

# PLAYING THE ANGLES: RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY BEFORE AND DURING THE WAR IN IRAQ

*Mark N. Katz*

*Dr. Katz is professor of government and politics at George Mason University.*

**I**n the lead-up to and during the American-led intervention in Iraq this year, the Putin administration had several goals:

- To work in partnership with other nations, especially France and Germany, to prevent the United States from acting unilaterally, to create a "multipolar" world in order to prevent American intervention in the first place, and (when this tailed) to prevent the United States (along with the United Kingdom) from determining Iraq's future without U.N. Security Council approval.
- To work in partnership with the United States, especially in the wake of 9/11, against terrorism and in pursuit of common security, and economic goals.
- To finally cash in on the contracts that Russian oil firms and other enterprises had signed with the Saddam Hussein regime (and as many as possible of those that were initialed or just discussed) after it was ousted and U.N. Security Council sanctions were lifted.
- To preserve the contracts Russia had gained under the U.N. Security Council's oil-for-food program in post-Saddam Iraq.
- To finally collect the \$8 billion in Saddam-era Iraqi debt owed to Moscow.

- To prevent events in Iraq from damaging Russia economically and from hurting the Putin administration politically.

Some of these goals contradict each other. In this paper, I will examine two questions: To what extent did Russia achieve each of these goals (and to what extent does it seem likely to)? And how successfully did Russia resolve the contradictions among these goals?

## BACKGROUND

Moscow developed close, though troubled, relations with Iraq during the Cold War. The Soviets sold weapons to Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War, the period in which the bulk of Iraqi debt to Moscow was incurred.<sup>1</sup> When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Gorbachev cooperated with the United States in securing numerous U.N. Security Council resolutions against Iraq, including some that imposed economic sanctions and authorized the use of force. Soviet diplomacy, though, attempted (but failed) to avert conflict when Gorbachev sent long-time Soviet Arabist Yevgeniy Primakov as his personal emissary to meet with Saddam in Baghdad.<sup>2</sup>

After the war and after the breakup of the USSR, Russian ties with Iraq increased. Iraq has the largest proven but undeveloped oil reserves in the world. During the 1990s, Russian oil firms signed, initialed or discussed a number of contracts with Iraq to develop these fields after the lifting of UNSC sanctions. Saddam apparently favored Russian firms in the expectation that Moscow would seek the lifting of these sanctions, which it did.<sup>3</sup>

Russian oil firms obtained an important role in exporting Iraqi oil in the U.N. Security Council-imposed oil-for-food program. Other Russian enterprises obtained an important role as authorized sellers of goods to Iraq under this program. There were also persistent reports before the 2002-03 Iraqi crisis of continued Russian arms sales to Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

Until the summer of 2002, when the Bush administration made it increasingly clear that it intended to seek a showdown with Saddam Hussein, Moscow's preferred solution to the ongoing problem of Iraq was the lifting of UNSC economic sanctions against Saddam's regime, which would allow Russian oil firms to begin the lucrative work of oil development there.<sup>5</sup>

With this background in mind, I will now turn to a discussion of the extent to which Russia achieved (or seems likely to achieve) each of the six goals listed in the introduction.

## A "MULTIPOLAR" WORLD

The Russian government has long been unhappy with American "unilateralism." One of the themes of Russian foreign policy from the middle Yeltsin years up to the present has been the creation of a "multipolar" world that would contain American "hegemony." This thrust in

Russian foreign policy was a major theme in Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's book. *The New Russian Diplomacy!*<sup>6</sup> The "unilateral" American actions that Moscow resents include NATO expansion, U.S.-led interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo, and U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

Not all of these were "unilateral" American actions but were carried out in conjunction with European allies. European governments and public opinion, however, were unhappy with other "unilateral" American actions, especially those undertaken by the Bush administration, such as withdrawal from the Kyoto Treaty, refusal to allow members of the U.S. armed forces to be subject to the new International Criminal Court, and U.S. support for hardline Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Like Russians, the Europeans were generally unhappy about the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty.

