

Changing Security Dynamics in the Crossroads of Eurasia

The vast expanse of the world covering much of Eurasia that is home to the successor states of the former Soviet Union has been undergoing rapid, unpredictable, and far-reaching changes since the end of the Cold War. Simultaneous attempts to introduce elements of democratic governance and a market economy, demilitarize post-Soviet societies and economies, and integrate into the international system have produced varied results from country to country. At the same time, distinct national identities have emerged (or reemerged) for the first time in centuries. The resulting tensions within and among states have on several occasions led to violence and open warfare.

The policy community and the general public on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to develop a new appreciation for the loosely defined region of Eurasia, which extends from Europe's East in the Caucasus to China's West in the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, have compelled the United States and its allies to focus on the ominous new threats that have emerged in Eurasia as the Cold War security order faded away and the region confronted the challenge of globalization.

The purpose of this conference was to cast the spotlight on U.S. strategy and policy for addressing key security challenges in Eurasia—proliferation, regional conflicts, and terrorism, among others—and to explore the prospects for international cooperation in meeting these challenges. The conference brought together senior government officials, military

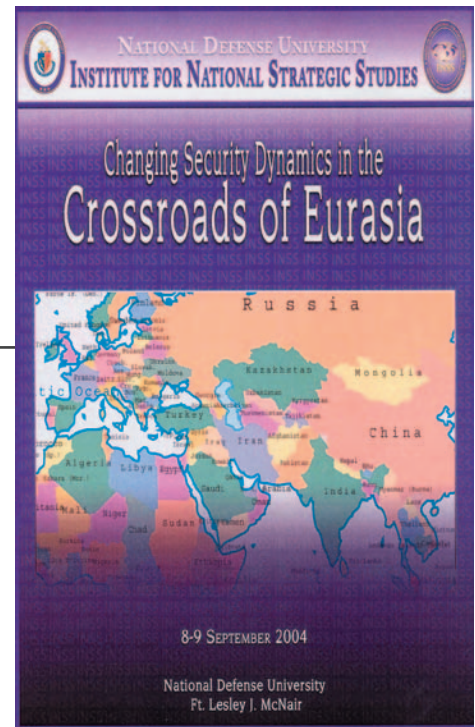
officers, diplomats, and academic specialists from the United States, Europe, and Asia for 2 days of candid and constructive dialogue and discussions about shared and differing perceptions and policies.

Key Security Challenges

Conference participants examined a mix of new and enduring themes, including the new round of tensions in transatlantic relations focused on, but not limited to, the issue of the war in Iraq, the definition of the war on terror, and differences in threat perceptions held by the United States, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its aspirants and partners in Europe and Asia, and the European Union (EU).

The Future of NATO

Presentations by panelists and subsequent discussions revealed a number of serious disagreements about the future of the NATO alliance and transatlantic cooperation in meeting new challenges to the interests of the United States and Europe and about strengthening the transatlantic security framework beyond the confines of new NATO members—in the Caucasus, the Balkans, and the Caspian basin. Some conference participants focused on the importance of transatlantic institutions to U.S. interests, which, they maintained, enabled the United States to pursue its core interests within the framework of an established partnership based on shared values and built on decades-long record of accomplishments. They maintained that the accomplishments of the June 2004 G–8, EU–U.S., and NATO summits—which included



overcoming key differences on Iraq, agreeing on an approach to relations with the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative, enhancing cooperation in countering terrorism, and growing support for the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI)—all attest to the underlying strength of transatlantic cooperation in meeting the challenges of the new century. However, much remains to be done. Recent terrorist attacks in Russia, the multitude of unresolved, “frozen” conflicts in the Caucasus, and the weakness of new states of the former Soviet Union and elsewhere on the doorstep of core European institutions, combined with the mounting threat of nuclear proliferation and transnational terrorism, offer compelling evidence that now is not the time for complacency.

Other participants disagreed with this dynamic view of transatlantic cooperation and focused on differences in the relationship between the United States and its allies and partners in Europe, which, they predicted, would have negative consequences for their ability to forge an effective partnership and extend the cooperative security relationship to include partners in Europe and Asia. Thus, the current rift in transatlantic relations is an inevitable result of the new

post–Cold War geopolitical climate in Europe. Despite the new, common threats posed by transnational terrorism, prospects for state failure on the periphery of Europe, proliferation, and the spread of radical ideologies facilitated by the advent of globalization, the United States and Europe have failed to define a new grand bargain underlying their partnership due to a U.S. tendency to dominate, rather than cooperate with, Europe. Washington’s



propensity to direct the relationship is a remnant of the Cold War, compounded by its post–Cold War emergence as the sole global superpower on the one hand, and the EU failure to develop its own coherent and effective foreign and security policy on the other hand.

