

Background

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U.S.–Russian Security Cooperation After Beslan

Ariel Cohen, Ph.D.

On September 1, 2004, the first day of school, a multiethnic group of over 30 radical Islamist terrorists, including two female suicide bombers and some Chechens, took more than 1,000 children, teachers, and parents hostage in Beslan, North Ossetia. The terrorists deployed explosives around the school, hanging them from basketball hoops in the gym, where most of the children were held. This was the fifth massive hostage-taking event in Russia since 1995, and it ended in tragedy. Shamil Basaev, leader of the radical Islamist wing of the Chechen separatist movement, has taken responsibility for the massacre.¹

In the aftermath of Beslan, the U.S. should emphasize to the Russian people, President Vladimir Putin, and the Russian government that the two countries are facing the same enemy. The U.S. should increase outreach in the battle for Russia's hearts and minds, paying particular attention to the younger generations of Russian citizens.

In addition to these public diplomacy efforts, Presidents Putin and George W. Bush should hold an anti-terrorism summit in the near future to hammer out a joint anti-terrorism action plan. The two countries should expand security cooperation in anti-terrorist force structure; command, control, and communications; and on techniques for dealing with hostage situations. The U.S. and Russia should expand the range of joint programs designed to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to terrorist organizations, going beyond the current Nunn–Lugar funding.

Talking Points

- Presidents Bush and Putin should hold an anti-terrorism summit to devise a joint strategy for the war on international terrorism.
- The U.S. and Russia should expand security cooperation in anti-terrorist force structure, command, control, and communications and on techniques for dealing with hostage situations.
- The U.S. and Russia should expand the range of joint programs that reduce WMD threats to both countries, going beyond the current Nunn–Lugar funding, to prevent WMD proliferation to terrorist organizations.
- The U.S. should support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all post-Soviet states.
- The U.S. should express its concern regarding the rollback of democracy in Russia and should develop programs that support the growth of the nonprofit/nongovernment sector, promote the rule of law and free media, and help to advance transparent, participatory, and democratic governance in Russia.

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214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002–4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

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However, even though the two countries face a common threat, the U.S. does not have to agree to Russia's policies toward its neighbors. The U.S. should support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all post-Soviet states, and it should not remain silent if democracy in Russia is rolled back. Instead, Washington should develop programs that support growth of the nonprofit/nongovernment sector, promote the rule of law, and help to advance transparent, participatory, and democratic governance in Russia. The U.S. should also expand support of the independent media in all forms, including print, broadcasting, and Internet.

Beslan: Russia's 9/11

The Beslan tragedy shook Russia on a scale comparable to how September 11 affected the United States. Terrorists subjected the children and other hostages to unspeakable abuses, denying them water and food, killing some at random, and forcing many children to drink urine.² Europe has not seen such cruelty since the Nazi atrocities during World War II and Stalin's genocidal exile of nations to Siberia and Central Asia.

After two days, the terrorists triggered an explosion in the gym, and many children ran from the building. The terrorists opened fire, shooting and killing hostages. Russian special forces and the armed local population attempted a rescue, but the death and destruction of that day speaks clearly of a monumental security failure.

Heart-wrenching scenes of small bodies in tiny coffins and parents breaking down in grief at their children's graves shocked the world. Many Russians watched the crisis on television, tears pouring down their cheeks.

Security Failures

The systemic failures of the policy and security apparatus that failed to stop the atrocities in Beslan

were immediately obvious to Russian and Western observers. The Russian intelligence networks—run by the military, internal security forces, and the Ministry of Interior police in the North Caucasus—failed to identify preparations for the attack or provide timely intelligence that would have allowed the terrorists to be intercepted en route to the school.

Nor was Beslan an isolated incident: A few days prior to Beslan, two female suicide bombers destroyed two Russian airliners in flight, and a Moscow metro station and a bus stop were bombed.

The failure of the rescue operation was also obvious. The top military commander indicated that “there was no planning to rescue hostages” and disclosed that 48 hours after the school was seized, the main special forces were training 30 kilometers away.³ Even if negotiations were underway, a rescue force should have been on location and ready to respond at any moment. Furthermore, the rescuers had only two or three armored personnel carriers to use as shields in approaching the building. As a result, the special forces were pinned down by the terrorists' heavy fire.