President George W. Bush's September 12, 2002, speech to the U.N. General Assembly, which made clear that the United States would intervene in Iraq either with or without the United Nations met with a negative response in Russia and in Western Europe (as well as elsewhere). We cannot know what Russian foreign policy would have been if France and Germany had sided with the United States on this matter. The fact that Paris and Berlin opposed the Bush administration so strenuously on Iraq, though, offered Moscow an opportunity to do so in the company of others rather than in isolation.

At first this alliance seemed to pay off. In the fall of 2002, the United States sought a single U.N. Security Council resolution that would not only call for U.N. inspectors to verify that Iraq had dismantled its

weapons of mass destruction (WMD), but also authorize the use of force against it if Baghdad were found to be in "material breach" of this requirement. Russia, France and Germany (as well as others), however, lobbied for a two-resolution formula: one calling for the return of the inspectors to verify the dismantling of Iraqi WMD, but the use of force (in case the inspectors reported Iraqi non-compliance) only to be authorized by a second resolution. The U.S. government eventually agreed to this latter formula, and the resolution calling for the return of U.N. weapons inspectors to Iraq was passed unanimously by the Security Council on November 8, 2002.<sup>7</sup>

The inspection process began soon thereafter. Since the reports of the inspectors were ambivalent and certainly did not declare Iraq to be in material breach of U.N. Security Council resolutions, this formula appeared to be an excellent mechanism for Russia, Germany, France, China and indeed a majority of the Security Council to indefinitely forestall intervention against Iraq.

Furthermore, it seemed, as President Putin declared on French TV in February 2003, that France, Germany and Russia together had taken the first step in building a multipolar world.<sup>8</sup> Noting that Washington's relations with Paris and Berlin had become far more strained than Washington's ties to Moscow, some Russian diplomats and commentators even volunteered Moscow to "mediate" among the Western allies - a role that would have increased Russia's importance to them all."

The United States and the United Kingdom (along with Spain and Bulgaria) sought a second Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.

When it became clear that they would not get it, they withdrew it from consideration and intervened anyway. The new "multipolar" world based on Moscow, Berlin and Paris was clearly unable to prevent this.

Even before the war broke out, though, it became increasingly clear that Moscow's closer ties to Paris and Berlin were of only limited value to Russia. Despite their common opposition to American-British intervention in Iraq, President Chirac himself indicated his disapproval of Russian policy toward Chechnya during President Putin's state visit to France.<sup>10</sup> In April, while the war in Iraq was going on, the European Union (plus seven others) submitted a resolution to the U.N. Human Rights Commission accusing Russia of violating human rights in Chechnya.<sup>11</sup> Nor did their common position on Iraq lead the French or Germans to push for the elimination of visa requirements for Kaliningraders wishing to visit Russia after this Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania becomes surrounded by EU members.<sup>12</sup> Nor, of course, did the French or Germans do anything to include their new Russian partner in the EU itself.

Since the toppling of Saddam's regime, Russia and its European partners have turned their attention to the post-war order in Iraq. While the United States and Britain sought U.N. Security Council approval for themselves to serve as occupying powers in Iraq, Moscow, Paris and Berlin called for a U.N. administration instead. France and Germany, however, initially showed more willingness to work with the United States on lifting Security Council sanctions than did Russia. Far from needing Russia to improve their relations with the United States and the United Kingdom, France and Germany are

attempting to do this without Moscow.

While Moscow had high hopes that the Iraq crisis would help it ally with Paris and Berlin to restrain Washington, the goal of constraining Washington was clearly not met. Even the goal of allying with Paris and Berlin has not resulted in much tangible benefit for Moscow.

