

rather than join the European Union. That makes it entirely plausible that Putin intends to invite these Russian-speaking territories to unite politically with Moscow.

If Russia and the Russians in these regions do wish to reunite, the American government should have a clear policy: let them. The Cold War is over. Soviet Communism is no more. And a bigger, stronger Russia benefits America in four specific ways.

First, Russia has thus far managed to keep control of the vast stockpile of weapons built by the former Soviet Union. Once spread throughout the USSR and Eastern Europe, these weapons have mostly been brought back to Russia proper. Many have been destroyed. A great many more will be dismantled in the decades ahead. Despite rumors, none are known to have fallen into the hands of terrorists or rogue regimes. This is one of the greatest averted catastrophes in human history. Any relative weakening of the Russian state, as may arise if the Near Abroad continues to drift away from Russia, threatens that unblemished record.

Second, America benefits by keeping resource-rich Siberia out of Chinese hands. Siberia is larger than Canada, with more natural resources and fewer people. Much of it was part of China for centuries and now sits next door. Going forward, China will be much richer and stronger than Russia. If Russia is too weak—or, worse, breaks up—China stands to retake Siberia. While American and Chinese interests are not in direct conflict, America should not run the geopolitical risk of excessively strengthening China by inviting her to acquire the riches of Siberia.

Third, from Chechnya to the steppes of Central Asia, Russia is on the front lines in the war against radical Islam. Russia had its own 9/11 at Beslan, where

The Patriot Act, which the Bush administration is attempting to make even more intrusive, has been falsely described as an essential law-and-order tool

against international terrorism. In the nearly four years since 9/11, there have been thousands of detentions and interrogations of terrorist suspects leading to nearly 400 prosecutions on terrorism charges and fewer than 40 convictions. Most of the 40 convictions were on the “aiding and abetting” level and were plea bargained. The average jail time for those convicted has been 11 months, suggesting that either the War on Terror is a complete failure or that there are no terrorists to find. More interesting, however, is the impact of the Patriot Act. While the due process afforded to terrorism suspects is less than completely transparent, none of the 40 terrorism-related convictions appears to have been based on information obtained through Patriot Act provisions.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai’s control over many provincial tribal areas is eroding

while insurgents, including remnants of the Taliban, have significantly increased attacks, making travel outside Kabul perilous. Dozens of U.S. and Afghan military personnel and civilians have died in recent weeks, and international aid programs are at a standstill. Karzai’s biggest problem is Washington. He is losing credibility with his own people and has been unable to demonstrate any political successes recently despite his pleas for symbolic American gestures that could bolster his position. For example, Afghanistan does not control its own prison system, and Karzai increasingly is being blamed by Afghans for the prison abuses at Bagram and elsewhere that recently sparked bloody anti-American protests. When Karzai raised the issue during his visit to the U.S., President Bush offered no concessions to Karzai that the latter could point to as progress towards genuine Afghan independence. Rumors have proliferated, even among close supporters of Karzai, that he is choosing to ignore repeated allegations that American troops have raped Afghan female interpreters. The rumors, spread by rebel chieftains such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, are not true, but they are becoming fodder for Taliban insurgents to rally public support against Karzai. The increased level of violence undermines predictions by U.S. and Afghan officials that the Taliban is about to collapse. Karzai’s viability as president of Afghanistan depends almost entirely on the continued American presence in the country, but reliance on a seemingly obtuse Washington is becoming a two-edged sword.



In a new sign that the Libyan regime of Muammar Khaddafi has not changed its stripes

despite Libya’s economically motivated rapprochement with the West, a prominent Libyan journalist was recently murdered. There are many indications that the journalist, Deif al-Ghazzelle, who was outspoken in criticizing Libyan government corruption, was tortured before being killed. Khaddafi’s Libya continues to be a place where individual liberties depend very much on who you are and whom you know. The regime will likely ensure that the foreign companies engaged in petroleum exploitation are able to operate in a protected cocoon, but al-Ghazzelle’s murder and the recent exposure of Khaddafi’s attempt to have Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia assassinated show a darker side.

