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**BETWEEN FRIEND AND FOE:
U.S.-RUSSIAN MILITARY RELATIONS TEN YEARS AFTER THE
END OF THE COLD WAR**

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Abstract

Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the relationship that exists between the militaries of the United States and Russia is strikingly hard to pin down. Just when you think you know what it is, it shifts, ever so slightly. One thing is for sure: it is neither as happy and close as many had hoped, nor is it quite as hostile or disconnected as it was during the Cold War. In a word, it is extremely mixed, with months of silence, then moments of antagonism, only to be followed by occasions of total transparency. It is, in fact, never entirely one thing all at once. Even the parts that are widely considered to be particularly good, such as NATO and Russian troops serving together in Bosnia, have a dark side. Likewise, the most lethal, and previously secret, parts, those involving long-range nuclear weapons, have spawned at times especially close relations among the officers who have command and control over these weapons.

At present, the relationship is stuck somewhere between friend and foe. One can imagine, with some high-level attention from either side, it might be possible to get it once again moving in a more cooperative direction, or at least, towards pursuing common goals in an efficient and professional manner.

Introduction

Ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the relationship that exists between the militaries of the United States and Russia is strikingly hard to pin down. Just when you think you know what it is, it shifts, ever so slightly. One thing is for sure: it is neither as happy and close as many had hoped, nor is it quite as hostile or disconnected as it was during the Cold War. In a word, it is extremely mixed, with months of silence, then moments of antagonism, only to be followed by occasions of total transparency. It is, in fact, never entirely one thing all at once. Even the parts that are widely considered to be particularly good, such as NATO and Russian troops serving together in Bosnia, have a dark side. Likewise, the most lethal, and previously secret, parts, those involving long-range nuclear weapons, have spawned at times especially close relations among the officers who have command and control over these weapons.

In the early 1990s, the U.S.-Russian military relationship was infused with great hope.¹ By the mid-1990s, the insulation of the military aspects of the relationship from political crises seemed not entirely out of the question. One observer even labeled the military relationship “one of the most positive developments” in the post-Soviet era.² If that were ever the case, by the late 1990s, the relationship was

¹ The U.S.-Russian military relationship encompasses all official contacts, at times over 100 programs a year, between the American and Russian militaries, run through an office in the Pentagon (OSD/RUE) and the office in the General Staff that controls all foreign contact for the Russian Ministry of Defense (UVS). It includes innovative programs outside these formal channels, particularly at the highest military levels, as well as formal programs funded by the Cooperative Threat Reduction, educational exchanges, and joint exercises. While studies have examined programs of Western engagement with the Russian economic and political sectors, the military relationship, despite its importance to national security, has gone relatively unanalyzed. Exceptions include: Michael J. McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms: Russian-American Military-to-Military Contacts Since 1992,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (December 1996), p. 743-778; Marybeth Peterson Ulrich, *Democratizing Communist Militaries: The Cases of the Czech and Russian Armed Forces* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1999); D.F.I. International, “Department of Defense Engagement of Russia: An Assessment of the Record and Recommendations for Future Interaction,” Unpublished Report, Washington, D.C., February 28, 1999; Kimberly Marten Zisk, “Contact Lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian Military-to-Military Ties,” *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Summer 1999), pp. 579-611. Even less work has been done looking at the relationship in the aftermath of the war in Kosovo.

² McCarthy, “Comrades in Arms,” p 743.

one of the most negative developments. In fact, it would be hard to exaggerate the chilling, and as yet on-going, impact that NATO's air war in Kosovo had on the relationship with Russia.

While neither the Americans nor the Russians are ready or willing to entirely walk away from military-to-military contact, neither appears entirely clear on a policy course forward. More than two years after the Kosovo war ended, the relationship remains deeply problematic, often neglected, and in some instances, actively thwarted. If the military is in many ways the sector most forsaken by the state in Russia, with soldiers unpaid, unfed and untrained, this relationship between the Russian military and the U.S. military is something that few policymakers in either country, with a few important exceptions, have spent much time nurturing.³ At present, the relationship is stuck somewhere between friend and foe. One can imagine, with some high-level attention from either side, it might be possible to get it once again moving in a more cooperative direction, or at least, towards pursuing common goals in an efficient and professional manner.

This paper proceeds as follows. Below, I address the way in which the military relationship was affected by larger strategic and political dynamics. By 2001, the impact on the Russians has caused them essentially to retreat, while the Americans seem generally tired of pursuing a relationship that their side has wanted more than the other. All that said, the relationship has not been without its high moments, and here I focus on the cases of getting both Russia and NATO troops to serve in Bosnia, beginning in 1996, and of pursuing increased transparency in the nuclear weapons arena, especially in 1997 and 1998. The role personalities play in getting closer relations emerges as fundamental.

Next, I explore how programs of engagement between the American and Russian militaries have involved more than just norms we associate with democracy and human rights. Two wars in Chechnya, and crime and corruption in Bosnia pose pressing policy quandaries that have, to date, gone unaddressed, but which are eroding whatever benefits are achieved in military-to-military contact. I end with some

³ For recent accounts of the disastrous condition of the Russian military, see Chris Stephen, "Ailing Russian Army Hunts Deserters," *The Scotsman*, August 27, 2001; Pavel Falgenhauer, "Military Cuts Illusory," *The Moscow Times*, August 30, 2001, both carried on the Johnson's Russia List.

recommendations for the American side to refocus the programs of contact with the Russian military including keeping expectations in line with the larger political environment, cleaning up peacekeeping, recognizing the role of individuals in shaping the relationship, and encouraging, where it makes sense, Track Two initiatives.

