

Russia's Foreign Policy Surge: Causes and Implications*

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This paper proposes a domestic electoral explanation for Russia's foreign policy surge during Vladimir Putin's second term. It argues that neither the rising power of Russia nor the incessant Western encroachment on Russia's core interests (international-level explanations) can fully account for the abrupt surge that shocked observers around the world. Instead, it points out the significance of Putin's succession and the domestic need to appeal to anti-Western sentiment during an election campaign in Russia's switch to a more assertive foreign policy. The international-level explanations provide insufficient reason for the abruptness and timing of the surge. A comparison is also made with China, a similarly situated continental power, to demonstrate that if international factors had been sufficient to provoke such a surge, Beijing would have taken a much more assertive attitude toward the West than Moscow. The fact that this has not happened points to a major difference between Russia and China: the lack of electoral competition and hence the need to whip up anti-Western sentiment in China. There has been no moderation in Russia's foreign policy after the 2007 and 2008 elections, despite the windows of opportunity

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opened up by the electoral cycle. This is attributed to the inherent tension in a diarchy, the ratchet effect, and the unfavorable international environment. It is asserted that if the current window of opportunity is shut, and as time goes by Russian politicians get geared up once again for electoral competition, the chances of a rapprochement between Russia and the West will grow even dimmer.

KEYWORDS: Russia; foreign policy; Vladimir Putin; Dmitrii Medvedev; domestic/foreign linkage.

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The conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 over the break-away region of South Ossetia has endangered the relationship between Russia and the West. This significant development in international relations is a direct result of Russia's foreign policy surge that began in mid-2006 and then intensified rapidly in 2007. What is the cause of this abrupt burst of Russian assertiveness? What are its implications? These are extremely important questions for anyone concerned with regional and global peace and security. As Russia is a truly Eurasian power that stretches from Eastern Europe through Central and East Asia, a change in Moscow's policy orientation is bound to have a great impact in both continents. This surge therefore deserves the closest attention by countries in both the West and Asia.

This paper begins with a short review of Russia's low foreign policy profile under Boris Yeltsin and during the first six years of his successor Vladimir Putin. This is followed by a description of the abrupt foreign policy surge in the latter half of Putin's second term. Three explanations are offered: a favorable balance of power for Russia, increasing pressure from the West, and electoral competition. The first and second are international-level explanations, while the third is one derived from domestic politics. Although it is true that international factors provided the overall environment for Russia's foreign policy surge, they fail to account for its *timing* and *abruptness*, or the way in which the surge occurred. Domestic politics and the electoral cycle in Russia are then examined to find the critical variable that tilted the balance in mid-2006 and made Russian foreign policy what it is today. The relative strengths of the three explanations

are also tested in a comparison between Russia and China. Here the international explanations are found wanting, for they cannot explain the anomaly that China, with much greater capabilities than Russia and under at least as much pressure from the West, did not assert itself as much as Russia did toward the end of Putin's second term. The domestic politics explanation, however, works quite well. The lack of competitive electoral politics in China and the much reduced need for the Chinese Communist ruling elite to whip up anti-Western sentiment during periods of political succession can account for the differences between Russia and China in their approaches toward the outside world. This is not to argue that Russia's rising power and the West's eastward expansion are not important. Those factors did provide the background for a reorientation of Putin's foreign policy. However, in order to understand the surge, its timing, and its abruptness, one needs to look into Russia's domestic politics, an area traditionally overlooked by Western scholars who easily brush aside the competitive nature of Russia's semi-democratic system.¹ Finally, given that electoral competition is a key factor in Russia's most recent burst of assertiveness, Moscow's foreign policy should become more realistic when the elections are over, as Russian politicians can better afford such attitudes in a favorable international environment. However, this certainly does not exclude the possibility that Russia will react very strongly when one of its core interests is directly threatened, as the conflict with neighboring Georgia shows. It simply suggests that the domestic need for a foreign policy surge is reduced in the years between elections, and that there is a window of opportunity for international reconciliation. Failing this, Moscow's foreign policy will be more recalcitrant, and the differences between Russia and the West less reconcilable. In the light of this observation, the conflict in Georgia may be said to have come at the worst time, as it may

¹For example, Steven Fish claims that Russia's democratic experiment suffered from a host of unfavorable factors in the 1990s, and totally failed when Putin got himself reelected in 2004. See M. Steven Fish, *Democracy from Scratch: Opposition and Regime in the New Russian Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); and M. Steven Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

have nipped the chances of a Russia-West reconciliation in the bud.

Russia's Foreign Policy Surge and Its Explanations

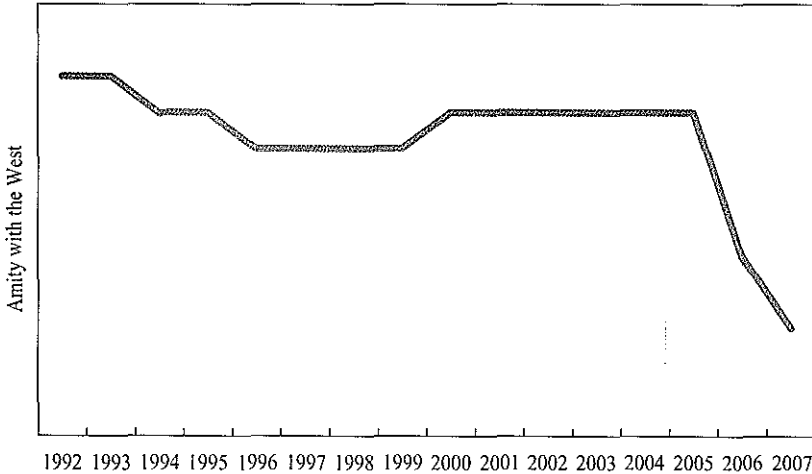
Because of the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia's traumatic economic transition, the halving of its population, significant losses in its natural resources as well as its military capability, and the chaos of its democratic system, Russia remained weak during the 1990s when Boris Yeltsin was its president. This decade may be divided into two periods. The early period was characterized by its liberal pro-Western policy under Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev (October 1990-January 1996), and the later period by the more Eurasia-centered pragmatism of Yevgenii Primakov (January 1996-September 1998) and Igor Ivanov (September 1998-May 2000).² The sacking of Kozyrev in early 1996 was a clear sign of Yeltsin's displeasure with his foreign minister's unpopular pro-Western stance as the country geared up for the mid-year presidential election. The replacement of Kozyrev by Primakov suggests that Atlanticism was no longer in vogue and Eurasianism was on the rise. However, despite Primakov's call for a multi-polar world and an anti-hegemonic coalition, he still yielded to the overwhelming power of the West, reflecting the general tendency under Boris Yeltsin. His successor, Igor Ivanov, did the same. Moscow's protest against the dominance of the West was sheer rhetoric which was never buttressed by real action.³ When push came to shove, Russia would still not challenge the will of the West.⁴ It simply succumbed

²Tom Casier, "Putin's Policy towards the West: Reflections on the Nature of Russian Foreign Policy," *International Politics* 43, no. 3 (July 2006): 386-87.

³Huang Dengxue, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng—shixilun Eluosi dui Meiguo wajiao zhengce de xinbianhua" (From retreat to resistance: an analysis of the latest change in Russia's foreign policy toward the United States), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (Studies of International Politics) (Beijing), no. 2 (April-June 2008): 161.

⁴The height of Russia's protest against the West came during the Kosovo crisis, when in June 1999 Russian troops entered Kosovo and occupied Pristina airport, in violation of international agreements. Ivanov initially promised a withdrawal of Russian troops, only to find himself subsequently overruled by Yeltsin. However, this move did not alter the overall

Figure 1
Russia's Relationship with the West



to the overwhelming pressure from the United States and Europe. In short, Russia's relationship with the West throughout the 1990s remained an unequal one.

Even with the change of guard at the turn of the decade, one finds no significant difference between Russia's foreign policy in the early 2000s and that of the 1990s, i.e., between Vladimir Putin's first term and the reign of Boris Yeltsin. There is even a noticeable toning down of Russia's protests against the West in the initial years of Putin's rule, under that same foreign minister, Ivanov, who loyally followed the directions of his new master. However, the second Putin term (2004-08) witnessed a radical change, particularly in the last two years of Putin's rule (see figure 1). Russia became much more assertive and openly talked of retaliating against Western actions that encroached on its vital interests.⁵ The change under

picture in Kosovo, as NATO kept control of the province and watched over its eventual declaration of independence.

⁵Most observers agree that there was a major change in Russia's foreign policy toward the end of Putin's rule. See Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 159-73. However, there

Putin in his second term was abrupt and it greatly surprised the West. What is the reason for this rise in Russian assertiveness, the single most important phenomenon in the foreign policy of post-communist Russia?

After Putin formally took over political power from Boris Yeltsin in 2000, he was clearly aware of Russia's weaknesses when he said in his first address to the Russian Federal Assembly: "The growing gap between leading nations and Russia pushes us towards becoming a third world country."⁶ His priorities were to rebuild the state and revive the economy, as only when those goals were achieved could Russia be strong again and respected in the world. Putin realized that Russia's occasional tough rhetoric in the latter half of the 1990s had proved ineffective as it was not buttressed by any real action.⁷ Based on this perception, Putin laid a foundation for Russia's foreign policy of "pragmatism, economic effectiveness, and the priority of national tasks." For him, the main purpose of foreign policy was to serve the country's economic revival and the buildup of its national strength. Because Russia lacked the means to exert influence in the international arena, it had to turn inward, implement reform, gain strength, and then come back to the stage.⁸ In a sense, it was not unlike what Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) advised his colleagues to do after the Tiananmen (天安門) incident: keep a cool head, maintain a low profile, never take the lead, and concentrate on developing the economy.⁹ From the early 1990s, China

are others who think there was a consistent line throughout Putin's tenure. See Alen Lynch, "Pujing zhengquan jiaojie wenti he Eluosi wajijiao" (The question of power transition for the Putin regime and Russia's foreign policy), *Eluosi yanjiu* (Russian Studies) (Shanghai), no. 2 (March/April 2007): 17-23. Some scholars stress the differences between Kozyrev and Primakov, and between Primakov-Ivanov under Yeltsin and Ivanov under Putin, and divide the whole period into four phases: initial amity with the West, realistic defiance, rapprochement, and assertive surge. See Xing Guangcheng, "Pujing dui Mei zhengce de jiben luoji" (The basic logic of Putin's American policy), *Renmin luntan* (People's Tribune) (Beijing), no. 224 (April 2008): 17.

