

Washington DC Peace & Security Forum: Russia as a US Partner for Stability and Peace in the World

William Selig
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Washington DC, USA - The UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs in Washington held a forum on: “Despite Present Problems: Russia as a U.S. Partner for Stability and Peace in the World” on May 28, 2014. The relationship between the U.S., its allies, and Russia is undergoing an evolutionary process. The acrimony on the part of the U.S. and Russia is leading both superpowers to a situation that is affecting the peace and stability of the international community. The forum participants agreed that this unfolding process should not be carried out in an adversarial and conflictive manner, but in an atmosphere of constructive engagement. A competitive relationship need not translate into becoming enemy nations. Participants agree that Russia can play a key role to deal with the terrible human tragedies of Syria, Iran, and elsewhere. The dangers provide an opportunity for cooperation and peace-building. Considering the news coming from Eurasia, particularly the results of the May 24th presidential election in Ukraine; the recent gas deal between Russia and China; and Russia’s continued support for Syria’s President Bashar al-Assad amid that country’s three-year civil war —America and its allies must come to accept that Russia, China and India, and other countries refuse to take a junior partner role to the U.S. in today’s world order, and that despite present problems, Russia is needed and should be invited to work with the U.S. as a partner for stability and peace in the world.

In an effort to pursue internal “soft power” solutions to the escalating confrontation between Russia and the West over events in Ukraine, the UPF Washington DC Office of Peace and Security Affairs convened a panel of experts. Two points quickly became clear:

In complicated issues, there is always more than one side to a story. It is clear that not everything is the truth or a lie. It depends on the lenses used to see through. Two narratives in the affairs and actions of President Vladimir Putin have emerged. One comes and is presented by the U.S., the UK, and their allies, along with the mainstream media and the official channels. The other is coming from Russia and other countries in Europe and around the world through means such as social media, where millions of the educated and not-so-educated “public opinion” differ from the West. These include respected scholars and political scientists and individuals in Europe, Russia and other countries.

The relationship between the U.S., its allies, and Russia is evolving and all precautions should be taken so it is not carried out in an adversarial and conflictive manner, but in an atmosphere of constructive engagement. A competitive relationship need not translate into becoming enemy nations.

Dr. Antonio Betancourt, Director, OPSA, invited participants to “think out-of-the-box,” and quoted President Putin from the International Economic Forum held in St. Petersburg, May 22-24: “Consistency and openness are always met with reciprocal steps and mutual trust.” Dr. Betancourt spoke about the need for balance between power and diplomacy and that power has to be subordinated to diplomacy. “You have to be consistent, which is what Putin is asking, and you have to be open. America has to accept that there is a shift towards a multi-polar world.”

The participants discussed the recent trip of Pope Francis to the Holy Land and the unique contribution that religious leaders and faith-based organizations can make to international peacemaking. As one participant said, “To appreciate its value, one doesn’t have to be a Catholic; one has to be a human being.” Participants were in agreement that if the leaders of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and other religions could come together and deal with the situation in the Ukraine, than a violent confrontation could be avoided.



Ms. Natalia Caryl, Founder, Caryl PR Company (for Russia and Kazakhstan abroad), said: “In the view of America, Russia and Ukraine are impaired. It looks like Russia is bullying Ukraine. It seems like America does not want to dialogue with Russia.” Ms. Caryl believes “America is pushing its ideals and values on the rest of the world without regard for the cultural differences of other countries and without thinking other countries might think differently from the U.S. or American values. This attitude makes many countries uncomfortable.” The biggest problem is “a lack of dialog. I don’t think the United States wants to hear the Russian view.”

Ms. Donna Wiesner Keene, Senior Fellow, Independent Women’s Forum, and former member of the Reagan and both Bush administrations, expressed concern about the media’s reporting about the news in Ukraine. “What is the truth? Balance is needed.” There is a pattern of misrepresentation of foreign policy on the part of the media, she said. “Only one side is expressed, however, the whole American opinion, voters and citizens, is fairly evenly divided. The media only represents one side. Ms. Keene said the “problem with our media and our education system is that they are poorly informed.”

