CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

FOREIGN POLICY for the Next President

OCTOBER 2008

Russian–American Security Relations After Georgia

ROSE GOTTEMOELLER
Director, Carnegie Moscow Center

SUMMARY

- Washington and Moscow's failure to develop a working relationship could lead to a dangerous crisis—perhaps even a nuclear one.
- There is an immediate need to grab onto the superstructure of the relationship through the START and CFE treaties, both of which require urgent action.
- A new architecture should follow that to broaden the relationship, including the creation of a new future for security in Europe.
- Both capitals need to devise a strategy as well as a mechanism to manage the relationship and prevent future crises.
- A commission of past presidents—U.S. and Russian—would have the authority to confront these monumental tasks.

The crisis in Georgia brings us face-to-face with the reality that the United States and Russia have squandered the opportunity to build a relationship that works for both parties. Getting the relationship back on track will be critical to the future security of Europe. Relationships among other countries and regions—not least how China relates to Russia and the United States—are bound to be affected as well. High-level political attention is clearly warranted in both Moscow and Washington. The question is how to accomplish it.

Tensions in the U.S.–Russia relationship have been building for some time. Russian politicians, gripped by belligerence and wounded pride, have expressed deep resentment that their security concerns are not being taken into account. Vladimir Putin has been articulating this resentment, beginning with his speech to the Munich Wehrkunde conference in February 2007 and continuing to the present day. In September 2008, Putin asked a group of international experts why Russia was not allowed to defend itself against Georgia. "…Were we supposed to just wipe away the bloody snot and hang our heads?" he asked.

For its part, the United States of late has not been in the habit of paying attention to Russia—nor indeed to many other countries and regions of the world. This phenomenon began with the onset of the all-consuming war in Iraq in 2003, but the U.S. presidential election campaign has exacerbated the effect. All political players are justifiably worried that the overwhelming force Russia used

Rose Gottemoeller was appointed Director of Carnegie Moscow Center in January 2006. Formerly, Gottemoeller was a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment, where she held a joint appointment with the Russian and Eurasian Program and the Global Policy Program. A specialist on defense and nuclear issues in Russia and the other former Soviet states, Gottemoeller's research at the Endowment focused on issues of nuclear security and stability, nonproliferation, and arms control.

Before joining the Endowment in October 2000, Gottemoeller was deputy undersecretary for defense nuclear nonproliferation in the U.S. Department of Energy. Prior to the Energy Department, Gottemoeller served for three years as deputy director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. In 1993–1994, she was the director for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia on the National Security Council staff responsible for denuclearization in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

against Georgia spells a new phase in Russia's approach to its periphery—a willingness to change borders by force. The tendency has been, however, for both presidential nominees and the Bush team to bash Russia while not offering any sense of "what next?"

To this bilateral dynamic must be added multilateral issues. The European Union, with France in the presidency, has been taking the lead on diplomacy to try to resolve the Russia–Georgia crisis. This effort, although much needed, has stoked suspicions in the United States that the Kremlin will try to separate Europe from the United States, exacerbating Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

Closer to home in the Western hemisphere has been the bizarre phenomenon of Hugo Chávez, the president of Venezuela, who has enthusiastically declared a "strategic partnership" with Russia. Russia has been more circumspect, but the Russian Ministry of Defense has announced it will conduct naval exercises in the Caribbean in November 2008, in cooperation with the Venezuelan navy, and it sent two Tu-160 bombers to land in Venezuela. Although the ministry said the bombers were carrying no nuclear weapons, for some the move conjured up memories of the Cuban missile crisis.

Since the Georgian crisis began, the Russian Federation has been operating as if no rules apply to it—whether the hoary Monroe Doctrine or the notion that an agreement signed by a country's president must be implemented lest his authority and legitimacy come into doubt. Certainly concerns developed that Moscow's resistance to implementing the Sarkozy–Medvedev plan showed a weakened Russian presidency and perhaps even a grave crisis in Russian civil-military relations.