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES**

Part of the reason that the Russian-French-German "alliance" failed to constrain the United States is that none of these countries, including Russia, was actually prepared to act against America. Ever since the Gorbachev era, Moscow has hoped that a Washington-Moscow partnership in which both were equals would be the basis of world order. There was considerable disappointment in the Yeltsin era when this did not come about. Although Russia's unexpected weakness and poverty made this largely impossible from the American perspective, the hope - even expectation - for such a partnership has, oddly enough, survived in Moscow.

The Bush administration's heightened determination to militarily intervene against Saddam if he did not (as anticipated) agree to surrender his weapons of mass destruction became evident in August-October **2002**. Initially, Moscow indicated that it would support the United States in the Security Council for a price: post-Saddam Iraq would honor Russian oil contracts and repay past debts to Moscow, the United States would drop objections to Russian atomic-energy-reactor sales to Iran, and the United States would give Moscow a "free hand" to intervene in Georgia (for which Moscow was not seeking U.N. Security Council approval).<sup>11</sup>

The United States, though, refused to make any concrete commitments, but issued general statements about how it would "take account of Russia's concerns."<sup>14</sup> American officials reportedly "ruled out" the possibility of a "secret deal" with Moscow on Iraqi oil.<sup>15</sup> Washington has not dropped, but increased its objections to the Russian-Iranian nuclear relationship.<sup>16</sup> And Washington forestalled Russia from intervening in Georgia by deploying small numbers of American troops to that country. Undersecretary of State Bolton said that the United States would not trade concessions to Russia or other countries for support of its stand on Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

Moscow's realization that Washington would not reward it for supporting the United States on Iraq coincided with the opportunity for Moscow to join with Paris, Berlin and others in seeking to restrain it. Yet even when it was cooperating with these states, the Putin administration appeared to go out of its way to indicate that cooperation with the United States was still possible. For example, on January 28, 2003, President Putin stated that while military action against Iraq was "unwarranted" if Iraq impeded U.N. weapons inspectors, "Russia could reach agreement with the United States on other, tougher solutions."<sup>18</sup>

In the same French TV interview in which Putin praised the first step taken to build a multipolar world, he also said that "if the United States had not taken a tough stance, we would not have been able to induce Iraq to cooperate to the extent that we are seeing today"<sup>19</sup> In addition, during the visit of Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi to Moscow in February 2003, the two leaders were said to agree that a military invasion of Iraq was a last resort

but did not rule it out.<sup>20</sup> At the same time that Putin sent Primakov on a high-profile mission to Baghdad in late February 2003, he also sent his chief of staff, Alexander Voloshin, to Washington "to sniff out business deals for Russia in return for its support" on Iraq, according to one Russian analyst.<sup>21</sup>

Once the war actually began, President Putin criticized American policy harshly, saying, "There's nothing that can justify this military action." and describing it as "a big political mistake."<sup>22</sup> In an op-ed piece published in *The Washington Post*, however, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov made it clear that Moscow wanted Russian-American cooperation to continue "regardless of what happens with Iraq."<sup>23</sup> In addition, an unidentified "high-ranking member of the Russian president's staff" was quoted as saying that while Moscow did not support American actions in Iraq, "a deterioration of relations with the United States is not in Russia's strategic interest either, so Moscow does not plan to take any drastic counteraction."<sup>24</sup> Even Primakov - who, as both foreign minister and prime minister under Yeltsin, tried valiantly to create a "multipolar" world that would contain American power - warned that Russia "should under no circumstances lapse into anti-Americanism . . . . This would inflict a great deal of damage on our interests."<sup>25</sup> President Putin himself, in an interview he gave in Tambov on April 2, noted that, "for political and economic reasons, Russia does not have an interest in a United States defeat."<sup>26</sup>

During the war itself, three issues arose that could have led to a serious deterioration in Russian-American relations. One of these was a complaint raised by Washington. In late March, the United

States government publicly accused two Russian firms of selling weapons (such as antitank missiles, night-vision goggles, and electronic jamming equipment) to Iraq in violation of U.N. Security Council resolutions stemming from 1990. Russian government officials denied these charges completely and with great vehemence. It appears, though, that these American accusations were true. Three *Izvestia* reporters provided evidence that the Iraqis possessed Russian electronic jamming equipment.<sup>27</sup> This dispute did not escalate, if only because whatever Russian weapons Saddam Hussein's forces possessed clearly did not provide them with any meaningful advantage.

