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Moscow resets expectations as disorder reigns in Washington



Russia's President Vladimir Putin motions to blow a kiss to journalists as he leaves a meeting of the BRICS countries

By Kathrin Hille

Ten years ago Vladimir Putin angrily declared that the post-cold war order was a sham. Standing before the western military and diplomatic establishment at the Munich Security Conference, the Russian president accused the US of plunging the world into chaos by warmongering, meddling in other countries' affairs and disregarding international law. For many, it marked the moment that Mr Putin became an adversary.

Now, as foreign policy and security officials gather again in the Bavarian city, the western order that Mr Putin railed against suddenly looks fragile. The agenda-setting security report for this year's Munich Security Conference asks whether the west is collapsing after public discontent triggered the UK's exit from the EU and brought Donald Trump to power in the US.

And the sidelined, victimised Russia that Mr Putin described in 2007 is gone, replaced by a country that has forced its way back on to the world stage with the invasion of Crimea, decisive intervention in

Some Russian ideologues believe that an irreversible decline of the west is lifting their country's status and global weight

Syria and western countries' accusations of disrupting their elections.

At his confirmation hearing last month, US secretary of state Rex Tillerson, the former ExxonMobil chief executive, said NATO allies were right to be alarmed at a "resurgent Russia" — a phrase that has been echoing through western capitals.

Mr Putin has "staked out a position that thrives on asserting Russian interests in the world at the expense of the US," says Eugene Rumer, director of the Russia and Eurasia programme at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington. Moscow has "positioned itself as the challenger to the global liberal international order that the US has upheld and promoted the world

over since the end of the second world war," he adds.

But even amid this talk of Russian resurgence, the mood in Moscow is cautious — particularly about the disorder in Washington. In the US there may be a perception that Russia is revelling in Mr Trump's election, but the rollercoaster ride of contradictory policy pronouncements and the failure to quickly establish top-level communication with the US president are upsetting previously high Russian expectations.

Russian officials had been cautiously optimistic that the US under Mr Trump could rebuild relations with Moscow but they have turned guarded and in some cases suspicious and frustrated, mirroring sentiment in European capitals.

"If we wanted, we could have taken advantage of the fact that they are not ready yet over there," says one senior official in the Russian administration. "We could probably have gotten some kind of agreement to have Trump and Putin meet quickly, and they might have hit it off. But what then?"

Even arranging talks between Mr Tillerson and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov at the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bonn proved difficult, though a meeting took place late last week.

"It looks like the massive western media campaign against Russia has made contact with us so toxic that Mr Trump, a leader who was determined to make a new start with Russia, is now shying away," the Kremlin official says.

Even beyond these difficulties, Russian observers say the west vastly overestimates Russia's power and misinterprets its motives.

"It is not the goal of Putin's foreign policy to become a new superpower or even to establish himself as the biggest dude on the block," says Andrei Kortunov, director-general of the

government-backed Russian International Affairs Council. "The Kremlin sees its actions much more as defensive and responsive against moves encroaching on Russia's interests."

However, some Russian ideologues are triumphant, believing that an irreversible decline of the west is lifting their country's status and global weight.

"The golden age of the liberal international order is over," says Natalia Narochnitskaya, a conservative nationalist former lawmaker and diplomat. She claims that many European citizens are disillusioned about the EU's ability to serve the continent. "Putin, for them, is the only leader who dares raise the banner and openly, without excuses, declare that he will defend traditional values," she says.

A postmodernist Europe would fail to survive the challenge by other civilisations, Ms Narochnitskaya says: "Only together can Russia and Europe become one side of the global power triangle — Eurasia, the US and China."

It was a long way to this self-assured attitude from Mr Putin's 2007 criticism. Moscow started taking things into its own hands in Russia's "near abroad" — the former Soviet republics that it sees as its rightful sphere of influence. Eighteen months after his Munich speech, Russia waged a week-long war with Georgia ostensibly to protect a pro-Russian minority in a breakaway region. It came only months after NATO's Bucharest summit had issued a declaration that Georgia and Ukraine would become members.

