

their duty to serve a cause greater than self interest and to keep faith with the eternal and universal principles of the Declaration of Independence.” Thus, he has already clued us in on his possible answers to some obvious questions: *What difference does it make to me and my family who rules Georgia or who dominates the former Soviet Union? Is there a vital interest at stake? If so, what is it?* McCain would likely answer that “Threats to freedom anywhere are threats to our freedom!” (A variant might be “Americans understand that we serve a cause greater than self interest”) Yes, Russia has a large nuclear arsenal—so why antagonize the Kremlin unnecessarily?

In his *Foreign Affairs* article, Senator McCain proposed forming what he calls a “League of Democracies” to help with the global crusade he has in mind. “The protection and promotion of the democratic ideal, at home and abroad,” he writes, “will be the surest source of security and peace for the century that lies before us.” But from outside the Beltway bubble, McCain’s globalist agenda looks more like a recipe for insecurity and endless war.

The question remains, however: Why the special dislike for Russia? After all, McCain struck a far more realistic note in his comments on China in that same article:

China and the United States are not destined to be adversaries. We have numerous overlapping interests. U.S.-Chinese relations can benefit both countries . . . But until China moves toward political liberalization, our relationship will be based on periodically shared interests rather than the bedrock of shared values.

Why, then, can't we have a hard-headed relationship with the Russians based on "periodically shared interests," too? That is a question I am often asked, as I make my living as a specialist on Russian affairs. Since I cannot penetrate the depths of McCain’s mind or read the thoughts of the leading neoconservatives, my answer is somewhat speculative. There are a few things that immediately come to mind distinguishing Russia from China in the neocon worldview. First is the marriage between transnational corporations and China as a manufacturing base to penetrate the U.S. market, stuffing Wal-Mart with cheap Chinese merchandise. Such corporations are relentlessly globalist and back a globalist worldview consistent with the neocon agenda. But I doubt that is all there is to it.

Americans, even Beltway globalists who consider the nation and national interests *passé* and love what they call “ethnic” restaurants, tend to view China as something like another planet, inscrutable and distant, somehow less real than Russia, which, as exotic as it is compared with Western Europe, is still understandable. Many Russian elites speak English, some of them better than their American counterparts. And there were all those dissidents who took part in the Cold War struggle, which, to a neocon, was just the beginning of the global crusade for democracy. So Russia seems more accessible, a doable democratic project.

There is something else to consider.

The neocons’ strong pro-Israel (to be fair, *pro-Israeli hard-liner*) bias is probably a major part of the anti-Russian line we hear from McCain. Russia sells weapons to Syria and is helping Iran build a nuclear power plant. Meanwhile, the Kremlin opposed the U.S. intervention in Iraq—a move that must have been particularly galling to the neocons, since the Iraq campaign was to be the centerpiece of their Bush II project. McCain, a combative and ill-tempered man, seems to take such disagreements personally, and perhaps some Jewish neocons have inherited a visceral hatred of Russia from ancestors who recalled Cossacks running down relatives in days gone by.

This brings us to (now former) Yukos oil magnate Mikhail Khodorkovsky, imprisoned on tax charges by a former KGB officer who obviously hated his guts. “Khodor” had the nerve to question the president publicly, implying that Putin’s cronies were corrupt, which provided an opening for those members of Putin’s entourage who coveted Yukos. I will leave aside the other likely motives of the competing parties involved, as the machinations of the various “clans” are too complex to get into here. Suffice it to say that certain parties in the “liberal” camp have steadfastly (though sometimes in a veiled manner) defended Khodorkovsky. Though reportedly a practicing Orthodox Christian, Khodorkovsky is partly of Jewish descent, while the almost exclusively Russian *siloviki*, the veteran and serving officers of the “power ministries” (security and law-enforcement agencies) in Putin’s entourage, have been cast as Khodorkovsky’s persecutors.

The subtext of the Yukos affair—the Putin regime cracking down on a “Jewish oligarch”—played well politically both in Russia (with certain segments of the electorate) and abroad with those inclined to what Russian nationalists call “Russophobia.” What happens to Khodorkovsky in the near future will be seen by many sincere Russian democrats—and plenty of insincere ones—as a sign of how strong certain *siloviki* factions are and of whether they can look forward to a “thaw” under Putin’s successor, Dmitri Medvedev. In the West, Khodorkovsky is widely viewed as a political prisoner in the vein of Soviet-era dissidents, a sign of the tightening screws of the “KGB oligarchy” in Russia, and so his fate will serve as a barometer of Medvedev’s liberalism in the eyes of Washington as well. Both views are distorted versions of a complex reality; of course, people are interested more often in symbols and political soap operas than in following the complexities of politics in a foreign land, especially one where hall-of-mirrors political games, disinformation, and “clan” politics further obscure that reality. Certainly, it is too much work for Beltway foreign-policy “experts.”