The other two issues that arose in the bilateral relationship were complaints raised by Moscow. The first of these was about American reconnaissance flights in Georgia near the Russian border, one of which prompted the scrambling of two Russian fighter aircraft. Russian officials expressed the fear that these flights were not intended to look for "terrorists" in Georgia as was claimed, but to spy on neighboring Russian territory.<sup>28</sup> Moscow did not press this issue, however.

Moscow had more serious cause to complain when an automobile convoy carrying Russian diplomats out of Baghdad toward Syria was fired upon, reportedly by American forces. Other countries had pulled their diplomats out of Baghdad before the war. A warning by the United States ambassador in Moscow that it was unsafe for Russian diplomats to remain in Iraq was interpreted by the Russian Foreign Ministry as a "threat."<sup>29</sup> Once again, though, Moscow did not press this issue.

By the end of the war, it was clear that both Washington and Moscow wanted their

"partnership" to continue. It was also clear that while Washington could afford both to avoid paying the price Moscow sought for its support as well as to proceed on its own without Russian support, Moscow was not in the same position vis-a-vis Washington. Russian attempts to alternately bargain with and oppose American policy ultimately gave way to acquiescence.

A similar pattern appeared just after the war. Moscow first insisted that the United Nations (and not the United States and United Kingdom) administer postwar Iraq, and that U.N. Security Council economic sanctions against Iraq not be lifted until U.N. weapons inspectors returned to Iraq and certified that weapons of mass destruction were not present there.<sup>30</sup> On May 22, though, Russia (along with all other Security Council members except Syria) voted in favor of Resolution 1483, which recognized the United States and the United Kingdom as the occupying powers and lifted the Saddam-era economic sanctions immediately without U.N. weapons inspectors certifying the absence of WMD in Iraq.<sup>31</sup>

## **IRAQI PACTS WITH RUSSIAN OIL FIRMS**

During the Yeltsin and Putin years, when Russian relations with Iraq were relatively good, Russian oil firms entered negotiations with Baghdad to develop several of its proven but untapped oil fields. Not willing to incur America's wrath while U.N. sanctions were still in effect, the Russian oil firms sought agreements that allowed them to develop these fields once U.N. sanctions were lifted. This converged with Saddam's interest to some extent. If Russian firms had to wait for

sanctions to be lifted, these agreements gave Moscow an incentive to seek their removal. Saddam, though, was not always patient. Baghdad had tried to push Russian firms to start developing these fields even before sanctions were lifted.<sup>33</sup>

By the time the crisis over Iraq was in full swing last fall, Russian companies had negotiated several preliminary deals with the Iraqis, but only one production contract had actually been signed: the 1997 agreement over the West Qurna field (estimated reserves 15 billion barrels) with LUKoil as the main partner and Zarubezhneft and Machinoimport as minor ones.<sup>33</sup>

The "best case" scenario for Russian oil firms seeking to take advantage of their "privileged access" to Iraq was for U.N. Security Council sanctions to be lifted while Saddam was still in power. So long as Saddam remained in power, though, the United States would not agree to the lifting of Security Council sanctions against Iraq. And if there was to be a regime change in Iraq, there was a risk that the new regime would not honor the Saddam-era contracts (and would certainly not be bound by any unsigned ones).

