competitive to the USA (or the EU, China) in the observed future.

We do not agree with an opinion that today 'all Russians are asking for is a little respect' from the US leadership³⁸. This opinion has a definite arrogant connotation.

"Fair enough", the reader may say. But then he or she must realize that Russian President Vladimir in fact announced what could soon become a new arms race on a scale not seen since the days of the Cold War³⁹. This is a fairly dangerous game with unforeseeable international repercussions⁴⁰.

³⁵ It is a 12-years long battle for the membership of the WTO since Russia's formal application. The USSR tackled this issue in late 1980s under Gorbachev..

³⁶ Speaking in Lithuania, Dick Cheney might even have remembered a speech two decades ago when George H. W. Bush went to Hungary, as Ronald Reagan's vice-president, to proclaim, wrongly, Russians had never really been part of European civilization.

³⁷ Dickey Christopher. Season of the Wolf, *Newsweek*. Web-exclusive commentary, May 12, 2006.

³⁸ This recipe was presented by Rock Brynner in an article in *the International Herald Tribune* on June 16, 2006 (Brynner R. All they're asking for is a little respect. *IHT*, June 16, 2006).

³⁹ In fact the arms race has never stopped; its pace has accelerated in late 1990s – the very beginning of 2000s.

⁴⁰ There is a long set of essential questions linked with the increase of world military expenditures, which includes the following ones, primarily important for the Russian audience: why should a country whose finances have just recently recovered from a ruinous state find the additional money for its military expenditures in a presence of no external enemy? Is the result of the previous arms race just a part of a history lesson that nobody have learned? And, finally, who benefits from a new arms race?

Two visions of Russia's strategic policy and co-operation with the US

Fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union post-Communist Russia and its Western partners seem to understand each other less and less or hardly can find a common language. The ideological Cold War is long over (Rukavishnikov, 2005). Why then is the atmosphere on both sides so chilling?

Part of the explanation is the path that Russia has chosen during the President Vladimir Putin second term. The USA is not satisfied with democracy in today's Russia. Western analysts refer to what could be called as the 'nationalist and anti-democratic backlash' that ensued in a serious shift in Russian policy (there were reports about signs of this 'backlash' even before the sky-rocketing rise of oil prices described below⁴¹). And, particularly, in Russian efforts to pursue what was termed an Eurasianist approach to foreign policy that included the effort to build alliances with other states that shared Russia's concerns about the dominant U.S. position in world affairs⁴². This recent shift is strongly associated with a decline of influence of the pro-western wing of the Russian political class on Putin administration's policy.

But there is the another part of explanation: Western policy toward Russia, and the behavior of Western states – first among them the United States – after the end of the Cold War. Concerning US policy towards Russia, many Russian foreign policy analysts used to refer to what may be called the 'theory of misinterpretation'. They say that since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States has consistently misinterpreted Russian objections, intentions and/or actions and used so called double standards' policy, that Washington is stubbornly misreading Russia's efforts to restore national pride as "some kind of reversion" to the USSR, etc. This point of view partly resembles the pattern of interpretation of the American policy towards the USSR, which was so popular in the Soviet Union in the Cold war period⁴³.

⁴¹ In 1999 unwarranted NATO bombardments of Yugoslavia caused a public outcry in Russia, and as its indirect aftermath "Mr. Putin was elected on a nationalist platform of 'restoring' Russia's military greatness", - this was a view published in *The Moscow Time* in autumn of 2000 (P. Felgenhauer. Reactions to NMD Deferral. *The Moscow Time*, September 7, 2000, p.9). This explanation is far from being complete; it made an accent only on one of a number of motivations that worked in the case of Putin's victory on the presidential elections of 2000.

⁴² The geographic location of the Russian Federation determines dimensions of its foreign policy to a large extent. However, the Russians always identified themselves with European civilization.

⁴³ This is a pseudo-sociological explanation, from our point of view. The American adherents of this opinion used to talk about the difference of values saying that the United States were gauging events according to its own ideals and expectations rather than by the values embedded in Russian mentality and culture. The emphasis on values is a characteristic of so-called the 'idealist school' among international relations scholars in the USA.