Despite the shock over the conflict, the west tried to seek a new start in ties with Russia. The Georgia war had only been the first shot, however: in 2014, Moscow annexed Crimea while stoking separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine after what it saw as US-backed street protests toppled Viktor Yanukovich, Kiev's Russian-leaning president.

The Ukraine conflict led to a full breakdown of Moscow's relations with the west. But Mr Putin did not stop there. As the US and the EU tried to punish him with sanctions and isolation, he intervened in Syria, helping President Bashar al-Assad regain ground in the civil war and derailing US-led attempts to broker a political transition.

If the US intelligence community is to be believed, Moscow is preparing to reap the top prize. According to the assessment of the Office of



Moscow resets expectations as disorder reigns in Washington (continued)



German Bundeswehr soldiers arrive at an airport in Lithuania as part of NATO's move to enhance its presence in the alliance's easternmost countries as a deterrent against Russian aggression

the Director of National Intelligence, Moscow meddled in the US election with an “influence campaign” of hacking and propaganda. Less than a month after Mr Trump’s inauguration, the resignation of Michael Flynn over the national security adviser’s lies about discussing sanctions with the Russian ambassador before taking office has further stoked fears in Washington of a Russian puppet master behind the US government.

Such concerns are fuelled by talk in Moscow of a “grand bargain” that Mr Putin could strike with Mr Trump. At a round table organised by state news

agency Rossiya Segodnya late last month, political analysts said they believed Moscow and Washington could make a deal by respecting each other’s spheres of influence. Some Russian strategists suggest that resolution of the Ukraine crisis and co-operation in the fight against global terror could become bargaining chips in such a deal.

A senior Russian foreign policy official says the Trump administration’s attitude towards who carried the blame for the non-fulfilment of the 2015 Minsk agreement on Ukraine could help isolate German chancellor Angela Merkel in

her hawkish stance against Russia. Alexei Chesnakov, a former Kremlin official who heads the Centre for Current Politics, a Moscow think-tank, says he expected the French election this spring to contribute to this shift because the rightwing candidates are more sympathetic to Russia.

He floats the idea that Ukraine was starting to resemble a “failed state” and could therefore be seen as a source of terrorism — a characterisation not shared by western capitals. “In that sense, it becomes part of the agenda for jointly countering international terrorism for the

US and Russia,” he said.

Mr Kortunov believes that under a different leader Russia’s search for a new place in the post-Soviet world could have turned out more benign and the Ukraine conflict might have been avoided. But he says Moscow would still have run into disagreements over the enlargement of the EU and NATO.

Mr Putin has compared Moscow’s foreign policy and security moves to a Siberian bear that has no desire to leave its habitat. However, that habitat, or the area where Russia sees its national interests, appears to range vastly beyond the country’s borders.

In step with the intervention in Syria, Moscow has revived ties with almost every country in the region. Exploiting the US’s waning presence, Russian diplomats presented themselves as a dialogue partner for countries with contradictory interests, thus building a network including NATO member Turkey, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

As a result, no state will be able to bypass Moscow when resolving regional conflicts. Already, France and Italy are turning to Russia to help integrate Khalifa Haftar, the Libyan military strongman whom Moscow has cultivated, into a UN-backed political arrangement.

“ In the long term, a superpower style foreign policy is absolutely unsustainable for Russia.

IVAN TIMOFEEV
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT
MGIMO

Some of these moves are rooted in Russia’s deep misgivings about western-sponsored regime change in countries such as Libya and Iraq. “They are now getting involved themselves in order to keep the west from making more mistakes,” a European diplomat in Moscow says half-jokingly. “We like it, because we need them.”

