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Russian Futures:
Challenges and Opportunities For the United States

Note: Below are informal notes taken by a JHU/APL staff member at the Seminar.

Mr. Goble began by noting that if you asked a Russian to explain what had been happening in his country, he would answer with an anecdote. This traditional way of explaining things provides the added benefit of plausible deniability. The anecdote that might be used involves two Georgians climbing a very steep mountain. The first one looses his grip and falls. His friend calls out to him and asks him if he has been hurt and the first climber replies that he has no injuries. The climber still on the mountain suggests that the first climber just climb back up. The climber replies that he can’t because he is still falling. This anecdote describes the situation in the Russian Federation today – still falling. There is a feeling that the future will be very different from the present and the past.

The falling Russian Federation has lots of company these days including the US which does not like to change its views:

- The old Soviet flag flew at the US State Department for six days after Gorbachev took it down in Russia
  - State did not know what to do about responding to the change
- There were many misconceptions about what would happen when the Soviet Union disintegrated
  - Most did not believe that ethnicity issues could pull the Russian Federation apart
  - Most believed that Russia had to become a stable democracy that would be friendly to the US
- US refused to tolerate any further secession from the disintegrated Soviet Union
  - Mostly US feared situations where nuclear weapons would be in the hands of areas like Yugoslavia

Two primary dangers:

1. By supporting the existing borders, the US was forced to support authoritarian regimes
   - But borders were originally drawn to create instability and, therefore, a need for central control
   - This US position was not surprising
2. More dangerous: by focusing on imperial decay, the US ignored what was really going on
   - There was decay of the entire public entity
   - This was the beginning of a failed state
   - US Assumption: if the Soviet Union ceased to be Communist, then it certainly would become like the US
   - Calling Russia a failed state made for seriously unpleasant reactions from some Russians

A failed state does not mean that there were no power centers

- In the 1990s there were many centers of power
- US did not want to face the question of who controls the nuclear weapons
  - Control of nuclear weapons was never as good as we had hoped
  - Russians would say that they had complete control, but could not say how many there were
- Other complications to consider
  - States don’t stay failed
  - We can already see that Moscow is willing to use violence on their own people or their neighbors
- Big powers don’t fail very often
Last one was probably Germany in 1918 before the Weimar Republic

The process of recovery might lead to even greater challenges

We have already seen Russia use force at home and abroad

Situations in Russia can change dramatically in only a few weeks

When the US has an election, very little changes really

Can see many views of what Russia will become in recent Russian newspapers

Could be liberal democracy

Could be Fascist – but Russians have such hatred of Nazis that it is hard for them to think about it

Futurology may be the last vestige of Sovietology – you don’t need facts for either

There are 3 broad ranges of possibilities – and many others, too and some of them would be miraculous

Potential Russian Futures

1. Rise of Fascism
   a. Not like the Nazis – more like the versions used by Mussolini and Stalin
   b. Involves nationalism and violence

2. Disintegration
   a. There is really no reason for the various parts to stay together
   b. Example: there is currently a potential revolt among auto-owners in the Far East
      i. The tariff for importing cars is now 35% and most cars there come from Japan
      ii. There is talk of a general strike on 31 January
      iii. There is no talk of breaking away from the Federation at this time

3. Optimistic view – Reindustrialization
   a. Americans must always have an optimistic choice and want a solution to every problem
      i. After listing problems in testimony to Congress, someone always asks for the solution
   b. Basic concept is that Russia moves away from #1 and #2 above
   c. There would be some proto-democratic economic development
   d. Reindustrialization would spread enough wealth among the middle class to keep them happy

Potential Future #1: Fascism

Authoritarian Capitalism is the term to use when talking to Russians

Russian government has already shown that it is prepared to be violent with its own people and neighbors

Willing to violate international laws as it did in Georgia

Must also remember that the Russian Federation is not the Soviet Union

There has been a big sense of loss for the people since the end of the Cold War

Think of what we would have felt if the Cold War had ended the other way

Many indicators of failure

Russian men’s mortality rates have declined by 9.5 years in the last 11 years

Biggest peacetime drop in recorded history

Caloric intake for the society has dropped from 3100 to 1900 per day

For some individuals that might be good but not for a whole society

Also must listen to foreign TV commentators constantly telling them what they did wrong