Oil prices were low in 1990s, and the Russian economy was slowly recovering from default of 1998. Then 9/11 happened and the United States went to war in Afghanistan. They got a support of Putin. However, oil prices remained low. In December 2001, they were running between US\$17 and US\$20 a barrel. A year later, they'd edged up to the US\$25 a range. It was only in 2003, after the Bush administration committed irrevocably to invade and occupy Iraq despite the objections of Russia and some other nations, when we started to see again the deterioration of Russian-American relations. The price of oil starts climbing up dramatically year after year since the Iraq occupation began and currently varies around US\$60-70 a barrel.

Of course, the non-finished war in Iraq serves US political interests but since the year of 2003 Russia's economic standing has improved significantly due to the rise of oil prices. Paradoxically, Moscow benefits from Washington's military intervention policy though stands against it.

Today, Russia is not in a deep economic crisis situation as in 1990s when she was forced to ask for loans from the West. Contrary, Russia has paid back almost all its loans. Russia's economic growth, although due to in great part to its oil and gas export, is among the fastest rates in the world. But Russia has profound domestic demographic and poverty problems that must be confronted in the coming years. They are not the same problems the US or the EC have, but they can be solved only in keeping with the security of the world.

Contemporary Russia's social, political, economic, and security reality is very different from that in both the US and the EC, as are Russia's perception of the forces that are driving international relations in the beginning of the 21st century. And the Russian leadership suggests that the West must acknowledge these differences when engaging post-Soviet Russia in a new 'war of words' or a new alliance against Iran to prevent this country from becoming a nuclear power.

Ideology no longer provides the foundation for the US-Russia or Russia-West antagonism, but what we see now as a basis for sliding to the familiar 'chilling rhetoric' is Russo phobia that seems is still alive and spread in the West as well anti-American sentiments and NATO-phobia in Russia. It seems to us, the treat of new Cold War is exaggerated by media, because present-day Russia does not occupy the same place in US global strategy as the former USSR did.

In American foreign policy the decade of benign neglect towards post-Soviet Russia's strategic policy ended not in 1999, when after the war for Kosovo the mutual confidence between two states decreased to the lowest level, but in September of 2001⁴⁴. The September 11th attacks led to a rapprochement between the US and Russia with improved relations primarily due to co-operation between two countries over the war on terrorism in Afghanistan. However, a new

⁴⁴ The hasty expansion of NATO and the EC eastward took place in that period.

deterioration of US-Russia relations started when the US went to war against Iraq paying no attention on Russia's objections. And even today, at the eve of G-8 summit in Saint Petersburg it is premature to speak about the end of the period of mutual discontent. The return of Cold war-like style of polemics in 2006 simply indicates the actual death of the idea of 'strategic partnership' between the US and the Russian Federation which was born after the 9/11.

Despite the swirl and tumult of events, a strong case can be made that the first six years of this century have witnesses remarkably little change in either the fundamental factors that define the post-Cold war international system or the broad policy directions adopted by the United States to protect and enhance its own national interests after the collapse of the USSR⁴⁵.

The current prospects for the European relations with Russia, evolving along two separate lines – Russia-EU and Russia-NATO, look more promising so far. The EU is much more interested in constructive relations with Russia than the United States. As for Russia-NATO relations, certain steps were made towards a closer military-political cooperation between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Alliance after the 9/11, though an inherited suspicious attitude of the Russian military brass to the block still exists, and, probably, NATO's military pay to their counterparts with a same coin. The partnership that exists today between Russia and NATO is primarily of the pragmatic kind. That is, "it is based mainly upon expedient and tactical calculations, and only really becomes operative when important interests are perceived on both sides to coincide" (Smith, 2006, p.127). There is no a convincing and definite answer on a core question, about what NATO is for in the post-September 11 security environment (ibid, p.35). It is not clear even for western experts, not to speak about Russians. In our view, the prospect of the Russia-NATO partnership depends upon whether the US will remain its central role in this military-political block, because NATO is a vital security instrument in any future engagement of the United States and the EU towards Russia.

Lessons from the past experience

The calendar prompts reappraisals of predicted futures as well as of observed past trends. It may be useful to rethink the certain similarities that exists between today's global challenges and those that being faced or anticipated in the last century. For instance, in retrospect, there was an impressive record of Soviet and American cooperation in restraining competition, where it seemed likely to lead to war. This pattern could be replicated in the 21st century. The assumptions

⁴⁵ The scholars have to examine whether these fundamentals are likely to remain essentially the same as we move further into the 21st century. There is a need to consider them from various perspectives and through differing disciplinary lenses, keeping in mind the agenda of coming challenges and the decisions that these challenges will require to make.

underlying such an approach are: 1) that the Russian Federation has interests that go beyond simply perpetuating the post-Cold war international system; and 2) that the Russian Federation can therefore best secure its own interests by seeking the Western (American, first of all) co-operation despite all existing discrepancies rather than on a way of confrontation⁴⁶.