Why engagement never led to marriage

In the early to mid-1990s, on the American side at least, there was a fairly clear concept guiding the interactions with the Russian military, called “preventive defense.” Then Secretary of Defense William Perry believed that it was possible that the military relationship with Russia could not only be considered separately from the larger political one, but that it might actually “lead” and positively shape it, helping both the United States and Russia prevent crises.⁴ Not only did this turn out not to be the case, but by 2001, those in the Pentagon responsible for the relationship expressed frustration and confusion over the goals of engaging the Russians militarily. “What we are doing is trying to implement an unknown relationship and that creates all kinds of problems” one staffer confessed, with her colleagues in the room nodding vigorously. “What is the goal?”⁵

There certainly are clearer lines of communication between the two militaries in the post-Cold War era. Regular meetings of the Defense Consultative Group (DCG), where the Americans and Russians meet approximately every six to eight months, serve the purpose of being able to channel issues and questions related to security, defense, and the military, and the possibility of moving together on areas of mutual concern, even if they do not amount to changing the overall relationship.⁶

⁴ Author’s interview with William J. Perry, former Secretary of Defense, Stanford University, August 20, 2001. See also Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1999).

⁵ Author’s interview with Patricia A. Jucabec, of the OSD/RUE staff, Washington, D.C., July 2, 2001.

⁶ Author’s interviews with dozens of participants from 1998-2001 suggest that as a format, the DCG serves a basic purpose. Generally, the Russians seem to prefer the scheduled approach to spontaneous or “out-of-cycle” invitations. General Leonid Ivashov made this clear in his comments at a meeting attended by the author at the

There also have been positive moments over the last ten years in areas as varied as: joint peacekeeping operations, relations between the guardians of the nuclear weapons, in non-proliferation programs, joint search and rescue operations in the Arctic, efforts to establish a center in Moscow that would detect accidental launches of ballistic missiles (the Joint Detection Early Warning Center or JDEC), and the U.S. Pacific Command's relationship with the Russian Navy.

Any breakthroughs, however, have been maddeningly ephemeral. The initial strengths of joint peacekeeping in Bosnia not only were not sustained, but did not translate into a smoother approach with the Russians to problems that arose elsewhere in the Balkans, namely in and around Kosovo. In fact, at one point, the Americans and the Russians (from the very same brigade in Bosnia in which Americans serve) nearly began shooting at one another at the Pristina airfield.⁷ Many participants in military-to-military programs hasten to add that even the most positive examples of joint cooperation that have occurred over the last ten years with the Russians have never approximated the closeness that has developed between the United States and the militaries of Eastern Europe and other Eurasian states.⁸

The relationship suffers from other structural problems, including a "funnel system" that the Russians insist on maintaining where nearly any and all contact with active-duty military must go through one office and one man. The gatekeeper's intention seems not to encourage contact but to restrict it. It's like getting past a strict parent in order to pick up your date. Sometimes, you don't make it through. Sometimes, your date doesn't even know you were trying to get in. And sometimes, alas, your date has no interest in you. All three seem to have happened over and over again to the Americans pursuing a relationship with the Russian military.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, D.C., April 21, 1998; also author's interview, Captain Jonathan Laahs, Assistant Air Attaché, Moscow, June 4, 2001.

⁷ On the Russian brigade breaking away from Bosnia, and the differences in the SACEUR's and British General Mike Jackson's approach to the problem, see Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), pp. 375-403.

⁸ In other countries, Americans sit inside the respective Ministry of Defense and have close day-to-day contact. These military liaison teams are generally run by the National Guard from different states, and each country has a negotiated relationship with the respective guard. The Russian Ministry of Defense has wanted its relationship to be

Held hostage to the U.S.-Russian political relationship

Despite hopes to the contrary, the U.S.-Russian military relationship has become an index of broader U.S.-Russian relations. This means that whatever problems exist, whatever “bad news” policy issues are being discussed between the White House and the Kremlin, they reverberate, and in many cases, impede or stall military contacts.

This dynamic began to be particularly pronounced in the lead up to the decision to expand NATO, but for a long time, policy-makers in the Perry Pentagon were able to contain the collateral damage with Russia. Perry himself had deeply feared the impact of NATO expansion and “almost threw [his] body down in front of the train to try and stop” it. His vision had been, instead, to create a robust Partnership for Peace program with the Russians (“PFP on steroids” as Ash Carter had called it), and only when Russia saw NATO as a “partner and not as an enemy” would NATO expand. Perry was alone among the principals in holding that point of view but felt “very strongly about it – enough to call for [a special meeting with the President], enough to consider leaving [his] job over it...” While Perry acknowledges that the Russians did not “explode” over NATO expansion, he laments that the result has been achieving “nothing in terms of ... integrating Russia [into European security arrangements] ... in terms of building successfully the military-to-military relationship, the US-bilateral and Russia to NATO.”⁹

While never entirely warm, real strains in the relationship actually appeared at least several months before NATO expansion, in the fall of 1998, following the crash of the ruble and the rise of Yevgeny Primakov as the new Prime Minister. By December 1998, with Operation Desert Fox taking place in Iraq, the Russians put the relationship on hold for several weeks. Months later, NATO’s air war over Serbia and Kosovo, coming just three weeks after NATO’s enlargement, had the effect of turning

directly with its counterparts in the Pentagon. Author’s interview with Major Rich Choppa, OSD/RUE, and former member of IFOR serving with the Russians, Washington, D.C., December 29, 2000.

