

THE CENTURY FOUNDATION

Project on U.S. Policy toward Russia

Shorn of the ideological struggle that for half a century had pitted the United States against Soviet Russia in a hair-trigger state of continuous confrontation, the relationship between the two major powers showed great promise of comity and convergence after 1989. But Washington's scarcely disguised triumphalism as post-Communist Russia rode a roller-coaster of wrenching economic and political transformation sowed bitter resentments among Russians, and not just in the security establishment; many Russians have yearned to recover national "greatness" as a country that counts in the world, and seem convinced that a strong hand at the top, and an unsentimental exercise of power abroad, are essential ingredients of greatness. From cooperative partner on Bosnia to guarded critic on Kosovo to post-September 11th collaborator against Al Qaeda to firm opponent on invading Iraq, Russians have responded to U.S. policy objectives in ways that underscore that, despite widespread assumptions in Washington, Russia--like the United Nations—is not irrelevant in the world. Buoyed by its oil wealth, a resurgent Russia has pushed back against U.S. efforts to influence its own politics and the politics of its neighbors, reciprocated Bush administration abrogation of key arms control treaties, and composed a contrapuntal line as part of the Middle East "Quartet" and Iranian "P5+1." Given the impact of their bilateral relationship on the management of critical issues in regional and global institutions, it is crucially important for both countries to get their bilateral priorities right.

With the appropriation voted by the trustees, The Century Foundation will undertake a new program initiative on Russia through commissioned papers and seminars to identify a new framework for U.S.-Russian relations and policy alternatives that a new administration and the Congress might pursue to right the troubled relationship at a crucial juncture.

The Century Foundation will convene a **high-level working group** to provide direction to the project and guidance on the work it produces. A broad range of policy papers will inform the working group, which will give primary focus to the lead policy paper, on the reasons why Russia matters for American foreign policy and on alternative approaches to U.S. relations with Russia, bilateral and multilateral, in the future. That report will be individually authored, shaped by the working group's input and critiques but without obliging the group's members to approve it as a common text. Working group members will be invited to agree on a succinct joint statement of policy recommendations that Century will publish and disseminate and that working group members may advance.

The following are proposed subjects for Century Foundation papers of this initiative:

Project Report: Resurgent Russia and U.S. Purposes

Today the Russian-American relationship has become the most testy and confrontational in the two decades since Moscow withdrew its military support for Eastern Europe's communist regimes, with nationalist alarmists on each side suspecting the worst intentions by the other. On

a growing number of policy fronts, the two countries have struggled to find common ground or else been directly at odds: antimissile weapons and their deployment in Central Europe, expansion of NATO and U.S. military bases into former Soviet republics, Russian pressures on weak or divided states on its periphery, Kosovo's status, "democratic" development in Russia and other ex-Soviet states, pricing and restraints on energy exports, as well as nuclear proliferation policy toward Iran and prospective space weaponry. Humiliated in the 1990s by a view of Russia as a spent empire and second-rate regional power—assuaged in part by the formal respect acknowledged in initiatives like the Gore-Chernomyrdin dialogue--many Russians have welcomed Putin's steps towards a more traditional, muscular foreign policy defined by Russia's willingness to stand alone, if need be, against U.S. temptations to hegemony. With so much of the rancor linked to a Bush-era reach for U.S. global dominance, a new American administration might seek to recalibrate U.S. policy and approaches. But need it bother? Does Russia matter? With so many in the American foreign policy debate convinced that Russia had become a ghost superpower, why should American politicians, policy elites, and press pundits take it seriously as a significant actor on the global stage again? What are core U.S. interests in human rights and democracy, economic policy, and alliance-building in the former Soviet space? What are the pressing international issues on which U.S. policymakers might need, or want, Russian collaboration? What are core Russian concerns in those areas, and in specific regions like the Balkans and the Middle East, and how might the United States seek to accommodate them? What use can a new government in Washington and a refurbished one in Moscow make of international institutional and legal regimes to consolidate and implement broader areas of agreement? And perhaps the overarching question: What is the basis for improved relations between the two in the years ahead?

