

CHAPTER 10

FROM FRIENDSHIP TO COLD PEACE: THE DECLINE OF U.S.-RUSSIA RELATIONS DURING THE 1990s



Itar-TASS photo/Sergei Veitchkin, Vladimir Rodionov

PUTIN IN THE STALINIST CAPITAL: President Putin greets North Korea’s dictator Kim Jong-Il at their July 20, 2000, summit in Pyongyang. This was the first time any Russian or Soviet leader travelled to the Stalinist state—not even Brezhnev went to North Korea. North Korea has recently threatened to “plunge the damned U.S. territory into a sea of flame,” a threat more likely to materialize with outside support. In February 2000, Putin and Kim Jong-Il concluded a Russia-North Korea Treaty of Friendship, reviving ties scrapped by Yeltsin.



Russia will strive toward the stable development of relations with the United States, with a view toward strategic partnership and, in the future, toward alliance.

Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, January 25, 1993

Certain plans relating to establishing new, equitable and mutually advantageous partnership relations of Russia with the rest of the world, as was assumed in the [1993 Foreign Policy Concept] and in other documents, have not been justified.

Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, June 28, 2000

Russia's Enduring Significance

Although Russia is not a superpower with military and political ambitions on every continent as the Soviet Union was, U.S. relations with Russia remain of supreme national importance. Russia possesses by far the largest nuclear arsenal in the world,¹ and a military-technological base second only to that of the United States. Russia possesses vast economic potential, with a large and well-educated population and a staggering array of natural resources, including more than a third of the world's natural gas reserves.²

As a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, Russia retains a veto over the actions of an organization to which the Clinton administration's multilateralism has often assigned a pivotal role in international affairs. And Russia profoundly influences vast areas of Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East—all regions of vital interest to the United States.

Russia matters immensely to American interests on virtually every continent, and especially across the critical Eurasian landmass that has been the scene of both world wars. As the noted Russia scholar James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, has written, “[b]oth the greatest opportunity and the greatest danger for the United States internationally may well still lie

in Russia.”³ The success of U.S. policy toward Russia is accordingly of supreme importance to the American people and the world.⁴

A ‘Lost’ Russia?

Ever since the Clinton troika's Russia policy began to fail visibly in the mid-1990s, the administration has responded by emphasizing both the limitations of U.S. influence in Russia and the still uncertain outcome of Russia's transformation. Secretary of State Albright has made the administration's case succinctly: “The suggestion made by some that Russia is ours to lose is arrogant; the suggestion that Russia is lost is simply wrong.”⁵

If Russia is not yet “lost,” it is indisputably more unstable, more corrupt, more lawless, and vastly more hostile to the United States than it was when President Clinton and Vice President Gore took office. And though Russia is certainly not “ours to lose,” the United States—particularly at the outset of this administration—possessed immense influence over a wide range of decisions and events there. President Clinton inherited an immense reservoir of goodwill and prestige in Russia, making America's imprimatur quite valuable for Russian politicians and policy makers. In addition, the Clinton administration possessed—and has not hesitated to use—immense financial leverage over the Russian government by virtue of the more



AP Photo/Dennis Cook



DEFENSE COOPERATION: At their June 1992 summit, Presidents Bush and Yeltsin followed up on Yeltsin's January 1992 suggestion and agreed to work on a global missile defense system. In July 1992, Itar-TASS published a joint U.S.-Russian statement, which called for "the working out of a legal basis for cooperation, including new treaties and agreements and possible changes in the existing agreements required for the implementation of the global antiballistic missile system." The talks went well, and weeks after Clinton's election, on Nov. 30, 1992, Itar-TASS reported that Russia was considering "the necessary changes in the ABM Treaty of 1972 to take account of the spread of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction." Instead of following up on the proposal, the Clinton administration precipitously broke off the negotiations. It followed up with a February 1993 budget that cut the Bush proposal for missile defense by 40%.

than \$20 billion in U.S. assistance it has provided, and the many billions of dollars more in international aid it has orchestrated.⁶

The aspects of Russia most subject to American influence, and for which the Clinton administration should therefore be held most strictly accountable, are the prestige within Russia of American values, and the state of the U.S.-Russian relationship.

Russian Perceptions of America Today

The current unfavorable state of U.S.-Russian relations accurately reflects the sea change in Russian perceptions of the United States that has occurred under the Clinton administration. This change in Russian perceptions of the United States—more than any particular development in the Russian government—is the most damaging legacy of the Clinton-Gore Russia policy.

Polling conducted by the State Department's Office of Research has charted a steep, steady decline in favorable opinion of the United States—from over 70% in 1993 to 65% in 1995 to 54% in 1999⁷ to 37% in February 2000.⁸ During this period President Clinton himself has become second in unpopularity among Russians only to Saddam Hussein.⁹

James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, testified before the Advisory Group that for the first time, even ordinary Russians are now working up hostility toward the United States—a phenomenon decades of Soviet propaganda had been unable to achieve during the Cold War.¹⁰

These trends are longstanding, and are steadily worsening. Whereas in April 1995, some 61% of Russians believed that the United States sought world domination (versus 24% who disagreed), by February 2000 a staggering 85% believed it (compared to just 6% who did not).¹¹ The number of Russians who agreed that the U.S. was using Russia's current weakness to reduce it to a second-rate power and producer of raw materials climbed from 59% in August 1995 to 71% in April 1997 to 81% in February 2000.¹²

When the State Department polled the 75% of Russians who say they follow international affairs to some degree, more than twice as many expressed an unfavorable view of U.S. foreign policy as expressed a favorable view (46% vs. 19%).¹³

In Russian eyes, America's relations with Russia have also declined relative to many other countries. When Russians who follow international affairs were asked to evaluate Russia's relations with other countries as "friendly" or "difficult," 9% judged relations with the People's Republic of China difficult, and 52% judged them friendly. Some 16% judged relations with Germany difficult, versus 41% friendly; 18% judged relations with Japan difficult, versus 39% friendly. But Russians judged relations with the United States to be difficult, rather than friendly, by more than two-to-one. Of the nations surveyed, only Estonia fared worse than the United States, and Estonia's relations with Russia are currently in a well-publicized crisis.¹⁴

Perhaps most troubling, young people—the 18-35 generation least touched by Soviet-era thinking and the most open to westernization—now largely share the average Russian's unfavorable perception of America: in an April 1999 poll, 67% of this age cohort had a neg-





ative view of the United States, versus 18% who had a positive view.¹⁵

The extraordinarily favorable view of the United States that most Russians held in 1993 has given way to a pervasive, largely spontaneous hostility and suspicion.¹⁶ That this should occur during a period of profound peace between the two countries was, at the outset of the Clinton and Yeltsin administrations, neither inevitable nor even imaginable.

The sources of this collapse in American prestige have been much debated. Some have attributed it to NATO enlargement and American efforts to build ballistic missile defense, despite consistent polling evidence that these issues are largely irrelevant to the vast majority of Russians. Others have attributed it to the NATO intervention in Kosovo, an event with much greater resonance for ordinary Russians; but in fact the polling data show that much of the collapse in support for America occurred before Kosovo.

The explanation most strongly supported by polling data and other evidence is that Russian public opinion was and is overwhelmingly focused on the social and economic situation in Russia, and that the Clinton administration's embrace of unsuccessful domestic "reforms" and "reformers" disastrously tarnished the image of the United States. As Paula Dobriansky of the Council on Foreign Relations recently wrote:

A careful examination of the evolution of U.S.-Russian relations demonstrates that a long-term negative trend has been underway for years and that the Kosovo conflict, far from being its sole or even major cause, has merely helped to highlight much more fundamental, long-term problems. ... [M]ore than any other traditional international-related factor, it is the dismal failure of Russia's economic and political reforms, as perceived by the Russian people, that has been responsible for the palpable worsening of U.S.-Russian relations.¹⁷

The collapse in American prestige among virtually every segment of Russian society is striking evidence of the bankruptcy of the Clinton administration's Russia policy. It represents a disaster of immeasurable significance for American foreign policy and for the future of America itself. It will render far more

difficult every aspect of U.S. policy toward Russia, including the creation of a more broadly-based relationship extending beyond the narrow set of official interlocutors favored by the Clinton administration.

When the United States again seeks to engage a broader cross-section of Russian government and society—an enterprise endorsed by the vast majority of observers—the diffusion of suspicion and dislike for America that the Clinton policies over the past eight years have engendered will vastly complicate those efforts.

The 'Moscow Consensus'

The highly negative perceptions of the United States among ordinary Russians are consistent with the climate of elite opinion in Russia. Just as the Clinton administration's economic thinking about Russia coalesced early on into the so-called "Washington Consensus," so too Russian strategic and foreign policy thinking about the United States has coalesced into a "Moscow Consensus"—a point of view that largely unites not only Russia's foreign policy and defense establishments, but also Russia's entire political elite. It is a set of perceptions that commands solid assent from nearly every sector and level of Russian society.