⁹ Author’s interview with Perry. For detailed discussion of the impact of American domestic politics on the decision, see James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1999). See also Perry’s account of the meeting with the President, in Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*.

“the freezer on.” It took more than a year to re-establish any formal military-to-military programs, although most of the work under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program did not stop. In 2001, the “Kosovo effect” on the U.S.-Russian military relationship continues.¹⁰ The fear among those working these programs from the American side is that the relationship will only get more difficult as the Bush Administration pushes missile defense and another round of NATO enlargement.

The I-told-you-so crowd wins in Russia

For the Russians, the domestic politics of developing close relations with the U.S. military shifted starkly after Kosovo. Before the war, there was a school of thought – like that of the new thinkers under Gorbachev in the 1980s – within the Russian military that pushed for close cooperation with the West. As long as Boris Yeltsin had reasonably close ties with Bill Clinton, that was an acceptable position for military officers to take. While never in the majority, that approach became nearly untenable and extremely rare in the post-Kosovo political environment.

The Americans could not help but notice that no Russian military officer ever advanced his career by becoming friendly with the West. For all those Russian military officers who had said, “NATO would be used offensively, you had NATO used offensively against a state that had not attacked it in a non-U.N. sanctioned action What you did [with NATO’s Operation Allied Force] was undercut the moderates in Russia.” If there was a group that said work with the West, and another that said always be suspicious of the West, then “we passed the football to group B in Kosovo.”¹¹

The severe economic constraints the Russian military has experienced in the last ten years and the extreme asymmetry in resources has also greatly reduced the potential for the relationship with the U.S.

¹⁰ In over two dozen interviews, the word “frozen” came up repeatedly. Colonel Robert Boudreau talks about it as a “sea change” after Kosovo. “Pragmatically, I think we have recovered. Psychologically, I don’t believe there will ever be a return to the state that we were prior to that.” Author’s interview with Colonel Robert Boudreau, J-5, Washington, D.C., June 19, 2001. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Russia, Eurasia and Ukraine, Dr. Jeffrey Starr, in an author’s interview, Washington, D.C., July 2, 2001, noted that, in addition to Kosovo, the sinking of the Kursk in August 2000 had been yet another “new low in U.S.-Russian military relations since they maintained to their own population that we sank the Kursk.”

military. Simply put, it has limited the degree to which Russia has been willing to participate in exercises. Agreements have often been reached at the bilateral DCGs, only to be cancelled later, and often suddenly, by the Russian side. As one former U.S. embassy official explained, “when you can’t provide fuel to the fleet or flying hours for your aircraft, it is difficult to justify... spending the amount of money it costs to engage in exercises or cooperative training programs” with the Americans. Pride, according to this former official, prevented the Russians from allowing the Americans to pay for everything.¹²

Given the economics of the Russian military, a common theme expressed by senior Russian military officials in discussions with Americans has been the shortage of housing for retiring officers. Russian law prohibits retirement without adequate housing. Many Americans working with the Russians believe that the relationship would have advanced significantly if, in the pre-Kosovo days, the United States government had been able to provide assistance targeted at this problem.¹³

In some cases, the issue of housing officers simply far outweighs any programs that could be done with the Americans. Former CINCSTRAT, Eugene Habiger paraphrased General Solotsov’s confession to him in July 2001: “listen Gene, I have so damn many things that are biting me in the rear end, I can’t even think about mil-to-mil.” Solotsov was in the process of having to shut down several missile divisions. “I have a missile division out in the middle of nowhere ... a town of 12,000 people. They don’t have any industry. They don’t have anything. The only reason that town exists is to support

¹¹ Author’s interview with Boudreau.

¹² Quote comes from author’s interview with a former U.S. embassy official, Washington, D.C., August 14, 2001. Author’s interviews with (ret.) General John Reppert, former Defense Attaché, Harvard University, May 10, 2001 and author’s interview with Laahs also focused on the economic constraints.

¹³ Author’s interviews with (ret.) General Eugene Habiger, former CINCSTRAT, San Antonio, Texas, August 15, 2001; author’s interview with Boudreau; author’s interview with Dr. Gloria Duffy, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Threat Reduction, Palo Alto, August 21, 2001.

[the missile division]. And I have to shut down that. What's going to happen to the town? Where am I going to put my people? I don't have any housing for them!"¹⁴

"Russia fatigue" on the American side

The American approach to the relationship has been characterized by a tension in "theologies." One theology has been based on a fairly narrow but pragmatic sense that Russia and the United States will be in the same place at the same time, and "we ought to have some sense of each other's traditions and approaches." A competing but probably more dominant theology centers around the idea that "contact at the operational level between our militaries will provide counter examples to the myth ... that has been sustained in Moscow that we are all bad news."¹⁵ In other words, one understanding from the American side of the purpose of pursuing this relationship is that the Americans can change in a positive sense how the Russian military thinks about them. (A by-product could also be that contact with the Russians changes how the Americans think about the Russians.) American participants tended to underestimate the time it takes to change perceptions. This miscalculation has led to a dynamic where people "state the objective and the strategy, pursue it, all enthusiastically, and then get frustrated and get turned off and change 180 degrees."¹⁶

Both approaches have resulted in what many working on the military-to-military programs call "Russia fatigue." Some become too burned out to take advantage of opportunities when they present

¹⁴ Author's interview with Habiger. The early programs with the Russian military included some money for housing, but retired veterans in the United States complained to Congress that since the U.S. government did not pay for their housing, the U.S.G. should not be paying for the "former enemy's housing." Author's interview with Reppert. Efforts at supporting housing in Russia have also been plagued by corruption: "between 1993 and 1995, \$65 million went missing from military asset sales, the proceeds of which were earmarked for the Ministry of Defense to build new military housing," from Christopher C. Locksley, "Human Rights in the Russian Armed Forces and the Threat of Catastrophic Political Scenarios," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 2000), p. 29. Non-governmental groups such as the Nuclear Threat Initiative are poised to spend some money in Russia on this issue. Author's interview with Laura Holgate, former Pentagon official and current head of the Russia program for NTI, Washington, D.C., April 27, 2001.

