

Iraq in the Context of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy

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The relationship between Moscow and Baghdad, like Russia's foreign-policy relationships throughout the Persian Gulf region during the post-Soviet period, is a prominent example of the problems, contradictions, and conceptual meanderings of Russian policy since the collapse of communism. Russia's policy toward Iraq is the result of a combination of many different factors, domestic as well as foreign. These include the Kremlin's periodic attempts to formulate a new foreign policy doctrine, its desire to play an international role for which it has neither the economic nor the political capacity, its dislike of America's unilateral policies, its desire to maintain its influence in the Persian Gulf region while simultaneously integrating with the West, its need to retain former Soviet republics under its control, and its geopolitical nostalgia. All these factors result in a Russian foreign policy defined by unpredictable zigzags.

At the same time, Russia's own domestic processes, its comprehensive and contradictory evolution, the trying shift in both the elites and the system of values, and the internal struggle for power have had a direct influence on policy choices, including foreign policy. Foreign policy was often hostage to the Kremlin's internal struggles, and its course was monopolized by special interest groups or sold off to various lobbies.

Russia in Search of a New Foreign Policy Strategy

The numerous factors that directly influence the formation of Russian foreign policy all played a role during the Iraqi crisis. First, in many ways the

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Russian elites continue to base their ideology on an understanding of the world formed during the Cold War. Even though President Vladimir Putin periodically speaks about global economic interests, the main emphasis of the country's foreign policy institutions continues to be national security and the safeguarding of the country's territorial integrity, in the military sense of the word. That is how the overwhelming majority of Russian diplomats and politicians view the contemporary world. One Russian expert writes, for instance: "For Russia, the issue is security in all its aspects and dimensions—global, regional, and national, as well as political, economic, social, ecological, and informational. The main strategic task of Russia's foreign policy institutions consists of securing a safe and stable environment."¹ This is a typical statement. Such an approach, more appropriate for a department of defense than a department of foreign affairs, creates a conceptual gap between Moscow and many other states and is one of the contradictions of Russia's foreign policy behavior.

Second, Russia still has not formed a coherent position toward the world's sole superpower, the United States, or for that matter toward the West as a whole. The thesis about the inevitability of the improvement in relations between Russia and the United States turned out to be misleading. Relations between Russia and the United States could not be improved, because they had been created for another political and international reality and were, by definition, unimprovable. The countries should instead build completely new bilateral relations, based on a qualitatively new strategic and conceptual foundation. One cannot indefinitely keep improving the steam engine—at some point you need to switch to something fundamentally new, like a gas engine or an electric motor. Neither Moscow nor Washington tried to make that leap. Both sides lost a decade by trying to improve the steam engine, and as a result, they presently do not have a defined policy toward each other, and given their size and power, this cannot help but have a negative influence on world developments.

While the criticism toward the Bush administration's foreign policy is justified, it must be said that in the Iraqi crisis Russia lost a lot more in its

1. K. Gadjiev, "From Bipolarity to a New Configuration of Geopolitical Power," *Foreign Policy and the Security of Contemporary Russia* 1 (Russian) (1999): 70.

relations with the United States than it could afford. Its position was far from pragmatic and thus directly contradicted the major foreign policy principles as proclaimed by Putin. This cannot be attributed only to the American unilateral approach toward international relations, or to the series of unfriendly steps toward Moscow, ranging from protectionism and the Jackson-Vanik amendment to pushing Russia out of Afghanistan, Georgia, and Moldova.

When President Putin declared his full and unconditional support of the United States on 11 September 2001, the move was seen as a strategic choice made by the Russian leadership, corresponding to the interests of both countries. But a few months later, Russian-American relations began to worsen once again. Without absolving the United States of blame for its own mistakes and miscalculations in its foreign policy, it must be said that the fault for not implementing any follow-up to the strategic choice lies largely with Moscow. In the past three years, the Kremlin has not bothered to explain what Russia's "strategic choice" for the West means in reality, to justify the choice to the Russian society and political elites, or even to take any steps toward realizing that choice. Subsequent Russian foreign policy has lacked the necessary economic and organizational resources, as well as the required political will, for coherence, much less success. The conflict over Iraq became the conceptual bankruptcy of the model of Russian-American relations created over the past ten years, especially after 11 September. It became obvious that if there is no fundamental basis to the relationship, and no understanding of strategy, then conflicts like Iraq can seriously influence the dynamic of the relationship. This is what happened in 2003.