The terrorists were permitted to dictate the operational tempo. They imposed the rescue timing by setting off the explosives and put up a stiff resistance that lasted for 10 hours, from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m., when most of them were finally killed. Sporadic fire continued until 4 a.m. of the next day.⁴

Because the building was rigged with explosives, the only chance to save the children if negotiations failed would have been to overwhelm the terrorists in a massive, precise surprise attack, which would take out most of the perpetrators in the first few minutes. Such an operation could have used advanced technology, such as night vision goggles, stun grenades, body armor, and incapacitating gas. Nothing of the kind happened.

1. Mark MacKinnon, “Beslan Hostage-Taking a Big Success, Warlord Boasts,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 18, 2004, at www.theglobeandmail.com/servlet/story/RTGAM.20040917.wchech18/BNStory/Front (October 6, 2004).
2. Olga Craig, “One Little Boy Was Shouting: ‘Mama.’ She Couldn't Hear Him. She Was Dead,” *telegraph.co.uk*, May 9, 2004, at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2004/09/05/wosse105.xml (October 6, 2004).
3. Author's notes on NTV (a Russian television network), 2 p.m. live broadcast from Beslan, September 3, 2004.
4. Author's notes on NTV, live news coverage, September 3–4, 2004.

Roaming Locals. Appallingly, the security forces failed to remove hundreds of armed locals from the scene. This failure to establish and enforce a police perimeter allowed civilians to interfere with the rescue attempt. It placed both the hostages and rescuers in their crossfire and exposed civilians to terrorists' weapons fire, leading to entirely avoidable civilian casualties. Furthermore, some terrorists were allowed to break out of the building, and they engaged in firefights until the next morning.

The Russian anti-terrorist forces were woefully unprepared. Beslan was Russia's fifth massive hostage situation, with over 1,000 hostages; yet Russian security forces demonstrated that they had learned little from the debacles of Budennovsk, Pervomaysk, and Kizlyar in the 1990s and from Dubrovka in 2002. They did not wear modern Kevlar helmets or even bulletproof vests in some cases, and the elite Alfa and Vityaz units lost 10 men—their largest losses in post-Soviet history.

Failures of Policy and Leadership

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, both the Yeltsin and Putin administrations have failed to reform the Soviet-era security services and the Ministry of Interior police forces, which in turn failed to prevent or adequately respond to the Beslan hostage situation. These are still quasi-totalitarian political control and crime fighting organizations, rife with corruption, as has been acknowledged by President Putin as well as other senior Russian officials.⁵ They are simply inadequate to the task of confronting modern local and global terrorism.

Despite the recent terrorist attacks on Russia, President Putin is ambiguous about Russian cooperation with the West in fighting terrorism. After

the tragedy, Putin repeatedly bemoaned the passing of the Soviet “great power,” but he also recognized that Soviet ideology suppressed numerous real ethnic conflicts.

Putin accuses Western intelligence services of maintaining contact with the Chechen rebels. Clearly, he believes that the U.S. and other Western powers support anti-Russian Chechen forces in an effort to keep Russia pinned down and “involved in its own problems.”⁶ After all, Great Britain and the U.S. have granted political asylum to some Chechen leaders.

Putin could have also mentioned the fundraising activities conducted in the West by radical Muslim groups to aid the “jihad” in “Chechnistan.”⁷ Such activities have been going on in Great Britain and the U.S. for years but now seem to be coming to an end (although fundraising for Chechnya is continuing in the Middle East and throughout the Muslim world without interference). In this regard, Putin's criticism may be legitimate in view of the Beslan atrocities and Basaev's own admission that he received money from abroad and, if offered, would have taken money from Osama bin Laden.⁸

As an intelligence professional, Putin should appreciate the difference between information gathering and operational support. Instead, he is apparently convinced that the West is preoccupied with creating an irritant for Russia. In an earlier speech to the nation, Putin went even further, saying that foreign powers are interested in dismembering Russia and neutralizing it as a nuclear power;⁹ he ignored, however, the much greater issue of the global Islamist networks supporting the Chechen extremists.