Simultaneously, Moscow has jumped in to build ties with leading countries in Asia, the fastest-growing region: apart from its closer relationship with China, Russia is building friendly relations with Vietnam and India, in competition with the US, and wooing populist Philippine leader Rodrigo Duterte. And Mr Putin is using the desire of Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe to settle the two countries’ territorial dispute to pull this most important US ally in Asia into his orbit.

These moves could put Russia in a key position in mediating conflict in areas such as the disputed South China Sea, or tension between China and Japan.

“Russia has its own post-imperial trauma, like many countries in Europe,” says Mr Kortunov. “A key priority for the Kremlin is therefore to bring Russia back as an important player.”

This return has paid dividends for Mr Putin domestically. Although polls show that many Russians think he is doing a poor job on the economy and are concerned over the direction of the country, a vast majority strongly back his assertive foreign policy.

And yet Russia faces constraints in its push for a return to the global stage. “Although we have seen several straight years of big increases in military expenditure, this has mostly gone into rebuilding capacities that had fallen into disrepair after the collapse of the Soviet Union,” says Ivan Timofeev, an assistant professor at MGIMO, the Moscow university where the foreign ministry trains diplomats. “In the long term, a superpower-style foreign policy is therefore absolutely unsustainable for Russia.”

For all the talk of a resurgent country, Russian experts are mindful that without strengthening its sluggish economy, Moscow’s push will be severely limited in the longer term. “There are examples in history of economically challenged nations making a big expansionist push and you could imagine that for Russia as well,” says Mr Timofeev. “But the economic and social fundamentals for a long-running, sustainable rise of the nation are not in place. We are not like China or India, for whom bigger global influence comes naturally with their growing economic clout.”

Even as Russia’s economy emerges from a two-year-long recession, the government, the central bank and independent economists all say growth will remain anaemic.

Mr Putin has proved a cunning tactician in exploiting opportunities around the world at limited cost to Moscow. Both western diplomats and Russian officials say there is no way Russia could do without the US or other western countries in its engagement abroad.

“They are seeking out opportunities [...] to insert themselves as a power to be reckoned with,” says Mr Rumer. “Yet it’s their insistence on being at the table and having a vote and a veto that makes it very difficult to move forward.”

With that approach, even Russian strategists doubt how much Moscow’s urge to play a role in so many locations will benefit the country in the long term. “If the assumption that the liberal international order will collapse is correct, there may be more opportunities for Russia in the ensuing chaos,” says Mr Timofeev. But he argues that is not the most likely scenario, as even challengers of the old order like China are copying its structures and institutions.

“If we end up with a reformed rather than a collapsing international order with a focus on development rather than security — then Russia will be marginalised.”

Grudges remain but Russia cannot be ignored

Any European or American diplomat who has dealt with Russia is well aware of Moscow’s grudges against the west.

Its list is topped with the fact that NATO and the EU have allowed former members of the eastern bloc and former Soviet republics to join, moving the borders of both blocs closer to Russia. Add to this the complaint that NATO never invited Russia to the club, as well as warnings about the threat to Moscow posed by US plans to deploy ballistic missile defence systems in Europe.

Russia’s grudges also feature criticism of the support many western governments have given for the development of civil society and promotion of democracy in other countries.

Next are US efforts at regime change in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and a smattering of other states, plus the interventions Washington conducted in some of these countries without a UN mandate.

Last but not least, it takes offence over Washington’s claim to sole superpower status and the disregard for

other countries’ interests that sometimes comes with that.