In self-justification, the Russians say that it was not they who threw out the rule book, but the United States. The war in Iraq and recognition of Kosovo's independence are frequent examples of what the Russians call the U.S. "unipolar world" strategy—that as the only remaining superpower, the United States has been disregarding or bending international law to its will. Now, the Russians say, they have recouped from their post-Soviet weakness: Their energy sales have given them new international heft, and they plan to use it.

No holds barred, no rules—the United States and Russia may be heading to a confrontation more unpredictable and dangerous than any we have seen since the Cuban missile crisis. A confrontation today would be different—the two countries are in constant and intense communication, unlike the situation in 1962—but if those exchanges provoke mutual anger and recrimination, they have the potential to spark a dangerous crisis.

This effect is especially dangerous because both countries are in presidential transitions. Russia, whose government is riven by corruption, internal competition, and disorder, is attempting an unprecedented tandem leadership arrangement. The United States is in the midst of its quadrennial election season, with both political parties competing to show that their man is more skilled and tough on national security issues than his opponent. The unpredictability of these two transitions stokes the potential for misunderstanding and descent into crisis.

We must avoid such a crisis, because we have never succeeded in escaping the nuclear existential threat that we each pose to the other. We never even came close to transforming the U.S.–Russian relationship into one that is closer to that which the United States has with the United Kingdom or France. What if Russia had refused to confirm or deny that no nuclear weapons were on the bombers it flew to Venezuela? Our nuclear weapons are still faced off to launch on warning of an attack, and in a no-holds-barred confrontation between us, we could come close to nuclear catastrophe before we knew it.

What next? Is it possible to outrun confrontation and return to a pragmatic working relationship in pursuit of mutual interests? Clearly the answer should be "yes," if the Russian Federation completely withdraws its troops from Georgian territory according

to the Sarkozy–Medvedev plan. But, following Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, that process may take months and perhaps years. Some Russian commentators have been arguing that a relevant time frame to consider is how long Cyprus has been the site of an unresolved territorial dispute between Turkey and Greece: nearly thirty years.

In the meantime, the United States and Russia have about six months of intense political transition to get through, until the new U.S. president settles into place. This begs for a short-term modus vivendi that would enable the two countries to avoid a potential crisis and establish an agenda to confront some of the severe problems that have emerged in their relationship. Ultimately, the United States and Russia should want to re-create a book of rules that both will embrace, corresponding to international law and in fact strengthening it.

Seize the Superstructure

The first step in this process, and the best way to begin it, is to grab onto the existing superstructure of the U.S.–Russia relationship. This is the system of established and well-understood treaties, agreements, and arrangements that has been built up over time. Beginning in the 1950s, many efforts have been made to insert predictability and mutual confidence into the relationship in the form of both bilateral and multilateral arrangements. For the next six months, both governments need to take advantage of this established and well-understood system. Derided in recent years as a Cold War relic not worthy of the friendship the two countries had developed, it could now be a lifeline.

The most important of the treaties is the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), which was brought into force in 1994 and, unless extended, will go out of force in December

FACT FILE ■ Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty

Major points

- 30 states are party: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Moldova, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States
- Duration is unlimited, but CFE has been adapted to the post–Warsaw Pact environment
- The treaty established equal limits on major armaments for NATO and the former Warsaw Pact, including:
  1) 20,000 battle tanks (no more than 16,500 in active units)
  2) 30,000 armored combat vehicles (no more than 27,300 in active units)
  3) 20,000 heavy artillery pieces (17,000 in active units)
  4) 6,800 combat aircraft
  5) 2,000 attack helicopters
- Specific limits on the number of tanks, armored combat vehicles, and artillery on Europe's southern and northern flanks were devised to alleviate concerns that either side would launch a flanking maneuver against the other
- No single state may hold more than a third of the equal limits on major armaments total
- The Joint Consultative Group was established as CFE implementing body
- Regular notifications, inspections, and data exchanges are key obligations; Russia suspended its implementation of CFE, including these measures, in December 2007

For more detail, see http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/%252Fcfeback2

2009. START has cut by 50 percent the number of deployed nuclear weapons in each country's arsenal, resulting in the destruction of thousands of nuclear missiles and their silos, as well as bombers and submarines. It also contains an extensive and detailed verification regime, negotiated to try to dampen the uncertainties of the Cold War arms control relationship.