⁶Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," July 8, 2000, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029type82912_70658.shtml (accessed July 20, 2008).

⁷Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 159.

⁸Casier, "Putin's Policy towards the West," 384.

⁹Liu Xinli and Cui Weifeng, "Eluosi jueqi de fengxiangbiao—buduan qiangying de dui Mei taidu" (An indicator of Russia's rise—ever hardening attitude toward the United States), *Fazhi yu shehui* (Legal System and Society) (Kunming), no. 3 (Part 1) (March 2008): 280.

concentrated on economic growth and made great progress. One can clearly see a similar mentality in Putin's address to the Russian parliament when he took over in 2000. His goal was to revive Russia's economy by rebuilding the state, protecting property rights, adopting unitary tax rates, fighting corruption, and of course taking advantage of the favorable external economic conditions.¹⁰ On all those fronts, Russia has demonstrated impressive progress. In short, Putin showed his commitment to the economy from the very start of his presidency, and defined the goals of Russia's foreign policy accordingly. This can be characterized as the "economization of foreign policy."¹¹

If one examines Putin's official statements and Russia's foreign policy from 2000 to 2005,¹² there appears to be a consistent line of pragmatism running through his first term and into the second.¹³ Putin's offer of Russian help to the United States in the immediate aftermath of September

¹⁰In the words of Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, Russia has "a sober and realistic view of Russia's place and role in international relations, unencumbered by any ideological prejudices and stereotypes," and "the central goal of Russian foreign policy was and remains creating the optimal external conditions for continued domestic transformation that strengthens the government, improves the economy, and increases the wellbeing of Russian citizens." See Igor Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2002), 33, 141.

¹¹Casier, "Putin's Policy towards the West," 389.

¹²See note 6 above; Vladimir Putin, "News Conference Following a Meeting of Heads of State During the G8 Summit," July 23, 2000, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2000/07/23/0000_type82914type82915_128921.shtml (accessed July 20, 2008); Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," April 3, 2001, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2001/04/03/0000_type70029type82912_70660.shtml (accessed July 20, 2008); Vladimir Putin, "News Conference after the G8 Summit," June 28, 2002, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2002/06/28/0000_type82914type82915_150122.shtml (accessed July 20, 2008); Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," April 18, 2002 http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2002/04/18/0000_type70029type82912_70662.shtml (accessed July 20, 2008); Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," May 16, 2003, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2003/05/16/0000_type70029type82912_44692.shtml (accessed July 21, 2008); Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation," April 25, 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml (accessed July 21, 2008); and Vladimir Putin, "Meeting with Russian and Foreign Media Following the G8 Summit," July 8, 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2005/07/08/1132_type82915_91210.shtml (accessed July 21, 2008).

¹³Casier, "Putin's Policy towards the West."

11th was a clear sign of this motif. There was a coincidence of interests between the two countries as both were fighting international terrorism connected with radical Islamic movements. Russia even rendered assistance to NATO's military operation in Afghanistan, and raised no objection when Washington sought to establish military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.¹⁴ Russia and the West also shared an interest in preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. In this overall favorable environment, Putin reacted mildly to Washington's decision to withdraw from the 1972 anti-ballistic missile regime. The exchange of state visits by Putin and George W. Bush in November 2001 and May 2002 marked the high point in U.S.-Russian relations in this early stage. The two countries agreed to cut nuclear warheads by two-thirds.¹⁵ The NATO-Russia Council was also signed into existence with the Rome Declaration of May 2002, giving Moscow an equal voice in counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and arms control.

The American invasion of Iraq in March 2003 caused some friction between Russia and the U.S.-led coalition, but Putin was quick to point out in April that he intended to maintain good relations with the United States and its allies. Moscow's objection to the invasion of Iraq was even milder than that of France or Germany.¹⁶ Russia took pains to signal to the United States that it was a staunch ally in the global fight against terrorism, and that bilateral ties between the two sides would not be damaged by their differences over Iraq. The Camp David meeting between Bush and Putin in September that year witnessed the confirmation that the United States and

¹⁴Marshall I. Goldman, "Russia and the West: Mutually Assured Distrust," *Current History* 106, no. 702 (October 2007): 314.

¹⁵In the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), the United States and Russia promised to deploy fewer than 2,200 operational strategic warheads each by December 31, 2012.

¹⁶Of course this can also be explained as an attempt by Moscow to act as a pivot between the United States and "Old Europe" (as U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dubbed France and Germany), and gain concessions from both. In any case, Russia's opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq was far less categorical than that of either France or Germany. See Mark N. Katz, "Exploiting Rivalries: Putin's Foreign Policy," *Current History* 103, no. 674 (October 2004): 338.

Russia were allies in the war on terror, and the two countries agreed that Iran should not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons. These friendly relations extended into 2004, with both Putin and Bush reelected. The "color revolutions" in Georgia (November 2003), Ukraine (November 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (March 2005) were the cause of great concern in Moscow, but the overall relationship with Washington was considered much more important in Putin's overall strategy for developing Russia's economy and keeping on good terms with the United States. This basic stance was maintained even after NATO's second eastward expansion into former Soviet satellites or ex-Soviet republics in Central and Eastern Europe in 2004, bringing NATO's military bases up to Russia's borders with those countries.

Relations between Russia and the West experienced an abrupt downturn in mid-2006 when Putin fired his first salvo at the United States. In his annual address to the Federal Assembly, Putin complained about America's military buildup and compared the United States with a wolf that "knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone."¹⁷ He made similar remarks when addressing Russia's ambassadors in June, criticizing the United States for its obsession with the use of force, lack of interest in disarmament, refusal to enter a dialogue with other states, and indulgence in Russia bashing.¹⁸ These criticisms were unprecedented from Putin, a hitherto staunch ally of the West in its war on terror. The U.S. plan to deploy a missile defense system in Central Europe also provoked warnings of retaliation from Putin, in contrast to Moscow's meek response in 2002 when the United States announced its withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. In October the murder of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who had intensively reported on atrocities committed by Russian troops in Chechnya, revealed the authoritarian nature of Putin's rule and attracted much criticism from abroad. The killing of Aleksandr

¹⁷Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly," *International Affairs* 52, no. 3 (June 2006): 13.

¹⁸Vladimir Putin, "There Are More Benefits to Be Gained through Friendship with Modern Russia," *International Affairs* 52, no. 4 (August 2006): 2-3.

Litvinenko, a former Russian security agent and critic of Putin, with a large dose of radioactive polonium 210 in London, was another blow to Russia-Western relations. The sharp 29 percent increase in Russia's military procurement that year fueled suspicions among Western countries.¹⁹ In a landmark speech delivered in February 2007 Putin criticized the United States for its unilateralism and obsession with force at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.²⁰ He particularly condemned the planned deployment of anti-missile systems in Europe and the expansion of NATO. In April the relocation of a Soviet-era memorial to fallen soldiers and war graves in Tallinn, Estonia, provoked anger in Russia, and Estonia, a NATO member, found itself under cyber attack, presumably with the acquiescence of the Russian government.²¹ In his annual address to the Federal Assembly, Putin complained about Russia's unilateral observance of the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, and proposed placing a moratorium on it. He also criticized the West for failing to adhere to international law, and for imposing development models on unwilling countries.²² In May, Putin accused the United States of adopting a hegemonic policy which was a threat to the world.²³ He described the Samara Summit

¹⁹Ketizu, "Eluosi qiangshi fuxing ji qi zhanlue yingxiang" (Russia's resurgence with a vengeance and its strategic impact), *Eluosi zhongya dongou yanjiu* (Russian, Central Asian, and East European Studies) (Beijing), no. 4 (July-August 2008): 4.

²⁰This speech was widely considered to be a path-breaking piece that defined Russia's new foreign policy. It was also characterized by some as a "Cold War Manifesto." See Aleksey Obukhov, "Russian President Did Not Threaten the West," *International Affairs* 53, no. 4 (August 2007): 2.

²¹The Putin government has shown great concern for ethnic Russians living in the "near abroad." The funding for promoting various programs in this regard in 2007 was seven times higher than in 2000. Of particular concern was the plight of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Estonia, particularly the 600,000 "stateless people," on behalf of whom Putin directed harsh words at the two Baltic governments. See Vladimir Putin, "Ensuring the Rights and Freedoms of Compatriots," *International Affairs* 53, no. 1 (February 2007): 4.

²²Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly," April 26, 2007, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/04/26/1209_type70029type82912_125670.shtml (accessed July 18, 2008).

²³In Putin's May 9, 2007, speech, he seemed to compare the United States with Nazi Germany. He described a "global threat in which, as in the time of the Nazi Third Reich, we saw the same contempt for human life, the same claims to world exclusivity and diktat." See Goldman, "Russia and the West," 317-18.

between Russia and the European Union (EU) as an overdue dialogue among equals and then clashed with the EU over the "Polish question" which stalled the drafting of a new EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.²⁴ In June, Putin attacked the international economic system and its main institutions (the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank) for being under the control of a small number of developed countries and for being "archaic, undemocratic, and awkward."²⁵ In return, Bush declared that Russia had derailed its promised democratic reforms, and he put the independence of Kosovo on the agenda for July. Despite the July 1-2 meeting of the two presidents in Maine, Russia's relations with the United States and the West went from bad to worse.²⁶ In November, the Russian parliament approved Putin's plan to withdraw from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.²⁷ In December, the dispute between Russia and pro-Western Ukraine over gas prices was rekindled, sending shock waves throughout Europe as Russia resorted to cutting off supplies to Ukraine which acts as a transit for 80 percent of Russia's gas supplies to Europe.²⁸ Russia was seen as a bully

²⁴The EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) covers almost all aspects of European Community-Russia trade, commercial and economic relations, and political communication up to the highest levels. It also places respect for human rights and democratic processes at the very core of the relationship. It came into force on December 1, 1997. See Vladimir Kuznechevsky, "Russia-EU Samara Summit," *International Affairs* 53, no. 4 (August 2007): 82-86.

