

Strategy Research Project

UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA: FORGING A WAY AHEAD

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA: FORGING A WAY AHEAD

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One of the major challenges facing President Barack Obama is the relationship between the United States and Russia. Over the last year the relationship between Russia and the United States has appeared strained at times, with both countries engaging in rhetoric over the Russian military response to the Georgian invasion of South Ossetia and the continued United States plan to deploy Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABMs) in Eastern Europe. It would seem these two countries have large differences, but closer examination is required to determine the nature of the relationship and develop potential areas of common interest. This project examines the United States – Russia relationship in light of Russian foreign policy and national security objectives and outlines specific policy recommendations for the United States regarding Russia. These recommendations are based on examining Russian – U.S. interests in four critical strategic structural areas: sovereignty and spheres of influence, oil production / exports, nuclear non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism.

UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA: FORGING A WAY AHEAD

President Barack Obama enters office with many foreign policy challenges. The primary issue facing the new President continues to be the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, United States relations with Russia pose an extremely important challenge for the Obama Administration. Russia will play a significant role in the future world order, and the United States must carefully approach this complicated country. Understanding Russian intentions is critical to developing long-term relations that benefit both countries.

Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu said, "Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril".¹ Developing policy recommendations for the United States regarding Russia must begin with an understanding of Russian thinking and Russian objectives. A stated goal of United States foreign policy is to "help create a world of democratic, well-governed states...".² This concept of democracy can be problematic, and may take on different meanings for different nations. During a lecture at the US Army War College, an International Fellow commented that the United States must be careful that, as they project democracy to the world, they also understand that democracy may be different for other countries, and the United States system of democracy may not work for all nations.³ With this in mind, it is prudent for the United States to understand the goals, objectives, and culture of other nations as it forges ahead with instilling democratic processes worldwide. The United States should develop policy towards Russia based not only on its desired goals, but must also consider the goals and objectives of Russia. It is prudent to examine Russian foreign policy and

national security goals and determine what common ground, if any, exists between the two nations.

This project begins with a review of recent Russian history. It discusses Russian foreign policy since 1991, during the post-Soviet era. Russia has a millennial history and culture, but close scrutiny of the last 18 years is essential for an understanding of current Russian thought. Once this history is traced and Russian policy goals and objectives identified, the project will examine four specific strategic structural areas that affect relations between the United States and Russia. These areas are: sovereignty and spheres of influence, oil production / exports, nuclear non-proliferation, and counter-terrorism. Within these four structural areas challenges arise for both the United States and Russia. However, there are also opportunities. This project will explore these challenges and opportunities in order to develop policy recommendations that can lead to a reduction of tensions in the challenge areas as well as capitalizing on the areas of opportunity to further enhance the relationship of these two very important strategic nations.

While specific recommendations follow at the end of this project, the overarching United States policy regarding Russia is termed "cautious engagement". Cautious engagement means that engagement is crucial to effective relations between the two countries. However, differences of opinion and strained relations continue to exist in certain areas. It is wise for the United States to approach these areas cautiously, making concessions where necessary without showing weakness to the rest of the world in areas of vital strategic importance to ourselves and other allies.

Post Soviet Russian Foreign Policy

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, western countries reached eastward to establish partnerships with former Soviet-aligned nations. This outreach attempted to break ties with the Soviet Union and instill western values and culture upon these former Soviet satellite states.⁴ Interestingly, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev did not oppose these overtures, instead moving ahead with a cautious plan to open relations with Europe and the United States. Boris Yeltsin became the first Russian Federation President in 1991. He focused his presidency on expanding the scope of initiatives instituted by Mikhail Gorbachev. In the years that followed, Yeltsin was plagued by a struggle to maintain strength on the international level while developing a fledgling economy being overtaken by the rise of the Russian oligarchs. Yeltsin made a dramatic shift in policy as the nation moved from a communist state to a democratic nation. Where Gorbachev favored slow, deliberate change, Yeltsin forged ahead with new objectives that seemed to indicate a desire to ally Russia with western nations, particularly Europe and the United States.⁵

