Russia and the Iraq War: was Putin’s policy a failure?

Galina Golan*

Hatlaim 8, 43568 Ra’anana, Israel

Abstract

Although Russian President Vladimir Putin has been faced with numerous crises since coming to office in 2000, most importantly the war in Chechnya, the Iraq War was the first major international crisis with which his administration was confronted. As in the case of Kosovo for Yeltsin, and the Gulf War for Gorbachev, the Russian President had to deal with conflicting domestic pressures and apparently still more conflicting Russian national and international interests. Indeed, one result of such a situation was a post-war accusation that Putin actually had no policy or at least no consistent policy with regard to the Iraq crisis [Golan, G., 1992. Gorbachev’s difficult time in the Gulf. Political Science Quarterly 107 (2), 213–230]. One may remember similar accusations of Gorbachev’s “zigzagging” in the Gulf War and claims that the Yeltsin government failed to forge a Kosovo policy altogether [Levitin, O., 2000. Inside Moscow’s Kosovo muddle. Survival 42 (1), 130]. Yet, a certain pattern did appear to repeat itself in the Iraqi crisis, namely, pre-war efforts to prevent a military conflict from breaking out, then gradual escalation of rhetoric if not actual involvement, and finally gradual but relatively rapid retreat to conciliatory posture toward the United States (in all three crises). Moreover, Putin was indeed consistent throughout the pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis periods in his opposition to the Americans’ use of force against Iraq and in the need to remain within a United Nations framework. Actually, one might ask (and we shall below) why Putin did not abandon the first part of this policy, in order to maintain the second component, when it

* Tel.: +972 9 9527399; fax: +972 9 7729261.
E-mail address: ggolan@idc.ac.il

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became certain that the U.S. was going to attack, with or without UN Security Council approval.

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**Objectives and motives**

To judge the success or failure of Putin’s policy, however, would require an understanding of his objectives, if not also his motives. The essential objective was to promote, or at least protect Russia’s interests, but the definition of these constituted the specific objectives sought in the Iraqi case. Thus, the immediate objectives would appear to have been prevention of war, and, once the war broke out, cessation of the war as quickly as possible and a return of the crisis to the United Nations and international decision-making. In broader terms, the underlying and no less important objectives were (1) the assertion of Russia as an essential player in the international arena; (2) minimization of damage to Russia’s relations with the United States, including, perhaps, the warm personal relationship between Putin and President Bush; (3) protection of Russia’s economic interests in Iraq. To this list must be added other objectives which might more accurately be categorized as motivations. Namely, the strengthening of Putin’s domestic political standing in the run-up to the December Duma elections and the Presidential elections scheduled for March 2004. Related to this would be both the matters of serving public opinion and responding to various interest groups even within the administration, namely the military and security organs.

A further motivation, which Putin and others noted, was concern over instability to the south of Russia and a post-war strengthening of radical Islam which might spread to the borders of Russia, affecting the large Muslim minority inside Russia, in particular in the Caucasus. There are other motives that have been ascribed to Putin, such as a wish to force the United States to take Russia more seriously or a concern that America might not stop at Iraq, or as expressed in some American media, even a return to Cold War thinking (*Moscow Times*, April 10, 2003; *Christian Science Monitor*, March 26, 2003; *New York Times*, March 29, 2003; *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, March 21, 2003; *Pravda*, March 26, 2003). Presumably some variation of all or some of these motives played a role in the setting of objectives, while some of the objectives were inherently contradictory or at best difficult to accommodate. This may account for the apparent inconsistency of policy. But the fact that not all members of Putin’s government had the same objectives, or motives, provided an additional complication.

One can easily understand Putin’s objective in maintaining the framework of the United Nations, and specifically the Security Council, since these organs represented the key to a role for Russia in the crisis. Russia’s status as a nuclear power does

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1 See, for example, Putin speaking to a Chechen group, INTERFAX, March 17, 2003.
provide the country with some weight in the international arena, and does command some attention from the United States. Nonetheless, given Russian weakness in every sphere — political, economic, and even military — since the demise of the Soviet Union, the United Nations Security Council is the only venue in which Moscow can command equal status with the United States. In this body, at least, Russia remains a superpower, whereas elsewhere it must struggle to achieve even the great power status both the Russian public and government believe is the country’s due.

Such power as accrues to Moscow through its veto option in the Security Council has not, however, been viewed by Putin in adversarial terms, at least not since the fall of 2001 when President Bush turned to the Russian President for cooperation against terrorism. Until then, during the first months of Putin’s administration, it was not entirely clear just what attitude the Russian President would adopt. Indeed his professional background in the intelligence services and his somewhat authoritarian reputation suggested that Putin would tend to a hard-line in relations with Washington, particularly regarding outstanding issues such as NATO expansion, arms agreements (notably the ABM treaty) and others. At the least, it was expected that, like his immediate predecessors, he would disdain the enthusiastic ‘Atlantic’ orientation characteristic of Russian foreign policy in the early post-Soviet period. Thus it may have been something of a surprise to observers when Putin developed a cooperative relationship with Washington which included agreement to American military installations in Central Asia for staging the war on Afghanistan. Quiet acquiescence to American abrogation of the 1972 ABM treaty and the expansion of NATO even up to Russia’s own borders looked like more than just a quid pro quo for American tolerance of Russia’s actions in Chechnya. As distinct from Europe, Washington was to relate to the war in Chechnya as an internal Russian affair, even supporting Moscow in the name of the struggle against terrorism coming from Chechnya. In fact, a close personal relationship developed between the two presidents in the course of Putin’s visit to Texas in the spring of 2002 and an era of close cooperation appeared to be opening.

America did indeed have a good deal to offer Russia, beyond the Chechnya matter. With Putin’s primary goal of stabilizing Russia’s economy, Washington could be of immense importance not least of which would be in assisting Moscow’s entry into the WTO, opening American markets easing trade, along with promoting investment in Russia, including the energy sector. Over the intervening year progress was indeed made, or at least initial steps taken, in all of these areas, one of the more significant of which was a deal for Russian oil exports to the United States (the first direct shipment of which arrived in the United States from the privately owned Russian oil company YUKOS in July 2003). Russia was also seeking American financial assistance for its space program, as well as cooperation in other areas. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why Putin wanted to preserve Russian–American relations, just as it is not difficult to grasp why preserving the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) channel was also important.

Putin’s opposition to war was a more complicated matter. In view of Russia’s war in Chechnya, it cannot be said that Putin’s opposition to the use of military force against Iraq derived from a basic abhorrence of war in principle. This opposition
apparently was derived from a combination of the above-mentioned considerations. It may be a moot point as to which was the more important: economic interests, domestic pressures, or regional concerns, given the intertwining of all three. Certainly the Kremlin would have viewed with concern instability in the region so close to the borders of the CIS (the perimeter of which Moscow continues to see as its security border, at least in terms of interests if not actual presence). And all the more so with the war in Chechnya, in addition to ongoing disputes with Georgia over Abhazia, for example. Instability bore the potential of increased outside support and aid for Muslims fighting in Chechnya, infiltration of Islamic militants throughout the Caucasus (with, perhaps, spillover into Central Asia), and the possible spread of Islamic radicalism (and terrorism) in Russia.

These were concerns of particular importance to the influential military and security circles, many of whom were close to Putin. Traditionally hawkish, and alarmist, these circles warned of an expansion of the conflict, even to the point of contending that the United States might not stop at Iraq, signaling a threat to Russia itself. There was deep suspicion of Washington among military and security people, fueled both by their frustration over Russia’s diminished power in the world and by what they viewed as American policies unfriendly to Russia. Even during, as well as following the war, arguments based on the present American threat to Russia were employed in opposition to planned military reforms (Izvestiia, May 3, 2003). But this was not simply posturing for budgetary purposes. The military, in particular, had been far from pleased with Putin’s ‘strategic partnership’ with Washington and increasingly cooperative attitude toward the Americans. With their humiliation in Kosovo not far from memory, the military had not been pleased by Putin’s sanguine acceptance of the expansion of NATO, American withdrawal from the ABM treaty, the growing military cooperation between the United States and Georgia, and the granting of military bases to the Americans in Central Asia for use against Afghanistan.\(^2\)

It was not just the military and security elements that believed Putin had conceded too much — and received too little in return. The Foreign Ministry, most notably its head, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, opposed the strong turn toward Washington undertaken by Putin over the preceding year. The old dispute in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy circles, the ‘Atlantic’ orientation versus a more varied Euro-Asian approach appeared to be revived and then buried by the development of Putin’s close personal relationship with President Bush and their post-9/11 anti-terrorist cooperation. Yet the Foreign Ministry continued to be frustrated by the failure to change American policies on such things as the Jackson–Vanik law of 1974 (barring Russia from normal trade relations), American help (or lack of it) regarding Russian entry to the World Trade Organization, and other trade-related issues.

It might be argued that many in the Foreign Ministry were more concerned over the regional ramifications of the Iraq crisis, viewing Iraq as a traditional ally, and like the military, having maintained an ongoing presence and relationship there.

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\(^2\) Moscow Times, April 4, 2003 added to this list the supply of arms to the Northern Alliance, overflights of Taliban and al-Qaeda sites, and intelligence sharing with the Americans.
Russia had consistently pressed for the lifting or modification of the United Nations sanctions against Iraq (primarily for economic reasons). However, judging from Ivanov’s consistent almost Cold War-like pronouncements during the crisis, the major concern was not regional but rather international, namely, opposition to American international dominance, which Ivanov castigated as unilateralism. Ivanov and his Ministry presumably shared Putin’s concern over a weakening of the United Nations, especially the bypassing of the Security Council where Russia’s international clout still existed. But, as in the case of the military and security circles, some of the pressures from this quarter were prompted not only by an interest in asserting Russia’s international role but also by an interest in containing the United States altogether. This was evidenced by the repeated demands of Ivanov (and others) for multilateralism, calling the U.S. ‘aggressor’ while Putin made it with far milder expressions.