One cause of the problem: The Russian state became an empire before the people became a nation

The state pre-existed the nation in Russia but happened the other way in the US

This causes big swings of power

Russian “experts” obviously don’t have kids since they don’t seem to understand what happens when the forces of authority are eliminated

They never seem to think about what the responses to changes might be

Now Russians willing to sacrifice civil liberties to bring back a sense of order

Russians must now deal with so many non-Russians

Immigrants become a larger percentage of the population as native population numbers drop

Also need to bring in more immigrants to fill jobs

There are problems in international relations if Russia moves toward Fascism

Russians also see themselves as anti-Fascists since they defeated the Nazis

Small middle class does not help since a larger group could have more power in a fight against Fascism

Declines in the viability of jury trials signals a move toward Fascism
Non-Russians are not being allowed on the juries
Result: No one there to protect non-Russians on trial who may actually be innocent

- Problems that would be caused if the Russian Federation moved more toward Fascism
  - Russia would be more likely to attack its neighbors
    - Even though the Russian military is much smaller than the Soviet military, it is much larger and stronger than that of its neighbors
  - Russia will want an enemy of its own stature – a worthy opponent
    - Only the US or China would compare
    - US is currently in the better position to fill this role

Potential Future #2: Disintegration

- Russia has actually been losing territory for a long time
- One thing that holds it together is the way the existing internal borders are drawn; Example:
  - One area that is larger than the European Union also has diamonds/other mineral wealth
  - Can’t stand on its own because it has no port on the Pacific
  - Designed not to stand on its own
- Things may be changing – another decolonization
- When Russians look at a map, they do not see one large country as we do but a crazy quilt
  - Vast regions nominally belong to non-Russian majorities

The Russian Federation

From Mr. Goble’s presentation which is available separately in the Video Archives

- Moscow’s recent activities have made things worse
  - Larger areas say that if South Ossetia is worthy of being its own country, why not us?
- Demographic changes
  - There will be fewer native Russians than all people in Yemen by mid-century
  - Fertility rate is about 1.1 which is lower than Italy’s
  - Death rate for males 18-55 years old is higher than for their equivalents in Afghanistan
    - From illnesses, alcohol abuse, industrial accidents, etc.
  - Increased needs in the work force makes it necessary to bring in more immigrants
- Suggested potential solutions being discussed
  - Little Russia solution – Have Russia shed all the other non-Russian areas
  - Greater Russian solution – Reabsorb all the areas of the old Soviet Union
• Not even infrastructure holds the country together
  o Putin was recently pictured opening the new cross-country highway and was honored for it
  o In reality:
    ▪ The highway project started in 1903
    ▪ Vast stretches of the highway are not paved and most of it is only 2 lanes
• There have been two prevailing philosophies
  o Under Yeltsin – Go out and steal as much as you can and leave me alone
  o Under Putin – Go out and do what we tell you to do or we will shoot you
• Recommendation: Don’t buy any maps – the borders will be changing
• Moscow does have enormous resources
• Russia suffered greatly under Yeltsin
  o Russians will do a lot to avoid going back to that time
• Problem: If things look like they are going to fall apart, Moscow will come up with an external enemy to distract the public

Potential Future #3: Optimistic – Reindustrialization and Reform
• A lot will depend on the price of oil. It is often said by Russians that:
  o At $160 a barrel – Russia can talk of world domination
  o At $120 – Russia could control its old areas
  o At $60 – Russia would be OK with NATO taking in Georgia, etc.
  o At $30 – Russia would demand that NATO take in Georgia, etc.
• Soviet Union remained viable throughout the 1970s because of the oil shock and high prices of that decade
  o When Regan forced down the price of oil, that helped to topple the Soviet Union
• New tariffs on imported Japanese cars are designed to protect Russian automakers
  o Keep them employed and off the street protesting
• While middle class entrepreneurs want rule by law, those in the oil exploration, those in oil industry do not
• A reindustrialized state will need more immigrants to fill jobs and more rule of law
• If energy prices go up, Moscow will be able to buy the people off
• If there is no reindustrialization / middle class / rule of law, then it is hard to identify an optimistic future
• In a reindustrialized future, there would be greater need to import things from the US
  o So more likely to be friendly toward the US