Where Gorbachev had sought to soften the East-West divide by speaking of a “common European home” and touting a new level of cooperation between the two superpowers, Yeltsin and his foreign minister declared a readiness to integrate Russia into the democratic West... Where Gorbachev spoke of “freedom of choice” as the path to the revitalization of socialism in Eastern Europe, Yeltsin and Kozyrev, as part of the Charter for American-Russian Friendship and Cooperation signed in June 1992, undertook to safeguard the “sovereignty and independence” of a new set of neighbors risen from the ruins of socialism. And, where Gorbachev signed a series of treaties constraining intermediate-range and strategic nuclear missiles...Yeltsin and Kozyrev, at the outset, embraced dramatic cuts in nuclear arms and overall defense spending on the grounds that neither the United States or NATO any longer posed a threat.⁶

Throughout his presidency, Boris Yeltsin continued aligning Russia with Europe and the United States in all foreign policy arenas. From 1993 to 1996, in particular,

Yeltsin remained focused on the West, and “continued to emphasize the constructive side of their mutual relations” in regard to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal drug trade, human trafficking, counter-terrorism, and, above all, development of Russia’s economic system.⁷ One example of the cooperation strategy of Yeltsin was Russia’s involvement with NATO in the peacekeeping mission in Bosnia, a mission approved by NATO at the request of Yeltsin.⁸

Russian foreign policy began to change in 1997 with the acceptance of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into NATO.⁹ Relations with the West hardened following these events and continued to decline in 1999 with the United States led bombing campaign in Kosovo. Yeltsin would not accept NATO’s attempt to assuage Russian fears by including them in a “Permanent Joint Council”. Although Russia did not completely break off relations with the West, dialogue continued in a half-hearted fashion. Russia - US relations were further strained when Russia sponsored Iran’s nuclear project at Bushehr, Iran.¹⁰ By 1999, “talk of a partnership with the United States disappeared, and in its place Yeltsin...railed against the idea of a unipolar world and the notion that any nation, no matter how powerful, should have special say in international affairs”.¹¹ By this time Yeltsin believed the United States was emerging as the world’s major power, with no country on equal military or economic terms. Thus, Yeltsin’s remaining days were focused on countering what he saw as a growing United States threat. Yeltsin turned his eyes east and began a dialogue with China, weakening Russian focus on the West and planting the seed that would grow into current Russian foreign policy thought.¹²

Vladimir Putin assumed the Russian Presidency in 1999 and continued on the road of alienation between Russia and the United States. Following in Yeltsin's footsteps, Putin continued to push forward relations with China and took a step further by reaching out to North Korea.¹³ Putin's early days were further complicated by the growing economic globalization effort. Putin faced a country struggling to maintain its position while attempting to keep pace with changing world economics. Putin devised a strategy of international trade and put a major focus on the domestic economy, spurred on by soaring oil prices. Oil prices rose from \$15 to \$70 per barrel between 1998 and 2006, creating huge cash revenues for Russia, a country so reliant on oil and natural gas exports.¹⁴ In early 2001, Putin appeared torn. On one hand, he was adjusting to a world dominated by economic globalism, a phenomenon punishing those who could not keep pace. On the other, he faced a lingering uneasiness over how much of the old world endured, one dominated by traditional security threats, where an expanding NATO, U.S. nuclear ambitions, and the maneuvering of Euro-Atlantic allies in regions such as the Balkans still mattered.¹⁵

Under Putin and Medvedev, Russia became the main supplier of oil and natural gas to Europe. Thirty percent of European oil and 50 percent of Europe natural gas supply comes from Russia. As this trend grows, estimates are that by 2030 Europe will import 70 percent of its energy (oil and natural gas) from Russia.¹⁶ With this in mind, Putin's foreign policy objectives shifted focus from the political to the economic sphere, as he equated the re-emergence of Russia as a dominant world power with continued economic growth and Russian entry into the Group of Eight and the World Trade

Organization.¹⁷ This shift required a renewed partnership with the major economic powers of the world, with the United States and Europe at the forefront.

The terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001 not only changed the focus of United States national security. They also changed the focus of Vladimir Putin and his alignment with the West. Putin was well aware of terrorism. He had struggled with it internally in Chechnya.¹⁸ Countering growing terrorist threats became the prime focus for the United States and Russia, and led to improved relations. Russia approved of United States combat operations in Afghanistan and made little protest when President George W. Bush backed out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002.¹⁹

The experiences of Yeltsin, the growing threat of terrorism, and the growth of the Russian economy have all factored into where Russia stands in the foreign policy arena. Additional factors are Russian disapproval for the United States invasion of Iraq, decision to employ anti-ballistic missiles (ABMs) in Poland and the Czech Republic, and continuing support for NATO membership for former Soviet territories. The United States must understand the Russian perspective in developing a way ahead for US – Russian relations.

“Russia has arrived at a historic fork in the road, as fateful and filled with potential as any in history. Already the change (under Putin) is far-reaching. Russia has made of itself something different from any Russia before, and it has introduced into its foreign policy features never before present”.²⁰ Putin still faces severe internal struggles, most notably a declining population and struggling economy. According to Nicholas Eberstadt, “Russia is in the midst of a genuine demographic disaster from which its

rulers have no obvious exit strategy".²¹ The Russian population has declined by almost 7 million people since 1992, deaths outnumbered births by over 250,000 in 2008, and in the last 40 years the death rate for men between 15 and 64 years of age has jumped by an average of 50 percent.²² Added to this is a dwindling economy fueled by a recession, resulting in severely declining oil prices. Russian industrial production, running at a 5.4 percent growth in the first half of 2008, stopped by the end of the year. The World Bank predicts that Russian economic growth will fall by half in 2009, and in the last five months of 2008 the Russian stock market lost two-thirds of its value.²³

Russia appears to have selected economic politics as its foreign policy position even as it continues to battle internal economic and demographic problems. Russia will leverage its immense oil production capability to get what it wants from Europe and the Baltic states, will continue to develop its economy and look for opportunities within the global economic system, and fashion relations with major world powers, particularly the United States, on an issue by issue basis.²⁴ The United States must understand this last point. It will not only aid in understanding Russian intentions, but will assist in developing a coherent strategy for relations with Putin's Russia.

In the last year it appears that tensions between the United States and Russia have grown, as evidenced by United States condemnation of Russia's attack on Georgia, Russia's continued protests against NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine, and Russia's continuing threats against America for the planned deployment of an ABM system in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Following Russia's invasion of Georgia in August, 2008, calls came for harsh measures against Russia. Retired Army General David Grange, President of The

McCormick Foundation, was one of several who recommended the United States take a “hard line” against Russian aggression in Georgia. Grange recommended the United States isolate Russia by cutting off all diplomatic ties. Additionally, his study called for immediate NATO acceptance of Georgia and Ukraine, a U.S. initiative of providing more weapons to Georgia, increased pressure throughout the region to stop Russia’s plans to build new pipelines, and immediate expulsion of Russia from the G8.²⁵

Russia, likewise, has stepped up the rhetoric over the last year, leading many to conclude that United States – Russian relations are becoming further strained. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, the day following President Obama’s election, appeared to lay down a gauntlet for the incoming president. In a nationally televised address, Medvedev said he would deploy short range missiles in Kaliningrad, a Baltic region belonging to Russia.²⁶ This deployment would place the missiles close to Poland. Analysts see this deployment as a retaliatory act against the United States plan to place anti-ballistic missiles in Poland. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates downplayed Medvedev’s remarks by re-iterating the United States intentions of deploying the missiles as a counter to future nuclear threats from Iran. About a week after he made the initial threat, Medvedev’s government indicated it would not rush to deploy the missiles to Kaliningrad, and would be open to further discussions.²⁷

Looking at the events of the past year, one could argue for the measures BG (Ret) Grange outlined. However, implementing these measures, along with the measures addressed by President Medvedev, would most likely place the United States and Russia on a course for continuing conflict. Prior to addressing a “road ahead”, the Obama Administration should assess this relationship in light of world events and

develop policy that capitalizes on opportunities while continuing to ensure the security of America and promoting democratic institutions worldwide.