Still, Putin left enough common ground to infer that continuing cooperation with the West in the

5. Author's notes of meeting of Western experts and journalists with President Vladimir Putin, Moscow, September 6, 2004.
6. Meeting with President Putin.
7. Author's interviews with anti-terrorism officials, Washington, D.C., and London, 2003–2004.
8. MacKinnon, “Beslan Hostage-Taking a Big Success, Warlord Boasts.”
9. Vladimir Putin, “Vystuplenie prezidenta RF V. Putina na rashirennom zasedanii pravitel'stva RF” (speech of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin at the expanded meeting of the Cabinet of the Russian Federation), September 13, 2004, at www.sinfo.ru/ru/main/officially/interview/detail.shtml?id=43 (October 6, 2004).

war on terrorism is possible. He sent a clear message that entrenched bureaucracies on both sides of the Atlantic hamper U.S.–Russian security cooperation. He also said that President Bush is a “good, decent man,” “a reliable and predictable partner,” and someone he can “feel as a human being.”¹⁰ He also stated that terrorist attacks in Iraq are aimed at achieving President Bush’s electoral defeat.¹¹

Thus, despite his vocal reservations concerning the West, Putin sent a message to the Western leadership. Putin presented himself as open to anti-terrorism cooperation, indicating that security “professionals” on both sides are in contact and recognizing that Cold War sentiments still excessively influence the bureaucracies on both sides of the Atlantic.¹² Putin is no doubt aware of shared risks of terrorists gaining access to weapons of mass destruction.¹³

New Challenges

While President Putin appears to understand the threat of global terrorism, Russia’s security apparatus does not seem to grasp sufficiently the challenge of the jihadi menace. This is an enemy different from the Cold War threats of “Western imperialism” and internal political opposition. Externally, Soviet foreign intelligence fought the Cold War against the U.S. and its European allies while, domestically, the secret police were positioned to ruthlessly suppress any political dissent among the unarmed population through intimidation and incarceration.

Ethnic and religious unrest, however, is endemic to the territory of the Russian empire and the Soviet Union, as prolonged guerrilla warfare during the

18th–20th centuries in the Caucasus, Central Asia, Western Ukraine, and Baltic states demonstrates. In particular, ethnic-based warfare and insurgency have hardly been new to the Caucasus—north and south—for the past two centuries.

A Missed Chance. President Putin has admitted that the first Chechen war, unleashed by the Yeltsin administration in the fall of 1994, in which 80,000–100,000 people were killed and over 100,000 became internally displaced, was an error.¹⁴ After the Russian army’s defeat in Chechnya, Moscow granted the rebel region quasi-independence in 1996.

Sadly, however, “independent” Chechnya turned into a disaster for its own people. Armed gangs and clans ran wild. Radical Sunni (called Wahhabi or Salafi) clerics imported from Saudi Arabia have established Islamic religious courts in the society, which had previously practiced a rather lax version of Sufi Islam.¹⁵ Public hangings have become commonplace. Thousands have been kidnapped for ransom. Slave markets have appeared. Oil has been stolen from pipelines, pipelines sabotaged, transit trains from Russia shot at, and passengers robbed. Trafficking in drugs, arms, and other contraband is rampant.

The Wahhabi presence, including ties with al-Qaeda terrorists, has increased, strengthening the leadership of radical Islamists such as Shamil Basaev. Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Osama bin Laden’s second in command, spent six months in Chechnya setting up training camps and preparing for jihad. The Russian security services even arrested al-Zawahiri, but unaware of his identity eventually let him go.

10. Meeting with President Putin.

11. Jill Dougherty, “Putin Urges Voters to Support Bush,” *CNN.com*, October 18, 2004, at www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/10/18/putin.iraq/index.html (October 18, 2004).

12. *Ibid.*

13. However, he authorized a Russian nuclear technology deal to complete the nuclear reactor in Bushehr, Iran, despite Tehran’s support for international terrorism.

14. *Ibid.*

15. SunnahOnline.Com, “Chechnya Relief Fund,” at www.sunnahonline.com/news/important/asia_chechnya_index.htm (October 7, 2004). See also Thomas de Waal, “Europe’s Darkest Corner,” *The Guardian*, August 30, 2004, at www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1293502,00.html (October 7, 2004).

The Second Chechen War. The second Chechen war began in 1999 when a radical Chechen faction commanded by Shamil Basaev invaded the neighboring republic of Dagestan. Bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow and Volgograd, in which over 300 people died, greatly escalated matters. Basaev and the radical faction he leads do not hide their geopolitical ambitions of establishing a caliphate from the Black Sea to the Caspian. Russia responded with a World War II-style invasion of Chechnya, which resulted in massive destruction and heavy civilian casualties.

