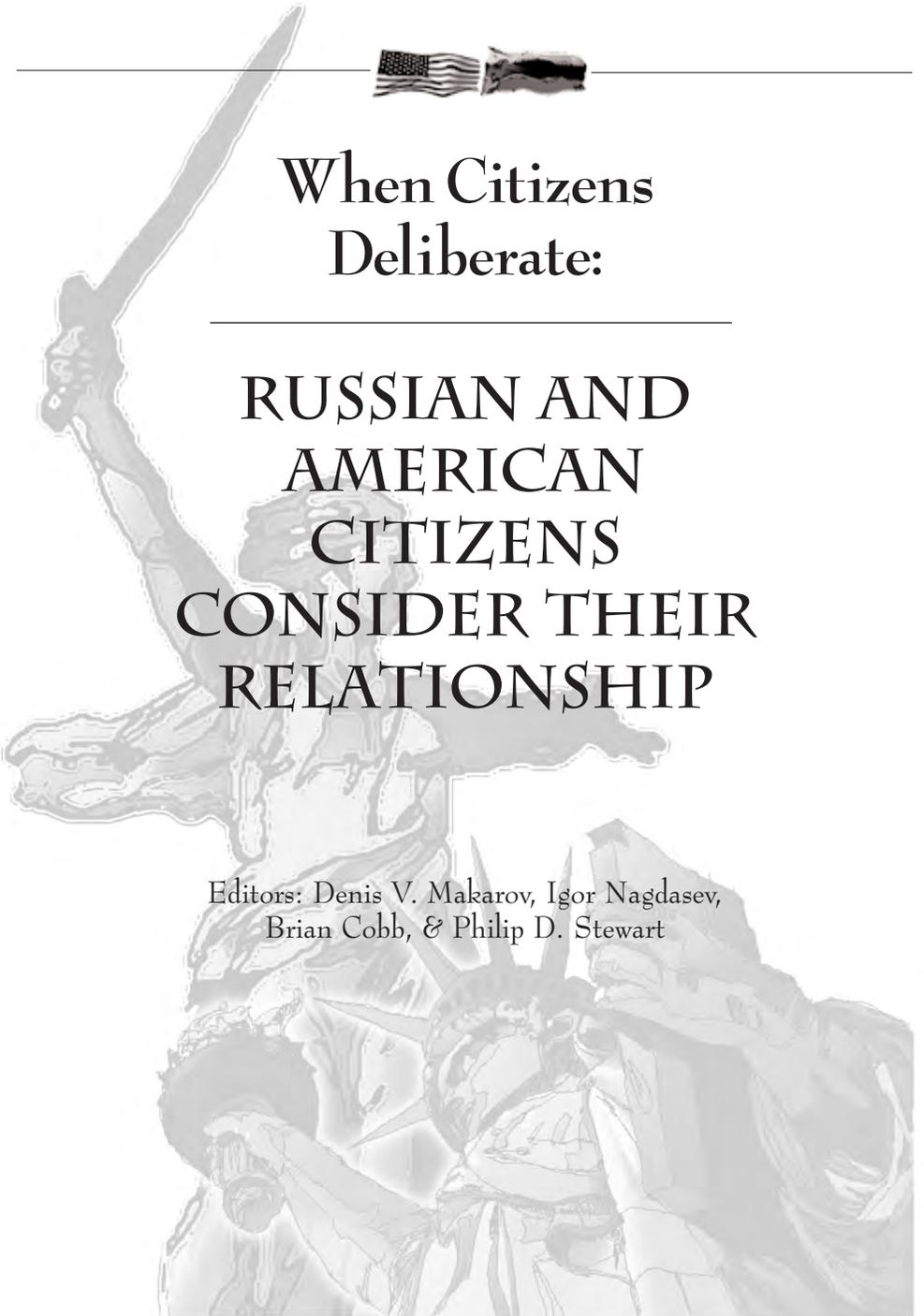




When Citizens
Deliberate:

RUSSIAN AND
AMERICAN
CITIZENS
CONSIDER THEIR
RELATIONSHIP

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CHAPTER ONE¹

A Relationship at the Crossroads

WHAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP DO AMERICANS WANT WITH RUSSIA?

by Brian Cobb and Robert J. Kingston

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The relationship between the United States and Russia has been a matter of longstanding international importance. Following the downing of the American U-2 spy plane in 1960, the two superpowers faced a seemingly insurmountable task. The episode had resulted in a breakdown of U.S.-Soviet relations, leading President Eisenhower to remark to Norman Cousins, then editor of the *Saturday Review* and later a Kettering Foundation (KF) trustee, “I can’t talk to the Soviets, but somebody had better.”

Soviet Chairman Nikita Khrushchev, like President Eisenhower, recognized the importance of maintaining communications between these two superpowers. So shortly thereafter, following initial contacts made by Cousins through the Union of Soviet Societies for Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, a group of leading Soviets and Americans came together to begin what would turn out to be a 40-year dialogue. Their first meeting was held on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and the series of meetings thereafter became known as the Dartmouth Conference.²

For the first 20 years, the conference met primarily in large plenary sessions every couple of years, alternately in the U.S. and U.S.S.R. In 1981, in order to probe more deeply into the dynamics of the overall U.S.-Soviet relationship, the conference formed two task forces—one on arms control and the other on U.S.—Soviet interactions in regional conflicts. Those task forces met approximately every six months throughout the 1980s. The plenaries ended during the glasnost period in 1990, and the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. But the work to which the conference had been committed continued, proceeding on two tracks until 1992, when the Arms Control Task Force ended.



The Dartmouth Regional Conflicts Task Force had turned its attention to what was then a Russia-U.S. relationship, and particularly to how conflicts in the territory of the former Soviet Union might undermine the new relationship. Then, in the early 1990s, the Kettering Foundation and colleagues in Russia, within what had been the dialogic framework of the Dartmouth Conference, began to focus on the interaction between the two civil societies which, as the Soviet Union opened up, had come to be recognized as an increasingly significant element in the relationship.

Through the 1990s, Kettering invited a series of young Russian professionals to study, as international fellows at the foundation, the practices of deliberative democracy, as developed in the U.S. by the National Issues Forums (NIF) network. The maturing of this work led to another new dialogue beginning in 2000, when citizens from Russia began to consider directions the Russia-U.S. relationship might take, while their counterparts in the U.S. explored the same question. This meeting of the “New” Dartmouth Conference was the first experiment in building a dialogue among citizens of the two countries who deliberated on the Russia-U.S. relationship with the conviction that a strong relationship will almost certainly be central to building and sustaining a peaceful world.

Today, the relationship between the two countries may be at a significant crossroads. When the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, it was replaced by a loose coalition of ten independent states called the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Russian Federation gained control of the military and nuclear forces, the U.N. Security Council veto, and the U.S.S.R. debt payments. Now, at the beginning of a new century, the balance of power between the two former superpowers is uneven. The U.S. remains an economic and military superpower, while Russia’s economy is in recovery and its military is a shadow of what it once was.

As Russia attempts to regain political, social, military, and economic stability and strength, its future remains uncertain. Yet many Americans believe that Russia will once again play a significant role on the world scene, perhaps within a generation or two. Now is the time, therefore, to define the kind of relationship citizens of the U.S. and Russia want their countries to have with one another. When considering international relations, it is not enough to focus on officeholders, the policy-influencing community, or the international business community, all of whom are often thought of as the “real actors” in this arena. Today, broadly democratic societies—and both the United States and Russia can



be included in this category—derive legitimacy and authority from their citizens. But democratic citizens are not content to exercise their sovereignty solely at the ballot box. We might therefore go so far as to conceptualize international relations, not simply as state-to-state relations, but rather as continuous interaction among whole bodies politic. While it is true that relatively few citizens, either Russian or American, give a lot of thought in their daily lives to their relationship with each other, there are, nonetheless, at least three things that bring this relationship to the forefront, as recent Russian and U.S. experience has shown.

