

# Russians Surprise U.S. at Forum; Say European, Not U.S. Relations Key

by William Jones

It was a rude awakening for Washington policy elites as a variety of Russian officials, think-tankers, and academics gathered in Washington on June 8-9 to attend a conference entitled "Russia—Ten Years After." The conference, sponsored by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was the first major conference of its kind held in Washington since the election of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation.

Although there was a broad range of views represented here, one thing was clear—Russia under the Putin government was seeking a different direction than the "Washington Consensus" of the 1990s, to resolve its serious economic problems. International Monetary Fund "experts" such as Jeffrey Sachs and Anders Åslund registered surprise at this, though they should not have, since Russia had been pushed to the point of national economic suicide. Åslund still made a rather pathetic attempt to defend the achievements of the "shock therapy" policy in his speech to the Carnegie gathering.

The decision announced by Russian Transportation Minister Sergei Frank on May 15, to move forward with an upgrading of Russia's transport and railroad system—in particular, the upgrading of the strategic Trans-Siberian Railroad and the construction of a new system from Russia through Iran to India—indicated that Putin is moving in the direction of the policy proposed by U.S. statesman and economist Lyndon LaRouche for the creation of a Eurasian Land-Bridge, creating corridors of development through the Eurasian heartland.

This "shift" in Russian policy became manifest from the beginning of the conference. The keynote speaker on the day's first panel was none other than Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of the prime perpetrators in launching the Central Asian "Arc of Crisis," during the 1970s, supporting those Islamic fundamentalists which were fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan, and which today are threatening the United States with their own brand of a terrorist "jihad."

As could be predicted, Brzezinski was very provocative.

Noting first of all that "the Russian socioeconomic system has been essentially a failure because of 70 years of communism," Brzezinski brayed that the United States, "whether it

likes it or not," is the "preponderant global power," adding the caveat that "the United States has to learn how to accommodate to its friends and even to its adversaries while exercising at the same time its preponderance." The task in exerting that "preponderant global power," Brzezinski went on, "was to construct structures, which would be more stable and to which insofar as our topic today is concerned, Russia will gradually have to adjust."

"And the most important of these is the enlargement of the European Union and the enlargement of NATO," Brzezinski said. "Both will happen. Both will take place. And opposition to them is futile," Brzezinski trumpeted. "Accommodation to them can be constructive. And I am quite confident when I say here on this platform that there will be significant enlargement of NATO. And there will be enlargement of the EU. And that creates a hard core for the international system that is very fluid, a Euro-Atlantic hard-core." This policy was later supported by Strobe Talbott, the Clinton point-man on Russia, who was to play the role of "dove" to Brzezinski's "hawk." Brzezinski then used Talbott's support for NATO expansion into the Baltic states as "proof" that this provocative policy had bipartisan support.

## Russia as a Part of Europe

The first Russian response to Brzezinski was from Vladimir Lukin, the Deputy Speaker of the Russian State Duma (lower House of Parliament). "If you look at your relations with Europe, you see that . . . there are very difficult problems which lie between us. More than that, I would be so bold as to affirm that in the last decade . . . the United States has been perceived in Europe as a less and less European country, culturally, psychologically.

"Russia, despite all its contradictions, all its problems, is being perceived as a more and more European country for many reasons. If we take China, there is another problem. If we take Japan, there is different kind of problem, which leads to some tension between them and the United States, not to speak about U.S. relations with the Third World. So, the problem of getting along on the bilateral level is a part of the problem of getting along with the United States more generally," Lukin said. "And I insist that Russia now is not

the one which is being perceived as absolutely outside of the world community vis-à-vis the relations with the United States.”

One of the problems, is “the problem of the change of administrations in your country,” Lukin continued. “Under Clinton the United States pretended to be the leading political power in the world, and not without reason. Of course, everybody knew the reasoning of the United States . . . that somehow the United States was a more humane, more noble country, more dedicated to the basic, correct, human values, universal values. So, it deserves to be leader. Very good! I can get along with it, if it is true in practice.”

