

PAX MEDVEDICA: MEDVEDEV'S RUSSIA EMERGES FROM THE DEFENSIVE

Gleb Pavlovsky

EX OFFICIO



GLEB PAVLOVSKY
is the President of the
Foundation for Effective Policy
and the Editor-in-Chief of the
'Russian Journal'.
Gleb Pavlovsky is the moderator
of Global policy forum section
in Yaroslavl in 2010

1.

In a relatively short time, Russia's foreign affairs, which seemed to be stuck in a rut at the end of the last year, has recently scored a series of breakthroughs. After the elections in Ukraine and the signing of the START Treaty with Obama, Russia has found itself in a different world. In this world, things which were once considered impossible have become a reality, like the agreement with Kiev regarding the prolonged lease of the Black Sea Fleet base in Sevastopol. Problems which were thought to be eternal are now being resolved, for example, the demarcation of borders with Norway in the Arctic and the Barents Sea. Simultaneously, the penultimate 'revolutionary' regime in Kyrgyzstan is breaking down and the matrix of orange and colour revolutions is ceasing to exist.

These achievements came to Medvedev as though out of thin air. That is actually the way that

things seem to happen in politics; you work hard and you think that it's all in vain, and then another person comes and reaps your harvest. **There is no doubt that, in the sphere of foreign policy, Medvedev is reaping the fruits of Putin's "pressure squeeze"** which was sometimes successful, and sometimes not, including the instance of his Munich speech. The results of this approach ranged from the Georgian war and "reset" in relations with Obama, to the collapse of the colour revolution's matrix in the post-Soviet sphere and the phenomenal agreement with Ukraine regarding the Black Sea Fleet. This refers to Poland as well. Putin took steps toward détente long before the Smolensk tragedy occurred.

The reverse also holds true. The leadership image of Putin in the world two years after he stepped down from the presidency, is the result of Medvedev's achievements. Recognition of Putin's post-presidential authority is also an appreciation of his correct choice of a successor.

2.

Putin conducted foreign policy while Russian policy was in a state of siege. When he came to power, Russia was not in a much better situation than Yugoslavia. On any issue, the behaviour patterns of the West in relation to Yugoslavia and in relation to Russia were pretty much the same with minor variations (minus bombing attacks). It was clear that the West did not intend to change their approach to Russia. Putin was besieged on the very first day of his presidency. He managed to break out of this conundrum inch by

inch. His step toward to Washington on September 11 and his initiatives regarding Europe were part of a cautious and calculated breakout from this situation.

In a very short period of time, Medvedev has managed to completely change the situation in both the European and Russian sphere into somewhat of a Euro-East. We've never seen anything similar to the developments that have been happening as of recent. In the Kharkov deal with Kiev there was an invisible third party; namely, Obama. Barack Obama raised the question of scrapping weapon-grade plutonium, while Medvedev was talking about 'leasing' Sevastopol. **It would be difficult for Yanukovich to cooperate with the one, and turn down the other.** He agreed to both, having assessed the disastrous situation in Ukraine and having revived a traditional Ukrainian policy of playing upon the balance of power. He would probably have loved to continue Leonid Kuchma's speculations on contradictions, but Yanukovich now faced somewhat of a united "Washington-Moscow regional committee".

Washington and Moscow played in pairs and addressed the issue with respect to Kiev point blank. We should not consider an agreement with Ukraine as a trade-off (i.e. 'gas for the base', or 'money for the fleet'). All of that is, of course, actually true, but it is not the *full* truth. It is not that Ukraine turned its back on NATO. Rather, the situation is more that NATO lost its importance for Ukraine, and Ukraine lost its relevance to NATO. What is important is that **Ukraine ceased to be the playing card used in the**

containment of Russia. Using Ukraine as a foothold to ensure Russia's containment used to be the key element of the West's policy throughout the past two decades. Medvedev has eliminated a key element in the preservation of the Cold War in the new form it took after to 1991.

3.