²⁵Goldman, "Russia and the West," 317.

²⁶See Wade Boese, "Arms Issues Divide U.S. and Russia," *Arms Control Today* 37, no. 7 (September 2007): 29.

²⁷In his address to the Federal Assembly on April 26, Putin complained about Russia's unilateral observance of the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty when some of the NATO members had not even ratified it. He proposed a moratorium on Russia's observance "until such time as all NATO members without exception ratify it and start strictly observing its provisions, as Russia has been doing so far on a unilateral basis." See note 22 above. Putin declared on July 14 that Russia would withdraw from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe in 150 days if the treaty limits on Russia and NATO were not altered to Moscow's satisfaction. Putin's plan was endorsed by the Russian parliament, and Russia's Foreign Ministry formally announced the suspension on December 12. See Wade Boese, "Russia Suspends CFE Treaty Implementation," *Arms Control Today* 38, no.1 (January-February 2008): 46.

²⁸Russia and Ukraine first became involved in a dispute over energy prices in the winter of 2005-06. In this dispute, Russia halted the supply of natural gas to Ukraine in order to

that would not hesitate to use energy as a weapon. The sense of insecurity among European countries was heightened.

It is quite clear that the initial pro-Western thrust of Russia's foreign policy could not survive Putin's second term, particularly the last two years of his rule. One wonders what can best explain this abrupt policy change. It is very important to understand the cause of this phenomenon, as we can then gain an insight into the pattern of policymaking in Russia, and extrapolate it into the post-Putin period. Depending on which level of analysis (or image, as Kenneth Waltz puts it) one chooses, there are four possible causes of Russia's foreign policy surge: the leader's personality, electoral competition, Russia's rising national power, and increasing pressure from the West.²⁹ The leader's personality is ostensibly suitable in the Russian setting, because of the overwhelming power of President Putin and the dominant role he has played in Russia's foreign policymaking. However, to trace a major policy change in Russia to the personality of its paramount leader is inherently flawed, as personality persists over time, and thus cannot constitute a plausible explanation for the abrupt surge. The second possible cause is domestic politics (Waltz's second image). This would explain Russia's new approach as being a reflection of the country's regime type, and the electoral cycles derived from it.³⁰ The third and fourth explanations are international by nature (the third image), citing the shifting balance of power and rising external pressure as the main causes of the Kremlin's policy change. The following discussion will concentrate on the relative merits of the last three explanations and weigh domestic politics against international factors in explaining Russia's foreign policy surge.

impose a price rise. In the following winter Russia raised energy prices for Georgia. There was another dispute over energy prices with Belarus and Ukraine at the end of 2007.

²⁹For Kenneth Waltz's three images, see Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

³⁰For some observers, it is the transitional nature of Russia that causes domestic politics to be the prime determinant of foreign policy. See Yuan Shengyu, "Guonei zhengzhi yu duiwai guanxi" (Domestic politics and external relations), *Eluosi yanjiu*, no. 4 (September-December 2006): 38.

The Deficiency of International Explanations

It is plausible that a shift in the balance of power in Russia's favor and/or rising Western pressure may have given rise to a more assertive foreign policy in the Kremlin.³¹ The former gave Russia the capability to play tough, and the latter enhanced Russia's threat perception and prompted it to counteract that threat. That may have been true in a general sense; however, if one takes a closer look at the situation, the deficiency of these two third-image explanations becomes obvious. The two international factors cannot account for the *abruptness* and *timing* of the surge, nor can they explain why China has responded to a similar situation in a way that contrasts sharply with Russia's approach. In order to fully account for Russia's foreign policy surge in mid-2006, one needs to integrate both the international-level explanations that stress the rising power of Russia and the West's incessant encroachment on Russian interests, *and* the domestic political factors that tilted the balance and prompted the surge. The former provided the background and the momentum, while the latter determined the timing and the way in which the surge took place.

Russia's rise under Putin is unquestionable.³² When he took over from Boris Yeltsin, the Russian economy had experienced a series of traumas from a short period of shock therapy, hyperinflation, a sharp decline in production, and a crippling financial crisis in 1998 that dashed whatever hopes had been raised by the modest recovery of the previous year.³³ The country's gross domestic product (GDP) was down by 50

³¹Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 159.

³²Putin took credit for this economic resurgence, even though one can claim that it was primarily caused by skyrocketing energy prices, or that it owed a lot to the structural reform of the 1990s that laid the foundation for a normal market economy based on private enterprise, and the 1998 financial crash which cleansed the market economy. See Anders Åslund, "Putin's Lurch toward Tsarism and Neoimperialism: Why the United States Should Care," *Democratizatsia* 16, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 17-25.

³³For a review of the Russian economic transition, see Wu Yu-Shan, *Eluosi zhuanxing 1992-1999: yige zhengzhi jingjixue de fenxi* (Russia's transition 1992-1999: a politico-economic analysis) (Taipei: Wunan, 2000).

percent.³⁴ It was in economic meltdown.³⁵ Chechnya was in revolt, and two invasions by Russian forces had been unable to quell the rebellion. After Putin became president, he took pains to strengthen the state, clamped down on corruption, reined in the oligarchs, redressed the excesses of hasty privatization, and energized the economy.³⁶ He was able to combine authoritarian political control in the name of *suverennaya demokratiya* (sovereign democracy) with a booming state-directed capitalist economy (state capitalism),³⁷ buttressed by ever higher energy prices.³⁸ In his 2003 annual address to the Federal Assembly, Putin set out his goal of doubling Russia's GDP within a decade. This would require an annual growth rate of roughly 7 percent, a target the Russian economy proved capable of meeting in the following years.³⁹ In 2005 Russia regained its pre-transition economic strength and registered its first net capital inflow. In 2007 it grew to be the world's eighth largest industrial power and was sitting on the third largest foreign exchange reserves. As an indicator of foreigners' confidence in Russia, the country attracted the seventh largest

³⁴Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 165.

³⁵Mark Kramer, "U.S. Policy and Russia's Economic Plight: Lessons from the Meltdown," PONARS Policy Memo 36, Harvard University, November 1998, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/pm_0037.pdf (accessed July 20, 2008).

³⁶Putin renationalized many of the valuable energy companies that were privatized under Yeltsin in deals that are widely viewed as corrupt. Currently more than half of Russia's crude oil is produced by state companies, and even private oil companies behave as if they were state-owned. Foreign energy giants were forced to welcome Russian partners, mainly Gazprom, or surrender their majority ownership. Shell Oil, BP, Exxon-Mobil, and Total were all affected. This situation provides the Russian state with the capability to implement its aggressive foreign policy using energy as the prime instrument. It also intensifies the conflict between Russia and the West. See Goldman, "Russia and the West," 316.

³⁷The term "sovereign democracy" was originally coined by Vladislav Surkov, a chief Kremlin theoretician. According to Sergii Ivanov, the former defense minister, sovereign democracy is the essence of Russia's political institution, meaning citizens have the right to determine national policy and to defend such a right with any means including force against foreign pressure. See Ketizu, "Eluosi qiangshi fuxing ji qi zhanlue yingxiang," 3; and Sergii Ivanov, "Triada natsional'nykh tsennostei" (The triad of national values), *Izvestia*, July 23, 2006, <http://www.izvestia.ru/politic/article3094592/index.html> (accessed August 23, 2008).

³⁸Russia is the world's second largest exporter of crude oil, and the largest producer and exporter of natural gas.

³⁹Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly" (2006), 1-18.

Table 1
Russia's Economic Revival under Putin

	1999	2007
Gross domestic product	RUB 482.3 b.	RUB 3,069 b.
Gold and foreign exchange reserves	US\$ 12.5 b.	US\$ 420.2 b.
Inflation	36.5%	8.5%
Per capita income	RUB 2,112	RUB 12,351
Average monthly pension	RUB 403	RUB 2,822
Foreign direct investment	US\$ 29.2 b.	US\$ 70 b.

Source: Huang Dengxue, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng—shixilun Eluosi dui Meiguo waijiao zhengce de xinbianhua" (From retreat to resistance: an analysis of the latest change of Russia's foreign policy toward the United States), *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu* (Studies of International Politics) (Beijing), no. 2 (April-June 2008): 166.

amount of investment in 2007 (ranking third among the emerging markets), whereas in the 1990s capital flight from Russia averaged US\$1 billion a month.⁴⁰ The dramatic revival of Russia's economy on Putin's watch is clearly demonstrated in the figures in table 1. Russia now provides roughly a quarter of the gas and oil that Western Europe imports, and the dependency on Russian energy of its erstwhile allies in Eastern Europe is even higher. With those facts in mind, it seems only natural that Russia seeks an equal relationship with the West, one that is different from that of the 1990s when Russia was weak and had to accept whatever the West dictated.⁴¹ For some, Russia's might means that the world is back to a bipolar structure, and Russia should play the role of a guarantor of lasting peace on earth, which will benefit all countries.⁴²

With Russia growing back into the club of great world powers, the West nevertheless continued pushing for the enlargement of NATO and the European Union, the two organizations that Russia would never be allowed

⁴⁰Goldman, "Russia and the West," 314.

⁴¹Kuznechevsky, "Russia-EU Samara Summit," 86.