A more nuanced understanding of Kremlin politics might bring us closer to a realistic approach to Russia-U.S. relations, one that would be sober and cognizant of real American interests, but undistorted by the reflexive Russophobia of the McCainiac neocons and their uto-

pian globalist ideology. The best assessment of Russian intentions comes from two sources. The first is former President Putin himself. The second is political analyst-cum-provocateur Stanislav Belkovsky, a man who seems to have connections to the *siloviki*, the “fallen oligarchs” of Yukos, and the burgeoning community of anti-Kremlin exiles in London. Since Belkovsky operates in the great Russian tradition of playing both sides of the street, it is worth listening when he speaks, if only to pick up on whatever story line he is selling at the moment.

Vladimir Putin is still a key player in Russian politics. Just one day after his chosen successor Dmitri Medvedev was inaugurated on May 7, Putin was made premier. Back in March, he told reporters that Medvedev is “no less a nationalist” than Putin himself, so the West should find him just as difficult to deal with. Russia would be no less hostile to NATO expansion and no less suspicious of Western support for “color revolutions” (e.g. Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” or Georgia’s “Rose Revolution”) in the former Soviet Union. Moscow would play hard ball on energy politics. (Before his inauguration, Medvedev was chairman of Gazprom, the Russian monopoly that supplies a substantial amount of Europe’s natural gas.) During the same press conference, held on the occasion of a visit with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Putin was asked whether Khodorkovsky would be pardoned. “If we suppose that the procedure required by law is observed,” he replied, “then the question of pardoning is in the competence of the head of state, the president of the Russian Federation,” Putin said. So Putin left open the possibility of a pardon by Medvedev.

Belkovsky has told us what Putin might be up to. According to *Stas*, Putin had several tasks to accomplish during his presidency. He was to protect the interests of the Boris Yeltsin clan known as “The Family,” the group chiefly responsible for Putin’s rise to power. He was to prevent any “review” of the privatization of the 1990’s, meaning that apart from the normal redivisions of property among the ruling clans (Yukos was largely absorbed by state-controlled oil giant Rosneft following Khodorkovsky’s arrest), there would be no full-scale renationalization. And finally, he was to ensure the legalization and legitimization in the eyes of the West of the property and cash accumulated by the Russian ruling class. The first two tasks have been accomplished, but the last one is dicey. And Russian money wants a place to go.

Thanks to skyrocketing oil prices and the sale of high-priced aluminum and other exports, Russia’s billionaires in both the private and the public sectors have lots of money and want to buy stuff. Being careful people, they would prefer not to invest the bulk of their holdings in Russia. And they want to sell shares in their assets to the West, as well as preserve their mansions and bank accounts abroad. After all, does anyone expect them to buy a villa in China or Iran? Vacationing in the Swiss Alps or the Mediterranean beats the pants off the Urals or the Black Sea coast. Elite British schools are full of

their children. They want to be accepted in the West and to be able to travel freely, a luxury they do not currently enjoy. Russia’s current “Oligarch No. 1,” Oleg Deripaska, for instance, is barred from entering the United States because of his alleged organized-crime connections. And Gazprom wants to sell shares on the New York Stock Exchange. These help to explain the hints about pardoning Khodorkovsky and the “liberal” image that is being cultivated for Medvedev.

Mccain has his own take on Medvedev’s inauguration:

President Medvedev pledged that his greatest duty would be to develop civil and economic freedom for the Russian people. I welcome this pledge and hope President Medvedev will soon begin restoring and strengthening the institutions of democracy, including a free press and the rights of a vibrant Russian political opposition to express its views and run for office. That is what the Russian people want and deserve, and it is also what we want for Russia. I also hope President Medvedev will take steps to ease tensions with Georgia by reversing recently announced measures that undermine Georgia’s internationally-recognized sovereignty which have rightly caused great concern among our European allies.