In recent years, Russia and the United States have been discussing a follow-on to START that would be designed not only to undertake further reductions, but also to simplify the verification regime. Both countries are in agreement that the particular format of START, which is expensive and cumbersome to implement, need not be maintained.

No holds barred, no rules—the United States and Russia may be heading to a confrontation more unpredictable and dangerous than any we have seen since the Cuban missile crisis.

The problem, however, is that time is running out to negotiate a treaty to replace START. Any new treaty would have to be completed and through the ratification process in the Russian State Duma and U.S. Senate by December 2009. The combination of the political transitions in both countries and the Georgia crisis makes this outcome extremely unlikely.

Another option is to extend the treaty to allow more time to negotiate and ratify a successor. START contains a routine provision for this purpose, which would extend the treaty for five years. Any other extension period, from one year to one hundred years, would be considered a change in the treaty, requiring a new ratification process in the respective legislatures.

With mutual recriminations dominating the mood in both capitals, the chance that such ratification would succeed is not high. Other approaches might be attainable, such as negotiating a one-year extension, submitting it to the legislatures, and declaring in political statements to each other that the treaty would continue to be implemented pending ratification. There is precedent for such a "provisional application."

However, in recent years, the Russians have been increasingly reluctant to make use of this approach. In fact, they have moved to ratify the agreement governing the Cooperative Threat Reduction program to clarify its status under Russian law and remove the necessity of applying it provisionally. In the current mood of heightened tension, they would be unlikely to declare new enthusiasm for provisional application of START.

With so little time before the treaty expires, START extension is a good example of an issue for which the established procedure should be embraced. Neither side, it is clear, wants to maintain the current treaty for five more years, but here the concept of a political statement could be used to good effect. Russia and the United States could agree to extend the treaty, as written, for five years but exchange political statements agreeing to negotiate a follow-on agreement within a year. The ratification goal could also be included in that one-year time frame, which would place the onus on the Duma and the Senate to remove the extra burden of implementing START in its original form.

The major goal here should be to prevent START from being caught in the backdraft of the Georgia crisis and swept away, leaving no means for the United States and Russia to regulate the strategic nuclear arms relationship. In particular, it is critical to continue to reduce weapons under the 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT), which is not to be completed until the end of 2012 but depends on START for its implementation. Also important is the predictability inherent in the START arrangements, one of the most direct tools available to rebuild mutual confidence in the nuclear arena.

European Security-Building: Russia In or Out?

The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) is the second element of the pol-

icy superstructure that needs to be addressed as U.S.–Russia relations deteriorate. On the face of it, this idea does not look hopeful, because Russia ceased to implement the CFE Treaty a year ago and had already been wrangling with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) about its future. Russia has been in particular revolt over the flank limits in the treaty, claiming that they prevent Russia from moving military forces on its own territory.

Then came Georgia, and the rationale for flank limits became painfully clear—to try to prevent the Russian army from massing on its borders and spilling over into neighboring states, where it could change borders and facts on the ground by force. Norway and Turkey, which have been NATO neighbors of the Soviet Union since the alliance's inception, have always been the strongest advocates of flank limits within the CFE system; they have recently been joined in that stance by the Baltic states, Poland, and other new NATO members.

With the failure to restrain Russia in this latest crisis, the interest inside NATO in adjusting the flank limits has plummeted to zero. The mood among some alliance members—principally the United States—tends toward simply discarding the CFE treaty. Other NATO members seem intent on trying to salvage CFE as a key element of European security. It is difficult to see how to do that, however, because the current process of consultation and negotiation over CFE is caught in the Joint Coordinating Group, the treaty implementation body whose technical experts can wrangle over, but not come to grips with, the main issue: the future of European security-building.