¹⁵ Author's interview with Starr.

¹⁶ Author's interview with former embassy official.

themselves, because it has been so hard in the last two years to do anything.¹⁷ Stories like the one about the Marine attaché left standing at the Sheremetevo airport in Moscow waiting for a delegation that he was expecting to accompany to the United States but which never arrived are not uncommon. Another attaché claimed that “literally thousands of man hours ... have been wasted” trying to get programs up and running.¹⁸ Those shepherding the relationship from inside the Pentagon admit “we start questioning ourselves: why are we doing this?”¹⁹

Wanted: innovative leaders

While a comprehensive study of the U.S.-Russian post-Cold War military relationship has yet to be written, the role of personalities will likely feature prominently. In dozens of interviews, the impact of William Perry as Secretary of Defense emerges as the “guiding light” behind attempts at reshaping the U.S.-Russian military relationship. His relationship with his counterparts was good, and they had a (relatively) easy time contacting one another by phone, setting up an approximation of a hot line.²⁰

While the recipe did not always produce success, energetic and enthusiastic personalities emerge as absolutely central to advancing the relationship. The stories, touched on briefly here, of General Joulwan’s relationship with General Shevtsov in getting Russia to serve with NATO troops in Bosnia, and of General Habiger’s relationship with both Generals Sergeev and Yakovlev in working to create greater transparency in the nuclear relationship, stand out starkly. The types of exchange that occurred between Joulwan and his counterparts and Habiger and his counterparts are remarkably similar. In both

¹⁷ Author’s interviews with Captain Robert Brannon, Navy Attaché, Moscow, June 10, 2001, and Laahs. They both noted that the Americans in 2001 had cancelled a visit to the Russian Far East, and that when General Shpak expressed interest in coming to the United States for a visit, he was told to wait until 2002.

¹⁸ Author’s interview with Laahs.

¹⁹ Author’s interview with Starr.

²⁰ On the hotline, author’s interview with Perry; see also Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 27. By the late 1990s, it sometimes took months to set up a “simple phone call between Sergeev and Cohen, and everyone was blaming one another.” Secretary Rumsfeld invited Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov twice in May 2001. Some Pentagon officials are “convinced” that he never even got the invitation. Author’s interview with Starr.

cases, there is little in the collective past of any of the individuals to suggest they would be particularly good or interested in advancing the relationship. And yet there is a common approach, based on a soldier-to-soldier respect, and an effort at pursuing transparency in order to build trust.

Disconcertingly, neither advances in the relationship grew out of the offices in the Pentagon and the Ministry of Defense tasked with running military-to-military programs. Habiger admitted that “no one had even talked to me about mil-to-mil programs. I didn’t even know there was an office in the Pentagon that even looked at this until someone told me I wasn’t going through the process.”²¹

Lessons learned from the failure to fully institutionalize the gains made in Bosnia and the nuclear weapons area also point to the role of personalities. The actions and decisions of policy-makers and senior military officials on both sides of the Atlantic who succeeded the teams discussed here demonstrate how fragile, if not fleeting, the advances were. With plenty of blame to go around, neither the Russian nor the American militaries or civilian leadership have rewarded those with demonstrated skills for advancing the ball in this relationship nor punished those who have impeded it. In the case of the Russian military, the disincentives for getting close to the West have only grown over time.²²

Going together to Bosnia

General George Joulwan’s impetus for dealing with Bosnia initially had little to do directly with the Russians; UNPROFOR was not doing the job, and he believed that “it was not a matter of *if* NATO would get involved but *when*.” As he moved forward on the planning of what a NATO mission would look like, he decided it made sense to include the Russians. He developed a good personal relationship with Minister of Defense Pavel Grachev that made dealing with difficult issues related to joint operations

²¹ Author’s interview with Habiger.

²² Author’s interview with Ashton Carter, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, Harvard University, April 25, 2001; author’s interviews with Laahs, Choppa and Habiger. Author’s interview with General Manilov, Moscow, December 1997, on the reluctance of Russian military personnel to serve with NATO.

easier. But the key relationship was with General Leonid Shevtsov, whom Grachev had picked to go, in a historic capacity as the first Russian officer, to NATO.