One is when governments appear to act in ways that run counter to, or threaten, what citizens hold most valuable about their own nation or their relationship with another nation. The public at such times becomes activated. When governments behave in ways inconsistent with citizens' deeply held views, the public struggles to set limits on what is possible in the relationship between their society and others. Indeed, if these limits are exceeded grievously and for an extended period of time—the war in Vietnam for the United States and the war in Afghanistan for Russia are instructive examples—governments can lose the authority to continue with their policies; and ultimately, the legitimacy of the political system itself may be compromised.

The relationship between Russia and the United States also becomes more important to people as citizen-to-citizen interactions between Russians and Americans grow ever more frequent. Russian citizens today come to the United States to study, to work, and to recreate. And thousands of American citizens work in Russia on intergovernmental projects, in private enterprises, and for NGOs and foundations. Many more meet through study, tourism, sister-city exchanges, and other programs. All of these contacts give the relationship between the two countries life; they make it concrete and real; and they lead to increasingly complex webs of interaction. They serve to shape, reinforce, or reform perceptions, beliefs, and expectations that citizens have about themselves and about people in the other country. We need to understand more fully the kinds of expectations that are emerging from such interactions.

A third event that raises significantly the salience of the Russia-U.S. relationship for citizens of each nation is the conscious act of deliberating together about the relationship itself. One of the uniform outcomes of the ongoing deliberative public forums held in the United States (and analyzed in this report) is the observation that the deliberations themselves create a new interest in



learning about Russia. As participants become more aware of ways in which the multiple things they hold valuable are impacted by the relationship, their appreciation for the complexity of the issues involved is heightened, and they want to learn more.

A Public Voice vs. Public Opinion

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Most studies of the public are based on opinion polls or focus groups. In such studies, the validity of the findings depends on questions of representativeness, sample size, and the formulation, sequence, and context of the questions. At best, polls provide us a snapshot of the aggregated opinions of individuals. This study, however, is based on public forums in which citizens spend several hours together, examining the tensions between and within different courses of action and the difficult tradeoffs they each will require. Our observations, over nearly a quarter century of deliberative public forums, clearly show that the deliberative process itself reveals deeply rooted values and concerns individuals may have been only dimly aware of prior to deliberation. Deliberation yields collective insights beyond the reach of any individual thinking alone. And, these insights tend to be far more stable and durable than the opinions found in polls. Indeed, deliberation often leads to collective judgments that might not have seemed clearly viable before the deliberation took place.

The outcomes of public deliberation create what we can fairly call a “public voice.” Rather than a representative sample, a public voice reflects the shared judgments of those citizens who have engaged issues together. Individuals may not necessarily share all attitudes and opinions, but the deliberation reveals what is politically important: the concerns they hold in common; the actions they collectively will accept; the movement they are prepared to resist as a group. Their collective engagement is what makes a public voice possible and what distinguishes it from mere opinion. This public voice on many varied issues shows a high degree of stability over time. This stability gives us confidence that, were a majority of citizens to go through a similar deliberative process on the issues, the fundamental findings would not significantly change from group to group. The forums about the Russia-U.S. relationship reported here occurred in communities across the United States over a period of 18 months.



Americans Frame the Issue

To begin the process of unpacking the issue of the Russia-U.S. relationship for Americans, the Kettering Foundation asked a group of citizens from the National Issues Forums network to frame an issue book on the topic, for use as a guide in public deliberation. In the fall of 2000, a small team of a half-dozen Americans came together, with staff from the Kettering Foundation, to begin the initial process of framing the issue for discussion in terms that would be accessible to the general public.

