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One of the most important questions in the world today concerns the intentions of Russia. One can only wonder what is motivating Russia to create so many artificial problems in a short period of time.

If Russia were motivated by logical concerns, it would be dedicated to balancing growing Chinese power, guarding against Islamic terrorism, and preventing the emergence of nuclear powers on its borders. Instead, however, Russia appears fixated on dominating the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union and appears willing to sacrifice its vital interests for the empty satisfaction of appearing to give orders to countries it believes it has a right to dominate.

The leaders of a country are usually dedicated to defending that country's vital interests. Developments in Russia, however, show that there is a real divergence between the interests of the country and the interests of the small group of people who run it. The latter, by all indications, are interested in the accumulation of wealth and power irrespective of the consequences for their country. The result is to make of Russia a disruptive and unpredictable force in international relations and a danger to itself.

The present ruling oligarchy came to power in Russia accidentally. Were it not for the fact that the Yeltsin leadership was totally corrupt and seized by fear of a grand settling of accounts in 1999, it is highly unlikely that someone like Putin, the head of the secret service with no previous political experience, could have become Yeltsin's successor. With Yeltsin and his family facing possible criminal prosecution, however, a plan was put into motion to put in place a successor who would guarantee that Yeltsin and his family would be safe from prosecution and the criminal division of property in the country would not be subject to reexamination.

For "Operation Successor" to succeed, however, it was necessary to have a massive provocation. In my view, this provocation was the bombing in September, 1999 of the apartment building bombings in Moscow, Buinaksk, and Volgodonsk. In the aftermath of these attacks, which claimed 300 lives, a new war was launched against Chechnya. Putin, the newly appointed prime minister who was put in charge of that war, achieved overnight popularity. Yeltsin resigned early. Putin was elected president and his

first act was to guarantee Yeltsin immunity from prosecution. In the meantime, all talk of reexamining the results of privatization was forgotten.

The group of former KGB agents around Putin quickly formed a new ruling hierarchy. Many people thought that the corruption under Yeltsin – referred to as the "Mobutu-ization of Russia" could not possibly get worse but this proved to be a very naïve assumption. After the price of oil rose from $9 a barrel in 1998 to as much as $78 a barrel recently, the possibilities for corruption exploded. The value of bribes in Russia is now estimated to be ten times what it was under Yeltsin.

The formative experience for many of the members of the present Russian elite was spymania, in effect, the search for phantoms. In recent years, they have stumbled upon an unexpected Klondike based on super high prices for oil. It is therefore not surprising that they are determined to protect their gains and do so with the help of artificial goals in foreign policy that make it possible for them to define the outside world as the enemy and in that way distract the population from the corruption and destruction of democracy that is going on inside the country.

What are we seeing today? There is near hysteria in Russia over the removal of the Soviet war memorial from the center of Tallinn although, after more than 60 years, Russia has not buried its own war dead and has certainly not bothered to memorialize many of the mass graves that contain thousands of nameless Stalin era victims. We see attempts to defend the separatism of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia although Russia waged a genocidal war to prevent separatism in Chechnya. We see a country that claims to be in favor of free elections but did everything possible to falsify the elections in Ukraine. Finally, and most incredibly, we see a country that feels itself threatened by plans for a U.S. defensive anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech republic while assiduously supporting the development of nuclear weapons in Iran.

Russia today is conducting a foreign policy directed against phantom enemies on the basis of artificial issues that have no relationship to the country's real interests but have everything to do with the needs of the small coterie of corrupt officials who treat the country as their personal property and have acquired unprecedented wealth. The problem is in equal parts political, psychological and criminal and it represents a challenge for the West because one should not assume that just because the Russian concerns are mythical that they are therefore not being treated by them seriously. I consider it a sign of Russian authorities' perverse seriousness that Viktor Yuschenko was poisoned. Although he's been left disfigured, he could have easily been killed. Similarly, Russian forces have attacked Georgia in the Kodori Valley and more serious escalation is possible. Russians have also unleashed a massive cyber attack against government websites and computers in Estonia, a potentially crippling blow in a country that is heavily dependent on the internet.

In dealing with Russia, we have a dual task. We have to make clear to the Russian leadership that there is no advantage to pursuing the policies that they are pursuing. To this end, we have to stop mollifying them. Recently, Alexander Litvinenko, a British subject was murdered by being poisoned with a radioactive substance. The crime took place on British soil. All evidence points to state sponsored murder. So far, the Russian

authorities have obstructed the investigation. Is it realistic to think about further cooperation with Russia, including Russian membership in the G-8 and the WTO until this crime is solved?

At the same time, we need to make clear to the Russian people that their real interest and the interest of their country is with universal moral values – one set of standards for all – which are the Biblical heritage of both Russia and the West.

Unfortunately, in this respect there is a problem. We have no hope of influencing Russian public opinion without first acknowledging the superficiality of U.S. policy toward Russia during the Yeltsin period. What we described as the progress of democracy was more properly seen in Russia as the triumph of criminality and now the United States has been discredited in Russia and democracy is associated with crime.

We are not involved in a Cold War with Russia and will not be but the traces of a delusionary Soviet mentality are still evident in the behavior and aspirations of the Russian leadership. That mentality has to be met by a commitment on our part to universal moral principles if it is to be limited and prevented from becoming an independent factor in international relations capable of doing great harm to both Russia and the West.

There is no sincerity involved in the foreign policy of the Russian government. By recognizing this and basing our policies accordingly, we have some hope of influencing both the Russian leadership and the Russian population and limiting the quite dangerous Russian tendency to once again live in a world of illusions, a tendency that is becoming more pronounced with each passing day.