When he first came in October 1995, ... I said to General Shevtsov, we have to work out a personal relationship here to see if this is going to work. So to demonstrate that, you tell me where you want to go in NATO. Where do you want to go? Anywhere you want to go. 'I want to see your Combined Air Operations Center [CAOC] running the air war over Bosnia.' [he said]. So we got on my plane, and we flew down to Italy, and I took him into the 5th Tactical Air, and we went into the CAOC ... by Vinzenza..... No secrets. Where you wanna go now? 'I want to go to the Rapid Reaction Core in Germany.' This [was] a brand new core – the ace Rapid Reaction Core. This was the core that was going into Bosnia. So Shevtsov spent three days down there. I said no secrets; show him anything. So he came back. Where do you want to go now? 'I want to go to your U.S. Headquarters in Stuttgart.' So I sent him down to Stuttgart. He came back with a long face and very quiet but with words to the effect that 'I have been misled for 30 years' I took some risk in doing this, but I tell you, when he came back, we now had a relationship, and this is what I was looking for. So I said now we can work together. I couldn't get the trust and confidence that we were going to commit lives here in harms way unless we both had this feeling. So I had a term I used: One team, one mission. And I said you are now part of this team, and we have the same mission. And he would come back often and say that one team one mission. I knew we had the same sheet of music....²³

Joulwan's idea was that NATO and Russian troops should begin to train to "common procedures, standards and doctrine" so that they would be prepared to move into Bosnia. "We need to organize for success to include all nations" with clarity of mission, unity of command, and a common set of rules of engagement. Over a series of meetings, Joulwan and Shevtsov developed a complicated arrangement with the Russians that allowed SACEUR to retain operational control of the Russian brigade through a Russian deputy to the SACEUR, but the commander on the ground of each region, in this case General Bill Nash in MND North, would retain tactical control. The Russian brigade could always resort to National Command if they were directed to do something that they objected to, just as all nations serving in a multi-national group can do.²⁴

²³ Author's interview with (ret.) General George Joulwan, former SACEUR, Arlington, Virginia, June 25, 2001.

²⁴ Author's interviews with Joulwan, Perry. (Ret.) General William Nash described how this arrangement worked, address to the Fletcher School, Tufts University, March, 1999. See also Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*.

Russians and Americans serving together in IFOR presented an opportunity for “real cooperation in an operational setting” where the threat was considered substantial. “We didn’t know if the Serbs or the Muslims were going to attack across the zone of separation” remembers one of the first American officers who served with the Russians in early 1996.²⁵ The mission had high level support and attention from the political and military leadership. Perry remembers calling Grachev before the Russian troops went into Bosnia and saying “the world is going to be watching you in Bosnia. You should put your best brigade commander in charge there. Your best ...”²⁶

Joulwan believed that what he had developed with Shevtsov was the beginning, the foundation for a fundamentally transformed relationship for not only the Americans but for NATO with the Russians. Instead, in retrospect, it was a brief success. Joulwan’s successor, General Wesley Clark, had other aspects of the Balkans he was focused on during the period 1997-2000. Neither SFOR nor the U.S.-Russian joint operation in Bosnia were his priority the way IFOR had been Joulwan’s. Clark writes disparagingly of the Russian brigade: “I had closely observed the double standard the Russians had ... in the Bosnia mission. They took care of the Serbs, passing them information, tipping them off to any of our operations ... while keeping up the pretense of full cooperation with us.”²⁷ Yet NATO officials indulge in their own form of pretense, where publicly NATO considers the experience of Americans and Russians serving together in Bosnia, as successful, executed in a “highly effective and professional” manner. This joint peacekeeping effort is routinely referred to as “the biggest success story” of the military relationship.²⁸

²⁵ Author’s interview with Choppa.

²⁶ Author’s interview with Perry.

²⁷ Clark, *Waging Modern War*, p.377.

²⁸ See for example, *The NATO Handbook: 50th Anniversary Edition* (Brussels: NATO, Office of Information and Press, 1999) pp. 98-99.

Getting transparency on nuclear weapons

The U.S. and Russian militaries at various points over the last ten years have engaged in a qualitatively new degree of transparency regarding, of all things, nuclear weapons. General Habiger's impetus for generating closer ties with the Russians stemmed entirely from his understanding of what U.S. security requirements were in the post-Cold War era, where the "war ended [but] no one really disarms." He complained, speaking about his time as CINCSTRAT from 1996 to 1998, that, "... I am being told by Congress that I can't bring down the force levels below what we've got. I don't need all those weapons here you have artificially high numbers of weapons which didn't make any sense and that was the main thrust behind what I was trying to do."²⁹ Habiger was trying to find common cause with his counterparts in the nuclear weapons establishment in Russia as a strategy for convincing the politicians on both sides to draw down the number of weapons.

Habiger developed a good working relationship with then head of Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF), General Igor Sergeev, while on a visit to Moscow in October 1996. In March of 1997, Habiger brought Sergeev to the United States. He discovered in this second meeting with Sergeev that he felt the same way: "... We [we]re having some very, very sensitive talks Sergeev and I would sit down just the two of us and his translator – not that I didn't trust mine, but I wanted him to feel confident enough that he would speak very, very candidly if he was in the room with just me and just his guy – and it worked perfectly. I did the same thing with Yakovlev. And we really talked about some wide ranging things ... we talked about how we have too many warheads..."

Habiger took Sergeev to the command center at the Francis E. Warren Air Force Base in Wyoming and into a nuclear weapons storage area. That had "never been done before. Ever. [I] showed him the Minute Man III new bulkhead that was START II compliant – single warhead – and he got up there and looked at it and said 'Gene, this is magnificent because now I can go back and tell the story' [to

²⁹ All quotations in this section come from author's interview with Habiger unless otherwise cited.

the Duma that was concerned about compliance].... he could see that we weren't going to be able to breakout once we put those bulkheads on."