⁴²Such was the view expressed by Andrei Denisov, Russia's first deputy foreign minister, when responding to Putin's May 10, 2006, address to the Federal Assembly. See Boris Piyadyshev, "Russia's Priorities," *International Affairs* 52, no. 4 (August 2006): 19.

to join. NATO's first wave of enlargement into the former Soviet bloc countries occurred in March 1999 with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joining the military alliance. At the 2002 Prague Summit, NATO invited Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Rumania, and Bulgaria to begin accession talks. As a result, those seven post-communist countries joined NATO in March 2004. The accession of ex-Soviet countries to NATO was particularly menacing, for it implied that other such countries could join the Western military alliance in the future and Russia would be besieged from the east and the south. In May 2004 and January 2007 the European Union admitted a total of twelve new members, including the ten countries that had previously been admitted to NATO. Turkey is a NATO member that has introduced major reforms in order to qualify for EU membership. Croatia is a candidate for both organizations. Macedonia is further away from membership of either organization than Croatia, but it is a candidate for EU membership and has been invited by NATO to take part in accession talks, the dispute with Greece over Macedonia's official name being the main hurdle. Albania has also been invited by NATO. From Moscow's point of view, Washington's most provocative gesture has been its eagerness to include Ukraine and Georgia, two former Soviet republics with pro-Western leaders (Viktor Yushchenko and Mikheil Saakashvili), in NATO.⁴³ A clear trend has emerged that unmistakably points to the expansion of the West into the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the ex-Soviet republics. Membership of Western organizations has blatantly been used to lure these countries into adherence to Western institutional requirements, state behavioral patterns, and core values. A recent example is the handing over of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, which came after the EU signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia in April 2008, but demanded Belgrade's full cooperation with the tribunal as a condition of its

⁴³The U.S. Senate passed a bill to support the accession of Albania, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, and Ukraine to NATO in November 2006.

implementation.⁴⁴ Moves like this, of course, look highly provocative from Moscow's point of view. The U.S. plan to put radar facilities in the Czech Republic and station interceptor anti-ballistic missiles in Poland has further annoyed Russia, as have plans to build military bases in Rumania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states.⁴⁵ Finally, the West's support for Kosovo's declaration of independence in the face of strong opposition from Serbia and Russia serves as a vivid reminder of how core Russian interests can be easily brushed aside. From Russia's point of view, Kosovo is a "frozen conflict" with a legal status similar to Transdniester in Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. For the West to support national self-determination in Kosovo, while opposing such a principle in Transdniester, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, is a plain and simple example of double standards.⁴⁶ In short, Russia's gestures of friendship toward the West have been met with repeated moves by Western countries that can only be interpreted as efforts to contain and isolate Russia. Those moves have irritated the leaders in the Kremlin.⁴⁷

It seems natural that, as Russia's capabilities gradually recover, continuous encroachment by the West on its traditional spheres of influence would provoke Russia to respond with increasing assertiveness, and that explains the rhetoric from Putin during the last two years of his presidency. However, there is a *mismatch in time*. Russia's power rose steadily under Putin for eight years. Not only was there a rapid growth in absolute terms, the Russian economy also grew as a percentage of the U.S. economy in those eight years. Russia's GDP was only 2.65 percent that of the United

⁴⁴Brian Whitmore, "Karadzic Arrest in Serbia Shows Power of Elections," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Feature*, July 22, 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1185483.html> (accessed July 22, 2008).

⁴⁵Liu Qingcai and Wang Haibin, "Mei-E zhanlue jiaofeng ji qi dui Zhongguo de yingxiang" (The conflict of the U.S. and Russian strategies and its impact on China), *Dangdai guoji guanxi* (Contemporary International Relations) (Beijing), no. 2 (February 2008): 33-39.

⁴⁶Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 165.

⁴⁷Verbal criticism and condescending remarks leveled at Russia by American leaders and influential think-tanks add to the irritation. For example, the speech delivered in Vilnius by Vice President Dick Cheney of the United States in May 2006, and the report of the Council on Foreign Relations entitled "Russia's Wrong Direction" issued in March 2006. See Piadyshhev, "Russia's Priorities," 35.

States when Putin took office, but by 2008 it was 12.41 percent (see table 2). This growth in comparison to the United States was quite evenly spread over the eight-year period. In 2006 the Russian economy grew as a percentage of the U.S. economy by 24.5 percent. This was against a mean of 21.52 percent for 2000 through 2007. It is clear that the growth in 2006 did not deviate from the average pattern and could not account for a sudden shift in foreign policy in that year. By the same token, although Russia's military expenditure did grow rapidly as a percentage of U.S. military expenditure during the Putin years, Russian defense spending remained meager compared to that of the Americans, rising from 5.59 percent in 2000 to 6.47 percent in 2007 (see table 3). Again the year 2006 did not see a jump in military spending that would justify a reorientation of Russia's posture toward the West. Even though there was 6.05 percent growth in Russian military expenditure as a percentage of U.S. expenditure that year, it was less than the percentages for 2000 (10.1 percent) and 2005 (7.76 percent). In short, neither the GDP nor the military expenditure of Russia as a percentage of that of the United States increased in such a way as to justify a major policy reorientation in mid-2006. That year witnessed typical Putin-era growth in Russia's economic and military power, and the country's national strength remained just a fraction of that of the United States, let alone the United States and Europe combined, by mid-2006. Clearly the surge cannot be explained by a rise in national power.

The abrupt policy shift of mid-2006 cannot be explained by an increased threat from the West either. It is true that the West's encroachment on Russia's core interests provided part of the momentum behind the policy surge, yet such encroachments had happened many times in the past, for example, in the 1990s and well into the Putin era. The most threatening gesture by the West by far was the enlargement of NATO in 1999, followed by the eastward expansion of both NATO and the EU in 2004, when the former absorbed seven and the latter eight post-communist countries, including the Baltic states which had been part of the Soviet Union. The military bases in those countries, the radar stations, and the deployment of interceptor missiles all came as a result of this expansion. However, there was negligible response from Moscow when these moves occurred. There

Table 2**A Comparison of China's Rise and Russia's Rise Against the U.S. (GDP)**

	(Billion U.S. Dollars)									
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
China	1,083.28	1,198.48	1,324.81	1,453.83	1,640.96	1,931.65	2,235.75	2,657.84	3,280.22	4,222.42
Russia	195.91	259.70	306.58	345.49	431.43	591.90	764.26	988.56	1,289.54	1,778.69
United States	9,268.43	9,816.98	10,127.95	10,469.60	10,960.75	11,685.93	12,421.88	13,178.35	13,807.55	14,334.03
CH/US	0.1169	0.1221	0.1308	0.1389	0.1497	0.1653	0.1800	0.2017	0.2376	0.2946
RU/US	0.0211	0.0265	0.0303	0.0330	0.0394	0.0507	0.0615	0.0750	0.0934	0.1241
Slope of CH/US	4.45%	7.15%	6.16%	7.81%	10.41%	8.89%	12.06%	17.79%	24.00%	n/a
Slope of RU/US	25.16%	14.43%	9.01%	19.28%	28.68%	21.47%	21.92%	24.50%	32.87%	n/a

Source: International Monetary Fund, *World Economic and Financial Surveys: World Economic Outlook Database*, 2009, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2008/02/weodata/index.aspx> (accessed February 9, 2009).

Table 3**A Comparison of China's Rise and Russia's Rise Against the U.S. (Military Expenditure)**

	(Million U.S. Dollars)									
	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	
China	21,636	23,778	28,010	33,060	36,552	40,278	44,322	51,864	58,265	
United States	329,421	342,172	344,932	387,303	440,813	480,451	503,353	511,187	546,786	
Russia	14,045	19,141	21,245	23,604	25,111	26,119	28,492	31,181	35,369	
CH/US	0.0657	0.0695	0.0812	0.0854	0.0829	0.0838	0.0881	0.1015	0.1066	
RU/US	0.0426	0.0559	0.0616	0.0609	0.0570	0.0544	0.0566	0.0610	0.0647	
Slope of CH/US	5.80%	16.86%	5.12%	-2.86%	1.10%	5.03%	15.22%	5.03%		
Slope of RU/US	31.20%	10.10%	-1.05%	-6.53%	-4.57%	4.12%	7.76%	6.05%		

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*, 2009, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4> (accessed February 9, 2009).

was no policy shift before 2006 comparable to the one that came after that dividing line no matter how Russia's core interests were threatened. After mid-2006, there was a steady escalation of tension and hardening of positions. Clearly the policy surge that took place in the middle of Putin's second term cannot be explained by any actions of the West. Therefore, since the abrupt change in Russia's foreign policy posture did not coincide with either a marked growth in its economic or military power, or with an increased threat from the West, it is necessary to look elsewhere for an explanation.

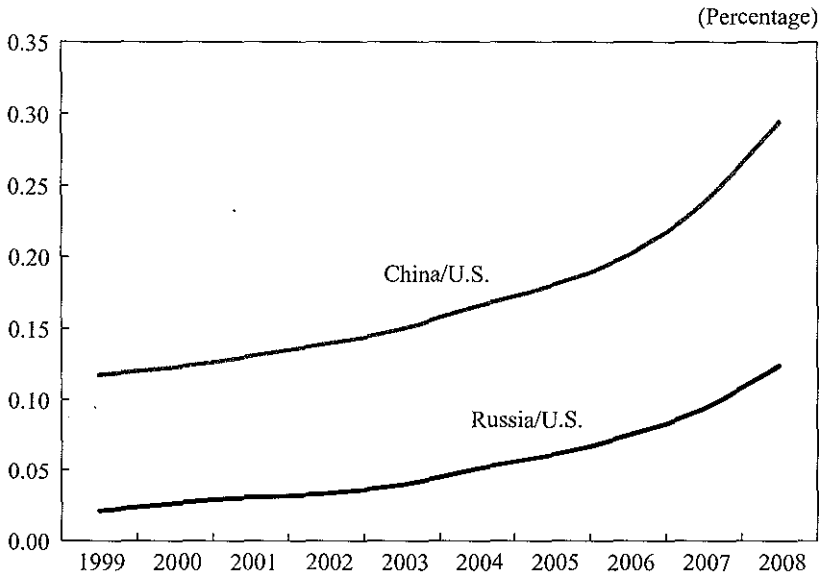
The inadequacy of these two explanations can also be demonstrated by comparing Russia and China.⁴⁸ If either of these two explanations was valid, one would expect a more assertive response from China than from Russia, as the former has accumulated greater capability and faced similar, if not more, pressure from the West. In terms of growth in economic power, China has demonstrated a much more impressive trajectory.⁴⁹ Throughout the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, China has become the world's third largest industrial power and accumulated nearly US\$2 trillion in foreign exchange reserves, a rate of progress unmatched by any other country in the world. It has attracted more foreign investment than Russia, and because of its huge population and high growth rate, China is the only country with the potential to compete with or even overtake the United States in the foreseeable future, in gross if not in per capita terms.⁵⁰

⁴⁸It is true that both countries are "unique" in many respects, and a comparison between them runs certain risks. However, they were always compared prior to the collapse of European communism, in the subfield of comparative communist studies. It is still appropriate to compare them today, for no other reason than their global strategic weight and the degree of potential threat they both pose to the West.