Mr. George Pope, Co-leader, Virginians for Quality Healthcare, saw the present crisis as an opportunity. “We need leadership. We need the truth. This is an opportunity to bring the right people together and try to point them in the right direction.”

Some of the participants expressed strong concern over President Putin’s recent actions in Ukraine and Crimea. Mr. Pope submitted the following written comments: “What’s at stake is a hodgepodge of over a thousand years of history covering religious beliefs, ethnic roots, geography and, communist vs. democratic ideology. The current state of affairs, as prompted by the Putin administration, is to as rapidly as possible return Russia to the the geographic boundaries the Soviet Union had prior to 1991. This will enable Russia to have the natural resource boundaries that can be secured at both east and western portals to build upon to become a global power into the future. What is needed is a small cadre of world leaders to look at the whole picture recognizing the perspectives of all sides, particularly those taking that of pro-Russian and Ukraine national paradigms to prevent at all costs an all-out war.” He suggests five points: (1) The U.S. must emphatically take a substantial lead similar to what Reagan did when he told Mikhail Gorbachev: ‘Tear down this wall.’ (2) NATO must enforce its treaties. (3) The power posturing driven by economics, religion and states to have dominance throughout Europe, the Far East and globally must be neutralized. (4) An updated workable Marshall Plan type solution must be initiated immediately glued together by a cadre of world leaders that will ruthlessly adhere to a no ifs or buts plan.

Government attorney Diane N. Dillon expressed a similar appraisal. She said: “I was struck by what appears in Russia as a skewing of the facts. Putin has an iron hand on information and comes out against even his own citizens. They don’t get the truth. He creates and fabricates his truth. I don’t trust the information coming out that he’s protecting the Russian-speaking peoples. It seems to be a repeat of history of what the Soviet Union did decades ago in fabricating good motives for what they were doing

but they were false. It was a power grab that was described disingenuously to mask what they were really doing. I'm confused about what's really happening in the Ukraine and Crimea. To me, as a neophyte to these issues, it's a complete land grab by Putin."



When the process of democratization, human rights and peace are heavily intertwined with hidden economic, financial and commercial interests then the credibility of the higher moral ground is lost. When a country, including the U.S., claims the moral high ground, in this case regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine, then they have to be consistent and act on principle. There cannot be ulterior motives to claim and regain the credibility for bearing the moral upper ground. America has to get rid of its "carpetbagger" practices, which means to put the merchants in their proper place."

In his opinion, merchants of weapons, the military industrial complex and its security apparatus are fueled by fear and profits. Security has an important place in our society but America's tradition was the balance between power and diplomacy. "What we have seen since the fall of the Soviet empire is power diplomacy. Diplomacy has been subordinated to power. The use of power should be left only as the last resort."

Ms. Eucharia Mbachu, Director, Voices of Women and Children, said: "What is happening in Russia-Crimea is a repeat of history," and asked, "What is the difference between the Russian invasion of Crimea and what Saddam Hussein did in Kuwait in 1990?" Ms. Mbachu believes that while these two powers are drawing the world's attention, like "two lions fighting it out," China has been quietly advancing its own objectives.

Dr. Joseph Prud'homme, Director, Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture at Washington College in Chestertown, MD questioned mainstream media's coverage of Russia, for example, that people drink too much, don't make much money, and generally are unhappy. "According to some media outlets, Putin is the standard bearer for Judeo-Christian values. Is that false rhetoric? A Machiavellian strategy? What is the truth?"

Defending the Russian President, Ms. Caryl said that life under Putin is much better than under previous leaders. When the Soviet Union collapsed in the early 1990s under Yeltsin, the economy imploded. Russia's economy was tied to the other republics. For example, an auto might've been built in White Russia (present-day Belarus) and sold in Kazakhstan. After the collapse, people lost their jobs, some were homeless, people didn't want to have children, the government could no longer provide free daycare and education. People emigrated to the U.S., Israel. Under the leadership of Putin, however, according to Ms. Caryl, inflation is down, pensions have increased, and most importantly, Russia's sense of self-worth has been restored. "Putin is doing great things for Russia."

