

Russia's Security Challenges

Mark N. KATZ

Statements made by Russian officials, scholars, and commentators suggest that Moscow faces (or thinks it faces) three principal external security challenges: the West (especially the US), the Muslim world, and China. The challenge that each of these poses to Russian security, though, is different from that posed by the other two. This article will explore how Moscow sees each of these three challenges as well as how the Putin administration has responded to them each. It will then discuss the dilemmas that these three challenges as a group pose for Russia.

How Moscow sees and responds to security challenges, however, is not just a function of the nature of external actors, but also of Russia's own strengths and weaknesses. Something must first be said, then, about what Russia is and has become under Putin in order to understand the nature of the security challenges posed to it by the West, the Muslim world, and China.

Russia's Strengths and Weaknesses in the Putin Era

What are the strengths and weaknesses of Russia in relation to its external challenges?

Russia has a sizable population. This, however, is not just aging, but shrinking, thus making it difficult to maintain its large military establishment vis-à-vis all the security challenges Moscow faces.¹

¹ On Russia's population crisis, see Fred Weir, "A Second Baby? Russia's Mothers Aren't Persuaded," *Christian Science Monitor*, May 19, 2006.

Russia is a very large country, but it is sparsely populated in Siberia, making it potentially vulnerable to its highly populous neighbor, China.

Over 10 percent of Russia's population is Muslim. While many Russian Muslims are Russified, some—both in Chechnya and elsewhere—have become attracted to Islamic radicalism, thus making Russia potentially vulnerable to their receiving support from the broader Muslim world.²

Russia is extremely rich in petroleum and other natural resources, but has a poorly developed economy otherwise, potentially making it more difficult for Russia to defend its resource endowment against outsiders (especially those undertaking rapid military modernization).

Russia has a sizable military, but its inability to repress even an internal rebellion in tiny Chechnya casts grave doubt on Moscow's ability to project force anywhere beyond its borders. (Russia, of course, maintains a sizable nuclear arsenal, but the devastating retaliation it would receive make it unlikely that Moscow will launch a nuclear attack against any other state possessing nuclear weapons, or against any other state closely allied to one that does.)

Russia under Putin seeks to act and be acknowledged as a great power, but its many debilitating internal problems limit the extent to which it can do so even in neighboring states, especially where societies are unhappy with Russian efforts to dominate them, thus making Russia appear weak both abroad and at home.

Russia under Putin has an increasingly authoritarian regime, yet Russian society is far more interconnected with the outside world than it was during the Soviet era,³ potentially (though not necessarily) making

² Ravil' Gaynutdin, head of the Russian Council of Muftis, saw the unwillingness of local authorities in Russia to allow for the construction of mosques as being responsible for the rise of the radicalism of young Muslims in Russia: "If no Muslim educational center is opened with the state's assistance where moderate Islam is taught, the [Islamic] education is conducted by no-one knows who or how." "State Support of Islam to Keep Young Russian Muslims from Radicalism—Mufti," Center TV, Moscow, May 30, 2006 (translation by BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, May 30, 2006).

³ "Obviously, the authorities cannot help but be concerned that the Internet, which, according to figures from the Public Opinion Foundation, is used by 18 million Russian citizens, is becoming not only an alternative source of information for the public, but also a center of growing opposition activity." Sergei Varshavchik, "Resistance on the Web," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, June 3, 2005 (English translation in *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* [hereinafter referred to as *CDPSP*] 57, no. 22: 14).

the democratic, prosperous West an attractive model for important elements in Russian society.

All these strengths and weaknesses contribute to how Moscow defines and responds to external security challenges.

The Western Challenge

Many in the West do not see it as posing any sort of challenge to Russia. America, Europe, and Japan (either singly or in combination) have absolutely no intention of militarily intervening in Russia. Moscow, though, not only sees the West (especially the US) as a security challenge, but as the most important one Russia faces.⁴

Just by its very existence, a prosperous, democratic West serves to undermine the legitimacy of a resource-rich but undemocratic Russia where so many people are poor.⁵ Some might think that while this was true during the Soviet era, anti-Western sentiment in Russia has grown so strong since then that it is no longer so. However, the Putin administration's crackdown on Western NGOs and the Russian organizations that they support indicates that the Kremlin remains deeply worried about the prospect of a Western-backed democratic opposition growing strong in Russia.⁶

⁴ In his 2006 address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin referred, apparently to the United States, as a wolf: "We see, after all, what is going on in the world. The wolf knows who to eat, as the saying goes. It knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone, it seems." Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly," May 10, 2006, http://kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2006/05/10/1823_type70029type82912_105566.shtml#.

