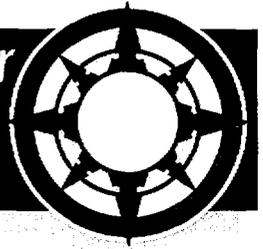


Renewing the US-Russian Strategic Partnership: Conference Report

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The Russia Project of CNAC's Center for Strategic Studies has been in existence since 1991. Its purpose has been to develop mutual understanding in a new strategic dialogue between the old Cold War adversaries. The work of the project has consisted of a series of seminars held alternatively in Russia and the United States, with reports published by CNAC of those seminars, and papers relating to national security issues written by the Russian authors and distributed widely within the United States by CNAC. The program is expanding beyond its original focus on the navies and their strategic context to the longer trends in relations between the two countries within the evolving world situation, both economic and military.

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Renewing the US-Russian Strategic Partnership: Themes and Observations

Conference Background

The conference was organized by Edward Lozansky of Russia House on the American side and Arkady Murashev of Democratic Choice on the Russian side. It was sponsored by the Free Congress Foundation. Democratic Choice is a center-right Russian democratic party that strongly supports free markets. The Free Congress Foundation is a Washington, D.C. think-tank run by Paul Weyrich that describes itself as both politically and culturally conservative, with its main focus on the Culture War (See www.freecongress.org for additional information).

The political tone of the conference was decidedly conservative, as all three organizers declared themselves to be staunch right-wingers. This bias, evident from the start in the conference description and the preliminary list of participants, limited participation from important Russian analytical and political organizations such as the Carnegie Moscow Center and the social-democratic Yabloko party.

The conference also suffered to some extent from a lack of organization. Part of the problem was in the timing, as it took place at the same time as the Millennium Summit in New York and the NATO conference in Reykjavik. Several of the top Russian foreign policy experts, including Sergey Rogov, Alexei Arbatov, and Andrei Kokoshin, were out of the country for these other events. Furthermore, because the conference lacked an agenda, almost the entire day was devoted to speeches and there was little time to discuss concrete proposals for improving US-Russian relations.

Conference Overview

Relations with NATO and International Security Systems

There was widespread agreement among the Russian participants in the conference that Russia has no choice but to establish a partnership with NATO. The participants argued that a new multi-national strategic defense system was going to be established in the near future. While it could be established with or without Russian participation, it could not and should not be created without NATO because of the financial and time savings achieved by starting with an existing framework. Russia was seen as needing to work with the United States to ensure that the new system does include Russia and covers the entire northern part of the world. Such a system could encompass not just Russia and Western and Central Europe, but also the countries that participate in the CIS collective security agreement, which could work within this system. Otherwise the CIS security system will soon collapse because of internal disagreements. The CIS security agreement partners would be likely to reconsider their attitude toward collective security if they see that the CIS is about to become part of a larger security structure.

At the same time as they saw that multi-national security organizations would continue to gain strength, participants saw the question of Russian membership in NATO, as proposed by some of the American participants, as a red herring. A gradual increase in cooperation was seen as both more useful and easier to achieve than actual membership. At the moment, they argued, even the existing mechanisms of cooperation are not being used.

Moving quickly toward Russian membership would increase tensions in the short run and may reduce the likelihood of setting up a true multi-national security system in the medium to long run. Also, the rapprochement must be mutual. The first step is for NATO to stop viewing Russia as a threat. Before Russia would be interested in seeking membership in NATO or a successor security system, it must see that it is being consulted on key issues. In the aftermath of policy disagreements over Yugoslavia and NATO expansion, the two sides need to rebuild trust before serious work on creating a common security framework can begin.

Russian liberals are still fighting against the Soviet mindset that treats NATO as inherently opposed to Russian interests. One participant cited a young Russian general who compared the danger of cooperation with NATO to Stalin's 1939 treaty with Germany. Just as Sakharov succeeded in changing the Soviet public attitude toward the Afghan war, Russia needs someone with the moral authority to convince the Russian public to change its attitudes toward NATO. In the past, Russian-American alliances have been based on common enemies. The participants expressed hope that in the modern world, they could be based on common values instead.

Altogether, it seemed that there was less hostility toward NATO than one might expect, given the rhetoric that came from Russia in the aftermath of Kosovo. The Russians recognize that if they want to be included in future multilateral security systems, they have no choice but to work with NATO. The disagreements surround the question of whether this cooperation should extend as far as eventual membership, or should be limited to bilateral contacts between the two sides.