Specialized papers:

1. *Rethinking U.S. Foreign Policy in Russia's Backyard*

Russia under Vladimir Putin has manifested a more assertive side in its relations with its neighbors, some of which chafe at a seeming reassertion of Russian imperial dominance. What are Russian leaders' goals in their dealings with surrounding states and what concerns do they have regarding ex-Soviet states' pursuit of ties with Western governments and institutions? Conversely, what are European and, particularly, American policy goals toward those same states? To what extent do publics and elites in Russia's ex-Soviet neighbors harbor suspicions of Russian revanchism or American democracy promotion in the region? How do contending factions in the politics of states like Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Azerbaijan see their political or national interests served by alignment with Russian policy goals or by security and economic partnerships with the United States, NATO, and the E.U.? What has been the impact of NATO's expansion on security perceptions and realities of states in the region--and on the security of the Western countries that are at the core of the alliance? How does the situation of the countries of Central Asia differ from those in the Caucasus or Slavic west? What implications do Russian suggestions of a sphere of influence in the region have for U.S. policy, and what countervailing influence might it be useful for the United States to assert in Russia's self-styled backyard? How crucial is the defense of human rights to American and European goals in the region? Are understandings possible between

Moscow and the West on the appropriate pursuit of their various interests with the governments and publics of the independent states?

2. *Coping with Creeping Authoritarianism*

As their political choices narrow, liberal-minded Russians and Westerners alike have been dismayed by the upsurge of nationalist revisionism pervading both old and new media, school books, and political debate that, critics say, resuscitates the most notorious canards of Communist-era “history” and helps legitimize the Russian state’s steady erosion of hard-won civil liberties and political activism. Are there countervailing pressures within Russian society that are pushing back against the revived nationalist narrative and creeping authoritarianism? How important to Russia’s future, and to its interaction with the rest of the world, is the enhanced vibrancy of an audible and critical center-left political community for reining in authoritarian nationalism? How may Russians’ experience of market economics and the privatization of property affect their perceptions of democratic governance, with which those were often linked? To what extent have internationally recognized human rights been compromised as political space contracts? As authorities seek to discredit and de-fund Russians who question the nationalist narrative, what support can these find from the outside world, from international organizations, and particularly from Americans? How important to Russian influentials is the closer relationship with the West that a more open political system was supposed to foster, and how important is the openness of Russia’s domestic politics and society to Western interests in dealing with Moscow?

3. *The Sino-Russian Relationship and Global Politics*

Since the Communist takeover of China in 1949, relations between Moscow and Beijing have alternated between a close partnership against a hostile or threatening United States and bitter estrangement that could allow Washington to play one against the other. Russia and China in recent years have drawn back together against perceived American overreaching, yet the rapidly rising economic strength and political influence of China also occasions disquiet in Russia. Its vast resource-rich but population-scarce territory of Siberia shares a long and still disputed border with an overpopulated China, providing an undercurrent of instability to the relationship between these giant neighbors. What are the strategic challenges that Russians see in China's breakneck rise, and what do they see as their opportunities? What shared interests do Moscow and Beijing see in Central Asia, in China’s western “autonomous” regions, and in offshore East Asia, and what opportunities and challenges do regional groupings like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization present to them—and to Washington? What are the two countries’ convergent (and at times divergent) concerns on vexing international issues in which the United States is engaged, both in the United Nations Security Council and outside? How can U.S. policymakers most successfully address the complex web of Russian interests vis-à-vis China to achieve greatest success on their own concerns, and how can progress on these issues strengthen U.S.-Russian cooperative relations in other areas?

