

GENERATIONAL CHANGE AND THE FUTURE OF U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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The Cold War has now been over for nearly two decades. In that time, a whole generation has grown up, both in the United States and Russia, with no memory of the conflict that defined world politics for half a century. Not only do today's college students have no memory of even the final stages of the Cold War, many were not even born when the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991. For an ever increasing share of young people in both countries, seminal events from the Cuban missile crisis to Ronald Reagan's stirring call to "tear down this wall" occupy approximately the same place in individual historical consciousness as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand or the Battle of Waterloo. That observation may seem obvious, but it has profound implications for the future course of relations between the two former Cold War rivals.

For much of the foreign policy elite in both Washington and Moscow, the Cold War remains the prism through which U.S.-Russian relations are filtered, largely because that elite gained its reputation and experience in an era when the entire panoply of foreign policy was based on the East and West struggle. Views and stereotypes that crystallized during the long twilight struggle of the late 20th century continue to provide an important intellectual framework for making sense of the messy post-Cold War, post-September 11 world. Institutionally as well, the United States, and Russia to a lesser degree, has struggled to adapt a Cold War tool-kit to a post-Cold War world.¹ After largely establishing its role to spy on the bureaucratic, authoritarian Soviet Union, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is still, nearly a decade after September 11, racing to figure out how to penetrate the amorphous ideological movement of Al Qaeda. Russia faces this problem as well, as demonstrated by its checkered efforts to downsize and professionalize its military in an attempt to address the asymmetrical threats of the 21st century.²

Yet, if the Cold War remains the default paradigm for viewing U.S.-Russian relations among elites in both countries, the very fact of generational change

means that within a comparatively brief period of time, that relationship will have to change in fundamental ways. In the United States, a generation for whom the “evil empire” and the communist menace are merely chapters in a history book will evaluate the challenge posed by Russia in a dramatically different light from a generation that grew up ducking-and-covering from imaginary Soviet missiles. In Russia, the situation is somewhat more complex. In contrast to the United States, the chaotic events since the collapse of the USSR never provided a respite in which

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Russians could dream about the end of history, nor has the end of the Cold War meant that Russians can stop worrying about the United States to the same degree that Americans can afford to ignore developments in Russia. Rather, the United States remains a central reference point for most Russian foreign policy, and Russian youth continue to hold strong, largely skeptical opinions about the United States.

For the United States, Russia has been downgraded as a foreign policy priority due to the diminution of Russian power and the emergence of new threats such as the spread of extreme Islamist ideology and the rise of China. The reduced centrality of Russia to U.S. foreign policy is matched by a much-diminished interest in Russia at the societal level. One important measure of public interest in Russia is the number of Americans learning to speak Russian: a number that has plummeted since the end of the Cold War. In 2006, 24,845 students at American universities were enrolled in Russian language courses, compared to a high of 44,626 students in 1990.³

Younger Americans, in other words, have increasingly moved on from the Cold War. Russia for them is just another country, one that offers less in the way of opportunity for travel, study, or doing business than China or India, and whose salience to American foreign policy appears to have slipped behind not only those two rising powers, but also the Middle East. For many Americans with no direct experience of the country, Russia is synonymous with bad weather, bad food, unfriendly people, corruption, crime, government snooping, and, for those who do chose to visit, a baffling visa regime. No longer posing a mortal threat to the United States and no longer appearing to offer an alternative to the West’s caloused capitalism, Russia no longer fascinates. On the one hand, the reduced attention paid to Russia by most Americans means that the younger generation will likely have much less knowledge and expertise on Russia than their elders. On the other, since Russia is no longer at the center of American foreign policy concerns, future policies will hopefully be free of the ideological baggage that continues to

haunt debates over the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, missile defense, and other sensitive issues in bilateral relations.

On the Russian side, the end of the Cold War has not resulted in a parallel process of turning away from the United States. Even though the Russian government and many individual Russians express a high degree of frustration with Washington, the fact remains that as the sole remaining superpower, the United States remains central to Russian foreign policy.⁴ For instance, even though Moscow has a clear interest in seeing the demise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, it remains wary of the U.S. military presence in Central Asia and continues to use the United States' need to move equipment across Russian territory and its onetime dependencies in Central Asia as a lever for extracting concessions elsewhere.⁵

The continued centrality of the United States to Russian foreign policy thinking can make it difficult for Russians to understand that the United States no longer makes policy decisions solely on the basis of Moscow's reaction. Consequently, Russians are often frustrated that the United States makes decisions which potentially impact Russian security without consulting Moscow first (e.g. to construct an anti-ballistic missile defense system in Europe).⁶ Even younger Russians, many of whom have traveled to the United States and have first-hand experience of dealing with Americans, are often mistrustful of U.S. foreign policy and believe that Russia must strive to become a truly great power once again, even as they disagree over what it would mean for Russia to be a great power in the modern world.⁷ Furthermore, in contrast to their American counterparts, they are as a whole unsympathetic to the West.

