SCUSA 60 THEME:
"MEASURING PROGRESS AND DEFINING NEW CHALLENGES"

RUSSIA, THE CAUCUSES, AND CENTRAL ASIA

"What to do" ("chto delat'?") is a timeless question in Russia that signifies its search for a place in the global community. Whether Russia decides to integrate within a liberal-democratic Europe, revert to an old pattern of autocracy and empire, or find a place somewhere in between remains to be seen. Currently, Russia appears to moving toward a security-state bureaucracy, with Putin and Medvedev running the show as Prime Minister and President. This choice will be the driving factor in that region as America looks to achieve its security goals there. Recent events in the Caucuses seem to indicate that Russia has chosen not to integrate into the West. The window of opportunity many predicted with the presidency of Dimitri Medvedev seems to have closed. Where once America faced countries in the region eager to cooperate and support its foreign policy goals, it now faces mistrust and competition. Russia and some Central Asian countries (e.g. Uzbekistan) have settled on policies to minimize the US presence in the environs of Russia and Central Asia. Although the global war on terror (GWOT) has produced some cooperation and increased mutual understanding, it did not lead to a flourishing of democracy and new alliances, as many Americans, including policy-makers, had expected (somewhat naively). This is in stark contrast to what happened in Eastern Europe, or the "new Europe" as America has branded the countries of the region.

America's disappointment with the lack of democratization in Russia and Central Asia is based in part on a failure to fully understand important differences between this region and Eastern Europe. Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and their neighbors experienced significant, if often fitful, western economic, cultural, and social development before the imposition of communism. This allowed them to make cooperation (and eventual integration) with the institutionalized democracies of Western Europe far easier than might be the case for Russia, the Caucuses and Central Asia. For most of Eastern Europe and its elites, the collapse of communism enabled their societies to return to the West. By contrast, Russia's history of the struggle between the ideology of West or of East (Orthodoxy vs. heresy, Slavophiles vs. Westerners, Communists vs. Capitalists) leaves it at a comparative disadvantage. Similarly, Central Asia and the Caucuses had even less exposure to democratic practice. In short, Central Asia, the Caucuses, and Russia have far more cultural and economic ground to cover than did their East European counterparts.

Matters arguably have been made worse by the fact that the United States in recent years has tended to neglect the region except when Washington needs support in the war on terror. The expansion of NATO has positioned the forces of the West near Russia's borders – almost unthinkable when one realizes that the Cold War has been over for only a decade and a half. This military advance and U.S. efforts to develop an anti-missile defensive shield, coupled with America's support for the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine and the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the possibility of Ukrainian and Georgian membership in NATO and American military presence in the Former Soviet Union as part of the Global War on Terror has made President Dimitri Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and much of the Russian population nervous about American intentions. Russia has clearly indicated where it believes its sphere of influence begins and has actively sought to limit Western influence in its 'near abroad'. Newly elected President Dimitri Medvedev appears to wholeheartedly embrace Putin's position towards the West. While Washington sees the American presence in the region as the advancement of democracy, many Russians view it as an encirclement of Russia by "non-friendly" regimes. The spread of American influence to countries that Russia views as its legitimate sphere of

interest, together with the accession of a nationalist Russian president and prime minister and the empowerment of conservative elites in Russia drawn from the security services, has made it increasingly difficult for the United States to convince Russia to support American foreign policy objectives. Russia has been further emboldened to "soft balance" against the United States due to its new-found wealth and power based on its vast reserves of oil and gas, and America's weakened international position caused by difficulties in Iraq and Afghanistan. The most significant recent difference of opinion between Russian and the United States has occurred in the recognition of Kosovo and subsequent Russian invasion of sovereign Georgian territory.