This "Moscow Consensus" was visible in the Advisory Group's meetings with Russian executive branch officials and Duma Deputies in Washington and Moscow, in polling of the Russian elite, in general public opinion polling, and in Russian official and scholarly commentary on international affairs and the West.¹⁸ As Peter Rodman testified on July 16, 1998, (before the further downturn in U.S.-Russian relations occasioned by U.S. bombing against Iraq and Serbia, and renewed fighting in Chechnya):

It is not just a question of personalities. It is hard to detect significant differences of perception between [then-Foreign Minister Yevgeny] Primakov and President Boris Yeltsin—or, indeed, among members of the Russian foreign policy elite. ... The guiding principle of Russian foreign policy today is to preserve Russia's independence and freedom of action—meaning, in practice, its independence from us. In a "unipolar" world celebrated by some Americans, Russia sees its prime goal as restoring some "multipolarity" to the



international system—that is, to build counterweights against American dominance.¹⁹

The Moscow Consensus represents the mainstream acceptance of the policy views of Russia’s military, security, and foreign policy establishments, whose highest reaches possess a largely unreconstructed Soviet-era view of the United States.²⁰ To give only a few examples illustrating this Russian thinking:

- On October 1, 1999, the respected, centrist military analyst Lev Volkov gave the following analysis of American intentions:

[J]ust slightly more than one-tenth of the developed countries use almost 80% of the world’s resources. . . . Consequently, in the 21st Century, the fiercest of battles will take place for the possession of the resources the developed countries so desperately need. Besides this, up to 30% of the world’s natural resources are concentrated in our country. Therefore, the U.S. and the West need a weak, fragmented Russia as a source of inexpensive raw materials. In this way, we have something to defend and it is clear from whom.²¹

- Alexei Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of the Duma’s Defense Committee and a respected, well-informed liberal, described the START II debate on May 9, 2000:

START II was ratified in Russia by the Russian Parliament not because Russians think that the threat is lower, not because Russians think that nuclear weapons are less relevant, nor because the Russian Parliament and public think that the United States will be a partner for cooperation and security. START II was primarily ratified because the Russian public and political elite think that the nuclear threat is great, that the United States is keen on achieving superiority, and that nuclear weapons are still as relevant as ever for Russian security and U.S.-Russian relations. . . . The fear of American nuclear superiority and the fear of the United States [were] the principal motive for many Members of Parliament to vote for START II.²²

- A further window into Russian perceptions of American policy is offered by the

extraordinary episode of January 25, 1995. At a time of significantly lower tensions in U.S.-Russian relations, the Russian government nonetheless suspected that a scientific satellite launch in Norway could be a missile carrying an electromagnetic pulse warhead—a weapon designed to disable a nation’s military command and control, rendering the country susceptible to a follow-on nuclear first strike.

As a result, the government in Moscow “for the first time in Russian history triggered a strategic alert of their LOW forces, an emergency nuclear decision conference involving [President Yeltsin] and other national command authorities, and the activation of their famous nuclear suitcases.”²³ The entire incident was a misreading of the Clinton administration’s intentions so staggering as to suggest the need for a basic reassessment of the Russian official view of the United States.²⁴

- Despite extraordinary budget constraints and economic hardship, the Russian government has devoted immense resources to the construction of massive underground headquarters facilities designed to wage and survive nuclear war at such sites as Yamantau and Kozvinsky Mountains in the Urals. Construction of the Yamantau Mountain facility, initiated by the Soviet Union during the depths of the Cold War, was accelerated by the Russian Federation during the 1990s so that, by 1998, it reportedly involved some 20,000 workers. The underground facilities under construction cover a territory as large as the entire Washington, D.C. area inside the Beltway.

In April 1997 it was publicly reported that the CIA attributed the decision to build and restore these sites, and four others in the Moscow area, to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. One of the Moscow projects reportedly involved a subway line to President Yeltsin’s dacha 13 miles outside the city²⁵—suggesting that the projects enjoyed the support not just of the defense establishment but of the civilian leadership





as well. The fact that the Russian civilian and military leadership feels that these facilities are a worthwhile use of scarce resources shows a concern over the possibility of war with America that is extraordinarily troubling.²⁶

- During the crisis in U.S.-Iraqi relations in 1998, on the same day that President Yeltsin warned that U.S. missile strikes on Iraq could cause a third world war, the Russian Embassy demarched the U.S. government to demand a guarantee that the United States would not use nuclear weapons against Iraq. As Chairman Curt Weldon has written, “the Russian assumption that the United States was prepared to act so precipitously with nuclear weapons betrays a paranoia or ignorance of the character of the United States that is alarming in the Russian nuclear superpower that is supposed to be our strategic partner.”²⁷
- In October 1995 the Russian semi-official Institute of Defense Studies (INOBS) provided the following assessment of U.S. policy:

On the whole, it appears the principal mission of U.S. and Western policy with respect to Russia is to keep it from turning into an economically, politically, and militarily influential force and to transform post-Soviet space into an economic and political appendage and raw materials colony of the West. Because of this, it is the United States and its allies that are the sources of main external threats to Russia's national security, and they should be considered the principal potential enemies of the Russian Federation. ... The line of the United States and its allies toward intervening in Russia's internal affairs to impose on it paths of development in a direction favorable to the West represents the greatest danger.²⁸

The evolution of Russia's official views of the United States is traceable in the successive iterations of the state papers defining Russia's foreign policy and defense doctrines. The decline in U.S.-Russian rela-

tions is clearly visible when the 1993 and 2000 versions of the *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* are compared. In the January 25, 1993, version of the *Concept*, the relationship between Russia and the United States is discussed at length. Although qualified by expressions of concern over various aspects of U.S. policy,²⁹ the 1993 *Foreign Policy Concept* states unequivocally that:

[R]elying on the existing agreements in the military-political and financial-economic spheres, Russia will strive toward the stable development of relations with the United States, *with a view toward strategic partnership and, in the future, toward alliance.* ... In the sphere of security, the main trait of the new partnership is the transition to cooperation at the level of military planning and military construction.³⁰

Concerning U.S.-Russia relations, the 1993 *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* stated that:

For the foreseeable future, relations with the United States will retain a prominent place on the scale of Russia's foreign policy priorities, corresponding to the position and weight of the United States in world affairs. The development of full-fledged relations with the United States is capable of facilitating the creation of a favorable foreign environment for the implementation of domestic economic reforms in Russia.³¹

Eight years later, not a trace of this tone or policy remains. The revised *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, approved by President Vladimir Putin on June 28, 2000, unmistakably repudiates the very idea of “partnership” implicit in the 1993 version—and the rhetoric of the Clinton administration.

Along with certain strengthening of the international positions of the Russian Federation, negative tendencies are in evidence as well. *Certain plans relating to establishing new, equitable and mutually advantageous partnership relations of Russia with the rest of the world, as was assumed in the [1993 Foreign Policy Concept] and in other documents, have not been justified.*³²



The new *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* reflects a completely different view of American power, listing first among “new challenges and threats to the national interests of Russia”:

... a growing trend towards the establishment of a unipolar structure of the world with the economic and power domination of the United States. ... The strategy of unilateral actions can destabilize the international situation, provoke tensions and the arms race, [and] aggravate international contradictions, national and religious strife. ... Russia shall seek to achieve a multi-polar system of international relations. ...³³

Interspersed between lengthy and comparatively favorable assessments of European³⁴ and Asian³⁵ relations are two cold paragraphs on a Russian-American “strategic partnership” that has been reduced to mere “necessary interaction”:

The Russian Federation is prepared to overcome considerable latter-day difficulties in relations with the U.S., and to preserve the infrastructure of Russian-American cooperation, which has been created over almost 10 years. Despite the presence of serious, and in a number of cases fundamental, differences, Russian-American interaction is the necessary condition for the amelioration of the international situation and achievement of global strategic stability.

Above all, this concerns problems of disarmament, arms control, and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as prevention and settlement of the more dangerous regional conflicts. It is only through an active dialogue with the U.S. that the issues of limitation and reduction of strategic nuclear weapons may be resolved. It is in our mutual interest to maintain regular bilateral contacts at all levels, not allowing pauses in relations and setback in the negotiating processes on the main political, military, and economic matters.³⁶

In the revised version, relations with the United States are reduced to the Cold War agenda of security issues and negotiations—an agenda on which other portions of the document lay out positions largely at

odds with the United States, apparently presaging a reprise of Cold War deadlocks. Likewise disconcerting is the fact that this passage appears to be aimed at least equally at persuading a dubious domestic audience of the need for “regular bilateral contact at all levels”—a staggering state of affairs for a relationship that the Clinton administration built entirely around the personal contacts between Vice President Gore, Strobe Talbott, Lawrence Summers, and their handful of Russian counterparts.