⁴⁹In 1980-84, Russia was the seventh largest economy in the world, while China was the 10th (in terms of five-year average GDP in current dollars). In 2001-05, the Russian economy dropped to 16th place in the wake of an economic meltdown, while China continued its remarkable growth and climbed to 6th position. Currently, Russia is the 8th largest economy, while China has surpassed Germany to become the 3rd. It is apparent that Russia has re-emerged as a great economic power, but China has maintained its growth to become one of the world's top three.

⁵⁰The Russian elite is conscious of the prospect of world leadership passing to China some time during the current century. See Piadyshev, "Russia's Priorities," 45.

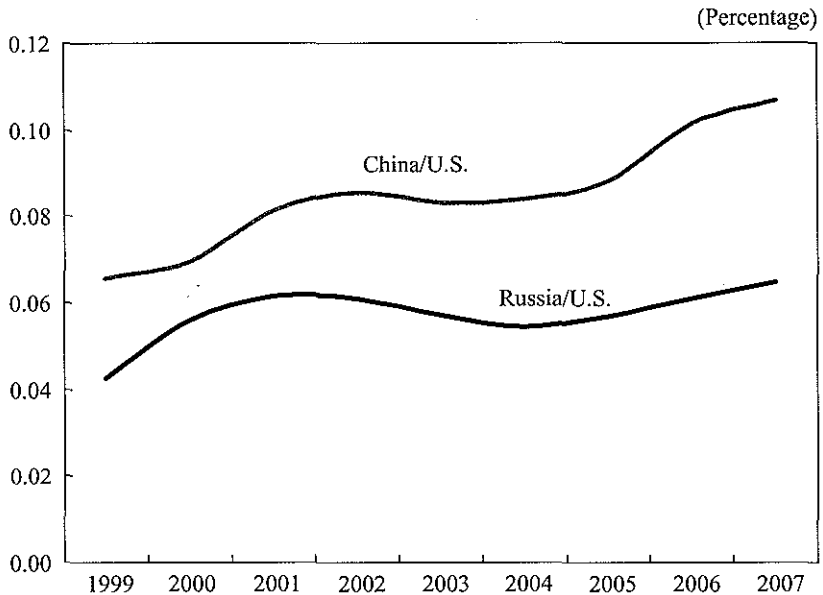
Figure 2
A Comparison of China's Rise and Russia's Rise
Against the U.S. (GDP)



Why has China not been flexing its political muscle with the West as Russia has?

China had a much larger GDP than Russia in 2000, the first year in which the Russian economy began to grow. At that time China's GDP was 12.21 percent that of the United States while Russia's was a mere 2.65 percent. After eight years of rapid growth in both countries, China's GDP was 29.46 percent that of the United States, while Russia's was 12.41 percent (see figure 2). China has been far ahead of Russia as a growing economic powerhouse and a challenger of U.S. hegemony. The same trend is apparent in military expenditure. China's spending was 6.95 percent that of the United States in 2000, while Russia's was 5.59 percent. In 2007, China's military expenditure had grown to 10.66 percent that of the United States, compared to Russia's 6.47 percent (see table 3). Neither was in a position to challenge U.S. military dominance, but Russia clearly trailed

Figure 3
A Comparison of China's Rise and Russia's Rise
Against the U.S. (Military Expenditure)



behind China in terms of funding for its military (see figure 3). This is the case even if we do not include the hidden military budget of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). It is obvious that China is in a stronger position to challenge the West than Russia.⁵¹

In terms of threats from the West, not only are there lingering ideological differences that provide easy ammunition for criticizing China's communist party dictatorship, and memories of the Tiananmen crackdown, but also concrete defense alliances that directly link the United States with

⁵¹Of course one needs to take into consideration Russia's advanced military technology, which is a legacy of the Soviet era, and its navy and satellites. However, even in those areas China is catching up with unprecedentedly ample funding.

China's immediate neighbors.⁵² The United States is interested in deploying missile defense systems on China's borders, just as it has done in Eastern Europe. The Taiwan issue is the most thorny, as the island is claimed by China while the United States is obligated to defend it in the event of a Chinese invasion. No such issue exists between Russia and the West. In short, ideological differences, bitter memories, threatening military alliances, missile defense systems, and the Taiwan issue seem to make it easier for China than for Russia to resort to anti-Western rhetoric and action.⁵³ Over the years, however, China has exercised much greater restraint than Russia, sporadic conflicts such as the Taiwan Strait missile crisis of 1995-96 and the EP-3 incident of 2001 notwithstanding. The basic attitude of the regime has always been to maintain a friendly international environment for China's peaceful rise, a strategy identical to that of Putin in his early years. The question is, if China can put up with Western pressure, why cannot Russia, particularly when the pressure on China is at least as great as that on Russia.

Russia and China, faced with a similar degree of hostility from the West, naturally cosy up to each other for strategic support. However, when push comes to shove, China has never seriously provoked the United States or the West. A vivid example of China complying with the wishes of the West is the way it has changed its policy toward Sudan over Darfur, switching from noninterference and respect for Sudanese sovereignty to agreeing to join the West in putting pressure on Khartoum. The missile crisis of 1995-96 was an attempt by China to put pressure on Taiwan; it was not precipitated by action against the United States, although Wash-

⁵²The increasingly close military cooperation among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia and the discussion of a North America-Asia treaty organization has further raised Beijing's anxiety about a U.S.-led military alliance against China modeled on NATO. See Ma Jianying, "Yazhouban Beiyue' yu Zhongguo yinying zhidao" (The Asian edition of NATO and the way China deals with it), *Lingdao kexue* (Science of Leadership) (Zhengzhou), no. 3 (March 2008): 50-52; and Charles E. Ziegler, "Russia and the CIS in 2007: Putin's Final Year?" *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1 (January-February 2008): 133-43.

⁵³One may even add the disturbance following the Mongolian elections in July 2008 which is widely considered in China as yet another attempt to foment a "color revolution" and build a pro-Western regime there.

ington's aircraft carriers came to the island's rescue. The EP-3 incident can hardly be blamed on the Chinese side, as it occurred after a U.S. spy plane collided with a PLA fighter jet in midair and landed without permission at a Chinese military airbase in Hainan (海南島). Neither Hu Jintao (胡錦濤) nor Jiang Zemin (江澤民) ever lambasted the United States as a threat to world peace as Putin has, or threatened military retaliation if the United States were to disregard China's core interests. When Putin stepped up his rhetoric against the West in mid-2006, China succumbed to international pressure and ordered its ambassador to the United Nations, Wang Guangya (王光亞), to pressure the Sudanese government into accepting a hybrid peacekeeping mission.⁵⁴ When Russia attempted to turn the Shanghai Cooperation Organization into a military bloc for collective security, it was given the cold shoulder by China.⁵⁵ In short, the abrupt surge in Russia's foreign policy has never been matched by China, although concerted action would be desirable from Moscow's point of view.⁵⁶ The contrast between Russia and China, two similarly situated countries, shows that increasing capability and Western pressure cannot fully explain Russia's abrupt switch to an anti-Western policy.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Chin-Hao Huang, "China's Evolving Perspective on Darfur: Significance and Policy Implications," *PacNet Newsletter*, no. 40 (July 25, 2008).

⁵⁵Huang, "Cong tuirang dao kangzheng," 172.

⁵⁶Zhang Jianrong, "Pujing shiqi de Eluosi jubian ji qi fazhan qushi" (The upheaval in Putin's Russia and its trend of development), *Eluosi zhongya dongou yanjiu*, no. 1 (January-February 2008): 83.

⁵⁷It can be argued that the difference between Russia's and China's attitudes toward the West is a reflection of the different approaches that the West adopts toward Russia and China. Russia has been treated as the successor to the Soviet Union, a country that must be contained by Western expansion into the ex-Soviet bloc. China, on the other hand, has always been treated more subtly, with due respect for its need for national dignity, and granted the role of a "responsible stakeholder." This differentiation in attitude provides the Russians with no incentive for self-restraint, hence their fierce response to the West's policies. However, the difference in the West's approaches to China and Russia is exactly based on the different strategies Beijing and Moscow have adopted toward the West: Beijing is generally patient and subtle, Moscow hasty and blunt. This brings us back to the reasons behind this difference.

Domestic Factors: The Electoral Cycle

Domestic politics has an impact on the external behavior of any country, and theories abound that seek to explain the linkage between domestic factors and foreign policy.⁵⁸ These theories, however, are not readily applicable to Russia, the world's second most powerful military power and a country with a unique cultural, historical, and geopolitical background. How does domestic politics affect Russia's security outlook? Have the most recent parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia had any impact on Moscow's foreign policy?

The linkage between domestic and international politics varies depending on the type of regime. The most important aspects of domestic politics are the contest for power and power transfer, for all political actors are primarily concerned with power. This observation leads us to look into the impact of the contest for power and power transfer on foreign policy-making in different regime types.

In a democracy, the electoral cycle is a critical factor in determining how domestic politics impacts on foreign policy. Because political parties are preoccupied with vote maximization during the election season, their stances on foreign affairs reflect the popular mood rather than international reality. When elections are over, it is natural for the incumbents to shift back to realism; thus foreign policy fluctuations are in sync with the electoral cycle.⁵⁹ However, whether this election/foreign policy cycle can be applied to Russia, a semi-authoritarian country, requires clarification.

⁵⁸Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, and Robert D. Putman, *Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining and Domestic Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Helen V. Milner, *Interests, Institutions, and Information: Domestic Politics and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

⁵⁹For an example, see Yu-Shan Wu, "Taiwan's Domestic Politics and Cross-Strait Relations," *The China Journal*, no. 53 (January 2005): 35-60; and Yu-Shan Wu, "Domestic Political Competition and Triangular Interactions Among Washington, Beijing, and Taipei: The U.S. China Policy," *Issues & Studies* 42, no. 1 (March 2006): 1-46.