Strategic Structural Areas

Defense Secretary Gates said, "One of the challenges facing the new administration is figuring out where you push back on the Russians and where...there are opportunities to build a closer relationship".²⁸ Determining these areas requires a look at what is important to both nations. What are the critical strategic structural areas around which a sound security policy is established? How do the United States and Russia view these areas, and where are the conflicts and opportunities?

Sovereignty and spheres of influence are vital to any nation, particularly nations looking to gain or maintain power in the world. Russia is no exception. Many of the conflicts between Russia and the United States center on Russia's quest to re-establish its position in the world. In November 2008, Secretary Gates stated Russia should not feel threatened by the Baltic States desire to align themselves with the West, and in particular, the desire to join NATO.²⁹ However, a brief review of Russian history shows that Russia has a concrete reason to fear this alignment, for strategic protection and for geographic reasons.

Since the 18th century Russia has protected its sovereignty and territory with buffer zones. Russian strategy was simple: control the territory separating yourself from your foes and you can "bleed out any invasion via attrition and attacks on supply lines".³⁰ Under this strategy, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia, and others have been a part of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union since the 1800s. Full understanding of

Russia's concern with sovereignty requires an understanding of these buffer states and their importance to Russian history.

The danger to Russia is that the north German plain expands like a triangle...As the triangle widens, Russian forces get stretched thinner and thinner. So a force attacking from the west through the plain faces an expanding geography that thins out Russian forces. If invaders concentrate their forces, the attackers can break through to Moscow. That is the traditional Russian fear: lacking natural barriers, the farther east the Russians move the broader the front and the greater the advantage of the attacker. The Russians faced three attackers along this axis following the formation of the empire – Napoleon, Wilhelm II and Hitler.³¹

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary's membership in NATO was not as big a threat to Russia as the current move to put Ukraine and Georgia into the alliance. The three Eastern European nations, although satellites of the Soviet Union were not part of the earlier Russian and Soviet empires. However, the others were, including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Once part of the former Soviet Union and Russian Empire, these states are all currently NATO members. Russia today no longer has any buffers protecting it from attacks from the West. By their own admission, the Commonwealth of Independent States countries are the "chief priority of Russian foreign policy."³² "Even if no western states intend to invade Russia, from the Russian point of view, history is filled with dramatic changes of intention, particularly in the West. The unthinkable has occurred to Russia once or twice a century."³³ That leaves little wonder why Putin sees any alignment with the west of the former buffer states as a threat to Russia's sovereignty and national security. Although the United States National Security Strategy focuses on promoting democracy worldwide, and Secretary Gates has indicated that eastward NATO expansion poses no threat to Moscow, history suggests otherwise. In this area of sovereignty and spheres of influence the United States and Russia are in conflict, and future United States strategic policy must address this conflict with an

understanding of Russia's quest for protection. Their opposition to NATO expansion appears to come from a desire to be safe from western attacks, and not solely from a desire to dominate the Eurasian region. The United States does not need to "cave in" to Russian demands, but it should understand the perspective as it helps to explain Russian fears about losing their buffer states.

The second structural area to consider is oil. As stated previously, Russia provides over half of Europe's supply of natural gas and oil, and projections are that this will continue to rise over the next 20 years. Oil and natural gas are critical to Russian economic survival. According to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, 64 percent of Russia's 2007 export revenue and 30 percent of foreign investment came from oil.³⁴ For the Russian economy, this has proven to be a benefit and a curse. Simply put, as the price of oil and gas goes, so goes the Russian economy.