These more adamant, anti-American positions were reflective of widespread sentiments among the media and the public during the crisis. Indeed the media, particularly the television — both private and state-owned — were almost hysterically anti-American. Some claimed that it was the government that sought to promulgate this tone, and that it was this tone that inspired the increasingly anti-American sentiments of the public as the crisis progressed. In any case, these sentiments were not totally fabricated; there was a strong anti-Americanism long apparent within the Russian public. Much of this was the result of disappointment over what were perceived as unfulfilled American promises of aid and investment (Rossiiska gayeta, April 8, 2003). Whether this could be found in business circles that had in fact experienced the disappointment of investments that did not materialize or contracts never achieved, or if this were simply a general disillusionment over a reality that fell so far short of expectations, there was a tendency to blame the United States for Russia’s difficulties and its decline in world status. There was a certain ease with which the media and public opinion slipped into old Soviet-era demonization of the United States, apparent during the Kosovo crisis, and once again in the Iraq crisis.

The public (in addition to military-security circles) was very suspicious of the United States. For example, most polls indicated the public belief that the U.S. motive for war was economic (38%) or to demonstrate world domination (14%); only a small percentage believed the U.S. motive was fear that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction or connections to international terrorism (12%) (INTERFAX, February 6, 2003). In a poll taken several days before the outbreak of the war by the generally reliable VTsIOM, some 71% of Russians named the U.S. as the country that most constituted a danger to world security (Itar-Tass, March 14, 2003). Several polls indicated the gradual decline in a positive view of the United States. For example, the poll cited above found only 48% who described their attitude

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3 For example, Oleg Panfilov, head of Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, or former Duma deputy Konstantin Borovoi (RFE/RL, April 1, 2003).
4 Poll conducted among 1500 persons by the Public Opinion Foundation on February 1; earlier polls were about the same.
5 Poll conducted among 1600 adults by VTsIOM-All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion.
toward the U.S. as positive as compared with 53% in January and 69% in the previous October (Itar-Tass, March 14, 2003). Another poll had different percentages but indicated the same trend, with 35% expressing negative feelings regarding the United States in March 2003 in comparison with only 22% who responded this way in 2002 (INTERFAX, March 27, 2003).6

This anti-Americanism was helped along by the Orthodox Church, if one can judge by the statement put out by the Patriarch of All-Russia Alexy II following a meeting in Moscow with the Iraqi ambassador Abbas Halaf. The Patriarch condemned the “hegemony of one power,” recalling the loss of innocent civilians and destruction of “national holy places” in the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (RIA/Novosti, March 7, 2003). And just before President Bush announced his 48-hour ultimatum to Saddam Hussein, Russian Orthodox and Muslim clergy led a delegation to Iraq. (As did Communist leaders Gennady Zyuganov and Gennady Seleznev deputy Duma speaker.) In addition, during the war, various Islamic leaders in Russia declared a Jihad against the United States, though they appear to have been split on just what form implementation of this should take.7 In response, Putin publicly warned the more belligerent Islamic institutions, but the 20 million Muslims (in a country of 148 million people), were also a factor in public opinion and the domestic pressures on the Russian president.

It was not, however, necessarily support for Iraq that formed the basis for public opinion during the crisis. In the VTsIOM poll some 62% said Iraq and North Korea should not be allowed to have weapons of mass destruction and 45% responded that they viewed Iraq as a threat to peace and security in the world, with over 40% holding a negative view of Saddam Hussein (Izvestiia, March 27, 2003). Although the polls showed an increase in support for Saddam as the war progressed, only one poll, early April, reached over 50% support for the Iraqis (58% with 35% not sympathetic to either side (INTERFAX, April 4, 2003)). However, one consistent result — regardless of sentiments about Iraq or Saddam — was the overwhelming popular opposition to the use of military force. Both just prior to the outbreak of the war and in the first few days, polls showed over 90% disapproval of any military action (INTERFAX, March 14, 27, 2003).

While both the opposition to the war and the anti-American sentiment dominated public opinion and particularly the media, it was also the case that these sentiments did not translate into much public action. By comparison with other G-8 countries or in contrast to the Kosovo crisis (in which public sentiments were guided in part by sympathy for Belgrade, in contrast to the a general lack of sympathy for Baghdad in the Iraq crisis), very few demonstrations, protests or petitions appeared and with few exceptions those that were organized were not particularly large. The few demonstrations that did occur were directed against the war and the United States (not the Russian government) and for the most part were organized either by the Muslim institutions, particularly in Dagestan, or by political parties, especially but not only the Communists. Putin’s own party, United Russia, organized a large demonstration

6 Poll conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation.
7 To be discussed below.
outside the U.S. Embassy after a Russian Embassy convoy exiting Iraq was fired on by American troops. 8

Duma politicians, including those in Putin’s own party, United Russia, tended to take a decidedly harsher, more anti-American line than Putin. This was apparent particularly in their initial response to the war and in their decisions (such as the decision indefinitely to postpone ratification of the Strategic Offensive Reduction treaty negotiated with the Americans in 2002). Aside from the connection between many deputies and various interest groups, one may speculate that much of their posturing was directed at the voters who would be determining their fate in the December elections. This was particularly true of United Russia, which, together with the Communists, constituted the two main blocs in the Duma. The UR’s electoral position was not as solid as that of Putin himself, which may account for what appears to have been something of a dissociation of the party from Putin’s own more moderate positions or pronouncements on the war, especially regarding the United States. By contrast, a study conducted by the director of the Russian Center for Political Geographic Research found that regional governors, by the time of the war quite loyal to Putin, did not vary from Putin’s moderate positions, with only very few exceptions (Petrov, 2003). These exceptions appeared in predominantly Moslem areas but also in areas that might be hit economically by a change of government in Iraq.

Russia’s economic interests in Iraq went well beyond the $8.5 billion debt owed from Soviet times (by some accounts close to double the amount if inflation and interest were taken into account). Actually there was little hope that Saddam would ever repay the debt. But Russia and Russian companies were profiting quite handsomely from contracts under the ‘Oil for Food’ plan of the United Nations as Iraq’s major trading partner in the period of sanctions to the tune of some $7.7 billion worth of oil exports (Fee, 2003). Estimates varied, but the amounts that might be lost on UN approved or pending contracts were said to be anywhere from $1.2 to $2.4 billion, in addition to millions in losses for work already begun and for deliveries of goods awaiting entry (as well as unknown amounts connected with sanction-breaking illicit deals — possibly in arms, for example). 9 Not included in this was the single largest outstanding contract: the 1997 $3.7 billion deal with Lukoil, the state-owned Zarubezhneft and Mashinoimport for the development of Iraq’s West Qurna oil fields. Lukoil owned 70% of this project with an investment of as much as $6 billion according to some accounts. The estimated return on the Qurna project was $70 billion (Kommersant, May 27, 2003). UN sanctions continuously held up implementation of the deal, and Iraq finally cancelled it in December 2002. Many other oil contracts were signed, however, as late as January 2003, primarily but not only with Zarubezhneft, along with contracts for other commodities. In August 2002, Iraq had announced that a $40 billion ten-year trade package was to be

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8 Press reports claimed a crowd of 60,000–80,000, by far one of the largest if not the largest demonstration throughout the period. The shooting incident will be discussed below.

signed with Russia, including 67 contracts in the areas of oil and gas extraction, transportation, and communications. Among the contracts that had already been signed were an $80 million UN-approved deal for a power plant in northern Iraq and one for the repair of Soviet-era projects.

Economically Russia stood to lose not only from the lost contracts and payments, and the attendant loss of jobs for Russians both in Russia and Iraq. There was also the strong likelihood of lower oil prices to result from the war, or at the very least, serious fluctuation and instability, which could harm Russia’s export revenues — 40% of which came from oil and gas. Additionally, the nascent energy cooperation with the United States, that is, Russian exports to the U.S., might collapse even before they got seriously underway if the United States could procure cheaper (and more easily accessible) oil in Iraq. Thus, a war in Iraq, which would most certainly end in the defeat of Saddam and the advent of a pro-American regime in Baghdad, carried with it the almost certain danger that Russia would lose its important economic interests in Iraq.

Theoretically, these economic interests in Iraq contributed significantly to Putin’s opposition to a war. Yet, as early as September, even as Putin was pressing for continued UN inspections and vigorously seeking to avoid any military action, Russian oil magnates, including some from government-owned companies, were lobbying the United States for some kind of a trade-off. Following the September 2002 American–Russian energy summit in Houston, rumors abounded over the possibility of American assurances regarding the future of Russia’s oil interests in Iraq in exchange for Russian support for the United States at the United Nations. It would appear, therefore, that at least some of those whose interests were most at stake believed that these interests could best be served not by continued Russian efforts to prevent a war — since these efforts were most likely to be futile, but by acquiescence to the American position. Given America’s steadfast position on war, if economic interests were to take priority, Putin could have used (and apparently was urged to do so) the leverage of Russia’s veto power to ensure these interests. The fact that he did not do so would indicate either that right up to the last moment he continued to believe that he could prevent a war, or that other pressures on him were stronger than those of the business and economic circles in Moscow. It is, of course, also possible, that having protested so long, Putin went beyond the point at which he believed he could change course without seriously impairing his political position, at home and abroad. Alternatively, it is also possible that the United States was not willing to make a deal, although there were numerous statements by officials such as

10 For example, after the Houston meeting Lukoil president Vagit Alekperov reportedly said that he had been assured by Russian officials that the Qurna contract would not be lost (Los Angeles Times, October 16, 2002).

11 The most openly ‘pro-American’ among the oil magnates was, understandably, Mikhail Khodorosky whose company YUKOS had the lucrative new contract with the United States. In the following summer, he and his company were the subject of a government crack-down in what was interpreted diversely as economically or politically motivated. Finally he was arrested and the company virtually closed for bankruptcy due to government demands for back taxes. One year later he was under arrest and the company on the verge of bankruptcy due to unpaid taxes.
Secretary of State Colin Powell to the effect that Washington would take Russia’s interests into account.