In contrasting the value system that underlies the foreign policy of the U.S. and Russia, Ms. Keene referred to the set of 22 values that are universal to all humans but are ranked differently in each country. For example, Russians are more comfortable with a lot more control than Americans. Power is more centralized and flows down in Russia while in America it tends to be diffused from people and flows up. These cross-national differences in value ranking and priorities have significant implications on foreign policy as well as how countries relate.

Dr. Sulayman Nyang, Chairman, African Studies Department at Howard University, expressed concern over the "liberal dominance of the media." There is a need to study the facts, not "doctored histories of the real history," and not be guilty of "historical amnesia." Dr. Nyang said it's important to study history, in particular, relations between Russia and Ukraine. Russia was responsible, under Stalin, for the displacement and deaths of millions of people in the Ukraine by a man-made famine. Historical facts must be kept in perspective, he cautioned.

With escalating violence in Ukraine threatening to raise the crisis to an even higher level, participants agreed that the crisis cannot be viewed in isolation from other conflicts and security concerns that are taking place in the region and world. There should be an understanding of the full context of the situation from Russia's perspective and view the broader picture.



The participants expressed gratitude to UPF and endorsement for the emphasis on “track-II diplomacy,” incorporating the global dimension, not only the regional. The problems in Afghanistan, Syria, Mali, and Central African Republic must be approached from the global point of view, utilizing not only diplomacy and military, but also religion, media, and education.

There was a general consensus that events in Ukraine represent a major crisis that affects not only Europe, but the entire world. How the West deals with Russia will have consequences that will define the world order for the rest of this century. As we enter unknown territory, the West must be careful to maintain an atmosphere of constructive engagement and avoid an adversarial and conflictive manner.

In the UPF point of view, expressed by Dr. Betancourt: “The key values of UPF, as taught by the founder, Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, are to commit ourselves to live for a higher cause and purpose. For human beings, this means to always leave behind a plus whether for family, community, nation and the world. What is the higher purpose for Russia and the U.S. and for that matter, for China and the other world superpowers? The higher value is world humanity. Russia and the U.S. have to find a way to work together for the sake of the world. They must subordinate their own national interests to the interest of a better world for all of humanity, otherwise, both nations and the world will lose. The challenge is how to convince these nations that it is in their interest to work together. Even if they have competitive adversarial interests, there is a common purpose, so by working towards a higher purpose, their own self interests will be satisfied.”

Host:

Dr. Antonio Betancourt - Director, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs, Washington, DC

Participants:

Prof. Yonah Alexander, Director, Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies
Dr. Sulayman Nyang, Chairman, African Studies Department, Howard University
Ms. Eucharia Mbachu, Director, Voices of Women and Children
Dr. Joseph Prud'homme, Director, Institute for Religion, Politics and Culture, Washington College
Mr. John Kukor, Former Intelligence Officer, U.S. Air Force (Ret.)
Ms. Donna Wiesner Keene, Senior Fellow, Independent Women's Forum
Ms. Diane N. Dillon, Government Attorney
Ms. Natalia Caryl, Founder, Caryl PR Company (for Russia and Kazakhstan abroad)
Ms. Natalia Simakova, Member, Welcome to Washington International Club, Inc.
Mr. Hari Bindall, Past President, American Society of Engineers of Indian Origin
Mr. George Pope, Co-leader, Virginians for Quality Healthcare
Mr. Brian Garrett-Glaser, Fellow, Just Consulting
Prof. Diane Falk, Research writer and editor
Dr. Mark P. Barry, Advisor, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs (Observer)
Dr. William Selig, Deputy Director, UPF Office of Peace and Security Affairs, Washington, DC