

Russia and China Rooting for Gore

By J. Michael Waller

The vice president's views on key foreign-policy issues have made Al Gore the presidential candidate of choice for Russian hard-liners and the Chinese Communists.



Vice President Al Gore welcomed President Clinton's Sept. 2 decision to postpone development of a system to defend the United States against incoming nuclear-missile attacks. So did Moscow and Beijing. Russian President Vladimir Putin called the decision a "well-thought-out and responsible step." The Chinese Foreign Ministry praised it as "rational."

The rhetoric matches a subtle but significant taking of sides by Russia and China in the U.S. presidential campaign between Gore and Republican candidate George W. Bush. While the rhetoric generally is indirect and low-key, Kremlin hard-liners, as well as China's communist leaders, have made it clear that, because of his views on missile defense and other issues, they would prefer to see Gore as the next president of the United States.

"Semiofficially they try, of course, to be reserved and distant, not to be involved in any way with the campaign," notes Victor Yasmann, a former longtime analyst at the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute in Munich who now edits the radios' new newsletter about Russia's security and intelligence services. But sometimes, says Yasmann, who monitors the Russian media, word is allowed to creep out.

Both Moscow and Beijing blasted the GOP platform issued at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia last month while offering faint praise for the convention platform of the Democrats. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhu Bangzao told reporters that the People's Republic of China takes a dim view of the GOP document: "We have noted that during the U.S. presidential campaign, the program proposed by a certain party contains accusations against China. We express concern and regret over this." The official "news" agency Xinhua, a government-controlled propaganda organ, quoted Zhu as calling on the Republican Party to "restrain itself from inserting U.S. presidential-campaign politics into Sino-U.S. relations." This came in sharp contrast to Beijing's own covert military-intelligence agency's funding of the 1996 Clinton/Gore reelection campaign.

"With Gore it will be much easier for Moscow," Yasmann says. "He is

He's their man: One Moscow hard-liner openly says, "Gore would be a better U.S. president for Russia."

CHRIS HONDROS/NEWSMAKERS

already very much involved in Russian affairs. This means he is very dependable based on what he has done." Gore was an architect and advocate of multibillion-dollar cash transfers to the Russian Central Bank, U.S. taxpayer subsidies to Russian government and business entities and arms-control initiatives that prevented the United States from taking advantage of Russia's post-Soviet strategic weakness. Yasmann notes that "ORT [a Russian TV network co-owned by the state and tycoon Boris Berezovsky] yesterday said that now the Democrats are gaining the upper hand, and that's not bad for Russia."

Both countries have contingency plans for a Bush presidency as well as backdoor channels of varying kinds into the people likely to staff a Bush administration. The specter of a Bush White House, Yasmann argues, might be used for domestic Russian consumption to rejuvenate the Russian Federation's sagging arms industry and the large political constituencies around it. But Gore, from the Russian perspective, is "good on arms control, he's good on missile defense, he's good on money," according to Yasmann. "He's not going to test Russia's fragile economy with a 'new arms race' over missile defense. He has a much greater understanding of Russia's business community and has better personal connections. He is also more amenable to rescheduling or canceling Russia's bilateral debts."

Analysts note that the Gore family's business ties to Moscow go back a half-century to when Albert Gore Sr., the vice president's father and then a Tennessee congressman, became a business partner with the late Soviet agent and money-launderer Armand Hammer — a relationship that benefits the vice president financially to this day. Leon Fuerth, Gore's national-security adviser, has taken a softer, sympathetic approach to Russia, while his counterpart on the Bush team, Condoleezza Rice, has been far more hard-nosed, calling for a termination of Western economic support to Russia's central government.

One dependable Kremlin ally, the camp of ultranationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky, is characteristically blunt. "Gore would be a better U.S. president for Russia," Zhirinovsky's son and political operative told *Insight* Senior Editor Jamie Dettmer last March. Zhirinovsky's National Liberal Democratic Party has a record of taking extreme positions as trial balloons or rhetorical benchmarks that provide political cover to the Kremlin.



An official Russian government broadcast reflecting concerns about U.S. missile defense termed a Bush administration a "nightmare scenario."

State-run media offer Moscow and Beijing a means of conveying their views subtly and indirectly, avoiding the entanglement of government officials and institutions in the U.S. political process and affording themselves political cover. Toby Westerman, who monitors global shortwave broadcasts for the electronic magazine *World-NetDaily*, has reported, "Moscow believes that the Democratic Party has a 'more balanced approach' in regard to relations with Russia than the GOP and that the Democratic Party platform is 'more open to Russia.'"

Russia's reform-minded social democrats and the Communist Party don't like Gore because of what they called his "chumminess" with the gangster-tycoons surrounding Russian President Putin and former president Boris Yeltsin. Yet Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov says he still prefers Gore over the Republicans, citing what he calls the GOP's "hawkish and highly negative attitude toward Russia."

Quoting broadcasts of the state-run Voice of Russia, Westerman says, "If the Democrats remain in power, Moscow expects to have 'more constructive possibilities to develop cooperation' with Russia." According to one recent Voice of Russia program, "The Democrats have a more bal-

Fingers crossed: Putin, right, and the Chinese military like Gore's opposition to a U.S. national missile defense.

anced approach to the problem of the antimissile system," since "they do not insist on the deployment of [a national missile-defense] system." By contrast, the government-controlled station has criticized the Republicans, noting that the Bush foreign-policy and defense team contains "quite a few politicians who never displayed warm feelings toward Russia" and saying that the "Republican wing of the Senate" still bases its worldview "on Cold War stereotypes."

Both Moscow and Beijing have singled out the Senate — and especially Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Jesse Helms of North Carolina — as the real enemy who, in the words of a Chinese Communist Party journal, has "made trouble for the Clinton administration." In July, *Shijie Zhishi*, an official journal on international affairs that reflects the views of Red China's Foreign Ministry, slammed Helms for "constantly making trouble — with many countries, including U.S. allies, hating him bitterly."

Helms is possessed by a "simplistic worldview that he evolved in his youth in the countryside" and an "abnormal anti-Communist mentality," according to *Shijie Zhishi*. "Particularly on foreign policy," the communist journal lamented, "he is completely against the positions of the Clinton administration."