**Before the outbreak of war**

As the crisis regarding Iraq unfolded, Russia was active particularly with France in pressing the United States to bring the matter to the United Nations. Once an American resolution reached the Security Council, the Russians agreed to the American demand that Iraq demonstrate that it did not possess weapons of mass destruction, but they sought to moderate the proposed resolution. At least in part due to their efforts, UNSC 1441 of November 8, 2002 did not contain authorization for automatic use of force but only warned of “serious consequences” should Iraq fail to comply with the inspection and reporting demands of the UN due one month later. Throughout the ensuing period, it was Moscow’s position that the inspectors be allowed to continue their work without a specific deadline or threat of attack, and that any further action be determined by a new Security Council resolution. In this they were joined by France, China, and, ultimately, Germany.

With the White House growing impatient, a Security Council resolution to authorize the use of force became the major issue. Putin undertook efforts to forge a joint stand with France and Germany, and speculation abounded as to the willingness of the two permanent members, Russia and France, to use their right of veto should Washington proffer a new resolution. Following a dramatic presentation on Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (and ties to international terrorism) by Colin Powell to the Security Council on February 5, Putin traveled to Germany and then to France for a three-day visit. At the end of these discussions, a declaration by the three countries called for the continuation of the inspectors’ work. This February 10 declaration explained what was in fact Putin’s position, namely, that while there was general agreement on the need for the disarming of Iraq, there was a debate on the means by which this was to be achieved. The three asserted that the use of force could only be “a last resort,” adding that this position was shared by a “large number of countries, particularly within the Security Council.” (AFP, February 10, 2003). The last phrase may have been in deference to Putin’s wish not only to avoid isolation, which was achieved by working with France and Germany, but also to avoid the appearance of creating an anti-American bloc, suggesting that the three countries merely represented widely held views.

Indeed in an interview on French television Putin made the point explicitly and at length that no bloc or axis was being created (Johnson’s Russia List 7056, February 11, 2003). The hint was clear in the declaration, however, that the United States would have difficulty getting a new resolution through the Security Council. In response to the French television interviewer’s question regarding a veto, Putin answered that he saw no reason to exercise a veto yet as he expected agreement to be reached among Security Council members. But he did say that “if something is adopted today that, in our view, would lead to the unjustified use of force, we will do this [exercise the veto], with France or without it.” In what may have been a
reference to ‘unjustified’ use of force, Putin also virtually dismissed American claims of a Saddam–al Qaeda connection.\textsuperscript{12} These claims, raised in Powell’s February 5 speech to the Security Council, had actually sparked rumors once again of a possible deal between Washington and Moscow, since Powell had spoken of Iraqi support for al-Qaeda elements aiding Chechen rebels. There was some interpretation of this comment as a gesture to Russia, namely a confirmation of Russia’s claims for some time that al-Qaeda was involved in Chechnya (thereby justifying Moscow’s military actions there). At the same time, the \textit{Wall Street Journal} (February 10, 2003) cited a “senior U.S. diplomat” to the effect that the State Department was soon to place three Chechen organizations on its list of terrorist organizations.\textsuperscript{13} These “gestures” were interpreted by some as “bait” for Russia to reverse its opposition to a new resolution. Indeed, asserting that there were signs that the Kremlin was preparing its public for such a reversal, the \textit{Wall Street Journal} went on to quote Duma Foreign Affairs Committee chair, Dmitry Rogozin that the State Department’s “friendly step” could not help but have “an indirect effect” on Moscow’s position on Iraq. Russia’s Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov, however, categorically denied that there could be any “exchange” of this sort, asserting that Russia had long since provided proof of Chechen connections to international terrorism and therefore should be on the State Department list (RIA-Novosti, February 7, 2003). Putin reiterated this in his French TV interview of February 10. Although, in a second French TV interview the same day, Putin said that if the UN arms inspectors were to find anything, Russia would toughen its position in the Security Council (Itar-Tass, February 10, 2003). Thus, the veto matter remained in a fog, and the rumors of a deal persisted, even after the tripartite declaration had seemed to rule this out. The next instance came in response to the announcement of a major British oil deal to form a joint venture with two Russian holding companies controlling Russia’s Tyumen Oil company. The respected Russian business daily, \textit{Kommersant}, saw this $6.75 billion BP investment as a ‘down payment’ for Moscow’s agreement to military action against Iraq (February 15, 2003). The connection presented was somewhat tenuous, namely the absence of economic logic making the British investment, in fact, a political move, ergo, connected to the Iraq-veto issue, according to \textit{Kommersant}. The paper’s interpretation, though, was indicative of the continued expectation of a ‘deal’ with the White House, as America’s perseverance became increasingly obvious.

Speculation grew both outside and inside Russia as to whether or not Moscow would use its veto, and voices could be heard in Moscow urging Putin to change his position, namely, to refrain from blocking the United States in the Security Council. Most notable among these advocates were important political analysts such as former deputy foreign minister Anatoly Adamishin, and Fyodor Burlatsky, head of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{12} This was not the first denial of such claims. As early as September 27, 2002 \textit{The Guardian} had reported that Foreign Minister Ivanov had rejected British claims of such a connection.

\textsuperscript{13} The State Department did in fact put the three Chechen groups on the terrorist list on March 6, the same day the Senate ratified the strategic arms treaty negotiated between Putin and Bush in 2002 — both steps timed, presumably, to encourage Moscow to withdraw its opposition.
\end{footnotesize}
the Scientific Council on Political Science at the Academy of Sciences, along with the director of the Institute for Political Studies, Sergei Markov, and the director of the Institute for Strategic Assessments, Aleksandr Konovalov. Markov, for example, recommended that even though the United States was acting “like a cowboy,” Russia’s policy should be determined by its economic interests and its interest in preserving the authority of the United Nations (by agreeing to a new resolution authorizing military action) (Moscow Times, February 18, 2003). Arguing that the United States was Russia’s most important partner, and that there was little chance of maintaining Russia’s Iraqi contracts, it would be best to work with America, for example, to prevent the U.S. from flooding the energy market with Iraqi oil. Adamishin made similar points, on the grounds that the United States was clearly going to war in any case, saying “We could keep our heads in the sand, let the Americans do what they want, but a UN resolution would ensure that it stays in the framework of international law,” while Russia must make sure it would not be cut off from a post-war Iraq (AFP, February 18, 2003). Konovalov said it most clearly: because of Russia’s contracts and the Iraqi debt, Russia had an interest in avoiding a rift with America; “our national interests are not to enter into conflict with the U.S.” (AFP, February 18, 2003). Somewhat more ambivalent, Burlatsky, albeit eschewing “blindly following” the United States without Europe and China, warned against anti-Americanism (Izvestiia, February 19, 2003). Providing a relatively sympathetic in-depth analysis of Washington’s motives regarding Iraq, the veteran analyst Burlatsky urged the Kremlin to adopt a “thought-out and balanced” strategy toward the United States. There were others who warned not only of anti-Americanism, but also of expecting too much of the cooperation with France and Germany, arguing that these countries had their own interests, even with regard to Iraq, that might not coincide forever.14

On the other side of the debate, Fyodor Ladygin, who had been head of the Russian Military Intelligence Services from 1992 to 1997, accused the United States of “flagrant violation of international law” (Moscow Times, February 18, 2003). Another former FIS official, Lieutenant-General Nikolai Leonov, made similar comments, arguing that Russia should work with the Europeans and China to block the United States, and failing to do so, seek to prevent the conflict spreading to the Caspian area (Johnson’s Russia List 7056, February 11, 2003). With control of Iraq’s oil the sole motive of the United States, Leonov argued, Russia would have little chance of protecting its interests in Iraq after the war, particularly since Washington had already designated a cabinet of émigrés from the West, with Israel having had a hand in their selection. Mikhail Gorbachev weighed in with a condemnation of America’s version of a new world order dominated by U.S. interests and “based not on international law but on crude force” (Rossiiskaya gazeta, February 14, 2003).

14 See comments, for example, by Aleksei Malashenko (at the Carnegie Center in Moscow) cited in WPS Monitoring, February 18, 2003 (Johnson’s Russia List, 7066, February 18, 2003, #13); see also Izvestiia, February 13, 2003 for similar comments and later, Duma Foreign Affairs Committee chair, Vladimir Lukin quoted in Moskovskie novosti, March 12–18, 2003.
Judging from Putin’s next steps, it is difficult to know if he were actually listening to all of the above arguments, trying to keep his options open, or truly convinced that he could still prevent a war. On February 22, just two days before the United States, Britain and Spain put their request to the Security Council for a new resolution authorizing war, Putin sent former Prime Minister-Middle East and Iraqi expert Evgeny Primakov to Baghdad. The next day he dispatched Alexander Voloshin, director of the President’s Bureau, to Washington to meet with top U.S. officials including President Bush himself. On the first day of Voloshin’s three-day visit, February 24, Russia, together with France and Germany submitted a new plan for Iraqi disarmament to the Security Council.

The new disarmament proposal submitted by Russia, France and Germany presumably was designed to put the American timetable off. Upon presentation of the American, British, Spanish request for a new resolution, President Bush’s National Security Advisor Condelezza Rice had explained that Washington would wait until UN arms inspector Hans Blix’ report on March 7 and bring the proposed resolution to a vote one week later (New York Times, February 25, 2003). Russia, France and Germany’s proposal called for additional inspectors and outlined a step-by-step procedure for the gradual disarming of Iraq, with three-weekly reports and a major progress report after four months but no deadline — and no automatic sanction for non-compliance. It seems unlikely that Putin and his colleagues believed that the United States would agree to such a proposal at this stage of the crisis; at the very least Putin could maintain that he had tried everything — although there is the possibility that Putin had persuaded himself that there was still a chance to avert a new resolution and war.