It is through this lens of increased bilateral tensions that one can perceive the difficulties that America faces in its relations with Russia, the Caucuses, and Central Asia. Washington finds it hard to "preach" to Moscow about the brutality of its war in Chechnya at a time when America needs Russia's support in its war on terror. That is all the more true because the Kremlin equates that war as a vital front in the global war on terror. Moscow also feels that the United States cannot "preach" to it about its actions in Georgia given U.S. unilateral action in Iraq and its recent decision to recognize Kosovo's independence. Moreover, America's attempts to promote democracy in Russia are increasingly seen by Russians as either patronizing assistance, at best, or interference in domestic politics, at worst. Russian nationalism is clearly an increasingly potent political force, raising the risk that Russia may lapse into insularity if it feels besieged, in either political or military terms, by the West. This raises a core question to the study of this region: what are the limits to America's ability to promote democracy in Russia, the Caucuses and Central Asia? Which tools are most effective in advancing this goal? What is the proper mix of security, political, economic, and cultural instruments? How can the United States reduce Russia's perception of threat caused by the expansion of NATO and the establishment of a ballistic missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic? Is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) a competitor to Western security initiatives, or a possible partner in combating terrorism and extremism in the region?

Promoting democracy is an important goal of American foreign policy, but the United States, like all states, must make difficult trade-offs in its formulation of foreign policy. For example, America must not lose sight of enlisting Russia's help to confronting the threat of nuclear proliferation. Although not front-page news, this problem is of high strategic importance. That is especially true when one thinks of the war on terror. Given the potential devastation of nuclear weapons and the size of Russia's stockpile, which remains only poorly secured, America needs Russia to continue Russian-American programs designed to better secure Russia's nuclear arsenal and the fissile materials in its nuclear labs and other facilities. Similarly, Russia and the United States still share an interest in slowing the acquisition of nuclear weapons by other states, particularly North Korea. Yet Russia's tacit support of Iran's nuclear program is in conflict with America's goals of ending it completely. How can the United States better enlist Russia in its efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and technology? Should the United States soft-pedal its support for Georgia and Ukraine – and perhaps their entry into NATO – in the interest of developing stronger relations with Russia? Given the recent events in Georgia, are we witnessing the beginning of a new Cold War, or can the United States cooperate with Russia where it shares mutual interests?

America is also largely ignorant of how its economic goals of free-markets and globalization affects Russia and its 'near abroad'. On the one hand, these policies have provided customers for its many resource extraction industries, especially natural gas and oil. The high price of oil has given these economies a tremendous boost in the foreseeable future. However, many other industries, such as steel and other manufacturing are having a hard time competing with American and other international companies. This provides some of the seeds for the more nationalist and autarkic voices in the Russian

polity. Even some specific projects, such as the Trans-Caspian pipeline, are in direct competition with Russian pipelines providing the same oil and gas. Moreover, Putin's practice of having former FSB executives on the boards of many Russian companies inject even more nationalism into what would otherwise be simply economic competition.

The West must keep in mind the challenges that Russia faces in a domestic and international environment are starkly different than that of the United States. Although we should not automatically assume that Russia is doomed to an authoritarian future because of its tradition of choosing a *vozhd'* (strong leader) during times of political stress, we also should not expect that Russia will inevitably choose authentic markets and democratic institutions simply because we think such choices are the right ones.

Questions to consider

Russia's recent war in Georgia has forced a fundamental reassessment of the oft-trouble U.S.-Russian relationship. The August war brought the relationship to its lowest point since the Cold War, leaving many to openly wonder if Russia's actions and the American response signal the beginning of a new Cold War. Although the rhetoric has softened to some degree on both sides recently, Russia and the United States remain wary of the other's intentions. The question of how to deal with Russia in 2008 is nearly as critical to American foreign policy as was the question of how to deal with the Soviet Union in 1948. One important difference is the apparent multitude of mutual interests between Russia and the United States today – countering nuclear weapons proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, and energy security among others. The United States must find a balance between cooperating with Russia to achieve these mutual interests and pushing back when Russia encroaches too far on American interests or American values. Finding the appropriate balance is critical not only to the U.S.-Russia relationship; it will also significantly impact the United States' relationship with the countries of the entire Eurasian region, particularly among the former Soviet states in the Caucuses and Central Asia.