The second Chechen war bolstered Putin's popularity and facilitated his election to his first term in office in March 2000, but it also left lingering problems. Tens of thousands of Chechen civilians were displaced, killed, or wounded. After Beslan, however, Putin refused to discuss the problems. Further, he asserted that the Chechen war had nothing to do with the hostage taking in Beslan. The Russian president offered no criticism of command, control, and leadership failures or of doctrinal and organizational lapses in fighting the terrorist war in the Caucasus and Russia.

Today, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, and "hearts-and-minds" issues desperately need attention throughout the Northern Caucasus. President Putin understands this, at least to some degree. However, it remains to be seen whether the newly installed nationalities minister Vladimir Yakovlev, former mayor of St. Petersburg and a political enemy of Putin,¹⁶ and the newly appointed Governor-General of the Northern Caucasus Dmitry Kozak, a Putin can-do confidante and former Cabinet secretary, are up to the demanding tasks involved.¹⁷

To address today's threats, Russia needs to rethink and revamp its anti-terrorism approach,

learn lessons from other countries and conflicts, and establish new security structures that are capable of dealing with 21st century terrorism. In such a predicament, one would think that Russia would not look for adventures in the "near abroad" (the other former Soviet republics) and would leave recent democratic achievements intact.

Prisoner of the Caucasus

However, in the days before and after Beslan, Putin and his inner circle overtly questioned the sovereignty of Georgia and her post-Soviet borders. Putin said, "When the Soviet Union collapsed, no one asked the Ossetians and the Abkhaz whether they want to stay in Georgia."¹⁸ Russia is also staunchly opposing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's plan for a peaceful settlement of the crisis in Transdniestria, a secessionist region in Moldova.

The message is loud and clear: Post-Soviet borders are no longer sacrosanct. Furthermore, in 2001, the Duma quietly adopted a constitutional mechanism for incorporating foreign lands and countries into the Russian Federation.

In Georgia, Russian arms, Transdniestria and Cossack volunteers, and Russian peacekeepers under the umbrella of the Commonwealth of Independent States have been deployed in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russian gunboats have entered Georgian territorial waters without authorization. One even had ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy on board. Zhirinovskiy was delivering the gunboat as a gift to the Abkhaz separatist leadership.¹⁹ Such events do not happen without the permission of Putin's administration.

Russian citizenship and passports, freely distributed to the secessionist populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, undermine the national iden-

16. ITAR-TASS, "Ministry for Regional, Nationalities Policy to Be Restored," September 13, 2004, at www.itar-tass.com/eng/level2.html?NewsID=1241323&PageNum=0 (October 6, 2004).

17. "Kozak Appointed Putin's Envoy to Terror-Hit South Russia," *MosNews.com*, September 13, 2004, at www.mosnews.com/news/2004/09/13/yakovlev.shtml (October 7, 2004).

18. Meeting with President Putin.

19. "Georgian Military Ship Pursues Motorboat with Russian Duma Deputies," *Pravda*, August 11, 2004, at english.pravda.ru/printed.html?news_id=13725 (October 7, 2004).

tity of the Abkhaz and Ossetians as citizens of Georgia, while these separatist elites benefit from contraband trafficking and are supported with secret Moscow-based funds.²⁰ Plans have even been laid to reopen a railroad line from Sochi to Abkhazia without Tbilisi's agreement.²¹

The Russian leadership seems to have a blind spot. By trying to pull South Ossetia and Abkhazia into Moscow's orbit, the Kremlin may be inadvertently strengthening the case of Chechen separatism.

Border Revisions? Since 1992, Moscow has supported sundry separatists—from Transdnier to Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Nagorno–Karabakh—for a reason. These moves open the door to revising other borders, especially in areas heavily populated with Russian speakers, such as northern Kazakhstan, Transdnier, and eastern Ukraine.

Russia may also support border revisions in such areas as Nagorno–Karabakh, which could have unpredictable consequences for the 10-year-old Armenian–Azerbaijani cease-fire. Border revisions can be held over the heads of uncooperative neighbors like the sword of Damocles. Internationally, this can become a powder keg. Undermining the territorial integrity of Russia's neighbors is unacceptable to the U.S. and the European Union, and it is dangerous to Russia itself.

