

## *Why treat Russia as an enemy?*

Paris, May 26, 2009 – The failure last week of Russian talks with the European Union on the security of energy supplies to Europe is one more occasion for Russian-Western tension. This has sent Europeans on a search for more reliable energy sources, but these are proving expensive and awkward.

Last week's talks, provocatively held in the Russian Far East, in Khabarovsk near the Chinese frontier (no doubt to make a point about Russia's vast resources and wide choice of collaborators and customers) took place at the same time that a rather pathetic NATO exercise was being ended in Georgia. It was meant presumably as a "warning" to Russia, but a warning of what?

The actual warning has been to NATO, which by violating its own rules contributed to last August's short war between Georgia and Russia. NATO's rules preclude membership for nations with unsettled territorial disputes or unresolved ethnic national claims, of which Georgia has both.

Under pressure from Americans apparently eager to humiliate Russia, the NATO governments were persuaded to offer Georgia eventual membership in the alliance, which Georgia's reckless president Mikheil Saakashvili took as authority to attack and try to seize autonomous South Ossetia, provoking a short and sharp war with Russia last August, which Saakashvili lost. (Ukraine, which also has a profound internal division on cultural and historical lines, was at the same time also offered eventual alliance membership, which has already made trouble, and can be expected to make more in the future.)

Russian-American as well as Russia-NATO relations have been chilly since, unsurprisingly. An excellent and clarifying brief article on U.S. policy towards Russia appears in the current National Interest bi-monthly, by the magazine's publisher, Dimitri K. Simes, and Gary Hart, the former senator and co-chairman (with Chuck Hagel) of the Nixon Center and Harvard Kennedy School's recent bi-partisan commission on relations with Russia, whose report was recently published.

The authors place part of the blame for existing Russian-U.S. tensions with those in the United States who resent the fact that post-Soviet Russia did not immediately remake itself on the model of the United States, and petition to become an American protégé.

Instead, Russia today has a highly imperfect parliamentary and presidential system with an unreliable legal system, media suppression, and rigged elections. Its dual leadership, by the seemingly interchangeable President Dmitri A. Medvedev and Prime Minister and former President Vladimir Putin, seems to exercise arbitrary power.

The authors ask if this is reason enough for the United States to resist cooperation with Russia on matters that are of strong mutual interest. Their answer clearly is "no." You have to take Russian governments as you find them, if you need to get along with them.

Since Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council, possesses nuclear weapons with competitive delivery systems, plus a very great deal of oil and natural gas, and it does or could dominate the ex-Soviet space in Central Asia as well as the Caucasus, and borders the Caspian and Black seas, with access to Iran, it cannot be ignored. Yet Washington has tended to behave towards it in an antagonistic manner while demanding cooperation (which it has often received) on matters of concern to the United States.

The authors ask a further question: "Are we holding the Russians to a higher standard of performance than we do other nations with whom we deal? And if so, why?" The answer is that we are -- notably by continuing to withhold trade benefits from it under the Jackson-Vanik amendment (passed in American law many years ago to force the Soviet Union to make democratic concessions, and to allow Jewish emigration). The Jackson-Vanik restrictions are no longer imposed on China or Vietnam, or Georgia or Ukraine. Why on Russia, which is no more undemocratic than China or Vietnam?

Hart and Simes blame "the dangerous triumphalism that has shaped U.S. international strategy since 1993." This is a problem among "a majority of America's political leaders and its wider foreign-policy elite" who hold "the arrogant yet naïve view that the United States could shape the world order without the consent of the other major powers and without creating a backlash against America and American leadership." They have treated Russia as a "defeated country."

An answer to this criticism has come from John R. Bolton, one of the most belligerent of the Bush administration neo-conservatives and a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, a body he indicated would better be dismantled with NATO taking its place.

Bolton says that the U.S. under Barack Obama is anxious to give away America's strategic assets to the Russians, in a desire to please its liberal friends and get a new Strategic Arms Reduction

Treaty before Christmas, at the cost of imposing on the U.S. a “dangerously low” level of nuclear warheads, and abandoning the “defense system intended for Poland and the Czech Republic.” (It formerly was described in the U.S. as a defense system intended for Americans.)

The basic question is whether the United States wishes to treat Russia as a permanent enemy, if it is not. The result of treating states as enemies is that sooner or later they become one. One might think the United States already has enough enemies.

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