These assumptions bring us to a center of a century-long dispute between so called *Slavophiles* and *Westernizers* amongst the Russian elite⁴⁷. For the first intellectual tradition, today backed by nationalists and the Russian Orthodox Church with its traditionally strong anti-Western attitudes, the second above-mentioned assumption is unacceptable, - "otherwise, Russia can no longer be great Russia". For this grouping, Russia's interests must be secured by its own military and economic power. According to Westernizers, the second intellectual tradition, currently backed by liberals, democrats and a part of entrepreneurs, the Westernization (or the Europeanization) of Russia is not only necessary, it is an imperative. They see is no alternative to a quest of Western (the US, primarily) hand to secure Russia's future.

The failure of rapid westernization of post-Soviet Russia in 1990s is an empirical fact with a plenty of interpretations (Cohen, 2000). The failure of this ambitious project in Russia had the effect of throwing discredit upon democratic principles as associated with the Western world and of weakening of democratic parties within Russia⁴⁸. The side effect should be noticed as well: those Russian Westernizers, who determined Russia's political course in 1990s, currently pushed out of Russian domestic politics, which are being determined more and more by anti-Western and nationalistic forces (Slavophiles).

The transformation of Russia into an energy-producing superpower, which now not only legitimizes hosting the G-8 summit, but allows the Kremlin to use its new oil and gas cards without any qualms to dictate positions not only to neighbors, but to the West that wrote off Russia too soon, is an indication that inherent

⁴⁶ Turning back to the starting point, we can say that if the fundamental structures of international realities and American strategic goals remained firmly in place, the analysts would be free to focus their attention on the "how" questions – how best to confront new emerged global threats, to resolve conflicts and sustain peace on the planet within a global framework that looks partly alike that dominated in the past rather than on the "why" and "what" questions which inevitably arise when the very ground for debate looks uncertain. But if the basic hypothesis is wrong, then this focus would not be necessary.

⁴⁷ There is a mountain of literature on this issue. English speaking readers may find a careful description of the positions occupied by these two groupings before the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in the short book of Norwegian scholar Geir Flikke (Flikke, 1994).

⁴⁸ Due to a limit of space in this paper we'll not discuss why the project of Russia's westernization supported by US President Clinton and other western leaders was miscarried. The interpretation of what now is going wrong from the point of view of Russian Westernizers the reader may find in the article of Andrei Grachev published in International Herald Tribune in June 2006 (Grachev A. How the West let Moscow down. *IHT*, June 16, 2006).

Russian strategic policy is compatible with liberalization of Russian economy. This is an argument, which is favored by those, who believe that Slavophile tradition and the Westernization of Russia, in economic terms, are closely related to one another.

Today's Russian Westernizers emphasize the lack of massive Western investments, a slow growth in industry, an increase of corruption, and a set of domestic and foreign policy mistakes made by the Kremlin as an argument in support of the idea of 'total incomparability of Putin's militaristic anti-western policy with real liberal reforms'. But they also agree that as long as oil problems remain high, none of these problems is likely to threaten Putin's regime. Russia is a major exporter of oil and gas in Europe, and the revenue is enough to paper over almost any mistake due to non-competent governance, leaving morality and gradual strangling of democracy and freedom aside.

The relationship between domestic and external politics in modern Russia is a rather complex matter. But what may be taken for sure is that the decrease of influence of Westernizers in Kremlin, and in Russia at large, has an ample effect on Russia's foreign policy. It was one of reasons for Putin's transformation from "Bush's best friend" to "a burdensome and problematic partner". In fact, Putin has not changed, but simply get mature, and that is why now he looks like typical Eurasian leader. He still wishes to promote economic liberalism and authoritarian nationalism simultaneously. His main foreign policy aim is the same as it was in 2000 - to restore a status of Russia as a global actor.

Putin's present-day strategy does not meet applauses in the western media. But is this strategy something unexpectedly new? The answer is negative.

