

# Russian Views on Kosovo: Synopsis of May 6 Panel Discussion

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On the 6th of May five members of the Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (PONARS) discussed Russian views on Kosovo for a panel at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The panel was co-sponsored by PONARS, the Strengthening Democrat Institutions Project, and the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy. Marvin Kalb of the Shorenstein Center chaired the session, which began with presentations by the panelists before moving to questions and discussion with the audience. This memo summarizes the issues discussed.

## **Domestic Politics and Kosovo**

To a substantial degree, the Kosovo situation is for Russia a domestic crisis. NATO's actions in Kosovo have complicated what was already a delicate and dangerous situation for the Russian government. The international crisis came in the midst of Duma deliberations on the impeachment of President Yeltsin--the biggest Russian domestic political crisis since 1993. The impeachment trial is scheduled to begin in the Duma on May 13th. Although not great, the chances for a successful impeachment were there, and this unfortunate coincidence led to Russian overreaction. Both the opposition and Yeltsin were interested in using the crisis as ammunition in the impeachment battle. The opposition could use Kosovo to show Yeltsin as a weak and irresponsible international leader, supporting the case for impeachment. The government could argue that the international crisis required Russian politicians to take a unified position, making impeachment inappropriate.

In this context, one should notice that the most vocal statements from the President's Office came during Duma debate on important procedural questions of impeachment. As soon as the impeachment matters receded, the Kremlin took a step back and avoided further escalation of rhetoric around Yugoslavia. With the start of the impeachment trial on May 13, the Duma may seize upon the Kosovo crisis again, pushing Yeltsin toward a confrontational line to counter certain charges in support of impeachment.

In this atmosphere and with these domestic incentives, the potential for an escalation of the crisis is great. For example, imposition of an oil delivery embargo by force on non-NATO countries (which is now unlikely, but has not been ruled out by NATO) would actually force Russia to assert its right to deliver oil to Yugoslavia. Russia delivers up to

70 percent of Yugoslavia's oil. Even if the Yeltsin government would prefer to avoid confrontation, it does not have reliable instruments to limit these deliveries. It is not inconceivable that some hard-line political group--wanting to undermine the government--would try to deliver oil under the Russian flag by penetrating a NATO blockade. If something like this were to happen during impeachment, it could lead to Russian involvement in the Yugoslav war.

In addition, the Kosovo crisis severely complicates the already difficult relationship between the Russian government and the Russian military. For some time, there has been increasing tension between the military and the president. On Kosovo, Yeltsin is vulnerable because the military has never been interested in cooperating with or trusting NATO, given enlargement and the development of NATO's new post-Cold War missions and capabilities. NATO military action in Kosovo made Yeltsin vulnerable to charges that he (once again) did not act to protect the country's interests and security in the face of Western disregard for Russia's concerns.

It is important to remember that the military is a substantial portion of the electorate in Russia when one counts not only active duty soldiers but reserves, retirees, and veterans. Kosovo has further contributed to the increasing anti-Western sentiment and sympathy for nationalists in Russia (already pronounced in the military electorate). As a result, the military now has greater influence in Russian foreign policy. At the same time, the crisis has undermined arguments for reducing and reforming the military's role in Russian society: the defense ministry has announced that cuts will be stopped and that some of the reforms already in process will be rolled back.

### **Russian Views Outside the Government**

Polls conducted in Russia since NATO bombing began consistently show nearly 100% opposition to the military campaign. The crisis has resulted in greater support for the Communist Party as well as Zhirinovskiy's return to the top five favorite presidential candidates. It is now estimated that the Communist Party will win about one-third of the vote in the December Duma elections--which, given how seats are allocated, translates into as much as two-thirds of the Duma seats. While party support can easily shift during the six months leading up to Duma elections, Kosovo's effect on Russian public opinion and voting is likely to be great--a reversal of past patterns where foreign policy issues mattered little or not at all.