But LUKoil, which had a signed agreement, argued that "a contract was a contract" and thus was legally binding. But was it really? LUKoil sought a commitment from the U.S. government on this. Washington's response was that, while it recognized Russia's interest in Iraqi oil, it would be up to the new Iraqi government to decide the specifics of these cases. Some Iraqi opposition leaders openly declared their intent to scrap the Saddam-era agreements with Russian oil firms and give them to American and British firms instead. The Russians then continued to press Washington on this issue. Mikhail

Khodorkovsky, CEO of Yukos (which was not involved in Iraq), reportedly told American officials that if Washington wanted Russia's cooperation in the U.N. Security Council, "it would be wise to promise Russia a role in Iraq's oil development."<sup>34</sup>

As this Russian campaign mounted, Iraq announced that it was canceling the contract with LUKoil over West Qurna. At first Baghdad claimed it was doing this

because of LUKoil's failure to carry out the terms of the contract.<sup>35</sup> When LUKoil hotly denied this, Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz stated that Baghdad had actually canceled the contract due to LUKoil's

attempts to seek guarantees for it from the United States in a postwar Iraq.<sup>36</sup> Aziz did say, though, that Iraq would award the contract to another Russian firm - an offer Moscow rejected out of hand.<sup>37</sup> Russian oil officials then renewed their efforts to woo Baghdad. LUKoil even claimed in late January that its contract had been reinstated.<sup>38</sup> Soon after this, however, Putin indicated that if Iraq impeded U.N. inspectors, Russia might agree with the United States on "tougher moves."<sup>39</sup> Shortly afterward, Baghdad's acting oil minister reiterated that LUKoil's contract was "dissolved."<sup>40</sup>

LUKoil has continued to maintain that its contract is valid and that it will sue any firm that attempts to take it over. The American-appointed acting oil minister in occupied Iraq, though, announced in late May 2003 that the agreement with LUKoil to develop West Qurna, which had been terminated by the Saddam regime, would

remain terminated.<sup>41</sup> Even if a post-occupation Iraqi government is willing to work with LUKoil in West Qurna, it is going to want to at least review the contract. If LUKoil digs in on this, it might keep this contract but not get any others. Or it might lose this one too. As for the other Russian companies that do not have signed contracts, their position is even weaker.

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### **A \$1 rise or fall in the price of a barrel of oil leads to a corresponding rise or fall of 0.35 percent in the Russian CDP.**

Negotiating contracts with the Saddam regime in the hope of keeping them with the post-Saddam government was a risky strategy at best. Moscow apparently hoped that it could make a "special deal"

on this with Washington, trading either its support (or just lack of opposition) in the Security Council for an American "guarantee." Washington, though, would not (in fact, could not) make such a deal before the war. While Moscow may still hope for such an agreement, it has even less leverage now that the war is over.

### **IRAQI DEBT OWED TO MOSCOW**

Iraq has outstanding debts of over \$100 billion, including \$8 billion owed to Moscow (primarily for weapons purchased by Saddam during the Iran-Iraq War).<sup>42</sup> Moscow had hoped that Saddam would repay this debt to Russia once U.N. Security Council sanctions were lifted (thus providing Russia with yet another incentive to work for their removal). Moscow has indicated all through the crisis that it wants this money to be repaid. The Russians were extremely upset by the suggestion of Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul

Wolfowitz that Russia (along with France and Germany) forgive "some or all of the debt owed to them by Iraq."<sup>43</sup>

On May 15, Secretary of State Powell indicated that a new Iraqi government will acknowledge Baghdad's debt to Moscow, but that debt repayment will have to be restructured or delayed.<sup>44</sup> Moscow has indicated a willingness to resolve the Iraqi debt issue via the Paris Club.<sup>45</sup> The Club typically reduces a given country's debt to its creditor members by an agreed-upon percentage but expects the rest to be repaid. Recent statements from German and Japanese finance officials indicated an unwillingness to grant any debt forgiveness to Iraq due to its oil wealth,<sup>46</sup> a position that Moscow shares.<sup>47</sup>

But, as one Russian observer noted, Baghdad's "acknowledging the debts doesn't necessarily mean that the debts \\ ill be repaid."<sup>48</sup> Without any commitment from the United States to "force" Baghdad to repay Moscow, Russia has little leverage over any new government that emerges in Iraq on this issue. In fact, there may well be a contradiction between Russia's oil interests and its debt-repayment interests. The more Moscow insists on Iraqi debt repayment, the less likely is any future Iraqi government to invite Russian involvement in its oil sector.

