

The United States, Russia, and the Middle East

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Brief Analysis

Let me start with the issue of Moscow's role. Russia is an obvious player in this region. We may or may not like this fact, but there is certainly no blinking it. To the contrary, anyone who starts from the assumption that our goal has to be to marginalize the Russians in the Greater Middle East has set himself a virtually impossible task... Russia is the only country that straddles the entire region. Proximity is one source of its influence. So are its history, its economic ties, and this is my main point, the new issues with which we must contend. Consider the problems that fill up our policy agenda today:

- As a major nuclear power, Russia is crucial to international efforts to address the South Asian nuclear issues in ways that support and strengthen, we hope, the global non-proliferation regime.
- As a member of the Missile Technology Control Regime, Russia has committed itself to preventing the proliferation of dangerous missile technologies - including to Iran and other rogue states; particularly I stress Iran.
- As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is key to international efforts to ensure Iraqi compliance with Security Council resolutions on eliminating Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capabilities.
- And as an immediate neighbor to the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russia is poised to help or hinder their efforts to build a prosperous, independent future...

Russia's own altered economic calculus may be one of the most importance sources of policy change. In the Soviet era, ideological, zero-sum calculations dominated Moscow's diplomacy. Economic considerations were subordinated to strategy. The USSR, just to take the most important example, was prepared to make concessionary arms sales and engage in unbalanced trade -- that's how it accumulated all those "debts" it is always talking about -- because doing so helped to advance both its regional and global ambitions. Those days are over. Russia can afford nothing of the kind, and governments and military establishments that in the past could count on Moscow's subsidies just for being anti-American now have to do without...

> In watching Russian foreign policy, we have to be alive to [two] trends, one positive, one not so positive, to see which one dominates -- the pressure to increase arms exports, or the opportunity to use Russia's economic and commercial leverage to become part of a growing international economy? A great many new players in Russia's new economy will play a part in answering this question -- from energy companies to banks to aircraft manufacturers and space launch services. The roles they play and how they advance their interest will be a major consideration in what route Russian foreign policy will take...

Iran. Here, the tension between Russia's short-term opportunities and long-term interests is perhaps more evident and the dangers more acute. Iran's desire to acquire ballistic missiles, coupled with decaying controls in Russia's military-industrial complex and economic opportunism, has generated a serious proliferation problem, a very

serious policy problem for us... For their part, Russian leaders are absolutely categorical in declaring that Iran's acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems would have grave consequences for stability throughout the Middle East and pose a direct threat to Russia itself. The problem has been to develop effective policy tools to stop the flow of sensitive technology.

We have made this issue among our top priorities with Moscow. I think we have clearly made progress... Is the problem solved? No, but I'd note that some skeptics who have been following the issue closely have taken note of the changes. Over the weekend, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was quoted as saying that he believes Russia has now gotten serious about the problem of missile technology transfers to Iran... We are carefully monitoring Moscow's implementation of its policy, and will continue to press for resolution of problem cases when they come to our attention.

> Now, in this situation, does the Iran Missile Proliferation Sanctions Act passed by the Congress help us solve the problem? The Clinton Administration believes it does not. To my mind, any proposed measure or step in this area has to pass this test: does it get us closer to the objective of stopping technology transfers that we're worried about? Those who have proposed this bill think that imposing sanctions will do so. For us, sanctions seem far more likely to disrupt a process that has started to work. This legislation could actually undermine our efforts to stop these transfers. This is why Secretary Albright and National Security Advisor Berger have recommended that the President veto this bill...

Iraq. Russia's leadership shares our strategic interest in neutralizing Saddam's aggressive tendencies and eliminating his WMD program. We have worked together, not easily I might add, to secure access by international arms inspectors to all relevant sites in Iraq. If Russian policy works at cross-purposes with the UNSC and UNSCOM, we tell them so. The Russian government knows that we are prepared to use a variety of measures, including force, to ensure Iraqi compliance with its commitments...

Middle East Peace Process. Since the end of the Cold War, the Middle East peace process has ceased to be a Russian-American battleground... We have seen the benefits of Russia's expanded relationship with Israel, a relationship that can rightly be considered one of the most dynamic in the region. Some 800,000 Russian-speaking immigrants live in Israel -- the largest such community outside of Russia -- and they provide a bridge, particularly an economic one, between the two countries. Over time, these broader and more constructive relations with Israel can become an important fact in Russia's regional policy. They obviously offer far more promise for Russia itself than continuing arms sales to Syria...

Caspian Energy. Finally, I'd like to add a word about the Caucasus and Central Asia... Both the U.S. and Russia can benefit from the development of Caspian energy, and from the emergence of a stable band of states in this region. In fact, we believe Russian involvement in this effort is essential, even obvious. That's why we have urged early construction by the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, of its pipeline out of Kazakhstan through Russia to world markets. The first major line of the East-West corridor can be through Russia, in other words...

Conclusion. Today I have sketched out of the opportunities, complexities and risks presented by Russia's role in the region. I have argued that the opportunities outweigh the risks, that we can benefit by focusing on serious problem-solving, not political posturing. This is no small task. Moscow, shall we say, is not always easy to deal with. The competing interest groups I mentioned earlier often make Russian policy seem contradictory and confrontational and can pose new obstacles in our relations. But let me put the problem to you this way. In the Greater Middle East over the next decade if we are able to address the first-order problems we face by working together with the Russians, we are far more likely to get the results we want...

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Heiko Stoiber.

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