It could be argued that the dispatch of Primakov to Baghdad was actually part of this new plan; officially Primakov was sent to seek reassurance that the Iraqi President would fully cooperate with the UN arms inspectors as well as to brief Saddam on Russia’s position. Yet Putin would not have needed Primakov, a person politically distant from Putin (some would say actually in opposition to him) for such a task. Moreover, given Primakov’s negative reputation in Washington, primarily because of his interventions in the first Gulf war, as head of Russian intelligence, and regarding Kosovo, as Foreign Minister, and his reversal of the Atlantic orientation of his predecessor in the Foreign Ministry, the use of Primakov by Putin appeared almost a provocation vis-a-vis Washington. However, the logic of the appointment became clear after the war. In April 2003 Primakov revealed on Russian television that the real purpose of his mission on behalf of Putin was to persuade Saddam to step down and leave Iraq. Thus, it made sense for Putin to send this Middle East expert, known to have a good relationship with Saddam, for such a mission. Whether Putin actually expected Primakov to succeed is another question; reportedly Primakov himself was hesitant to go because of the unlikely chance for success. According to Primakov, Saddam merely listened to his proposal, reminded him of his interventions in 1991, and left the room.

Voloshin’s mission to Washington was said by some to be for the purpose of briefing the Americans on the results of Primakov’s visit. Meeting with Bush, Rice and Powell, it may be assumed that Voloshin did so — bearing results that cannot
have come as a surprise to Washington. It may also be assumed that Voloshin conveyed Putin’s continued wish to see war averted. There were rumors, however, that Putin had sent his top official, an astute negotiator and an architect of Putin’s American policy, to see what kind of assurances could be obtained for Russian interests in a post-Saddam Iraqi. Whether a deal was actually discussed or not is unclear, but Russian observers were quick to point out both that there was very little likelihood of Russia’s oil companies getting any promises and that it was a little late for bargaining. As political scientist Lilia Shevstova put it, “the train Russian should end up on has already started off. Now Russia should be thinking not about dividends or bargaining with the United States but about getting on the train and finding a seat” (Los Angeles Times, March 1, 2003).

Almost immediately after this flurry of activity, which had also included a lightening visit to Moscow by German Chancellor Schroeder on February 26, Foreign Minister Ivanov on February 27 (in China) and again on March 5 said that Russia would indeed exercise its veto if and when the United States’ resolution were put to a vote. Following telephone consultations between Putin and French Chirac and Schroeder, Ivanov (not Putin) announced officially on March 10 Russia’s intention to exercise its veto — as did President Chirac. This was one week before the March 17 deadline America and Britain had set for Iraqi compliance and a vote on their resolution to the Security Council. Nonetheless, the United States apparently continued to try to persuade Putin to forego use of the veto. The American ambassador to Moscow, Alexander Vershbow, even stated outright that abstention would be received better than a veto. His comments, however, provoked still more debate, and criticism, for he actually listed the various areas in which Russia was seeking U.S. investment (energy) or cooperation (against terrorism — meaning Chechnya, missile defense, space program improvement, trade), saying that “It will be a great pity if progress in those spheres is postponed or reversed at all because of serious differences on Iraq.” He warned Moscow to “weigh carefully the consequences” of such a step (Izvestiia, March 12, 2003; Los Angeles Times, March 14, 2003).

While some spoke of American blackmail and the emptiness of American promises, there were both political and business figures who spoke out against jeopardizing Russia’s critical relationship with the United States. There was also criticism of Ivanov’s public statements on the use of the veto. Yet, while Ivanov commented on Russian television (March 7) that an American military attack without United Nations authorization “would be a violation of the UN Charter,” Putin himself remained relatively quiet, sparking speculation that he was still trying to keep his options open while letting Ivanov take the flak.15 In retrospect, it is clear that Putin was not planning to change his position. But his effort to limit damage to Russian relations with the United States was apparent in his response to the Americans’ decision to forego a Security Council vote and deliver a 48-hour ultimatum to Saddam. In contrast to the above-mentioned remark by Ivanov, which

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15 A virtually isolated exception to this was Putin’s comment after his February 26 meeting with Schroeder, when he said, “a resolution automatically calling for war would be unacceptable.” (Moscow Times and AFP, February 27, 2003).
Ivanov repeated on March 17, Putin responded only that anything but a peaceful solution would be “a mistake.”

The war

Putin’s reaction to the beginning of the war was decidedly mild. Having told Bush by phone that the ultimatum was “regrettable,” Putin’s official response to the outbreak of hostilities was to say “military action against Iraq is a great political mistake” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, March 20, 2003). He did say that the hostilities were against the norms and principles of international law and the UN Charter, dismissing all of the American justifications, namely that there was no information regarding Iraqi links to international terrorism and that the UN team was still in the country to determine if there were any weapons of mass destruction, noting that resolution 1441 did not authorize anything but peaceful disarmament. He argued that Iraq, a weak country, was not a threat to anyone, and that any change of regime could only come from inside. Even though this explicit statement spoke of a threat to the inviolability of a state’s sovereignty there was a noteworthy absence of the words ‘aggression,’ ‘attack,’ ‘condemnation’ that might have been expected from such a description. As for Russian demands, Putin called for the cessation of the military action as soon as possible and a return to the United Nations for resolution of the crisis. This was the official government position throughout the war, emphasizing the importance of international organizations, specifically the United Nations, but also increasingly as the war progressed, asserting the intention of maintaining the partnership with the United States. Foreign Minister Ivanov was somewhat less restrained than Putin regarding the United States, warning a number of times that the anti-terrorist coalition might be split by the American action, with the war possibly mushrooming into a confrontation of civilizations.

Ivanov delivered a particularly harsh and detailed indictment of the United States, at a State Duma meeting March 21. The Duma, however, had already taken a still more anti-American position. In its deliberations of March 18, it had decided to postpone indefinitely the scheduled debate for ratification of the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty negotiated by Putin and Bush the previous year (and ratified by the U.S. Senate on March 6, 2003). International Affairs Committee chairman, Dmitri Rogozin reportedly explained that the idea was to make sure that Russia did not send a signal that in any way indicated approval of America’s action (Izvestia, March 20, 2003) though Rogovin himself criticized various deputies for

16 Ivanov: “We believe that the use of force against Iraq, especially with reference to previous resolutions of the UNSC, has no grounds, including legal grounds.” Putin: “We are for solving the problem exclusively by peaceful means...any other development would be a mistake, fraught with the toughest consequences, leading to victims and destabilization of the international situation as a whole” (INTERFAX, March 17, 2003).

17 See for example Ivanov’s press conference March 21, 2003 and his article published in Rossiiskaya gazeta March 25, 2003, both distributed by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
calling for what he termed a “premature anti-American protest.” Foreign Minister Ivanov subsequently supported the Duma decision in his March 26 press conference, but deputies close to Putin publicly said that the decision had been a mistake (*Izvestiia*, March 20, 2003). Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Mamedov, who consistently expressed more moderate positions than his boss Ivanov, reportedly called U.S. deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley with the message that Russia was still committed to the treaty (AFP, March 19, 2003). Nonetheless, following Ivanov’s fiery speech to the Duma March 21, that body passed a resolution castigating the United States’ “strong-arm action,” and the “aggression” by the United States, Britain and their allies (*Itar-Tass*, March 21, 2003). The Duma called the war a threat to international stability and Russian national security (necessitating an increase in the 2003 defense budget).

The Federal Council (the upper house of the Russian Federal Assembly) actually opposed the Duma position on ratification of the strategic arms committee, scheduling to proceed with its debate March 25. The speaker of the Federal Council Sergei Mironov called the Duma postponement a mistake, and the Council sent the Duma an appeal not to postpone ratification of the treaty (*INTERFAX*, March 18, 2003). Nonetheless, Ivanov appeared before them on March 26 and persuaded them to postpone their debate as well. The Federal Council’s official statement was far less vituperative and alarmist than the Duma statement, although it did accuse the United States of “an act of aggression” against Iraq (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 26, 2003). The use of this expression may have been a reflection of the harsh speech Ivanov made to the Federal Council in the debate before that body adopted its statement. Ivanov had not used the word ‘aggression,’ for, as he explained to journalists afterwards, it was up to the United Nations to make the legal assessment of the military action (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, March 26, 2003).

Beyond the realm of statements, Russia engaged in very little action during the war. Leaving a skeleton staff in the Embassy, the Emergencies Ministry had sent planes to evacuate Russian personnel, and it was reported that just prior to the outbreak of hostilities Russia turned down an invitation by the American Central Command to send a liaison officer to deal with post-war humanitarian matters. Russia also turned down an American request at the beginning of the war to freeze Iraq’s bank accounts in Russia. About a month before the war, there were reports that Russia was planning a large naval exercise in the Indian Ocean. Defense
Minister Sergei Ivanov explained that the date of the maneuvers had not been decided, and would be determined by ‘technical’ considerations only, denying any connection to the Iraqi situation. In fact, the maneuvers took place only in May 2003, postponed, as Sergei Ivanov later explained, so as “to avoid misunderstanding” (RIA/Novsosti, April 3, 2003). Colonel-general Yuriy Baluyevskiy, first deputy chief of staff, told reporters that in case of war, Russia’s military would not get involved or go on combat alert, beyond the regular monitoring already underway (INTERFAX, February 19, 2003).

Deputy Foreign Minister, Georgy Mamedov also said that Russia would not launch a ‘noisy’ anti-American campaign, but the media, both state-owned and private, did indeed engage in what some observers termed near hysteria regarding the United States. The media attitude, likened to the strong anti-American stance taken during the Kosovo crisis, itself became the subject of discussion in Russia (Feifer, 2003a,b). Most observers agreed that the media were far more hysterical than the public, or at least responsible for much of the anti-Americanism in public opinion, pointing to the relative absence of public protests in contrast to the strong public action that had occurred against the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia (Feifer, 2003a,b; Lukyanov, 2003). But if the media were responsible for the public wave of anti-Americanism, the government was said by many to be responsible for the path the media had taken. Oleg Panfilov, director of the Center for Journalism in Extreme Situations, accused the Kremlin of orchestrating the anti-Americanism of the media in Soviet style, and former Duma deputy Konstantin Borovoi characterized the media spin as a struggle between anti-West Foreign Ministry people, namely Igor Ivanov, versus pragmatists (Feifer, 2003a,b; Izvestiia, April 23, 2003).