Realistically, then, the choice Moscow may face is this: either graciously agree to write off most (if not all) of Iraq's debt in exchange for a Russian role in the Iraqi oil sector, or insist on a repayment that it will not receive and have no role in Iraq's oil sector. Moscow's insistence that Iraq repay it suggests either that Moscow hopes to use debt forgiveness as a means to gain access to the Iraqi oil sector, or that it has already concluded that it is unlikely to receive any

role in the Iraqi oil sector and therefore might as well press for repayment.

## **RUSSIA'S "OIL FOR FOOD" CONTRACTS**

Under the U.N. Security Council's oil-for-food program, which limited how Iraqi proceeds from oil sales could be spent, Russian firms became important suppliers to Iraq. In May 2003, there were \$4 billion in approved but outstanding contracts held by Russian firms under this program.<sup>49</sup> In return for Moscow's support for Security Council Resolution 1483, Washington was willing to allow the oil-for-food program to be extended by six months so that these contracts could be honored. Once the program comes to an end, though, it is doubtful that Russian firms will be able to continue selling as much to Iraq either while it remains under American-British occupation or afterward.

Although Moscow initially insisted that U.N. weapons inspectors return to Iraq and certify the elimination of weapons of mass destruction before it would agree to the lifting of U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iraq, it soon backed down from this position. While Russia could have blocked the removal of the sanctions, the United States could have blocked the renewal of the oil-for-food program. U.S. support for Russian firms being paid for their existing contracts undoubtedly helped ease Moscow's acceptance of the end of the oil-for-food windfall.

## **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DAMAGE IN RUSSIA**

There is no doubt that part of the Putin administration's concern over Iraq has been the impact of events there on the Russian domestic economy and politics.



According to some estimates, a \$1 rise or fall in the price of a barrel of oil leads to a corresponding rise or fall of 0.35 percent in the Russian GDP.<sup>50</sup> An Iraq no longer under U.N. Security Council sanctions ramping up its substantial oil-production capacity raises the prospect of lower oil prices for a long period. This will have a negative impact on all other oil exporting countries, but may have an even greater impact on Russia, where the costs of producing oil are especially high. This, of course, is something Russia would have experienced if sanctions had been lifted against Iraq with Saddam still in power. Russian oil firms, though, would have been able to offset their losses to some extent through being able to execute the oil-development contracts they signed or negotiated with Saddam. As was mentioned earlier, Moscow tried very hard to get Washington to agree to let these firms keep their contracts after the downfall of Saddam - a request which Washington refused.

In the political sphere, Russian public opinion consistently opposed an American-led intervention to topple Saddam both before and during the conflict. A poll published in early February 2003 revealed that 46 percent of Russians saw Iraq as posing "no danger."<sup>51</sup> At the outset of the war, another poll showed that 75 percent of Russians saw the United States as an "aggressor," and 71 percent saw it as the "main threat to world peace."<sup>52</sup> Reflecting this sentiment, the Duma declared the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq to be "aggression."<sup>53</sup> At the behest of Foreign Minister Ivanov, the Duma also postponed ratification of the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty in protest against American policy.<sup>54</sup> Putin himself cited

how Russia must consider the views of its 20 million Muslims in explaining his opposition to the war at its outset.<sup>55</sup>

A desire to avoid the negative consequences to Russia from Saddam's ouster, and the Russian public's negative view of U.S. foreign policy in general (and its policy toward Iraq in particular), combined with the fact that elections for the Duma will be held in December 2003 and that Putin must run for reelection in early 2004, might all serve to explain the strong Russian diplomatic opposition to the American-led war effort, even when it was clear that the Bush administration intended to follow through with it.