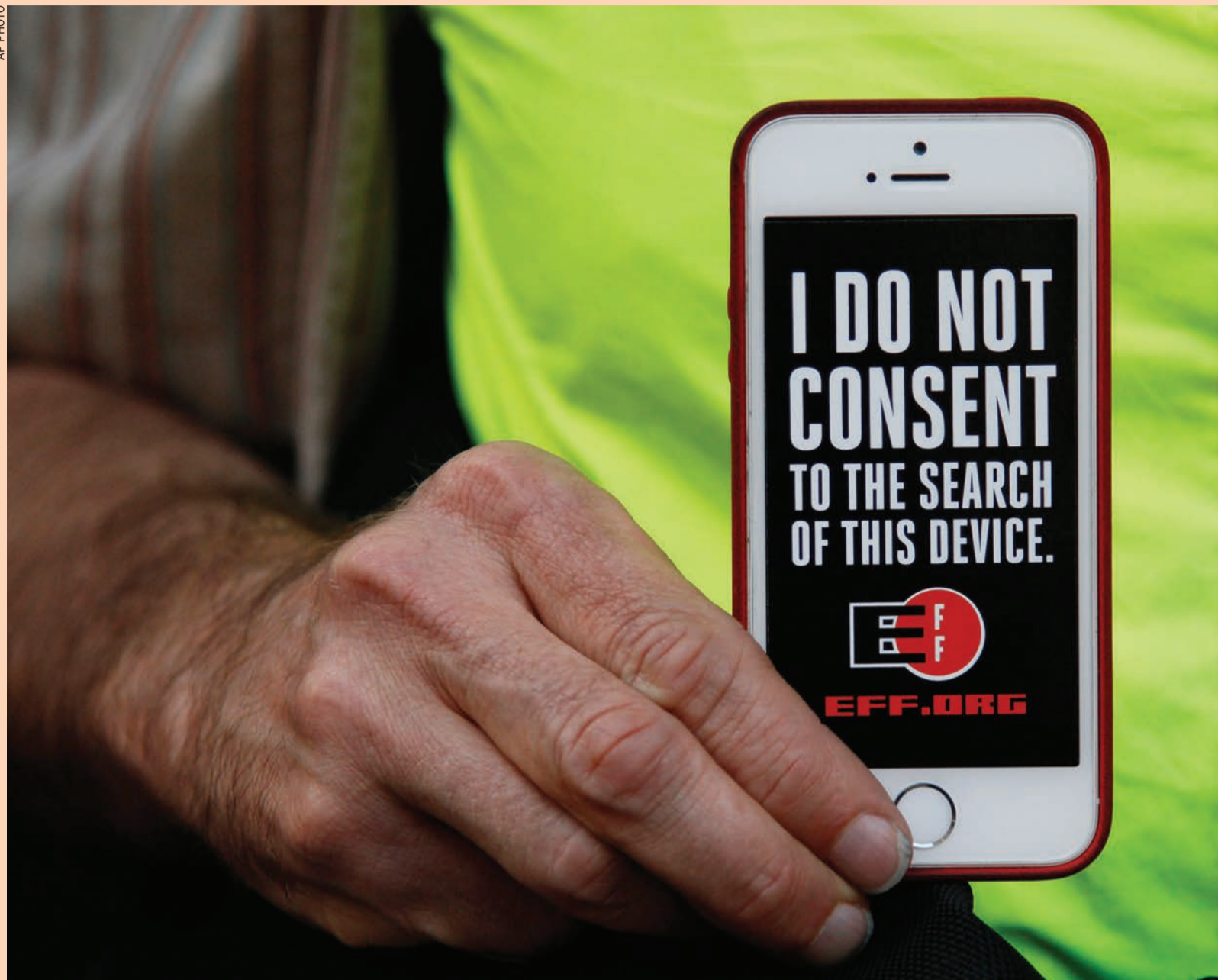
In its purest form, the list appeared in President Vladimir Putin’s 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference. There, the Russian leader for the first time laid out a systematic critique of the post-Soviet international order.

Ten years later, Russia’s assertion of its interests from Ukraine to Syria has had limited success in crossing items off Mr Putin’s grievances. NATO has reacted to Russia’s more assertive posture in Europe by adding troops and patrols close to its borders. There are no signs of missile defence deployment slowing down.

However, EU enlargement could be petering out, both because the EU is struggling internally and because new candidate countries are nervously looking to Russia. Washington’s appetite for promoting regime change may also be reduced.

The one big change Mr Putin can note, though, is that 10 years on, the west can no longer ignore Russia.