Several weeks after the trip, Sergeev was promoted to Minister of Defense. By October 1997, Habiger was in Russia, after Boris Yeltsin approved it, inspecting a Russian nuclear weapons storage area at an SS-24 base. In April of 1998, Habiger brought Sergeev's SRF successor, General Yakovlev, with whom he has become "good buddies," to the United States:

... Now I pull out all the stops – and encouraged him to bring General Oparin, Mikhail, who is the LRA [Long-Range Aviation] guy.... And I send the LRA guy with Phil Ford who is my bomber guy. Phil takes him to Whiteman and shows him a B-2, and he crawls around a B-2. He flies the simulator. He goes to the nuclear weapons storage area – they take him to the Dyess Air Force base – [to show him that] the B-1s are no longer in the nuclear business. Just to let him see that. And Phil takes him to Barksdale, and lets him fly the B-52, to include making a bomb run, which is kind of bizarre, but those are the kinds of things that you need to get folks to do so that they can have confidence in each other, so that when they look each other in the eye people will trust each other. And then I took Yakovlev not only to a missile base and showed him all that stuff. I took him to Bangor, Washington and show him one of my sub bases and showed him one of the nuclear weapons storage areas there Took him on a sub.... so then things are on a roll Less than a month after he gets back, there is a reciprocal invite, even though I told him in confidence that I was leaving. He says, 'I want you to come back because there are some things I want to show you.' And I thought, man, this is really great and even though it had not been announced, I said Rich [Meis] you come; you guys need to start learning to love one another, and Phil Ford, you come, and you dialogue with Oparin. And then Yakovlev and I agreed in this trip [on] an exchange program of missiliers and security experts and that sort of thing.... And then we bombed Kosovo.

The high points of the STRATCOM-SRF relations have not yet been regained since the Kosovo war for a variety of reasons. Habiger's analysis, based on a visit as a civilian in June 1999 and July 2001, centers around what one long-time participant in the U.S.-Russian military relationship described, above, as the Americans passing the football to team B. Habiger is bitter that "... things definitely unraveled because of Kosovo.... the Sergeevs and the Yakovlevs of the world were told 'knock it off.'" By 2001, an added domestic political dimension revolved around the SRF losing out to the conventional forces in what became a very public battle over resources. "Morale is really down," Habiger observed.

The future of this relationship seems on hold until there are clearer, less ambiguous signals from the Russian leadership on whether transparent relations are desirable. According to Assistant Air Attaché

Laahs, a general who is supposed to be guiding the relationship on the Russian side but is not particularly secure in his own future “does not necessarily want to put his hat in the ring and say ‘yes I am going to play with the Americans’ when the political relationship is not so sure above his level.”³⁰

The politics of not talking about Chechnya

Some aspects of the U.S. and Russian militaries getting to know one another may have the unintended consequence of helping to legitimize behavior and norms that are antithetical to the overall mission of increased security and democratization. Two examples of this dynamic stand out: a muddled response on the part of the Americans to the Russian military’s conduct in Chechnya, as well as American and NATO officials looking the other way as members of the international community in Bosnia, including the Russian brigade, participate in the trafficking of women. These issues pose pressing policy quandaries that have, to date, gone unaddressed, but are actively eroding whatever benefits have been achieved by military-to-military contact.

Chechnya has been a relatively low item on the U.S. security agenda with Russia, certainly when compared with arms control, non-proliferation efforts, missile defense and NATO enlargement. Many (in both Russia and the United States) will surely argue that that is how it should be. Given that the NATO action in Kosovo had such a pronounced impact on how the Russians deal with the Americans, however, it is worth considering why the Russian military’s actions in two wars in Chechnya have had virtually no impact on how the Americans deal with the Russians.

The issue deserves in-depth study, but a preliminary investigation suggests a muddled U.S. policy. Comments condemning the war were routinely included in the talking points prepared for the Secretary of Defense but over time, even these were dropped. There was no “juice in our points” explained one Pentagon official in 2001; “we didn’t have a national policy ... about ... the conduct of the

³⁰ Author’s interview with Laahs. A few Russian generals have continued forging the relationship. See Lyuba Pronina, “Bottoms Up for Visiting U.S. General” *Moscow Times*, August 27, 2001, p. 1, that describes the recent visit of General Thomas Keck to now commander of the SRF, General Oparin.

war, the indiscriminate use of force, and the breadth of the use of force, the sort of destroy-it-in-order-to-save-it kind of concept.”³¹

The reasons for developing a policy on Chechnya are several. First, to have a policy of engaging the Russian military in 2001 but have no policy that addresses what the Russian military is doing to its own population or to itself (torture of conscripts is highly institutionalized) suggests the policy of engagement is, at a minimum, flawed, and at worse, bankrupt. Second, and more generally, to the extent that the United States has consistently in the post-Cold War era followed a policy of trying to support various institutions associated with democracy in Russia, policy-makers could reasonably be expected to be concerned when certain institutions, such as the military, fall far behind the development of other institutions.

By 1999, the way in which the war was conducted began to affect adversely these other institutions: the Russian government began to exert increased control over what had been a critical media; that government’s control of coverage of the war played a large role in parliamentary and presidential elections; and some politicians were systematically discriminated against by the Kremlin for taking a stand critical of the war. In short, by the beginning of the second war, the idea that the conflict in Chechnya was deeply regrettable, but largely an “internal affair,” when much of U.S. policy towards Russia had been intimately involved with Russian internal affairs, such as the marketization of the economy and the democratization of the political system, appears disingenuous.³²

While it is not clear that any one program could affect war-fighting or doctrine, and while it is true that the (U.S.) Uniformed Code of Military Justice and discussions about compliance with the Geneva conventions are, in some programs with the Russians, at the top of the agenda, one finds affinity in the U.S. military with some specific aspects of how the Russians have fought the war. “Given the task

³¹ Author’s interview with Starr.