Given that so much of U.S.-Russian relations is backward-looking and based on images drawn from the Cold War, it is clear that the transition to a new generation of elites in both countries will have a profound impact on relations. A generation with no memory of the Cold War cannot but approach the question of U.S.-Russian relations in a fundamentally different light from that of its parents. Already, the rise to power of Barack Obama (born in 1961) and Dmitry Medvedev (born in 1965), both of whose entry into politics did not come until the Cold War was all but over, has contributed to a more optimistic tone in relations.⁸ One example of a perception gap between generations can be seen by contrasting Obama with his much older 2008 presidential rival, John McCain, who sought to expel Russia from the G-8 and favored a hard line on the fraught question of missile defense.⁹

For many older Americans, Russia, even in its post-Soviet guise, appears to inspire a particular antipathy out of proportion to either the threat it poses to U.S. interests or to the scope of its governmental malfeasance. Over the past decade, the United States has largely managed to maintain good working relations with China, even though China is much less democratic and pluralistic, practices a much tighter

variety of censorship, and poses a significantly greater geopolitical threat to U.S. interests both in East Asia and globally. Even as senior U.S. figures like McCain have demanded Russia's expulsion from the G-8 on account of its undemocratic behavior, calls have been mounting for the creation of a new G-2 comprising the United States and China to manage the construction of a new global political and economic architecture, despite the fact that the priorities of the United States and China diverge more sharply than do those of the United States and Russia.¹⁰ Part of the reason for the divergent attitudes and policy responses toward China and Russia appears to stem from the fact that two generations of Americans were raised to see the Soviet Union, for which today's Russia often appears a proxy, as a kind of global bogeyman. The arrival of a new generation not socialized in the imagery of the Cold War and not worried about red-baiting ought to make possible the adoption of a more sober approach to Russia.

Of course, what constitutes a sober approach will depend in large part on the nature of Russia's continued post-communist evolution. Here, a note of caution is in order. The upheavals associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union have contributed to creating a younger generation in Russia whose values are in many ways sharply at odds with mainstream Western liberalism. For current Russian youth, it was the chaotic 1990s that served as the crucible in which a new post-Cold War, post-Soviet sense of identity was formed. This generation, more or less contemporaries of Medvedev's teenage son Ilya, is notable for its support of Russia's great power ambitions, its xenophobia, and its heightened sense of political efficacy, or ability to have an impact on the larger world. These trends, moreover, have been cynically promoted by the Russian government in ways that appear likely to further entrench the illiberal tendencies of many Russian youths. The passing of Russia's last Cold War generation from power may well lead to a qualitative change in the nature of Russian governance and foreign policy but there is no guarantee that these changes will be positive from the perspective of relations with the United States.

IN FROM THE COLD

The last days of the Soviet Union were a heady, optimistic time for many Russians. Mikhail Gorbachev's cautious opening to the West made it possible for many Russians to see for the first time what life on the other side of the Iron Curtain was like. Censorship was relaxed and barriers to international travel began to fall.¹¹ Gorbachev laid out his vision of a future in which Russia and the West lived together in a "common European home" embedded in a zone of peace and security stretching "from Vancouver to Vladivostok."¹² The battle over reform in this era was in many ways a generational struggle that had started back in 1985

when the Politburo selected the then fifty-four year-old Gorbachev, a member of the generation of *shestdesyatniki* (children of the 1960s) who found their political identity during the period of cautious liberalization undertaken by Nikita Khrushchev.¹³ Gorbachev was almost a full two decades younger than his immediate predecessors; many of his key supporters in pressing for *glasnost* and *perestroika* were, like him, products of the 1960s.

