Stephen F. Szabo

Can Berlin and Washington Agree on Russia?

Both Russia and Germany are back on the U.S. agenda. Russia will be a key element of a wide array of policies to the Obama administration, including dealing with Iran and the construction of a broader nonproliferation regime, energy security, nuclear arms reductions, and Afghanistan. Russia policy will also be central to U.S. designs for NATO, including how to deal with Georgia and Ukraine, and the viability of a pan-European security structure.

Germany will be the key player in Europe on dealing with Russia. Given the lack of any consensus in Europe over Russia, Berlin plays a decisive role in shaping a coherent and successful Russia policy. Yet, while Germany is crucial to any Western policy consensus on Russia, there are real differences in interests, cultures, and approaches between Berlin and Washington, which could lead to dangerous divisions if not handled well. There is a real danger that without a common approach, Germany could increasingly play the role of a mediator between Russia and the United States.

Voices in the West are raising concerns about Germany's reliability as a partner in dealing with Russia. *The Weekly Standard* warns "Berlin has entered a new era of shared interests with Moscow and divergence from Washington. Incoming administration officials would be wise to recognize that on issues ranging from the gas dispute to Eastern Europe to Afghanistan and Iran, the Germany of today is not the partner the United States once had."[1] Zbigniew Brzezinski believes, "If the romance between Russia and Germany goes too far, it could strike a blow against European integration,"[2] and Edward Lucas, the author of a recent book on Russia titled *The New Cold War*, argues that the

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The Washington Quarterly • 32:4 pp. 23–41
DOI: 10.1080/01636600903224746

Real differences in interests, cultures, and approaches exist between Berlin and Washington.

German-Russian relationship is "the most puzzling and troubling feature of modern European politics."[3]

There has long been an undercurrent of worry about Germany's reliability as a partner, dating back to the Rapallo complex of the 1920s, when Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics engaged in a policy of accommodation that raised concerns in Western Europe about a potential anti-West alliance, and more recently, references to a new Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, in which Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin agreed to carve up Poland in 1939, an action that opened the door for Hitler to begin World War II. The future of the U.S.–German relationship, and with it the direction of the transatlantic relationship, will hinge on how Germany and the United States manage their approach toward Russia. What, therefore, are the sources of both divergence and convergence of interests between Berlin and Washington, and how can the two develop a common strategy?

Who, or What, Won the Cold War?

Part of the root causes of the U.S.–German divergence on Russia lies in the lessons learned from the end of the Cold War. Germans tend to believe the Cold War ended peacefully and Germany was reunified because of détente and engagement with the other side. This is part of the legacy of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*, which opened a phase of West German diplomatic approaches to East Europe and lowered tensions with Poland and the Soviet Union. The German public has consistently credited Mikhail Gorbachev and former Foreign Minister Hans Dietrich Genscher, one of the key West German architects of détente policy, for the peaceful ending of East–West hostilities. The lesson drawn for future policy was that dialogue, diplomacy, mutual trust, and multilateralism were the best approaches for dealing with seemingly intractable opponents. When Helmut Kohl, a German conservative politician, decided to support the enlargement of NATO in the 1990s, he did so with the precondition that Russia would be included via the NATO-Russia Council. When former Chancellor of Germany Gerhard Schröder stressed diplomacy and multilateralism in contrast to the Bush administration's unilateral approach to Iraq, Berlin consequently formed a coalition with Moscow and Paris against the U.S. policies. Along the same lines, current Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel favors active engagement with Iran rather than sanctions, which the United States has generally favored.

The German strategic culture is part of what Robert Cooper, director-general for external and politico-military affairs at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, has labeled a postmodern state, or what Professor Hanns W. Maull of University of Trier has labeled a civilian power.[4] Under this approach, Germany maximizes both its influence and security through interdependence, the use of soft over hard power, and the priority of multilateral institutions over national or bilateral approaches. This approach preceded the end of the Cold War when Germany, as a defeated and semisovereign nation, used a post-national, multilateral approach to regain both its sovereignty and its standing in Europe.[5] Its policy of "Change Through Rapprochement" allowed it to gain the confidence of the Soviet leadership to the point that Gorbachev could accept the unification of Germany in 1990 without fear of German revaunchism. This approach is not only compatible with the political culture of democratic Germany, but also with the imperatives of a global Europe. In short, soft power and a multilateral approach enhanced German influence, prestige, and room for maneuver.

