
Moscow Discussion

Can U.S.-Russian Relations Improve?

by Rachel Douglas

Russian media and expert commentary on the U.S. midterm elections outcome was generally dour, being laced with skepticism about how Democrats like incoming House International Affairs Chairman Tom Lantos (Calif.) will act toward Russia, and bitterness about the country's experience with the United States, NATO, and international financial institutions during the 1990s. An important exception appeared in *Expert* magazine of Nov. 20, under the headline "From Empire, to Global Condominium." Especially against the backdrop of concern over what the Bush Administration may do next in the Middle East, not to mention the anti-Russian rant of Republican Sen. Richard Lugar (Ind.) at the late November NATO summit in Riga, Latvia, the article by regular columnist Pavel Bykov revealed a different quality of discussion of potential U.S.-Russian relations, one which could become more significant in the period ahead.

Bykov wrote about the "Political Atlas of Our Time," a new rating of nations according to various criteria, designed by a team at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations (MGIMO, the "university for the Foreign Ministry") as a counter to the endless "democracy rankings," "transparency ratings," etc., generated by think-tanks around the world. Andrei Melvil of MGIMO presented the study in this same issue of *Expert*. "The Political Atlas of Our Time shows that there are only two countries whose chief concern is their world political influence," began Bykov. "They are the U.S.A. and Russia. Amid growing worldwide dangers, it would be logical for them to think about strategic partnership."

This point about the self-conception of leading circles in the United States and Russia has featured in Lyndon LaRouche's discussions with Russian academic and political circles for over a decade, and is especially well known from his 2001 essay, "The Vernadsky Strategy." Published in Russian in *Zavtra* newspaper at the time, and widely circulated on the Internet thereafter, LaRouche's essay says at the outset, that "there are only three present cases of national cultures which are capable of conceptualizing the initiation of global solutions for such current global problems as the presently accelerating collapse of the world's present financial system. Once again, these are the U.S.A., Russia, and the British monarchy."

Bykov proposed to think about a "real G-8," which would be the present Group of 8 industrialized countries, minus Canada and Italy, plus China and India. Of its members, he noted that Germany and France are functioning within Europe, and have surrendered elements of their sovereignty. Even China, he went on, is more of a regional power, than a global one. "Historically," Bykov wrote, "Russia and America are the ones that have emphasized sovereignty, and the possibility of playing an active role in international affairs—and this is something that unites them. They are also united by the fact that neither Russia, nor the U.S.A. will survive in its current form, without playing an active role on the international scene and facing up effectively to global challenges. . . . The world requires a new quality of relations between Russia and America."

Signs of Change

Bykov chose to illustrate the potential for such a "new quality of relations," with comments made by Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), during her Oct. 31 foreign policy address to the New York Council on Foreign Relations. As Bykov presented it, "She called on China, Russia, and India to take part in creating new rules of the game, and to assume greater responsibility for ensuring global stability, rather than dumping everything on the U.S.A."

The remarks on which this precis is based were not in Senator Clinton's opening speech, but came at the end of a lengthy discussion, in reply to a question about the United Nations. She said that the UN cannot be effective, "if we don't have a better atmosphere in which to deal, particularly with China and Russia, on some of these intractable problems." Having criticized Russia and China on a number of issues, she said, "I think we need to try to create a new level of responsible leadership among nations that are now assuming greater roles in the world, like China, like Russia, like India. They need to be part of us creating a new set of rules to guide us by, and we're not there yet." An FNS transcript, showing the comments in their context, is posted at www.cfr.org. This aspect of Senator Clinton's CFR appearance was picked up by a number of Russian news agencies, being seen as a signal of coming possible changes in policy.

Bykov also cited a *Los Angeles Times* article by Anatole Lieven, suggesting to let China oversee regional regulation of problems on the Korean Peninsula, and Thomas Friedman's recent *New York Times* call for effective "collectivism," involving China and Russia in dealing with Iran and North Korea. While noting that all of these commentaries were critical of Russia, Bykov made his point: "America has ripened to the point of reconsidering its 'imperial' status."

It is noteworthy that the same issue of *Expert* also featured the latest essay by Kremlin official Vladislav Surkov, in his current campaign to clarify the doctrine of "sovereign democracy."