The Gorbachev era, in turn, produced its own generation of reformers who would continue carrying the torch of liberalization into the 1990s and beyond.¹⁴ During the difficult period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, what was most notable about major reformers—such as acting Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar, Finance Minister and privatization guru Anatoly Chubais, and the reforming mayor of St. Petersburg Anatoly Sobchak—was their youth. Gaidar was still in his thirties when Russia's first president, Boris Yeltsin, tapped him to lead the Russian government as it implemented the shock therapy program that freed prices and turned Russia into a market economy. Similarly, the new class of oligarchs that emerged in the early 1990s from the fringes of the Soviet economy was predominantly young. Over time, these new oligarchs would push out many of the old Soviet *nomenklatura* (oligarchs) who had seized many of the USSR's more valuable assets during the breakdown of state control.¹⁵

The current relationship between Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin in some ways continues this dynamic of differing perspectives. Even though Putin, who was born in 1952, is only thirteen years older than Medvedev, his formative years occurred under vastly different circumstances.¹⁶ Too young to be a *shestdesyatnik*, Putin joined the KGB out of university in the mid-1970s, by which point Leonid Brezhnev's policy of "normalization" was in full swing.¹⁷ As a KGB agent serving abroad, Putin missed the ferment of the Gorbachev years entirely.¹⁸ Medvedev, meanwhile, was still in his early twenties during *perestroika* and *glasnost*, and his values appear to be much more those of *glasnost* rather than the Brezhnev-era *zastoi* (stagnation) that shaped Putin.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Medvedev's political persona has been notably more liberal and open to the outside world than Putin's, characterized by an affinity for blogging and the British heavy metal band Deep Purple. Once again, the leading reformers around Medvedev are also of his generation or younger, such as Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov, who was born in 1967. These figures are the product of a more hopeful era in Russia.

RUSSIA'S MODERN YOUTH

The children of the *shestdesyatnik*, however, came of age during a much different, much harsher period in Russian history. With the passing of the optimism that characterized the era of *perestroika* and the first days of Russian independence,

the scope of the challenges facing Russia became apparent. The early 1990s, when the first truly post-Soviet generation came of age, were characterized by a degree of upheaval scarcely imaginable in the West.²⁰ In percentage terms, Russia's economy shrank by a larger amount in the 1990s than the American economy during the Great Depression.²¹ Personal security for vast swathes of the population was undermined by hyperinflation, rampant criminality, and the disastrous first war in Chechnya.²² For many Russians, the chaos of the 1990s has come to be associated with the concepts of liberalism and democracy and with the West, which was busy promoting Russia's transformation.²³ When Western-supported initiatives went awry, such as in the 1995 and 1996 "loans for shares" privatization scheme, the West and its army of consultants took much of the blame (though to be fair, some of these consultants were engaged in dubious practices that allowed them to profit from the policies they were advocating to the Russian government).²⁴

Growing up without the safety net of state socialism, younger Russians are much more entrepreneurial and possess a greater sense of personal efficacy than their parents.²⁵ That is, younger Russians tend to believe that their actions can make a difference both in their own lives and in the life of the country as a whole. These feelings of efficacy have translated into a somewhat higher degree of political activism, and a much higher level of entrepreneurialism, among Russian youth than among their elders. Younger Russians tend to have a positive view of the oligarchs who dominate the commanding heights of the Russian economy; they see the oligarchs as success stories, individuals who took advantage of the opportunities available to them. Not only are the young proud of Russia's super-rich, to a surprising degree, they aspire to join the ranks of the capitalist elite themselves.²⁶ They are also increasingly willing to travel, live and work abroad, in part out of frustration with the corruption and red tape that continue to stymie entrepreneurial ambitions inside Russia. This generation's willingness to emigrate, at least temporarily, stands in somewhat striking contrast to the general distrust of foreigners that characterizes much of Russian youth culture.²⁷ It also represents a potential long-term challenge to Russia's competitiveness if the bureaucratic inertia of the Russian state convinces a significant proportion of the best and brightest of the younger generation that they have a brighter future abroad.