A similar decline is apparent in comparing Russia’s December 1997 *Russian Federation National Security Blueprint* with its recently revised version.³⁷ The 1997 document, although approved by Yeltsin after years of development over a period of sharply increased tension with the United States, included relatively little that is specific to the United States. Its survey of “Threats to the National Security of the Russian Federation” was dominated by internal factors, and the discussion of NATO enlargement (described as creating “the threat of a split in the continent that would be extremely dangerous”) was relatively restrained. It concluded that:

the main [threats] right now and in the foreseeable future do not have a military orientation and are of a predominantly internal nature. ... The development of qualitatively new relations with the world’s leading states and the virtual absence of the threat of large-scale aggression against Russia while its nuclear deterrent potential is preserved make it possible to redistribute the resources of the state and society to resolve acute domestic problems on a priority basis.³⁸

In foreign policy, it promoted “constructive partnership with the United States, the EU, China, Japan, India, and other states.”³⁹

The revised *Russian Federation National Security Concept* approved by the Russian National Security Council on October 5, 1999, by contrast, opens with a stark dichotomy between “mutually exclusive tendencies toward forming a multipolar world and toward establishing the domination of one country or group of countries in world affairs”—specifically “the domination of developed Western countries in the international community (with U.S. leadership) calculated for unilateral (including military-force) solutions to key





AP Photo/W. Douglas Graham/Congressional Quarterly



STATESMAN-LIKE ADVICE: Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger testifies in support of NATO enlargement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Oct. 30, 1997. Secretary Kissinger strongly opposed both the Clinton administration's "Founding Act" and its "Partnership for Peace" program as undermining the Atlantic Alliance, and testified that the Clinton administration "has embraced the proposition rejected by all its predecessors over the last 40 years—that NATO is a potential threat to Russia." He dismissed the argument that the Founding Act was non-binding as one that "may carry weight in law schools [but is] irrelevant to the diplomacy that will result from an instrument signed by 17 heads of state and ratified by the Russian Duma."

problems of world politics in circumvention of fundamental rules of international law."

The 1999 *National Security Concept* rejected the earlier view that Russia faced no external military threat, instead stating that the totality of external threats "can present a threat to Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including the possibility of direct military aggression against Russia." Of the eight external threats enumerated, three are clearly related to U.S. policy and another two may refer to it indirectly.⁴⁰ Senior Russian officers also made it unambiguous that the source of the "external threat" was the United States and NATO.⁴¹

The decline in U.S.-Russia relations that these doctrines memorialize did not occur overnight, and no single factor or event transformed Russia's relationship with the United States. Rather, a whole series of policy mistakes, often but not exclusively made in Washington, produced the current crisis in U.S. relations with Russia.

Mishandling NATO Enlargement

Some observers attribute part of the decline in U.S.-Russian relations and the concurrent Sino-Russian rapprochement to the enlargement of NATO, and from this premise draw the conclusion that NATO enlargement was a mistake. Little evidence supports either the premise or the conclusion. NATO enlargement is not a highly salient issue for the Russian general public.⁴² Russian elite and official opinion, though hostile to NATO enlargement, has consistently attached greater importance to other foreign policy issues and, most particularly, to domestic economic and social issues. The flaw in the Clinton administration's NATO policy, and the principal source of damage to U.S.-Russian relations attributable to NATO enlargement, was the administration's protracted *obstruction* of NATO enlargement.

Initial Clinton administration opposition to NATO enlargement was followed by a belated embrace of a phased enlargement, to be drawn out over more than a decade. This approach completely missed the early window of opportunity to comprehensively enlarge NATO without serious or lasting damage to U.S.-Russian relations. As late as the August 25, 1993, summit between President Yeltsin and Polish President Lech Walesa in Warsaw, the joint statement issued by the leaders expressed Russia's "understanding" of Poland's desire to accede to NATO. Indeed, Yeltsin subsequently was publicly and privately criticized for this in Russia, and as a result later suggested joint NATO-Russian security guarantees for the Central European states.⁴³

The solution to the political problem caused within Russia by NATO enlargement was to localize it in time, rather than protracting Russia's discomfiture over more than a decade or buying off Russia with implicit promises of power-sharing that NATO ultimately had no intention of honoring. But key figures in the Clinton administration were ambivalent towards NATO itself, much less NATO enlargement.



This was especially true of one of the Clinton trika, Strobe Talbott. Even before the end of the Soviet Union, in 1990, Talbott wrote that “[i]t ... is time to think seriously about eventually retiring the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with honor, to be sure, but without too much nostalgia. ... NATO is at best a stopgap until something more up-to-date and effective can be devised to take its place.”⁴⁴

Not surprisingly, given such deep-seeded doubts, the Clinton administration moved with excruciating slowness—only proposing the generic concept of NATO enlargement after Clinton had been in office for a full year. At the January 1994 NATO summit, the Clinton administration proposed the NATO halfway-house Partnership for Peace program (largely to paper over a lack of consensus on the pace and scope of NATO enlargement itself).⁴⁵ After a further 12-month delay, at a December 1994 ministerial meeting, they proposed criteria for NATO admission (but not actual candidates).

Criteria for admission were not formalized until September 20, 1995. The proposed admission of new members by 1999 did not occur until October 22, 1996; naming the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as the American candidates for admission took until June 12, 1997 (the nominations were ratified at NATO’s Madrid summit on July 8, 1997). The formal admission of the three states to NATO did not take place until March 12, 1999—nearly a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The grandiose NATO 50th anniversary summit in Washington on April 23-25, 1999, brought no substantive progress towards further enlarging the alliance, or even better articulating the process and criteria for membership. On June 30, 1999, Defense Secretary William Cohen stated that while NATO’s “door is open,” it was “at the top of a steep stairwell.”⁴⁶ The Clinton administration’s mantra for NATO enlargement—that it would be “gradual, deliberate, and transparent”—has translated into a process that promises to extend well into the 21st century.

Throughout the process, the Clinton administration also repeatedly diluted the effectiveness of NATO’s security guarantee to new member-states and distorted the fundamental structure of the alliance itself in an attempt to appease the Russian opposition exacerbated by its own delays. Despite lip service to the

proposition that “[a]ll members, regardless of size, strength or location, should be full members of the Alliance, with equal rights and obligations,”⁴⁷ on December 10, 1996, NATO formally announced that it had “no intention, no plan, and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members. ...”

On September 6, 1996, Secretary of State Warren Christopher endorsed a French proposal to create a joint NATO-Russian “charter.” On May 27, 1997, Russia and NATO, with the Clinton administration’s strong encouragement, agreed to the “Founding Act”—a much different document creating a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, and codifying the December 1996 nuclear non-deployment pledge. The Founding Act also added a further pledge that “in the current and foreseeable security environment,” NATO would not station “substantial combat forces” on the territory of new member-states.⁴⁸

The Founding Act is a particularly egregious example of the disingenuousness of the Clinton administration’s approach to foreign policy in general, and Russia policy in particular. After having heightened the difficulty of NATO enlargement by protracting the process through the entirety of Clinton’s and Yeltsin’s first terms, and with no end to the process in sight, the administration was bent on solving the problems its delays had created by securing Russian assent to the first round of NATO enlargement. Its method of squaring this circle was the Founding Act, a nebulous document *designed* to mean different things to Russian, Central European, and NATO audiences.

The Founding Act was signed in May 1997 by seventeen heads of state in a blaze of trademark Clinton showmanship in the Salle des Fêtes of the Elysée Palace. At root, the Founding Act was an attempt to paper over profound substantive differences, including over such issues as Bosnia and the expanding crisis in the Balkans. Instead of hammering out substantive agreements, the Clinton administration created an open-ended negotiating *process*.

The ambiguity of the Act led President Yeltsin to claim plausibly that it gave Russia a virtual veto over NATO operations, saying that “[s]hould Russia be against any decision, the decision will not pass.”⁴⁹ Administration spokesmen from the president down claimed that it gave Russia “a voice, not a veto” in NATO decision-making and a veto only over joint





NATO-Russian actions.⁵⁰ As Dimitri Simes has argued:

[I]nterpretations of the agreement in Washington and Moscow were clearly vastly different—and each interpretation was bound to cause serious problems. If the Russian interpretation had been followed, Moscow would have gained a de facto veto over NATO actions. Conversely, if the Clinton administration's interpretation was followed—as happened—it was almost inevitable that Russia would feel misled by false promises of a genuine role in NATO deliberations.⁵¹

The Clinton administration continued its delaying tactics at the 1998 Madrid summit. It vetoed a French proposal to admit Romania, and an Italian proposal to admit Slovenia, despite the support of most NATO allies for a broader enlargement. The administration's unwillingness to go forward was apparently motivated at least in part by fear that admitting Romania and Slovenia in the first round would increase pressure for admission of the Baltic states in the second round.

Predictably, neither the delaying tactics of the Clinton administration nor the Founding Act appeased Russia. By late 1996, a resolution opposing NATO enlargement had already passed the Duma by a vote of 307-0. The subsequent studied ambiguity of the Founding Act led to a fundamental breach between NATO and Russia within less than two years, as NATO decided to intervene in Kosovo. Russian expectations of decisional partnership (which the Clinton administration had dishonestly encouraged in order to finesse its way through the 1997 enlargement round) were abruptly dashed in the 1999 dispute over Kosovo. Russian disillusionment with the United States was far deeper than if no such ambiguous promises had ever been tendered in the first place.

