



## WANTED: AN ARCHITECT

The outcome of the parliamentary elections of December 2, 2007 puts a logical end to the transition period in contemporary history of Russia. Embroilments, quests, bows – all is over. Russia enters a new era – the epoch of consistent fulfillment of its potential, as a state enjoying political stability and economic success. The fallow land of Russian civil society, still dormant, can wake step by step and rise from rigor, thanks to the climate of stable development.

Foreign policy should, above all, be the tool enhancing dynamics of this internal development and sustainability of Russia. Among the current national projects there is none that would be directly related to missions beyond Russia's borders. In fact, the country is focused on its inner self.

Pragmatism in foreign policy is a good thing. However, new stage of Russia's development enables the country to set forth some new projects, perhaps even ambitious ones. One of the key tasks among them could be the restoration of linkage with neighbors – ex-Soviet family members (except three Baltic nations). *Restoration* is a major word here. Nowadays despite numerous declarations about high priority of relations with the CIS countries in Russian foreign policy, the relationship is subject to the same erosion, which started to destroy it at the edge of the 1980s and 1990s. Unfortunately, Russia has not undertaken enough efforts to resume this linkage, its mutuality, common sense and speech of this orchestra. At the same time, Moscow has done deplorably too much to make this mission sound impossible and even self-destructive to many.

Russia's relationship with each of the ex-USSR states has its own specifics – this is a common place. Of course, the situation in each case is unique. Sometimes there are still strong integration trends, somewhere the opportunities are lost and Russia is to blame for this, in some cases mutual interest can hardly be seen, it is abating...

Nonetheless, today, when Russia has strong voice on the world arena, it can afford the luxury of speaking about integration... but quietly and softly. There is no need for exclamations – enough is enough. Moscow should progress slowly, without agitation, calmly and with self-confidence – this will be the reflection of Russia's dignity instead of boasting, playing muscles and rattling the saboteur.

Economic positivism should be augmented with a few *trifles*. First of all, Russia needs a *design*, a plan. It may sound boring, nearly *a la allemande*. But the nation does not need a broad, emotional concept that lacks substance – it requires a well-designed strategy, a scrupulous plan aimed at restoration of the aforementioned link.

The second *trifle* is an *architect*. Neither the CIS, nor the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) has ever had a leader. They all had godfathers, executive secretaries. etc. At present, a leader – *an architect, a designer* – is wanted. And he should be recognized not only (and



maybe not necessarily) by top officials in the capitals, but by the general public occupying the so-called *post-Soviet space*.

President Putin, whose service in the Kremlin is coming to a legitimate end, has a few options in front of him.

One of them is a road of Russia's national leader. He can perform these functions inside the power system (e.g. through the parliament, in potential capabilities of which he is likely to believe, unlike many skeptics) or at some (let's say, pseudo-) distance – exploiting the experience of Deng Xiaoping or Ayatollah Khamenei.

So far the December congress of United Russia party and the statements of Dmitry Medvedev, nominee for the presidency, imply the following scenario – the party of parliamentary majority (United Russia) suggests to the new president its own candidate for premiership. And hence, the most obvious candidate to head the Cabinet will be No.1 in the electoral lists of United Russia – Vladimir Putin. So far the latter publicly approve such turn of events. Another question is whether it is his strategic choice for all years of Medvedev's presidency, or a tactical move designated solely for the transition period, e.g. the first year of Medvedev's rule, when he would need powerful Putin's shoulder against potential rivalry of different lobbies.

Therefore, as time goes by, Vladimir Putin may have another way ahead – the road of re-integrator of broken links in the post-Soviet area. This will be a much more difficult and thorny path in comparison with the domestic road to glory. In the last seven years Putin did nothing but rebuilding of a nodded house. Now it is seemingly the time he started to make improvements inside this refurbished building. He could do well by reaping the fruit and not thinking about a new journey to a dangerous land, where he failed to win laurels in the recent past. But his authority of an architect provides him with a unique chance – to vitalize the entity called CIS, whose body is reaching the end of its days.