The U.S. strategic culture is, in Cooper's terminology, a modern one. It remains national rather than post-national and views the world in balance of power terms, although it has a stronger ideological component than a traditional realist state. It gives force and the threat of the use of force a higher priority than do most European countries, especially Germany, with a stronger belief in the concept of just war. Its unparalleled military capabilities are not only a product of this culture but reinforce it. Consequently, the United States has tended to view the end of the Cold War as a vindication of the more aggressive policies of former president Ronald Reagan, such as the military build up, the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), "the evil empire" and "tear down this wall Mr. Gorbachev," rather than the Reagan of Reykjavik and arms control agreements. This conservative Republican view of the world, emphasizing the role of resolution and military strength in defeating the Soviet Union while disparaging negotiations as appeasement, remains an important, if not dominant, strand in U.S. thinking about the world in general and Russia in particular.

In addition, the argument between realists and neoconservatives within the Republican Party, and realists and liberal interventionists among Democrats, is also one about the relevance—or lack thereof—of domestic political systems to foreign policy. Realists tend to look primarily at external behavior of states and the implications of state behavior for the international political system, while both neoconservatives and many idealist and interventionist Democrats stress the importance of democracy and the respect for human rights at home as a necessary characteristic in order to serve as an example to the international community.[6] Realists view the struggle with Russia as simply a continuation of a power struggle built into a state system based on competition for relative power and security. Their approach toward Russia is one, however, which would recognize Russian interests,

Part of the divergence lies in the lessons learned from the end of the Cold War.

especially in its region, and the limits of U.S. power in a region close to Russia, where U.S. influence is less important than the dangers of overextension and vulnerability. Realists also emphasize the U.S. stake in a good working relationship with a power that has a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and a nuclear arsenal that can still destroy the U.S. homeland.

Thus, the legacy of over 60 years of diplomatic experience has led policymakers in Washington and Berlin toward diverging strategic cultures—a divergence reinforced by growing U.S. military capabilities and Germany's shrinking ones, driven by a desire to not use military force as an instrument of statecraft. This difference crosses party lines in both countries so that even a Democratic U.S. president is more likely to see the need for a hard power component of a smart power approach to the world than a Christian Democratic German chancellor would. The fact that this legacy is still very much alive and well was evident during Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier's first visit with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in February 2009. Even so, the correspondent from the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* contrasted the somewhat cordial meetings between Steinmeier and Clinton, with an earlier meeting with Condoleezza Rice, in which they disagreed strongly over the causes of the fall of the Soviet Union, with Steinmeier declaring it the result of détente policies and Rice crediting it as the fruit of Western strength.[7]

Public Opinions and Russia

The views of Russia today among the German and American publics do not differ as much as the policymakers' views. When Germans look at Russia today, they are forced to reconcile two dimensions of their strategic culture, that of a trading state and that of a country which emphasizes human rights, democracy, and global norms. Germany is an export-driven economic power and the world's second largest exporter as well as its fourth largest economy. The dark side of trading states is that they have a tendency to downgrade human rights, democracy, and other domestic factors in their relations with trading partners. When the guiding principle is economics and trade *über alles*, then reliability of trade routes, assured access to raw materials, and predictability and stability in the political systems of key partner states is paramount. This was made clear in the German case when Merkel met with the Dalai Lama to the consternation of

the German private sector and her own foreign minister, who worried about the impact on German exports to and investment in China.

