



Russian honor guard in Moscow performs during Chairman's visit

# Improving Military-to-Military Relations with Russia

JFQ ID: Wyles Cullen

SPECIAL FEATURE

By CHRISTOPHER T. HOLINGER

**D**uring the Cold War, the sight of soldiers wearing the uniform of the Red Army marching through the fields near Grafenwoehr, Germany, would have been most unsettling for members of the U.S. Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. In 1988, if you had suggested to a sergeant in U.S. Army Europe that he could ride in a Russian infantry fighting vehicle in exchange for giving a Russian soldier a ride in a Bradley, he would have reported you to counterintelligence officers or the closest military police unit. No 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet Sailor in the late 1980s would have ever expected to see the inside of the Soviet navy base at Novorossiysk or to spend much time in the Soviet lake that is the Black Sea.

Fortunately, times have changed, and the military-to-military (mil-to-mil) relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation has grown to the point where all of the events mentioned have either happened or are scheduled to happen soon. In Exercise Torgau '05, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR) Soldiers traveled to a Russian training facility in the Moscow military district and enjoyed nearly a week of staff and small unit tactical training, to include vehicle and weapons familiarization. Then the whole exercise moved to the U.S. training area at

Grafenwoehr for similar familiarization with American weapons and vehicles. USS *Elrod* recently completed a port call in Novorossiysk, and in February and April 2006, USS *Porter* cruised the Black Sea, conducting port calls and engagement with the navies of several Black Sea nations.

Despite frequent political ups and downs between the United States and Russia, U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) remains on the lookout for new opportunities for cooperation. Indeed, developing a robust mil-to-mil relationship will make it easier for our forces to operate together in the tactical arena of the war on terror. Also, it should lead to better cooperation in the political realm as strategic leaders in the security services of both countries begin to see more areas of convergent national interests.

## Relations Since 1991

U.S.-Russian mil-to-mil contacts started simply in the early years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Initial efforts focused on building individual relationships and transparency, overcoming the barriers to trust that had built up over years of staring at each other across the Fulda Gap. There were many

successes, most of the early ones spearheaded by USAREUR. In 1994, the first bilateral peacekeeping exercise involving U.S. and Russian forces was held in Totskoye, Russia. Exercise Peacekeeper '94 included Soldiers and vehicles from the 3<sup>d</sup> Infantry Division (then still based in Germany) deploying to Russia to train with the 27<sup>th</sup> Guards Motorized Rifle Division. From that exercise, a tactics, techniques, and procedures guide was produced that enabled the integration of Russian forces into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Stabilization Force in Bosnia.

However, any relationship between two former rivals is fraught with difficulty, and there were plenty of bumps in the road. During Operation *Allied Force*, when NATO aircraft waged a bombing campaign against Serbia to expel Serb forces from Kosovo, the Russians announced that their forces in Bosnia would no longer take orders from the U.S. commanders in the region; they cut off several other military contacts and even expelled a number of U.S. diplomats from Moscow.<sup>1</sup> In the endgame of *Allied Force*, as NATO troops entered Kosovo, the political and military maneuvering over the Pristina airfield and Russian efforts to establish their own sector

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led General Wesley Clark, USA, to remark, “NATO has been deceived or misled by about everyone in the Russian government,”<sup>22</sup> which nearly led to a military confrontation between NATO and Russian troops.

Despite these episodes, there have been many instances of mil-to-mil cooperation, and our efforts have slowly grown beyond mere transparency and relationship-building to developing true interoperability. Army events such as Exercise Torgau '05 (named for the city on the Elbe River where U.S. and Soviet forces linked up late in World War II) have built on the success of the Peacekeeper series of exercises in the 1990s to develop a true cooperative operational capability between the U.S. and Russian armies, and the addition in recent years of naval exercises such as Northern Eagle has expanded this success beyond just land forces.<sup>3</sup>

Even though recent events have led to a few setbacks, such as the postponement of the 2006 iteration of the Torgau exercises to allow for passage of Russian legislation consistent with Russian and U.S. policies regarding such large events, the USEUCOM staff continues to strive for momentum in the mil-to-mil arena with Russia's armed forces, in support of overall U.S. Government policy regarding engagement with Russia. Such relationships are difficult to start, and if momentum is lost, they are even more difficult to restart.