It is important to be clear that opposition to NATO's attacks on Yugoslavia is not based on ignorance of Serbia's actions in Kosovo. The Russian public is informed of Serbia's actions against Albanian Kosovars and the refugee situation and ethnic cleansing are reported on Russian television. There is no sympathy to Milosevic in Russia: there is sympathy for the Serbian people, but not to the government.

Why does the Russian public care about a small foreign country bombed into submission by western countries that are at the same time giving loans and humanitarian aid to

Russia? To understand, we need to put the problem in a broader context. The society's reaction is a small part of a larger phenomenon--emerging Russian national sentiment--that is underestimated in the US. Most analysts argue that Russians have only a weak national consciousness and no strong national identity, because one did not exist before 1917, and then for most of the 20th century it was bound up with Soviet ideas, which were discredited after Soviet collapse.

This may be changing. Modernization has been superseded by globalization, which is associated with the English-speaking world. This is the identity offered Russians, who find it difficult to switch to this new global culture, unlike the small nations of Central and Eastern Europe which are comfortable adopting in large measure this identity. However, such a change was not impossible: when the Iron Curtain lifted, average Russians were very happy about the West. Russians saw their country as a prodigal son returning to the family, but the West was not a forgiving father. NATO remains--and indeed has expanded--despite promises to Gorbachev. Now, the West appears as a direct military threat to Russia itself. This is not mere paranoia on Russia's part, as recently US Defense Secretary William Cohen said that the US stands ready to use force against Russian tankers should they try to ignore a NATO embargo and deliver oil to Yugoslavia.

This global culture is therefore not only different and therefore difficult to adopt, it (1) is associated with economic collapse and hardship; (2) humiliates Russia as weak and unimportant; (3) feeds the anti-Americanism dormant but constant in Russian society throughout the 1990s; and (4) has been transformed by the attack on Yugoslavia to something aggressive and dangerous. Russian society's opposition to NATO's action arises not so much from commitment to its Serbian brothers (although there is certainly sympathy for the Serbian people), but primarily from fear for Russia itself.

Therefore, the Kosovo crisis may be the last straw in formulating an emerging Russian national identity that views the US as an enemy of the Russian nation. The real problem is that an identity formed during the short-term conditions of Kosovo may have long-term consequences.

Russia's elites of course hold diverse views on the reasons for and impact of Kosovo. Elites differ over the degree to which western policy intentionally aims to harm Russia and dominate European (and global) security. They also disagree on what Russia's response should be--ranging from isolationism, balance of power politics, and direct military opposition to redoubled efforts to develop and use international law.

Yet at the same time, there is fundamental agreement among Russia's foreign policy elites that NATO's policy toward Yugoslavia harms Russian interests. The crisis is shifting focus toward a definition of Russian identity and national interests that is substantially in opposition to the West.

## **Russian Foreign Policy and Relations with the West**

It must be recognized that despite these negative effects, Russia's response to the crisis has been very moderate. Both the President and Prime Minister have done their best to prevent overreaction on the Russian side. In particular, if one looks at the deeds of the Russian government, Primakov and Yeltsin tried to avoid crossing the two most crucial lines: 1) unilateral arms deliveries to Yugoslavia, which are prohibited by the UN; and 2) sending any combat ships to the Adriatic. This practical restraint in the face of calls for such action was deeply significant--had either of those lines been crossed, Russia could have easily become involved in a military confrontation against NATO.

The most important consideration in Russia's relations with the West during and after Kosovo is its highly complicated relationship with NATO. For some time, NATO has been the main irritant in Russia's relationship with the West. NATO has tried to assure Russia it is defensive and unable to take offensive military action, emphasizing internal transformation as its contribution to security in Europe. There has always been skepticism about this in Russia. Kosovo has justified Russia's worst-case fears, showing that NATO is indeed changing, but in the direction most undesirable and threatening to Russia.