AP PHOTO



In this Feb. 23, 2016 file photo, a man holds up his iPhone during a rally in support of data privacy outside the Apple store in San Francisco

Electronic media searches at border crossings raise worry

By Gillian Flaccus in Portland

WATCH DOG groups that keep tabs on digital privacy rights are concerned that U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents are searching the phones and other digital devices of international travelers at border checkpoints in U.S. airports.

The issue gained attention recently after at least three travelers, including a Canadian journalist, spoke out publicly about their experiences.

The episodes have gained notice amid an outcry over President Donald Trump's travel ban and complaints of mistreatment of foreign travelers, but the government insists there has been no policy change in the new administration.

The Border Patrol says searches increased fivefold in the final fiscal year of the Obama presidency, but still amounted to less than one-hundredth of 1 percent of all international arrivals.

Here are some things to know about the searches and your privacy rights.

WHAT HAS PROMPTED THE CONCERN?

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Electronic Frontier Foundation both say they have noticed an uptick in complaints about searches of digital devices by border agents.

The increase has become most noticeable in the last month, said Adam Schwartz, a senior staff lawyer at the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

"We are concerned that a bad practice that has existed under past presidents has gotten worse in quantity under the new president," Schwartz said.

The government says nothing has changed. Customs officials also say the perceived shift can be attributed to a jump in the number of electronic devices that people are carrying with them and shifting tactics as the agency adjusts to the amount and types of information that can be stored

on today's devices.

WHAT SEARCH AUTHORITY DOES THE BORDER PATROL HAVE?

Americans have protection under the Fourth Amendment from unreasonable search and seizure. A police officer, for example, must obtain a warrant from a judge before searching a suspect's phone.

But the U.S. border is a legal gray zone. Border agents have long had the right to search travelers' physical luggage without a warrant, and that interpretation has been expanded to include digital devices, ACLU staff attorney Nathan Freed Wessler said.

In 2013, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that if agents want to do a forensic search they need to have a reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing, he said. But the court stopped short of requiring agents to obtain a search warrant beforehand, he said.

And an agent can flip through a phone in a cursory search for any reason.

The law has not kept up with

the "incredible volume of personal data that we have in our pockets now" — and that creates tremendous constitutional questions, said Wessler.

"In some ways, a search of your phone is more invasive than a search of your house," he said.

A case currently headed to another appeals court could further clarify the law, said Schwartz.

WHAT DOES THE BORDER PATROL SAY?

Numbers provided by the Border Patrol show a fivefold increase in electronic media searches in the 2016 fiscal year ending on Sept. 30 over the previous fiscal year.

In 2016, under the Obama administration, there were 23,877 electronic media searches. That comes to 0.0061 percent of total arrivals into the U.S. In fiscal year 2015, there were 4,764 electronic media searches.

A senior CBP official briefed reporters on the issue Friday, but the agency insisted the official not be identified.

"We see it as an article that is brought into the U.S., no different than a booklet of materials, no different than a suitcase with items in it," the official said.

"We've uncovered very serious and significant information in these types of searches, everything from national security concerns to child pornography to evidence of crimes to determinations of people's admissibility status under the immigration laws."

HOW CAN YOU PROTECT YOUR DIGITAL PRIVACY WHILE TRAVELING?

Privacy advocates say travelers who are concerned should leave their phones and laptops at home and buy a cheap phone once they arrive at their destination.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations is also advising its members to do the same.

Those who can't leave their devices behind should encrypt them and close out of all social media applications so they aren't accessible without a password, said Schwartz.

But those steps won't matter much if a border agent asks a traveler to unlock the phone or provide a password, said Schwartz.

And travelers should also be aware of the rules in other countries. Israel authorities can check mobile phones at the airport, for example.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU REFUSE?

The Border Patrol can't bar a U.S. citizen from entry if they refuse to comply, but agents can make things difficult. Travelers who don't unlock their phones could be questioned, detained temporarily and have their phones taken by agents for days.