### Current Strategic Guidance

*The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS) identifies Russia as one of the “main centers of global power,”<sup>24</sup> the only individual country identified in this way. Several principles drive our national strategy in dealing with these centers. The NSS states that these relations “must be set in their proper context”<sup>25</sup> (that is, regionally/globally) and “supported by appropriate institutions,”<sup>26</sup> whether they exist already or need to be created. The NSS also states that our interests with nations in these centers of global power are influenced “by states’ treatment of their own citizens . . . [since] states that are governed well are most inclined to behave well.”<sup>27</sup> Finally, the NSS adds that we should “seek to influence the calculations”<sup>28</sup> by which other states make their choices, even while we do not seek to dictate choices to them.

To place our relationship with Russia in its proper regional and global context, we must pay significant attention to the former Soviet republics that are now independent

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states surrounding the Russian Federation. USEUCOM's area of responsibility (AOR) includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Outside the USEUCOM AOR, but certainly within its area of interest, are the Central Asian republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. When combined with China, another of Russia's neighbors with significant influence both globally and regionally, we see one of the major challenges to successful engagement with Russia: these states with significant regional stakes are scattered among *three* regional combatant commands: USEUCOM, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), and U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM).

How to overcome this challenge is clear, although not easy, and it is the first important element of the operational-level application of concepts articulated in the NSS: the combatant command staffs must eliminate the seams among them through regular and frequent collaboration and coordination. USEUCOM's bilateral mil-to-mil activities with the Eurasian republics represent a major Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) priority, and issues such as security cooperation in the Caspian Basin lead to the right kind of regular cooperation

with USCENTCOM. Annual TSC conferences hosted by each of the combatant commands with reciprocal invitations between the staffs help to eliminate the seams and to ensure that

U.S. mil-to-mil activities with all the states that border Russia are coordinated to some degree, or at least that everyone is aware of what is going on elsewhere.

Representatives from other combatant commands and the Joint Staff also participate in USEUCOM's discussions with the Russian Federation to work out the U.S.–Russia Interoperability Work Plan, the annual agreement on mil-to-mil activities between the two countries. By involving all the combatant commands whose AORs touch Russia and the Joint Staff in developing this crucial plan, we are better able to eliminate seams in Department of Defense efforts.

There are two other important aspects of USEUCOM's actions in the Eurasian region that have a profound impact on the U.S. mil-to-mil relationship with Russia: Euro-Atlantic integration (via NATO and Partnership for Peace), and capacity-building activities within the former Soviet republics. Several of the former Soviet republics in USEUCOM's AOR are NATO aspirants, and by helping with defense reform<sup>9</sup> and other aspects of Individual Partnership Action Plans, USEUCOM can facilitate countries such as Ukraine and Georgia eventually joining the Alliance. Capacity-building activities with nations such as Georgia also bring the countries closer to NATO, and they demonstrate their desire to cooperate with the United States and NATO by sending troops to participate in coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These activities frequently put us at odds with what the Russians see as their interests in the region, and USEUCOM seeks to diffuse this tension through the use of multilateral events to bring the Russians together with their neighbors in search of common ground. Partnership for Peace and “in the spirit of Partnership for Peace” exercises are a large part of this effort, with events such as Baltic Operations and Combined Endeavor bringing the Russians together with new NATO members and aspirants to work on areas of common interest, such as maritime security and command and control modernization.



Russian Armed Forces General Staff Chief greets Chairman during visit to Defense Ministry in Moscow

JFO (D. Myles Cullen)



By helping forces from all over the region develop the ability to cooperate on small tactical issues, we hope to assure Russia that the Alliance's expansion eastward is not threatening, and it gives Moscow the chance to assure the Western-leaning former Soviet republics that Russia respects their status as independent nations and partners in regional security. Ultimately, Russia's reaction to the increased Euro-Atlantic integration of former Soviet republics, to those republics' increased capacity for independent military action, or to increased U.S. presence and access to these countries' territories is a political issue, but any positive mil-to-mil event has the potential to make a positive impact on the underlying political climate.