Actually Ivanov claimed the Americans were responsible for what he called the “information war,” in his March 26 speech to the Federal Council. The accusation came in response to American claims that U.S. forces were facing weapons provided to Iraq by Russia in violation of the UN sanctions. Bush delivered a telephone protest to Putin over the supply of anti-tank missiles, devices for jamming satellite guidance signals, and night-vision goggles. Western sources added the presence of Russian technicians assisting with the jamming devices. According to a Washington Post report on March 23, Washington had been lodging complaints for many months, and decided to go public when it was discovered that the cooperation (that is, the presence of technicians) was still going on. Moscow, at all levels, denied having supplied any equipment over the ten years of sanctions. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov (whose ministry is responsible for overseeing permits for arms transfers) denied that the equipment was even present in Iraq, while Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov suggested that private companies may have been guilty of some illicit deals. Duma Defense Committee chair (and former deputy Defense Minister), Andrei Kokoshin said that all the former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, as well as many Middle Eastern customers, possessed such equipment. He added that he did not rule

\[21\] Comments by Yevgeny Verlin, one of the editors of Nezavisimaya gazeta (Johnson’s Russia List, 7119, March 27, 2003, #8).
out the possibility that the equipment may have gotten there via persons interested in creating a “political scandal” (INTERFAX, March 23, 2003).22

The company supplying the anti-tank missiles, KBP-Tula, is actually owned by the government. The company producing the goggles was said to be a Belarus manufacturer; the one producing the jamming equipment and claimed by the Americans to be providing technicians on the spot, was Aviakonversia, owned by a group of ex-Soviet military. Its director, Oleg Antonov, according to Reuters, said that the Iraqis over the past four years had in fact wanted to buy the equipment but the deals had never gone through because the Iraqis did not send payments in time. This comment suggested that the company had in fact been willing to provide the jamming equipment, but Antonov claimed that in any case these were simple devices, not banned or subject to the sanctions, and available to everyone. In fact, according to another source, of the twenty devices offered for sale, 15 had been bought by the United States (Reuters and INTERFAX, March 25, 2003). Thus, counter-attacking, Russian government spokesman Aleksei Volin said the same allegations could be made against American (and European) companies supplying dual-use systems to Iraq and sending illegal equipment (Itar-Tass, March 25, 2003).

The equipment supply-cooperation issue was the first apparent political clash between Russia and the United States during the war, as the U.S. ambassador to Russia reported that Washington was not satisfied with Moscow’s response. Russia appeared to raise temperatures a bit more when Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov revealed that he had given the order for Russian fighter planes to scramble to track an American U-2 flying near Russia’s southern borders. The Foreign Ministry reportedly delivered a protest to the U.S. Embassy concerning at least three such flights in March and what it reportedly called the use of “Cold War tactics” (AP, March 26, 2003). American diplomats said that Russia had been told in advance of the flights over Georgia and Azerbaijan as part of the anti-terrorist effort (including tracking of al-Qaeda elements assisting the Chechens). Sergei Ivanov dismissed the claim that terrorists could be spotted from a U-2 (AP, March 26, 2003).

In fact it looked as if both countries were working their way up to a major dispute. At a meeting with Duma faction leaders on March 28, Putin made his harshest comments on the war to date. He said that the crisis in Iraq was going “beyond the framework of a local conflict.” And that “Perhaps for the first time since the end of the Cold War, the world community has encountered such a grave crisis. In essence, the danger of an undermining of the foundations of global stability and international law” (Office of the President, March 28, 2003). Putin refrained from the kind of accusations launched by Ivanov to the Federal Council two days earlier, and he reiterated his conviction that the “level and character” of U.S.–Russian relations developed in the past few years would permit cooperation for

22 A number of media comments contained the claim that the U.S. was trying to find an excuse (the jammers) for its lack of success in the battle. Duma Foreign Affairs Committee chair Rogozin said on television that the U.S. might next claim that Russia was responsible for the sand of the sand storms in Iraq. He coupled this with criticism of the way Russian politicians had presented Russia to the Americans, saying that Washington should not underestimate the country: “We are a large and powerful country that no one can isolate [economically], and we should behave appropriately” (RFE/RL, March 31, 2003).
a solution to the crisis. Nonetheless, these comments were more alarmist than any Putin had issued to date. At this point anti-American comments had become especially vituperative in the electronic media, with Izvestia (April 3) reporting that television commentators were going so far as to compare Bush to Hitler and to speak of a Holocaust and the killing of civilians in Iraq. For its part, the Foreign Ministry sent a relatively strong protest to the United States when the bombing hit the neighborhood in which the Russian embassy was located, though no Russian action was threatened.

This would appear, however, to have been the peak of official Russian consternation — and the strains that had appeared in Russian–American relations climaxing in the mutual recriminations over Russian aid to the Iraqis. As American coalition ground forces neared Baghdad, Putin returned to a more conciliatory tone, apparently shifting his concerns to the protection of Russia’s economic interests, and relations with Washington, now that a swift American victory was clear. Russian military estimates at the beginning of the war had anticipated both a late launching of ground attacks and stronger Iraqi resistance; the early difficulties faced by the American coalition forces apparently had reinforced the latter estimate.23 There had even been media jibes that the jamming equipment issue was raised by Washington as an excuse for these difficulties (Nezavisimaya gazeta, March 25, 2003). According to one analysis, the Foreign Ministry (and possibly Putin) had been operating on the assumption that the United States would leave Iraq, much the way it had Vietnam (or one might add, Lebanon) and the issue would come back to the United Nations. This, according to experts from the Institute for Applied International Research, was a faulty assumption — it took ten years for America to leave Vietnam, and with regard to Iraq, a guerilla war in the desert would have little effect. These observers urged a rethinking before it was too late, while others pointed out that Putin had in fact chosen a more pragmatic position. In any case, Putin, if not the Foreign Ministry, did begin now to try to temper the public anti-Americanism, and more attention appeared to be given preserving relations with Washington.

The first signs of these efforts came on April 2 in a comment to reporters after a meeting on domestic health issues at the State Council in Tambov. Putin said “I must say that for political and economic reasons, Russia is not interested in seeing a U.S. defeat in Iraq.” (Reuters, April 3, 2003). At a press conference the following day, he did not repeat this phrase but went into great detail explaining just what economic, political and security interests Russia had with the United States, extolling cooperation and expressing confidence that this cooperation would continue (Office of the President, April 3, 2003). Asserting that acting from emotions, while understandable in view of the scenes on television, was not wise, Putin clearly was trying to reverse the anti-American course that Russia’s policy had appeared — accurately or otherwise — to be taking. At the same time, presumably in response to orders from the Kremlin, the Russian ambassador to Washington published an article in the Washington Post (April 3, 2003) calling for reconciliation and outlining steps

23 Foreign Minister Ivanov too had claimed that it was hardly possible to say that the U.S. would win in the immediate future (Nezavisimaya gazeta, March 24, 2003, www.ng.ru).
for strengthening bi-lateral relations. Obviously trying somehow to make the same points as Putin had in his speech, the Ambassador’s comments were, however, far less conciliatory — even hostile in parts, particularly regarding Russian grievances, such as the Jackson–Vanik Amendment and what were called America’s “sometimes prosecutorial” and unfounded accusations against Russian companies. Nonetheless, the article was symptomatic a new Russian effort to reverse the negative trend that had evolved in the relationship.

If Putin’s comments could be explained by concern over the acrimony entering the relationship over the arms to Iraq issue, coupled with the now rapid progress the Americans were making toward victory in Iraq, the specific timing of his comments may have been connected to additional events. On April 3 Foreign Minister Ivanov was scheduled to meet with Colin Powell in Brussels, but, also, an event closer to home may have been at least a small factor. The same day, a relatively large demonstration in Ufa, Bashkortostan came out in support for a Jihad against the United States declared by the head of the Central Islamic Board of Muslims, Supreme Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin.24 The declaration called for the creation of a fund for the purchase of arms and supplies for the people of Iraq (INTERFAX, April 3, 2003). The Bashkortostan Prosecutor-General and Justice Ministry officials quickly responded, warning Tadzhuddin that he was breaking the law. Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin, head of the Council of Muslims which was the other major Muslim administration, condemned the declaration, saying that Jihad was legitimate only if no illegal means were used. The Council of Muftis was the smaller of the two administrations, but reportedly closer to the Kremlin (politically as well as geographically), and Gaynutdin proclaimed his Council’s support for the policy of the Russian government. In the end, Tadzhuddin retreated, saying that the intention was only for humanitarian aid and a spiritual Jihad. But these events, if not the bombing close to Russia’s embassy in Iraq, may have prompted Putin’s comment in his April 3 press conference that he would do “everything in his power to prevent Russia being dragged into the Iraqi crisis in any form.”

Further signs of Putin’s efforts to demonstrate moderation appeared in connection with the Duma. Statements by many Duma deputies and particularly articles in its organ Parlimentskaya gazeta had been decidedly anti-American, and the Duma was set to discuss a new resolution condemning the United States. Suddenly this resolution was removed from the agenda for amendment on April 4. It is safe to assume that this change was connected with Putin who, the next day, speaking at the headquarters of Russia’s space program, said that he wanted the strategic reduction treaty ratified (Office of the President, April 5, 2003). In an obvious message to the Duma deputies who, with Ivanov’s encouragement, had indefinitely postponed the ratification debate because of the Iraq crisis, Putin clearly stated that despite the war, he would work with the deputies to ensure the ratification, which he believed

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24 Tadzhuddin had taken a delegation of clergymen to Iraq just before the war. Actually the demonstration was one of many organized by Putin’s own party, United Russia, presumably to exploit public sentiments to its own electoral advantage. The Mufti’s announcement was, however, not anticipated.
important. (The Duma finally ratified the treaty May 14, 2003, a month after the war.)