It is unclear what strategy the Clinton administration may now develop to reconcile Russia to subsequent rounds of enlargement, which administration spokesmen describe as “inevitable.”

Amputation One Inch at a Time

Protracting NATO enlargement over the course of more than a decade in a perversely counterproductive effort to assuage Russian official opinion has been just-

ly compared to amputating a limb one inch at a time, with the goal of diminishing the patient's suffering. As a result of this temporizing, NATO enlargement became an issue in the 1996 Russian presidential race, and will be a continuing irritant in U.S.-Russian relations as each cycle of enlargement occurs.

The fundamental flaw in the Clinton administration's approach was the assumption that the issue was critical to U.S.-Russian relations and, still more, to the fate of Russia's internal reforms. As former Under Secretary of State Robert Zoellick testified in April 1995:

I am skeptical that the fate of Russia's reform depends on whether NATO expands. ... In addition, given the great uncertainties about Russia's political future, it would be a mistake to try to fine tune our policies to suit the twists and turns of Russia's internal debates. It certainly should not be surprising that Yeltsin, Kozyrev and others have toughened their rhetoric about NATO expansion as the U.S. and others have signaled their uncertainty. ... [I]f we back down, the next time the hard-liners have a contest with moderate Russians, the hard-liners will be able to argue that sternness with the West pays off.⁵²

NATO Enlargement Without Threatening Russia: What Could Have Been

From the earliest days after the end of the Soviet Union, Republican leaders in both houses of Congress made NATO enlargement a central foreign policy initiative. Over Clinton administration opposition and delays, legislation to promote NATO expansion was repeatedly advanced in Congress.⁵³

These bills in their totality represent a sharp rebuke of the Clinton administration policy of lengthily-phased enlargement, unequal security treatment for new members, and inclusion of the Joint Council in alliance decision making. The Clinton administration vigorously opposed most of these legislative initiatives, although it was unable to prevent a number of them from becoming law.

Congress' approach, unlike the Clinton administration's, has been rooted in the understanding that NATO enlargement, like the creation of NATO in 1949, is fun-



damentally defensive in nature. It is a reaction to the fundamental imbalance of power between Russia and its neighbors, either individually or in combination—an age-old reality reflected in Romanov dominion over Poland, the Baltic nations, Finland, Belarus, and Ukraine in the 18th and 19th centuries, and Moscow’s sway over the still vaster imperium of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact in the 20th century. This tragic history entitles these peoples to insurance against the possibility of renewed Russian domination.⁵⁴

In addition, just as NATO proved essential to fostering democracy and the rule of law in Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece, and Turkey, so too NATO membership will promote those values and the stability that flows from them in Central European countries struggling to revive or create free markets and democracy after decades of Communist autocracy.

And just as NATO membership helped abate the rivalry between France and Germany and contain disputes between Greece and Turkey, so too NATO membership will help diminish long-standing animosities between the nations of Central Europe. The mere prospect of NATO membership helped promote settlement of issues predating World War II between Germany and the Czech Republic, and led Hungary and Romania to resolve centuries-old territorial disputes. These goals—of independence, democracy, stability, and reconciliation in Central Europe—are as much in Russia’s interest as they are in America’s.

Moreover, the achievement of these goals through NATO enlargement involves no objective threat to Russia itself⁵⁵—particularly in light of the Clinton administration’s avowal that it has no intention of prepositioning nuclear weapons, NATO forces, or military infrastructure in the new members. The indigenous military capabilities of the Central European new and candidate members, either singly or in combination, present no objective threat to Russia.⁵⁶

The Failure of Economic ‘Reform’ and the Decline of U.S.-Russian Relations

The fundamental cause of worsening U.S.-Russian relations in the early years of the Clinton administration was the tectonic shift in Russian domestic politics in this period, and the close associa-

tion of the United States with individuals and policies that were discredited by it.

Russian faith in democracy, free enterprise, and “reform” suffered hammer blows in the years from 1993 to 1996. This period withstood the shattering confrontation between Yeltsin and the legislature in October 1993; the electoral success of nationalist extremists like Zhirinovskiy in the December 1993 elections to the Duma; the bloody and disastrous first Chechen war beginning in December 1994; the “loans-for-shares” privatization fiasco in 1995-96, which ordinary Russians perceived as a witches’ sabbath of corruption and theft orchestrated by Washington; the 1995 Duma elections, which returned an entrenched Communist-led bloc bent on thwarting reform; and the 1996 flood of IMF money into the hands of Russia’s unpopular *semibankirshchina*—the so-called “Rule of the Seven Bankers” whom oligarch Boris Berezovskiy had said owned half of Russia.⁵⁷

Because the United States was inextricably associated with both the “reformers” and their “reforms,” these events cumulatively had a disastrous effect on the public and elite perception of the United States. The result was a climate of opinion in which both Communists and “reformers” profited from attacking the United States, from making common cause with the Communist government of the People’s Republic of China, and from embracing American opponents such as Iran and Iraq. For many Russian ideologues, these attacks were a matter of conviction; for many embattled “reformers” from Yeltsin on down, they became a comparatively inexpensive expedient to appease critical public opinion without tampering with more important domestic priorities—such as the “loans-for-shares” insider privatization program.⁵⁸

At critical junctures such as the October 1993 confrontation with parliament, and the run-up to the 1996 presidential election (when Yeltsin reportedly contemplated canceling balloting to prevent his potential defeat) Yeltsin became far more dependent on the military and security services. He was consequently far more susceptible to their policy agenda of opposition to the United States—particularly since he was unable to satisfy their highest priority, increased funding. Just as he did in his relations with the Duma, Yeltsin was able to use anti-American foreign policy stances as a relatively inexpensive sop to the “power ministries”—defense, interior, the security services, and atomic energy.





As internal Russian economic, political, and social developments accelerated Moscow's turn away from Washington and toward U.S. rivals, the Clinton administration clung even more desperately to its habit of dealing exclusively with the handful of Russian executive branch officials, such as Yeltsin, Chernomyrdin, and Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais, who would assure them personally that everything was going smoothly. This had the effect of inextricably associating the United States and American values with politicians who were rapidly becoming among the most unpopular figures in Russia—further worsening America's precipitous fall from favor among both Russian elites and the Russian public.

Similarly, the Clinton administration continued to link itself with successive flawed reform plans that it produced in collaboration with its circle of Russian partners. When both the “reformers” and their “reforms” became discredited and unpopular, it was predictable that their foreign patron, the United States, would become discredited and unpopular as well.

Kosovo

Operation Allied Force, the 1999 air campaign triggered by the Milosevic government's repugnant campaign of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, powerfully reinforced the negative view of the United States held by Russian public opinion at every level.⁵⁹ The initially one-sided press coverage of the 89-day NATO air campaign against Serbia quickly deepened animus towards the West.⁶⁰ A poll released April 1, 1999, reflected 92% Russian public disapproval of the NATO airstrikes;⁶¹ in another poll, 65% believed that NATO was the aggressor.⁶² Indeed, President Yeltsin's own strident reactions may have been colored in part by the need to court inflamed public opinion: the main proponents of the then-pending impeachment proceedings against him in the Duma were nationalists vehemently opposed to NATO's actions.⁶³

The Russian government was infuriated by the betrayal of its reading of the NATO-Russian Founding Act. The Clinton administration's willingness to conclude this fundamentally ambiguous agreement in 1997 was thus proved early on to have been a costly error. Moscow was not only upset by the process of taking NATO action without Russia's consent. The Russian government also feared that the policy of NATO mili-

tary action for reasons other than responding to an attack on NATO, and without U.N. sponsorship, might be a precedent for future NATO action in Chechnya.

This, too, was an example of the high cost of the Clinton administration's disingenuous statements. Russia took the Clinton administration's sweeping human rights rhetoric more seriously than did the administration itself, which had largely ignored Russian atrocities in Chechnya in 1994-96, and would make no effectual protests later in 1999, when Russian troops began their brutal second assault.

Moscow took drastic steps to underline its displeasure. In March 1999, because of impending NATO airstrikes in Yugoslavia, then-Prime Minister Primakov abruptly canceled his visit to the United States, literally turning his airplane around in mid-air en route to a scheduled meeting of the Gore-Primakov Commission. President Yeltsin subsequently suspended Russian participation in a broad range of cooperative efforts underway with NATO and NATO member countries, citing “deep outrage” about NATO's bombing campaign.⁶⁴ Russia also withdrew control from NATO over its Bosnia peacekeepers, and placed them under the command of the Russian General Staff.