Despite their economic ambitions, political involvement of the Russian youth is high only in relation to their elders. On balance they remain less politically engaged than their peers in other post-Soviet countries and prefer to look after themselves and their families rather than to take the risks involved in public activism.²⁸ This relative retreat from politics appears connected to the nature of Russia's political system, which offers few opportunities for direct political engagement. To a large degree, Russian youth seem to have internalized the bargain

implicit in the semi-authoritarian regime established by Vladimir Putin, which solicited loyalty in exchange for economic opportunities.²⁹ While they remain cynical about the motives of politicians and skeptical of Russian political institutions, they approve of Putin's guidance of the country's political course by a fairly large margin. In fact, more than 70 percent of Russian youths say they trust Putin. Conversely, their cynicism toward politicians other than Putin means that there is relatively little support for democratization, with most youths agreeing with their elders that Russia needs to be ruled with a strong hand.³⁰

Of course, not all young people have accepted this bargain and Putin remains something of a polarizing figure. Since the very beginning of his presidency in 2000, the major rallying point for youth participation in politics has been support for or against "Putin's Plan," and the increasingly authoritarian system that he has overseen.³¹ Opponents to Putin have flocked into the youth wings of opposition parties, including the liberal Yabloko and Union of Right Forces (SPS) as well as the neo-fascist National Bolshevik Party, and less cohesive groups such as Walking Without Putin. Putin supporters, on the other hand, have been mobilized by the Kremlin and the ruling United Russia Party into activist groups of which the most notorious is the uniformed, flag-waving, rabble-rousing *Nashi* (Ours).³²

THE KREMLIN'S YOUTH POLITICS

While Putin's opponents are divided among themselves along ideological and personal lines, the Kremlin's ability to mobilize young people through groups like *Nashi* has given it the ability to both intimidate opponents and attract new supporters through the variety of activities and opportunities for career advancement that participation in *Nashi* offers.³³ Through its sponsorship of *Nashi*, as well as its intervention in the educational system to promote a slanted view of Russia's recent history, the Kremlin is helping to ensure that the current generation of youth grows up with an exaggerated sense of Russia's special mission coupled with a profound skepticism of the liberal-capitalist West.³⁴ To the extent that the values expressed by the young will shape Russian politics and foreign policy in the future, the Kremlin's current interventions are a worrying sign from the perspective of future relations between Russia and the United States.

Nashi was designed to prevent a Russian version of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, where youth opposition activists played the central role in the protests that forced a rigged presidential election to be rerun, leading to the victory of Putin antagonist Viktor Yushchenko.³⁵ *Nashi* grew out of the earlier pro-Kremlin youth group Walking Together (*Idushchie Vmeste*), which had been organized by a young activist named Vasily Yakemenko to provide a cadre of unquestioning supporters as Putin set about consolidating his grip on power.³⁶ Walking Together proved

something of an embarrassment, with its fawning devotion to Putin recalling the Stalin-era cult of personality, even as it provided the inspiration for the anti-Kremlin organization Walking Without Putin (*Idushchie bez Putina*) as well as the government inspired girl-pop duo Singing Together (*Poyushchie Vmeste*), known for the single “I Want a Man Like Putin.”³⁷

Unlike its predecessor, *Nashi* was created with the direct participation of the Kremlin, and it continues to maintain close links to the government, mainly by way of official ideologist and deputy chief of the presidential staff Vladislav Surkov. Yakemenko, who was also instrumental in establishing *Nashi*, is now also a Kremlin insider, having been named by Medvedev to head the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs.³⁸ *Nashi* has also been surrounded by controversy since its creation.

Nashi's leaders help to perpetuate a strand of xenophobia that has become increasingly pronounced.

Although allegedly an independent organization devoted to battling “fascism,” *Nashi* has more often been used for breaking up opposition rallies and other alleged threats to the existing regime in Russia.³⁹ Some *Nashi* activists have reported being asked to infiltrate opposition youth groups in order to spy on them, and possibly act as provocateurs.⁴⁰ In early 2009, Georgian authorities also allegedly stopped a group of *Nashi* activists from creating provocations in the de facto republic of South Ossetia and in Tbilisi that were designed to create a pretext for renewed

Russian intervention following the August 2008 Russo-Georgian war.⁴¹

Nashi's ideology is rather ambiguous, though it emphasizes a hard-line version of Russian patriotism that highlights the danger of Russia falling under foreign (i.e. Western) domination.⁴² Along with greater Kremlin participation, this post-Orange Revolution emphasis on the threat of foreign groups and foreign money taking control of Russia is what sets *Nashi* apart from the cruder Putin-worship of Walking Together.⁴³ In this way, *Nashi*'s leaders help to perpetuate a strand of xenophobia that has become increasingly pronounced in Russia throughout the past decade, while inculcating in-group members with a distrust of the West that cannot but have long-term consequences for U.S.-Russian relations. *Nashi* has also been used to foment anti-Georgian sentiment before and during the August 2008 war, and has on occasion openly collaborated with far right organizations to attack anti-government activists.⁴⁴

