

**CDA Institute Seminar
26 February 2009
Fairmont Chateau Laurier Hotel, Ottawa, Canada**

**Panel III – Contemporary Security Concerns
Dr. Mark Katz, George Mason University
“The Russian Challenge”**

SLIDE 1: The Russian Challenge

[Introductory Remarks]

SLIDE 2



The Obama administration has a very different vision from the Bush Administration about what American foreign policy interests are. The Obama administration, though, inherits several of the Bush administration’s concerns about Russia:

- Russia’s increasing authoritarianism
- Fear that Russia is attempting to exploit European dependency on Russian gas for political leverage
- Russia’s opposition to NATO expansion
- Russia’s recent use of force against Georgia and the prospect that its success there will lead to similar actions elsewhere (especially Crimea)

--Russia's (and China's) only fitful cooperation with the U.S. and EU-3 on the Iranian nuclear issue

--Russia's encouragement of Kyrgyzstan's efforts to expel the U.S. from the Manas air base, and thus increase the difficulty of supplying US and NATO forces in Afghanistan

(Many other concerns could also be mentioned)

SLIDE 3



The Putin/Medvedev regime, for its part, has concerns about the U.S. Its concerns about America are often the reciprocal of American concerns about Russia:

Moscow wishes that the U.S. and the West would practice “non-interference in Russia’s internal affairs”—i.e., simply accept and do business with the Putin/Medvedev regime and not concern themselves with democracy and human rights in Russia;

--Moscow wants the U.S. and the EU to accept Russia as the major gas supplier for Europe, and not resist this;

--Moscow wants NATO expansion to halt because it sees this as directed against Russia;

--Moscow wants the U.S. and the EU to accept the former Soviet republics (including those in Central Asia) as being in Russia’s “sphere of influence.”

SLIDE 4



Moscow’s main problem with the U.S., though, is that unlike during the Cold War, Russia has not been Washington’s main foreign policy concern—especially since 9/11. Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and the “War on Terror” in general have all become higher priorities for the U.S.

By contrast, Moscow continues to see America as its main foreign policy challenge. But Russia also faces other challenges. And some of these are ones that Moscow really cannot deal with on its own, and needs to cooperate with the U.S. on to some degree.

This has led to Moscow pursuing contradictory and confusing foreign policy goals in some instances.

Iran and Afghanistan are cases in point.

SLIDE 5



Iran:

Moscow has taken advantage of Iranian-American hostility to improve Russian-Iranian relations. Moscow has provided crucial assistance to the Iranian atomic energy program, sold arms to

Tehran, and (with Beijing) worked to delay and soften US and EU-3 proposals for UN Security Council Resolutions against Iran.

Iran, though, has proven to be a difficult—even ungrateful—partner for Russia. Tehran has refused to accept Putin’s various proposals for resolving the Iranian nuclear crisis through Russia serving as the supplier of enriched uranium for the Iranian atomic energy program. Tehran insists that it will enrich at least some of its own uranium—which Russia, along with the West, fears could lead to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons.

In addition, while Moscow does not want the U.S. or Israel to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, it does not want to sell the S-300 air defense system that Tehran wants which might limit the effectiveness of such an attack. This is partly because Moscow fears Iranian possession of the S-300 will embolden Tehran to more quickly acquire nuclear weapons, and partly because Moscow does not want to harm the close cooperation that has developed between Russia and Israel, especially in the security field.

Finally, while Moscow fears the consequences of Iranian conflict with the U.S. and/or Israel, Moscow also fears the consequences of an Iranian-American rapprochement. Moscow worries that improved Washington-Tehran ties will lead to:

- Iran buying arms and nuclear technology from the U.S. instead of Russia;
- America approving and helping build pipeline routes for Caspian Basin oil and gas through Iran (which will result in declining transit revenues as well as influence for Russia in this region); and
- America needing Russia even less than it does now for “dealing with Iran.”

SLIDE 6



The war in landlocked Afghanistan presents a significant logistical challenge given that the country has few good roads, even fewer road links to the outside world, and no rail links.

Afghanistan:

Moscow fears the growth of U.S. influence in Central Asia (which Moscow sees as belonging to a Russian sphere of influence), and has worked to minimize, if not eliminate, this.