Everybody knew that the agreement with Tymoshenko with the gas price at 330 USD was impracticable. It was just as unreal to enforce it as it would be to call on Iraq to pay back the debts borrowed by Saddam Hussein. Russia would have to write off Yushenko-Tymoshenko's debts in any case, as it essentially reduced the gas price by 100 dollars per 10,000 cubic metres (in other words, it bargained away a hundred dollar margin which wasn't there in any case). While President Yanukovich has got real money, it should be noted that this is the money of future administrations. **The agreement is well secured from two angles. Specifically, the political risks are covered by financial relations, and the financial risks are secured by political agreements.**

The agreement with Ukraine that was signed by President Medvedev, once it is ratified, will, for the first time ever, create a situation of **long-term peace in Eastern Europe**. It is the peace of Medvedev and it is the cumulative result of a decade of Russia's becoming fully sovereign, so to speak. Today, Medvedev is not a besieged leader and Russia is no longer besieged either. **Medvedev turned out to be an even more successful Russian nationalist than Vladimir Putin** – here, I refer to 'nationalist in the good sense of the word', as Putin used to say.

As the country enters the 'Chinese' 21st century, Russia is not faced with a potential threat within Eastern Europe – a threat

that has otherwise existed, has been preserved, maintained and artificially enhanced over last two decades.

Before our very eyes, we can see a global partnership and a European partnership emerging for Russia.

4.

And it is here that a new stage begins, which requires a more subtle game. You cannot continue solely with a simple *pro et contra* position – pro ABM or against ABM, pro NATO or against NATO. We need sophisticated, subtle politics which could potentially maintain and expand the unique corridor of the 'most favourable conditions for Russia'. The same fine-tuned politics will be required when the 'Kharkov Treaty' is eventually ratified by Ukraine. Indeed, a new geostrategic space is emerging in Europe. This is neither a military alliance nor a common economic space, nor is it a much spoken about 'integration of the two countries'. What it is instead is a giant field for strategic understanding. It is a *partnership space*, which is also sure to see plenty of conflict. We cannot bang the table with our fist and shout that "we'll raise the price" and we cannot threaten to shut off the valve. **Russia does not have a ready-to-use model of new 'partner' relations with Ukraine.** This is a new challenge to our foreign policy.

It is President Medvedev's achievements that ultimately make the upgrade of our foreign policy inevitable. The kind of condominium property developments that have appeared in the Crimea in the area of the Greater Black Sea raises the opportunity for further joint activity, for example, in relation to Transnistria and Moldova.

5.

Thus, Medvedev's Russia has achieved all the goals that Putin's

Russia had set for itself. At the western and south-western borders of Russia, peace has virtually been achieved and this may last for a long time. The main geopolitical issues in this regard have been resolved and even the "big agreement" of Medvedev, which was at first rejected by everyone in the West, is actually being implemented today as if it does indeed exist. NATO has invited the Russian Federation to participate in the Euro-Atlantic anti-ballistic missile system. Relations with Obama are opening the way to move further and, here, it is also unclear what the next objectives are.

We keep saying that the world is changing. It's time to identify exactly what it is that is changing. For instance, the recent and somewhat strange story of the Icelandic cinders that paralysed bureaucrats and air travel throughout Europe **effectively returns such an 'outdated' issue as Mother Earth to the agenda.** With all of the importance placed on politics over the past two decades, we have forgotten about the Earth, together with its human and natural resources. And now it seems that the planet, as an encyclopaedia of issues, people, territories, resources, roads, and development sites, is again appearing high on the new agenda. Russia is also the owner of this reality which now needs to be protected.

For all that, **Medvedev has been incredibly lucky** and he has deserved this luck. And to some extent, this was just the break that he has been patiently waiting for. Today, he can appear before his country in a totally new capacity. While he is not even ranked among the top ten most influential policy makers in the world, **Medvedev is nevertheless becoming the most influential politician in Russia on the eve of a series of parliamentary and presidential elections.** ■