Shared Challenges

Those holding such dim views of transatlantic relations argued that the United States and Europe should begin a substantive dialogue on implementing more robust engagement policies in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia in order to promote modernization and security instead of attempting to inject democracy into places that more closely resemble 14th-century feudal France than an enlightened Western European country.

The relationship between the security and stability of Eurasia on the one hand and the broader Middle East on the other hand was highlighted by adherents of yet another prominent school of thought, who stressed that the root causes of the main challenges to the security and stability of the continent lie in a wider cultural and political conflict with the broader Middle East. Notwithstanding the risk of oversimplification and drawing comparisons with the East–West conflict of the Cold War era, the best approach to meeting this challenge may be offered by the experience of the assertive engagement through which the West fostered positive change in Eastern Europe during and after the Cold War. Specifically, this engagement should focus on five key tasks: stopping WMD proliferation, securing Iraq, combating terrorism, promoting reform, and maintaining the military capability to intervene in the Middle East.

“Frozen Conflicts”

In addition to focusing on these broader themes that transcend the regional boundaries of the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia, conference participants devoted considerable attention to the issue of so-called *frozen conflicts* scattered along the periphery of Russia. Conference participants were unanimous in their view that these conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and in and around Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria pose a real threat to the security and stability of Europe and Asia as potential sources of interstate conflict and as safe harbors for terrorists, smugglers, and traffickers. Participants further agreed that for any settlement process to work, the warring parties themselves must be actively engaged. Some raised questions regarding the role and utility of international organizations in resolving the frozen conflicts, in particular the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe’s (OSCE’s) Minsk process, arguing that it has proved unsuccessful in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Other participants disagreed, insisting that international organizations are

preferable to unilateral action, which has had a dismal track record in the region. They suggested that the role of international organizations is often misunderstood, since their purpose is to provide procedures for warring parties to employ in making peace, rather than to impose peace from above. Some audience members argued that the OSCE must be strengthened to be more effective, while others went further and maintained that new mechanisms altogether were needed to replace the OSCE.

Democracy and Security

Conference participants gave much thought to the issue of balancing democratic norms and principles with the security and stability necessary for economic development. A consensus was reached that true security and stability could not be divorced from democratic norms and principles, although some disagreement did arise on which should come first—security or democracy. Some stressed the importance of functioning economic and security institutions as prerequisites for the democratic process. Others took issue with this argument, favoring fast-track democracy as a precondition for security and citing Iraq as a case in point where a lack of confidence in the legitimacy of public institutions is a driving force for violence.

Proliferation Consensus

Conference participants regardless of national origin or political affiliation concurred on the dangers that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) pose to Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Speakers and commentators representing various governments and nongovernmental institutions agreed on the need for the United States and its European allies, as well as other nations in Europe and Asia, to respond with urgency to the threat of WMD proliferation. Participants further agreed that the prospect of these weapons falling into the hands of a terrorist group was a threat of utmost concern. In addition, they underscored that some state actors, particularly Iran and North Korea,

are undermining the global nonproliferation regime. Conference participants supported the direction of counterproliferation initiatives implemented by the Bush administration thus far, although some questioned whether they went far enough or were sufficiently effective.

Discussion of Eurasian proliferation trends and challenges brought out a striking degree of agreement on the inadequacy of the current nonproliferation regime and the need for a more dynamic, proactive approach to the challenge of proliferation. While some participants raised the possibility of international preemptive use of force against proliferators, others stressed the importance of cooperative action to help alleviate systemic conditions that enable proliferators gain access to WMD components and know-how. All agreed, however, that the international community's current reactive attempts to address the problem of proliferation may prove inadequate in the face of threats posed by determined proliferators and that a more vigorous, forceful response may be required.

The Next Decade

Turning their attention to the future of the broad region at the juncture of Europe and Asia, participants noted a number of important strategic and economic accomplishments of the preceding decade, such as institutionalization of the Partnership for Peace and the progress on the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, neither of which was seen at the outset as a particularly promising undertaking. Both are likely to play an important role in the political, security, and economic developments throughout Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and beyond. The countries of the former Soviet Union have defied many analysts' pessimistic predictions, which were often portrayed as conventional wisdom. The economies of virtually all post-Soviet states have returned to growth, while some are performing better than expected. Despite the importance of economic factors, the prevailing opinion was that security concerns would dominate the shaping of future trends. Participants also

stressed that despite the prominent role that the United States and Russia play in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, their influence and ability to shape regional events will be limited, and the key to progress and stability will be in the hands of local leaders and their constituents.