On the other hand, civilian postmodern states place a great deal of emphasis on human rights, international law, multilateralism, and democratic practices. When the United States violated these norms in Iraq, the German public and leaders were openly and unreservedly critical. Now, Germans face similar dilemmas with Russia. For example, the 2008 *Transatlantic Trends* survey found that Germans were the most concerned of all European publics about the weakening of democracy in Russia.[8] In addition, Germans feel less warmly toward Russia than do other Europeans or Americans.[9] A 2009 Pew Research Center survey mirrored these results, finding that 51 percent of Germans had an unfavorable view of Russia, which is a level higher than those in Spain and the United Kingdom, comparable to those in France and Poland.[10] The Allensbach Institute found that in 2008 only 25 percent of Germans liked the Russians, 35 percent did not, while 40 percent were undecided. This decline in the Russian image in Germany is due to the decline of democracy in Vladimir Putin's Russia as well as Russia's increasingly nationalist foreign policy. Allensbach polling also revealed that while Germans thought of Russia in terms of its great geographic size, its role in world politics, and its cultural tradition, only 2 percent saw it as a firm democracy, 11 percent as a dependable partner, and 21 percent as a favorable place to invest.[11]

The *Transatlantic Trends* survey found that Germans were worried about Russian behavior toward its neighbors, its role in providing weapons to the Middle East, and its role in the Balkans, with a majority supporting security assistance to Georgia and Ukraine (prior to Russian actions in August 2008). Germans are also concerned about Russia's role as an energy provider (78 percent are very or somewhat concerned while the average is only 64 and 61 percent in the EU-12 and the United States, respectively). These concerns were great even before the Russian–Ukrainian energy dispute in the winter of 2008. Similarly, the Pew Research survey found that concerns about dependence on Russian energy had increased in Germany from 58 percent in 2007 to 62 percent in 2008, which was similar to the Czech Republic and Ukraine, and higher than France and Spain.[12]

The Allensbach survey also revealed that Germans view Russia as a great power—62 percent regarded Russia as a world power, up from only 38 percent in 2004. In addition, 45 percent believed Germany should work closely with Russia, though 56 percent believed that Germany should work more closely with the United States instead. The *Transatlantic Trends* survey found that only 30 percent would approve restricting cooperation with Russia in international organizations, which is lower than the EU-12's 38 percent and the United States' 47 percent.[13]

On energy dependence, the Allensbach Survey found that 67 percent of Germans feared that Russia would use its energy resources to push through its goals with Germany. Meanwhile in the *Transatlantic Trends* survey, a robust 38 percent approve of the notion of increasing cooperation with energy producers even if they are undemocratic, with 35 percent looking to reduce energy dependence and 22 percent in favor of increasing diplomatic pressure. While 35 percent of Europeans in the survey would agree to continue dependence, only 23 percent of Americans would, although U.S. policy hardly reflects any action in this direction to date.[14] This reflects the realist or trading state side of the German strategic culture and provides a check on the democratic and human rights emphasis.

Americans, surprisingly, have a less negative image of Russia than do Germans. A series of Pew Research surveys have found that in July 2009, 39 percent of Americans had an unfavorable view of Russia compared to 51 percent of Germans.[15] A Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey in 2008 found that Americans, similar to Germans, support talking with leaders of countries of hostile or unfriendly nations, with up to two-thirds of those surveyed supporting talks with Cuba, Iran, and North Korea.[16] Even prior to the election of Barack Obama as president, polls were showing a growing American public fatigue and disenchantment with the Bush administration's approach and legacy in foreign policy, including skepticism about the ability of the United States to export democracy.[17] Though there is a policy gap between the German and American publics, it is much wider at the political elite level.

Asymmetrical Economic Stakes

While the publics are not as far apart as conventional wisdom posits, there is a clear divide between Germany and the United States when it comes to the economic stakes involved. German business has been the "anchor" of the German-Russian relationship for centuries.[18] The leading German expert on Russia, Alexander Rahr, predicts the construction of a German–Russian strategic partnership in which energy and Russian natural resources will be welded with German technology and know-how in a common EU-Russia economic and free trade zone.[19] Trade between the two countries grew close to $50 billion in the first half of 2008 with German exports to Russia totaling $36 billion. Over 4600 German companies are currently investing $13.2 billion in the Russian economy.[20] As a result, Germany is by far the largest exporter to Russia.