³² For an extended discussion, see Sarah E. Mendelson, “Russia, Chechnya and International Norms,” forthcoming in *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Spring 2002).

they have been given, there are only so many tools available” remarked a U.S. officer who had worked for several years with the Russians.

They have to use [mines] for denial, for flank protection, funneling. So we find common ground. To set up the battle ground the way you want it set up, you must use mines right now.... What is understandable to me, if you go back to the Grozny fight... what did you expect them to do? ... there are not that many ways to do their job. And again looking at it as a military person, you want a job done, and you have been told to do X, and there are only so many tools to get the job done.³³

If this position is widely shared by the U.S. military working with the Russian military, one can imagine that the Russians may be receiving implicit, if not explicit, signals from the Americans that they are sympathetic to the “job” they have before them.

At a minimum, as former Secretary Perry concedes, the policy of affecting change simply through contact does not seem to have worked, especially on the issue of Chechnya. A review of what the U.S. and the Europeans could be doing to help stop the war, or affect its conduct, is time-urgent. The Bush Administration needs to consider the best way to engage militaries that are deeply involved in the abuse of their own civilian population, because if it does not, it is ignoring what could be a much longer-term problem. At a minimum, the argument that the way in which abuse has been institutionalized in the Russian military has “generate[d] support within that institution for dysfunctional anti-democratic political models....” needs to be closely studied.³⁴

A blind eye to trafficking in Bosnia

By mid-1997, there seems to have been severe drift in the U.S.-Russian collaboration in SFOR. The tight relationship that General Bill Nash, the commander of MND North, had with General Lentsov, his top-notch Russian counterpart, was never matched, nor was the relationship between the SACEUR and his Russian deputy after Joulwan’s and Shevtsov’s departure. Most disturbingly, however, is the

³³ Author’s interview with active duty U.S. military officer, Washington, D.C., June 2001.

³⁴ Locksley, “Human Rights in the Russian Armed Forces,” p. 14. See also Alexei G. Arbatov, “Military Reform in Russia: Dilemmas, Obstacles and Prospects,” *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), p. 107.

increasing amount of evidence that crime and corruption have become institutionalized, not just among the local population, but among the international community in Bosnia.

Specifically, human rights groups and the International Organization of Migration have detailed information that trafficking of women into Bosnia (and Kosovo) increased dramatically following the deployment of peacekeepers.³⁵ Former U.S. peacekeepers deployed in Bosnia with the Russian troops can also describe encountering college educated women from Ukraine, and Russia who thought they were applying for secretarial jobs in Hungary only to end up as hostages, without passports and unpaid, near Uglevic, Bosnia, in the part of the military district controlled by U.S. troops (MND North) “servicing” soldiers. Russian soldiers frequented these brothels sometimes bringing along U.S. troops who were on patrol with them. NATO commanders, when told about these trapped women not only did nothing, but urged one soldier not to repeat the story.³⁶

Russians are not unique in considering trafficked women as prostitutes rather than as slaves. Nor are they alone in trafficking.³⁷ When asked about the possibility of pursuing a protocol for soldiers who encountered trafficked women, one senior U.N. official in Kosovo is reported to have said to an American official that he considered it a “right” of soldiers to have sex with these women. There is much evidence that American as well as senior NATO officials have known for some time that the Russians have engaged in trafficking. They do not deny trafficking has occurred but shrug their shoulders over what to do about it. “Boys will be boys” suggested one high ranking military commander.

U.S. troops and NATO command structures continue to describe U.S.-Russian cooperation in Bosnia as a success and have taken a laissez-faire attitude towards the subject. This approach is, to say

³⁵ Author interviews with sources in Russia, Bosnia, and Washington, D.C., 2000-2001. I thank Madeline Rees of the U.N. Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina for sharing the “Report on Joint Trafficking Project of the UNMIBH/OHCR.” See also Colum Lynch, “Ex-U.N. Officer Sues U.S. Firm Over Dismissal,” *Washington Post*, June 23, 2001, p. 20.

³⁶ Author’s interview with Major Steven Sabia, who served in SFOR in August-December 1997, Newport, R.I., August 8, 2001.

³⁷ Author’s interviews with Carter and Reppert report that the Ukrainians were initially much more corrupt than the Russians. See also “Mother Tells of Ordeal as a ‘Sex Slave’ for NATO Soldiers,” February 4, 2001 available at <http://www.zenit.org>

the least, problematic. Many argue that Russians take lessons from watching how the West deals with civilian populations and human rights. Certainly, the attitude regarding trafficking represents a case where the norms that the international community in Bosnia is sharing with the Russians are at odds with basic human rights, not to mention in violation of the Dayton Peace Accord.

It would seem that NATO has looked the other way when it comes to the Russians in Bosnia on several issues. Clark, in his book, accuses them of passing information to the Serbian side. U.S. officers serving with the Russians describe the “price of admission” for doing business with the Russians as a “drunk fest.” Simply put, if the Americans assigned to the Russian brigade did not regularly drink excessively with the Russians, they were “totally ignored... is it part of your job (to get drunk)? No. Can you not do it and be effective? I don’t think so. I didn’t see anyone strike that balance.” The U.S. military has displayed surprising flexibility on this issue, from relaxing the usual rules, where if a soldier had one beer in theatre, he or she could be sent home, to seeming to classify all drinking with the Russians as ceremonial. “Just don’t do anything stupid” the American soldiers are warned. What else should the American officers do? No one seems particularly interested in cleaning up the situation, and ordering U.S. soldiers to not drink with the Russians does not seem a solution. One suspects, however, neither is turning a blind eye.