The Russian government also promotes a narrow nationalism through its control of education. At the level of primary and secondary schooling, the Kremlin has actively intervened to rehabilitate the image of Josef Stalin and to cover up some of the darker pages in the country's Soviet past. In 2007, it approved new

manuals for training teachers in which the Stalin-era repressions are downplayed by noting that “in other countries, worse things happened,” while Putin’s rule is praised for restoring Russia’s “sovereignty” in an international order that had been dominated by the United States since the end of the Cold War. The rationale behind the adoption of the new textbooks was that Russia had found itself “ideologically disarmed” with the Soviet collapse and needed to develop a new “national ideology” that would provide a rallying point for young Russians to develop pride in their nation’s accomplishments.⁴⁵ In higher education as well, there appears to be a growing tendency to encourage scholarship that celebrates Russia’s leading international role as well as the virtues of Russia’s unique cultural-religious heritage, denigrating outsiders in the process.⁴⁶ While it is not clear if this latter tendency is part of a concerted campaign on the part of the central government, it suggests that such beliefs are fairly widespread even among highly educated youth, and that the authorities do not see them as problematic.

The rehabilitation of the Soviet Union across the Russian educational establishment is designed to inculcate a sense of pride among the Russian population in past accomplishments, particularly those that demonstrate Russia’s potential for greatness as a state. Given the trials and humiliations to which many Russians have been subject in the years since the Soviet collapse, it is only natural that Russians and their leaders would look for a usable past, free of the accumulated baggage of the past two decades. Yet this depiction of the Soviet period, including the Stalinist era, as a positive alternative to the messy recent past encourages young Russians to value elements in the nation’s history that set it at odds with the West, as well as with neighbors who resent the legacy of Russian colonial domination that represented the USSR. From the perspective of the Kremlin, abetting some of the darker trends in Russian society is both a matter of conviction and a small price to pay for heading off the possibility of a Ukrainian or Georgian style “colored revolution.”

Yet at the same time, Kremlin appeals to nationalism and anti-Western xenophobia are possible only because the pre-existing beliefs of much Russian youth already provide a viable foundation. On balance, Russian youths want their country to be a fully sovereign member of the international community, rejecting integration with the West in favor of pursuing a uniquely Russian path. At the same time, Russian youth culture exhibits a powerful strand of xenophobia and racism at odds with the liberal, cosmopolitan ideals at the heart of Western culture.⁴⁷ The combination of great power nationalism and xenophobia comprises a particularly Russian brand of patriotism that exists independent of government-sponsored initiatives like *Nashi*.

In part, the hard-core patriotism that increasingly characterizes the younger

generation in Russia developed organically as a response to the massive economic meltdown of 1998, when foreign imports largely disappeared from the shelves and Russia's attempt at emulating the Western model of political-economic development became discredited. In rejecting the foreign influences that they blamed for bringing about the crisis, younger Russians in particular turned to an exaggerated reverence for all things Russian: from chicken legs to cars to centralized rule. Around that time, a new word came to describe all that was Russian, and hence superior: *nashe*.⁴⁸

The fetishization of everything Russian is expressed in terms of both pride in the Russian state and its accomplishments, and in a kind of cultural superiority complex toward both the outside world and toward members of non-Russian

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ethnic groups at home. In terms of Russia's position in international politics, a plurality of Russian youths would prefer that Russia be a major international power that other countries fear and respect, rather than a medium-sized power with a higher standard of living.⁴⁹ For many, hostility toward the outside world overlaps with hatred for ethnic minorities within Russia. Indeed, one of the most pronounced developments among Russian youth since the Soviet collapse has been the proliferation of far right groups and the increasing number of attacks on both ethnic minorities

and foreigners across the country. According to the Sova Center, a Moscow organization that monitors extremist groups, 2009 saw sixty racially-motivated murders in Russia (most committed by skinheads and similar far right groups), significantly down from the 110 recorded in 2008, but still alarmingly high.⁵⁰ Some of these crimes, such as the videotaped beheading of two migrant workers in 2007 or the 2004 stabbing death of a 9-year old Tajik girl by a gang of skinheads in St. Petersburg, have been particularly shocking in their brutality.⁵¹ Russia has also seen an increasing number of large-scale street brawls between skinheads and members of ethnic minorities (and increasingly between skinheads and so-called AntiFa, or anti-fascist youth activists).⁵² And while violent far right groups are a problem elsewhere in Europe as well as in the United States, their presence in Russia is distinguished by two factors: their sheer numbers (estimated at more than 80,000 individuals), and the fact that their activities do not generally draw widespread condemnation from mainstream groups and individual leaders.⁵³