Energy remains central to this burgeoning economic relationship. Schröder saw an energy alliance with Russia as the cornerstone of the new EU–Russia economic zone, and his subsequent role on the board of Gazprom has only emphasized this commitment. As president, Putin underlined his interest in this

strategic energy alliance in a speech to the Bundestag in 2001.[21] Germany gets about 37 percent of its gas supplies and 32 percent of its oil from Russia. Its dependence on Russian energy is likely to grow over the coming decades, especially if Berlin stays with its plan to phase out nuclear energy. When completed, the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline from Russia directly to Germany under the Baltic Sea will make Germany the chief distributor of Russian gas in Europe.[22] Currently Germany receives its gas via three pipelines: the Ukraine pipeline, which exports approximately 80 percent of Russian gas to Europe; the Yamal pipeline via Belarus; and the Blue Stream pipeline via the Black Sea and Turkey.[23] It receives about 26 percent from Norway, 18 percent from the Netherlands, 15 percent from its domestic sources, and 4 percent from Denmark, the United Kingdom, and other sources. Dependence on Russia, however, is likely to grow as these other sources of natural gas diminish over the coming decades. It is the Nord Stream pipeline that has raised concerns in Poland, which sees it as further evidence of a bilateral Russian-German relationship at Poland's expense. In the United States, those with similar concerns would like to see German support for the Nabucco pipeline from the Caspian through Turkey to Eastern Europe to ease German dependence on Russian gas.

Views of Russia among German and U.S. policymakers differ more than their publics.

The EU–Russia energy relationship, however, is an interdependent one, based on over thirty years of experience with Russia as a reliable energy supplier, with 90 percent of Russian oil exports and 70 percent of its gas exports going to the EU market. Russia is heavily dependent on European, especially German, investment and imports. As a result, German political and business leaders stress this as an interdependent rather than a dependent relationship, although Germany has no realistic alternative to energy dependence on Russia for at least the next half century. The coordinator for German-American Relations in the German Foreign Office, Karsten Voigt, explained in an informal conversation in Washington earlier this year that many Germans thought that the Iraq war was all about oil, while many Americans think that Germany's relationship with Russia is all about energy. Neither is the case, but both capture important elements of policy interests.

In the German case, geostrategy is heavily economic, and thus the German economic stake is paramount in its relationship with Russia. The unification of Germany shifted German strategic interests in a number of ways. First, it greatly reduced the security threat posed by the former Soviet Union, as Soviet troops were removed from the heart of central Europe to a distance of over 1000 kilometers from German territory. Second, the current state of the

Russian military is weak compared to its former Soviet self, due to massive reductions in defense spending and demoralization from wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. Furthermore, Russia remains a nuclear power, but is not seen as a serious military threat beyond its immediate borders. The Georgian incursion in the summer of 2008 did not fundamentally change this assessment in Germany.[24] Finally, German elites tend to regard modern national states such as Russia as retrograde and out of place in twenty-first century Europe. They dismiss spheres of influence as well as balance of power thinking, and have a hard time taking it seriously in contemporary Europe.[25] They do, however, take Russian perceptions of encirclement and humiliation seriously and understand that perceptions are often reality in international politics.

The U.S. economic stake in Russia is far smaller. Total trade between the two countries was approximately $36 billion in 2008, with U.S. exports totaling only $9.3 billion. This is still an increase from the late Boris Yelstin years when trade was around only $10 billion.[26] The United States exports automobiles, machines and tools including tractors as well as agricultural goods, and imports raw materials, such as petroleum products and minerals.[27] Investment also remains low and has diminished significantly with the financial crisis. There is no energy relationship to speak of, and the Russia lobby in the United States is confined to groups such as the Coalition for U.S–Russia Trade and the U.S.–Russia Business Council. In contrast to German interests, U.S. interests in Russia are almost entirely strategic, starting with nuclear weapons and Russia's role in areas of key importance to the United States, especially Central Asia and the Caucasus. The democracy agenda is also far more important in the formulation of U.S. policy than it is in Germany.[28] In short, German stakeholders in the relationship with Russia are in the economic community, while U.S. stakeholders are in the strategic community.

While there are substantial geopolitical, cultural, and economic differences between German and U.S. views, interests, and policies toward Russia, the need for a common approach remains crucial to both countries. A major split over Russia policy could have important spillover effects on the broader U.S.–German relationship. Therefore, it is important to open a broad strategic discussion as soon as possible.