Romanian politician Petre Roman said at the Bucharest NATO summit in 2002: "We believe that we can discern a dual strategy in Russia's current policies, one that can be illustrated by the analogy with an open pair of scissors. On the one hand, economic modernization, pragmatic cooperation with the West and a determined pursuit of its interests in the global arena; on the other, the gradual emergence of structures of an old extraction, dedicated to rebuilding a status of global superpower for Russia" (Roman, 2002, p. 150).

Because these two options did not make him happy, Petre Roman had recommended Russia to adjust its course to western demands: "In the case of Russia, a realistic strategic foreign policy cannot serve for both opening the Russian society to the world and reserving Russia's political course. It cannot aim to carry out the economic reform in the interest of acquiring a status of economic superpower, and to reserve obsolete imperial ambitions at the same time" (ibid., p. 151). He also warned the NATO leaders against being deluded by Putin's move towards the West after 9/11: "... We should avoid the "romantic disposition" of embracing Russia unconditionally..., as well as the rather irrational attitude that wants us to see Russia as "a lie wrapped in a golden foil". [...] We cannot ask

Russia to abandon its old clichés while preserving our own. We would be caught in a vicious circle of distrust perpetually breeding distrust” (ibid., p. 152).

Concluding his analysis, Petre Roman expressed certain optimism concerning the Russian attitude to new NATO members, and, finalizing, sound a warning to Russia: “Russia is and will be a great country. No matter how its future will take shape, Russia will respect its partners’ firm and clear choices.[...] If as do we hope, Russia genuinely follows the path of democracy, this is in its own advantage, since a united Europe will not be a greater Europe, but a stronger one as well” (ibid., pp. 152-153)⁴⁹.

In our view, both sides, Russia and the West, must recognize that differences in cultures, choices and interests are something they live with, not something they fight against, and that neither side can hope to dominate the other in the era of China's growing might (in form of China’s growing trade hegemony so far).

However, if we recall a failure of Gorbachev’s idea of a “Common European House” that suggested uniting Russia with its western neighbors, or Western civilization, whose geographical borders would stretch from Vancouver to Vladivostok, then the prospect for the unclouded future looks rather problematic. There are certain reasons for such a pessimistic view: the unilateral US withdrawal from the ABM treaty, the active support of anti-Russian forces in days of ‘colored revolutions’ by the US and the EC, the deployment of US and NATO troops at military bases near Russian borders from the Baltic and Black seas’ to the Caucasus and Central Asia – all these events occurred during the Putin reign era. Whatever were motivations for these actions, they may be perceived as a continuation of Cold-war policy of containment, as a revamped version of old theory of ‘rolling back Communism (i.e. Russians)’.

The maxim, "Democracies do not go to war with one another", is one of the most popular ideas among contemporary political scientists. But if one agree that *in fact* contemporary *Russia is no democracy*, then the mentioned theoretical formula does not work, and all in all it means that the question about the peaceful future for the Russians regains his place and validity⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ Petre Roman’s advice to Putin to promote in Russia what he had named “the demilitarization of patriotism”, using the expression he heard in Belgrade after the fall of Milosevic (Roman, 2002, p. 151), sounded cynical, in our view, at least. Romanian politician feared a restoration of the former strong influence of Russia on European and global affairs, and therefore equalized Serbia, which was defeated by NATO, and Russia, which he wanted to see in the future as powerless and dependent on the US and the EU as it would be possible.

⁵⁰ According to the school of the "democratic peace," the long peace between democratic states since 1945 has demonstrated that democratic norms and institutions help states in the international system transcend traditional concerns about security, allowing for the possibility of a "perpetual peace" between democratic states. This theory has been used by Americans as a basis the basis for recent claims that the establishment of democracy in Iraq could be the foundation for an expanding zone of peace in the Middle East at large. However, there is an alternative view which argues that the long peace between democratic states in the second half of the 20th century was created by such factors as

Conclusion

Contemporary Russia does not resemble the Soviet Union, and the main objective the Russian Federation has identified in its relations with the USA is the assistance in the joint task of fighting international terrorism. But, perhaps, despite the absence of conflicting ideologies the old idea of the “competitive coexistence” is or might be deeply hidden behind numerous declarations about ‘partnership’ between two former rivals.

The USA have severely weakened its standing in the world at large through its unsuccessful military quest for the ‘victory of democracy’ in Iraq, while the Russian government has used the global rising of oil prices to strengthen significantly its own military and economic position, and with somewhat less success – the war in Chechnya has done little to enhance its external image - to widen its influence in its near abroad and in the rest of the world.