There are many possible combinations of the these three futures
• Most likely some parts of the Russian Federation will have something like each of these futures
• Russia is likely to be smaller
• One of biggest problems is that everyone must work with Moscow – very different than rest of Russia
  o Most Russians hate Moscow the most, then the Georgians, and the US third
• US would like to see a Russia that:
  o Has a stable, reindustrialized economy
  o Is not ready to attack its neighbors
  o Is following the rule of law internally
• The US is not powerless in determining which future will prevail but also can’t determine which will
  o US could do some things to influence Russia
    • Make it more difficult for some people to travel – considered a major improvement for people over the restrictions of the Soviet era
    • Watch banking practices outside Russia very carefully
    • Disrupt its communications
  o US has failed to understand that words matter
    • Declared early on that Russia was European and a democracy – but it isn’t
    • Military alliances are important but we need international communication more
      • US government decided to kill off the Arab language service of the Voice of American after 9/11 – big mistake
      • Made other similar decisions that were not good about Russia, too
Concepts to consider:

- For the first time since 1991 (if ever) Russia’s neighbors must face the fact that they need their militaries for more than decoration
  - They must have adequate defenses available to get bloodied and hold on until help arrives
- If a country does not accept its borders, then it becomes a revisionist power which is dangerous
- Some say that if we object to what Russia is doing, then we will be going back to Cold War thinking
  - Not so
  - Russia does not have the military power nor ideological attractiveness that the Soviets had
- In 1991 the US did have the opportunity to direct the Russians to a more favorable path
  - The opportunity was passed up
- The assertion that the US and Russia always have common interests is not true
  - Example: Iran no nuclear weapons – yet Russia is helping to build Iranian nuclear plants

The Russian Federation will be different in 20 years

- Demographics alone will cause great changes
  - Moscow is already more Muslim than Paris
  - By 2012 the military draft cohort will be 50% Muslim
- US will face a regime that remembers how we treated them during their transition period
  - Look at the situation in Iran – those who came to power remember their bad or non-existent relations with the US as the Shah was falling
- The Cold War was an American dream
  - It was a zero-sum game
  - It was non-geographic (and Americans don’t understand geography)
    - Americans believe that we don’t have any cultural biases, that we are rational
    - Therefore, people should do what we say they should do
    - History was not involved
- Americans also believe that all problems have solutions
  - That makes Americans willing to try to do things but we get over-committed
  - We must realize that the US will not be able to control all situations
  - We will face a longer history than we are comfortable thinking about
  - There are many things that we have not thought through

Conclusion

To explain the situation, consider the anecdote from the end of the movie *Charlie Wilson’s War*

- In a Greek village, a family saves and buys the son a horse
  - Villagers say how good that is
  - The village wise man says “We’ll see”
- The horse trips and falls on the young man, crushing his legs
  - Villagers say how tragic that is
  - The village wise man says “We’ll see”
- Greece goes to war and all the young men are called up except the one with injured legs
  - Villagers say how good that is
  - The village wise man says “We’ll see”

We need to think “We’ll see” about the future of the Russian Federation

- US must begin to think beyond Moscow
- US must also begin to think about unthinkable things

**QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

When looking at Russian Federation we need to take a broader societal approach

- The Russian government is subject to some popular pressure
- We also need to avoid adding insult to injury from Western “experts”
- US must not do things without considering alternatives and their outcomes
- Avoid situations such as what happened when the US was permitted to place bases in Uzbekistan
  - US thanked the Russian Federation
Crime in Russia is not really organized

- Instead there has been a total criminalization of the government
  - Loss of the rule of law

- No magic bullet to solve the problem – everyone is implicated
  - If say they are fighting terrorism, can be sure that some countries will support them
  - Terrorism problem is not as big as Russia thinks it is but it is growing

