



**Testimony before the
Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats
United States House of Representatives**

**“Russia – U.S. Relations and Emerging
Threats to National Security”**

March 9, 2005

A Statement by

**Celeste A. Wallander
Director, Russia and Eurasia Program, and Trustee
Fellow**

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Director of the Russia and Eurasia Program, and Trustee Fellow
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“Developments in U.S.-Russian Relations”

Mr. Chairman, and Mr. Wexler, thank you for this opportunity to speak with you about the U.S. – Russia relationship. The U.S.- Russia relationship is multidimensional, and Russian foreign policy faces many challenges. As we have seen in the last year, that combination has created a number of strains in the relationship which create potential negative effects on the ability of the two countries to cooperate in meeting 21st century emerging threats. Yet despite the strains, both the need and potential for US-Russian cooperation remains great. We are all indebted to this committee for its work to assess the relationship in a serious manner in order to support a sensible and productive U.S. engagement with Russia that balances opportunities with realistic analysis.

Russia has been living with the complex and serious challenges of “emerging threats” environment for at least as long as the United States, and in many respects its experience has been far more immediate and tangible. This experience has been filtered through the Putin leadership’s broader approach to and priorities on foreign policy. In particular, there is a problematic disjuncture between the leadership’s overall traditionalist great power foreign policy

approach and the complex set of traditional and emerging security threats it – and the United States – face.

Russian foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin, like Russian foreign policy under President Boris Yeltsin before it, involves participation in the global economy in order to stimulate growth. Unlike Yeltsin's foreign policy, however, which sought global economic integration for leverage in changing the domestic political economic system, the role of economic growth in Putin's foreign policy has a different immediate primary objective. Economic growth is instrumental to the core objective of establishing Russia as an influential, autonomous, and accepted great power.

For example, increased appreciation of the power, economic value of energy assets and transit corridors have contributed to a greater, and more strategic, focus on Europe and Asia, and Russia's interest in international trade and business is not limited to interest and activity in the West, but applies as much to relations with the countries of what Russia continues to conceptualize as the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Russia's foreign policy strategy by 2005 is internationalist, but it is also statist, and most certainly not liberal. Trade is fine, but foreign ownership of Russian oil or gas is not, because international business brings transparency and the primacy of commercial interests to policy. International summits and modern global media technologies are useful, but only if their message is controlled by the Russian state. Opportunities for great power partnership to address

global security and political challenges such as transnational terrorism, proliferation, and trafficking are part of Russia's proper status as a great power member of the UN Security Council and the G8, but the international community is not welcome to offer its views on whether Russia's elections are free and fair.

One effect of the great power focus of Putin's internationalist foreign policy has been the rise of geopolitics in Russian strategy and priorities. As a 19th century European great power approach to security and diplomacy, Putin's foreign policy is more attuned to the value of regional bilateral relationships for their security, political, and economic value. While trade with any country is important if it increases Russian economic well-being, trade with regional powers such as China and Iran is all the more important for the political relationships it helps to build. While good relations with the United States important as part of the Russian goal for membership in the World Trade Organization and the economic benefits membership brings, economic growth cannot trump Russian understanding of its need for strategic security in Eurasia. Expecting Russia, for example, to trade close economic and political ties with Central Asia or Ukraine for WTO membership is fruitless, because both are high priority components of Russia's strategy for re-building and reinforcing itself as a great power.

Russia's approach to the foreign policy challenges of terrorism, proliferation, international criminal networks, and other aspects of "emerging threats" is geopolitical and filtered through the leadership's great power objectives. This means that while Russia's concern about transnational terrorism is genuine, the concern is not only to prevent 9/11-type or Beslan-type attacks, but also to maintain Russia's prerogatives to act with a high degree of autonomy in

regions around its borders, and with full autonomy within its borders. It means that while the Russian leadership has no interest in seeing Iran obtain WMD capabilities, it does have a very strong interest in both profiting from sales of technology to Iran and maintaining strong political relations with its leadership. It means that while Russia has little to gain from China's rise as a military power with potential designs on Russian territory or with the capacity to counterbalance Russian influence in Asia, it does have a very strong interest in selling energy and arms to the Chinese leadership, and in joining with China to try to balance U.S. influence in Asia and to insist that the U.S. live within the rules and constraints of international law.

In this context, the Russian leadership unfortunately sees U.S. policies as part of the problem it faces in its objectives to establish itself as a great power. Because the Putin leadership views emerging threats such as transnational terrorism and proliferation through the lens of geopolitical and traditional 19th century great power concerns, it imputes that perspective to what, in the Russian view, must be the true basis for U.S. policies and actions. This is why, for example, the Putin leadership does not see the establishment of U.S. political-military relationships in Eurasia as an effort to respond to transnational terrorist and criminal networks that intersect with proliferation vulnerabilities. Russian leaders assume a great power and geopolitical framework in U.S. policy, so instead they see the net of U.S. relationships in Eurasia as a form of neo-containment meant to restrict Russian power and influence.

Similarly, Russia's response to U.S. involvement in transatlantic efforts to support free and fair presidential elections in Ukraine in fall 2004 was related to Russia's assumption that the stakes were geopolitical and related to its relative status as a great power, rather than accepting

that U.S. policy was motivated by the U.S. belief that the establishment of democracies throughout Europe and Eurasia serves the long-term goal of undermining the sources of emerging threats – weak, corrupt, and failed states. There are other important reasons for Russia’s self-defeating and failed policy on Ukraine in late 2004 – not least the closed and non-democratic nature of its political system – but in thinking about future U.S.-Russian interactions in Europe and Eurasia it is most important to understand (if not to agree with or condone) the Russian leadership’s suspicions that the U.S. is primarily motivated by a great power strategy meant to enfeeble and constrain Russia in its own backyard.

Under these circumstances, the challenge for the United States is

- to continue to cooperate with a Russia that is suspicious of our motivations and strategy
- to continue to engage Russia in international integration and diverse bilateral programs that span security, political, economic, and social dimensions
- to continue the U.S. commitment to practical policies for the development of elections, rule of law, independent media, a robust legal system, protection of human rights, and economic development as the only workable long-term strategy to counter the sources of emerging threats throughout Eurasia
- and to continue through contacts at all levels of government and non-governmental institutions efforts to break through the closed decisionmaking structures that Russia has become burdened with in order to help the Russian leadership and the Russian people to evolve from a comfortable but problematic world view that is stuck in a form of diplomacy, great power

politics, and geopolitical concerns which do not allow the country to reach its full potential as a prosperous and secure partner in the 21st century.