⁵ Although the Russian government acknowledges that 20 percent of the population lives in poverty, a Levada Center poll showed that 40 percent of the Russian population considers itself to be poor. Dar'ia Guseva, "A Rich Imagination," *Vremia novostei*, June 22, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 25: 6). A poll by the Public Opinion Foundation confirmed this, indicating that 41 percent of Russian citizens consider themselves to be poor. Elena Iakovleva, "Russia: Project or Maelstrom?" *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 11, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 32: 10).

⁶ The authors of a *Kommersant* article identified this as being Putin's main concern about Western NGOs: "The president's inflexibility on this matter is directly connected with the subject of a possible 'color revolution' in Russia, something that the Kremlin still regards as a major political threat. According to *Kommersant*'s information, the question of countering the 'color threat' has been discussed many times during the past year at the president's traditional Saturday conferences with members of the Security Council, and noncommercial organizations have been identified as the main channels by which the

Of more immediate concern both to the Kremlin and much of the Russian public is the expansion of Western influence into countries where Moscow not only used to be influential, but still wants to be. Most of the former Warsaw Pact states of Eastern Europe and the three former Soviet Baltic republics are now members of both NATO and the EU. Two other former Soviet republics—Georgia and Ukraine—have to some extent come under Western influence. Others still might follow.

Moscow sees this expansion of Western influence into Eastern Europe and certain former Soviet republics as aggressive moves to limit and weaken Russia. Russians never seem to acknowledge that governments and public opinion in these countries have themselves actively sought to join the West. Their motives include not only the desire for higher living standards, democratization, and the rule of law, but also a continued fear of Russia in these countries—which Moscow’s bullying reaction to their increased cooperation with the West only increases.

Nor does there appear to be any appreciation in Moscow of the possibility that it might actually be in Russia’s best interest that countries on its border come under Western influence since this means that they are more likely to become stable and prosperous, and hence, not a threat to Russia. By contrast, unstable, impoverished neighbors—even if they are within the Russian sphere of influence—can present problems for Russia that Moscow cannot deal with on its own.

But Moscow does not see things this way. It fears democratization encroaching on its borders because it fears democratization in Russia itself—and all this would do to destroy the existing power structure there. Further, Moscow reacts viscerally to the rise of Western influence on its borders, even though this could actually be beneficial to Russia, because this threatens Russia’s core self-image as a great power. Thus, Russia sees the West as a very serious threat.

The Muslim Challenge

The Muslim world represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Moscow. The existence of several anti-American governments there has

‘color contagion’ is spread.” Dmitrii Kamyshev et al., “Vladimir Putin Reserves the Funding of Nongovernmental Organizations for Himself,” *Kommersant*, November 25, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 47: 3).

given Moscow ample opportunity to ally or otherwise cooperate with them. On the other hand, elements within the Muslim world have in the past provided support to Chechen and other Muslim opposition groups within Russia⁷—some of whom seek to establish “caliphates” in Central Asia, the North Caucasus, and perhaps other Muslim regions of the Russian Federation. Further, this support could increase enormously, thus complicating and perhaps even dooming Russia’s already difficult and costly attempts to suppress Chechen and other Muslim opposition groups in Russia and Central Asia.

This radical Islamic threat to Russia, however, does not emanate from the Muslim world as a whole, but primarily from Sunni fundamentalist forces and their supporters. Russia, of course, is not the only country eager to contain and suppress Sunni fundamentalism. Not only do all other governments in the non-Muslim world oppose this (albeit some far more vigorously than others), but virtually all governments in the Muslim world do as well. Even governments as anti-American as Arab nationalist Syria and Shia fundamentalist Iran are fearful of the rise of Sunni fundamentalism, since they would also be targets of it. Indeed, the Muslim governments that Moscow is most worried about are two pro-American ones, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, where there is widespread support for Sunni fundamentalism both within their publics and even elements of their regimes⁸ (something that the US and many other governments are also worried about).