Several conference participants stressed the importance of visionary leadership by local elites for finding solutions to frozen conflicts, as a



precondition to further economic and political normalization and democratization in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe. Such leadership, they predicted, would be even more important than economic growth. Without a real solution to the problem of frozen conflicts, a sustained status quo is the best outcome to be hoped for, but one aggravated by increasing social tensions and frustrations of the international community. The United States, the European Union, and Russia would have to play an active role in resolving the issue of frozen conflicts—which, if unresolved, could escalate and become “hot,” enabling the radical elements in each of the warring sides to gain the upper hand in domestic politics. Although Russia must be a key partner in the resolution process, it would have to change its present attitude and decide that durable peace is the

preferred alternative to “neither peace nor war” situation along its southwestern frontier. The United States would have to mobilize a good deal of political, intellectual, and physical capital to develop practical solutions to the problems of peacekeeping and political and economic rehabilitation of post-conflict societies. Enhanced U.S. involvement was cited as a key enabling factor in the search for solutions to the problem of frozen conflicts.

Some participants stressed the important role that Russia, by virtue of its geography, historical, and economic ties, is bound to play in the future of the vast region from the EU's easternmost frontier to China's western borders. Several speakers expressed concerns about Russia's ambition to establish a sphere of influence throughout the former Soviet states. Others noted that given the extensive and deep ties the region still has to Russia and the legacy of Soviet infrastructure development, a Russian sphere of influence is a historical and cultural fact that should be neither ignored nor seen as a barrier to U.S. influence and presence, as evidenced by U.S. security cooperation with various post-Soviet states and Baltic membership in NATO. They noted that while the United States can and should play an important role in regional affairs, its ability to shape trends on the ground would be limited by each country's domestic politics and interests of local political and economic elites.

Conference participants discussed the issue of generational change in post-Soviet countries, which is likely to be the major domestic concern in the next decade. The new generation of leaders is bound to have fewer ties to the Soviet past. However, their commitment and ability to carry out political modernization and sustainable economic development remain uncertain. The legacy of the Soviet Union and its impact on their societies will be considerably weaker as well, introducing both new uncertainties and new opportunities for their development.

Shared Vision

Conference participants heard several presentations on and engaged in lively discussions about the means with which the countries of the region, the United States, and its allies and partners will have to meet the challenges they will face in the next decade. One of the most important aspects of this discussion concerned the ongoing global repositioning of U.S. military forces and, in particular, the future U.S. military presence and posture in Eurasia.

Global Force Repositioning

The progress of the U.S. Global Posture Review, which President George W. Bush profiled in an August 20, 2004, speech, ranks among the most important developments in American foreign and defense policy since World War II. Under the plan, thousands of U.S. military personnel currently stationed in Germany, South Korea, and other locations will be redeployed to bases in the United States and more dispersed facilities abroad in an effort to address more efficiently new and emerging global security threats. Participants focused on the rationale and the details of the proposals, as well their projected costs, extent, and timing of some of the changes. Overall, the discussion featuring some of the key architects of the repositioning plan, as well as active participants in the public debate surrounding it, revealed a broad consensus among government and non-governmental experts on the need for repositioning, as well as on most of its details known to date.

The Global Posture Review is an inevitable response to the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War confrontation in Europe and Asia, as well as the globalization of security affairs. The review also takes into account the broad transformation of the U.S. Armed Forces over the past two decades. As Operation *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan demonstrated, the contemporary global security landscape will require the United States to deploy smaller, lighter military

units quickly to locations often far from established U.S. overseas bases. Accordingly, the review seeks a new U.S. military footprint overseas that will support rapid expeditionary operations worldwide, reduce friction in host countries, and maintain alliances and other security commitments. This has led to reduced emphasis on a few large operating bases in favor of more austere and dispersed forward operating locations with the requisite transportation and host nation support assets. The U.S. Government is developing the final shape of this realignment, which will take a decade to complete, in consultation with allies and partners.



The smaller, more flexible military presence abroad that the review envisions will better serve U.S. global political and military interests while providing sufficient capabilities to maintain security commitments to its allies and partners. So, too, the presence of modern U.S. forces in a wider range of allied and partner countries, where they will conduct combined training and operations with host nation units, will contribute to the transformation of those forces. In addition, this will spread the burdens of hosting U.S. forces and facilitate the development of flexible coalitions for future military operations.

New Challenges

Conference participants engaged in an animated discussion about the

future of NATO and its role in extending the transatlantic security framework to the Balkans, Caucasus, and Central Asia. Questions regarding the proper role for NATO in those regions, its ability to address new and enduring security challenges there, its open-door policy, and its relationship with the EU dominated the proceedings.