- Good measurement tool for how things were going in Chechnya: cost of a tank
  - Russian tanks were being sold for a case of vodka
  - When the price dropped to one bottle per tank, it was a sign that the Russians were losing

- Putin doesn’t help the situation by recently cutting the size of the general officer corps
  - Should not do that to people with guns

- Creating troubled areas can help prove the need for central control

- Russian government uses the term terrorism to hide what it is doing
  - Often not really terrorism
  - The government often kills everyone so no one talks
  - First rule of fighting terrorism is to capture not kill terrorists in order to find out about others
    - Russian government does not do that

Gorbachev and Yeltsin

- The US could not have helped Gorbachev
  - He destroyed the Soviet Union quite effectively on his own – without CIA help as was claimed
  - US went further with Gorbachev than it should have

- Yeltsin was the most democratic leader of our time
  - US helped draft the new constitution so it should be democratic
  - Even so, it was passed only because they changed the number of electors four times in 24 hours
  - Yeltsin hated the old system so he really wanted the change

- We celebrate Gorbachev because he failed at what he was trying to do and the Soviet Union fell apart

- Central Asians thought that they had benefited from being part of the Soviet Union
  - But they were still not all that happy with the arrangement

- We need to understand the desperation of nationalism
  - There is a belief in the ethnic areas of: Why should we fight when we know we will win anyway?
    - Will be done eventually with numbers
  - American scholars don’t pay attention to this type of thinking – not their type of nationalism

The Russian Military

- For the next 18 years we know what the available cohort of conscripts will be since all are already born
- Last year 40% of the new conscripts were Muslim and so Moscow reacted by:
  - Increasing the number of draftees from the native Russian areas
  - Decreasing the number of draftees from the mostly non-Russian areas

- Moscow is not likely to be able to keep up this procedure
  - Soldiers’ Mothers’ organizations are very unhappy about this

- By the mid-teen years can expect that Muslims will be the majority of the conscript force
  - Won’t be the same situation in the officer corps since they come from different sources

- Conscription will be ethicizing the force and that will be radicalizing to those in the force
  - Some will be radicalized when they learn that more of their ethnic group have been drafted
  - Some will be radicalized when they recognize that less of their group have been drafted

- It is not reasonable to think, as some have said, that Muslims would not kill Muslims in battle
• If the Disintegration future plays out, there will always be worry about more parts of the country breaking off into small pieces
• If the Optimistic future plays out, the military will not be a big player
• Most likely different areas of the country will industrialize at different rates

Russia and China
• Russia sees itself as European and so China is not a worthy opponent
• It is possible that Russian and China could get together in about 20–40 years
  o Americans are found everywhere in Russia
  o There are only a few small Chinatowns in major Russian cities
    ▪ Still considered an irritant
• Russia is much more obsessed with Poland – with a deep-rooted hatred
• China is basically too far away to worry about immediately

Putin
• One of the worst things to happen to Russia
• Russians are beginning to get unhappy with Putin
  o Upset with the flaunting of wealth, gross illegalities
  o Many are now calling for his resignation
• Medvedev will come to like being president and will try to restrict Putin’s power
• It would be nice to believe Putin’s time is limited
• Expect Medvedev to become stronger – a good thing
  o More willing to move toward Reindustrialization
  o This would be good for Russia and its neighbors
  o Medvedev is not committed to democracy, however
• Putin’s arch of fame was interesting
  o In 1999 the Russian reaction was: Who is Putin?
  o In 2007 the feeling was Putin Forever
  o In 2009 there is a desire to get rid of Putin
• Putin’s day is past – he should leave sooner rather than later
• Example of Putin’s cruelty and criminality and why he should be gotten rid of
  o As a birthday present a journalist was murdered
• Putin believes that the rules don’t apply to him
  o Medvedev believes that some rules do apply to him
• Authoritarianism is helping to push different sections of the Federation away from Moscow
  o Putin is over-reaching in some areas such as South Ossetia
  o Stripping local governments of power and imposing huge unfunded liabilities
• Regions are more likely to be playing games horizontally with each other and not with Moscow