This could be a new designer project for Putin for the coming years, or rephrasing the title of famous novel by John le Carre – «The Putin House-2».

Frankly speaking, at present Vladimir Putin hardly feels readiness and zeal to implement such project. One of the indications of such reluctance is a fruitless official visit to Belarus in December 2007, which could have started a new epoch under different circumstances. But it seems that for the foreseeable future the real development of the union with Belarus is postponed.

Truly speaking, in the interview given to me by First Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey **Denisov**, the diplomat argues that «the CIS is not a defunct organization» and «its dissolution is not considered». On the contrary, he maintains, it is a matter of reform of the Commonwealth, during which «best practices will be kept and further developed.» Economic integration, which is in fact a common market, will be carried out through the EurAsEC, while security ties will be provided by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). At the same time, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) becomes more and more important both in economy and security – Denisov calls its member states *the SCO family*.

Hence, Moscow continues to insist on multilayer, multivelocity integration, heterogeneous in time. This process can be understood by experts, but hardly warms the hearts of ordinary people in the former Soviet Union. Without a leader-architect, who has a clear design-plan, any reform of the Commonwealth, attempts to set up a common market and even the very desire to replicate the EU model will be at best a sluggish bureaucratic process and at worst will be buried by centrifugal trends.

\*\*\*

*Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities.* This is a title of a winter bestseller that came out in early December 2007. The report has many fathers, their name is Legion – the U.S. intelligence community. The conclusion is precise, in a soldier-like manner, «we judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.»

What's now? Despite belligerent rhetoric of President Bush, the probability of U.S. military strike against Iran is brought to minimum. But will the international community be able to transform dispirited negotiations with Tehran into a constructive dialogue and find mutually acceptable solutions?

Our experts have opposite views on how Iran should be dealt with. Yury **Fedorov** believes that «Iran's persistent willingness to acquire nuclear weapons and inability of the international community to stop Tehran with political and economic means, e.g. by introducing efficient sanctions, prove that the world is coming to a hard dilemma. It can either be a military solution to the problem ... or it can put up with the fact that extremist and aggressive regime will possess nuclear weapons. The latter may be even more dangerous than preemptive strike against Iran.» Dmitry **Evstafiev** claims that it is not important whether the military action is taken or not, since the very «expectations of the attack govern the oil and gas prices, transportation routes, investments, and contracts.» The idea of oil and gas routes is further developed by Azer **Mursaliyev**, who says, «Russia tries to plug the Caucasian corridor with a Georgian cork and then... the West will have to break through the gates, i.e. Iran. The West *inter alia* attempts to put the cat among the pigeons in Central Asia, i.e. to knock together Russia and China... Iran realizes the stakes and plays an all-or-nothing game.»

Regardless of which scenario takes place in reality, the Iranian issue will dominate global affairs and political news for long – for years, not months. It happens simply because Iran is the very actor in the current system of international relations, whose behavior will stipulate not only regional, but global balance of power. Iran is a sort of new *Heartland* – one who controls Iran control many significant world processes. Or Iran may stay without control and remain a kind of *free radical*.

Like it or not, but modern Iran steps decisively into the 21st century with his application for the role of a regional superpower. His advantages are many – huge oil and immense gas reserves, unique geopolitical position at the Gulf bottleneck – the strategically important Strait of Hormuz. But among Iran's merits one has to mention also a relatively open society and high dynamics of social life, especially among the youth.

This is a generally educated society, which demonstrates inner readiness for change, for breakthrough, and what's more, it strives for this breakthrough. This is a society with enormous propensity towards hi-tech progress, and it already possesses a serious basis for such technological leap – atomic energy is one of the most impressive, but not the only indicator of affection to technologies.