The benefit of rising oil prices in the early 2000s allowed Russia to amass incredible financial reserves. Windfall oil profits brought Russia's cash reserves to just under \$600 billion in August 2008. However, the declining economy since then has had a significant impact on Russian cash reserves, as the value fell to \$484 billion by October, with an amazing \$31 billion drop in just one week.³⁵ Since oil profits are the major part of the Russian economy, a sudden decline in prices means a continued dip into the cash reserves account, with declining overall economic prosperity.

Previously Russia has used oil as a bargaining chip with Ukraine. In 2006, and again in 2009, Russia cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine, accusing Ukraine of siphoning off natural gas bound for Europe.³⁶ Gazprom, Russia's oil monopoly that provides much of Europe's oil and natural gas requirements cut off supplies to pressure

Ukraine to pay higher prices.³⁷ While the gas stoppage only lasted a few days, the fact that Russia is using natural gas as a tool to raise overall prices shows just how important their reliance on oil and gas is.

Nuclear non-proliferation is vital to both Russian and United States national security interests. It has also been a contentious area due to the United States plans to employ an ABM system in Eastern Europe.

In 1986 Russia and the United States had almost 64,000 nuclear warheads. Today, although those overall numbers are greatly reduced due to the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), these two nations still maintain over 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons and weapon-grade material.³⁸ While it is unlikely that nations will engage in nuclear war, there is a fear that, with the rising threat of trans-national terrorism, an extremist terrorist group could use a nuclear weapon to rain terror on the world. Neither the United States nor Russia wants to become the nuclear "Home Depot" for terrorist organizations.³⁹ Indications are that, although the chance of acquiring nuclear weapons is small, rogue terrorist organization will try. Since 1993, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) data base has logged 408 cases of illicit trafficking in nuclear material (ITNM). Fourteen of these cases were labeled most dangerous, pertaining to highly enriched uranium or plutonium.⁴⁰

In January 2009 the United States levied sanctions against 13 people and firms involved in the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Chief among these individuals is Doctor A.Q. Khan, a physicist from Pakistan who has led an "extensive international network for the proliferation of nuclear equipment and know-how that provided one stop shopping for countries seeking to develop nuclear weapons".⁴¹ In 2004 Khan admitted

to selling nuclear equipment to Libya and Iran. Among the equipment Khan provided were centrifuge designs and complete centrifuges. The United States also alleges that Khan provided similar equipment and nuclear weapons knowledge to North Korea.⁴² While there has been no clear indication that terrorist groups are actively working to develop or buy nuclear capability from him, the presence of the A.Q. Khan network shows that the possibility exists. It is of vital importance to all countries, most notably the United States and Russia, since they have the predominance of nuclear weapons in the world, that this technology and these weapons not fall into the hands of terrorists eager to use them.

Since the 2001 Al Qaeda attack on the United States, terrorism has been the main threat to the security of the country. The United States remains engaged in a war in Afghanistan with one objective being to prevent Al Qaeda from planning and organizing further attacks against the country. President George Bush, in his farewell address to the nation, emphasized that since 2001 there have been no terrorist attacks against the United States and several terrorist attacks were thwarted by U.S. Government Agencies, further testifying to the seriousness of this threat against the country. Terrorism is also a major concern for Russia. Under the Soviet Union, terrorist attacks were rare. Since 1991, Russia has faced many terrorist threats, posing a serious threat to the security of independent Russia.⁴³

In June 2008, the United States – Russia Working Group on Counterterrorism issued a joint press release. It read in part, “The combination of international terrorism and the danger of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery represent a profound threat to the security of the United States, Russia, and

other countries around the world".⁴⁴ The Counterterrorism Working Group has accomplished much. The United States and Russia are focusing on counter-narcotics, terrorist financing networks, law enforcement, and the proliferation of not only weapons of mass destruction, but also Man Portable Air Defense systems.⁴⁵