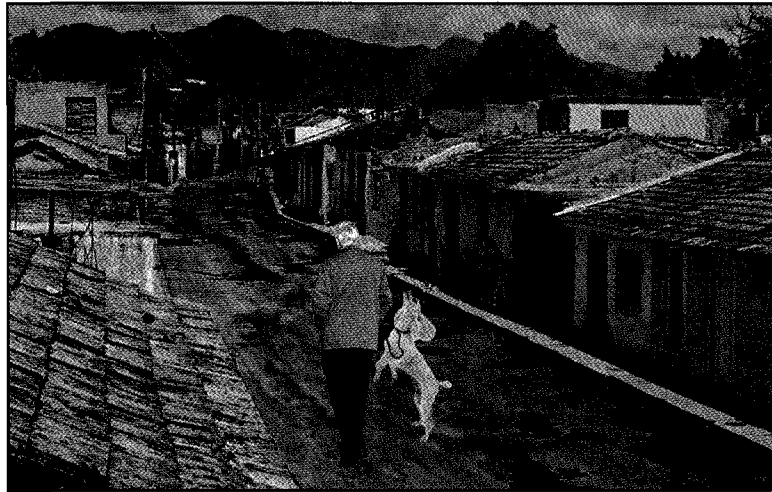
The Kremlin has no intention of allowing free rein to a “fallen oligarch”-backed political opposition or of shutting up about protecting its position in the former Soviet empire. Thus, McCain’s hostile attitude is not likely to soften even if Khodorkovsky is pardoned. Anything short of a “color revolution” in Russia will be seen as a defeat by the neocons who influence him. And McCain seems to be a man who needs enemies. Unfortunately, both of his potential opponents, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, worship at the same globalist shrine, though neither is so openly hostile toward Russia.

The last thing the United States needs is to get into a conflict with a nuclear-armed Russia when there is no vital U.S. interest involved, especially when Washington already has us bogged down in two wars. A more realistic approach would be to view Russia as a potential partner on some fronts (energy sales, combating Islamic terrorism), while soberly recognizing Moscow for what it is—another oligarchy like so many others in the world run by “clans” and Corleone-style “families.” We can do business with the Russians, while keeping one hand on our wallet and restricting the Russian gangster businessmen from further infiltrating our country and economy. Their strong desire to be accepted by the West and to sell us their resources and products gives us bargaining chips in dealing with the Kremlin. *Pace* John McCain and his neoconservative advisors, there is no good reason for fomenting a clash with Russia, just as there is no good reason for allowing yet another group of shady foreigners to establish a beachhead in our country. ◊

The Fortune Teller

An Excerpt From *Mexico Way*

by Chilton Williamson, Jr.



Melanie Anderson

"I don't want to be married any longer."
 "What does that mean?"
 "What I said."
 "You don't love me."
 "I don't love anybody."
 "You loved me. Or said you did."
 "Nobody's responsible for what they said twenty-five years ago."
 "I love you."
 "I wish you wouldn't."
 "Am I so tough to get along with?"
 "Not tough."
 "What then?"
 "I think you are the most boring human being I've known ever, in my entire life. But that isn't the reason why I'm going to leave you."
 "What is the reason?"
 "I don't want to be married any longer."

Two weeks before his wife announced her intention to sue for divorce and ten days before she moved out leaving him the furniture, the toy poodle, her wedding dress, and several pairs of worn-out shoes at the back of the closet, Samuel Adams White, retired inspector with the United States Customs Bureau, had returned from a trip to Wyoming where he'd signed the closing papers on a forty-acre ranchette. The property, a yellow log house

built twelve years before from a kit and surrounded by a buck-and-pole fence enclosing a sagebrush meadow stretching below stony peaks streaked with snow, was meant to realize a dream conceived by the inspector as a boy of fourteen when his father had taken him to see *The Virginian* at the moving-picture cinema in Spring Valley, in those days a dusty farm town of a few thousand people drowsing in the California sun fifteen miles east of San Diego. After quitting the realtor's office the inspector had walked down the main street where late-season skiers gawked before the false fronts of the frame buildings and entered a western-wear store, where he purchased blue jeans, three candy-striped shirts with yoked shoulders and pearly snap-buttons, a canvas duster that reached below his ankles when the buttoned hem was dropped, a pair of tooled boots with undershot heels, and a broad silver-belly hat with a curled brim and a silver ribbon circling the base of the crown. Next he'd driven in the rental car to visit the local horse-trader recommended by the realtor, with whom he left a one-thousand-dollar deposit on two quarter-horses and a pair of well-used roping saddles the trader happened to have on the place. The inspector was reconciled to writing off the horses, but hoped to rent out the property for the summer until he could make up his mind what he wanted to do with it in the long run. Wyoming, the ranch, horses—they belonged to the dream from which he'd awakened not to reality but into limbo. Faced by the destruction of the new life even before it commenced, the inspector had seized on the spectral form of the old one before it could evanesce. Back in Nogales now, he drifted like a ghost among scenes familiar

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