Deliberations about Iran should not be centered on its president. In fact, he is the second person in the state and his rank is lower than that of Ayatollah Khamenei. President Ahmadinejad is truly no bargain – neither for world leaders, who would like to see Iran as a strong and independent actor in international affairs, nor for the Iranians themselves. And his example is another proof that democracy may have serious flaws – he was elected by popular vote (by the way, are there many other leaders elected by popular vote in the region?). His principal problem is not inept foreign policy rhetoric, but his inability to become a chief manager of Iran. The country on the edge of economic and technological breakthrough lacks such leader. By his inappropriate rule, President Ahmadinejad inflicts much more serious detriment to the Iranian economy than all international sanctions. However, eventually such *ahmadinejads* come and go and strategic course of Iran will not undergo dramatic changes in case of such reshuffles.

Iran's strategy is aimed at maintenance of sovereignty, independence of the country in international affairs. And nuclear program of Iran is one of the elements that underpin this course. Develop the peaceful nuclear program to such an advanced stage when it can easily, within several months – and under appropriate political decision! – be switched to military rails... Or not switched... I.e. a *Japanese version*: Tokyo has such an advanced peaceful atomic energy program that anytime within a couple of month Japan may turn it into nuclear weapons and start serial production of nuclear munitions. Tehran has the same aspirations – to keep the field for maneuver, to prevent anyone from restricting its right to development.

Realizing Tehran's global role, President Putin could not but visit Iran in October 2007, despite tough pressure on the eve of the tour. 40 days later he received the Iranian delegation of



nuclear negotiators at home. Iran is a serious strategic partner for Russia, even though he is not an easy partner. This is why Russia cannot afford to boycott Iran or to neglect it. On the contrary, it will do its best to ensure engagement – in bilateral relations, in regional projects and in the time being in global projects as well. At the same time, being one of the watchdogs of the letter and spirit of the NPT, Russia cannot permit anyone to weaken the treaty, even indirectly. Iranian partners, to put it mildly, have not always been honest and transparent in this area and partly because of this, current Tehran's position has also to be scrutinized with *double suspicion*.

\*\*\*

Most of the articles in this issue of *Security Index* are devoted to the mosaic of Russian identity, notably on the Asian flank. Will the new design/plan be based on pragmatism or stereotypes of the past? Mikhail **Margelov**, who chairs the International Affairs Committee of the Federation Council, speculates on the marriage of convenience between Russia and the United States and campaigns for pragmatic cooperation, maintains «The Americans should also take into consideration the particularities of post-Soviet space and the special influence, which Russia exerts over it. Because Russia is the potential core of this space, and Russia has the most powerful economy and military force here.» Pavel **Baev**, a senior researcher from the Peace Research Institute in Oslo, who is more skeptical and fears the domination of myths in policymaking, confirms, «Central Asia with its erratic spread of oil and gas reserves gives a number of examples how misapprehension of interests in energy sphere dictates the course for uncompromising confrontation with the United States, the victory in which would leave Russia back at the bottom of the ladder similar to the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe' of the past century.»

One will definitely notice that particular importance is attached to Central Asia. Vadim **Kozyulin** analyzes military-technical cooperation in the region and Russia's role in it. The roundtable held by the PIR Center deals with a more peaceful, but nonetheless explosive, topic of Russia's energy policy and it also focuses on Central Asian and Caspian resources. By the way, our interest in energy matters – both atomic and traditional ones – will be reflected in a number of articles that I collect for the coming issues of the journal. Hence, it would be interesting to get your feedback on discussions at the aforementioned roundtable.

\*\*\*

As I am speaking about the plans for the future, I would like to ask you – have you already subscribed to the *Security Index*? If not, it is not too late to do this! In 2008 the journal will be distributed by paid subscription and free access to full electronic version of the journal on PIR's website will be closed. You can get full information about subscription at the pages of this issue.

Or perhaps, you are interested in regular tea parties with our most prominent contributors? Then you can send an application and join the *Dialogue Club* – simply write to us at [dialogue@pircenter.org](mailto:dialogue@pircenter.org).

See you soon – at our tea parties or on the pages of our journal! 🍵📖

**Vladimir Orlov**