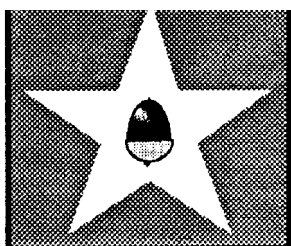


# **Conflict Studies Research Centre**

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## **Russia & The West Since 11 September 2001**

18 December 2001



**Occasional  
Brief No 89**

## Russia & The West Since 11 September 2001

Dr Mark A Smith

The events of 11 September 2001 seem likely to bring about significant changes in Russia's relations with the USA and the major West European states and, subsequently, with the European Union and NATO.

Prior to September 2001, Russia's relations with the West as a whole and with the USA had been improving since the low point of 1999, when Russia froze relations with NATO following Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. Relations with NATO have steadily improved, since Putin has adopted a policy of full economic integration with the global economic system, by seeking to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and a cooperative relationship with the West. However the Russian leadership was still unhappy about the unipolar nature of the international system, and the USA's leading role within it.

It does seem likely that since the terrorist attacks on the USA, at least for a short time (and probably longer) there will be changes in the nature of Russia's relations with the West, particularly the USA, which may well have long-lasting effects on the nature of the international system and Russia's place and role in it. The Russian Federation has been extremely supportive of the USA and its attempts to form an anti-terrorist coalition. Russia sees the events of 11 September as a vindication of her long held view that international terrorism motivated by Islamic extremism is a major threat to international security. The USA's military action against the Taleban regime thus serves Russia's national interest. Foreign minister Igor Ivanov has called for cooperation with the USA and other states in creating a new global system to fight terrorism, although it is so far not clear what the Russian leadership has in mind when it talks of "a new global system".

These developments have created the possibility that there could be major shifts in the nature of Russo-Western (particularly Russo-US) relations. This is certainly the view taken by the Bush Administration. In *Argumenty i Fakty* on 3 October 2001, the new US Ambassador to the Russian Federation Alexander Vershbow commented that Moscow and Washington might once again become allies. On 4 October, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice said US-Russian relations had received a new impetus towards pursuing a common agenda.

The way is now open for closer cooperation between Russia and the West in the security sphere; Putin said when he visited Belgium for the Russia-EU summit in October 2001 that Russia was prepared to make profound changes in its relations with NATO. This summit made it clear that the

security dialogue between Russia and the EU will intensify. Arrangements for possible Russian participation in civilian and military crisis management operations will be established as progress is made in the development of a European Security and Defence Policy.

## **Russia in the International System**

Russo-US relations are now at their warmest since the late Gorbachev and early Yeltsin periods at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. The creation of a Russo-US quasi-alliance and the anti-terrorist struggle give Russia an opportunity to push for a change in the nature of post Cold War international relations. Putin's idea of closer economic integration with the West inevitably has a political dimension. However it is quite probable that Russia still finds a US-led unipolar international system unpalatable to her, and hopes that this crisis will enable her to renew efforts to encourage the emergence of a multipolar international system. The Russian ideal since the end of the Soviet Union has been to see Russia and the USA as equal partners in the international system, with the US-Russian relationship as the single most important one. This was wishful thinking, as Washington did not have the same view of the Russo-American relationship. NATO used force in former Yugoslavia (most notably over Kosovo in 1999), in spite of Russian wishes. The USA and Britain have carried out numerous bombing raids on Iraq since 1991, and for most of this time Russia has opposed such action. The USA has taken the lead role in seeking to promote a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, with Russia as a bystander. Moscow has also been frustrated over her inability to prevent western powers from playing the key role in shaping a post-Cold War security system in Europe.

The blow suffered by the USA may force her to realise that she needs closer cooperation with other powers, including Russia. Russia is placing great emphasis on working with the USA and the EU in the anti-terrorist struggle, and close cooperation with these two other power centres in managing security in both Europe and the Middle East has been a long-standing Russian objective.

It is currently unclear whether Russia will openly link her cooperation with the anti-terrorist coalition with various long-standing Russian foreign policy objectives. It is possible that she may demand (or even get without demanding) concessions in the following key areas:

### **NATO Widening**

The USA may be more willing to slow down or even call a halt to the process of NATO widening, as Russia strongly objects to this process, although she has been powerless to prevent it. Another possible scenario is that NATO widening takes place, possibly even including Russia. This is likely to involve a significant transformation in the nature of the NATO alliance. The Russians have long argued that either NATO should be abolished as the Warsaw Pact was in 1991, or transformed into a political rather than a

military organisation. This would mean that the alliance ceases to be a collective defence organisation and might also cease to play the gendarme role envisaged in its 1999 strategic concept, which was practised in Kosovo. Another scenario is closer cooperation between Russia and NATO that goes beyond the 19+1 format of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, without Russia becoming a member. In other words, cooperation would be in the form of a "20" rather than "19+1". Russia may well seek to acquire something more than a voice, possibly even a veto, that would make future operations like Operation Allied Force impossible without Moscow's consent.