Drug trafficking, money laundering and organized crime, porous borders, radical extremist ideologies, and developing nations susceptible to corruption are key ingredients that can give rise to, sustain, and enhance trans-national terrorist organizations. The Central Asian region is rife with every one of these ingredients, and, therefore, of critical concern to the United States and Russia.⁴⁶

Both Russia and the United States realize the threat terrorism poses to the world, as well as the strategic location of Russia in the fight against Terrorism. Additionally, the southern tier of the Eurasian land mass, approximately contiguous with what Zbigniew Brzezinski has trenchantly described as an "arc of crisis" or "whirlpool of violence" co-terminus with the great crescent of Islamic civilization, is a zone of mobilization for the world's most threatening and aggressively anti-American jihadist terrorist groupings, including the remnants of Osama Bin Laden's original Al Qaeda organization.⁴⁷

In addition to the Islamic factor, many Central Asian states are developing nations, gaining their independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁴⁸ These countries, with undeveloped governments and rule of law, are a main source of instability in the region. It is imperative to United States security objectives that it remains engaged in the Central Asian region. Partnering with Russia to contain terrorism will benefit both countries for the long term.

United States – Russia Policy Strategy

Where does the United States go from here? How should President Obama and his Administration approach Russia? What should be the overarching theme, as well as specific measures the United States can take? Options include, as BG (Ret) Grange discussed, cutting off ties and isolating Russia on all fronts and treating them in much the same way we looked upon them during the Cold War period.⁴⁹ Appeasement also accomplishes United States security objectives. However, this would be a major show of weakness for the United States and, most likely, damage American credibility in the rest of the world, and, in particular, the Middle East and Europe.

Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, both former Secretaries of State, said in October, 2008:

Diplomacy without strength is sterile. Strength without diplomacy tempts posturing. We believe that the fundamental interests of the United States, Europe, and Russia are more aligned today—or can be made so—even in the wake of the Georgian crisis, than at any point in recent history. We must not waste that opportunity.⁵⁰

With this in mind, the United States should adopt a policy of “cautious engagement”, or, as outlined by Janusz Bugajski, “practical engagement”. Mr. Bugajski defines this concept as “combining practical engagement with the Kremlin on issues of mutual concern, such as anti-proliferation and counterterrorism, with a strategic assertiveness that strengthens the Atlantic community”.⁵¹

Developing a policy of cautious engagement allows the United States to pursue its national security objectives without showing weakness to the world. The approach balances cooperating with Russia together with maintaining the uni-lateral power America has enjoyed since the conclusion of the Cold war. Developing this strategy requires a focus on American interests, ensuring the protection of America while

simultaneously engaging Russia on mutual interest areas. The State Department must actively engage Russia in areas of mutual interest without losing focus on America National Security. This is not an easy task, but a careful balance will prevent further Russian alienation and protect both countries in their common interest areas.

Policy Recommendations

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) Negotiations. The START I Treaty, signed July 31, 1991, expires on December 5, 2009. This treaty limits Russia and the United States to no more than 6,000 strategic long-range nuclear warheads, and limits the number of delivery systems to 1,600. In December, 2008, United States negotiators met with Russian counterparts to begin re-negotiating the START treaty. Under Secretary of State John Rood led the United States delegation. The main issue preventing a new agreement is Russia's desire to include conventional force limits as well as strategic nuclear limits.⁵²

Negotiating a new START arrangement goes beyond non-proliferation. As one analyst noted,

above and beyond reducing the number of Russian nuclear weapons that could be targeted in our direction, if you look over the past twenty years, when there's a nuclear arms dialogue between Washington and Moscow, it seems to have a broader positive impact on the relationship. The Russians like it, if for no other reason that it's an acknowledgement that they are a superpower on nuclear terms, on par with the United States.⁵³

Differences must be overcome and a new START treaty completed prior to the expiration of the current one. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her staff would be wise to make this an immediate priority towards the continuing effort to combat nuclear proliferation worldwide.