In April 1999, Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznyov told the press that President Yeltsin had ordered Russian missiles re-targeted on NATO Europe, rescinding the de-targeting pledge he had made with great fanfare at the 1997 Paris summit at which the Founding Act was signed. Although Moscow subsequently denied the reports, Yeltsin himself warned that Russia could not allow NATO ground forces to invade Serbia, and said that “I told NATO and the Americans and Germans: do not push us into military action, or there will definitely be a European and possibly a world war.”⁶⁵

When at the height of the crisis Yeltsin named Viktor Chernomyrdin to help mediate the U.S.-Russia dispute, Vice President Gore's close personal relationship with his favorite interlocutor proved less than helpful. Chernomyrdin wrote in the *Washington Post* that the NATO operations in Kosovo had “set back [U.S.-Russia relations] by several decades,” and compared the air campaign against Milosevic to the Soviet Union's crushing of the Prague Spring. He concluded by stating that “[t]he world has never in this decade been so close as now to the brink of nuclear war.”⁶⁶



Nor were these verbal broadsides a smokescreen to allow Chernomyrdin to adopt a more cooperative policy than Primakov's, as Clinton and Gore had initially hoped. Gore's friend Chernomyrdin was an obstructive ally of Milosevic until the final stage of the negotiations, actively colluding with Belgrade to such a degree that it became necessary to add an additional intermediary, Finnish President Maarti Ahtisaari, to the negotiations.⁶⁷

The fundamental differences between the United States and Russia not only over the manner in which the Kosovo operation was handled, but over whether NATO should have intervened in Kosovo at all, made a significant cost to the U.S.-Russian relationship unavoidable. But the major factors that inflamed the situation were entirely avoidable. All that had preceded the Kosovo campaign guaranteed that the United States had no reservoir of goodwill among the Russian people.

As a result, the Russian public was willing to believe the worst about NATO and the American government. The spectacular failure of the Clinton troika policies made it politically advantageous for a wide range of Russian political figures—from Yeltsin to Lebed to Zyuganov—to attack NATO and the United States, and made it exceptionally risky for any Russian to defend them.

The result of eight years of the Clinton administration's "strategic partnership" with Russia, tens of billions of dollars in aid, and high-pressure courtship and flattery by senior U.S. officials from President Clinton and Vice President Gore on down, is that the United States is losing popularity contests with Slobodan Milosevic in Russia even today.

The Destabilizing Effects of the Clinton Troika Policy on Russia's Neighbors

Increasingly, throughout the tenure of the Clinton administration, Russia has worked to assert influence over a number of the former Soviet "Union Republics" in what Russia calls the "near abroad." These efforts have steadily intensified, and appear to have received a fresh impetus under the new Russian administration.

Although Russia's legitimate economic and security interests are implicated in its relations with its

neighbors, Russian policies towards them have often suggested that Moscow is not looking for a relationship of sovereign equality, but is instead seeking to again exert its will over its weaker neighbors.

Russia's new *Foreign Policy Concept* states that relations with the former republics "should be structured . . . to take into account in a due manner the interests of the Russian Federation, including in terms of guarantees of rights of Russian compatriots," tens of millions of whom live in the "near abroad." Russia's Union with Belarus is cited as the model for such relations: "a priority task is to strengthen the Union of Belarus and Russia as the highest, at this stage, form of integration of two sovereign states."⁶⁸

While Russia's Union with Belarus is consensual,⁶⁹ at least as far as Belarus' autocratic President Lukashenka is concerned, renewed Russian activity in other countries has not been as welcome. Ukraine, for example, finds itself facing renewed economic pressure due to its dependence on Russian gas.⁷⁰ Despite Ukraine's great strategic importance to the United States the "pronounced russocentrism"⁷¹ of the Clinton team has led to "ignorance of and, worse, indifference toward the other successor states, notably Ukraine."⁷²

Kazakhstan has also come under increasing economic and political pressure.⁷³ Pavel Borodin—the State Secretary of the Belarus-Russian Union, a close associate of President Putin, and a central figure in Swiss criminal investigations of Kremlin financial dealings and money-laundering—predicted during Putin's April 2000 visit to Minsk that both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, as well as possibly other former Union Republics, would join the Russia-Belarus Union in the next three to four years.⁷⁴

In addition, Russia has actively intervened in the internal affairs of Georgia, helping to foment secessionist violence in Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, and maintaining Russian "peacekeepers" who themselves have required OSCE monitors. Moscow has also repeatedly threatened the Baltic states. And despite recent visits by members of the Clinton administration,⁷⁵ many of the Central Asian republics have increasingly turned to Moscow for assistance in dealing with the threat of terrorism and radical Islamic separatism.⁷⁶

Rather than tempering Russia's ambitions, the Clinton administration's weak policy has emboldened





Moscow, undercutting the ability of the new independent states to maintain unfettered sovereignty. Former U.S. Ambassador to Belarus David H. Swartz attested to “Talbot’s policy of looking at regional matters through Russia’s prism, as though the [Soviet] Union still existed; of ignoring the other new states; of conveying unmistakable signals to Moscow that the United States recognized its hegemonic ‘rights’ in what Moscow calls its ‘near abroad.’”⁷⁷

Russia’s New Nuclear Doctrine

Russia’s current nuclear doctrine⁷⁸ carries enormous risks for both the United States and Russia. Successive Russian defense doctrines have dramatically lowered the threshold for the use of nuclear forces.

For example, as early as October 1994, Lt. Gen. G.D. Ivanov, Assistant Defense Minister for Policy, gave a presentation on Russian nuclear doctrine to an American delegation headed by Assistant Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter. He outlined a “model of military deterrence” involving four scenarios, three of which involved potential use of nuclear weapons. Only the first, deterrence of a potential non-nuclear aggressor, was to be accomplished by conventional deterrence. Nuclear deterrence was to be employed against not only a potential nuclear aggressor, but also against a non-nuclear aggressor allied with a nuclear state. Nuclear weapons could also be used against a non-nuclear aggressor if it was acting together with, or being supported by, a nuclear state.

Indeed, as one observer noted, there is “a tendency today to consider solving the problem of Russia’s immense weakness in conventional arms by introducing low-yield, tactical nuclear weapons in order to strengthen conventional deterrence.”⁷⁹

Russia’s new nuclear doctrine thus involves heavier reliance on nuclear weapons—and their first use—than did the doctrine of the U.S.S.R. As General Ivanov has noted:

As you can see, Russia’s new military doctrine includes a harsher, stricter component in its nuclear policy with respect to surrounding countries. ... [W]e want every state, including non-nuclear ones, to consider the possible consequences of initiating aggression against Russia. ...⁸⁰



AP Photo

NEW USE FOR OLD ICBMs: Russia’s new nuclear doctrine involves heavier reliance on nuclear weapons—and their first-use—than did the doctrine of the U.S.S.R. Russia is retiring its older ICBMs and, unlike the United States, developing and building new models to maintain a smaller and more modern force. A Russian army SS-25 “Topol” (Poplar) ICBM is taken into position during military training near Irkutsk, Siberia, Russia, Apr. 12, 1995.

This change of doctrine is especially troubling because Russia’s capacity to accurately assess whether it is being attacked, and to control its strategic forces, is decaying.⁸¹ Compounding this problem is the fact that Russia has adopted a hair-trigger “launch on warning” posture that compresses nuclear decision making to a few minutes. As Bruce Blair of the Brookings Institution has testified:

Russia’s heavy reliance on this option means that its early warning and nuclear release procedures require a response time of 15 minutes in total; they allow only three or four minutes for detecting an attack, and another three or four minutes for top-level decision making. ... It is obvious this is not a safe operational practice ... and its [danger] is compounded by the deterioration of Russia’s command-control system and missile attack early warning network. ...⁸²

Russia’s nuclear posture reflects much more than the decay of its technical capabilities, however. Much of Russia’s senior-level officer corps appears to regard the United States with such intense suspicion as to make an American first-strike seem plausible to them.⁸³ This attitude forms a striking contrast with the Clinton administration’s rosy vision of its relationship with Moscow—particularly given the increasing influence of the Russian foreign-policy and military establishment’s views on mainstream Russian thinking.



The combination of these factors has created an extraordinarily unstable and dangerous security environment for the United States and Russia a decade after the end of the Cold War.

Recently, there have been extensive though inconclusive press reports that the Russian government is reconsidering its military funding priorities.⁸⁴ There has been a longstanding, multidimensional rivalry between the conventional forces, championed by the general staff, and the Strategic Rocket Forces (RVSN), strongly supported by the current Defense Minister, a former commander of the RVSN. It involves, among other issues, resource allocation issues. The outlines of any final decision remain unclear.

What is clear, however, is that no reallocation of resources will address the *subjective* mistrust of American intentions that produced the 1995 war scare, and led the Russian government to spend immense resources on the deep-underground facilities at Yamantau Mountain.

The Outmoded ABM Treaty: A Case Study in Policy Failure

The mounting tension over U.S. plans to deploy national and theater missile defenses offers a sobering case study of the disintegration of U.S.-Russian relations under the Clinton administration, the parallel movement toward a proto-alliance between Russia and the People's Republic of China, and the extraordinarily-serious implications of these developments for the supreme national interests of the United States.

After eight years in office, the Clinton administration made headlines with its abortive quest for a “grand bargain” with Russia over national missile defense at the Moscow summit in June 2000. The limited aims of the summit, which nevertheless were not achieved, stand in marked contrast to the far more desirable “grand bargain” that was within sight when President Clinton took office in January 1993.