If Russia were to achieve a transformation of NATO into a form of talking shop under the OSCE, Russia would gain what she has argued for since at least the mid-1990s, namely a reduction in US involvement in European security affairs. Although these are inevitably long term developments, the emergence of a less Atlanticist Europe with a Russia more closely tied to NATO, along with the probable development of EU military structures (with which Russia strongly desires to cooperate), may result in Russia having a much greater say in the management of security in Europe than hitherto.

### **National Missile Defence (NMD)**

NMD has been a major stumbling block in the development of a harmonious Russo-US relationship. Differences still exist, and whether they can be resolved (either partly or fully) remains to be seen. However, given the importance of Russia as a partner to the USA, both sides may be willing to become more flexible, despite the US decision to withdraw from the 1972 ABM treaty. Russian public statements on the ABM issue have been notably milder in tone since September 11.

### **Middle East**

There have been no major differences between the USA and Russia over the Arab-Israeli dispute for some years. Both Russia and the USA (and also the EU) support the Mitchell Plan as the basis for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Russia now has fairly cordial relations with both Israel and the Arab states bordering her. However, Russia's economic and political weakness has meant that she has been unable to play any significant role in trying to broker a settlement and she has been forced to let the USA play this role on her own. Ideally, Russia would like to return to the Middle East, as she has long seen herself as having the right to play a key role in this region.

It is now quite possible that the USA will encourage Russia to play a greater role in the Middle East as part of the anti-terrorist coalition. The possibility of some international force being deployed in order to guarantee a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians was mentioned by Igor Ivanov in July 2001, and Russia may well form part of such a force if such an agreement is reached.

More determined efforts by the USA, EU and Russia to try to broker a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians may eventually lead to the

creation of some sort of OSCE-type regional security system in the Middle East, something that Moscow has advocated for several years. If such a system is created, then Russia is likely to play a major role, partly due to her history of close relations during the Soviet period with the Palestinian leadership, Iraq and Syria and with Iran in the post-Soviet period.

### **Economic/Financial Issues**

Russian entry into the WTO may be accelerated, although some in the Russian leadership may be cautious about rapid entry, as they fear that it may have a negative impact on Russia's relatively uncompetitive economy. Russia hopes that Western powers may also take a more flexible attitude over Russia's debt.

### **Europe**

The development of closer ties with Europe, particularly the European Union has been a long-standing Russian aim. It was an objective of both Gorbachev and Yeltsin, but has received renewed emphasis under Putin. The Putin leadership has emphasised that Russia is above all a European power, and sees itself as an integral part of a greater Europe in all aspects, political, economic, military, social, spiritual and cultural.

Since 2000 the Russian Federation has sought to develop the EU as a strategic partner, and it seems as though she sees a close, almost organic, link with the EU as a foundation stone of her post-Cold War foreign policy orientation. An indication of how Putin sees the future of Russia-EU relations was obvious during his visit to Germany in September 2001, where he stated that:

*Nobody doubts the great value of Europe's relations with the United States. However, I simply think that, certainly and in the long-term, Europe will better consolidate its reputation as a powerful and really independent centre of international politics, if it combines its own possibilities with Russia's human, territorial, and natural resources, with Russia's economic, cultural, and defence potential.*

This statement makes clear Putin's desire to develop the Russia-EU relationship as a closely integrated entity independent of the USA, which could therefore diverge from the USA. If energy supplies from the Middle East become disrupted because of instability in that region, then Russia is likely to become a more important source of energy to Europe, and her importance and weight in the Russia-EU relationship will increase.

### **A New Detente?**

US Ambassador to Moscow Alexander Vershbow has said that the USA and Russia have formed an alliance unprecedented since the Second World War.

## Russia &amp; The West Since 11 September 2001

The common cause of fighting Hitler caused Great Britain and the USA and the Soviet Union to set aside their differences. However, those differences were only set aside; they were not eliminated.

Although Putin is no Stalin, Russia's foreign policy interests are not likely to coincide fully with those of the USA. Russia may not be averse to seeking opportunities to enhance her position in the international arena in ways that may subtly be at the expense of the USA, whilst maintaining the essential features of the new US-Russian partnership.

A Russia that by cooperation and involvement in joint activities acquires a much greater say in Europe's security affairs may in the long term be in a stronger position to influence the evolution of European security systems away from Atlanticism. Indeed Russia would like to see a Russia-EU security axis develop which in the long term may conflict with US interests. Although Russia may once again play a bigger role in the Middle East initially as a US partner, given the instability of the region it is not impossible that new realignments may take place there that could bring the USA and Russia into conflict. There is no guarantee that Putin's successor will continue his rapprochement with the West, or that Russia's current political stability will extend beyond the Putin era.

Since 1991, the collapse of Russia's economic and military power has seriously constrained her ability to act in the international arena. The events of 11 September give Russia an opportunity to reverse this process. In the long term this could prove to be a watershed in Russian foreign policy as great as that of Stalin's decision to ally with the USA and Britain in 1941, or Gorbachev's decision to abandon the fundamental features of post-1945 Soviet foreign policy. Like those two watersheds, the implications for the international system as a whole, and particularly Europe and the Middle East, could be far-reaching in nature.

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ISBN 1-903584-50-7

**Published By:**

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Centre**

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Camberley  
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**ISBN 1-903584-50-7**