But Moscow also fears the possible spread of Islamic radicalism to Central Asia. Not only would this challenge Russia's ability to maintain a sphere of influence there, but could also spill over into the Muslim regions of Russia itself. The fear of this was part of Putin's motivation both for supporting the American-led intervention in Afghanistan that began after 9/11, and for allowing the U.S. to make use of military bases in Central Asia in order to facilitate this. Moscow understands that the American-led presence in Afghanistan very much serves to protect Russian interests in Central Asia.

These conflicting motives have led to conflicting policies recently.

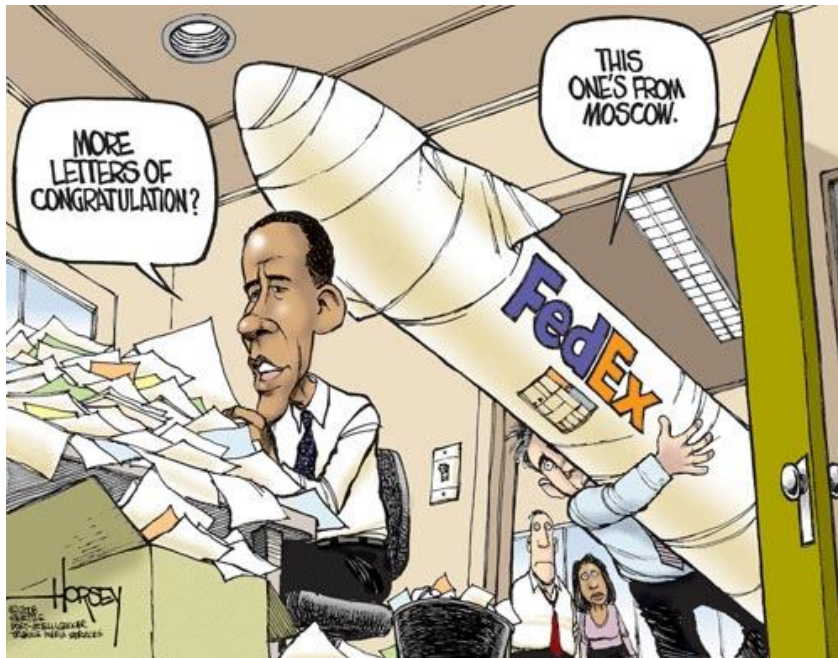
US/NATO supply lines through Pakistan to Afghanistan have come under increasing attack. Russia has responded to this by allowing the US and NATO to increase the amount of "non-lethal" supplies they ship through Russia (and Central Asia) into Afghanistan.

But ever since Uzbekistan expelled the U.S. from the base it was using there in 2005, Moscow has also been pushing Kyrgyzstan to expel the U.S. from the Manas air base. It appears that the Kyrgyz government definitely intends to do this.

Expelling the U.S. from Manas serves Moscow's goal of reducing U.S. influence in Central Asia. But since Manas plays an important role in the US/NATO effort to combat Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan, closing this base may only serve to strengthen the latter.

Moscow, then, does not want the U.S. to have a strong position in Central Asia, but does not want it to have a weak one in Afghanistan either. However, the more successful Moscow is at achieving the former goal, the more it undercuts the latter.

SLIDE 7



Given Moscow's inability to persuade Washington to alter its foreign policy in ways that suit Russia, Putin in particular has attempted to do so through opposing the U.S. on various issues but then offering to cooperate with it on them in return for American concessions on other issues.

Putin himself has suggested that Washington's acceptance of the result of the August 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict would lead to greater Russian cooperation with the US vis-à-vis Iran.

It is possible that if Washington asked nicely, Moscow might be willing to persuade the Kyrgyz government to reverse its decision on expelling the U.S. from Manas—in return, of course, for something such as abandoning the ballistic missile defense deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic that Moscow objects to.

The Obama administration, though, does not want to be seen to give in to Russian pressure since this would only provide support for Republican charges that it is “soft” on national security. In addition, no American administration—whether Democrat or Republican—would be willing to make serious concessions to Moscow in order to obtain its cooperation on what Washington regards as their common goals.

Both the US and Russia want to have a good bilateral relationship. They have important common interests, including common opposition to Islamic radicalism.

But as during the Cold War and the post-Cold War era up to now, differences over third countries, including Iran and Afghanistan, are likely to continue bedeviling Russian-American ties.