In part, the prevalence of far right groups in Russia is a reflection of general attitudes toward ethnic and religious minorities. Among the general population, support for the forcible deportation of migrants and the notion of "Russia for

(ethnic) Russians” is quite pronounced.⁵⁴ A survey sponsored by the U.S. National Science Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation in 2005 found that between a quarter and a third of respondents supported variants on these propositions. Even among young people who did not share such views, there was a tendency to downplay the significance of skinhead groups, seeing them as just another youth subculture.⁵⁵ Another survey found that almost a quarter of youths supported “liquidation” of illegal immigrants in Russian cities.⁵⁶

This attitude is reinforced by the authorities who at times appear indifferent or outright encouraging toward far right groups. While the Kremlin has openly called for taking a harder line against racially-motivated violence, in practice, prosecutors and courts continue to downplay the severity of these crimes. Most skinhead attacks go unpunished, especially in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and those that do result in prosecution generally lead to short or suspended sentences for offenses such as “hooliganism.”⁵⁷ In large part, the indifference of national and regional authorities to the activities of these far right groups has much to do with the government’s reliance on the language of nationalism and, during the war with Georgia, outright xenophobia as a tool for political mobilization. At the regional level, it also appears that the activities of far right groups benefit at times from the overt political sympathy of the authorities.

In this context, *Nashi* itself appears essentially to be an organized, respectable alternative to the “unwashed” far right with which it shares a significant portion of its political outlook. Given the prevalence of nationalist and xenophobic attitudes among Russian youth and the need to mobilize nationalist sentiment as part of the campaign to strengthen the current elite’s hold on power, the Kremlin appears to have calculated that it would be safer controlling and channelling the nationalist energies of the younger generation.⁵⁸ Hence the development of *Nashi* into a strange hybrid of uniformed street brawlers and a vehicle for identifying and training new leaders. Beside its evocation of the Nazis’ brown-shirted *Stürmabteilung* (SA), the group has much in common with the Soviet-era *Komsomol* (Communist Youth League), which was the main avenue for upward mobility among Soviet-era youth. *Nashi* is internally organized much like the *Komsomol* and fulfills a similar social role by providing opportunities for both leadership training, public service, and networking among its members.⁵⁹ It is this fusion of hard-line nationalism with modern technical and political savvy that is central to the paradox posed by *Nashi*, and to a large extent, Russia’s younger generation.

Especially since Medvedev has become president, *Nashi*’s role in training and identifying future leaders appears to have become increasingly important to the Kremlin. Medvedev has argued that Russia’s current economic model, where economic growth is almost wholly dependent on fluctuations in the price of oil, is

unsustainable over the long run. Instead, he has called for development based on technology and innovation.⁶⁰ Central to this call for innovation-led development is the need to identify, recruit, and train a new generation of leaders with the skills necessary to succeed in the economy. *Nashi* has been central to these efforts, with its meetings of youth activists increasingly focused on inculcating the virtues of not only patriotism, but also entrepreneurship.

The Kremlin has also undertaken other efforts to train Russian youth to take their place in the innovation-led economy envisioned by Medvedev. It proclaimed 2009 the “Year of Youth”, and, with Yakemenko again playing a highly visible role, organized a series of events to identify talented individuals, particularly in business and technical fields, and give them opportunities to develop their ideas into new start-up ventures.⁶¹ The fundamental goal of the “Year of Youth” as well as of *Nashi*’s less bellicose activities is to encourage a cultural shift among younger Russians away from the culture of dependence on the state that characterized generations raised during the Soviet period. Such initiatives, in tandem with the broader cultural and political changes of the past two decades, including the freedom to travel and work overseas, have succeeded to a large degree in ensuring that the younger generation of Russians is more self-reliant than its elders, and more likely to believe that individual initiative and hard work are the keys to success.