For Russia, all the hypothetical security concerns of the past decade are the threats of today. NATO is now closer to Russian borders, and is bombing a non-NATO state. Even before NATO's new strategic concept, the alliance's development of Combined Joint Task Forces offered ways for the alliance to employ forces outside the constraints of Article 5 (self-defense). NATO's changes combined with its determination to use force against non-members threatens Russia because political turmoil in the former Soviet Union increases the likelihood of NATO involvement near and perhaps even in Russia. Moscow has long feared that expansion of the alliance could radicalize or destabilize neighboring countries, sparking internal splits or civil wars that could drag in Russia--a role it neither wants nor can afford.

Unfortunately, NATO-Russia cooperation failed to address these concerns even before Kosovo. After Kosovo, it is difficult to see what kind of cooperative relationship NATO and Russia can have. For one thing, the air strikes violated several principles of the NATO-Russia Founding Act--primarily NATO's commitments limiting its right to use force and promising the settlement of disputes by peaceful means. Russians interpret the ongoing military campaign absent UN Security Council approval as NATO's drive for unilateral security in Europe. NATO's new strategic concept adopted at the 50th anniversary expanded the alliance's mission to include non-NATO Europe as a potential area for further NATO use of force. While the Concept recognizes the role of the UN Security Council, it does not require that NATO obtain UN mandate for actions beyond the alliance's border.

Against this background, cooperation should be viewed as extremely unlikely. Currently, there is bargaining over the makeup and command structure for an international force in Kosovo, with NATO insisting it play the essential role while allowing the force to be

labeled as UN and to include Russia. However, even when NATO-Russian relations were on an upward trajectory (e.g., IFOR and SFOR in Bosnia), cooperation was symbolic rather than substantial, and remained limited.

Without fundamental agreement on political objectives in Kosovo, Moscow's only option to influence Western policy was to disengage completely from all cooperative activities. This is why Russia froze its relations with NATO with the initiation of the bombing. Kosovo has made a difficult and limited cooperative relationship even less promising. The relationship is unlikely to revert to pre-crisis levels, let alone advance further. If there will be a joint military mission in Yugoslavia, it is highly doubtful that Russia will participate under a NATO chain of command. At best, Russia's official position is that it will send in peacekeeping or security forces with Belgrade's consent. Given that Russia has little if anything to gain, and much to lose, from cooperation with NATO, it is unclear to most why Russia should be involved at all.

Furthermore, Russia's relations with NATO will be limited even if there is some settlement. While Russia needs to distance itself from Belgrade, to remain a mediator it must not be associated with NATO either. Although bilateral contacts may resume after the conflict, Russia will do its best to ignore NATO, since it has no interest now in legitimating it as an organization. In particular, given its geopolitical position and instability in the former Soviet Union, Russia has to make sure that NATO's intervention in Kosovo does not become an international precedent.

Kosovo will also affect Russia's defense and military policies. Important defense analysts and military figures are calling for a general strengthening of Russia's military forces, increased defense spending, and greater reliance on nuclear weapons in Russia military planning. The military doctrine of the past three years, which had been developing in accordance with the Russian national security concept's low estimation of any external security threat, is already being reworked. The presumption that the main threat to Russian security was internal has been decisively abandoned with Kosovo.

In particular, Russian military efforts will focus on developing an integrated air defense system and military cooperation with Belarus. More attention will be given to the usefulness of military presence in the CIS, and the importance of better training and emphasis on (expensive) training exercises. Increased defense spending will mean a greater defense burden on the economy, and a greater incentive for increasing arms sales.

### **Speakers' Biographies**

Oksana Antonenko-Gamota is a Research Fellow at the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in London, where she is responsible for the Institute's research projects and seminars in Russia, Ukraine and CIS states. She is currently working on an international relations doctorate examining domestic lobbies and interest groups in Russian foreign policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Antonenko-Gamota holds a diploma in political economy from Moscow State University and a Masters in

Public Policy from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Her most recent project involves Russian military reform, and will result in an Adelphi paper scheduled for publication in 1999.

Alexander Pikayev is Scholar-in-Residence and Non-Proliferation Program Co-Chair at the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Dr. Pikayev is Editor in Chief of the Nuclear Proliferation Journal published by the Center. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO) and an M.A. from Moscow State University. Pikayev has served in advisory capacity to defense-related committees of the State Duma from 1994 through the present, and has lectured at numerous Russian and foreign universities and institutes. He has authored articles on the chemical weapons convention, technology control, and assorted nonproliferation and compliance issues.