4. *Russia and the Challenge of Political Islam*

Political Islam under the sway of fundamentalist radicals long posed a regional and a domestic security concern for Russia, of which the eagerness with which Russians embraced the Bush administration's counterterrorism agenda following September 11th was a testament. How widespread, and well-founded, is the Russian fear of increased Islamic radicalization in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia becoming a frontline Russian challenge when NATO forces exit Afghanistan? To what extent do American and Russian concerns about political Islamism still coincide, and how much do they diverge based on differing threat perceptions from various conflicts and regimes in the Middle East? How can Russians and Americans most effectively address security concerns regarding political Islam, and how might the United States bring Russia into closer collaboration in dealing with secular Syria, Islamic Iran, and fiercely anti-Israeli factions in Lebanon and Palestine? What connection do Russians see between international efforts to defuse or confront radicalized Islamist political movements abroad and Russia's episodic domestic problems with Islamic fundamentalism? How can U.S.-Russian cooperation on these issues facilitate a durable relationship in other areas?

5. *The United States and Russia in International Institutions*

Even through four decades of cold war, the United States and Soviet Russia never renounced the global institutions in which they had inscribed for themselves a privileged role at the close of World War II, including in particular the United Nations and its Security Council. After two subsequent decades' experience with trying to make those institutions work, do Washington and Moscow still see the system and its rules as workable frameworks for managing troublesome security crises, social and economic problems, and international order? Amid complaints that the distribution of formal power in these institutions has not kept pace with changing power relationships in the real world, in terms of both has-been and want-to-be powers, do the United States and Russia have any interests in common in terms of restructuring or reforming the formal, legally based institutions? What might the United States gain by working around a recalcitrant Russia intent on impeding U.S. objectives in U.N. bodies, perhaps through reliance on alternative multilateral arrangements, such as NATO (e.g., on Kosovo) or new groupings defined by their members' relative degree of domestic democracy—and what would Washington lose? What role do the two countries foresee for each other in the international economic institutions—in particular those of Bretton Woods as well as the World Trade Organization? Might an energy-enriched Russia see a larger role for itself in international economic policymaking, and especially on global strategic purposes like the Millennium Development Goals and control of climate change?

6. *After Bush: The Russo-American Arms Control Agenda*

Containment of a costly and risky nuclear arms race was a central theme of the U.S.-Soviet relationship for a third of a century, and even two decades after the end of the cold war, the vast arsenals, weapons complexes, and military budgets spawned by the conflict linger. As weapons threats to security diversify, can a new U.S. administration find

common ground with a post-Putin presidency in Russia to reduce or eliminate such dangers? Given Russian caution about U.N. sanctions, what initiatives can the two countries take to ensure firm responses to nuclear weapons proliferation among other states? Do the two countries have convergent, competing, or opposed interests in prospective nuclear technology transfers to non-NPT countries, such as India? Despite Moscow's longtime formal commitment to nuclear disarmament, has the post-Soviet degradation of its conventional military capabilities intensified its attachment to nuclear arsenals, and in any event what ability do they have to press other nuclear-armed states into a global rollback or abolition schedule? How crucial to American security—and how destabilizing to international order—are such signature Bush-era initiatives as antimissile weapons and antisatellite military capabilities or other space weaponry, and to what degree can a new administration put them on the table for negotiation? Can conventional force pacts be resuscitated, and other arms abolition pacts, such as on biological weapons, be reliably monitored and enforced?

7. *Russia and the Middle East*

For much of the past half-century, Moscow has been a “player” in sundry Middle East conflicts, during Soviet times primarily as patron of secular Arab nationalist regimes opposed both to Israel and to lingering vestiges of Western colonialism. With the relaxation of Soviet controls it also became one of the largest sources of Jewish immigration into Israel, and while seeking in recent years to maintain cordial relations with Israel as part of the international “Quartet,” it has also been the one Quartet partner to open up channels to anti-Israeli factions like Hamas in defiance of Washington. Russian opposition to U.S. policies favoring regime change in both Iraq and Iran antagonized more than just conservatives in Washington, though its weakened position left some voices in the region regretful at the loss of any significant counterweight to the United States. In the absence of a cold war, what are Russia's overriding interests in the Middle East, what influence can it muster with Israelis and Arabs to complement—or possibly undercut—U.S. policies, and what might it seek to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability among the countries that ring the Persian Gulf?

The Century Foundation program officer for this project is Michael Wahid Hanna, supported by Jeffrey Laurenti, senior fellow and director of TCF foreign policy programs.

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