

United States Foreign Policy Towards Russia and Central Asia – Building Trust

Introductions

The August war in Georgia has strained U.S. relationships with Russia beyond any point seen since the end of the Cold War. However, American economic, political, and military interests continue to rely upon a close and productive relationship between the two powers. To avoid further estrangement and establish a foundation for future cooperation, we advocate for a re-focusing of our foreign policy regarding Russia and its near abroad on issues where there is a common ground between Russian and US interests.

Russia

In recent years, a lack of communication between high-level officials has impeded mutual trust and cooperation between the United States and Russia. Therefore, our overarching recommendation is that first, the two countries each send cabinet-level officials to meet, initiating and maintaining constant, open dialogue. This will allow us to rebuild relationships starting with our common interests, such as security concerns in Pakistan and North Korea by sharing intelligence and threat assessment. Border and economic concerns with China are also of interest to both countries.

Both countries have a mutual concern about arms proliferation. Pushing a START-like agreement in which the reduction of nuclear war heads is the goal, and the United States taking the first step would act as a confidence and trust-building measure. Missile defense systems such as the one recently agreed on in Poland have antagonized Russia, so in order to reduce the perception of a Western threat, there should be joint NATO/Russian missile defense system talks. It is to the benefit of both countries to keep nuclear weapons as secure as possible both within Russia and in other states to prevent their falling into terrorist hands. Therefore, we recommend that the United States work with and support the United Nations-run World Institute for Nuclear Security (WINS).

We also recommend that the United States share advanced drilling technology with Russia, whose economy is heavily reliant on oil and natural gas. Deeper and new wells are needed and American technology would help stabilize the economy. This is also in United States interest because the European Union, a key ally, is heavily dependent on Russian oil. In return, Russia should pledge to adhere to abide by agreed market principles. Sharing our technology with Russia is an example of showing our good intentions and establishing trust; in the future, this might allow us to encourage Russian leaders in a more democratic direction. We do not advocate overtly pushing democratization.

Central Asia and Caucasus

Instability and lawlessness in Central Asia and the Caucasus undermines American national security. While sensitivity to European economic interests in the region must be maintained, global security imperatives dictate that the U.S. must take a more prominent role in the region, including heightenend formal and informal diplomatic relations with each government in the region, significant, no-loss opportunities for improved relations exist within the fields of counter-narcotics and counter-proliferation, education, and development.

Illegal transport of narcotics through Afghanistan and Tajikistan, along with smuggling of small arms and WMD materials through Georgia and the Caucasus pose substantial risks to American interests abroad, and, to a lesser extent, US national security. Terrorists eager to harm our interests, as well as those of Russia, Europe, and humanity at large, are keen to exploit these pockets of lawlessness to transport weapons and information harmful to global stability. Improved intelligence sharing with Caucasian and Central Asian law enforcement agencies, along with Russian authorities, will enable a more robust and effective defense against the proliferation and trafficking of harmful materials.

Furthermore, such activities would be most effective should they occur within the context of a broader cooperative relationship between the United States and Central Asian state powers, possibly

through engagement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Two relatively simple opportunities for new cooperative agreements brokered through the SCO include encouragement of direct foreign investment and foundation of American educational institutions in the region. U.S. support for governments, such as the rebuilding of the Georgian military, should be contingent upon, and geared towards, assistance in the prosecution of counter-terror and counter-narcotics campaigns and sensitive to European energy concerns.

Eastern Europe

Although the center of gravity of U.S. foreign policy has shifted to the Middle East region, it is still in the interest of the United States to maintain a stable Eastern Europe with strong democratic institutions. Our recommendations will focus on Ukraine, as the panel views it as the key country that occupies a strategic position to the future stability of Eurasia. While there is a great variety of issues to address, we favor using the soft power toolkit to serve the U.S. interests in the region.

Given the recent Caucasus crisis, as well as taking into account that the Ukrainian bid to join NATO has been a very polarizing issue within NATO and Ukraine, we recommend deepening the current partnership (Partnership for Peace) while upholding the prospect of future membership to NATO that should be used as an incentive to expand cooperation with Ukraine. The latent problem of the presence of the Russian fleet in Crimea adds to the complexity of Ukrainian NATO membership, which would significantly and unnecessarily deteriorate U.S.-Russian relationship and obstruct U.S. access to Central Asia. Currently, the cost of Ukrainian membership outweighs the benefits, which suggests the need for a strategic pause of further eastern NATO expansion.

We propose strengthening Ukrainian nation- and state-building, which would allow for increased cooperation among different actors on the political scene. It is in the U.S. interests to facilitate bridging the gap between eastern and western Ukraine by means of strengthening civil society. We suggest achieving this by increasing support and funding for NGOs, as well as promoting bilateral educational and cultural exchanges between Ukraine and the United States. A strong middle class would further facilitate nation- and state-building, and therefore we recommend focusing on promoting economic development, encouraging foreign direct investment and assisting Ukrainian officials with fighting corruption.

We endorse a bottom-up approach in promoting stability and encouraging U.S.-Ukrainian cooperation on a technical level. U.S. policy towards Ukraine should focus on developing economic partnerships, as well as strengthening civil society that will in the long term lead to the inclusion of Ukraine in the Western community and simultaneously allow positive, neighborly relations with Russia.

Conclusion

Our panel reaffirms Russia's importance as a strategic partner for the United States in the region. It is imperative to maintain and deepen a continuous dialogue between the two nations that is focused primarily on opportunities for cooperation. U.S. policy towards Russia should be centered on pursuing common interests in areas such as combating terrorism, assisting with nation- and state-building, limiting WMD and nuclear proliferation, and stabilizing the world economy. Successful partnership in these areas will foster cordial relations built on trust and may expand cooperation to other areas in the future.