The NSS makes it clear that U.S. relations with other nations are influenced by the way those nations treat their own citizens and that we seek to influence how they make decisions without trying to dictate specific decisions to them. At first glance, these two principles might appear more political than military, but mil-to-mil engagement can have an impact on how Russia treats its citizens and makes decisions, albeit only over the long term. People are at the heart of any mil-to-mil exchange or exercise. At the end of the day, after the mission is complete, people talk. Pilots "shoot their watches." Soldiers trade insignia and talk about the quality (or lack thereof) of field rations. Sailors compare liberty stories. Generals and admirals (especially those who used to be adversaries) talk about how much things have changed.

While the primary goal of an event such as Torgau '05 was improving the ability to execute operations together at the tactical level, a second-order effect can be summed up in a comment by a Russian participant: "I found some real friends among the American soldiers."<sup>10</sup> This effect can be even more pronounced in school exchanges. In recent years, several Russian noncommissioned officers



Russian honor guard passing in review at Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow

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(NCOs) have graduated from the Warrior Leader Course at the Joint Multinational Training Center NCO Academy in Grafenwoehr. In 2006, a U.S. Army major spent a year training in Russia, culminating with his graduation from the Mechanized/Tank Battalion Commander's course at the Russian Combined Arms Academy.

When Russian and American officers and NCOs live, work, and study side by side for weeks and even months, they form relationships that will last a lifetime. These relationships lead to the key second-order effect that could have lasting impact on our relationship with Russia and on Russia's relationship with its neighbors: the NCOs who went to the academy at Grafenwoehr, the officers, cadets, and soldiers who participated in Torgau '05, and the sailors who have done cross-deck exchanges will all have attitudes about the United States and its military that have been shaped by their personal interaction with Americans. These positive experiences could lead to long-term improvement in relations between the two militaries if some of these individuals rise through the ranks, carrying their positive impressions of America.

### Moving Forward

The way ahead in USEUCOM's mil-to-mil relationship with Russia is complicated, but the keys to success can be summed up in three points:

- engaging multi-laterally (in addition to bilaterally)
- continuing efforts via the work plan
- searching for areas of convergence.

As stated earlier, multilateral activities will allow us to assure both Russia and its neighbors that they have common interests and dissuade them from provoking each other. By engaging in tactical-level exchanges across a wide range of military disciplines, we can enhance the capabilities of both nations' military forces and improve their ability to operate

together. Improved cooperation at the tactical and operational levels will provide our civilian leadership more options for dealing with common threats, which hopefully will improve our strategic relationship and make us more able to deter and, if necessary, defeat common enemies.

The U.S.-Russia Interoperability Work Plan is the primary vehicle for collaboration between the U.S. and Russian militaries. The plan is a list of specific bilateral mil-to-mil activities intended to "enhance our ability to work together and coordinate our military activities."<sup>11</sup> All events are agreed upon by both nations through a series of planning workshops, and the final document is signed by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of the Russian General Staff. At the recent signing ceremony for the 2007 work plan in Moscow, General Peter Pace stated, "I am anxious for military-to-military cooperation to show through its transparency the potential for our two nations to walk into the future hand in hand."<sup>12</sup>

The work plan includes tactical- and operational-level training events that will enable the two militaries to execute combined operations in the future. These events are the stimulus for a cycle that can become self-sustaining: individual events and visits bring Russian and American leaders together, familiarizing them with each other and with their units, weapons systems, and other assets. This

access and information exchange breed transparency and trust, which promote coordination and ultimately cooperation. Cooperation leads to success in both exercises and operations, and success, in turn, creates a desire for more exchanges, exercises, and operational cooperation. Reinforcing success has long been part of both U.S. and Russian doctrine.