In keeping with this attitude, official Russia virtually ignored the U.S. House of Representatives' decision to ban Russia, along with France, Germany and Syria from U.S.-funded post-war projects in Iraq. The Russian press reported that Powell had informed Moscow that the administration and the Senate would not support the House decision. It was harder, however, to ignore the next incident: the attack on the Russian embassy convoy leaving Iraq on April 6. The convoy, which included the ambassador himself, was caught in the crossfire of a gun-battle when American forces fired on Iraqi troops as the convoy began to pass by. The Ambassador's driver was seriously injured, along with several other diplomats. The Americans, reportedly, at first claimed they had had no troops in the area at the time (UPI, April 7, 2003). Then the U.S. ambassador to Russia explained that the convoy must have have changed its route on the advice of the Iraqis, without informing the U.S. military. A senior U.S. official reportedly added that the Iraqis might have intentionally sent the Russians into a contested area so as to create an international incident. A Russian journalist who was in the convoy confirmed (as did other officials later) that the route had been changed, on the advice of the Iraqis, presumably for security purposes, although deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov told INTERFAX that the report of a route change was “not quite true.” (Rusnet, April 9, 2003). The Russian ambassador himself, Vladimir Titorenko, was quoted on Russian television the next day to the effect that the Americans had intentionally fired on the convoy (Rusnet, April 9, 2003).

Colin Powell immediately called his counterpart and expressed his deep regret, but he did not assume responsibility for the incident, promising only to do everything to ensure the safe departure of Russian diplomats (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 6, 2003). While Ivanov was the one who spoke with Powell, it was the Foreign Ministry’s spokesman Alexander Yakovenko who spoke with the media. It was also the spokesman and not Ivanov who issued the Foreign Ministry statement that the U.S. and Iraqi ambassadors had been called in Moscow and were “demanded in harsh terms” to ensure the safety of the Russians and investigate the incident. The lowering of the level of representation may have been a diplomatic signal to limiting reactions and subsequent damage to U.S.–Russian relations. The following day, after speaking with U.S. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice in Moscow for brief meetings that had been scheduled a week earlier, Putin said, through his spokesman, that the shooting had been discussed “in a calm and non-emotional way” (Moscow Times, April 8, 2003). The issue of the equipment sold to Iraq was reportedly discussed in Rice’s conversation with Defense Minister Ivanov. Indeed Rice’s trip had probably been initiated as part of the effort — possibly by both sides, to close the rift that had developed over the arms issue. The visit itself received little publicity, but it came with a commitment from Bush to continue the partnership.

25 Apparently in response to the incident, Primakov appeared on television on April 6 with the warning: “We should under no circumstances lapse into anti-Americanism. This would inflict a great deal of damage to our interests” (BBC monitoring, April 6, 2003 in Johnson’s Russia List, 7134, April 8, 2003, #1).
with Moscow despite the differences over Iraq, and, most likely, with assurances similar to the ones the Americans had been delivering for some time that Russia’s interests would be taken into account in post-war Iraq.

Anti-American comments, along with the discussion over Russian–American relations continued in the media, and a massive demonstration was even held in Moscow on April 9, the day before Baghdad fell. But one corner had been turned both in official positions and public comments. Eyes were now fixed on assessing the damage — and how to repair it — with regard to Russia’s intertwining interests in post-war Iraq and in the relationship with Washington.

Post war

Moving forward was not going to be an easy matter. Important outstanding issues remained, but the manner in which they were to be tackled depended to some degree on the evaluation of the policy that had been adopted by Putin from the outset of the crisis. The most serious, and scathing, criticism came from the respected chair of Russia’s Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, Sergei Karaganov (Izvestiia, April 14, 2003). Making numerous specific points raised by others as well, Karaganov charged that Russian policy had been “improvised” and sometimes at cross-purposes, lacking in a clear strategic objective. He asserted that Russia had “swallowed” Washington’s line about wanting to disarm Iraq and then acted in a confused manner. If the idea had been to dissuade the United States from attacking and to defend international law, this was “naive” and doomed to failure. If the idea had been to defend the Security Council, Russia acted in a way that would, and did, accomplish just the opposite. By continuing to demand “where is the proof” and placing itself in a position against America and Britain (“we are right, you are wrong”), Russia had only made matters worse.

By making the Security Council an instrument against the U.S., Moscow played into the hands of those who sought to weaken the UN, for “without the U.S. there is no UN.” Echoing criticism heard during the war, Karaganov asked if Russia had been trying to make friends with the Europeans and pit them against the Americans or remain on good terms with Washington? Calculating that France and Germany would challenge the United States indefinitely, was also an error, underestimating the relationship between them and America, so that Russia found itself isolated as the Europeans made amends with Washington. China, which had also opposed American action, had been far wiser — expressing its opposition at the outset and leaving it at that. Karaganov also criticized the intelligence failure, namely the overestimation of the state of Iraqi forces and the determination of Iraq’s leaders to defend their country.26 Other commentators also pointed to this failure and the resulting estimates that the United States would get bogged down in a lengthy war. The outspoken but well connected military journalist, Pavel Felgenhaur, blamed Russia’s mistaken policy on what he said was the “virtual monopoly” of the defense

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26 Karaganov may have forgotten that he himself had spoken of America’s military problems and failures in the first week of the war (Nezavisimaya gazeta, March 25, 2003).
and foreign ministries, along with the intelligence services, on the information reaching the President (Moscow Times, April 24, 2003). Actually, Putin himself reportedly chastised the military for the faulty estimates, referring to reports that the war would last three to six months because of strong Iraqi resistance (RFE/RL Reports, April 19, 2003).

Political scientist Lilia Shevtsova was somewhat more generous. She did say that Russia’s wartime demand for immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq made little sense and only exacerbated the tension between Russia and the United States (Moscow Times, April 10, 2003). She also criticized Moscow’s decision to back France so strongly. She ventured that had Russia not backed France so solidly, nor condemned the United States so strongly, and perhaps if Moscow had hinted at an abstention, France’s isolation might have led to a different situation in the Security Council. However, Shevtsova suggested that Putin may not have originally intended to go so far in opposing Washington, but that he was “pushed or rather seduced by smart French diplomacy.” Moreover, she pointed to mistakes Putin did not make. He did not, she argued, try to play the western powers off one another or create an anti-West alliance with other states, such as China, “or to assist Saddam — as Gorbachev did during the first Gulf War or as Yeltsin tried to do with Milosovic during the Kosovo crisis.” Nor did he fall victim to the “anti-American hysteria” or “imperial nostalgia” of many in the Russian foreign policy community. But, she added, Putin could not go against his political base, particularly with elections coming up, and this base did not share his pro-Western orientation.

Duma deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov, who had been critical of the anti-American hysteria during the war, also pointed to mistakes that Putin had not made. Comparing, positively, the policy during the Iraq crisis with that of Moscow during the Kosovo crisis, Ryzhkov revealed that the Kremlin had actually considered providing Milosovic with S-300 anti-missile systems during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, and it had sent reconnaissance ships to the Mediterranean. Worse still, Moscow had tried to trick the West by sending its peacekeeping troops to Pristina before the designated (French) troops could get there. By contrast, in the case of Iraq, Putin himself never called the American coalition attack “aggression,” using only the mild phrase of “big mistake.” And, although harsh words had been expressed, particularly around the accusations of Russian arms to Iraq, the Kremlin had not over-reacted to the shooting on the Russian diplomatic convoy.

The effects of the war domestically, or the lessons that could be learned, understandably were analyzed differently depending upon the area of interest of the analyst. There was probably little disagreement that the war had strengthened the nationalist and hawkish elements in the country. Certainly influential military and defense officials saw it as an opportunity to press for a strengthening of Russia’s defenses, and its nuclear potential, rather than the military reforms Putin had been pushing (Izvestiia, May 8, 2003). The anti-reform view held that the structure of the

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27 See also Shevtsova’s lecture to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 3, 2003 in Johnson’s Russia List, 7141, April 11, 2003, #3.
armed forces built in the Soviet era, with the major threat defined as coming from the West, was now proven valid for the present as well. As retired General Aleksandr Rutskoi expectedly put it on Russian television: “Anyone can see that we must forget the demagoguery of armed-forces reform and begin restoring our defensive and offensive might” (RFE/RL, April 14, 2003). Others such as Shevtsova were more concerned that the war had not only strengthened these conservative, anti-reform elements, but had also sown confusion among liberal politicians. Thus, together with the surge of anti-American sentiment, prospects for radical democratic reform were reduced.

While there were varying estimates as to the damage done by the anti-Americanism, there was increasing criticism of the phenomenon, and of the policy, if indeed it had been a policy. Repeating the claim that the government had inspired the anti-American campaign in the media, one commentator argued that this had come back to the government as ‘public opinion,’ although the public itself was not particularly engaged in the crisis (viz. the small number of demonstrations). Nonetheless, it was claimed, feeding the already strong anti-American sentiments among the public, led to the adoption of more radical positions than the government might otherwise have assumed. Putin’s effort to change this, saying it was not in Russia’s interests for the U.S. to lose the war, came too late. In short, according to this line of criticism, there had been a poor manipulation of public opinion, which contrasted with Britain’s success, for example, in ignoring public opinion (Lukyanov, 2003).

The anti-Americanism was also attributed by some to envy of the United States, particularly when America’s speedy victory, in a land quite distant from it, was contrasted with Russia’s on-going seven and a half year struggle with Chechnya, within its own borders. Such envy was said to include the realization that Russia was merely the ‘poor relation of a rich uncle’ or a ‘junior partner’ to Washington unable to catch up with the U.S. ‘Imperial pride’ was also noted, having led among other things to the delusion of being part of a ‘Paris–Berlin–Moscow axis.’ Thus Russia was left alone with its anti-Americanism, having overestimated its own possibilities. One result, it was noted, was that Russia would suffer from exclusion from such matters as the North Korean nuclear issue, for which China not Russia would now be intermediary for the United States.29 Yet, while on the whole these critical comments dominated, there were those who defended Moscow’s position with the argument, for example, that the United States had not and would not come through with its many promises to Moscow, and one analyst even went so far as to say that because of its stand, Russia might now become a “world moral and legal leader.”30 Actually much of the above criticism was directed not only against the policy

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29 The above sample of comments could be found in the WPS (Russia Media Monitoring Agency) survey of April 16, 2003 citing Izvestiia, Moskovskii Komsomolets, Profil, Vedomosti, Yezhenedelnyi Zhurnal and others; see also Nezavisimaya gazeta, April 16, 2003 and AFP, April 17 and the Vremya novostei, April 17, 2003 account of a meeting on the war of political scientists and political figures, including Anatoli Adamishin and Fyodor Burlatsky, on April 16, 2003.