“But now the United States says, ‘Yes, we have to play a leading role because we are the United States, because we are strong, and because we know something you don’t know.’ ” Lukin made the comparison to the way the Communist Party used to claim for itself the “leading role.” “And that was not so successful,” he noted. “Yes, we accept that you are leaders, but you must prove that you are capable to be leaders in your actions, not in your metaphysical self-perception, but in your concrete actions. And in this situation, there are problems. There are problems in various regions in crisis. The United States throws aside everybody in resolving the Middle East crisis, and suddenly becomes not only the leader, but the only country which has pledged to resolve it. The results, unfortunately—very unfortunately for everybody—have not been successful. So the capacity of the United States to unite, to convince, to elaborate programs, and to walk with others in collective actions, remains to be improved, to say the least.”

Then Lukin added a most telling, significant comment, indicating the new, evolving geometry in Russia foreign policy: “But the most natural direction of Russia development is to return to Europe. . . . Problems between Europe and the United States will be developing, but it is something of an objective, long-term reality, and the less Russia interferes in these, the better for Russia. But Russia will positively become part of Europe. In that way, outside relations with the United States should be very good,” he said.

In a similar vein, albeit even more outspoken, was the next speaker, Sergei Rogov, the director of the U.S.A.-Canada Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences. “The first point to be noted, is that Russian-American relations are no more central to the international system, like they used to be for many decades,” Rogov said. “I think we have about 18 months to fix Russian-American relations, because by the end of the next year, three negative developments could overlap. And really, we could reach the point of no return in Russian-American relations. One would be a unilateral American decision on ballistic missile deployment. The second would be a NATO decision on enlargement despite Russian protests, including the Baltic states. And the third, would be the decline in oil prices, which would make it impossible for Russia to pay the foreign debt in 2003, when that payment will jump.

“If all these events coincide, then the Russian-American relations would go into a completely different direction. Then, all the talk about a Russian-Chinese strategic alliance, Russia and China jointly trying to oppose the United States, in a way Russia becoming junior brother for China: this talk might become reality. And that’s why I just want to emphasize the feeling of urgency.”

At that point, Talbott became a bit peeved. “I think it is shibboleth to talk about or to threaten us, as it were, with the China card,” Talbott bristled. “I’m not a China expert. There are people in this room who are. I am deeply skeptical about whether Russia has an option or, indeed, whether China has an option of some kind of sustained, strategic partnership against the United States. It has an opportunity in the near term, which, by the way, I think it shares with countries like France, of ganging up against the United States on certain specific issues, because of this problem they see of the preeminence of American power. But I do not think it is helpful or accurate to wave in our faces the danger that if we don’t get it right in the next year, Russia and China are going to go off together for the rest of the century.”

### **And the Eurasian Land-Bridge?**

Talbott’s heated response, however, raised the real question, brought up by this reporter to the keynote panel. “Dr. Brzezinski has spoken of the 70 years of socialism in Russia which have ended in total failure. But what we’re also talking about today are the ten years of unbridled capitalism which have brought Russia more to the brink of an abyss than those 70 years of socialism. The policy is now towards creating the physical infrastructure which has been destroyed over so many years. It seems that President Putin is pursuing what we have called for the past ten years the Eurasian Land-Bridge policy, engaging Russia, China, the Central Asian countries in that effort. Is it not now time, when Putin has now begun to initiate a Witte or Hamiltonian policy, for the United States to give its support to the construction of this Eurasian Land-Bridge as a hope for the countries in the area and for the world as a whole?”

Brzezinski replied icily, “Maybe.” Talbott, who unlike the crazed Cold Warrior Brzezinski, has been considered supportive of Russia’s development efforts, would not respond to that all-important question. And yet, on the U.S. response to that new political orientation, will probably depend the very future of a stable U.S.-Russian relationship.

Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr. wrote in a recent memo: “The key to a global economic and related recovery lies within the Eurasian development perspective as I have defined that. However, the likelihood is that unless the U.S.A. comes to play a positive, collaborative role in that Eurasia project, success is doubtful. Hence, the moral persons, the only actual Christians, in the U.S. today, are those devoted patriots of the U.S. who will, as patriots, work to bring this nation quickly into its proper role in the crisis-ridden world of today.”