What now?

Despite mixed, and even negative or minimal impact, military-to-military engagement is not likely to stop. Those who work on these programs argue that the arrangement ought to be refocused, restructured and placed higher on the agenda of policy-makers in both countries. Most people involved in these programs are beginning to realize that a stable, working relationship across the board is a medium- to long-term policy goal, not likely to be realized anytime soon. In the short-term, there are several lessons to be learned.

- **scale back expectations**

Like other types of engagement, expectations for change have not matched the slow pace and narrow scope of transition in Russia. The American and Russian militaries may never be extremely close. Policymakers and military leadership might help regain some lost ground if they recenter the relationship around a few pragmatic areas of joint concern, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo. In the nuclear weapons area, General Habiger suggests, for example, having technical experts on both sides do a joint study on the de-alerting of nuclear weapons. While this is not a particularly popular position among the U.S. military, he has proposed getting the people who made the Minuteman II and the capsules together with their Russian counterparts to think up a solution. High-level attention from principals on both sides to the issue of accidental nuclear launch might break log-jams that have been created by American and Russian bureaucrats and that have delayed breaking ground on a Joint Early Warning Detection Center.

- **prioritize the role of personality**

One need only remember the power of Mikhail Gorbachev's and Ronald Reagan's personalities in bringing about change in the U.S.-Soviet relationship to recognize that leadership can utterly alter almost any political dynamic. The desire to prioritize the U.S.-Russian relationship was never quite matched after Perry's departure from the Pentagon in January 1997, although others who worked the relationship on both sides continued to think it important.

But leadership below the level of the presidents also is necessary. It is not enough simply to have people on both sides who work hard and are smart. Breakthroughs require political will. Success stories (or moments) all have leaders who want something to work out so much that they put their careers on the line to make it happen. The impact of prioritizing the relationship comes through again and again. Eagerness and enthusiasm cannot be manufactured, but without them, effecting change in the relationship is very difficult.

The political and military leaderships in the United States should reward the development of a good U.S.-Russian military relationship. For example, why, in the post-Cold War era, is developing a good relationship with the Russians not considered an important component of what CINCSRAT or

SACEUR does? Multiple sources suggest that at present it plays zero role in the military's thinking about good candidates for these jobs. If the U.S. military is not geared to prioritizing this relationship, when the push in the relationship has consistently been coming from the American side, no one should be surprised that the Russian military is not rewarding those who have sought good relations with the West.

- **clean up peacekeeping**

As the U.S. Army undertakes a review of training for peacekeepers to include ways of preventing or avoiding human rights abuse, a central issue must include trafficking in women and children. The U.S. military should adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards trafficking in humans. Any soldiers serving with U.S. military abroad engaged in trafficking in women should be sent home. Commanding officers should be informed. Trafficking rings, if they involve foreign peacekeeping troops, need to be broken up. The atmosphere of permissive compliance must end.

There are precedents for such actions. When Russian peacekeepers serving with U.N. troops in Eastern Slavonia (now Croatia) were found several years ago to be trafficking, the U.N. special representative, Jacques Paul Klein, flew to Moscow and spoke with the General Staff. He threatened to go public with the information. The General Staff withdrew the soldiers and put in more professional, and better trained troops. The U.N. peacekeepers could then turn to their real mission: catching persons indicted for war crimes.

U.S. and NATO troops and commanders have to be educated that prostitution and trafficking are not the same thing. Surely, the NATO official who insisted "boys will be boys" was referring to sex, not to slavery. A first step in the zero-tolerance campaign is to make clear that not only is trafficking modern-day slavery and that it exists in Europe, but that when U.S. military officials look the other way, they contribute to its spreading.

Another, more general, approach to cleaning up peacekeeping in Bosnia would be to reinstate the "lessons learned in Bosnia" meetings. These meetings took place in 1996, 1997 and 1998 but were stopped in 1999 after Kosovo. One could imagine that these meetings might involve alumni from both sides who had served together, might take place in some neutral setting and might walk through what

worked and what did not. For example, many on the American side were unhappy about having the Russians serve in “their” sector, and rather than using this as an opportunity to work together, minimized their roles and interaction. It is time to talk openly about this, and propose some changes to make the SFOR experience look more like it appears in NATO’s official public accounts.

- **pursue track two options**

Non-governmental initiatives have a role to play in helping stabilize U.S.-Russian military relations. For several years, Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government has run a “General Program” with American and Russian generals meeting for two weeks every January in Cambridge. There need to be many more such programs and targeted at lower ranks.

One model might be to develop a network along the lines of the already existing civilian network of U.S. and Russian scholars called the Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (PONARS). This network is entirely privately funded, by the Carnegie Corporation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Since 1996, U.S. and Russian scholars have been meeting twice a year, with the policy community in Washington and as a separate scholarly meeting. In addition, the network has active, daily communication on a list-serve. Within the meetings there is plenty of disagreement and the impacts of Kosovo and Chechnya have been felt at different times in different ways within the group. But the network has been able to sustain discussion regardless of political crises.

A military PONARS-like network could be centered around a specific issue, such as peacekeeping in Bosnia. Each side need not try and match skill sets person-for-person. The premise behind the program would be to establish a network among military officers on both sides that is able to sustain shocks that are inevitable in the larger U.S.-Russian relationship, such as those from Kosovo. This network might not guarantee that the American and Russian militaries are best friends, but it would be a small insurance policy against them becoming enemies.