Travelers who are not U.S. citizens can be denied entry. Hasaim Elsharkawi, a self-employed businessman from Anaheim, California, told the AP that he was stopped by agents in Los Angeles last week as he was boarding a plane to Saudi Arabia to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. They asked him to unlock his phone without telling him why.

Elsharkawi, a Muslim, said he refused because he didn't want the male agents to see photos of his wife with her head uncovered.

When he asked for a lawyer, the agents detained him, handcuffed him and interrogated him for four hours before he agreed to unlock the device for a female agent, he said. He was then released and his phone was returned after the female Homeland Security officer checked his email, photos and eBay and Amazon accounts.

Elsharkawi, 34, was born in Saudi Arabia to Egyptian parents. He came to the U.S. in 2004 and became a U.S. citizen in 2012.

"I was already nervous before and after what has happened [...] I don't know what to expect next," he said. **AP**

Rumor the German shepherd wins best in show at Westminster

AP PHOTO



Rumor, a German shepherd, leaps to lick her handler and co-owner Kent Boyles on the face after winning Best in Show at the 141st Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show

By Ben Walker in New York

QUITE a rally for Rumor — a commanding comeback for German shepherds, too.

Rumor was crowned America's top dog last week when, a year after a near miss on the very same green carpet, she came out of retirement to win best in show at the Westminster Kennel Club.

Cheered loudly all around the ring by a packed crowd at Madison Square Garden, she's just the second German shepherd cham-

pion at the event that began in 1877.

"Unbelievable," handler and co-owner Kent Boyles said.

In a year that's seen lots of late, startling twists in sports — think Patriots, Cubs and Cavaliers — Rumor pulled something of a shocker. She'd been at home in Wisconsin for months, a house pet headed toward having puppies, when she suddenly jumped back into the show ring in January.

Boyles is a fan of the Packers and star quarterback Aaron Rodgers.

Seeing a pet go from the couch to this top prize, heck, that's a dog world Hail Mary.

The 5-year-old Rumor beat out a Norwegian elkhound, a Pekinese, a miniature poodle, an Irish setter, a boxer and a Norwich terrier in the final ring. The Irish setter called Adrian finished second.

"The German shepherd standard talks about quality and nobility," judge Thomas Bradley III said. "When you recognize it, it hits you at home, and that's what it really is. She is just magnificent."

Rumor is named for the hit song "Rumor Has It" by Adele, a champion herself after sweeping the major categories at the Grammy Awards on Sunday.

This was the 104th career win for Rumor, and earlier in the day, Boyles said that this would definitely, for real, be her last major show.

"She's going to be relaxing for a while," Boyles said after the win, but ultimately, there are "puppies in her future."

Clearly the crowd favorite, Rumor came out flying into the best-of-seven final ring to fans whistling and calling her name.

Rumor raised up for a well-de-

served treat right after the win. Moments later, as Boyles did post-show interviews, Rumor spotted him and ran toward the man who guided her to victory.

Rumor joined the fittingly named Manhattan in 1987 as the only German shepherds to go best in show at the Garden.

There were nearly 2,800 dogs entered in the 141st Westminster canine competition, spread across the 202 eligible breeds and varieties.

The moment any German shepherd steps into the ring at the Garden, the crowd goes crazy.

New Yorkers just love 'em. Some say it's because rooting for a German shepherd is the same as putting on an NYPD or FDNY hat, standing up for a dog that stood tall at a time of the city's greatest need.

"My sentiments, exactly," Boyles said.

While German shepherds hadn't won a lot here, many of them were on the green carpet of the center ring in 2002 when Westminster honored search and rescue dogs for their tireless work at the World Trade Center and Pentagon following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. The solemn tribute

is considered by many the most cherished memory ever at Westminster.

"They're loyal, dependable dogs that you can count on," Boyles said.

Rumor nearly won Westminster last year. She came to town as the nation's No. 1 show dog with more than 100 overall ribbons but was beaten in a surprise by a German shorthaired pointer named CJ.