Democratization in the former Soviet bloc countries gave rise to three types of regimes.⁶⁰ In Poland, the Czech Republic (and later Slovakia), Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, one finds nascent democratic regimes that basically adhere to the Western pattern. In each of these countries, one finds multiple transfers of power, consolidated democratic institutions, and accession to the EU as the final seal of approval by the West. Rumania and Bulgaria are the latest additions to this family of "stable nascent democracies." At the other extreme, one finds the "presidential autocracies" of Central Asia. With the exception of Kyrgyzstan, all the Central Asian states are dominated by former communist party first secretaries or top leaders. All of the first secretaries-turned-presidents have resorted to modifying their constitutions to make it possible for them to stay in their current positions for life. Here again—with the exception of Kyrgyzstan where the Tulip Revolution of March 2005 inspired inflated hopes of real democracy—none of these countries has experienced a transfer of power following the electoral defeat of an incumbent leader. Between the stable nascent democracies and presidential autocracies there is a group of "competitive authoritarian regimes" that allow competitive elections but curtail political freedoms and manipulate electoral rules to such an extent that the ruling elites are usually guaranteed victory. In these countries, the main purpose of elections is to legitimize the regime. Because of the existence of regular multiparty elections, these countries cannot be categorized as autocracies. However, owing to the concentration of political resources in the hands of the ruling elite, and the unscrupulous use of state power to favor the incumbent party, one cannot call them liberal democracies either. Competitive authoritarian regimes are inherently unstable. Sometimes the competitive aspect of the regime is strengthened and one does see a change of government. However, the norm is for the ruling elite to continue its rule. Because there is an inherent huge gap between what the competitive authoritarian regimes

⁶⁰Michael McFaul, "Transitions from Postcommunism," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 3 (July 2005): 5-19.

promise and what they deliver, anti-regime emotion tends to accumulate rapidly when there is a major political incident, say an obvious mismatch between the election result and people's widely shared expectations. It is these states that have experienced the "color revolutions."⁶¹

Russia is a typical example of competitive authoritarianism. Particularly during Putin's rule, there has been a serious curtailment of media freedom, the killing of whistle-blowing journalist Anna Politkovskaya, the imprisonment of a disobedient business tycoon (Mikhail Khodorkovskii), the murder of an overseas critic (Aleksandr Litvinenko), changes in the electoral rules to favor the ruling party (*Yedinaya Rossiya*, United Russia), and the concentration of power in the hands of the president with little heed for the separation of powers and the country's federal structure.⁶² On the other hand, Russia holds regular elections, there is still a viable opposition, and the president has not amended or violated the constitution to grant himself power for life. The regime is genuinely popular, on account of the spectacular rise in the country's wealth and power under Putin. Even if he had not bent the rules, Putin would in all likelihood have been victorious at the polls over the past eight years, although his victories would not have been as big for sure. So if a regime is both authoritarian and electorally competitive, what does that mean in terms of the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy? Does the electoral cycle play the same role as it does in a stable democracy? Does the ruling elite in Russia need electoral support as badly as its counterparts in the West?

The answer to all the above questions is a resounding "yes." It should be noted that Putin did not win the 2000 presidential election by fraud (nor

⁶¹ Wu Yu-Shan, "Yanse geming de xunuo yu juxian" (The promises and limitations of color revolutions), *Taiwan minzhu jikan* (Taiwan Democracy Quarterly) (Taipei) 4, no. 2 (April-June 2007): 67-112.

⁶² Other prominent features of Putin's authoritarian regime include the concentration of power in the presidential office as a parallel government, the transformation of the parliament into an extension of the administration through the dominant role of United Russia, virtual state control over the central election commission, near monopolization of the mass media by the state, the use of energy and other resources controlled by state enterprises for domestic and foreign policy purposes, the direct appointment of local heads of government, and periodic mobilization campaigns. See Lynch, "Pujing zhengquan jiaojie wenti he Eluosi wajiao," 19-20.

did his predecessor Yeltsin win the 1996 race by vote-rigging). Putin enjoyed high popularity as the country found itself fighting a war on terror and on separatism in Chechnya. Elections are real tests for the incumbents in Russia. Throughout the Yeltsin years, the opposition always posed a great threat to the ruling party by denying it a majority in the State Duma. It was only in 2003 that the pro-government party won a dominant position in the parliament, and it was only in 2007 that it gained an outright majority. Putin and his supporters could not be sure of victory in the elections and they needed to appeal to the voters. In national security and foreign policy, nothing can whip up pro-government sentiment better than mobilizing nationalism/patriotism and playing hardball against separatism and foreign powers. This was exactly what Putin and his team did in order to win elections, and they were extremely successful.⁶³

In 1999, Yeltsin found it difficult to find a successor with a good chance of winning the presidential election the following year. Putin was his fifth prime minister in two years, and he was preceded by Viktor Chernomyrdin, Sergei Kiriyenko, Yevgenii Primakov, and Sergi Stepashin. These rapid reshuffles of the government diminished the prestige of the office of prime minister. As a little-known politician from St. Petersburg and a former spy with a stint in Germany, Putin did not have a resumé that commanded national respect. However, Yeltsin's resignation at the end of 1999 turned Putin into acting president, and forced a new electoral schedule on the opposition, catching them by surprise. Above all, the start of the second Chechen war proved a very important factor in rallying Russian voters around their new leader. The war was preceded by a series of terrorist attacks in Moscow, including bombings in the subway and in apartment blocks, as well as incursions by Chechen rebels into Dagestan.

⁶³Some observers endorse the domestic explanation of Russia's foreign policy, but emphasize that Putin was beholden to his defense planners who constitute a critical domestic constituency, and not to the general public who were much more concerned with the consequences of strategic confrontation than their political leaders. See John Steinbruner and Nancy Gallagher, "If You Lead, They Will Follow: Public Opinion and Repairing the U.S.-Russian Strategic Relationship," *Arms Control Today* 38, no. 1 (January-February 2008): 24-30.

Horrified by these attacks, the Russian people naturally looked for a strongman to lead them in the fight against terrorism and separatism. Putin assiduously played that role and accused other presidential candidates of weakening the government at a time when the nation badly needed unity. That was the main reason why he won the 2000 presidential election—by playing the patriotic card and rallying the Russian voters around him at a time of national crisis.⁶⁴

As in 1999 and 2000, the surge of anti-Western rhetoric in mid-2006 was also timed to give a boost to the incumbent's chosen successor in the upcoming elections. Although Putin gained tremendous popularity as a result of Russia's remarkable economic performance, and his version of "sovereign democracy" seemed capable of maintaining political stability,⁶⁵ the question of political succession loomed large and troubled everyone. Putin was barred by the constitution from seeking a third term, but the country had never had a set of rules that guaranteed a smooth transfer of power, in either the imperial, Soviet, or post-Soviet eras.⁶⁶ Would Putin change the constitution to enable him to bid for a third term? Would he retire completely? Would he anoint a successor and then exercise ultimate power from behind the scenes? Or would he remain in the system as an important power-holder but yield the presidency to one of his protégés? As the 2008 election approached, there was more suspense and uncertainty in Russia than there had been at the time of the previous presidential election in 2004 when Putin was pretty much guaranteed to win. In 2008 it was not Putin running for the presidency, but his successor. For Putin, the less prestigious that person was the greater the chance he would have to control the political scene after his retirement from the presidency. Furthermore,

⁶⁴Li Chunyan, "Qianlun Pujing de Chechen zhengce" (A brief review of Putin's Chechen policy), *Xiboliya yanjiu* (Siberian Studies) (Harbin) 34, no. 3 (May-June 2007): 68.

⁶⁵Based on a multi-year panel survey, Putin's popularity rose from 46 percent to 55 percent from 2004 to 2007. In June 2007, 57 percent of the respondents thought that they had enough political freedoms, 25 percent more than expressed such a view in 1997. See Feng Shaolei, "2008 nian Eluosi zongtong xuanju yu Zhong-E guanxi" (The Russian presidential election of 2008 and Sino-Russian relations), *Eluosi yanjiu*, no. 3 (May-June 2007): 25.

⁶⁶Leon Aron, "After Putin, the Deluge?" *Current History* 106, no. 702 (October 2007): 307.

Putin would have to appoint his successor at the last minute so as to reduce the "lame duck" effect while he was still in office. This strategy of appointing a lightweight at the last minute made it inherently difficult for Putin's successor to get overwhelming approval from Russian voters who would not only have to love Putin, but have to love someone whom they had not thought much of until Putin's last-minute anointment. This was the source of anxiety. Furthermore, the country's economic performance could not be relied on, particularly as it hinged on world oil prices. West-bashing, on the other hand, was a more reliable source of popular support as resentment against the West ran deep among the Russian people. Even though Putin enjoyed tremendous popularity prior to the 2008 presidential election, whether that popularity would directly translate into support for the post-Putin system was much less sure. This meant no matter how Putin managed his succession, he would need to secure a big win in the 2007-08 parliamentary and presidential elections. A landslide victory was required to lay the foundation for the post-2008 regime in which Putin could not play the same role as he did in his second term.

It was under those circumstances that a reorientation of Russia's foreign policy took place. The pragmatist, economy-in-command posture was replaced by the hasty utterance of highly assertive, anti-Western remarks, without proper regard to their international impact. It was as if Putin had adopted a different personality, adhered to a different philosophy. The true intention behind the change in behavior patterns, however, was to whip up domestic support for the regime. Russians were so fed up with the West's patronizing and condescending attitudes that they fell easily into Putin's embrace when he lambasted the West. This made it more likely that they would support whatever solution Putin dreamt up for the succession and vote for whoever the popular president appointed. The regime was most vulnerable when it was going through a change of leadership, hence the need to strengthen its position by an assertive foreign policy, a policy that might not serve Russia's long-term international interests.⁶⁷ In short,

⁶⁷For example, it was utterly unrealistic for Putin to talk about confronting the United States

Russia's foreign policy surge went far beyond what its increase in power warranted. It was not rational on the international level, but perfectly so on the domestic level.

The Succession and Beyond

The succession went smoothly. Putin chose as his successor Dmitrii Medvedev, a first deputy prime minister and chairman of Gazprom's board of directors, and turned himself into the prime minister-cum-chairman of United Russia, the majority party in the State Duma. This way Putin did not violate the constitution, but remained in the power game by taking two commanding heights, the premiership and the chairmanship of the majority party. The successful execution of this plan, however, required the victory of United Russia and its presidential candidate, Medvedev, in the parliamentary and presidential elections. Even though the president and the government enjoyed great popularity, the regime took pains to make sure that the whole process went smoothly, and that popular support for Putin translated directly into support for his anointed successor.