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radical Muslim Chechnyans murdered 186 Russian children. America should avoid any risk of another victory for radical Islam comparable to that in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Finally, America also stands to benefit from the establishment of a peaceful, stable boundary between Europe and Russian Orthodox civilization. In Eastern Europe, the greatest American interest is peace. America does not specifically care who rules in Kishinev or Dnepropetrovsk. As a practical matter, given the institutions in place

Kaliningrad—taken by Stalin in 1945 and now a bizarre island of the Russian Federation surrounded by EU territory—and make it in some way part of the European Union. And Russia should repatriate as many Russians as can be accommodated from the remainder of the Near Abroad in Europe—that is, from the remainder of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Baltic States.

Under such a reciprocal territorial deal, a stable border between Russia and the European Union would come into being. Politically and economically,

Beltway Russophobia. Consider, for example, the view of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Polish-born academic and national security adviser to President Carter. Brzezinski recently castigated the Russian government and its well-wishers in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal*, taking to task those who “pretend that [Russia’s] non-democratic regime is already a democracy.”

Count me among the pretenders. In a world of China, Saudi Arabia, and a score of Equatorial Guineas, any plausible division of the world into “democratic” and “non-democratic” states would put Russia in the democratic column.

Brzezinski is not alone in being a Russophobe. Most leading neoconservatives have publicly and consistently taken positions against Russian Orthodox Christian civilization. When the first President Bush made some peaceable comments about Russian unity, William Safire and other neoconservatives taunted him with the phrase “Chicken Kiev.” When Muslim terrorists in Chechnya (a province of the Russian Federation) began their insurgency against Russia, Bill Kristol, Frank Gaffney, and other neoconservatives signed up to support them through the American Committee for Peace in Chechnya. The record is sadly clear: neocons talk about democracy but work to divide and undermine Russian Orthodox civilization.

True democracy cuts the other way. Given the geography of Russia and the Near Abroad, Russian voters actually want a stronger, bigger Russia. Voting patterns in Ukraine suggest that the people of eastern Ukraine, Crimea, Belarus, and northwestern Kazakhstan want—and will vote—to rejoin Russia. America’s interests are clear: let them. ■

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IN A WORLD OF CHINA, SAUDI ARABIA, AND A SCORE OF EQUATORIAL GUINEAS, ANY PLAUSIBLE DIVISION OF THE WORLD INTO “DEMOCRATIC” AND “NON-DEMOCRATIC” STATES WOULD PUT RUSSIA IN THE DEMOCRATIC COLUMN.

today, peace in Eastern Europe should take the form of a sensible border between the European Union and NATO on one side and the Russian Federation on the other. Territories with mixed allegiances in the middle, such as the current Ukraine, will inherently be points of conflict.

Unfortunately, the existing borders of the Russian Federation leave more than 20 million Russians stranded in the Near Abroad. To protect its own stability, Russia must get bigger in Europe by reuniting with East Ukraine, the Crimea, and perhaps Belarus. The U.S. should therefore make clear to Russia that it has no objection to residents of Ukraine, Crimea, Kazakhstan, or Belarus choosing to join the Moscow government.

What do we get in return? America should ask Putin to allow the remainder of Ukraine and Moldova, if they wish, to join the European Community and NATO. Russia should demilitarize what was Northeast Prussia and is today

that border would be crisp: there would be almost 600 million Europeans on one side, roughly 170 million Russians on the other, and no one in the middle. At least in Europe, Russia would achieve stability.

Under such a deal, Russia would pose no threat whatsoever to America. It would be a satisfied power far more interested in defending itself against threats to its broad territory and riches than in making trouble for America. What would we fight over, islands in the Bering Strait?

A greater Russia would govern more than 10 percent of the world’s territory but under 3 percent of its population—a population shrinking even in absolute terms. A satisfied Russia would be a partner for a satisfied America.