In fact, when the judge began to announce his champion pick with "German sh...", Boyles took a step forward, anticipating the prize.

"I was thinking," Boyles said.

That was supposed to be Rumor's last show, and she was set to head home with Boyles to Edgerton, Wisconsin, to be a house pet and have puppies. She didn't conceive and late in the year, Boyles thought twice about Rumor's retirement.

"She liked to show and was in good shape, so we thought, why not?" he said.

Rumor went back on the circuit in January for 10 shows. She won the herding group Monday night at the Garden, beating top show favorite Preston the puli.

She topped that with the ultimate win at America's most prestigious dog show, rewarding the faith German shepherd fans always show in them.

"It's a recognizable dog, people have liked them for a long, long time," WKC President Sean McCarthy said earlier. "I think it goes back to Rin Tin Tin." **AP**

ASK THE VET



by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester

DHLPP (5 IN 1) VACCINE FOR DOGS

The five-in-one vaccine for dogs is not a compulsory vaccine, but may help your dog and prevent various diseases that commonly affect canines. DHLPP are initials that stand for various canine diseases that may be potentially fatal such as the distemper, the hepatitis, leptospirosis, the parvovirus or the parainfluenza. The first DHLPP vaccine can be administered when the dog is six weeks old and several boosters will be given periodically during the following months. Yearly boosters are also needed for the DHLPP vaccine.

THE CANINE DISTEMPER

The DHLPP vaccine prevents canine distemper (very common in Macau), which is an infection caused by viruses. The infection can attack the intestinal tract, the respiratory tract and the central nervous system of the pet. The canine distemper is highly contagious and can be caught through the contact with bodily fluids such as nasal secretions. The virus may also be airborne and contracted in this way; dogs in kennels and animal shelters are more likely to catch this infection.

CANINE HEPATITIS

The canine hepatitis is an infectious disease caused by the adenovirus type 1. The virus

can be transmitted through bodily fluids. The disease can be fatal and may manifest through the hepatitis blue eye, which is the formation of a cloudy-bluish pellicle on the surface of the dog's eye. Vaccination can prevent the contraction of the disease.

LEPTOSPIROSIS

Leptospirosis is a condition that may affect canines and humans alike. There are several types of leptospirosis and the DHLPP vaccine will prevent the occurrence of canicola and icterohaemorrhagiae. Other types of leptospirosis may be potentially dangerous for the dog, even if he receives the DHLPP vaccine. The infection manifests through elevated fever, chronic vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration.

Some canines may be allergic to the DHLPP due to the leptospirosis antibodies.

DOG PARVOVIRUS

The parvovirus (common in Macau) causes a condition that affects the gastrointestinal tract and will affect most often puppies. The virus may be deadly, especially in immunocompromised pets or puppies that don't have a fully developed immune system. The presence of the virus will cause diarrhoea, vomiting and weight loss. The parvovirus can be transmitted



through faeces or direct contact with a contaminated area.

THE PARAINFLUENZA

Parainfluenza is not a deadly disease, but it may cause a lot of discomfort and is a contagious condition. Parainfluenza manifests through dry coughing and breathing problems. The condition will go away without treatment. However, it's best if vaccines are administered to protect the dog.

DHLPP ADMINISTRATION

The first DHLPP vaccine will be administered when the puppy is six to eight weeks old or later, if the puppy has missed his vaccinations. Booster shots will be administered in the following months. After the first year of vacci-

nes, the dog will only require a yearly booster shot, which will be helpful in preventing the above mentioned diseases in your pet. Some vets recommend administering boosters only once every three years.

The DHLPP vaccine is not 100 percent effective, but will protect most dogs that receive the recommended shots.

Hope this helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan

Ask the Vet:
Royal Veterinary Centre
Tel: +853 28501099, +853 28523678
Emergency: +853 62662268
Email: royalveterinary@gmail.com