In his State of the Union address on January 29, 1991, President Bush dramatically recast the Strategic Defense Initiative away from a large-scale effort to preserve U.S. nuclear retaliatory capabilities against a Soviet first strike. His proposed GPALS (Global Protection Against Limited Strikes) system reoriented America's proposed missile defenses toward the far

more limited threats of accidental or unauthorized launch, or emerging threats from third countries. It therefore dramatically reduced the scope of the program.

President Bush's proposal responded to and fostered the ongoing sea change in U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian relations. It also reflected the growing risk of attack by third countries—a risk that had been dramatized just days before, when Saddam Hussein used Scud ballistic missiles against civilian targets in Israel and against U.S. forces in Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm.

While President Bush downscaled the scope of the threat against which GPALS would defend, he also extended the protection intended by the system from U.S. nuclear forces to the whole American homeland—and also to “our forces overseas and ... our friends and allies.”⁸⁵

President Bush worked closely with Senator Sam Nunn and the Democratic Congress to build consensus for his new approach—a lesson unheeded by the Clinton administration, which has repeatedly sought to evade or preclude Congressional review of its initiatives. The Bush administration secured Democratic support for the enactment of the Missile Defense Act of 1991, which made it our national goal to “deploy an anti-ballistic missile system, including one or an adequate additional number of anti-ballistic missile sites and space-based sensors, that is capable of providing a highly effective defense of the United States against limited attacks of ballistic missiles.”⁸⁶ The Act authorized negotiations to facilitate deployment, and authorized a limited initial deployment of ground-based interceptors supported by ground- and space-based elements. Though far from ideal, the Missile Defense Act represented a constructive compromise that transcended prior Democratic opposition to the concept of ballistic missile defense.

The Russian response was exceptionally promising. President Gorbachev wrote to the G-7 summit participants in July 1991 to indicate his interest in pursuing some form of missile defense cooperation, a position surprisingly echoed by the Chief of the Soviet General Staff.⁸⁷ The accession of Boris Yeltsin to power led to an even more significant turn of events: Yeltsin's January 1992 U.N. speech urging that “the time has come to consider creating a global defense





system for the world community. It could be based on a reorientation of the United States Strategic Defense Initiative, to make use of high technologies developed in Russia's defense complex.⁸⁸

Yeltsin's Global Protection System (GPS) proposal was discussed at the June 1992 Camp David summit of the two Presidents. That summit gave rise to the so-called Ross-Mamedov negotiations seeking cooperation on early warning, defense technology, non-proliferation, and the legal regime necessary to under-gird the GPS—including important amendments to the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

The Ross-Mamedov group held two highly promising negotiating sessions before being abruptly and unilaterally suspended by the incoming Clinton administration, which subsequently ordered the U.S. delegation to the Standing Consultative Committee to *withdraw* the ABM Treaty amendments that had been proposed by President Bush.

As President Clinton's former CIA Director James Woolsey wrote recently:

In early 1993, the administration could have chosen to continue some promising negotiations—the Ross-Mamedov talks—which were, at that point, only one year old. ... Negotiators were beginning to discuss an approach that would leave research and development unconstrained, deploy over 1,000 interceptors at multiple sites, and place a time limit on the duration of the ABM Treaty, to allow future deployment of space-based interceptors. But the new Clinton administration canceled the talks and took the position that the ABM Treaty was the “cornerstone of strategic stability” between the U.S. and Russia.⁸⁹

The abrupt Clinton action shocked the Russian government, and gave rise to lasting, deep-seeded suspicions of U.S. strategic intention and good faith.⁹⁰

Although the Clinton administration's actions offended Moscow, they were actually aimed at a different enemy: the signature Reagan-Bush emphasis on strategic defense. The new administration was determined to bury the late-20th century version of the Reagan Strategic Defense Initiative they had for so long derided as “Star Wars.”

On May 13, 1993, Defense Secretary Les Aspin, in announcing a sweeping downgrading of the entire strategic defense program within the Defense Department, proclaimed “the end of the Star Wars era.”⁹¹ The new Clinton Defense Department had by then already announced that it was making national missile defense a lower priority than theater missile defense, transforming the former from an acquisition program to a “technology readiness program”—its status until the final months of the first Clinton term.⁹²

Notwithstanding President Yeltsin's personal involvement in the missile defense proposal, the Clinton administration stridently asserted that missile defense would do long-term damage to U.S.-Russian relations. Over time, Russian officials obligingly took to substantiating that claim, and Russian objections have themselves grown steadily more strident.⁹³

But as with NATO enlargement, there is little evidence to suggest that the Russian public is concerned about the issue. The State Department's own Office of Research reported on the basis of opinion sampling as recently as February 2000, after years of heated official controversy: “An overwhelming majority of Russians have heard or read little (31%) or nothing (55%) about American proposals to modify the ABM Treaty to permit the U.S. to install a limited missile defense. Only 5 percent have heard or read at least a fair amount about it.”⁹⁴

On the defensive after Republicans swept the 1994 legislative elections on a platform endorsing vigorous pursuit of a national missile defense, the Clinton administration vetoed the Missile Defense Act of 1995—part of the Contract With America—and sought to make its case for delay. To this end, the administration produced the now-notorious National Intelligence Estimate, “Emerging Missile Threats to North America During the Next 15 Years.” The report predicted that “no country, other than the major declared nuclear powers, will develop or otherwise acquire a ballistic missile in the next fifteen years that could threaten the contiguous 48 states and Canada.” The report particularly deprecated the possibility of North Korea developing a “longer range operational ICBM.”⁹⁵

The National Intelligence Estimate was immediately subjected to a firestorm of criticism for downplaying the potential impact of outside assistance—



including direct sales of missiles—to regimes developing ballistic missiles. It was similarly criticized for minimizing the impact of space launch vehicle development on missile proliferation, and for excluding missile threats to Alaska and Hawaii from the category of threats to the United States. Not only was the report promptly controverted by the General Accounting Office,⁹⁶ it was authoritatively debunked in the July 15, 1998, report of the bipartisan Rumsfeld Commission.

The Rumsfeld Commission had been chartered by Congress to consider the same issues covered in the National Intelligence Estimate. It concluded that the United States “might have little or no warning before operational deployment” of a ballistic missile by a hostile Third World country.⁹⁷ On August 31, 1998, just a month and a half after the Rumsfeld Commission’s report, North Korea fired a three-stage rocket over Japan, ending as conclusively as possible this phase of the debate.

The Clinton administration had, however, managed to buy three years’ delay in the debate over deployment of a national missile defense. In the interval, President Clinton secured the 1997 Russian-American protocols to the ABM Treaty, which were intended to render the creation of a robust theater missile defense or national missile defense both practically and legally impossible. First, the Clinton administration significantly broadened the coverage of the ABM Treaty by “insist[ing],” as former Clinton CIA Director Woolsey put it, that “Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan [were] the four ABM Treaty successors to the USSR.”

[T]he administration and the Russians have joined forces against the U.S. Senate. . . . Since the execrable [Lukashenka] regime in Belarus is the corrupt partner of the most unreconstructed parts of the old Soviet military-industrial complex, it (and they) would have a veto over any ABM Treaty amendments.⁹⁸

In early 1996, shortly after the issuance of its National Intelligence Estimate, the Defense Department announced that it would not be able to meet the operational dates mandated by Congress for two promising theater missile defense systems, Navy Upper Tier and theater high-altitude area defense. And in 1997, a further protocol on “demarcation” to limit

the effectiveness of any theater missile defense system was signed by Russia at the Clinton administration’s urgent insistence. It lobotomized some of the most promising theater missile defense technologies to ensure that they could not assist in a national missile defense.

The protocols set the now-familiar pattern of Clinton administration policy: attempting to curry favor with Russia by delaying deployment of American missile defenses and eviscerating their effectiveness. As the next step in this process, the Clinton administration let it be known that at the June 2000 Moscow summit with Putin the president would seek a “grand bargain”: a START III agreement drastically cutting U.S. and Russian warheads, *and* a U.S.-Russian agreement to amend the ABM Treaty to permit only a very limited U.S. national missile defense while continuing to bar more promising forms of missile defenses.