Third, over the past decade the Russian elite have been attempting to achieve two important goals simultaneously. On one hand, they want to ensure the country's national security and territorial integrity, and, on the other hand, they want to gain back the influence possessed by the USSR as one of the leading powers of the world. The Russian establishment strongly feels that "Russia cannot help but be a great power simply because it holds a unique place in the global geopolitical structure."²

But these goals to a large extent contradict each other. Russia today is unable to independently ensure its own security and also contribute to

2. *Ibid.*, 69.

global stability. For that, it needs tight bonds of partnership with the United States as well as economic and military assistance from the West. When national security became America's foremost priority, it seemed Russia had gained the most powerful of allies. But that is the very obstacle to Russia's conduct of an independent foreign policy. In other words, Moscow wants to regain its lost international authority, which it has traditionally done by opposing Washington. This, naturally, damages the possibilities of a strategic partnership and decreases Russian security and its capacity for protecting its national interest and territorial integrity.

Fourth, the system of international organizations created after World War II guaranteed Russia an important role in international relations and an influential place in all the major international structures. A permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, coupled with a nuclear arsenal, guaranteed it parity with the United States in the second half of the twentieth century, making it one of the capitals of the world, without whose participation practically nothing could be undertaken in international relations. Today, that seat on the Security Council is the last important instrument that allows Moscow to assert its influence in the world, without which Russia risks ending up on the political sideline, which is completely unacceptable to the Russian elite.

Moscow is extremely wary of any attempts to revise the foundation of the Yalta system of international relations. The Kremlin is constantly proclaiming the leading role of the UN, but almost completely avoids the problem of its ineffectiveness.³ In the Iraqi crisis, Moscow steadfastly supported the idea of keeping the UN as the leading world organization, since Russia could never play a role equal to the United States in any new system of international organizations.

Moscow is also well aware that the battle with international terrorism and the war in Iraq could become the beginning of the UN's long decline in its present form, which corresponds to historical logic but also, to a large extent, to the desires of U.S. leadership. Any reforms of the UN will inevitably lower Moscow's status even more, a development it will try to prevent. In demand-

3. Igor Ivanov, "International Security in an Era of Globalization," *Russia in Global Affairs* 1 (January–March 2003): 47.

ing that any issues dealing with Iraq be passed over to the UN, Russia was attempting not only to internationalize them while decreasing the role of Britain and the United States but to increase the role of the organization in which it plays a leading role. It was not for naught that Putin said that any UN reforms should be undertaken “not only within the framework of the UN itself, but also by using the procedures embedded in the norms of international law recognized by the UN,” that is, with Russia’s decisive participation.⁴ By coming out against the American actions in Iraq in spring 2003, Moscow, together with Paris and Berlin, exacerbated the crisis of the UN and the Security Council and lowered the status of these bodies. If, for instance, the United States, and then Britain, decide to leave the council or stop taking part in its activities, or else if its membership expands significantly while the veto procedure is altered, Russia has the most to lose.

Fifth, post-Soviet Russia continues to search for a new way to position itself in the world. Former secretary of state John Foster Dulles’ remarks about England half a century ago could apply equally well to Russia today—it has lost an empire but has not found a new role. Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, Moscow believed that it would be possible to retain its superpower status and become a sort of a democratic copotentate of the world together with the United States. But the inequality of the two countries’ potential was so obvious that not only did this joint rule turn out to be impossible, the idea of strategic partnership as such has floundered as well. It was not clear what could unite the two countries besides massive nuclear arsenals. A push was made to integrate the Confederation of Independent States into a single geopolitical space with Russia dominating as a natural power center. But this approach was rejected due to a lack of Russian resources as well as the reticence of the former Soviet republics to once again fall into complete dependence on their neighbor.

After Boris Yeltsin was elected to his second presidential term, Moscow attempted to create a model for a multipolar world, making advances toward India, China, and a number of smaller countries such as Serbia and even Iraq and Iran. After coming to power, president Putin proclaimed, “Russia

4. Vladimir Putin, “UN Modernization Should Proceed Only within the UN Framework Itself,” RTR News, 12 April 2003, at www.vesti.ru/news.html?pid=30393.

should build its foreign policy on the basis of a clear definition of national priorities, pragmatism, and economic effectiveness.”⁵ But this did not mean a rejection of the multipolar idea. During the Iraq crisis, Moscow united itself with a number of states from “old Europe.” Russian-American relations turned out to be securely locked into three important but narrow paths: international security, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and cooperation in the energy market. But the potential for building relations between the societies of the two countries has only decreased during this time.