Finding Areas of Common Interest with the United States

The participants agreed that during the last 10 years, differences in approach between Russia and the US toward security issues have increased, even when compared to the Cold War period. US interest in Russia has fallen because the "evil empire" has fallen and no global challenge to American values remains. At the same time, there is widespread disillusionment about the Russian path to democracy and the market. The decline in Russian economic and military potential means that Russian GDP now equals that of Minnesota and is somewhere between that of Spain and Holland. Russia's population is half of the US and its military expenditure is 1/30 of the US. It increasingly appears that the world can live without Russia. What remains of interest to the US is nuclear weapons, missile defense, the security of nuclear weapons within Russia, and cooperation in solving conflicts – but not as an equal partner, just as one part of the whole.

Russia sees similar security concerns – focusing not just on nuclear but also on new American conventional weapons. It wants to be recognized

as a great power, if only in the FSU area. At the same time, Russia needs to take steps to show the US that it does not view the US as an enemy.

One speaker was concerned that the participants in the conference had over-emphasized the extent to which US-Russia relations equals Russia-NATO relations. He argued that there will be no progress in rebuilding the US-Russian strategic partnership as long as both sides remain fixated on the NATO issue.

Participants agreed that the Russian-American strategic partnership can best be revived by focusing on cooperation in areas of short-term common interest – such as the fight against terrorism, religious and ethnic extremism, WMD, and illegal drug trafficking. Russia and the US share two common global challenge – China and radical Islam.

Everyone thought that the best way to foster cooperation was to concentrate on common projects. One speaker noted that there exists a joint working group between the State Department and the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry on Afghanistan and the Taliban. This was seen as a blueprint that can be followed in other cases. A similar effort could address the threat of Islamic terrorism more generally. In the future, such working groups could be expanded to include third countries, such as India for the Taliban or Israel for the Islamic threat. There is also the potential of cooperation in the Far East and the Pacific, as shown by cooperation of the US and Russian Pacific fleets. Russia and the US can discuss the effects of Korean reunification and Chinese expansionism on security in the Pacific region. Finally, the U.S. and Russia can share their experiences in dealing with illegal immigration.

On China, one speaker argued that China still has a 5000 year old ideology that only the Chinese matter and that all others are barbarians who should be happy to serve China. When this ideology is combined with China's economic growth, the threat of China looms large. The governing elites of both countries do not understand this problem.

While most of the discussion focused on security issues, there was some sentiment that no true partnership could emerge until the two sides felt able to spend more time talking about trade and law than about security questions. After all, as one participant pointed out, the US does not spend much of its time talking about security with its West European allies.

The Future of Nuclear Weapons

Several participants addressed the role of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War world. Some thought that there has not been as much progress on the complete elimination of such weapons as might have been expected with the end of the Cold War. Progress on arms control agreements was seen to have fallen by the wayside as economic and political reform in Russia became the top priorities of both the Russian and US governments.

One speaker noted that the future of nuclear weapons in the new post-Cold War environment is being dealt with not just by the Russian and American governments but also by committees of scientists that were formed at the end of the 1980s in both countries. These committees have met twice a year throughout the 1990s and continue to do this work. The committees report to their respective governments on their country's technical capacity to preserve security while continuing disarmament. The scientific viewpoint avoids the "who goes first" mentality usually adopted by the military when discussing arms reductions. After completing their work on nuclear weapons, the committees also dealt with chemical weapons and are now working on biological weapons.

National Missile Defense

Russian scholars were less preoccupied with NMD than might be expected considering the prominence of the issue in recent US-Russian policy discussions. Nevertheless, NMD was seen as the product of US security paranoia that would continue to be a complicating factor in US-Russian relations. The Russian participants seemed dubious that the missile threat to the US was real. They argued that North Korean missiles will not be able to reach the US in the foreseeable future.

At the same time, some speakers expressed the view that a similar security paranoia exists in Russia and could serve as a base for US-Russian cooperation on this issue provided that the US is willing to cooperate with Russia on NMD development. One scientist pointed out that not long ago Russia was ahead of the US in missile defense technology development, especially in the area of lasers. By seeking to go it alone, the US lost a chance to promote cooperation in *developing*

these technologies, which could have changed the partnership dynamic. This was seen as part of a pattern on the part of the US of underestimating Russian scientific and technological know-how that was detrimental to the interests of both sides.

Without providing much support for their conclusions, the Russian were optimistic that a compromise on NMD conflict will emerge as part of a START III agreement with the new administration.

Relations with the Muslim World

The Russian participants were moderately concerned about the threat of instability from Muslim insurgents on their southern border, both in the Caucasus because of Chechnya and in Central Asia because of Afghan militants. At the same time, they were careful to emphasize that they do not view the Islamic world as a whole as an enemy. They do strongly believe that there is a need to counter Islamic terrorism and that this is an area in which the US and Russia could cooperate.