Eduard D. Ponarin is Associate Professor of Sociology at European University in St. Petersburg. His previous appointments include Assistant Professor of Social Psychology at the Leningrad Institute of Culture (1998) and Research Scientist of the Institute of Sociology, Russian Academy of Sciences (1996-97). Ponarin holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Michigan (1996) and an undergraduate degree from the Department of Psychology at Leningrad State University. He has conducted extensive fieldwork in Estonia, and has published on topics such as emigration prospects of young adults in Ukraine, ethnic relations between Estonian and Russian communities, and social values in Estonia. Ponarin's current interests include nationalism, the formation of ethnic consciousness, ethnic minorities, the role of generational succession in social change, and methodology of social sciences.

Alexander A. Sergounin teaches political science at the University of Nizhny Novgorod in Russia, where he served as Head of the Department of Political Science (1994-96). Prior to that he was Adjunct Professor of American History at St. Petersburg University. Sergounin earned his Doctor of Science in political science from St. Petersburg University in 1994; a Ph.D. in history from Moscow State University in 1985; and a Masters in history from Gorky State University in 1982. His research interests and publications focus on issues of international relations, political science, history and theory, international security, and foreign policymaking.

Ekaterina A. Stepanova is a Research Associate on Foreign, Defense and Security Policy at the Moscow Center of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where she has worked since 1994. Her research interests and publication activities focus on US and Russian foreign, defense and security policy, regional conflict regulation and peacekeeping. She holds a Ph.D. in History from Moscow State University (1998). Stepanova was awarded a MacArthur NGO Fellowship to work on the Regional Security in the Global Context program at the Department of War Studies, King's College, University of London (1998) and a Dissertation Fellowship of the President of the Russian Federation (1997/98). Stepanova participates in numerous international meetings on issues of international security, military operations and strategy, and Russia's role in European security structures.

### **Sponsoring Institutions**

The Program on New Approaches to Russian Security (PONARS) was created in January 1997 by Professor Celeste Wallander, who is Associate Professor of Government and Faculty Associate of the Davis Center at Harvard University. The program is sponsored by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (which funds Russian membership specifically) through June 2000. The PONARS network of Russian and American scholars includes more than forty experts on many facets of post-Soviet security who communicate via an email network and through one academic-style conference and one policy-oriented meeting each year. The program also features ongoing publication of policy memos on issues related to Russian security, and an academic working paper series. We have published a total of 60 policy memos and 12 working papers, all of which are circulated to scholars and practitioners who work on Russia and the former Soviet Union.

[The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy](#) is a Harvard research center dedicated to exploring the intersection of press, politics and public policy in theory and practice. The Center strives to bridge the gap between journalists and scholars and, increasingly, between them and the public. Through teaching and research at the Kennedy School of Government and through its program of fellows and conferences, the Center is at the forefront of discussions in this area. Established in 1986 with a generous gift from the Shorenstein family, the Center has emerged as a major source for research on U.S. campaigns and elections, journalism and public policy, international news, and race, gender and the press. It is widely respected for convening journalists, scholars and political activists working to help the press improve its role in democracy.

[The Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project](#) (SDI) is based at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA) of the Kennedy School of Government. The project works to catalyze support for three great transformations underway in Russia, Ukraine and the other republics of the former Soviet Union: to sustainable democracies, free market economies, and cooperative international relations. The Project seeks to understand Western stakes in these transformations, identify strategies for advancing Western interests, and encourage initiatives that increase the likelihood of success. It provides targeted intellectual and technical assistance to governments, international agencies, private institutions, and individuals seeking to facilitate these three great transformations. Established in 1990 by Graham Allison and David Hamburg of Carnegie Corporation, SDI was the first independent Western research and technical assistance project in Moscow to actively engage Russian counterparts, and to encourage other Western independent and governmental actors to get involved in the post-Soviet transition.