These views are increasingly in line with attitudes of young people in the West, including the United States, where the notion that one can shape one’s own destiny through hard work is an article of faith. This convergence in terms of attitudes toward self and work between both Russian and American youth has not, however, translated into more positive perceptions of the United States among Russian youth. One striking example is the Russian response to the election of Barack Obama in late 2008. While Obama was lionized in many corners of the globe for his youth, charisma, and rejection of the smug superiority associated with George W. Bush, young Russians were never caught up in the fervor of their peers in the rest of the world. In a VTsIOM poll taken in June 2009, nearly twice as many twenty-five to thirty-four year old respondents (36 percent) expressed “indifference” to Obama as expressed “hope” (20 percent).⁶² Meanwhile, in a poll conducted by the Levada Center, a majority of youth believed that Russia faces many enemies. Asked to name these enemies, 53 percent identified international terrorists, 38 percent identified the United States and another 22 percent identified NATO.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the younger generation in both Russia and the United States view


their bilateral relationship through a vastly different prism than the one employed by their elders. On the one hand, these differences are grounds for hoping that policy making in the future will be less subject to the knee-jerk responses that have often characterized policy in both countries during and after the Cold War. When American leaders no longer view Russia as a country that by its very nature poses a threat to U.S. interests, it will be easier for them to design policies grounded in the reality that the United States and Russia need each other across a range of important foreign policy issues: from non-proliferation to counterterrorism to European security. The Obama Administration is already trying to normalize relations with Moscow, asking Russia to play a constructive role in resolving mutual problems, and holding out the prospect of giving Russia a greater say in designing the rules for the new post-post-Cold War world. As Obama is discovering, however, mistrust of Russia runs deep in a U.S. establishment that in many ways reflects the concerns and priorities of the Cold War. Moscow often has a point when it accuses the United States of adopting a double standard; Russian malfeasance tends to rile up Congress and the punditocracy to a degree that Chinese, Pakistani, or Saudi malfeasance rarely attains.

The effects of a post-Cold War generation in Russia are somewhat more difficult to predict. On the one hand, with their desire to improve their own standard of living, to travel, and to live abroad, Russian youth have no desire to go back to the Soviet era. By a large margin, Russians between the ages of eighteen and thirty-four would prefer to live in the Russian Federation as currently constituted than in any other political arrangement (including a reconstituted USSR). Around a fifth of Russians in this age group would like to live in a Russia that is part of the European Union which is twice as many as would prefer a new USSR.⁶³ At the same time, just because Russia's youth are more comfortable living and working in a globalized world does not necessarily mean that they will contribute to a political rapprochement between Russia and the West.

For Russia's current leadership, figuring out how to satisfy the economic ambitions of the younger generation while getting them to play a constructive role in politics remains one of the principal long-term challenges. The reliance on *Nashi* as a vehicle for integrating Russia's youth into politics is a dangerous strategy given the organization's rabble-rousing ways. The Kremlin seems to believe that, given the pre-existing prejudices of many young Russians, channeling their frustrations

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through a closely monitored group like *Nashi* is safer than leaving the field open to more extreme organizations. Yet the Kremlin is playing with fire, particularly in a country with a substantial minority population and which, for demographic reasons, will need to rely on immigration to boost its standard of living over the long-run. *Nashi* also feeds the belief, already prevalent among Russian youth, that the country does not need the West. Burdened with an uncompetitive economic structure and facing a rising, increasingly assertive China to its east, it is vital that Russia finds some kind of workable *modus vivendi* with the West. Medvedev appears to recognize that fact and even Putin hints at it from time to time. Yet through its patronage of *Nashi*, the Kremlin is not forcing Russia's youth to confront this reality, instead allowing them to wallow in the dangerous illusion that Russia is strong enough to go it alone.

Despite their increasing openness to globalization and ambition to improve their own standard of living, Russia's youth are generally unsympathetic to the West and increasingly beholden to a narrow conception of Russian nationalism. The current generation of college students in Russia has been socialized to believe that the West is the cause of many of the hardships that they and their parents were forced to endure after the Soviet collapse. While they do not want to see the Soviet Union re-established, they want to create a Russia that is powerful, self-sufficient, and capable of turning its back on an international architecture designed by and for the benefit of the West, even as they are increasingly open to living and working abroad. Like their elders, young Russians do not see their country as fundamentally Western. The young reformers around Medvedev may well be more liberal and pro-Western than the generation that will follow them. If that is the case, then the hopes that the rise in power of a generation with no memory of the Soviet past will transform the nature of Russian foreign policy, and improve relations with the United States, may well be in vain. 

NOTES

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