Prior to the parliamentary elections, Putin's name was put at the top of United Russia's party list as an attraction for voters. This proved a very effective strategy. As the electoral system had by then shifted from one in which half of the 450 members of the State Duma were elected from party lists and half from single-member districts to a fully proportional representation system, the significance of political parties was increased and the composition of the party lists mattered a lot. On December 2, 2007, United Russia captured 64.3 percent of the popular vote, more than it had done four years previously. The Communist Party was a distant second with 11.6 percent of the vote, followed by Vladimir Zhirinovskii's Liberal-Democratic Party with 8.2 percent, and Fair Russia: Motherland, Pen-

militarily if the planned anti-ballistic missile system was deployed in frontline NATO countries; Putin himself was well aware that U.S. defense spending was 25 times as much as that of Russia. See Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly" (2006), 13.

Table 4
The Russian Parliamentary Elections of December 2, 2007

Political Party	Percentage
United Russia	64.3
Communist Party of the Russian Federation	11.6
Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia	8.2
Fair Russia: Motherland, Pensioners, Life	7.8
Agrarian Party of Russia	2.3
Russian United Democratic Party "YABLOKO"	1.6
Civil Force	1.1
Union of Rightist Forces	1.0
Patriots of Russia	0.9
Party of Social Justice	0.2
Democratic Party of Russia	0.1

Source: Tsentral'naya izbiratel' naya komissiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii, TsIK (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation), 2007, http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100021960186&vm=100100021960181®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100021960186&type=242 (accessed July 23, 2008).

sioners, Life (a staunchly pro-Putin party founded in 2006) with 7.8 percent (see table 4).⁶⁸ A clear majority party emerged in the State Duma, thanks to the highly popular president. On December 10 the leaders of four pro-government political parties, United Russia, Fair Russia, the Agrarian Party, and Civil Force, met Putin to recommend Medvedev as their presidential candidate and received Putin's endorsement. As many had expected, Putin designated his successor at the eleventh hour.⁶⁹ Medvedev's popularity immediately surged. One day later, Medvedev announced that he would ask Putin to become the prime minister and lead the government. In this scheme the two men would trade places: Putin would shift from president to premier, while Medvedev would shift from first deputy premier to president. On March 2, 2008, Medvedev received 70.28 percent of

⁶⁸A party needs to clear the 7 percent threshold to be allotted seats in the State Duma.

⁶⁹Lynch, "Pujing zhengquan jiaojie wenti he Eluosi wajiao," 20.

Table 5
The Russian Presidential Election of March 2, 2008

Candidate (Nominating Parties)	Votes	Percentage
Dmitrii Medvedev (United Russia, Fair Russia, Agrarian Party, Civil Force)	52,530,712	70.28
Gennadii Zyuganov (Communist Party of the Russian Federation)	13,243,550	17.72
Vladimir Zhirinovskii (Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia)	6,988,510	9.35
Andrei Bogdanov (Democratic Party of Russia)	968,344	1.30
Invalid Ballots	1,015,533	1.35
Total	73,731,116	100.00

Source: Tsentral'naya izbiratel'naya komissiya Rossiiskoi Federatsii, TsIK (Central Election Commission of the Russian Federation), 2008. http://www.vybory.izbirkom.ru/region/region/izbirkom?action=show&root=1&tvd=100100022249920&vm=100100022176412®ion=0&global=1&sub_region=0&prver=0&pronetvd=null&vibid=100100022249920&type=227 (accessed July 23, 2008).

the popular vote in the presidential election, beating Gennadii Zyuganov of the Communist Party (17.72 percent) and Vladimir Zhirinovskii of the Liberal-Democratic Party (9.35 percent) (table 5). Medvedev was inaugurated on May 7, and swiftly appointed Putin as his prime minister. The power transition was complete.

With the succession completed, a major domestic factor that accounted for the surge in Russia's foreign policy was removed. There is no longer an urgent need to whip up anti-Western sentiment for domestic purposes, at least not for electoral reasons. The Russian electorate has diligently cast its votes in the way it was expected to do. Based on this logic, it seems that one may expect a toning down of rhetoric and a moderation of action from Moscow vis-à-vis the West. However, there are several caveats that require attention here.

Putin may have secured a smooth transition of power, but the new system he created is so unique and delicate that a new battle for power may

erupt within the regime. Putin has little institutional power vis-à-vis his successor, but he has great informal power, while for Medvedev the opposite is true. Standing on two different power bases, the two men are in a delicate balance, even though Putin's position was initially much stronger. This peculiar and delicate balance between the president and the prime minister may later turn out to be a source of conflict, as Medvedev may wish to exercise his formal power to an extent that goes beyond what Putin considers proper, while Putin may wish to remain the ultimate ruler of the country without due respect for Medvedev's formal authority.⁷⁰ Already the two have expressed different views concerning where the ultimate ruling power lies: while Putin insisted that the premier-led federal government is the highest executive authority in Russia, Medvedev asserted that according to the constitution the president is the only power center.⁷¹ The slump in the market price of oil in late 2008 and the rapid deterioration of Russia's economic situation as a result of the international financial crisis will provide plenty of opportunities for the president and the prime minister to disagree on how to rescue the economy, and on whether the government has been doing enough and doing it efficiently.⁷² It is possible that a struggle for power between the mentor and his protégé has already

⁷⁰This is a typical situation when the institutional and informal powers in a political system are pitted against each other. In a sense, what Putin expects may be a Chinese scenario in which a veteran leader calls the shots from behind the scenes, à la Deng Xiaoping. However, in China Deng could afford to retire from all his positions in the party, the government, and the military and rely on his revolutionary credentials, whereas Putin in Russia lacks such credentials entirely. By having himself made premier and chairman of the majority party, Putin has suggested that he was not confident of his informal power base, and was thus in need of the guarantees offered by institutional positions. It may turn out that Jiang Zemin's failed attempt to stay in the power center after his retirement from the position of CCP general secretary is a more appropriate analogy. Furthermore, just because China experienced a period of mentor politics, this does not mean that Russia is also capable of doing the same, as there has never been any general secretary or president in the Kremlin who reigned but did not rule.

⁷¹Liang Qiang, "Meidewei jiefu zhi mi" (The myth of Medvedev), *Nanfengchuang* (For the Public Good) (Guangzhou), no. 6 (June 2008): 78.

⁷²On several occasions Medvedev has lambasted Putin's government for its slowness in implementing anti-crisis policies. See "Russia's Medvedev Slams Slow Response to Economic Crisis," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty News*, February 20, 2009, http://www.rferl.org/content/Russias_Medvedev_Slams_Slow_Response_To_Crisis/1496542.html (accessed February 22, 2009).

begun.⁷³ One can even detect different power blocs forming around them, pitted against each other and vying for influence. The two power centers may not see eye to eye on foreign policy, with one sticking to the confrontational tone of the last president, while the other attempts to reconcile Russia's differences with the West.⁷⁴ It is not untypical for a president and a prime minister in a semi-presidential system to collide over foreign policy, especially when the pecking order between the two has not been fully established. Russia may move into that situation. The internal differences and competition may not necessarily lead to the weakening of the diarchy, but they certainly have the potential to thwart any moderation of foreign policy.⁷⁵ Competing factions may trade vetoes on any policy initiative proposed by the other side and torpedo rapprochement with the West. The security-centered faction in particular has such a tendency. In this way, the peculiar power arrangement in Russia may act to hinder the advent of Russia-Western reconciliation. As Medvedev is only in the early stage

⁷³The constitutional amendment that extends the presidential term from four to six years is widely seen as preparation for a Putin comeback after Medvedev's current term ends in 2012 (or even earlier). It was rushed through the Russian parliament and the nation's provincial legislatures in fifty days and signed by Medvedev on December 30, 2008. This development may actually precipitate the competition between the two top leaders by denying Medvedev the possibility of a second term, should that be the design behind the engineering of the amendment.

⁷⁴There has already been a lot of discussion about whether Medvedev is more liberal than his predecessor, and more willing to risk stability by introducing reforms that can energize the country. See note 71 above. The fact that Putin chose Medvedev as his successor, instead of someone from the military-security complex, such as First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, suggests that Putin wanted to maintain a manageable relationship with the West. This is a choice of economy over security, pragmatism over nationalism. When Putin was president, the competition between Medvedev and Ivanov to succeed him was also a competition between two trends of thought that coexisted under Putin for dominance in the post-Putin era. See Lynch, "Pujing zhengquan jiaojie wenti he Eluosi wajijiao," 20, 23. Medvedev represents the energy elite who are not afraid to use energy as a weapon, mainly for the purpose of developing Russia's economy. Ivanov, on the other hand, represents the security elite who are hyperconscious of the West's encroachment on Russia's traditional spheres of interest. The latter were losers in the bid for the presidency, and are obviously disgruntled. They are poised to oppose any moderation of Russia's foreign policy line established in the last years of Putin's rule.

⁷⁵For the view that the Putin-Medvedev diarchy may be an imperfect, but working, tandem, see Robert Coalson, "Baby Steps?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: The Power Vertical Feature*, January 30, 2009, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Blog/1376981.html> (accessed February 9, 2008).

of his presidency, whether any of this will come about remains to be seen, although there are signs pointing in that direction. With a solid economic background and experience in Gazprom, Medvedev naturally holds a more moderate line compared to that of his predecessor, and yet the competition between the two top leaders has made it difficult for Medvedev to tone down Russia's anti-West rhetoric.