If we look closely at Russia’s foreign policy today, we can see elements of all these concepts. They are united by two circumstances. First, they are all, to some extent, based on a belief that Russia has a rightful place as a first-class world power, or at least that Russia is on its way back to that position. A disagreement with the United States over Iraq or Iran produces feelings of self-respect in both the Russian elite and the people as a whole. Moreover, Russia still retains a massive nuclear arsenal and a military doctrine designed for deflecting the threats from the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Yeltsin more than once threatened Washington and “Friend Bill” with practically a third world war for expanding NATO, bombing Iraq in December 1998, and bombing Serbia in March 1999.

Second, all these concepts are based on traditional geopolitics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when Russia saw itself as a great power and a dominating force, a country not being integrated but integrating others into itself. This way of thinking was evidenced by the conflict over Iraq in 2003 and had a significant influence on the Kremlin’s geopolitical judgment of the events around it. In other words, after the collapse of the USSR, Russian foreign policy, despite all its attempts to reform and its shifts in rhetoric, has not created, in my view, coherent new approaches or conceptions. Over the past decade Moscow has only solidified its reputation as an unpredictable partner. Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov’s turning his plane around over the Atlantic after hearing about the bombing of Yugoslavia is a prominent example of

5. The full text of Vladimir Putin’s address to the Federal Council of 3 April 2001 is available at www.vremya.ru/cgi-bin/print/2001/59/events/1590.html.

Russian foreign policy improvisation. The Kremlin's zigzags over Iraq demonstrated this no less clearly.

Russian-Iraq Relations: The Fusion of Politics and Economics

The history of the relationship between Russia and Iraq has several stages. Starting in 1958, it developed fairly successfully. Until the collapse of the USSR, the two countries signed over fifty decrees and agreements, while their annual trade in 1989 reached almost \$2 billion. Huge contracts were signed for building pipelines, including the Nasiriya-Baghdad pipeline, and the electric power stations at Yusifiya, Nasiriya, Kharta, and Nadjibia, as well as for extracting oil in the south of the country. But in the beginning of the 1990s, relations gradually began to change. This was the result of both the political changes and economic decline inside Russia and the conflict over Kuwait in 1990. Under pressure from Foreign Minister Edward Shevardnadze, President Mikhail Gorbachev publicly condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and demanded its immediate withdrawal. The fact that the Soviet leadership supported the West was an unpleasant surprise for Iraqi leaders, who viewed the Soviet reaction as a betrayal of a 1972 agreement on friendship and cooperation.

Initially, Moscow preferred a political resolution, but under pressure from Washington it came to support an American military action, doing so for the first time in its history. It approved all the UN resolutions condemning Iraqi aggression, although it was through Moscow that Iraq had tried to block these resolutions. Far from everyone in the Arab world welcomed such a position from Kremlin. Russian-Iraqi relations began to change, there was a visible cooling-off, and Moscow's influence in the region began to wane.

That is why the Kremlin soon began to formulate a new, dual position—distancing itself from the anti-Iraq coalition but taking up an intermediary place between the coalition and Iraq. Trying to rescue Moscow's reputation and influence in the Arab world, Gorbachev appointed Evgeny Primakov his special Iraq envoy. Primakov met with Saddam Hussein in 1990 in Baghdad, where they discussed possibilities for avoiding war with the United States. Moscow gradually turned into Washington's half-ally, trying not so much to avoid war but to guarantee that the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from

Kuwait would restore Russian political presence in the region. Moscow even offered to link Iraq's concession to withdraw its troops to beginning a normalization of the Israeli-Palestinian problem, but could not find any supporters. In other words, by the time of the Persian Gulf War, the beginnings of the Russian approach that blossomed in 2003 could already be discerned.

Russia's military establishment predicted that the earlier war would become America's second Vietnam, and the generals assured the country's leadership of the real possibility of a U.S. defeat. They spoke of the danger for Russia of American forces appearing in the Persian Gulf region, and there was even talk that the United States was planning to place nuclear weapons there. Second, even though the country's leadership proclaimed a course of converging with the West, since Russia badly needed Western aid, investment, and technology, both the public and the elite did not view America in a friendly manner and were sometimes outright hostile, a fact that Gorbachev, who was rapidly losing public support, had to take into account in his stance on Iraq.