The U.S.–German Strategic Debate

The debate on how to deal with Russia will hang on assumptions about what motivates Russian foreign policy and the linkage between domestic politics and external behavior. As described by *New York Times* reporter Ellen Barry, there

are two broad scenarios concerning where Russia is headed: interdependence and cooperation, or retrenchment and nationalism.[29]

Under the first scenario, the financial pressures working on Russia will force it to pull back on its foreign ambitions and cooperate with the West. The second scenario takes the opposite conclusion, namely that tight economic times will foster nationalist behavior and policies. Russian leaders will try to turn internal dissent against an external enemy as Putin did in his scathing attack on the United States at the January 2009 Davos World Economic Forum, as Barry explained: "To a Russia intent on reclaiming great power status, there may be something elemental about resisting America."[30] The economic crisis has only accentuated the debate within Russia itself on the lessons it needs to draw from the collapse of global energy prices and the severe financial crisis within Russia. One commentator asked, "Will they conclude that the West has 'infected' Russia and retreat into isolationism? Or will they realize that Russia's fate is inextricably tied to the world economy and engage more fully?"[31]

The assumptions about the direction and sources of Russian policy lead to different strategic conclusions. Those leaning toward what German analyst Peter Rudolf calls an "essentialist" view of Russian foreign policy—neocontainment advocates—see it as "a prism through which the authoritarian turn in the Russian polity and a strong-handed assertiveness in Russian foreign policy are two sides of the same coin." The West, under this approach, should "respond with a policy that in substance if not in name amounts to military containment, reassuring NATO members in the East through credible defense commitments and speeding up enlargement of NATO."[32] Advocates of this policy, therefore, have given up on the idea that Russia will be a partner and believe that the Russian leadership will want to use Russian alienation from the West to solidify the authoritarian system and defend it against domestic opposition. Engagement under this interpretation, therefore, will be futile.

German geostrategy is heavily economic.

Another approach, which Rudolf labels "hedged cooperation and integration,"[33] is agnostic about the long-term intentions of Russia. It is based on a view of Russian foreign policy that believes that Russia will be open to interaction with the West and that accepts Russia as a great power with legitimate security interests whose cooperation is needed to manage key security and global issues. This approach advocates an interest-based, realist approach that sets priorities and avoids NATO enlargement. It also holds out the hope that engagement and hedged cooperation will ensnare Russia in a web of interdependency, giving it a large stake in cooperation over confrontation. In

the U.S. debate, both Henry Kissinger and George Shultz are clearly in this school.[34]

The German Debate

While there is a broad consensus in Germany that Russia must be engaged rather than merely contained, there are differences between the two main German political parties, reflected in differences between the foreign office and the chancellor's office. The Social Democratic Party (SPD), both its leadership and base, is more likely to lean closer to Russia than is the Christian Democratic Union (CDU). This is due not only to the legacy of Schröder and his appointed successor, Foreign Minister Steinmeier, but also to a cultural and political affinity to Russia, and distancing from the United States, which can be traced back as far as the first postwar SPD leader, Kurt Schumacher, who preferred a neutral and unified Germany to an Atlanticist and divided one. The Schröder legacy is just an extension of the longer one of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the deep détente culture of the party.

In the 1980s, the SPD had an intensive dialogue on values with the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the communist party of East Germany, and attributed the end of the German division largely to Gorbachev and Soviet policy. During the George W. Bush–Schröder years, the SPD accelerated a shift toward Moscow and away from Washington, a shift accentuated by the rise of Die Linke, a political party committed to a left version of socialism, and the pressure it put on the SPD from the left. Even former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a social democratic politician, was quoted in 2003 as saying: "Russia poses far less of a threat to world peace today than, for example, the United States" and went on to describe Putin as "an enlightened potentate."[35] There is also a realist tendency in Germany that regards Russia as the Big Neighbor, one which must be accommodated. Now, whether the clear affinity for Obama within the party will redress this shift remains to be seen.

Within the CDU, the split on Russia tends to be based on economic interests, with the business wing of the party pushing for a bigger share of the Russian market and leaning against the party's other instincts. The party of the first postwar German Chancelor, Konrad Adenauer, was the Christian Democrats, who have always been both more Atlanticist and pro-EU than the SPD. They were opponents of the *Ostpolitik* and are generally more skeptical about Russia. Eckhard von Klaeden, a leading Russia critic, leads a faction in the party which is wary of overdependence on Russian energy and believes that Russia's deficiencies in democracy and human rights must be more openly criticized. This faction, however, remains in the minority within the party. Merkel is a realist and, despite her concerns about Russia's record on human rights and

the state of democracy there, sees the need for a stable and constructive relationship.