U.S. policy must remain balanced as dynamic change sweeps through Eurasia. There must be on-going assessment of the match between short and long-term goals on one hand and the resources that the American electorate is willing to bring to bear on the other. Even as war in the region brings the United States closer to Afghanistan's neighbors to the north, issues such as NATO expansion into the Baltic region, Ukraine, and Georgia, U.S. moves to isolate what the Bush administration sees as an extremist regime in Iran, the construction of an anti-missile defense system, and even U.S. efforts to promote peace between Palestinians and Israelis all conspire to complicate relations with one or more of the countries of Central Asia, and particularly have the potential for exacerbating Russian intransigence toward U.S. policy moves throughout the world.

An important question is whether the United States should further complicate its relationship with Russia – and risk inflaming Russian intransigence on key issues that require Russia's cooperation, or at least its acquiescence – by vigorously protesting the anti-democratic measures of the Russian regime. Is it time for the West to rethink its support for Russia's membership in the G-8? Should the United States block Russian entry into the WTO? Or is the prospect of resurgent Russian nationalism and perhaps revanchism, and the danger of Russia wielding the oil and gas weapon against Europe, too great a risk to run?

A related issue is how to assess Russia's attempts to end the secessionist movement in Chechnya. Many Russian and Western observers have recently noted the decline in Chechen separatism and terrorism due to the killing of Shamil Basayev and other Chechen commanders over the past four years, but also to the precipitous decline in popular Chechen support for separatism. Is Russia now more

willing to support an authentic political solution for Chechnya that moves beyond the current policy "Chechenization" that has left brutal and corrupt Chechens, led by Razman Kadyrov, at the helm of the republic, doing little to alleviate the economic deprivation, physical insecurity, and political repression that has fueled separatism over the past decade? What can the United States do to promote the peaceful and productive re-integration of Chechnya into the Russian Republic? What can the United States do to help stem the spread of radical Islamism throughout the Caucasus? How has Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia changed its relationship with Chechnya and other separatist regions within Russia?

In other areas, we should ask the question, "Does American economic policy promote or retard the growth of free markets in the Caucuses, Central Asia, and Russia?" Are there joint public sector ventures similar to the international space station that could be more successful in improving the Russian or Kazakh economy? Should globalization, perceived by many as a new encroachment of "American ideology," be vigorously pursued in Central Asia?

Beyond traditional foreign policy questions, how much of a threat do failures in the region's health sector – and other categories of "human security" -- pose for the United States? How can authorities in the region be enlisted in the fight against international organized and cyber-crime? Should the United States throw its weight behind the democratic opposition in Russia, or in the campaign for political reform in the less-than-democratic Central Asian republics? If yes, what forms should this intervention take? Also, how can we convince the population of the region that democracy is important to them given their history of autocrats and dictatorships and their desire for stability (something that current regimes provide)?

What long-range security issues are influenced by the efforts of NGO's in the region? How might limitations on NGO efficacy be overcome? What initiatives are likely to receive broad-based support from the American electorate? Can U.S. cooperation with international organizations be used in nurturing productive economic, social and political change in the region? What changes in U.S. relations with the UN might broaden the range of U.S. policy options? What initiatives could better be handled through organizations such as the World Bank, WHO or Council of Europe?

The events following 9/11 - war in Afghanistan and Iraq, the new "American internationalism," and the attendant flux in traditional multilateral alliances - present new challenges as well as opportunities for U.S.-Russian relations. Delegates to the SCUSA 60 Russia, the Caucuses, and Central Asia roundtable should reexamine U.S. policy in the light of these changes and propose initiatives that aim to improve the long-term conditions for security and democracy in the region.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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On-Line Sources for Russian and Central Asian Issues

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Human Rights Watch: http://www.hrw.org.
Johnson's List: A daily compilation of articles and materials on Russia and its environs. <http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/default.cfm.
PONARS (Program on New Approaches to Russian Security) – concise, expert analyses of NIS issues. http://www.csis.org/ruseura/ponars/policymemos/pm_index.htm.
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