Third, by that time representatives of religious and national organizations, including Muslim movements, became a more serious alternative to Communist Party rule in the region. These movements saw Russia's Muslim regions as part of a global Muslim civilization. They applied significant pressure on the Kremlin to take the interests of Muslim countries into account. Fourth, Moscow was attempting to internationalize the Persian Gulf conflict, especially by trying to engage other Arab countries in finding a solution. This approach allowed it to kill two birds with one stone—it could remain a member of the anti-Iraq coalition while maintaining good relations with the Arab countries. Moscow was also afraid that its direct military involvement would inevitably lead to another Afghan syndrome.

Fifth, Russia kept open an independent channel of dialogue with Baghdad until the last possible moment, searching for a way to resolve the crisis without losing face. In other words, Moscow did not whole-heartedly embrace either side but attempted to safeguard its political interests in the region and continued its cooperation with Saddam. It aided in the perpetuation of his regime, actively trying to prevent a final resolution of the problem desired by the United States. Saddam remained Russia's economic and political part-

ner. Russia was quite satisfied with the secular nature of his regime and did not raise concerns about human rights violations in Iraq, even after Saddam practically annihilated all political opposition, including the Communist Party. Iraq's importance for Russia increased as the ultra-orthodox Muslim regime solidified in Afghanistan, and as Russia's own geopolitical influence waned. In spring 2003 the same arguments were being discussed in the Kremlin, and the Russian approach to Iraq was equally complex.

After the 1990 war, Russia concluded that neither the defeat of the Iraqi army nor long-term sanctions changed the character of the regime, weakened the position of Saddam himself, strengthened the security of Iraq's neighbors (including Israel), or stopped terrorist attacks against Western interests in the region. This became the Russian establishment's intellectual base for a pessimistic view of the effectiveness of a new military operation against the Baghdad regime.

Throughout these years, Iraq continued to play the role of the economic and political outpost of Russian interests in the gulf region. Moscow thought that Russian-Iraqi cooperation could set an example for other countries wishing to build economic relations with Russia. That way it could return domestic manufacturers (and military-industrial enterprises first and foremost) to the Middle East, which was a major priority for its policy in the region. To pursue this agenda, a special Russian-Iraqi committee on trade issues and economic and scientific cooperation was set up.

In January 1996, Primakov became Russia's foreign minister. Moscow did all it could to push for the repeal of UN sanctions, even though it was the country that most benefited from the sanctions in the first place. In the first four years of the Food for Oil program, which began in 1996, Russia exported around \$3 billion of goods to Iraq, and the annual trade volume reached \$1.5 billion. Russian companies had a 40 percent share of all the oil being exported from Iraq. Meanwhile, the country's debt to Russia grew to \$8 billion, and even though Moscow understood perfectly well that it would probably never see the money, it thought the debt might be a good instrument for putting pressure on Saddam's regime.

Economically, Russia wanted to bind Iraq to itself, and repealing the sanctions would have given it greater prospects of achieving that goal. By demanding their repeal, Moscow not only accumulated a political debt from

Iraq but strengthened its reputation as a defender of Arab nations. Iraq even tried to persuade Moscow to unilaterally withdraw from the sanctions regime, or at least to argue that sanctions be eased with respect to Russia, promising in turn to provide lucrative, multibillion dollar contracts, which the Russian economy needed badly. These contracts concerned oil extraction and production in the south and west of Iraq. According to official Iraqi sources, Russia lost approximately \$30 billion in business due to the sanctions.

In Iraq, Russia was always trying to show the Arab world that its policy was different from the West's in its prudence, deftness, and respect for Islam as the regional religion and for the needs and interests of the common people. Yeltsin met with Iraqi prime minister Tariq Aziz several times in the Kremlin, and certain Moscow circles lobbied for a presidential visit to Iraq. The Kremlin held a steadfast belief in the manageability of Saddam, and no one put his loyalty to Moscow into question.

Moscow responded to the bombing of Iraq in December 1998 very negatively and publicly expressed its disapproval. Yeltsin made a sharply phrased speech, and the Duma refused to ratify the START-II treaty with the United States and passed a resolution stating that the United States and Britain had committed an act of state terrorism and were attempting to play the role of the world's policemen. The Duma demanded a reevaluation of the Russian-American relationship. (The next time the Duma took such a step was in 1999, once again refusing to ratify the START-II treaty after the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, a country that Russia saw as a brotherly, Eastern Orthodox nation.) The ministers of defense and foreign affairs, who in December 1998 were traveling abroad, were ordered by Prime Minister Primakov to return home immediately. This was followed by the evacuation of Russian citizens from Iraq, well publicized in the Russian media, and Moscow began demonstrative consultations with China on developing a shared foreign policy line.