The democracy and human rights critique of Russia is stronger in the CDU and Die Grünen (center-left political party) than it is in the SPD. Within the Free Democratic Party (FDP), a liberal political party, Chief Foreign Policy Spokesman Werner Hoyer has been critical of what he sees as the SPD's too conciliatory approach to Russia, and argues for increasing nuclear power as a way of easing German energy dependence on Russia.[36] The legacy of long-time leader and former Foreign Minister Genscher, however, remains with the party. It is a legacy that would engage Russia and seek to ensnare it in a web of dependency. The pro-business FDP is also unlikely to give up on the growing German-Russian economic relationship.

Russia policy is not likely to play a role in the September 2009 Bundestag elections because of the overall consensus between the coalition parties on Russia policy. Despite the critique of von Klaeden and others in the CDU, there remains a broad German consensus on a hedged cooperation and integration approach, an approach reinforced by the financial crisis and the need to find new markets for German goods.[37] This was reiterated by Merkel at the Munich Security Conference in February 2009, during which she referred to "the extraordinary importance of Russia for the EU and NATO," and called for immediate intensification of the NATO–Russia Council: "It is in our interest to incorporate Russia in this new security architecture."[38] At the July 2009 meeting of the Petersburg Dialogue, she agreed to deeper German-Russian economic cooperation, including a $700 million in German government guarantees for German exports to Russia. She also supports a Russian-backed company acquiring the troubled German carmaker Opel from General Motors. Medvedev and Merkel also expressed their mutual concern over the murder of the Russian human rights activist, Natalya Estemirova. As Merkel is likely to emerge from the fall 2009 German election as chancellor, little change in Germany's Russia policy is to be expected.

> The U.S. can center its Russia strategy around bilateral, EU-centered, or German approaches.

The U.S. Debate

Obama has very limited foreign policy experience with his formative view of Russia shaped by his work with Senator Richard G. Lugar (R-IN) on securing Russian nuclear assets. He is focused, therefore, on arms control and nonproliferation policy. A self-described pragmatist, the president sees Russia

through the prism of U.S. global interests, and both he and Clinton have made it clear that they favor a new, more cooperative approach toward Russia. They see Russian cooperation as important to their top priority of stabilizing Afghanistan and of containing nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea. They will also want to move toward a new Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) agreement and reductions in nuclear arsenals. They are in no hurry to deploy antimissile systems in Europe, and will be open to cancelling or severely modifying them if there is progress made on the Iranian nuclear issue or if the missiles prove too costly or are technically not shown to be operationally effective. During the Obama-Medvedev Moscow summit meeting in July 2009, the president left this issue unclear, postponing any further consideration until after an internal U.S. government review is completed late in the summer. The new administration is also likely to go slow on NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, and to look to the EU for ways of bringing these two contentious states closer to the West.

Many of the themes in the emerging Russia policy were laid out in Vice President Joseph R. Biden's speech to the Munich Security Conference, where he spoke of pushing the reset button on relations with Russia. His message was reinforced by Obama's meeting with Medvedev in April 2009.[39] While Biden's message in July 2009 regarding Georgia and Ukraine had been more mixed, his intemperate critique of Russia which followed made it clear that the administration will not be pushing for new military commitments in this sensitive region. Obama's realism is reinforced by the severe economic crisis the United States is undergoing. The administration is unlikely to want to overextend its power and commitments with a new Cold War approach at a time of major domestic challenges. A confrontational approach would also fail to gain German support, only splitting Washington and Berlin and shattering Obama's hopes of reconstituting the transatlantic relationship.