Moscow has responded to the challenge of the Muslim world actually or potentially assisting Moscow’s Muslim opponents in Russia and the former Soviet Union in several ways. In addition to attempting to militarily suppress the Chechen rebellion, these include:

⁷ “Russian estimates of the total level of external support for Chechen rebel groups range from \$10 million to \$200 million per year and focus on Saudi Arabia (and the opium trade in Afghanistan) as the principal sources of the money; State Department officials admit privately that \$100 million may have flowed into Chechnya from 1999 to 2003.” Geoffrey Kemp and Paul Saunders, “America, Russia, and the Greater Middle East: Challenges and Opportunities,” Nixon Center, Washington, DC, November 2003, http://www.nixoncenter.org/publications/monographs/US_Russia_ME.pdf.

⁸ Mark N. Katz, “Saudi-Russian Relations Since 9/11,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 2 (2004): 3–5; Mark N. Katz, “Less-Than-Great Expectations: The Pakistani-Russian Rapprochement,” *Current History* 104, no. 680 (2005): 137–141.

- Working with Russified Muslims in Russia and the former USSR in order to suppress Muslim secessionists and radicals;
- Cooperating with the US and other non-Muslim governments (including Israel) in the “War on Terror” so that they will see Russia’s struggle with the Chechens as a legitimate part of it;
- Currying favor with Muslim governments and publics so that they will not support the Chechen rebels or make an issue of how Russia treats its Muslims;⁹
- Expressing sympathy for the Palestinian cause—even for Sunni fundamentalist Hamas¹⁰—so that Muslims focus their anger on American support for Israel and overlook what Russia does in Chechnya and elsewhere in the former USSR.

Except for the attempt to defeat the Chechen rebels, these efforts have met with considerable success. Western and other non-Muslim governments are certainly not doing anything to help the Chechen rebels, and have even muted their criticism of Russian human rights violations in Chechnya (although Moscow is indignant about what little criticism it does receive from the West about this). Nor are there any Muslim governments that are overtly helping the Chechens or Islamic oppositionists elsewhere in the former USSR. The only government in the Muslim world that was doing so overtly—the Taliban—was ousted by the American-led (and Russian-backed) post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan. Some outside assistance to the Chechens and others is still getting through, but not enough to allow them victory. Nor have the Chechen rebels

⁹ In his speech at the 2003 Organization of the Islamic Conference summit in Malaysia, Putin offered reassuring words on this score: “I would like to tell you that in the case of Russia, attempts to stir up anti-Islamic feeling in our country have met with complete and total failure.” Gennadii Kochuk, “Dialogue with Islam,” *Trud*, October 17, 2003 (*CDPSP* 55, no. 41: 17).

¹⁰ Much to the annoyance of American, Israeli, and European officials, senior Russian officials received a Hamas delegation in Moscow in March 2006. Although Hamas refused the three main conditions of the “Quartet” (US, EU, UN, and Russia) for working with it, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov declared, “We are satisfied with the talks.” Elena Shesternina, “Mardi Gras Hamasquerade,” *Izvestiia*, March 6, 2006 (*CDPSP* 58, no. 10: 15–16).

become a cause celebre within the Muslim world as the Afghan mujahideen were in the 1980s when Moscow was fighting against them.

The Putin administration, thus, has dealt quite successfully with the Muslim challenge to Russia's security so far, even if this success is probably due less to its own efforts and more to Russian interests regarding Sunni fundamentalism coinciding with those of so many other governments (both Muslim and non-Muslim). Yet despite the success of Moscow's strategy so far, there are two potential problems that could arise that this strategy would be hard-pressed to deal with.

First, even the best of ties between Moscow and all Muslim governments has not prevented the alienation and radicalization of some Muslims inside parts of Russia, especially the North Caucasus. The harsh measures undertaken by Russian security services to combat Islamic extremism may actually serve to foster it.¹¹ Although the Russians cannot seem to admit it even to themselves, their own hostility toward their Muslim and other foreign population¹² may be a far more important stimulus to Islamic radicalism inside Russia than is outside support for it.¹³ Neither the Russian government nor Russian society, however, appears willing or able to ameliorate this.¹⁴

¹¹ For example: "Muslims in Kabardino-Balkaria are split into two groups—those who trust the official clergy, and 'young people,' led by unofficial 'emir' Mussa Mukozhev. In an interview . . . he said he has attracted believers who feel aggrieved by the government and who have joined his network of 40 Islamic congregations. The total number of 'aggrieved' believers is close to 10,000. Understandably, most of their complaints are directed at the police. 'We have been completely deprived of our constitutional rights and civil liberties,' Mukozhev said. 'We're finding it very difficult now to keep young people from taking counteractions. The authorities' policy cannot be described as reasonable—'provocative' would be a better word.'" Milrad Azizovich Fatullaev, "'Building Bridges' with Armored Personnel Carriers," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 2, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 5: 5). See also: Andrei Riskin, "Wahhabis Are Gaining the Upper Hand in Southern Russia," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, February 4, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 5: 6).