While our components execute the tactical-level events of the work plan, USEUCOM must look for areas of convergence with Russia. Simultaneously, we must help Moscow and its neighbors find similar shared national security interests. The best place to start searching for these commonalities is the five anchor points for NATO left by General James Jones, USMC (Ret.), former USEUCOM Commander and Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR). During his final year as SACEUR, General Jones regularly espoused these anchor points as issues that could help move NATO from common defense to collective security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They are equally applicable as potential areas of convergence between the United States and Russia:

- transnational terrorism (and the convergence of this threat with organized crime)
- security, stability, and reconstruction (SSR) in postconflict environments
- critical infrastructure security
- energy security
- weapons of mass destruction proliferation and consequence management.<sup>13</sup>

Each of these anchor points presents a unique set of opportunities for mil-to-mil cooperation. Counterterrorism is an obvious area for convergence. The 2002 Moscow theater crisis and the 2004 Beslan school attack show that Russia faces an even more immediate threat from terrorism in its home-

land than does the United States. In the SSR arena, Russia has capacity far beyond many other nations. Where and when the political situation is conducive, the United States and Russia could bring considerable resources to bear to help a nation struggling to emerge from a conflict. Critical infrastructure is a national issue when the infrastructure in question lies entirely within a nation's borders, but international cooperation is beneficial in safeguarding trade via international land, sea, and air lines of communication.

Energy security (ensuring the flow of energy resources from the source to the consumer) is a combination of infrastructure security and diversity of sources, and, as a major producer/exporter of energy, it is in Russia's interest to ensure that its exported products reach customers safely. Finally, stopping nonstate actors or rogue states from obtaining weapons of mass destruction and preparing to deal with the consequences if they use them are clearly in the interests of both the United States and Russia. There has already been a great deal of cooperation between Moscow and Washington in the counterproliferation arena, and these actions have also involved many of the former Soviet republics—a regional success story if ever there was one.

Regional security cooperation talks could be a useful vehicle for USEUCOM, along with the other combatant commands that border Russia, to seek areas of convergence first with Russia's neighbors and ultimately with Russia itself. As we have done with some success in the Caspian Sea and Black Sea regions, USEUCOM can bring the security services of several nations in the region together to work out cooperative solutions to problems related to any of the

anchor points or to find other areas where our interests converge.

If these anchor points serve as the foundation for NATO's growth and transformation and also help to guide the U.S. relationship with Russia, we will find ourselves with more opportunities for military cooperation between NATO, Russia, and Russia's neighbors. This could have a positive impact on our broader political relationship with Russia, which has been trending somewhat negatively of late. A healthy mil-to-mil relationship could go a long way in reversing this trend and helping us avoid a larger conflict later. **JFQ**

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (Cambridge, MA: Public Affairs, 2001), 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>3</sup> General James L. Jones, USMC, Commander, U.S. European Command, statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2005, available at <<http://armed-services.senate.gov/statemnt/2005/March/Jones%2003-01-05.pdf>>.

<sup>4</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, March 2006), 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Jones, statement.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Weisel and Dave Melancon, "U.S., Russian Soldiers Renew 60-Year-Old Bonds at Torgau '05," *EURARMY* 1, no. 1 (Summer 2005), 2-7, available at <[www.hqusaureur.army.mil/EURArmy/Summer05.pdf](http://www.hqusaureur.army.mil/EURArmy/Summer05.pdf)>.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Karas, quoted in Corey Barker, "U.S. and Russian Senior Officers Discuss Way Ahead," July 1, 2006, <[www.eucom.mil/english/FullStory.asp?art=1037](http://www.eucom.mil/english/FullStory.asp?art=1037)>.

<sup>12</sup> General Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, quoted in "Russian, U.S. Military Chiefs Ink Pact," *The Associated Press*, October 30, 2006, available at <[www.foxnews.com/wires/2006Oct30/0,4670,RussiaUSMilitary,00.html](http://www.foxnews.com/wires/2006Oct30/0,4670,RussiaUSMilitary,00.html)>.

<sup>13</sup> General James L. Jones, USMC, Commander, U.S. European Command, quoted in Steven Donald Smith, "NATO 'Reinventing' Itself, General Says," *American Foreign Press Service*, March 9, 2006, available at <[www.eucom.mil/english/FullStory.asp?art=871](http://www.eucom.mil/english/FullStory.asp?art=871)>.



**USS Chosin and RFN Marshal Shaposhnikov sail in formation in a joint U.S.-Russian exercise near Guam**

U.S. Navy (Nathanael T. Miller)



U.S. Navy (Patrick Dille)

**Russian sailor receiving tour of USS Blue Ridge in Vladivostok**

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