The Kremlin Response After Beslan

Crying over the phantom pains of empire will not protect Russia from terrorism. Instead of revamping, retraining, and reorganizing Russia's anti-terrorist and security services, Putin has opted for a massive re-centralization of power—despite an outcry from the Russian liberal elites.²² In

doing so, he is taking the country on a path reminiscent of the Soviet and czarist eras.

Specifically, on September 13, 2004, Putin announced the following measures ostensibly to ensure that Russia is effectively governed:

- Regional leaders will no longer be elected by a popular vote. Instead, regional legislatures will approve nominees submitted by the president.
- All Duma deputies will be elected through party lists in single-seat constituencies.
- A “public chamber” will be established to provide public oversight of the government, particularly of law enforcement and security agencies.
- Voluntary people's patrols, ubiquitous in the Soviet era, will be established and will work in tandem with police to ensure that public order is re-established.
- A special federal commission will be set up to oversee the North Caucasus issues.
- The government will re-establish a new Ministry for Regional Policy and Nationalities.
- The government will elaborate a system of responses to thwart terrorist threats.²³

Putin is essentially rebuilding the Soviet state security apparatus and applying the 19th century Russian imperial model to a 21st century state that is riddled with terrorism and corruption. For example, there are also plans to reintroduce police-issued residence permits, similar to the Soviet-era *propiska*, to control internal movement of the population.²⁴

These measures are unlikely to provide an effective antidote to expanding terrorism in the North

20. Anton Krivenyuk, “Abkhazians Opt for Russian Citizenship,” *The Moscow News*, June 26, 2002, at english.mn.ru/english/issue.php?2002-26-6 (October 7, 2004).

21. Vladimir Sokor, “Moscow Breaches Sochi Agreement on Abkhazia,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 04, 2004, at www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=401&issue_id=3036&article_id=2368350 (October 7, 2004).

22. For a typical criticism, see Andrey Piontkovsky, “Putinskaya Shinel,” *Fond Liberal'naya Missiya*, September 17, 2004, at www.liberal.ru/article.asp?Num=213 (October 7, 2004).

23. Dr. Yevgeny Volk, Coordinator of The Heritage Foundation's Moscow Office, summarized these measures.

24. “Gosduma reanimiruyet institut propiski,” *Pravda*, September 21, 2004, at news.pravda.ru/politics/2004/09/21/67505.html (October 7, 2004).

Caucasus and Russia, and they reverse democratic achievements of the 1990s. Nostalgia for the Soviet past may beget new authoritarianism, as former Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Mikhail Gorbachev warned in interviews on September 16, 2004.²⁵

Reverting to the Past? Putin's decision to nominate governors, doing away with their election, will not only dilute Russia's developing democracy. It will effectively end administrative ethnic autonomy, which was adopted by the Bolsheviks after the 1917 coup.

The number of regions—"federation subjects" as they are called in Russia—is likely to be reduced through constitutional changes from 89 to about 30. However, in the 21st century, it is extremely difficult to govern a country that spans 11 time zones from one political center. The information overload and corruption may become severe enough to slow the pace of economic growth. Putin may have to abandon his proclaimed goal of doubling Russia's gross domestic product by 2012.²⁶

It is also counterproductive to undermine the connection of voters and their elected representatives by abandoning the single-district system and shifting to elections by party lists.

Establishing an unelected and disempowered "public chamber" to supervise the security services will not solve Russia's flagging anti-terrorism conundrum. There is no substitute for effective civilian control by the legislative and civilian executive branches. Nor are additional bureaucratic offices, such as the new Ministry for Regional Policy and Nationalities, likely to resolve the systemic problems of the Northern Caucasus.