Counterterrorism. Countering radical extremist terrorist groups was a cornerstone of President Bush's foreign policy. The threat continues; therefore, the United States must continue engaging Russia in this area of mutual interest.

In December, 2006, President Bush and then President Putin launched the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, designed specifically to reduce the threat of terrorist organizations gaining nuclear weapons and technology. Seventy five nations are participants in this initiative so far.⁵⁴ The United States and Russia must continue to push this initiative worldwide, with the ultimate goal of combining knowledge and expertise to collectively keep these weapons out of terrorist hands.

The United States Embassy in Moscow must make counterterrorism a priority in developing specific partnership programs. The U.S. – Russia Working Group on Counterterrorism must expand its work. The Working Group has already had a positive effect on countering terrorism. Specifically, they have established liaison between the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and Russian counter-narcotics police, created a joint working agreement of information sharing, helped establish the permanent NATO – Russia Council Counternarcotics project designed to train nations on combating narcotics in Afghanistan and Central Asia, increased intelligence sharing between the two nations, and worked closely together to keep Man Portable Air Defense weapons out of the hands of extremist terrorist organizations.⁵⁵

Proponents of isolation, or a hard line foreign policy towards Russia would be wise to review the successes of this joint working group. Countering terrorism is a key part of both countries' national security objectives. Engaging Russia in this area has

produced positive results, and continued engagement can only add to a world that is safer from terrorist groups bent on destroying anyone with opposing ideologies.

NATO Membership for Georgia and Ukraine. The United States should use caution and take a “slower” approach to NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. Specifically, the United States should press NATO for a document that delays the Membership Action Plan process until a later date, secure a multi-lateral agreement towards future partnership activities between NATO, Georgia, and Ukraine, and press for NATO dialogue with Russia on the overall NATO enlargement policy.⁵⁶ Slowing down the process would align the United States with most of Europe, particularly Germany and France. This slow down would be a sign of good faith to Russia and allow President Obama to open his administration on common ground with President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. In light of the tensions regarding the placement of anti-ballistic missiles in Poland, this softer approach to NATO membership would ease U.S. – Russian tensions and strengthen relations for topics more relevant to America’s national security.

Aligning with the European powers strengthens NATO as this would be a multi-lateral approach. The recent United States policy of immediate membership was seen by some as uni-lateral, demonstrating a divided NATO to Putin and Medvedev. In this multi-lateral approach Russia would see a unified NATO as opposed to a series of NATO members with differing opinions on the timing for Ukraine and Georgia NATO membership. A unified NATO with a longer timeline, in a sense, supports Russian objectives while demonstrating NATO remains, strong, unified, and relevant.

Russia may continue to see any support for NATO expansion in the East as a threat to their national security. It is vital that this slowdown in American support be coupled with aggressive diplomacy by NATO and the State Department to demonstrate to Moscow that Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership is not a threat to them. The United States, while slowing down the process, must use caution so that the basic principle of promoting worldwide democracy continues to be at the forefront of America foreign policy relations. Brookings Institution writer Steven Pifer said, "Finding a mechanism that will respect Ukrainian and Georgian sovereignty in general – while addressing Russian concerns will pose a challenge, but it is a necessary step for long term stability in the region".⁵⁷

Anti-Ballistic Missiles. Despite continuing Russian objections, the United States should continue plans to deploy an ABM system in Poland and the Czech Republic. The United States has made it clear that this system is for defense against future threats from "rogue states" pursuing nuclear capability, primarily Iran. It is unlikely Iran has nuclear capability and unknown if they continue to pursue it. However, the United States should not wait until a country like Iran gains this capability to properly defend itself and allies.

Russia has vehemently opposed these missiles, and, as stated earlier, threatened President Obama with the deployment of Russian missiles to Kaliningrad as retaliation against what Russia perceives as a threat to the homeland. Russian objections come in two forms.