Relations with Rogue States

Russian participants were skeptical of President Putin's efforts to improve relations with "exotic countries" such as Iraq, Libya, and North Korea. His visits to these countries show that he does not fully understand Russia's place in the global system. While participants did not explicitly reject better relations with these countries, they were concerned that such ties might have a negative effect on relations with Western countries, which were seen as crucial for Russian economic development. Putin's efforts to court these traditional allies were seen as an unthinking continuation of the Soviet view that "any country that is an enemy of the United States is our friend." Some speakers expressed hope that an improvement in US-Russian relations would lead Putin to scale back his emphasis on ties to such countries.

The Russian elite and the Cold War paradigm

Several speakers focused on the threat to future US-Russian cooperation caused by political elites in both countries that still have a Cold War mentality. There was concern that in both countries, essentially the same elites are running foreign policy as during the Cold War. These elites are not ready to follow a new paradigm. Russia's nuclear potential makes Russian elites feel equal to the US, despite Russia's economic and political decline. When these elites bring up the idea of a multipolar world, they are simply using a codeword for Russian anti-Americanism. This sort of language is part of an effort to check US power.

One speaker pointed out that the Russian elite confuses two different things. There is a difference between being defeated and being a loser. Defeat in the Cold War does not mean that Russia is a loser. Making proper conclusions from defeat can lead to great victories. For example, Russia's defeat in the Crimean War led to rapid economic development at the turn of the century. Russia's current geo-political situation is similar and can also be turned to Russia's advantage as long as the proper conclusions are drawn by those in power.

For now, Russia is still under the illusion that it can divide the US and Western Europe. Similarly, Russia's support for "rogue states" is a leftover of the "everything bad for the US must be good for the Soviet Union" mentality of the pre-perestroika period. The only way to improve the situation is for a new generation that was not subject to Communist indoctrination to gain power in Russia.

Russian public opinion and mentalities

The Russian participants were highly skeptical about the existence and importance of independent public opinion in Russia. They argued that Russian public opinion is easily controlled from the top, so that the governing elite can refer to public opinion as the source for its decisions while actually pursuing its own interests. As an example, one scholar pointed to the common view that the Russian public is opposed to joining NATO, arguing that in actuality the elite is opposed to joining NATO and has manipulated public opinion to support this policy direction. For this reason, Russia must develop and institutionalize a system of rule of law.

Until this happens economic liberalization and democracy will remain a game among the powerful.

But even though many such institutions have been created and 70-80% of Russians support free civic society and the rule of law, the majority of Russians still do not know how to behave democratically. Most Russians do not know how to use these new institutions. Furthermore, the Russian understanding of concepts such as freedom and democracy is completely different from how they are understood in the West. The US and Russia need to develop a common language if relations are to improve. Otherwise discussions on cooperation will succumb to a lack of understanding between the two sides.

Also, key reforms need to be made in education. The liberal reformers made a mistake in thinking that economic reform by itself would change the nature of Russian society. Without a change in mentality among the Russian people, nothing else will change. Much of the Russian education system is still Bolshevik in nature, producing 20 year olds with authoritarian mentalities. Without reform in this sphere, future generations will not be able to function in a democratic society.

Economic Issues

Russia's economic recovery was seen as a requirement for Russia to be able to continue to play a prominent role in world affairs. Participants argued that Russian leaders have to make a choice between trying to rebuild in isolation and sincerely opening up to the rest of the world. The participants opposed isolation, arguing that to rebuild its economy, Russia needs sustained 10% GDP growth. This rate of growth cannot be accomplished with autarkic methods, which have repeatedly failed throughout the world in the 20th century.

Economic development can only succeed if Russia is able to expand its markets in developed countries. Modern Russian goods are already being sold primarily to developed countries. Furthermore, these are the countries where Russian citizens' money has gone. \$150 million is now abroad – primarily in the US, Japan, Western Europe. The rhetoric of a multipolar world is unfortunate – it's a truism and no one is arguing with Russia about it. The best way to further Russian economic development

is to start by establish regional and super-regional markets in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Russia would benefit by participating in both European and Asian markets and serving as a link between them. The prospect of super-regional cooperation could also reinvigorate economic cooperation within the CIS.