¹² According to Russia's Center for the Study of Xenophobia and Extremism, 51–53 percent of Russians support "the idea that 'Russia is for ethnic Russians.'" Viktor Khamraev, "Russian Nationalist Thugs," *Kommersant*, December 7, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 45: 1).

¹³ Geidar Dzhemal', the chairman of the Islamic Committee of Russia, warned of this possibility after the November 4, 2005 march by Russian nationalists in Moscow, especially "if the authorities encourage such demonstrations." Aleksandr Bogomolov et al., "French Lessons," *Novye Izvestiia*, November 10, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 45:5).

¹⁴ For example: An official of the Russian Council of Muftis reported that a group of 8–10 Russian "skinheads" entered a mosque in Moscow province and injured about ten

Second, excellent relations between Russia and governments in the Muslim world will not prevent the latter from succumbing to, or being co-opted by, Sunni Islamic fundamentalists. Should they ever take over another country or otherwise become stronger than they are now, these Sunni Islamic fundamentalists might well decide to help their brethren inside Russia and the former USSR—especially since the Chechens and others are likely to flock to them for support. And, of course, Sunni fundamentalists in the Muslim world could become seized by this issue even if they are not in power. In June 2006, the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq seized four Russian diplomats in Baghdad and threatened to kill them unless Russian forces withdrew from Chechnya within 48 hours.¹⁵

In addition, if a Muslim (or any other) threat to Russia does indeed arise, it is highly unlikely that any existing Muslim government that Moscow has good relations with now is going to be willing or able to help Russia deal with it. Most are not strong enough to do much for Russia. Those that could would probably not want to incur the ire of the Sunni fundamentalists through supporting non-Muslims against fellow Muslims.

Although Moscow currently seems rather successful in containing the challenge to Russia presented by the Muslim world, it will be extremely difficult for Moscow to deal with any increased Muslim challenge (internal, external, or both).

The Chinese Challenge

The rise of China affects virtually every other country in the world, but most especially those that neighbor it. Moscow has an important reason to

worshippers including the imam on October 14, 2005. The Moscow Province Chief Internal Affairs Administration, however “denies that the prayer house was attacked.” “Skinheads’ Herd Instinct,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, October 17, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 42:7).

Also: According to a study released by Lyubov’ Kezina, the head of the Moscow Education Department, “78 percent of young Muscovites are in favor of using force to resolve ethnic conflicts.” Ekaterina Blinova, “Juvenile Babel,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, November 22, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 47: 12).

¹⁵ When Moscow refused to comply, the Mujahideen Shura Council in Iraq announced the execution of the four Russian diplomats “in revenge for our brothers everywhere with whose blood the Russians’ hands have been stained.” For more on this episode, see Mark N. Katz, “Russian Hostages in Iraq,” United Press International, June 24, 2006.

be concerned about China: the Russian territory bordering it is sparsely populated. Furthermore, large numbers of Chinese citizens have been crossing the border to settle in Siberia—something that many Russians in the region have become nervous about.¹⁶ Siberia also possesses petroleum and other natural resources that a rapidly modernizing China increasingly wants access to.

In the past, Beijing has asserted territorial claims to a significant portion of Siberia. Almost all of these claims have been settled,¹⁷ but if a more powerful China ever in the future decided to revive its claim to any of this territory, Russia would face an extremely difficult challenge. The Chinese military appears to be undergoing modernization at a far more rapid rate than the Russian military—in part because China is the largest customer for Russian weaponry. As time goes on, the Russian-Chinese conventional force balance is steadily shifting in Beijing's favor. Russia, of course, continues to possess a large nuclear arsenal—as does China. But would the Kremlin really be willing to risk Moscow in order to save Vladivostok or any other Russian city near the Sino-Russian border? The answer to this question may not be clear to the Kremlin even now, and will be much less so in the future when China has become more powerful.