The President and Vice President Gore thereby sought to achieve both their policy goals and their political goals. From a policy standpoint they would perpetuate the obsolete ABM Treaty, seek security through new arms control agreements, and outlaw precisely the types of missile defenses that Congress has pursued since 1994. From a political standpoint, they could expect a spectacular signing ceremony in Moscow, and a subsequent patriotic Rose Garden ceremony announcing that a single-site national missile defense system would be built by a date certain on American soil. Both of these ceremonies would come in time for the November 2000 election. As the *Washington Post* reported on March 30, 2000:

Sen. Joseph Biden, ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, said yesterday that President Clinton “is absolutely going full-bore” to reach an agreement with Russia on modifying the ABM Treaty so the United States can go ahead with a limited missile defense system. Clinton’s plan, Biden told reporters, “is to get the limited system locked down in a deal with Putin” in order to block Republicans from pushing forward with a broader, full-scale, national ABM system.⁹⁹

Though it may have been brilliantly manipulative in the realm of domestic politics, the administration proposal was hopelessly flawed from the perspective





of national security. Former Clinton CIA Director James Woolsey recently called it:

a school-uniform program for national defense: it does almost nothing to deal with the basic problem, but it may at least get the president some credit for trying. But unlike school uniforms, which at least don't undercut the cause of education, this approach to missile defense does undercut its ostensible goal by impeding our efforts to deal with our growing vulnerability to rogue-state missiles. . . . [T]he administration has purposely designed vulnerabilities into its own system in order to assure the Russians that they can penetrate it with ease.¹⁰⁰

But the rot in U.S. relations with Russia was by then considerably too far along for Moscow to accept the Clinton proposal, however bad a bargain it was for the United States. At the end of eight years of a Clinton policy explicitly designed to cater to Russian official and popular opinion, the administration had the support of neither. Tellingly, the PRC and Russia had already cooperated in sponsoring an overwhelmingly successful U.N. General Assembly Resolution calling for preservation of the ABM Treaty, and implicitly criticizing U.S. efforts to amend it.¹⁰¹

The striking suspicion of American motives held by officials at the highest levels of the Russian government was graphically displayed in a June 23, 2000, interview given by Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev. Sergeev asserted that:

[T]he true reasons for deploying the U.S. National Missile Defense do not lie in imaginary threats from certain pariah countries. Apparently, some people in the United States are in the grip of the temptation to acquire strategic dominance by means of increasing the technological gulf between them and the rest of the world and creating exceptional conditions of invulnerability, that is, implementing the forgotten doctrine of Fortress America.

At the same time the possibility is not ruled out that some people want to drag our country into a new arms race so as to retard Russia's economic development.

Furthermore, *in my opinion some people in the United States are under the illusion that by*

deploying an NMD system capable of intercepting a few hundred strategic missile warheads and reducing the number of warheads and delivery vehicles as a result of the accords under START III and subsequent treaties, it is possible to acquire the potential to destroy Russia's strategic nuclear potential as a result of a pre-emptive strike and the interception of those Russian missiles and warheads that would remain for a retaliatory strike. . . .

[W]e regard the deployment of NMD as only the first step toward the future emergence of a multifunctional global system for combating all types of . . . targets. This comprehensive defense system will be directed first and foremost against the deterrent potential of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. Russian Defense Ministry experts are in no doubt about this.¹⁰²

At the June 2000 Moscow Summit, President Putin signed a Joint Statement of Principles with President Clinton which acknowledged that the international community faces "a dangerous and growing threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, including missiles and missile technologies."¹⁰³ But as with other ambiguous Clinton administration statements, Russia inferred a vastly different meaning from these words. Just one week after the Joint Statement of Principles was issued, President Putin told the German newspaper *Welt am Sonntag* that "we are now convinced that the missile threat from so-called 'problem countries' in the Middle East or in the Asian region, to which the United States refers, does fundamentally not exist, neither today nor in the foreseeable future."¹⁰⁴

Throughout his subsequent European trip, Putin attempted to use national missile defense and the ABM Treaty debate to drive wedges between the U.S. and NATO Europe, reviving Soviet-era diplomatic tactics little seen since the Cold War.

Colonel-General Valery Manilov, the Russian Deputy Chief of Staff, likewise flatly asserted on June 23, 2000, that "in the foreseeable future, 10 or 15 years, there is no threat to the United States from North Korea, or from Iran or Iraq."¹⁰⁵ On June 30, 2000, Maj. Gen. Ivashov, head of the Ministry of Defense's Department of International Cooperation, wrote in the



official armed forces journal *Krasnaya Zvezda* [*Red Star*] that American concerns about rogue states' missile capabilities were "fairy tales," based on an analysis of their technological capabilities that ignored their likely motivations.¹⁰⁶ And Foreign Minister Ivanov wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that "none of the 'problem states,' as they are now referred to in the West, are likely to acquire missiles capable of reaching the United States in the foreseeable future."¹⁰⁷

Russia's revised *Foreign Policy Concept*, approved by President Putin on June 28, 2000, states flatly that:

Russia shall seek preservation and observance of the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems—the cornerstone of strategic stability. The implementation of the plans of the United States to create a national missile defense system will inevitably compel the Russian Federation to adopt adequate measures for maintaining its national security at a proper level.¹⁰⁸

Most strikingly, the Joint Statements issued by President Jiang Zemin of the People's Republic of China and President Putin during the July 17-19, 2000, summit in Beijing categorically repudiate the idea that America is facing a ballistic missile threat. The statements bluntly threaten a return to a Cold War if the United States deploys a national missile defense. The security documents issued at this summit are the most explicitly anti-American to date, and represent an across-the-board repudiation of American positions:

The 1972 ABM Treaty remains the cornerstone of global strategic stability and international security. ... It is of vital importance to maintain and strictly observe ABM. ... China and Russia believe that the nature of NMD [national missile defense] is to seek unilateral military and security advantages, which will pose the most grave adverse consequences not only to the national security of Russia, China, and other countries, but also to the security of the United States itself and international strategic stability. ...

The damage wrought by ABM will trigger a new arms race and lead to an about-face in the positive trend that appeared in world politics after the end of the Cold War. ... Analysis of

the international situation shows that the demand of a certain nation to amend ABM on the pretext of missile threat is totally unjustified. The proposal to revise ABM is actually a ruse to cover its attempt to violate ABM.¹⁰⁹

In addition, the summit's Joint Statement endorses Beijing's opposition to theater missile defense for Taiwan, and for Northeast Asia as well. And it takes pains to distinguish Moscow's proposal for a Russian-European cooperative theater missile defense system. The Joint Statement thereby finesses Beijing's concern that the Russian theater missile defense proposal could be broadened to embrace defense against the PRC's missile forces, and reinforces the impression that the Russian proposal was more an anti-American wedge-driving exercise than a constructive effort to reach a compromise on the ballistic missile threat. In the words of the joint Russia-PRC statement:

A non-strategic missile defense program and international cooperation in such areas, which is not prohibited by ABM, should not undermine security interests of other countries, not lead to the establishment of any closed military or political bloc, or threaten global and regional stability and security. China and Russia are deeply concerned that a certain country in the Asia-Pacific region might deploy any such non-strategic missile defense system, and steadfastly oppose this.

The incorporation of Taiwan into any foreign missile defense system is unacceptable. ...

China and Russia call on the international community to heed continuously the activities of a certain country to develop a missile defense system, which is detrimental to global strategic balance and stability, and to do what is necessary to prevent such a dangerous situation from continuing. ...

Based on the strategic partnership featured by equality and trust, China and Russia will continue their close cooperation on these issues.¹¹⁰

President Putin's July 2000 summit with North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il revealed a similar hostility to American policy and interests in the area of missile defense. The "Democratic People's Republic of Korea-Russia Joint Declaration" issued at the





Pyongyang summit recites “the DPRK and Russia view that it is totally groundless ... that the so-called missile threat from some countries is used as an excuse to justify the plan to amend the 1972 ABM Treaty,” which is described as “a cornerstone to strategic stability and a basis for further reducing strategic offensive weapons.” Both governments likewise stated that “deploying a bloc-style closed Theater Missile Defense system in Asia and the Pacific could seriously destroy regional stability and security.”¹¹¹

Most controversially, Putin and Kim Jong-Il separately broached a scheme that would in essence create an “Agreed Framework” for North Korea’s missile program—embarrassingly for the Clinton administration, a replica of the 1994 arrangement it brokered whereby the United States, South Korea, and Japan would in essence bribe the North Korean dictatorship to suspend its nuclear program. Pursuant to this agreement, the North Korean dictatorship, arguably the worst human rights violator on earth, has become the largest recipient of U.S. aid in East Asia—and continues its program of nuclear and missile development.

Although Russian officials have claimed that under their proposal North Korea might be forced to use launch facilities and rockets in third countries, the Kim Jong-Il government has refused to repeat this reassurance.¹¹² Moreover, the notion that the North Korean dictatorship is genuinely interested in peaceful scientific activities in outer space, or that such a desperately poor government should be pursuing such an expensive discretionary expense, is grotesque. The Clinton administration, however, has accepted such sophistries from North Korea before, as illustrated by its proposal of the 1994 Agreed Framework based on the premise that North Korea was building nuclear reactors only to generate electricity.