What particularly concerns us is whether the familiar traits of the pattern of ‘competitive coexistence’ regime lost in the past are actually emerging, and, - in the light of new global challenges, economic and political changes occurred in Russia during Putin’s reign, the diffusion of economic power formerly centered in the United States, and of other likely future trends, – will the next administrations in both Russia and the USA have determination to reverse or accommodate themselves to this trend sharing responsibility for peace and security with other global powers⁵¹.

No one in Moscow will explicitly announce the goal of “competitive coexistence” by the time both Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush will have to leave office, but the geopolitical conditions may change, and not to the advantage of the United States as well as of the Russian Federation⁵².

US hegemony, the nuclear deterrence, the solidification of borders, globalization and economic growth, and so on. These factors made it possible for liberal democracy to flourish in many western countries. The conclusion sounds as follows: only states which are relatively secure - politically, militarily, economically - can afford to have free, pluralistic societies; in the absence of this security, states are much more likely to adopt, maintain, or revert to centralized, coercive authority structures.

⁵¹ There are many speculations about the nearest future of US-Russia relations. For instance, the vision of the US-Russia relations in the observed future presented in the recent report "Russia's Wrong Direction: What the United States Can and Should Do?", published by the Council on Foreign Relations, cannot be named very promising. According to the report the US should try to mount pressure on Russia using ‘the democracy card’ and to limit its influence in Europe and the rest of the world acting together with the EU. In our view, there is no alternative to co-operation between Russia and the West, and we want to believe that old stereotypes and power-seeking and security models will be replaced by a more rational vision.

⁵² The argument that none of the ex-socialist states, one part of which has been absorbed inside NATO and the EC, while another part has declared its intention to join NATO and the EC, can be considered as a geopolitical threat to the Russian Federation in the future, is, from the Russian perspective, utterly and dangerously false. During the recent Ukraine ‘orange revolution’, Russia's President Vladimir Putin said he had no objection to Ukraine associating itself more closely with the

There are many paradoxes in the relationship between Russia and its partners from G-8 group. The G-8 summit in Saint-Petersburg in mid-summer of 2006 comes after spring season of discontent. At the time of writing we do not know its results. Russia is against any confrontation and new 'saint' unions (to act jointly against Iran's nuclear ambitions, for example) either. But we may foresee that the debate over the thorny Iranian issue will not absolve the world leaders from the responsibility to consider the question of international terrorism, sustainable energy supply, education, diseases and some other global challenges⁵³.

The dilemma today is not whether Russia and the USA are sliding to a new Cold War or a new cohesion is possible. Let us not forget about the necessity for a fundamentally renewed framework of the relations between Russia and the West within the context of still uncertain pattern of international system of the 21st century.

Note:

The opinions expressed in this article are those of the author.

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European Union. But he was adamantly against any of Russia's immediate neighbors joining the NATO which is still viewed by the bulk of Russians as anti-Russian military alliance (leave aside all politically correct statements about Russia-NATO co-operation).

⁵³ On neither issue are Russia and the US diametrically opposed. Moscow has expressed alarm at Tehran's nuclear enrichment programme but wants to cap it diplomatically rather than decapitate it militarily, while the issue of gas contract sanctity is one that primarily worries its European partners.

* References on newspapers mentioned in the text are not included in the list.

Владимир Рукавишников

Већ виђено: социолошки поглед
на садашње стање руско-америчких односа

Резиме

Аутор социолошки сагледава текуће стање руско-америчких односа при чему се усредсређује на реторику истакнутих политичких личности, двоструко тумачење новог захлађења у односима између некадашњих супарника као и на погледе модерних руских славенофила и прозападњака на руску политику током Путиновог режима. Кратак период америчко-руског приближавања који је започео након трагедије од 11. септембра 2001. у САД изгледа да се приводи крају. Присутно је осећање „већ виђеног“ јер смо сведоци начина на који се изванредан вид примене притиска у међународним односима још увек може сматрати легитимним, како се подгревају политичке расправе у зони спољне политике и међународних односа, како их покривају медији и како се разрешавају.

Кључне речи: социологија иностраних послова, Русија, САД, америчко-руски односи, реторика, медији, славенофили, прозападњаци, демократија, рат, будућност, когзистениција.