It's hard to say how much of a role bluster played in these actions, but in the spring of the following year Yeltsin sent his special envoy, Minister of Oil and Energy Viktor Kalyuzhny, to visit Saddam with a personal letter that stated, in part, that Russia would be decisively pushing for a repeal of all sanctions and would block any proposals for a military solution in Iraq.

Yeltsin offered to advocate for replacing the inspection regime with other methods of control, but Baghdad expected more.

Russia was extremely interested in maintaining its leading role in the Iraqi market. Zarubezhneft and Lukoil were expressing the most interest, having signed contracts for developing the most promising oil fields—West Kurna-2 and Northern Rumallah, whose deposits are estimated to be around 560 million tons. The value of the contracts had the potential to reach \$70 billion. But full-scale work could begin only after the repeal of the sanctions, even though Baghdad had repeatedly offered to start the job without waiting for sanctions to be lifted. Russia, at the same time, maintained an active diplomatic dialogue with France and China, who also favored repealing the sanctions because of their economic interests. When, in November 2000, an American warship intercepted the Russian tanker *Volgoneft* on suspicion that it was transporting illegal Iraqi oil, the Russian reaction was rather restrained.

At the end of 2002, the Iraqi leadership eliminated all ties with Lukoil and several other Russian companies for what it declared were economic reasons. Many in Moscow saw this as a desire by Baghdad to force Russia to take a more active position in the defense of Iraq, in an environment of increasing pressure from the Bush administration. Iraqi ambassador to Russia Kunduf Abbas Khalaf declared in December 2002 that Russia remained the major strategic partner of the Iraqi oil complex. Iraq's oil infrastructure was created by Russia and remains Russian, emphasized the ambassador, and such cooperation cannot be dismantled quickly. Moscow was given to understand that huge contracts were being signed purely for political reasons, they were not the results of fair competition, and their lifespan was only as long as the lifespan of the Iraqi regime. Now it was no longer Moscow attempting to bind Iraq to itself, but Saddam declaring political preconditions in return for a lucrative financial return. In Russia, opinions were voiced that if the Kremlin was unable to protect the foreign policy interests of the country and its companies, then such a foreign policy was not a sensible one. In such circumstances, President Putin could not take a position supporting military action against Iraq.

2003: “Russia Is Not Interested in a U.S. Defeat”

The outcome of a potential American-Iraqi conflict was extremely important from the viewpoint of Russian interests, as well as for domestic reasons. The Russian Council on Foreign and Defense Policy at a special hearing in December 2002 examined the future of Iraqi and Russian interests. It concluded that the line pursued by Moscow over the past decade could not help but be harmful. The whole world was convinced, it concluded, that Russia was strenuously trying to help Saddam and lift the sanctions, which would be a triumph for Saddam’s foreign policy and would lead to a strengthening of the dictatorship.⁶ Russia must, on one hand, support demands for inspections in Iraq, and on the other, it must avoid, by any means possible, the onset of a war not sanctioned by the Security Council.

In this way, Russia again attempted not only to prevent the war but to internationalize the conflict within the framework of the organization in which it played a leading role. It was once again unable to fulfill the role of a middleman between Iraq and the United States. Moscow quickly realized that the Bush White House could not simply be dissuaded from war and that Bush’s decision to use military force against Saddam’s regime would not depend on the Russian position as such, but if the issue went to the UN, Russia’s position would indeed be very important. Simultaneously, the Kremlin was constantly trying to find a golden middle, resisting the impulse to wash its hands of the whole issue, for then it could end up on the sidelines in the post-Saddam Iraq, a scenario it could not tolerate.

President Putin took a wait-and-see position, leaving up to the administration the responsibility to speak for the country as a whole. This was seen by many as evidence of a lack of confidence within the Kremlin administration, a desire to avoid burning bridges with either side. At the same time, Moscow entered into an intense dialogue with Berlin and Paris regarding the formation of a united political platform within the Security Council. Russia’s European orientation corresponded not only to a desire to create a center of power counterbalancing the United States, a multipolar world of sorts, and not only to demonstrate its peaceful intentions to the Arab world, but also to

6. George Mirsky, “The Baghdad Puzzle,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 1 (January–March 2003): 119–20.

show Russia's readiness to integrate increasingly with the old continent. At the same time, personal mutual sympathy between Bush and Putin allowed Russia to maintain a friendly and nonconfrontational tone with the United States.