Russia sees the deployment of these missiles as the first step in a continued American nuclear build-up in Europe. Russia knows the ABM system does not pose an

immediate threat to the Russian homeland. But Russia envisions a future offensive missile build-up as well as defensive, significantly altering the balance of nuclear power in the world. Dr. Stephen Blank from the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute said, regarding Russian perception of American ABMs in Eastern Europe, "these defenses rupture the fabric of strategic stability". Russia also contends Iran does not have nuclear capability. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that these ABMs are designed to counter Russian missiles.⁵⁸

Russia's basic premises outlined by Dr. Blank are wrong, and the United States should not risk its future security from a potentially nuclear Iran. Iran may not have nuclear capability, but it does have Ashura and Sajil missiles, each with a 2,000 kilometer range, enough to reach Israel, Europe, and Russia.⁵⁹ As Dr. Blank says, "If Russia is so concerned about these missiles, it would be better advised to use its influence in Iran to stop that country from building nuclear weapons".⁶⁰ Our diplomatic efforts with Russia should focus on getting them to attack the problem, a nuclear Iran, rather than the solution, the ABM system in Europe.

Economic Policy. It would be prudent for the United States to support two major initiatives regarding Russia. The first is to maintain the status quo and keep Russia in the Group of Eight (G8). The second initiative is to support Russian membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Some have argued that, in light of the Russian invasion into Georgia in August 2008, the United States should take the lead and dismiss Russia from the G8. This would be nothing more than a retaliatory act and, in the end, would have a limited effect. In today's world of globalization, and in a world where predictions are that Russia will

provide Europe almost 70 percent of its gas and oil by 2030, it is imperative that they be included in any world organization designed to integrate world markets to the benefit of all trading countries.⁶¹

In June, 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said, “Accession to the WTO is the threshold, which Russia should overcome. Nobody has changed this course and nobody is going to change it. Russian accession to the WTO should be solid, worthy and open new prospects.”⁶² Russian interest in the WTO began with the initial admission application in 1993.⁶³ They continue to aggressively pursue membership in the WTO, and the United States should vigorously support this.

The objectives of U.S. trade policy include achieving more equitable and reciprocal market access for U.S. goods, services, and investment, and reducing and eliminating barriers to trade and other market-distorting policies and practices. American consumers and Russian businesses will benefit from lower trade barriers to Russian goods, such as steel, fuel for nuclear reactors, and certain types of aircraft. The negotiations over Russia's membership in the WTO should clearly focus on such mutual interests.⁶⁴

Dr. Ariel Cohen wrote this in 2002 and it remains relevant today. In today's global world, Russia benefits from integration with world markets. Russian involvement in trade, capital projects, and world finance has helped them develop economic stability. Accession into the WTO “can be used as a means towards locking in domestic reforms, ensuring that Russia benefits from a rules-based international trading regime, as well as strengthen Russia's future integration into the world economy by improving its policies and institutional capacity”.⁶⁵ Russia needs the approval of all WTO members to complete the accession process, including Georgia.⁶⁶ Given Russia's invasion of South Osetia in August 2008, it is unlikely Georgia would support Russian accession without

significant involvement of the United States. America should use its influence to push for full Russian accession.

Conclusion

Cautious engagement balances aggressive engagement while capitalizing on multi-lateral opportunities. America must continue to lead the world and promote democratic freedom for all. However, while pursuing this agenda, it remains wise to understand that democracy is perceived differently throughout the world. America should not alienate developing nations and fail to capitalize on shared interests and opportunities. President Obama's Administration has an opportunity to forge a new way ahead in Russian relations. The idea of cautious engagement is best summarized by Steven Pifer, who said, "On the one hand, you want to have certain penalties. Make clear that the Russians can't break international rules without some sanction. On the other hand, on things like controlling nuclear materials, cooperation has to go forward. That's an interest we share with the Russians and we share with the Europeans."⁶⁷ The challenge for the Obama administration is finding the correct balance.

Endnotes

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