



## Putin's ravings

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When today's world appears too complicated to deal with, some have been known to long nostalgically for the days of the Cold War. It is clear the Russian President Vladimir Putin is among them, judging by his tirade against the United States at the annual *Wehrkunde* conference on security policy in Munich.

The speech, in which he accused the United States of "a hyper-inflated use of force" in the cause of world domination, was in the fine old tradition of Soviet leaders blustering and raging against the United States. All that was missing was Mr. Putin taking off his shoe and banging the table.

Mr. Putin's speech was received with dismay by Europeans and Americans alike, particularly given

the prestigious venue in which it was delivered. In some ways it may have been a salutary reminder of the continued value of NATO for both sides. "I can't hide my disappointment. I will not hide my disappointment. It's not helpful," commented NATO Secretary-General Japp de Hoop Scheffer.

These days, of course, it is more common to find Europeans airing laundry lists of grievances against the United States. So, reminding the world what the alternatives are -- Russia and China -- may be quite helpful, much in the same vein as the nutty rant of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez at the U.N. General Assembly.

But there may be those who will listen and find justification for their

own anti-Americanism in Mr. Putin's ravings. One could shrug them off, as did Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who took the high road at the conference. However, as familiar themes emerged, the speech is worth examining a little closer.

Mr. Putin's target in particular was a "unipolar" world with the United States calling the shots. It "means in practice one thing: one centre of power, one force, one center of decision-making, a world of one master, one sovereign." "The United States has overstepped its borders -- economic, political and humanitarian -- and has imposed itself on other states." U.S. dominance is "ruinous, not only for those inside the system but for the sovereign himself because it destroys him from within. It has nothing in common with democracy." "Local and regional wars didn't get any fewer. The number of people who died didn't get less, but increased ... We see no restraints, a hyper-inflated use of force."

What Mr. Putin is setting up here is a caricature of today's world and the role of the United States. While American power is undeniable -- and some of us believe essential at this point in time for the stability of the international system -- the world is hardly unipolar. It is far more complicated than that. Powers like Russia, China and India -- and in some ways the European Union -- constitute secondary power centers, constantly jockeying for position and influence. The developing world, too, is finding and applying its muscle in international arenas.

The United States, furthermore, is engaged multilaterally throughout the world. After the end of the Cold War, it became clear that being the world's sole policeman is too big a job for any nation. While the United States reserves the right to act alone in national self-defense, the National Security Strategy spells out the critical importance of international cooperation.

Finally, Mr. Putin asked why the United States is negotiating for missile defense radar installations in Poland and Czech Republic, which he considers a hostile act. (This may in the end be his real reason for going on the attack.) "Why is it necessary to put military infrastructure on our border? It is hardly connected to today's global threats." Interestingly, Russia does not have an eastern border with either Poland or Czech Republic, one of which borders Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus, and the other Slovakia. In other words, Russia still does not see its former satellites as the free nations they are today.

The Russia that Mr. Putin is busy building up is not unlike the picture he paints of the United States. It uses its vast oil resources strategically to squeeze its customers, mainly in its former sphere of influence, and seeks international dominance through new monopolistic agreements with energy-producing nations. It has not abandoned plans for continued domination of its former sphere of influence, and it has reverted to authoritarian patterns in domestic affairs. As a colleague of mine likes to say, you can take the

man out of the KGB, but not the KGB out of the man.

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