Another caveat is whether there is ratchet effect working in Russia's foreign policymaking, i.e., whether the assertiveness of Putin's hard-line policy is irreversible once it reaches a certain level, particularly with international factors (rising Russian power and incessant Western encroachment) working in the same direction. Up to this point, there has not been any obvious deviation in Russia's foreign policy away from the tone set by Putin toward the West.⁷⁶ Russia and China are still united in their common opposition to U.S. unilateralism and Western interference in other countries' internal affairs, with Moscow speaking out more bluntly than Beijing. Medvedev has labeled countries that consider themselves "spreaders of civilization and emancipators" as Fascists who think they can ignore history and arbitrarily impose solutions to fundamental problems.⁷⁷ Medvedev's first foreign trip was to China, via Kazakhstan. The U.S. plan to deploy anti-ballistic missile systems in the Czech Republic and Poland is still angering Moscow, and drawing fierce criticism and even threats of military confrontation.⁷⁸ The conflict in Georgia intensified the antagonism between Russia and the West, as the daring and flamboyant Saa-

⁷⁶One can compare the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2000 under Putin, with the one adopted in 2008 under Medvedev. The basic principles remain the same. See Dmitrii Medvedev, "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," July 12, 2008, <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml> (accessed August 10, 2008).

⁷⁷Huang Yinan, "Meidewejijiefu chanshu Eluosi wajijiao xinluxian" (Medvedev expounds Russia's new foreign policy line), *Eluosi xinwenwang* (RUSNEWS.CN), July 16, 2008, <http://big5.rusnews.cn/xinwentoushi/20080716/42205293.html> (accessed July 20, 2008).

⁷⁸In July, Russia's *Izvestia* newspaper quoted a "highly placed source" as saying Russia could land Tu-160 supersonic bombers, nicknamed "White Swans," in Cuba in response to the planned U.S. missile defense shield in Europe. The report drew a strong response from the U.S. military and was later denied by Russian officials. It could have been a veiled threat from Moscow to test the response of the United States and draw public attention to the issue.

kashvilli risked a Russian invasion by shelling Tskhivalli, the capital of South Ossetia, in an attempt to recover the breakaway region that had been under virtual Russian occupation. When the United States responded by signing an agreement with Poland to secure the stationing of intercepting missiles in that country, Russian anger was fueled further. It is obvious that international confrontation of this kind is cancelling out the opportunity offered by the electoral cycles in Russia, and diminishing the possibility of rapprochement.

As far as East Asia is concerned, there have been signs of moderation since the election. There is a need to differentiate between Moscow's attitudes toward China and Japan. A surge in Russia's foreign policy vis-à-vis the West directly translates into a drive to seek better relations with China as a counterweight to Western dominance.⁷⁹ The same surge had a different meaning entirely for Japan, which is considered a staunch ally of Washington in Northeast Asia. Because of the great strategic value of China for a resurgent Russia, both in geopolitical and economic (arms sales) terms, Moscow has always suppressed local concerns about Chinese migration into the Russian Far East and that region's vulnerability resulting from its economic dependence on China.⁸⁰ Sino-Russian relations have always been cast in the most positive language by Putin.⁸¹ The Russian foreign policy surge coincided with the "Year of Russia in China" (2006) and the "Year of China in Russia" (2007). The signing of a demarcation pact in July 2008 concerning the border along the Amur River (Heilongjiang, 黑龍江), which ended the forty-year-long border dispute between the two

⁷⁹Ziegler, "Russia and the CIS in 2007: Putin's Final Year?" 139.

⁸⁰Viktor Larin, *Kitai i Dal'nii Vostok Rossii v pervoi polovine 90-kh: Problemy regional'nogo vzaimodeistviia* (China and Russia's Far East in the first half of the 1990s: problems of regional interaction) (Vladivostok: Dal'nauka, 1998).

⁸¹Putin's characterization of the Sino-Russian relationship at a meeting with Russia's ambassadors and permanent representatives on June 27, 2006, is typical: "Russia's friendly ties with the People's Republic of China have become all-encompassing in nature. We see our main task as being not to preserve what we have achieved thus far but to take new steps in order to further expand the partnership between Russia and China." See Putin, "There Are More Benefits to Be Gained through Friendship with Modern Russia," 1-7.

countries, was a clear sign of Moscow's intention to strengthen Sino-Russian relations.⁸² As China is of great importance to Russia both in strategic and economic terms, one should expect good relations even if the Putin surge is brought to an end and moderation reigns in Russia's foreign policy, as in 2000 through 2006.⁸³

This contrasts sharply with a similar territorial dispute with Japan over the four Kuril Islands, the only outstanding political issue between Moscow and Tokyo. In the foreign policy surge of 2006-07, Putin took a high-handed attitude over this issue, reminiscent of the Soviet Union's Cold War policy.⁸⁴ He seemed to recognize only the 1956 Joint Declaration which stipulates that the Soviet Union would hand over to Japan only two of the four islands in dispute (Habomai and Shikotan, not Iturup or Kunashir) after the conclusion of a peace treaty, ignoring the 1993 Tokyo Declaration which brought all of the four islands into consideration.⁸⁵ The advent of the post-Putin era bodes well for an improvement in Moscow-Tokyo relations. Judging from the two meetings between Medvedev and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan, the high-handed and coercive remarks of Putin are a thing of the past.⁸⁶ The meeting between Taro Aso, Fukuda's successor, and Medvedev in February 2009 in Sakhalin further

⁸²Kommersant, "Russia, China Settled Demarcation of Amur Islands," July 21, 2008, http://www.kommersant.com/p-12880/r_527/Amur_demarcation/ (accessed July 21, 2008).

⁸³The Sino-Russian relationship during that period was characterized by great amity, as evidenced by the 2001 Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship signed by Putin and President Jiang Zemin of China, and the first joint military exercises by the two countries in 2005. See Viktor Larin, "Pujing de dui Hua zhengce" (Putin's China policy), *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi* (World Economics and Politics) (Beijing), no. 6 (June 2007): 55-60. This shows that Moscow is unlikely to stop cultivating good relations with Beijing when it improves ties with the West.

⁸⁴At the height of Russia's foreign policy surge, Putin said that if the Japanese want to "play samurais and brandish swords, then we can play at this game too, get our swords out and run about and shout." See Vladimir Putin, "One Must Always Strive to Attain Big Victories," *International Affairs* 52, no. 2 (April 2006): 1-7.

⁸⁵Masamori Sase, "Japan-Russia Relations After Putin," *AJISS-Commentary*, no. 38 (August 1, 2008), http://www.jiia.or.jp/en_commentary/200808/01-1.html (accessed August 1, 2008).

⁸⁶Dmitrii Medvedev, "Press Conferences, Meetings with the Press, Press Statements," July 9, 2008, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/07/09/2235_type82914type82915.shtml (accessed July 21, 2008).

confirmed the moderate and cooperative line of the new Russian president. The Japanese are anxiously waiting for Prime Minister Putin's visit this summer to see if such a change is also evident with the president-turned-premier, and whether the two countries can move closer on the territorial dispute, following the example of the successful agreement between Russia and China. Thus far, Medvedev's diplomatic performance in dealing with Japan confirms that he is more moderate than Putin, but given Japan's role as the most ardent ally of the United States in Asia, and the constraints on Medvedev's authority, there are clearly limits to the improvement of Russo-Japanese relations at this early stage of Medvedev's presidency.



This paper proposes a domestic electoral explanation for Russia's foreign policy surge during Putin's second term. It argues that it was not the rising power of Russia or the incessant Western encroachment on Russia's core interests that prompted the abrupt surge in mid-2006 that shocked observers around the world. Instead, it points out the significance of Putin's succession, and the domestic need, in the face of electoral competition, to appeal to anti-Western sentiment within Russia through an assertive foreign policy. Russia's rising power and Western encroachment were also important, however, in that they provided the necessary background conditions for Putin to change his foreign policy. However, those factors alone could not account for the *timing* and *abruptness* of the surge. Here a domestic explanation linked to the electoral cycle comes in. As such, a full explanation of the policy surge would have to include all three factors, with the international ones constituting the background and electoral competition functioning as the catalyst. The momentum is provided by the former, but the *timing* and *abruptness*, or the *way* in which the surge took place, can be attributed mainly to Russia's domestic politics. As foreign policy is made by the ruling elite, their political calculations must be part of any major policy shift. In this case, no matter how confident members of the elite were about Russia's newly regained national strength, or how indignant they were over the West's eastward expansion, they would not

have engineered a realignment of foreign policy without taking into account domestic political implications. A comparison with China, a similarly situated continental power, shows that if international factors are sufficient explanation for foreign policy changes, then Beijing should have taken a much more assertive attitude toward the West than Moscow. The fact that this has not happened points to a major difference between Russia and China: the lack of electoral competition and the need to whip up anti-Western sentiment for electoral purposes in China. Even though Russia is not a typical liberal democracy, but a prominent case of "competitive authoritarianism," the regime still needs regular electoral victories to stay in power, and that makes a lot of difference.

Given the importance of electoral competition, one would expect Moscow's post-election foreign policy to be different from that under Putin. This is not apparent as yet, probably because the new president has been in office for less than a year and because of the conflict in Georgia. In addition to the extremely unfavorable international environment, there are other factors that may work to prevent the emergence of a realistic and moderate foreign policy line in Moscow. One is that the delicate balance that Putin has created between himself and Medvedev may not survive long, for the great gap between institutional and informal powers will naturally breed miscalculation, frustration, and competition between the two power centers. Conflict over foreign policy is a likely result under those circumstances. Even if the tandem still works, internal competition may act to thwart any major policy change, especially when competing factions are afraid of appearing submissive in the face of foreign pressure. The other factor is the ratchet effect by which a jacked-up, assertive foreign policy does not lend itself easily to moderation, particularly with international factors working in the opposite direction. In order to test the relative validity of the various explanations of Russia's foreign policy, one needs to make steady observations over time. Those in the West who want to encourage Russia to tone down its bellicose rhetoric should seize the current window of opportunity, i.e., the inter-election period, to cultivate better ties with Moscow, especially with the new president. Although Russia may not respond swiftly to friendly gestures by the West, one can easily appreciate

the importance of not trampling on Russia's core interests. Any such move may dampen the possibility of rapprochement offered by reduced political competition in Russia. Once the current window of opportunity is shut, and political competition intensifies in Russia with the approach of new elections, the prospects for a smoother Western-Russian relationship will dim. As Russia's foreign policy posture toward Asia is basically a function of Moscow's attitude toward the West, the deterioration of the Western-Russian relationship bodes ill for most countries in the region, with their close connections with the United States. China remains a conspicuous exception to this rule. It stands to benefit from increasing tension between Russia and the West.

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