Even an offer by Pyongyang for an “Agreed Framework” to forbear in its pursuit of missile developments would not necessarily include a promise not to sell missiles and missile technology abroad. Given Pyongyang’s propensity to demand payment for the same concessions repeatedly, this is hardly a hypothetical risk.¹¹³ Yet despite the manifest implausibility of the offer from Pyongyang and Moscow, the Clinton administration has allowed itself to be put on the defensive internationally by the initiative—until Kim Jong-Il similarly embarrassed Putin by claiming that his offer was only meant as a joke.¹¹⁴

In almost all material respects, the Clinton administration’s bungling of U.S. missile defense deployment parallels its bungling of NATO enlargement. In each case, the Clinton administration let slip the best opportunity to cement U.S.-Russian agreement on a major initiative. In the case of both NATO enlargement and national missile defense, subsequent events drove the administration to endorse the policy belatedly and half-heartedly. In both cases, temporizing and delaying hardened rather than mitigated Russian opposition. And in both cases, the administration’s policy secured the worst possible outcome: it severely compromised the potential benefits to the United States, while ensuring that the issue would indefinitely remain an irritant in U.S.-Russia relations.

Ersatz Missile Defense: The Clinton “Detargeting Agreement”

The Clinton administration’s superficial approach to missile defense is perfectly illustrated by its celebrated “Detargeting Agreement” with Russia.

In January 1994, Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin signed a Detargeting Agreement that Clinton hailed as reducing the nuclear threat to America by ensuring that no Russian missile was aimed at a U.S. target.¹¹⁵ Subsequently, on more than 147 separate occasions, President Clinton, Vice President Gore, members of the cabinet, and other senior administration officials have touted the agreement as a boon for U.S. national security.¹¹⁶ For example, on August 26, 1996, in a speech in Toledo, Ohio, the president proclaimed that “... for the first time since the dawn of the nuclear age, on this night, this beautiful night, there is not a single nuclear missile pointed at a child in the United States of America.”¹¹⁷

The emptiness of the Clinton administration’s rhetoric was made abundantly clear in hearings held by the House National Security Committee in 1997. At a hearing of the Military Research and Development Subcommittee, Dr. Bruce Blair, a Brookings Institution expert on nuclear security policy, testified of the detargeting agreement and associated Russian and American actions:

Neither removed the wartime aim points from [Russian] missiles portfolios of preprogrammed targets. Neither lengthened the amount of time needed to initiate a deliberate missile strike.



And the risk and consequences of an accidental or unauthorized launch were not significantly affected by their pledge [to detarget].¹¹⁸

Because the detargeting agreement contains no verification provisions, there is to this day no reliable evidence that the Russian nuclear missiles were ever detargeted.¹¹⁹

Even assuming that the detargeting has been carried out, the benefits for U.S. national security are minimal. First, the Russian General Staff has publicly stated that it would take at most a few minutes to retarget the missiles on their previous targets.¹²⁰ Under the detargeting agreement Russian missiles are to be set on a “zero flight plan;” however, because the missiles can store multiple flight plans, and the Russian military can quickly switch between these flight plans, the detargeting presents little impediment to a deliberate launch.¹²¹

The Clinton administration has also argued that while a deliberate launch would not be impeded, the danger from an accidental or unauthorized launch is reduced by detargeting. However, in the event of an accidental or unauthorized launch, a Russian missile set on a “zero flight plan” would snap back to its wartime flight path and strike one of the real target points stored in the missile’s database. Conversely, American missiles that have been detargeted would fall into the sea in the event of accidental or unauthorized launch.¹²²

The Russian government has been forthright about the ephemeral benefits of the detargeting agreement. In a 1995 interview, a senior adviser in the Ministry of Defense said that, “When it was decided to detarget missiles, the decision was mostly of a political, propaganda character.”¹²³

Rather than being honest with the American people, the Clinton administration has used the detargeting agreement for just such a “political, propaganda” purpose in an effort to distract attention from the absence of a more reliable missile defense for the United States.

Clinton’s Rootless Russia Policy

One of the standard criticisms of the Clinton administration’s Russia policy is that it has failed to cultivate a broad range of support within Russia. It has focused on Moscow in preference to the regions, on

government in preference to private actors, within government on the executive branch in preference to the legislature, and within the executive branch on a handful of individuals in preference to a broader spectrum of officials and bodies. This lazy diplomatic shortcut has left American policy and prestige in Russia a hostage to the reputation, honesty, and ability of as few as five or six Russian officials—Chubais, Gaidar, Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin, and a handful of others.

Less often noted is the parallel to the Clinton administration’s approach to pursuing its policies in the U.S. Congress. Its tactics at home have similarly produced a narrowly based policy bereft of public and congressional understanding and support. At home, as well as in Russia, the administration eschewed working with the leaders of the legislative branch and doing the hard work of either cultivating support or compromising differences. As a result, the administration’s policies have won understanding and support in neither party.

The Clinton approach at its most self-defeating was on display in the negotiation of the 1997 New York Protocols to the ABM Treaty, and the ensuing refusal to submit them to the Senate for ratification. The Protocols effectively represented a collaboration by the American executive branch with foreign governments—including the contemptible Lukashenka regime ruling Belarus—against the American legislative branch.

The president and vice president were well aware that the demarcation and multilateralization protocols were utterly unacceptable to Congress in general and to the Senate in particular. Instead of seeking either to persuade the Congress or to reach an honorable accommodation of the differences, the administration collaborated with foreign governments to circumvent the American legislature and create “facts on the ground” that would make it impossible for Congress to execute its constitutional role.

The Russian government obliged this year. When the State Duma conditioned its ratification of START II on Senate ratification of the 1997 Protocols, it completed the work of the Clinton administration, which had deliberately failed to submit the 1997 Protocols to the Senate for its advice and consent for three years. When Under Secretary of State Pickering testified before the Speaker’s Advisory Group on May 10, 2000, he said





that it was “inopportune” to submit the protocols to the Senate, because they were integrally related to START III and issues of national missile defense. He gave no explanation of why it was “opportune” for the President to sign the protocols, but not for the Senate to have the opportunity to ratify them.

By acquiescing—indeed, encouraging—the Russian Duma’s linking of START II to the protocols, the Clinton administration has jeopardized the historic reductions in offensive nuclear forces that President Bush had achieved in cooperation with a Democratic Congress—all in the interest of coercing Congress to abdicate its long-held views on missile defense.

The Clinton administration’s defiance of the Senate’s constitutional role is not unique to this episode, or even its Russia policy generally.¹²⁴ From the beginning of the Clinton administration, consultation with Congress on Russia policy has consisted of little more than the annual budget presentation. Requests by the House International Relations Committee for documents bearing directly on the failure of the Clinton administration Russia policy have gone unanswered; senior administration policy makers such as Strobe Talbott have routinely been “unavailable” to the committees of jurisdiction. Talbott refused to meet with the leadership of the six committees of jurisdiction that comprise this Speaker’s Advisory Group on Russia.¹²⁵

In July 2000, the Clinton administration ignored strenuous objections by the Senate and House committees of jurisdiction and leadership to its policy on rescheduling Russian debt.¹²⁶ As a result, it was strongly rebuked on July 19, 2000, by an overwhelming 275-146 vote for a resolution approving a bar on such restructuring until the President certifies an end to Russian use of a spy facility at Lourdes, Cuba. The passage by enormous bipartisan majorities of successive Russia-Iran missile proliferation bills in the face of veto threats similarly underscores the administration’s credibility gap.¹²⁷

In the United States as in Russia, the self-defeating nature of the Clinton administration policy process has not dissuaded the administration from pursuing it to the end: the last major policy gambit of the administration, the so-called “grand bargain” compromise with Russia that the President sought to unveil at the Moscow summit, was rejected by the Russian government in part

because it was clear that Clinton and Gore had done nothing to secure congressional support for it.

Conclusion: A Cold Peace

Russian-American relations now bear a troubling resemblance to the pre-*perestroika* Cold War. In response to American proposals to amend the ABM Treaty, the Russian government has now announced that if the United States does not accede to its position, it will withdraw not only from strategic arms agreements but also from the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, which banned intermediate-range missiles in Europe. Clinton’s policy has brought U.S.-Russia relations full circle, returning to the last and most heated Soviet-American controversy of the Cold War.

In the meantime, the Russian government seeks to weaken ties between the United States and NATO Europe, reviving Soviet-era proposals to substitute a pan-European collective security structure for the current alliance-based security system. And Moscow has threatened to deploy multiple warheads on Topol intercontinental ballistic missiles in violation of START II as part of its “asymmetrical” response to a U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty.¹²⁸

Russia is continuing and possibly intensifying the proliferation that has made a U.S. national missile defense essential. As recently as June 2000, just weeks before President Putin’s visit to Pyongyang with its ostensible purpose of ending North Korea’s missile program, missile component companies in Russia and Uzbekistan were reportedly collaborating to sell North Korea a special aluminum alloy, laser gyroscopes used in missile guidance, and connectors and relays used in missile electronics.¹²⁹

The Russian government is accelerating its rapprochement with the rogue’s gallery of former client states that the Soviet Union supported during the Cold War—not only reviving the Soviet intelligence relationship with Castro based on the listening post at Lourdes, Cuba, but also working with Beijing to renew both political and military ties with the pariah regimes in Iraq,¹³⁰ North Korea, and Libya,¹³¹ and cultivating the Milosevic dictatorship in Belgrade. A more troubling contrast to the atmosphere of the early 1990s could hardly be imagined.