Washington is deeply at odds over whether Russia can be further involved in this process. Some influential voices argue that having done total violence to the notion that independent countries must consent to the presence of foreign troops on their soil, Russia, by its actions involving Georgia, has obliterated any shred of confidence. Russia, in this view, cannot be trusted in any way to contribute to the security of Europe. Not only should Russia be cut out of European security-building, this thinking goes, but it should in fact become the focus of a rearmament of NATO Europe.

Other American experts argue—and many European allies would agree—that Russia has taken a seriously wrong step and obliterated confidence by its actions, but that it now must be slowly and painfully reengaged. In other words, Russia must be a part of European security-building, no matter how difficult the effort, rather than become the potential aggressor against which Europe rearms.

The Russians are threatening to remobilize against NATO, which extends the twentieth-century European security nightmare into the twenty-first. Surely we can do better than that.

If this view dominates, the CFE Treaty can play a role in the slow and painful process, but not by reverting to technical-level talks. Instead, CFE must be used in its high-level policy role, as one of the most significant products of the Helsinki Process that was so important in bringing the Soviet Union closer to Europe in the 1970s and 1980s. CFE can be used as the superstructure on which to build new European security talks with Russia.

Why is CFE appropriate in this role? First, it provides a seat at the diplomatic table for all of the relevant players—all NATO members, including the United States; Russia; and key non-NATO countries on Russia's periphery, among them Georgia and Ukraine. The European Union excludes the United States except in an observer role, and so loses a major and necessary negotiating partner.

Second, although far below the radar scope for most policy makers, the treaty has always had a significant security-building role in Europe. It is important for codifying low numbers of conventional armaments in all the European armies, including Russia's, but also important is its system of information exchange and problem-solving. The result has

been an enhancement of transparency, predictability, and restraint in the European military environment.

An example of how the system works showed up in the period immediately prior to the August conflict, when Russia and Georgia were trading diplomatic barbs and beginning to escalate armed incidents. In July, an unmanned aerial vehicle was shot down over Georgia, and both Georgia and Russia brought complaints over the matter to the CFE forum. Although this process did not head off the violence that erupted between Georgia and Russia, it is an example of CFE's role that both parties were willing to use it as a mechanism.

Over the next six months, an agenda based on familiar issues and guided by eminent wise men is the best hope for avoiding a more serious clash.

Although Moscow is loath to recall it, the CFE Treaty in fact played a critical role in providing assurance to Russia when Germany was reunified in 1990 and again in 1996 to 1999 when Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary entered NATO. During those periods, CFE was the multilateral vehicle that set out explicit reductions and binding limits on ground and air equipment. It also placed limits on the size of peacetime reinforcements that could take place in the new member states. In that way, CFE has played a real role in Russia's security, and it could continue to do so—such as by regulating arms buildups between two volatile neighbors, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Thus, both Russia and the European countries should look to CFE as a superstructure on which to build new talks about European security. The violence that Russia has done to the treaty—first by ceasing to implement it, then by invading Georgia—cannot be ignored. Some careful legal and policy consideration will be required to understand what might be possible in such talks. However, three elements would seem to be the key to structuring the agenda*:

- An effort to salvage the data exchanges and inspection activities that were at the core of CFE system, but which the Russians had ceased a year ago when they stopped implementing the treaty
- A review of CFE key principles, including the all-important concept of host nation consent, and how they pertain to the "rules of the road" for maintaining security in Europe
- A broad-ranging discussion of European security concepts, not only exploring the legacy of the Helsinki process from the 1970s to the present day, but also considering new ideas that parties—such as the Russians—may wish to introduce

Such talks should be convened not at the working level, but at a level engaging some of the most experienced diplomats and experts who have been involved in European security discussions since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Their ultimate task should be to rebuild the system of European security in the aftermath of the Georgian crisis. Russia should be included as a full participant in the process.

High Politics, High-Level Consultation

U.S.–Russia relations are in crisis, and this is no time for routine ways of doing business. The skilled diplomats and technical experts who tend to the relationship in normal times cannot make the decisions that need to be made, or hold the conversations that need to be held. This is a time for attention at high political levels, including the highest level, the presidents.