These factors, that is, might have explained Russian diplomacy except for the strong Russian hints at various points in the crisis that Moscow would drop its opposition to the United States at the U.N. Security Council in exchange for American recognition of Russia's oil interests in Iraq and granting of other requests, which would somehow allow Putin to overcome Russian popular opposition to American policy toward Iraq.

In addition, there were several indications that Russian public opinion did not serve as a serious constraint to Putin's actions:

- Putin's allies in the Duma quickly defeated a resolution proposed by the Russian Communist party calling for Moscow to supply munitions to Iraq as well as withdraw from the antiterror coalition and boycott American goods.<sup>56</sup>
- Putin's stated concern for the opinions of Russia's Muslims about Iraq seems dubious since he has never displayed much concern about their opinion on Russian policy toward Chechnya.

- When Talgat Tadzhuddin, head of the Central Ecclesiastical Administration of Muslims of Russia, declared "jihad" on America and Britain for attacking Iraq, the Russian Prosecutor General's office warned that such a statement fomented religious discord and that further such moves could lead to the dissolution of his organization.<sup>57</sup>
- Although the Duma postponed ratification of the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (signed by Bush and Putin in May 2002) at the outset of war due to its opposition to U.S. policy, the Duma was somehow able to change its mind and ratify it on May 14 during Secretary of State Powell's visit to Moscow.<sup>58</sup> The Federation Council also ratified the treaty on May 28, shortly before the Bush-Putin summit in St. Petersburg.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, while Russian public opinion opposed a U.S.-led intervention in Iraq, the Russian public appeared to be basically passive about this issue, as shown by the almost complete absence of antiwar demonstrations in Russia compared to such events in Western Europe and many other parts of the world (including the United States).<sup>60</sup> The one sizable protest in Moscow came at the very end of the war, when 20,000 demonstrated outside the U.S. embassy. According to Russian news reports, though, many workers appear to have been given the day off or other enticements to attend.<sup>61</sup> Two Russian journalists noted earlier that state-run TV was far more critical of American action in Iraq than were independent stations.<sup>62</sup>

These additional pieces of information suggest that the Putin administration was actively seeking to arouse the Russian public against the United States (while also

keeping this arousal within limits). It was almost as if the Putin administration wanted to be able to point to an incensed public as forcing it to oppose the United States on Iraq even though this was not really the case.

It is impossible to say whether Putin would have paid a domestic political price if he had come out in support of American policy toward Iraq during this crisis. This would have been unpopular in Russia, but Putin would now, of course, be part of the victorious coalition. Washington would probably have done far more to accommodate Russian interests if this had been the case, something that could have helped Putin in the Russian domestic political context. The path of opposing U.S. policy that Putin actually pursued apparently did receive the support of Russian public opinion before and during the war. It remains to be seen whether its having proved to be fairly ineffectual will have any negative consequences for Putin in either the upcoming parliamentary or presidential elections.

The damage, though, may be limited. As one poll before the war indicated, what 60 percent of the Russian public wanted was for Russia not to get involved in the conflict<sup>63</sup> - something which Putin did deliver on.

## CONCLUSION

What did the Putin administration gain from all its frenetic activity over Iraq? The short answer: not much. While the leaders of France and Germany welcomed Putin's support, they have not been willing to offer Russia any special concession as a result. They have not even toned down their criticism of Russian policy in Chechnya - something Moscow considers a vital

interest but is only a peripheral concern for Europe. While the Russian-American "partnership" has not disappeared, it is clearer than ever that this is not a pact between equals, as Moscow had hoped. Despite Russia's desire to secure a role in Iraq's post-sanctions oil industry, this is now very much in doubt. The repayment of the debt Iraq owes to Russia is also very much in doubt, and is years away if it occurs at all.