What Should Be Done

In pursuing the global war on terrorism, the U.S. should attempt to accomplish a number of policy objectives with regard to Russia:

- **Cooperating** with Moscow to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, especially preventing terrorists from acquiring such weapons;
 - **Shoring up** Russia as a reliable supplier of oil and gas to the world market, in addition to the Persian Gulf states, and keeping the Russian energy sector open to U.S. and Western investment;
 - **Supporting** the territorial integrity and independence of the post-Soviet states of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, and Central Asia; and
 - **Developing** the forces of democracy in Russia, especially supporting civil society and free media.
- To advance these policy objectives, the Bush Administration should:
- **Emphasize** to the Russian people, President Putin, and the Russian government that Russia and the U.S. are facing the same enemy, which threatens their national survival, their peoples, and their most cherished values. Presidents Bush and Putin should hold an anti-terrorism summit in the near future to hammer out a joint anti-terrorism action plan. In view of Beslan, President Bush should order a review of U.S. policies on asylum for Chechen leaders, Chechen fundraising in the U.S., and the U.S. intelligence community's contacts with Chechen rebels.
 - **Increase** U.S. outreach in the battle for Russia's hearts and minds, paying particular attention to the younger generations of Russian citizens. Cold War paranoia still permeates the Russian elites. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow is already busy reaching out to Russia's media, think tanks, and government offices, but more needs to be done on the public diplomacy front.
 - **Expand** security cooperation in anti-terrorist force structure, command, control, and com-

25. Steven Lee Myers, "The World—Dark Age; Putin Gambles on Raw Power," *The New York Times*, September 19, 2004, Section 4, p. 1.

26. Russian News and Information Agency, "President's Adviser on Doubling GDP," August 12, 2004, at en.rian.ru/rian/index.cfm?prd_id=159&msg_id=4704450&startrow=1&date=2004-08-12&do_alert=0 (October 7, 2004).

munications and on techniques for dealing with hostage situations. The Trubinkov–Armitage Group run by the U.S. Department of State and the Russian Foreign Ministry could coordinate cooperation. A joint project, such as neutralizing Shamil Basaev and his organization, could be undertaken cooperatively. On the U.S. side, participants might include the Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security and the CIA. On the Russian side, participating offices might include the Foreign Intelligence Service, Federal Security Service, Emergency Situations Ministry (Russian FEMA), and Alfa and Vityaz units.

- **Cooperate** with Russia, if it so desires, in strengthening transparency and civilian control of the Russian security services. This can be accomplished through expanded contacts between the Duma, the Council of the Federation, and the U.S. Congress. Congress and the Pentagon, as well as think tanks, could conduct a series of seminars discussing the U.S. experience in this field in Moscow.
- **Develop** a range of joint programs that reduce WMD and terrorist threats to both countries, going beyond the current Nunn–Lugar funding which focuses on storage, safety, and security. Such programs should actively prevent WMD proliferation to non-state actors. As both countries have an interest in strategic arms reduction and ballistic missile defense, such cooperation can help to transcend Cold War fears. The U.S. and Russia should intensify cooperation on joint ballistic missile defense and aggressive non-proliferation to help further reduce Cold War sentiments.²⁷
- **Support** the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all post-Soviet states. Expand cooperation with these countries via NATO's Partnership for Peace and bilateral military-to-military ties, exchanges, train-and-equip programs, and (where necessary) limited troop deployment. Maintain and expand dialogue with Moscow over contentious issues, such as

South Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as the U.S. presence in Central Asia.

- **Develop** programs that support freedoms of the press and of political organizations, federalism and local self-governance, growth of the nonprofit/nongovernment sector, and the rule of law and promote transparent, participatory, and democratic governance in Russia. This can be accomplished through joint activities involving political parties, their institutions, and other nongovernmental organizations, such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and the National Endowment for Democracy in the U.S. and the Moscow Helsinki Group, International Memorial Society, and Glasnost Defense Foundation in Russia. The U.S. should also expanding support of the independent media in Russia in all forms, including print, broadcasting, and Internet.

Conclusion

The U.S. faces a delicate and difficult policy challenge after Beslan. President Putin is taking Russia in the direction of greater centralization, which he believes will make Russia more secure and make it into a greater power. An authoritarian Russia, lacking democratic checks and balances, is likely to pursue a regional and even global foreign policy that increases friction with the United States, its vital interests, and its allies.

The U.S. should do its best to encourage democracy, political pluralism, and media freedoms and dissuade Moscow from becoming increasingly authoritarian or expansionist. It should support Russia's weaker neighbors, their independence, and their territorial integrity. At the same time, the U.S. should avoid an unnecessary confrontation with Russia while shoring up and expanding U.S.–Russian cooperation in the global war on terrorism.

—Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., is Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies in the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies at The Heritage Foundation.

27. Heritage Foundation analysts James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Jack Spencer contributed to this recommendation.