There was some concern at the relative lack of foreign investment in Russia. It was noted that the size of the US-China trade relationship is 10 times greater than China's trade with Russia. While some participants thought it was hypocritical of the US to invest so much in a Communist country, others pointed out that US companies invest in China because they are secure there. On the other hand, many US companies were burned in Russia in the mid-1990s when their holdings were taken over their Russian partners using dubious legal means and even physical intimidation or their profits were taxed out of existence by the labyrinthine Russian tax code. During the course of the discussion, it became clear that if Russia wants more foreign investment, it must provide greater legal and physical security for investors. This can only be done by strengthening state institutions. But because of past experience with the omnipresent Soviet state, some members of the Russian political elite see any action to strengthen the state as an attack on democracy. This conflict will need to be resolved before foreign investors will return to Russia in any numbers.

Russia's ability to compete in the world economy depends in large part on its ability to preserve the nation's scientific potential. The government must therefore pay particular attention to education and research. Funding science would also bring economic benefits, particularly in the field of biotechnology which can work to increase food and industrial production.

There was a discussion of the types of goods that could be sold abroad successfully. Space technology was seen as one key area where some initiatives have been taken. Space launches from Baikonur have been done for Western Europe, Japan, South Korea. There is also the potential of commercial use of the Mir space station in cooperation with American companies, as well as the joint development of the new space station with the U.S. government. There has also been discussion w/G-7 countries about building a floating space launch facility.

Another source of export earnings is arms exports. Again, these are not being sold to Iraq and Libya, but to South and East Asia and Central Europe – countries that are oriented toward the world economy. Russian interests therefore require alliance with Western developed countries and NATO.

Russian participants thus supported an increase in Russian-American economic cooperation, particularly in the fields of space and arms sales. There seemed to be little faith in the ability of Russian manufacturing to produce consumer goods that could be sold in the developed world. At the same time, the need for the state to adopt concrete policies to promote foreign investment was widely held.

Russian Democrats and the US Republican Party

One of the most striking impressions to emerge from the conference was the sense that the Russian pro-democracy movement had largely limited its contacts in the US to the right wing. Representatives of the Union of Right Forces (URF) political group that was one of the conference's co-organizers repeatedly emphasized their close contacts with Republican Members of Congress and with the Bush campaign's foreign policy advisors. The URF representative at the conference mentioned specifically that his group had lobbied Congress on ending the intervention in Kosovo. The URF also sent representatives to attend last summer's Republican Party national convention in Philadelphia.

At the same time, these groups had virtually no contacts with the Democratic Party or the Clinton Administration. This bias was described as the result of the Clinton Administration's exclusive focus on the Russian governing elite. The Western left was also seen as more aggressive toward Russia for ideological reasons, whereas the right was described as more pragmatic on these issues.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this conference exposed American participants to the current thinking of Russian security specialists. The most surprising finding is the amount of support expressed for Russia-NATO

cooperation. While Russians do resent what they see as NATO interference in a country's domestic affairs, they recognize that Russia needs to cooperate with NATO if it wants to be a player in international affairs and not be left out of future international security arrangements. Similarly, there is widespread skepticism about President Putin's efforts to revive ties with the rogue states that were formerly supported by the Soviet Union. These findings are encouraging in that they show that there remains a solid base of support for strong US-Russian relations in the security sphere.

Participants List

Golfo Alexopolous – University of South Florida
Gennady Ashin – Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)
Galit Bar Am – Israeli Embassy
Oleg Barabanov – Russian Institute of Strategic Studies (RISI)
Denis Dragunsky – Institute of the National Project, Director
Dzhangar Atamali – Association for EuroAtlantic Cooperation (former Soviet Peace Committee)
Peter Ekman – Moscow Times columnist
Fritz Ermarth – retired senior CIA and NSC official
Don Feder – Boston Herald syndicated columnist
Dmitry Gorenburg – CNA Corporation
Valery Khomiakov – Union of Right Forces political party
Alexander Knorre – IREX
Tatiana Kosmarskaya – CAIS, economist
Sergei Kravchenko – MGIMO, head of sociology dept
Sophie Lambroschini – Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty correspondent
Bill Lind – Free Congress Foundation, director of Center for Cultural Conservatism
Tatiana Lozansky – American University in Moscow
Edward Lozansky – American University in Moscow, co-sponsor
Arkady Murashev – Democratic Choice of Russia, co-sponsor
John Nicolopolous – Greek Business Review, journalist
Yuri Osipian – Russian Academy of Science, Committee of Scientists for Global Security
Don Redfern – Iowa State Senator
Feodor Shelov-Kovedyaev – Indem Fond, former deputy defense minister
Paul Starobin – Business Week
Ira Strauss – Committee on Eastern Europe and Russia in NATO
Igor Tsesarsky – Kontinent USA newspaper, editor
Mikhail Tsyarkin – Naval Post-Graduate School, Associate Professor
Yevgeny Volk – Heritage Foundation Moscow
Paul Weyrich – Free Congress Foundation, co-sponsor

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