The Chinese challenge to Russia, of course, has not reached this point by any means. Some Russian observers, though, have expressed fear about China's future intentions toward Russia.¹⁸ Yet China and Russia also have several important common interests, including opposition to American “hegemony,” democratization, and Sunni fundamentalism. They also have a growing trade relationship that is important to both.

¹⁶ For example: “Rodina’s leader, Dmitry Rogozin, has previously accused China of plotting to take over Siberia, if not by force then by demography, and he has called for new laws ‘to restore Russia’s control over its borders’—specifically to stem the inflow of Chinese migrants, nearly half a million of whom already live in Russia. Russians should be encouraged to move to border areas, he has said, to counter the Chinese ‘threat to Mother Russia.’” Owen Mathews and Anna Nemtsova, “Fear and Loathing in Siberia,” *Newsweek*, March 27, 2006.

¹⁷ Vladimir Skosyrev, “Brothers Forever II: Fifty Years Later,” *Vremya MN*, July 17, 2001 (CDPSP 53, no. 29: 1–2).

¹⁸ For example: “Is this growing [Chinese] power dangerous for Russia? Yes, because everyone realizes that we could potentially have a ‘disagreement over the land question’—in effect, a ‘peaceful absorption’ of Siberia by China. And in general, having a neighbor that is 10 times stronger than you are is a rather dubious pleasure.” Leonid Radzikovskii, “The US + Russia = ?” *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, February 22, 2005 (CDPSP 57, no. 8: 4).

Moscow's response to the Chinese challenge has so far involved a mixture of bandwagoning with it and balancing against it. On the one hand, Moscow bandwagoned with China through signing the Treaty of Friendship with Beijing in 2001, working with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to reduce America's post-9/11 presence in Central Asia, and participating in joint military exercises that were widely seen to have both anti-Taiwanese and anti-American overtones.¹⁹ On the other hand, Moscow has balanced against China through repeatedly calling for a strategic partnership with India as well as China (despite the important differences between these two), and selling more advanced weapons to India than to China.²⁰

The Putin administration's conflicting approaches toward China can best be seen by contrasting Moscow's arms export and petroleum export policies toward it. China is the biggest customer for Russian weapons.²¹ By contrast, the Putin administration has been hesitant about building an oil pipeline from Siberia to China as Beijing has long hoped for.²² The result is that Moscow is providing Beijing with the means (i.e., arms) to threaten Russia while also giving it some incentive to do so by denying Beijing as much Siberian oil as China wishes to buy.

Fortunately for Moscow, Beijing is preoccupied with Taiwan, the US, Japan, and even domestic unrest. But if China ever decided to take measures that Russia found threatening, Moscow could find fending it off to be extremely difficult—if not impossible.

¹⁹ Victor Mallet, "Heed the Warnings of a New Cold War in Asia," *Financial Times*, March 28, 2006.

²⁰ According to the noted Russian military analyst Dmitrii Trenin, "Moscow realizes that the steady weakening of Russia relative to China can be offset, in a way that does not provoke China, through a 'triangle of friendship' involving India." How this will "not provoke China," however, is unclear. Nikolai Khorunzhii, "Three-way Exercises Are Next," *Izvestiia*, October 18, 2005 (*CDPSP* 57, no. 42: 14–15).

On how Russia sells more sophisticated weapons to India than it does to China, see Viktor Litovkin, "Nonequilateral Triangle," *Vremia MN*, December 3, 2002 (*CDPSP* 54, no. 49: 5–6).

²¹ "Russian Military Industrial Complex Is on the Brink of Collapse," *The Russian Business Monitor*, June 17, 2005.

²² Eric Watkins, "Putin Coy in China," *Oil & Gas Journal* 104, no. 12:29.

Dealing with Three Security Challenges Simultaneously

The challenges Russia faces from the West, the Muslim world, and China are very different from one another. China represents a traditional geopolitical challenge. The Muslim world could do much more than it is doing now to inspire and support Islamic opposition inside Russia and some other former Soviet republics. The West poses a threat to Russian influence in neighboring states as well as to the authoritarian order within Russia.