As the Obama administration approaches Russia, it will have to consider a number of possible avenues. They can choose a bilateral approach, an EU-centered one, or one focused around Germany. The EU brokered the Georgian conflict as well as the Russia-Ukraine dispute and should play a larger role. This, however, will require cohesion on developing a European-wide Russia strategy, which is a major task. There is no European consensus on Russia and there is no uniform Russia policy. Furthermore, the split is not simply an old vs. new Europe split, as many East European states are divided as well. Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Hungary, and Italy are willing to cooperate with the Russians on energy, and have allowed for an increasing Russian role in their energy sectors, while the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom are deeply skeptical about Russian energy muscle. France would

cooperate on an EU strategy if it had to, but the convenience of nuclear power allows it to remain independent on this issue. As a result, Germany is the strongest economy and most outspoken Russian energy ally, but is by no means an exception in Europe. Despite Russia's conflict with Georgia, and its occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was severely criticized by the EU, the lack of consensus on Russia is likely to continue within the EU.

> There is no European consensus on Russia and there is no uniform Russia policy.

If the EU fails to play a collective, coherent, and constructive role vis-à-vis Russia, then the Obama administration will have to look to Berlin to develop a Russia policy in the EU and NATO. France could be a partner as well, but has no real and consistent policy interest toward either Russia or East Europe. An element of economic competition remains between Germany and France vis-à-vis Russia, but the French economic stake with Russia remains marginal. France remains focused on the Mediterranean. The United Kingdom is not a serious partner here either. Its relationship with Russia is the worst of any of the major European powers, and it remains marginal to any European discussion. While this would put Germany in an awkward position regarding its smaller neighbors to the east, if the United States made clear that Germany was acting as its partner in this area, it would limit the opposition of smaller states to a leading role for Germany. Given this vulnerability, a Russia Contact Group made up of France, Germany, Poland, and the United States would be the best way to go, with the U.S.–German duo at the center.

Toward a Common Strategic Approach

As Germany and the United States work to develop a core strategic approach for dealing with Russia, the following seven elements will be important. First, while Germany and the United States are close allies—and their relationship will be central in this policy area—important differences in interests and political cultures will arise. As a result, both countries must be prepared for differences and friction, and should avoid demonizing the other. As a recent study by the Bertelsmann Foundation noted, "A unified Western policy on Russia has long ceased to exist and trans-Atlantic partners have come to agree to disagree in their approaches . . . If the U.S. can acknowledge that Europe's perspectives on Russia start from a fundamentally different point of view, and can move on from there, they may find great utility in an open and candid trans-Atlantic exchange about what to do next with Russia."[40]

Second, Germans are hoping the United States will reach out to Russia early and move to those areas where common interests will lead to progress. These include arms control and nonproliferation policy, along with cooperation in Afghanistan and the Middle East. It is important, therefore, to move toward positive rhetoric about Russia. Statements that accuse Russia of "clinging to something in the past" made by Biden, and those that highlight Russia's weaknesses may be factually correct, but hardly set the tone needed for a rapprochement.[41]

Third, the Obama administration should aim to improve the atmosphere for further progress by reviving the NATO–Russia Council and opening discussions on a pan-European security proposal as well. This requires taking a more balanced view of Russia. Compromise is not appeasement. Russia is not the Third Reich. Even critics who see a new Cold War with Russia, such as *Economist* correspondent Edward Lucas, note that "never in Russian history have so many Russians lived so well and so freely."[42] Russia's demographic, economic, political, and military weaknesses are far more important than its strengths. In other words, it is more similar to the early twentieth-century Ottoman Empire than Adolf Hitler's Germany. Russian intentions may not be benign but its capabilities, both in soft and hard power, are meager. As Quentin Peel, the international affairs editor of the *Financial Times*, put it in his assessment of the Group of 20 London Summit, "...Russia's weakness is more fundamental. The oil price may rise and fall but the crisis has exposed its failure to diversify beyond the energy sector. Its financial institutions are inefficient, its judicial system corrupt. In the longer term, it faces a chronic demographic crisis likely to result in severe labour shortages in the next two decades."[43]

> The road to Moscow will go through Berlin.