30 Vladimir Orlov, director of the Center for Political Studies in Vremya novostei, April 17, 2003, account of the meeting.
adopted during the war, but also as a warning regarding the coming weeks of jockeying for position regarding post-war Iraq and the related if not more important matter of relations with the United States.

In view of the above assessments, and the problems that had arisen in Russian–American relations during the war, as well as the failure of Russia’s pre-war policy, a number of the steps taken by Putin in the immediate post-war period were apparently contradictory if not outright puzzling. With the fall of Baghdad, Putin met with Chirac and Schroeder in a hastily organized summit in St. Petersburg on April 10–11. Putin sought to minimize the impression of continuing the pre-war tripartite ‘bloc,’ referring to the precedent of a similar 1998 summit in Moscow and defensively explaining that other countries had been invited. Britain reportedly had been invited, though obviously refrained from attending (AFP, April 13, 2003). Putin strove to keep his comments moderate, concentrating on the need to bring the Iraqi issue back to the United Nations. However, his answers to reporters’ questions slipped into a condemnation of “exporting a capitalist, democratic revolution,” a warning against a “new colonialism,” and, perhaps most damaging for relations with Washington, a comment that no weapons of mass destruction had been found (or used) in Iraq and therefore the question “What did they [the ‘anti-Iraq coalition’] fight for?” (Office of the President, April 11, 2003).

In the same press conference, Putin took a surprising position regarding Moscow’s economic interests in post-war Iraq. U.S. deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz had told the Senate Armed Service Committee that the best way other states could contribute to Iraq’s post-war reconstruction would be by forgiving Iraq’s debts. When asked by a journalist for his response, Putin said that the proposal was “understandable” and that “Russia had no objection to the question being posed that way.” He said that such matters are dealt with through negotiation in the framework of the Club of Paris, and that “We are prepared for these negotiations.” His colleagues seemed less prepared and perhaps surprised by Putin’s apparent acquiescence on this issue. Ivanov reportedly was angry, and deputy Prime Minister-Minister of Finances Alexei Kudrin was reported to say that Russia was not planning to write off Iraq’s debt, which in any case, he said, was not connected with the Club of Paris. Andrei Illarinonov, an economic advisor to Putin, in Washington with Kudrin for World Bank–IMF meetings, said that only a rescheduling might be discussed since the Club of Paris wrote off debts only for very poor nations, but Iraq, like Russia was an oil exporter and by implication would not qualify. Unless, as Kudrin reportedly suggested, “Russia’s own foreign debts [$63 billion] were cancelled” (Reuters and Kommersant, April 12, 2003).

Putin’s apparently conciliatory position on the debt notwithstanding, there were other signs of continued tension regarding America when Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov cancelled a scheduled (April 13–15) visit to the United States, and the Foreign Ministry refused an American request to close the Iraqi Embassy in Moscow including the expulsion of its Saddam era ambassador. The real issue arose, however, when President Bush announced on April 16 that he wanted a new Security Council resolution to lift the sanctions against Iraq. This would clearly be a move to facilitate the sale of Iraqi oil and finance reconstruction, even before an Iraqi government was
in place. For Russia the immediate meaning of the measure would be the end of the Oil for Food regime in favor of open competition for oil contracts in Iraq — a competition Russia would undoubtedly lose to American companies, in effect moving control of Iraqi oilfields from the United Nations to the United States. Beyond this, the sanctions issue meant a return to the Security Council where Russia’s potential veto (once again) provided Moscow with some leverage over the matter of who would be running or participating in the reconstruction of Iraq.

Foreign Minister Ivanov immediately replied in the negative, explaining that the reason for the sanctions, namely the suspicion that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, had to be allayed and this could be done only with a return of the UN arms inspectors (INTERFAX, April 17, 2003). This was the explanation Putin was to give later as well, and for almost a month Russia played tough, refusing to agree to a lifting of sanctions. Ivanov may simply have been going through with his previously promised refusal to grant the United States post-war legitimacy in Iraq.31 But it appears that the maneuvers over the sanctions were a screen for intense negotiations regarding Russia’s economic interests in Iraq and possibly certain Russian–American issues that Moscow hoped to see resolved. Quite early, Duma foreign relations committee chair Rogovin said that Moscow was likely to drop its demand regarding the return of the inspectors if Washington were to allow Russia to take part in the reconstruction. Oleg Chernov, deputy secretary of the National Security Council, said on April 25 (INTERFAX) that negotiations were in fact taking place with the United States, Britain and the UN for the inclusion of Russian companies in reconstruction work, return of Russian specialists, and the preservation of existing contracts. And deputy Prime Minister Kudrin was optimistic at the conclusion of his talks a few days earlier on these issues with U.S. Secretary of the Treasurer Snow. Nonetheless rumors abounded regarding an expected split, once again, among Security Council members, denied by Foreign Ministry spokesman Yakovenko. And pundits in Moscow were once again warning about anti-Americanism or against counting on the Europeans, who were, it was claimed, in fact trying to mend their fences with Washington.

At the end of April, Prime Minister Tony Blair came to Moscow in what was seen as a fence-mending visit (promised perhaps when he refused to attend the summit with France and Germany two weeks earlier). Far from mending any fences, however, the visit was described as worse than a failure because of what the London Times (April 30, 2003) called Putin’s “tirade” at the joint press conference. The reference was to Putin’s comments not only that two weeks after the war no weapons of mass destruction had been found but also his rhetorical and contemptuous questions: “Where is Saddam, where are those arsenals if they really do exist? What is happening to them? Maybe Saddam somewhere sits in a secret bunker and is just planning soon at the last seconds to blow up all of these things, endangering hundreds of human lives. We know nothing about this. These questions have to be answered” (Office of the President, April 29, 2003). Calling for an extension of the

31 For example in his March 26, 2003 speech to the Federal Council.
Oil for Food regime, Putin repeated, in detail, the logic behind his position on sanctions and the need to have the United Nations in charge of reconstruction.

Blair answered that while the UN should and would have a role, but one should understand that “our soldiers having fought and died in this war in Iraq, cannot simply hand over Iraq to the sole charge of the UN whilst coalition forces are there on the ground stabilizing the situation” (Office of the President, April 29, 2003). The British Prime Minister also offered some bait for Russian cooperation when he said that partnership with the Americans might mean American attentiveness to partners’ concerns, such as the Middle East peace process or global poverty and development issues. Putin did not, however, respond. Certainly in stark contrast to Gorbachev during the first Gulf War, Putin at no time suggested — or expressed any interest in — a linkage of Iraq and a solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict. Nor was such a linkage the subject of major debate during the present crisis. While Russia was part of the Quartet (together with the European Union, the UN and the United States) that had devised a ‘Road Map’ for a peace process, that conflict was no longer a direct or major interest of Russia.

In terms of post-war Iraq, the one conciliatory comment Putin made was to repeat his willingness to have the debt issue discussed in the Club of Paris (although he said nothing of forgetting the debt). In addition, despite the negative impression left by the Blair visit, some progress seemed to be underway behind the scenes in the area of bilateral American–Russian relations, possibly as quid pro quo for a change in Moscow’s position on sanctions. The first official Russian visit to the U.S. took place at the end of April when deputy Prime Minister-Farming Minister Alexei Gordeyev went for what turned out to be successful talks on agricultural trade. On May 3 it was announced that the mandate for the joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism was to be extended and its mandate expanded, and Russia expressed its satisfaction that three Chechen groups had been placed on the State Department’s list of terrorist organizations. There were reports that Putin was to propose an agreement to the Americans for cooperation on missile defense — possibly a treaty to ban weapons in space, and U.S. Under-Secretary of State John Bolton came to Moscow for discussions with the Russian Atomic Energy Ministry. It was also announced that Bush would attend the celebrations in St. Petersburg at the end of May, as planned.

Apparently sufficient progress had been made in formulating a resolution that Putin could support to warrant a trip to Moscow by Colin Powell on May 15. Setting the stage for the visit, Ivanov made extremely conciliatory remarks at a meeting of political experts in Moscow on May 13 (although he continued to speak of the need for multilateralism as distinct from unilateralism). In addition, obviously as a goodwill gesture, the Duma ratified the Strategic Reduction Treaty on May 14 (with speeches by Putin and both Ivanovs). At the same time, Karaganov urged the government not to fight the United States at the UN, but rather to try to get as much Russian participation as possible in the peace-keeping and reconstruction of Iraq — pointing out that Iraq was not Kosovo (from which Moscow had just

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32 There had been an outstanding dispute over Russian imports of American chickens that AFP, May 3 reported was resolved in the meeting.
announced the removal of its peace-keepers). “We have something to gain in Iraq,” the head of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy said (Izvestia, May 14, 2003).

The major points of the resolution Powell was said to be bringing would encompass a lifting of the sanctions and an end to Oil for Food program within a certain period, accompanied by United Nations control over the income from Iraq’s oil. Judging from Powell’s comments in an interview after his Moscow meetings, full agreement was not yet reached on the resolution, but Powell explained that it was not going to be a matter of a Russian veto, or not, but rather of Washington’s satisfaction of all parties concerned. Thus, the two countries were, according to Powell, still working to reach agreement on certain elements of the resolution. He revealed that one of these was the issue of the return of the arms inspectors; the Oil for Food program was another. In tones that sounded more like Washington was wooing Russia rather than Russia trying to repair relations with Washington, Powell pointed to the (renewed) cooperation between the two: ratification of the strategic reduction treaty, meetings between the ministers of agriculture and between energy officials, a coming visit by Washington’s commerce experts to discuss improved trade relations, and efforts to help Russia join the WTO. With regard to the Iraqi debt, he said that the matter had not been discussed in his talks with Putin the day before, but that it would be dealt with in the context of all of Iraq’s debts, requiring rescheduling or refinancing or other action. He added that he was “sure the new Iraqi government will take fully into account its obligations to the Russian Federation” (Department of State, May 15, 2003). At the end of the visit, both leaders said they believed their differences over Iraq were behind them.