Moscow did receive some concessions from Washington on the oil-for-food contracts held by Russian firms. But this does not really amount to much and will be of limited duration. Putin looked good domestically for opposing U.S. policy. To the extent public opinion matters in Russia, however, it is clear that he failed to halt the American-led intervention or to extract

much from the United States to "compensate" Russia for its losses in Iraq. And sooner or later. Russia will face the adverse consequences that restored Iraqi oil exports will have on oil prices, the Russian economy and the Russian government budget.

Why did Moscow fare so poorly? There are basically three reasons: First, it overestimated the price Washington was willing to pay just for not opposing it in the Security Council (never mind more active cooperation). Second, it underestimated the ability of the United States and the United Kingdom to quickly destroy Saddam's regime without Russian help in the U.N. Security Council. Third, and most important, Moscow did not prioritize its goals, but pursued contradictory ones simultaneously.

<sup>1</sup> On the Soviet-Iraqi relationship, see Oles M. and Bettie M. Smolansky. *The USSR and Iraq* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> On Gorbachev's diplomacy during the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis, see Robert O. Freedman, "Moscow and the Gulf War," *Problems of Communism*, July-August 1991, pp. 1-17.

<sup>3</sup> On Russian policy toward Iraq during the Yeltsin era. see Robert O. Freedman. "Russian Policy toward the Middle East: The Yeltsin Legacy and the Putin Challenge." *Middle East Journal*. Winter 2001. pp. 72-80.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Con Coughlin. "Iraq Orders Russian Anti-Aircraft Missiles." *Sunday Telegraph*. July 16, 2000 (internet edition); and Jessica Berry, "Iraqis Step Up Secret Russian Weapons Trade," *Sunday Telegraph*. February 25, 2001 (internet edition).

Freedman, "Russian Policy toward the Middle East."

<sup>5</sup> Igor S. Ivanov, *The New Russian Diplomacy* (Washington, DC: Nixon Center and Brookings Institution Press, 2002), eh. 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Disarming." *The Economist*. November 9, 2002. p. 48; and "Tick. Tock," *The Economist*. November 16, 2002, pp. 21-2.

<sup>7</sup> Arkady Dubnov and Pyotr Rozvarin. "Missionary of Multipolarity " *Vremya novostei*. February 13, 2003. p. 2 (translation in *Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* - hereinafter referred to as *CDPSP* - March 12, 2003. pp. 1-3).

<sup>8</sup> Sergei Karaganov (chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy). "Russia. Europe and New Challenges." *Trud*. February 19, 2003. p. 4 (*CDPSP*. March 19, 2003. p. 6).

<sup>9</sup> Elmar Guseinov. "Vladimir Putin and Jacques Chirac Find a Common Language on Almost All Issues," *fzvestia*, February 12, 2003. p. 2 (*CDPSP*. March 12, 2003. p. I).

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Fowler, "EU Accuses Russia of Chechen Abuses," *Moscow Times*, April 9, 2003. p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> In November 2002, Moscow yielded to EU demands that Kaliningraders obtain "facilitated transit documents" - visas in all but name - in order to travel to and from Russia. Peter Savodnik, "Kaliningrad." *The Wilson Quarterly*, Spring 2003, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Mark N. Katz. "Don't Trade Georgia for Iraq." *EurasiaNet*. September 20, 2002; and Mark N. Katz. "Is Russia Demanding Too High a Price for Security Council Support on Iraq?" *EurasiaNet*. October 23, 2002.

- <sup>11</sup> Sec. for example. "USA to take Russia's Concerns into Account When Deciding on Iraq U.S. Official." RIA News Agency. September 13, 2002 (BBC Worldwide Monitoring. September 13, 2002).
- <sup>15</sup> Valeria Korchagina. "America: No Secret Deals for Iraqi Oil." *Moscow Times*. March 13, 2003. p. 5.
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