Anyone who watches the evening news realizes that the crisis at the intersection of Russia and European security is one among many in the international arena. A sampling of news stories on a recent weekend reported a resurgent Taliban in Pakistan and terrorist attacks in India. The United States is still immersed in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. This is not to mention the economic crises that have been

** I am grateful to Ambassador Craig Dunkerley for his insights on the role and continued importance of CFE.*

dogging the international system, including Russia. Political players in both countries, in short, have a lot to handle, and for either Moscow or Washington, the other capital can take up only one part of each day.

And yet, getting the U.S.–Russia relationship back on track will be critical to the future of Europe and could even affect relationships in other parts of Eurasia, including the relationship between Russia and China. For that reason, high-level political attention is warranted. The question is how to accomplish it.

A never-ending expansion of NATO, quite evidently, does not at this time work for the Russians. The Russians, in fact, are threatening to remobilize against NATO, which undoes the good accomplished at the end of the Cold War and merely extends the twentieth-century European security nightmare into the twenty-first. Surely we can do better than that.

One approach that merits consideration is to engage a brain trust made up of past presidents of the two countries—a challenging idea, admittedly, given both their politics and the demands on their time. But as the most senior and experienced "wise men" that each country has to offer, who better to grapple with this vital issue than Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Mikhail Gorbachev, and Vladimir Putin. Once George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009, he might also wish to participate. (Putin's official status as Russia's prime minister need not perturb the balance in the group. For the purpose of its deliberations, he would be serving in his role as past president.)

The mission of the group would be worthy of its elite membership. Participants would be doing no less than trying to correct the major problem that went unresolved at the end of the Cold War: how to weave Russia, and Russian security interests, into the full fabric of European security.

The past presidents' work on this agenda could be pursued at two levels. First, they could consult directly on new ideas for Europe's security, including those that Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's current president, has hinted at on several occasions. Second, they could provide a high-level sounding board and source of advice for those who are pursuing the START and CFE agendas. Although START and CFE talks should be pursued only by highly experienced diplomats and experts, they are bound to run into obstacles during this tense period. If the past presidents were available for regular consultations with the leaders of these groups, the obstacles need not be overwhelming. Moreover, new ideas generated, particularly in the CFE group, could feed directly into the presidents' deliberations.

Now is the time to hold tightly to the superstructure of the U.S.–Russia past relationship, but only in order to have a stable foundation to think about the future.

This agenda may seem modest and too focused on the past—past treaties, past practice, past presidents. However, U.S.–Russia relations are in the grip of a deep crisis during the most unsettled of political seasons, when top leaders are in transition in both countries. Over the next six months, an agenda based on familiar issues and guided by eminent wise men is the best hope for avoiding a more serious clash. Now is the time to hold tightly to the superstructure of the U.S.–Russia past relationship, but only in order to have a stable foundation to think about the future. And that future must be approached in an entirely new way, drawing Russia into the system of European security as it has never been involved in the past. ■

The Carnegie Endowment normally does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views presented here do not necessarily reflect the views of the Endowment, its officers, staff, or trustees.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. Founded in 1910, Carnegie is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results. Building on the successful establishment of the Carnegie Moscow Center, the Endowment has added operations in Beijing, Beirut, and Brussels to its existing offices in Washington and Moscow.

RESOURCES

Visit **www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs** for these and other publications.

Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security, George Perkovich, Jessica T. Mathews, Joseph Cirincione, Rose Gottemoeller, and Jon B. Wolfsthal (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/univ_comp_rpt07_final1.pdf; http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/univ_comp_reportcard_final.pdf.

Reykjavik Revisited: Steps Toward a World Free of Nuclear Weapons, George P. Shultz, Sidney D. Drell, and James E. Goodby, eds. (Stanford, CA: Hoover Press, 2007).

Abolishing Nuclear Weapons, George Perkovich and James M. Acton, Adelphi Paper 396, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2008.

New Nuclear Realities, Harold Brown, *Washington Quarterly* 31:1 (Winter 2007–2008): 7–22, http://www.twq.com/08winter/docs/08winter_brown.pdf.

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

FOREIGN POLICY
for the Next President