Indeed, these American interests are so overwhelming, the costs of a greater Russia so minimal, and the strategic logic so straightforward, we should ask ourselves why this is not already America’s stated policy. The answer may be

Arts & Letters

FILM

[Yes]

Film in Rhyme? Yes, It's Time

By Steve Sailer

MOLIÈRE'S BOURGEOIS GENTLEMAN was famously delighted to learn he had been speaking prose all his life. Yet as historian Jacques Barzun noted in *From Dawn to Decadence*, "His surprise is well-founded ... What he spoke all his life was *not* prose, but speech. Prose is the written form of deliberate expression ... It is as artificial as verse."

Nor should a modern gentleman assume he is speaking "dialogue," because what screenwriters are paid large sums to contrive is barely more authentic than quatrains would be. I recall a 1994 radio interview with Steve Barancik, the painfully shy writer of the snazzy film noir "Last Seduction," which starred Linda Fiorentino as the ultimate femme fatale. The perky interviewer asked him if he comes up with all those killer replies in real life. "Well, sure," the author stammered, "In my car ... on the ... way home."

Cinema's visuals are constantly evolving, but its dialogue is deteriorating. Why write eloquent English when it's just going to wind up translated into Turkish and Tagalog to serve as wadding between detonations?

It's time for something different, and Sally Potter's film "Yes" is a gloriously reactionary step backwards.

Shortly after 9/11, Potter, who is best known for her 1992 adaptation of Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, began composing a scene illustrating the clash of civilizations between an Arab immigrant and a wealthy Western woman. She recalled, "The argument between the two lovers came out onto the page, for the most part, in iambic pentameter (ten syllables per line) ... Perhaps it was an instinctive attempt to let the characters speak to each other on screen about things which are hard to express in normal conversation."

The screenplay ended up as rhyme of the most conspicuous kind: couplets. The expert actors in "Yes"—led by three-time Oscar-nominee Joan Allen, the tall, severely blonde actress from Chicago's famed Steppenwolf Theatre Company—play it like Shakespearean blank verse, pausing at the end of sentences rather than at the end of lines, but the constant rhyming won't let us forget it's verse.

Because it's poetry, the dialogue cannot even pretend to be realistic. This frees the characters to articulate impossibly literary lines that don't sound any more implausible than their most banal statements.

Many will hate "Yes," but I found it delightful, reminiscent of the pleasures of a musical. I hope Potter makes another verse film, allowing her actors to stress the rhymes. This movie's high point comes when Potter permits Sheila Hancock, who plays Allen's dying Communist aunt, to read her witty voice-over monologue as heroic couplets, blending Alexander Pope with Dr. Seuss: "Oh, you'll be sorry when I'm dead / I'm only joking, dear. I only said / That for a laugh. Although of course it's true."

In prose, Potter sounds like a doctrinaire leftist, but in verse she's more con-

tent to let her characters each have their say, airing issues that are more visible than discussed.

Allen—like many contemporary actresses, such as Nicole Kidman and Cate Blanchett—is extremely fair, and her character's olive-skinned Arab beau repeatedly admits that their difference in coloration both attracts and annoys him. Indeed, "Yes" and Potter's earlier "Tango Lesson" illustrate anthropologist Peter Frost's new book *Fair Women, Dark Men*, which documents that this cultural preference has been found in most societies. Apparently, this is because women actually are "the fair sex," being slightly paler on average.

The man, a surgeon from shattered Beirut who can only find work as a chef in London, eventually realizes that his Muslim masculine pride can no longer tolerate being an invisible man. He demands of his mistress, a celebrated American embryologist, "From Elvis to Eminem, Warhol's art; / I know your stories, know your songs by heart. / But do you know mine?"

No, and like the rest of us, Potter's heroine isn't going to try to learn. Rather than offer to accompany her homesick lover back to Beirut for a visit, she demands he come with her to Havana, of all places, where she plans to bask in nostalgia for her late aunt's radicalism. I'm not sure Potter realizes what an awful person her adulterous heroine is.

Ironically, Cuba turns out, due to Castro's stultifying tyranny, to look like a well-preserved slice of the Eisenhower era, full of '57 Chevys and Hemingway-worshipers. Potter doesn't quite get the joke, but at least her artistic daring makes up for her tedious politics. ■

Rated R for language and some sexual content.