



Partnership, Under Construction

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Op-Ed

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What a difference thirty years can make. It was in the winter of 1973 that I first visited the USSR. I entered the country at Khabarovsk, rode the Trans-Siberian railroad to Irkutsk, then flew to Moscow. I stood in Red Square, toured the GUM department store, and took in all I could about the country that I, as a member of the U.S. military establishment, had learned to both respect and fear.

From that first trip I gathered three strong impressions of Russia. One was of its immensity and beauty. A second was of the common humanity between the Russian and American people that, I believed, would one day triumph over our political differences. My third impression was of the terrifying capacity of the Soviet ruling apparatus to intimidate its own people, to crush the human spirit.

Today, as I return again to Russia, I see that the country is still immense, and still very beautiful. I see that the common humanity of the Russian and the American people *has* triumphed over old differences. Most important, I see that Soviet terror is gone, enabling both sides to cut away at the thick crust of suspicion that characterized our Cold War relationship.

Thirty years ago, Russian and American leaders sat in separate rooms, looked at maps, and saw target sets. Today, Russians and Americans often sit in the same room, look together at maps, and see targets of opportunity for cooperation on common problems.

We do this in our joint efforts to fight terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and as we together fight HIV/AIDS and drug-resistant tuberculosis. We do this in Korea, where our cooperation includes that of China, Japan and South Korea. And we do this in the Russia-NATO Council, where the objects of our cooperation range from the Balkans and Afghanistan to anti-missile defense.

The United States and Russia cooperate to mutual benefit, in part, because our interests coincide. We both recognize, for example, that terrorism threatens the essential moral order of international life as well as innocent human beings. We can cooperate on developing further Russia's energy resources, matching products to markets and diversifying global energy resources, because both sides will prosper from it.

But our ability to cooperate rests, too, on trust, which President Bush and President Putin have labored tirelessly to build. The knee-jerk antagonism of the past is behind us. We can now deal effectively with even the most difficult issues between us. We are friends now, and we can speak frankly to each other as only true friends can. It is natural that there will be occasions for such frank speaking. Although we share much in common, our histories, cultures, and geographies are different. So we do not agree on all policy questions; but then, no two major nations do.

We must acknowledge the sources of our differences if we are to deal wisely with one another. Beyond interests and trust among leaders, the capacity of any two nations to cooperate rests on a convergence of basic principles shared broadly in society. Here, too, thirty years has proved a long time. Our basic political and economic philosophies are closer today than ever.

But as democracy is a work in progress even where it is most mature, so it is a work in progress in Russia. We know that the civic institutions of a democratic society take time to develop, that a nation cannot leap all at once out of its history anymore than a person can leap out of his skin. We know that the path to a democratic future is not a straight or an easy one.

There can be no doubt, however, that Russia's future greatness lies in its achieving stable democratic institutions. Political, economic and intellectual freedom form the gateway to prosperity, strength and social development in the 21st century. We welcome such a future for Russia. We do so as an expression of our common humanity, for the whole world will benefit from the flowering of Russia's economy, sciences and arts. And we do so because we know that without basic principles shared in common, our relationship will not achieve its potential. This is why certain developments in Russian politics and foreign policy in recent months have given us pause.

Russia's democratic system seems not yet to have found the essential balance among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government. Political power is not yet fully tethered to law. Key aspects of civil society – free media and political party development, for example – have not yet sustained an independent presence. Certain aspects of internal Russian policy in Chechnya, and toward neighbors that emerged from the former Soviet Union, have concerned us, too. We recognize Russia's territorial integrity and its natural interest in lands that abut it. But we recognize no less the sovereign integrity of Russia's neighbors and their rights to peaceful and respectful relations across their borders, as well.

Russia has too much to offer the world for us allow the promise of our partnership to go unfulfilled. As we joined thirty years ago to develop the Apollo-Soyuz mission, thirty years from now we can be surveying together the outer reaches of the solar system. Here on earth, our countries' scientists can work together with the governments of Central Asia to restore the natural environment there, for example. We can work together to improve the global public health system to meet the challenges of our time. Our leaders can work together for peace, prosperity and freedom worldwide.

America's friendship with Russia, and with the Russian people, will not abate. Since our partnership ultimately does not depend on personalities, but on mutual interests and shared values, our hand will be outstretched, our hearts will remain open. As Russia constructs a new democratic political life, so we together will construct a greater U.S.-Russian partnership.

We hope that Russia's path to mature democracy and prosperity is cleared soon of all obstacles. We both have a large stake in that journey, and we trust in its eventual completion. It will take time. But after all, we know what a difference thirty years can make.

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