Notwithstanding a wide range of views on the overall state and prospects of the transatlantic relations, the conference spotlighted a number of important but little-noticed accomplishments and future plans of the Alliance, including the reform of its command structure, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and the development of new

capabilities such as those seen in the NATO Response Force and the new Czech-led Multinational Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Defense Battalion. NATO's decision to take over the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan was also cited as an important milestone for the Alliance, as was its support for the Polish-led multinational force in Iraq. Significant areas for improvement remain, including but not limited to much-needed strengthening of the capabilities of European forces, the NATO-Russia partnership, and relations with the EU.

Discussions among conference participants made clear that while NATO's open door policy remains in place, the Alliance is not prepared to alter its standards and admit new members that fail to meet criteria for

membership. By the same token, its potential for peacekeeping operations in the Caucasus was questioned as a proposal exceeding its reach and capabilities.

In this context, the idea of limiting NATO's geographic scope provoked a lively discussion among conference participants, some of whom noted that the Alliance lacked a clearly defined strategy for some regions where its individual member-states were becoming actively involved. The South Caucasus was mentioned as one such region. The two waves of NATO expansion have resulted in a more complex decisionmaking process, further complicating the already difficult task of forging the new NATO strategy for the South Caucasus. At the same time, it was noted, new NATO members with historical, cultural, and geographic ties to the former Soviet states of the South Caucasus represent a constituency and a source of expertise within the Alliance necessary for it to pursue an effective strategy in the region.

The expanding geographic scope of NATO activities and relationships has placed new emphasis on its Partnership for Peace program. Initially conceived as an intermediate step toward membership, the program has assumed a life of its own, proving to be an effective mechanism for promoting NATO principles and wider security sector reforms in the former Soviet Union. Thus, some conference participants argued, NATO's assets should be used to foster change across Eurasia, and especially closer to the traditional borderlands of Europe. The Partnership for Peace is ideally suited to play the role of connecting NATO to these regions and therefore should be seen as relevant in its own right.

Cooperation and Competition in Eurasia

Recognizing that NATO will have to contend with various regional powers and organizations in defining the nature and scope of its activities as it looks further East, conference

participants offered a range of opinions on the role of these players and their relationship to the United States and NATO.

Some participants described key U.S. interests in the former Soviet states as counterterrorism, counternarcotics, counterproliferation, a secure energy regime, and strategic access. These interests amount in effect to the pursuit of a sphere of *stability* rather than a sphere of *influence*. U.S. attitudes toward other powers and organizations, it was further noted in this context, would be determined by their agendas and the degree to which they would facilitate or obstruct U.S. efforts to establish a sphere of stability. While a powerful rationale exists for regional multilateral cooperation among various actors who embrace the same goals, it is undermined by longstanding



mutual suspicions and rivalries, the prevalence of “zero-sum” attitudes, as well as parallel competing agendas and disagreement on the best means to achieve the shared goal of stability. None of the organizations active in the region—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Commonwealth Security Treaty Organization, GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova)—has developed the necessary institutional vision and muscle, which leaves all of them disproportionately dependent on their largest members, which derive the greatest benefit. In these circumstances, the United States has thus far pursued its interests in the region on a bilateral, rather than multilateral, basis for practical, rather than philosophical, reasons.

This rather dim view of regional multilateral cooperation met with a

competing perspective from some conference participants, who argued that the United States should be more open to the idea of coexistence with other powers and organizations in Eurasia and should avoid asserting itself in a way that would complicate its partners' relations with their neighbors and other regional players. Russia and several regional organizations in which it plays the leading role do not represent an insurmountable obstacle to U.S. continuing presence and interests in the region.

Tools of Stability

Finally, conference participants examined the experience of several countries participating in coalition operations as the ultimate form of meeting new challenges to the security and stability of Eurasia. This discussion focused on different perceptions and attitudes toward coalition operations across Eurasia, their perceived costs and benefits, as well as prospects for future coalition operations in the light of this experience. While some speakers highlighted the benefits of coalition operations in the form of enhanced training and shared experience, as well as considerable prestige related to them, others maintained that their benefits were “more political than practical” and noted considerable costs associated with them.

Notwithstanding the assistance that coalition participants often receive from their partners, some countries face considerable burdens—including the task of replacing depleted materiel and equipment—that add to their funding pressures and undercut other aspects of their defense programs. Recent participants in coalition operations reported problems with personnel and insurance costs, predeployment and language training, outdated military doctrine, Soviet-era equipment, and various interoperability issues. Nonetheless, they stressed the benefits of their deployment to their armed forces, especially the invaluable operational experience and enhanced international profile.