Fourth, the United States must stop courting small countries. Small countries are not noble just because they are small, and their leaders are not democrats just because they are anti-Russian. U.S. policy should be clearly based on what it considers its national interests, and should avoid being pulled into unnecessary confrontations by small client states which want to leverage their ties with the United States in pursuit of their own agendas.[44]

Fifth, the United States must avoid personalizing international relationships. This was one of the cardinal failings of the Bush administration. As Lord Palmerston reminds us, states have interests, not friends, and statesman should never confuse the interests of states with personal relationships with other leaders. Presidents Bill Clinton and Bush placed far too much emphasis upon the relationship with the Russian leader of the moment, and Kohl and Schröder were no different. One of Obama's great strengths is his ability to separate

interests from personal relationships, and he has proved admirably ruthless in cutting loose former supporters when they were no longer serving his interests.

Sixth, the United States must focus on demilitarizing Russia policy. NATO membership toward Georgia and Ukraine must only go forward if both countries meet the membership requirements fully and only if the United States is really prepared to offer serious security guarantees to those countries. The United States should also be willing to offer the missile defense program as part of a larger package deal with Russia, and put a halt to any further development plans at least until the systems are operational and talks with Iran have clearly failed. It is imperative to make the link to Iran clear and avoid such contradictory steps as providing Patriot systems to Poland, which are clearly aimed toward Russia. The latter systems were part of the overall missile defense package, but are not related to defense against Iranian missiles.

Seventh, realism should be the touchstone of policy. Russia is not a military threat to the West. It is, at best, a declining power that feels its decline, and wants to at least remain a regional power with quiescent neighbors. The U.S. position is also weaker than at any time since the great triumphs of 1989. Its economy is under severe strain, its military overstretched, its international legitimacy and soft power at a nadir. The United States needs the Russians for help on some key issues and this interest overrides the benefits of confrontation or containment. As Fareed Zakaria rightly points out:

> The problem with American foreign policy goes beyond George Bush. It includes a Washington establishment that has gotten comfortable with the exercise of American hegemony and treats compromise as treason and negotiations as appeasement. Other countries can have no legitimate interests of their own. The only way to deal with them is by issuing a series of maximalist demands. This is not foreign policy; it's imperial policy. And it isn't likely to work in today's world.[45]

Russia: The Challenger to U.S.–German Relations

Russia will be the great challenge for the U.S.–German relationship for at least the first Obama term. It will take great statesmanship in both Washington and Berlin to contain the built-in differences over Russia and to shape a common strategy. The new U.S. administration is off to a promising start, but a time of testing could come if a confrontational Russia rejects the new relationship being offered by Washington. The United States has seized the high ground with the accession of Obama to the presidency and has put Russia on the defensive. If it continues to pursue a path of foreign policy restraint and realistic balance, it stands a good chance of shaping a healthy new relationship with both Moscow and Berlin. A crisis in U.S.–Russia relations, however, could severely test the U.S.–German relationship and finalize the shifts in German policy toward

Berlin and Washington must be prepared for differences and friction to arise; they will.

Russia presaged in the Schröder years. The most dangerous candidates for this role are Georgia and Ukraine.

The Obama administration may in fact be increasingly tempted to work out a bilateral relationship with Russia. A strategic arms control agreement will be bilateral, but beyond the conclusion of an agreement to replace the START treaty, which expires in December 2009, many U.S. interests with Russia are global. A weak, divided, and ineffectual Europe will also make a bilateral approach more appealing to Washington. Moscow may even seek to reach out directly to the United States not the EU, which is not seen in Moscow as a player in the first league. But the key issue facing the United States with Russia concerns Russia's role in its neighborhood, and this will require a joint approach with key European players.

The road to Moscow will go through Berlin, as Germany will remain the key player in Europe on Russia policy. With this in mind, both the German and U.S. governments should set up a working group to manage a joint strategy toward Russia. This group could be chaired by the directors of the policy planning staffs in the respective foreign ministries, or by the key persons in the National Security Council and the chancellor's office, and should include key players from the economic and national security bureaucracies. All major initiatives toward Russia should be discussed and coordinated with future potential crisis options worked out. In addition, the Petersburg Dialogue, which brings leaders from Germany and Russia together twice a year, should be expanded or adapted to allow U.S. participation. The U.S–German relationship must continue to be reshaped to fit the new geostrategic environment and this is a good place to start.

Notes

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6. See Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars: From 11/9 to 9/11* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).
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14. Ibid., p. 11.
15. Pew Global Attitudes Project 2009, p. 47.
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