At the same time, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov made strident statements proclaiming that the war was unacceptable, that Russia would not be involved in it under any circumstances, and that actions by Britain and the United States would lead to a complete destabilization of the region and an increase in international terrorism. Igor Ivanov was actively involved in the global discussion on Iraq and repeatedly demanded that the issue be returned to the UN and solved through political means. The Russian establishment did not express any serious opposition to this view, and it took on an increasingly official form, especially given the continued silence from the Kremlin itself.

Public opinion on the matter was rather apathetic. An increasing number of people took the position that "Russia should stay out of it"—40 percent of respondents held such a view, according to a VTsIOM poll three months before the start of the war. Fourteen percent believed that Russia should approve the American military strike, and 21 percent believed that Russia should protect Iraq diplomatically. Only 3 percent thought that Russia should protect Iraq using military means. Only recently the world had witnessed a completely different reaction by the Russian public, after the Kosovo bombing. In any case, the majority of people believed that Russia should remain America's ally in the war against international terrorism. In response to the question, "Why do you think America wants a war with Iraq?" 43 percent said "to show its global dominance," while 34 percent attributed the desire to taking control over the Iraqi oil deposits.

Public opinion was influenced by several other important factors: first, by groups that had economic and political ties with the Saddam region, a sort of Russian pro-Iraq lobby, whose strength should not be underestimated; second, by the country's military elite, who stated that Russia's security would suffer an irreversible setback if a large contingent of American troops was placed in the Persian Gulf region; and third, by the anti-American and nationalistic mass media. But the long and hopeless war in Chechnya facilitated the consolidation of distrust and hostility toward the Muslim world

among the Russian public, and it was in that world where the majority saw its next potential enemy.

Politically strengthening the UN remained an important policy priority. At the end of February 2003, Germany, Russia, and France prepared a special memorandum that assumed a continuation of inspections and offered it to the Security Council members as an alternative to the second British-American resolution, which could have served as a pretense for a military strike against Iraq. The Russian position was finding increasing support among the Arab world as well as in Europe. At the same time, the Kremlin was attempting to gain some concessions from Washington in return for potential support of a military strike on Iraq, concessions that included agreements on some provisions important for Russia—debt guarantees and validation of oil deals that had already been signed, respect toward Russia’s political and economic interests from any regime that would replace Saddam’s, and the legitimacy of a war approved by the UN. Russia was unable to reach an agreement over any of these conditions.

The war began on 19 March. President Putin made a statement saying that Russia found the military action to be illegal and unjustified, taken against world public opinion, and launched without a UN mandate. Brute force had come to replace international law, stated Putin. His main argument was that it had not been shown that Iraq possesses weapons of mass destruction or that it posed an immediate threat to anyone and also that Saddam had been allowing the inspectors to fulfill their duties. “The military action against Iraq,” Putin said in his statement, “is a huge political mistake.”⁷ Moscow demanded that the issue be returned to the Security Council in order to respect Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The political struggle within the Russian leadership during the war is itself a topic for research. In my view, the leadership turned out to be unprepared for such a turn of events. The analysis upon which the Kremlin’s officials developed their tactics turned out to be incorrect in many aspects. The Russian mass media unleashed a furious anti-American campaign, not without the support of the government, but the government itself took a frank wait-and-see stance. The Kremlin had invested so much in the pro-American,

7. President Putin, address on Iraq, *Izvestia*, 22 March 2003.

pro-Western position, that to lose this investment over Iraq would have been unwise. Moscow saw that Washington had expressed a strong political will, and it was unclear what dividends Russia's opposition might yield. According to Russia's Fund for Public Opinion, a polling firm, after the outbreak of war 71 percent of Russians declared that the United States was playing a negative role in global affairs, while in September 2001 this number was 48 percent. The number of people who thought Russian-American relations would worsen as a result of Iraq grew from 10 percent in February 2002 to 41 percent in March 2003. The number of people who considered the United States to be an enemy state reached 59 percent.⁸ Anti-American sentiment began to threaten Putin's foreign policy foundations.

The Kremlin needed over two weeks to formulate its position in this new environment. On 3 April 2003, Putin declared that "because of political and economic considerations, Russia is not interested in a defeat of the United States. We are interested in having the resolution of this problem be transferred under the aegis of the UN."⁹ Under all its external pragmatism, the formulation was extremely unclear. Putin said nothing about the Russian interest in a U.S. victory, about Saddam's regime, or his view on what was happening in Iraq. The declaration about transferring the issue to the UN could be viewed as a naive attempt to display the expediency of Moscow's position, which turned out to be a case of choosing the lesser of two evils. But Putin's statement signaled the beginning of a new stage in Moscow's policy toward Iraq. This stage had been forced upon Moscow by external forces and circumstances.