Whatever issues had needed final ironing out, just one week later the UNSC approved resolution 1483 canceling all trade sanctions with the exception of those connected with arms. The new resolution extended the Oil for Food regime for six months (without the restrictive monitoring measures) and called for the UN, together with the occupying authority (the United States and Britain) plus Iraqi representatives to review and fulfill important previously approved contracts. Moreover, until that new government, all proceeds from export energy sales would be deposited in a development fund for Iraq. This fund was to be under the supervision of an international advisory and monitoring board composed of the UN, the IMF, the World Bank and the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, though dispersed by the occupying authority. The resolution also included a complicated clause legally protecting, until 2008, all oil, oil products and natural gas originating in Iraq, providing immunity from attachment (for debt repayment, for example). Thus the debt issue remained where Putin had agreed to it, as the resolution “welcomed” the willingness of creditors, including members of the Club of Paris to deal with the matter. At the same time, all assets abroad of the former Iraqi government were to be frozen.

Aside from the last item, the resolution reflected many of Russia’s demands, both regarding a role for the UN (political as well as economic and social), especially that

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33 The U.S. reportedly had sought a maximum of four months’ extension (RFE/RL Newsline, Vol.7, no. 91, May 15, 2003).
which prevented an American takeover of Iraq’s oil resources, and at least temporary protection for Russia’s oil interests. Moscow probably also had a hand in the clause that provided for other states in addition to the occupying powers to work in Iraq (albeit under the occupying authority). Moscow’s hand could also be seen in the inclusion of a clause regarding the continued validity of UNSC resolutions regarding the disarmament of Iraq, but the most the Americans would concede on this point was “encouragement” of the U.S. and Britain to report their progress regarding Iraq’s disarmament obligations, with the UN intending to “revisit” the mandates under the existing resolutions. In other words, the Russians’ and others’ demand for the return of UN arms inspectors was not met.

Glossing over this last point, Foreign Minister Ivanov, in Paris, expressed his full satisfaction with the new resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 23, 2003). With the removal of this last barrier in Russian–American relations, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov made his delayed visit to Washington, armed with a warm note from Putin, and resulting in a joint pledge for a “new strategic relationship.” The statement on the relationship, released on May 24, contained what presumably was also a quid pro quo in the negotiations for the new resolution. It asserted America’s “intention to advance concrete joint projects in the area of missile defense.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no date). The stage was now set for the scheduled 40-nation summit at the celebrations of St. Petersburg the following week.

In a joint Putin–Bush press conference at those festivities, the American President expressed his appreciation of Russia’s agreement to the new resolution and revealed the rest of the bi-lateral quid pro quo apparently conceded for this support (Office of the President, June 1, 2003). Bush spoke of increased trade relations between the two countries, which he said, would expand still further with Russia’s entry into the WTO (a hint of U.S. assistance in this), promising once again to work with Congress for the abrogation of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. He referred to cooperation leading to the fulfillment of Russia’s potential on world energy markets, implying plans to proceed with U.S. purchases of and investment in Russian oil. He also spoke of the International Space Station, possible meaning that the U.S. would provide the, or some of the, financial assistance Moscow was seeking for its space program. Bush also spoke of Chechnya in the context of fighting terrorism — the context preferred by Moscow, of course, and he also appeared to be reallocating Moscow a mediator’s role when speaking of a joint interest in non-proliferation with regard to Korea. He spoke of Iran in this context as well, with Putin confirming, in answers to questions, that the positions of Russia and the United States on this issue were “much closer than it may seem.” Indeed, a few days later, Putin told a reporter at the G-8 Summit in Evian that he believed the IAEA should play a key role in non-proliferation with regard to Iran, adding “we will insist that all Iranian programs in the nuclear sphere are overseen by this organization. And we will build our cooperation with all countries in accordance with how open they are and how willing they are to place their programs under IAEA control” (Office of the President, June 34

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34 Elsewhere the Americans praised the government-organized referendum that had taken place in Chechnya while attention had been focused on the Iraq war.
3, 2003). These comments prompted speculation that there had been a Tehran for Baghdad deal in connection with the horse-trading over the resolution, American concessions and Russian interests in Iraq (AFP, June 4, 2003; Reuter, June 6, 2003).

In the final analysis, Putin sought to give the impression that in fact there had been no horse-trading, no concessions, and no deviation from his correct stand throughout the Iraq crisis. Thus speaking after the G-8 meeting in June, he praised Bush’s magnanimity for coming to St. Petersburg, for refraining from taking offense or aggravating Russian–American relations despite Russia’s “consistent…and quite harsh” position on Iraq. Implied in these remarks was the conclusion that Putin had accomplished his policy objectives.

Just what did Putin accomplish? On the one hand, he could claim that he had succeeded in asserting Russia’s status as a great power, since together with France, Russia had blocked Security Council support for the war, thereby forcing the United States to abandon a Security Council vote and go to war virtually alone. At the same time he could claim that he succeeded in preserving the authority of the United Nations by getting them into the post-war reconstruction of Iraq. He could also prove that he had preserved Russia’s economic interests by preventing outright American control over Iraqi oil resources, extending the Oil for Food regime, and protecting at least some of Russia’s contracts.

On the other hand, Russia’s own role regarding the United Nations was relatively quickly forgotten, not only because the sanctions were lifted as the United States wanted, but also because subsequent events in Iraq itself during the following months made it necessary for the United States to turn to the United Nations. And as for Russia’s economic interests, Putin himself admitted in his press conference with Bush that while Russian companies might be able to work in Iraq in the future, this would “depend on the situation there” while “long-term prospects and investment and projects” were a matter for the future. Indeed months later, although some contracts had been included in the UN priorities list, Russia’s oil companies were still uncertain regarding their contracts, including Lukoil’s large Qurna fields investment. Moreover, the Club of Paris decided in July 2003 on the rescheduling of the debt, reducing it to $3.5 billion, excluding $2.5 billion owed for arms procurement and, according to one Russian account, leaving only one-sixth of what was invested by Russia to be repaid, and that over a period of decades (RIA-Novosti, July 16, 2003).35 In sum, with regard to Russian objectives related to Iraq itself, the conclusions are far from positive.

With regard to the United States, Putin could point to success in advancing Russian interests on specific, outstanding issues. These included American commitments regarding missile defense cooperation, expanded bilateral trade, including also Russia’s energy sector, abrogation of Jackson-Vanik, and assistance for entry into the WTO. Yet, the missile defense promise had been offered well before, as early as January 2003, as was the trade in energy, the first shipments of Russian oil having arrived in July 2002, as noted above. The issues barring expanded trade, and in

35 Later Putin reportedly promised an Iraqi Governing Council delegation to write off two-thirds of the debt, in hopes of gaining contracts for Russian oil companies (Kommersant, December 23, 2003).
particular the Jackson-Vanik obstacle remained, promises to resolve them, like the
promise to assist entry to the WTO all having been proffered before. It was not clear
what more Washington was actually doing, nor, in the case of Russia’s space program,
was any firm commitment actually made. This does not mean that some commitments
were not made, but perhaps the most that can be said regarding American–Russian
relations is that the status-quo ante was restored. 36 That was not a small achievement;
as Putin said, Bush could have responded otherwise. And in terms of Russia’s
objectives, preservation of the relationship with Washington was a priority — actually
achieved.

But did Moscow sell itself cheap, considering that the United States needed
Russia for the ending of sanctions? Did Russia actually pay a price, or too high
a price, for what amounted to merely the resumption of the past relationship? Putin’s
comments after the G-8 meeting suggested that Russia had indeed caved in if not
actually paid a price. To the praise for Bush’s magnanimity, Putin said that many
things — documents and issues, had been agreed between the two, since (it was
implied) “it would have been stupid…to reject the hand that was extended to us. It
would be an unforgivable error to show disdain, to pout and turn away to create
certain coalitions and divide the international community” (Office of the President,
June 3, 2003). Atomic Energy Minister Alexander Rumyantsev used similar words
when he was asked about Russian agreement to linkage between nuclear fuel
deliveries to Iran and IAEA inspections (under the new protocol American was
pressing Iran to sign). Denying direct linkage, he acknowledged that the scheduled
new agreement between Russia and Iran on the subject has been delayed, adding,
“we are a civilized country. President Bush held his hand out to us. President Putin
said we have to take into account [U.S. concerns]” (AFP, June 5, 2003). 37

Whatever was or was not agreed regarding Iran, there was not, however, the general
impression at least in Russia that Moscow had paid a price or that Putin had caved in.
Quite the contrary, aside from criticism from sophisticated political observers and
some politicians, Putin was perceived to have followed the correct policy. Certainly he
was in tune with the public on the issue, thus maintaining his electoral strength. (At
least insofar as it was connected with foreign policy. Pre-Duma election polls showed
majority dissatisfaction with all of the government’s policies — economic, human
rights, public order, Chechnya — but 78% said Putin’s foreign policy had strength-
ened Russia.) It could also be said that even Putin’s Franco-German maneuvers
and the anti-Americanism of the period, for which he was indirectly held responsible
by some, had not caused particular damage in the end. By the end of the summer
of 2003, and despite some squabbles over the safety of the Russian Embassy in
Baghdad, Russian–American relations were relatively good, as evidenced by Russia’s

36 The same could be said for Britain, following a successful visit by Putin at the end of June after which
the BP $6.15 billion deal was formally signed (New York Times, June 27, 2003).
37 Iran’s nuclear energy chief Gholam Reza Aghazadeh came to Moscow as scheduled at the end of
June, without apparently signing a new. Foreign Minister Ivanov said that while Russia urged the Iranians
to sign the new protocol of the IAEA, Russia would continue to meet all its obligations to Iran (New York
Times and RFE/RL, July 1, 2003).
sympathetic response, in contrast to that of Bonn and Paris, to Washington’s call for
the UN to help out with the occupation of Iraq (New York Times, September 5, 2003).

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