Russia, of course, can—and does—respond to each of these security challenges through pursuing policies aimed at reducing them. The problem for Moscow, though, is that it faces these three challenges simultaneously. Russian success in reducing any one of these challenges may thus result in increasing the threat Moscow faces from one or even both of the others. If, for example, Russia succeeds in pushing America out of Central Asia as it is now trying to do, Moscow will not be in a stronger position to deal with continued Islamic threats to the ex-communist regimes of this region. Nor will Moscow be in a stronger position to resist any Chinese attempt to increase Beijing's influence there.

If it faced just one of these three security challenges, a sensible policy for rich but weak Russia would be to seek one or more powerful allies against it. But both because of Russia's nature (specifically, its dearly held notion of itself as a great power) and of the three-fold challenge that Moscow faces, Russia has not done this. Nor does it seem likely to do so in the future.

No matter how good Moscow's relations with existing Muslim governments are, these would be neither willing nor able to do anything meaningful to help defend Russia against the West or China. Even those Muslim governments that have sought Russia's help against their opponents (including the US) are not powerful enough to help Russia against its opponents (especially the US).

Russia could ally with China against America and the West. Indeed, several Russian leaders and observers have suggested this. Moscow and Beijing clearly do not object to each other's systems of government. Yet even though it has important differences with the West, Beijing is not willing to ally with Moscow against America, Japan, or Europe. China's trade relationships with all three are more important than its trade

relationship with Russia. Beijing does not wish to jeopardize these for the sake of an alliance with Moscow. Even if China's relations with the West deteriorated markedly and it was willing to ally with Russia against it, how could Russia then protect itself against China? An alliance with the West—especially the US—is the most obvious answer. But this, of course, would probably mean the end of any alliance with China.

Russia could also ally with the West against threats both from the Muslim world and from China. But the Kremlin is loathe to do this because of the increased pressure for internal reform in Russia that this would lead to. While such an alliance might benefit Russia as a whole, it would not benefit Russia's authoritarian regime—and so will not come about.

There are other possibilities besides these. During the contentious lead-up to the American-led intervention in Iraq in 2002–2003, Putin hoped to split the West by allying with France and Germany against the US and the UK. Yet despite their differences with Washington, Europeans are hardly willing to trade an alliance with the US for one with Russia—which Europeans tend to regard either as a problem or as a threat.

A Russia fearful of China could ally with Japan, which also has reason to fear Beijing. But Moscow is not willing to return the four Kuriles that it seized from Japan at the end of World War II as would be necessary for this to occur.

Finally, there are a number of smaller countries in the ex-communist and the developing worlds that are already allied with Russia to a greater or lesser degree. These include the Central Asian republics, Armenia, Belarus, Iran, Syria, and even Venezuela. These, however, are more interested in receiving help from Russia than in helping Russia, and are not particularly useful against a serious threat emanating from any of the security challenges Moscow faces.

What this means, then, is that Russia must face its security threats largely on its own. This is partly because Moscow does not trust those few that are powerful enough to help it (the West and China), and partly because other governments are generally unwilling or unable to help Russia against any serious security threat it faces. Fortunately for Moscow, it is highly unlikely that any two, much less all three, of the areas presenting security challenges to it will (or even can) ally with each other against Russia. Indeed, Western-Muslim, Western-Chinese, Muslim-Chinese, or Western-Muslim-Chinese alliances against Russia all seem

inconceivable. Russia benefits from the fact that the rivalries among these three groups (especially those between the West and the Muslim world and between the West and China) are so great that they focus more on each other than they do on Russia.

The persistence of rivalries among the West, the Muslim world, and China, however, does not guarantee that Russia will not face a serious security challenge or be able to deal with it effectively. Indeed, should a serious security challenge to Russia arise from any one of these three, Moscow cannot depend on the rivalries among them to lead either of the others to ally with Moscow against that challenge. As was argued earlier, the Muslim world is too weak and divided to assist Russia either against the West or China. China can do little to help Russia stem either a rising democratic or Islamic tide in Russia. The West has its hands full dealing with Islamic radicals outside the former USSR and might not be able to do much to help Russia if Islamic opposition grew stronger there. Nor would the West be eager to intervene on behalf of an authoritarian Russia in any dispute or confrontation it might have with a nuclear-armed China.

Due to Russia's suspicion of any potential ally that could help it against any serious threat to it that might emerge, Moscow may end up facing that threat largely on its own—something that will make dealing with its security challenges all the more challenging for a Russia burdened with so many weaknesses.