Russian Alternatives after the War in Iraq

The Kremlin is now faced with several alternatives for its foreign policy in Iraq. First, it still has an opportunity to align itself with the occupying coalition and begin playing a more active role in the normalization of Iraq. This is precisely what France and Germany seem to be attempting. But in Russia, the political base for such a policy diminished significantly after the Duma

8. *Dominants Weekly*, 27 March 2003, and 10 April 2003, available at <http://bd.english.fom.ru/map/projects/dominant/dominant2003>.

9. Vladimir Putin, interview in *Izvestia*, 3 April 2003.

elections of December 2003. A second option would be to maintain the stance that the war was a political mistake while admitting that its aftermath demands a solution and attempt to once again bring the issue into the framework of international law under the Security Council. Yet Moscow would then face the task of convincing the UN to take on this responsibility without the support of Britain and the United States, which is unlikely.

A third option would be to take a wait-and-see position and watch how the situation develops, expecting that the difficulties facing the coalition will force Washington to change its strategy and call on the war's erstwhile opponents for help. But even in that case, Moscow would not be the first place the Americans would turn, since it has already declared that unlike the Europeans, it does not want to take on any financial obligations for Iraq's reconstruction or write off its debts.¹⁰

A fourth option would be to continue the active critique and rejection of the British-American actions and simultaneously try to create an alternate power center in alliance with France, Germany, China, and/or a number of Middle Eastern and Arab countries and suggest an alternate strategy of combating international terrorism. But it's doubtful that anyone would choose to participate in such an alliance with Russia. Even the Russian foreign ministry's recent idea to hold an international summit on Iraq in order to develop "a plan created not by one or two countries, but by the international community" did not find any support.¹¹ Fifth, it could take an exceptionally pragmatic position and focus on protecting its interests in Iraq and the Persian Gulf region, that is, to look at the issue tactically, as a process of solving specific tasks.

Each of these alternatives has its own pluses and minuses for Russia, which has found itself in a unique situation. On one hand, the Iraqi regime to which it was a benefactor for several decades no longer exists, and Moscow will find it difficult to establish normal relations with the new regime. On the other hand, Moscow has found itself in the unusual position of an insider in the Western world, a member of the Group of Eight, at the precise

10. "Rossiya ne namerena brat na sebya finansovye obyazatelstva po vosstavleniyu Iraka," *RIA-Novosti*, 22 October 2003, available at www.globalaffairs.ru/live/news.asp?id=4443&rubric.

11. "Rossiya predlagayet provesti mezhdunarodnuyu konferentsiyu po Iraka," *RIA-Novosti*, 11 November 2003, available at www.globalaffairs.ru/live/news.asp?id=4606&reubic.

moment when that world is undergoing a schism unprecedented in its history. In that schism, Moscow took the side of France and Germany, and until recently it was able to maintain good relations with the White House, relations that took a noticeable downturn at the end of 2003 as a result of the Khodorkovsky arrest and the results of the Duma elections.

Moscow is hoping to minimize the potential damage to its economic interests in Iraq by softening its critical stance. But regardless of what concessions the Kremlin makes, Russian participation in the restoration of Iraq will be at best marginal, secondary, and subordinate to the strategy developed by the occupying nations. Russia faces difficulties in maintaining its presence in the Iraqi market in competition with Western companies, particularly U.S. and British ones.

At the same time, the wait-and-see policy can lead not only to a complete loss of a future presence in Iraq but also to a new surge of instability around the region, which cannot help but affect oil prices. Russia, as the world's second largest oil producer, is interested in preventing a sharp increase in America's influence on oil prices, which became a possibility after the Americans took control of the large oil deposits in the Persian Gulf.

According to the calculations of the former energy minister Yuri Shafra­nik, if oil prices remain in the range of twenty-one to twenty-five dollars per barrel, Russia has a good chance to modernize its energy sector and increase production to 450 million tons per year. If prices fall to eighteen-to-twenty dollars per barrel, Russia will barely be able to maintain the current level of production. At prices below that level, oil production will decrease, and many manufacturing and social programs will be suspended, which would have a dire negative effect on the country's domestic situation.¹²

Objectively, Russia still has a chance to become one of the key countries having a stabilizing effect on oil and gas prices, and thus on the political atmosphere as a whole. Moscow is assuming that the West is interested in this energy market stabilization, but it's difficult to fathom when Russia might be ready to play such a role. The Russian elites are afraid that once the country undertakes the massive task of modernizing its economy with an

12. Yuri Shafra­nik and Alexei Mastepanov, "Relevant Issues in Russian Oil Policy," *International Energy Policy*, no. 3 (2003).

emphasis on the energy sector, spending billions of dollars and causing a number of difficult social reforms, the need for energy stabilization will disappear or will be met by other countries. Russia will find itself in an energy trap that will be more difficult to leave once it has been entered. Moreover, the more Russia enters into the energy market, the more it will have to compete with a number of oil-producing countries in the Arab world, where Russia has historically had strong political positions. Will the benefits of the potential oil profits outweigh the drawbacks of worsened relations with these countries and a loss of influence in the gulf region? Or will an energy partnership with the United States overshadow those risks? Such a partnership, at any rate, is impossible without close political cooperation, whose chances have been damaged by the disagreement over Iraq.

Moscow is attempting to hammer out with the United States the rules of the game in the global energy market and will offer itself to Washington not only as a source of diversification for U.S. oil exports but also as a non-Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries producer. According to expert opinion, Russia needs at least \$20 billion in annual investments in order to maintain oil production at the current level. In the past three years, the investments have averaged at \$8 billion, and increased investment from the West is needed to reach the desired amount. It's possible that Moscow will establish a dialogue with the Shiites in Iraq on energy cooperation. Moreover, it will try to take under control the oil-producing regions in the Caspian Sea, whose significance for Russia has increased sharply since the loss of the Iraq reserves. Moscow is trying to stay ahead of the Western companies by investing in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan in order to take control of up to 30 percent of the coal resources of those countries.

Russia is counting on the fact that part of Iraqi society will see Russia, together with France, as a counterbalance to the United States, since Iraq is unlikely to want to remain under the complete domination of the United States. Russia has traditionally been a reliable and tested economic partner, more aware of local intricacies than the United States, and it is in the middle stages of economic and technological development that is more appropriate for work in the Third World.

Russia's main foreign policy priorities remain the strengthening of its

national security and territorial integrity, as well as creating favorable international conditions for its economy. As President Putin once noted, each country has its own axis of evil. For Moscow, this axis includes Georgia, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, whose rockets can reach Russia, while Iraq did not present any significant threat.

The Russian army is unable to conduct a modern war, while a traditional war would not lead to stability in the dangerous regions. Russia is therefore vitally interested in preventing Iraq from turning into a nest of Islamic extremism and terrorism. This is an even higher priority for Moscow than getting a piece of the post-Saddam pie. With its own intractable problem in Chechnya, a large Muslim population, and a border with several Muslim countries, Russia is wary of a potential Islamization of Iraq and the dangerous fusion of anti-Americanism, nationalism, and Muslim extremism. A break-up of Iraq or the start of a full-scale civil war would have an extremely negative effect on Russia's national security and would weaken its domestic unity. Moscow will insist on a secular authority in Iraq, which is consistent with the interests of the Western world.

The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq showed that Russia is unable independently to safeguard its own security or maintain stability in the Eurasian region. It can achieve that only by becoming part of an international security structure, in which it would no longer play its traditional dominant role. Attempts to create structures with Russia at the helm are doomed to failure. Regardless of the sharpness of the disagreement over Iraq, Russia is fated to cooperate with NATO and the United States on questions of international security, nuclear nonproliferation, and the war on terrorism. Such global cooperation will allow it to focus more on domestic concerns. Trying to compensate for a loss in the quality of its influence, Russia will strive for quantity and express an interest in participating in various international structures and organizations that it previously ignored. But after the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam, Russia's withdrawal from the Balkans and the Middle East, the rise of China to first-arbiter status in the Korean conflict, and the equivalent rise of the European Union in solving problems in Iran and the Middle East, as well as a decrease in its participation in Afghanistan, Moscow's outlets for influence in non-UN structures have become insignificant.

That's why in the coming years Russia will pay less attention to the Persian Gulf and the Arab world, focusing more on countries of the former USSR. Losing a global agenda, Russia will try to maintain its last bastion of influence. It is there, and not in Iraq, Iran, or North Korea, where its vital interests are concentrated. A loss of these interests would mean a complete withdrawal to the periphery of the geopolitical landscape. In these regions loom not only the potential threats to its security but also the potential for conflict with its neighbors and the West. The way it manages relations with that part of the world will affect not only the future of Russian-European and Russian-American relations but the consolidation of Russia itself.