KF director of international affairs Harold Saunders, who for many years had been a leading participant in the Dartmouth Conference, wrote a background memo that provided a context for the framing team, which, with a little revision, became the first cut at a “map” of the issue. Saunders’ memo described a relationship that was suffering due to a period of poor advice by Western advisors, broken or misunderstood promises, Russian disillusionment, American lack of interest, and American foreign policies, which are sometimes antagonistic to the growth of a relationship between the two countries. The memo also charged its readers to consider why a U.S. relationship with Russia might be important. It noted that, Russia, with its considerable natural as well as human resources, would someday surely regain its status as a significant world power. As Russia becomes stronger, Saunders noted, one could argue that it is “essential to peace for the world and to the security of the U.S. that the United States have a constructive relationship with Russia.” The Saunders memo provided an impetus, even a sense of urgency, about the need for U.S. citizens to engage with each other in a dialogue about the relationship between these two former Cold War enemies.

KF research assistant Ian Schmidt then prepared an extensive research paper that provided historical context, comparative data, and opinion-poll findings. It discussed both the U.S. perspective of Russia and the Russian perspective of the U.S.; it outlined U.S. foreign policy toward Russia, U.S.-Russian business interests, education in Russia, and religion in Russia; and it provided a summary of current U.S. media stories related to the topic.

Although some people have developed the skills—even what sometimes looks like a structured, step-by-step process—for issue framing, the reality is that framing a complex issue in a way that makes it accessible to a broad cross-section of



the public remains as much an art as a science. Each attempt is an experiment. A major challenge in framing an issue for public deliberation is to identify three or four approaches to it, each of which presents a different take on how to address the problem. The art is to capture in each approach the values and concerns of those who support that choice in a way that provides a fresh look, one that is not ideological, partisan, or merely reflective of a special interest point of view. The Kettering Foundation's experience of public deliberation over almost a quarter century has made it clear that three or four different sets of concerns, all of them profoundly human and broadly understandable, tend to drive public responses to any shared problem. When framed to reflect those concerns, rather than expert analysis or particular solutions, issues become accessible for public consideration.

The framing team decided to conduct a specific experiment: Convene three separate issue-framing sessions with diverse groups of citizens and consolidate the results into an issue-map. In March 2001, three sites were selected—in Ohio, Kentucky, and Oklahoma—for citizen workshops to frame the issue. Full-day framing sessions were held in Ohio and Oklahoma, with a somewhat shorter session in Kentucky. Then in April and May of 2001, the framing team, representing the three locations, consolidated the framing. During the summer of 2001, possible public reactions to this framing were tested through focus groups in Baltimore, Maryland, and Austin, Texas. The experiences in these test forums led to a final revision of the issue framework, resulting in three different approaches to achieving a sustainable relationship with Russia.

One approach calls for putting a strong priority on national security and adopting a cautious and guarded approach to Russia as a once-and-future superpower and competitor. Another approach is to develop a relationship based on sharing expertise, assets, and resources. A third approach suggests that we might begin our relationship anew as a good neighbor, providing humanitarian aid and cultural exchange opportunities, yet without the formal interdependence that might be strategically constraining to either party. Conversations among members of the framing team, drawing on interviews and focus groups with large numbers from a broad range of U.S. citizens, revealed clear tensions between these three approaches, each of them nonetheless a compelling way to look at the issue.



These approaches, described in more depth in the following paragraphs, served as a starting point for public deliberation. Each approach, or choice, expresses a distinct, but not mutually exclusive, perspective that could drive public policy. Each choice offers a foundation for action, and each action has consequences and tradeoffs that must be considered. Each choice impinges on the other two, to some degree, which limits or constrains it, at least in part. Thus, citizens, as they deliberated together, weighed one choice against another with the hope of identifying courses of action that would be complementary to each other.

Each of the approaches was framed in what might be imagined as the words of its most ardent proponent. A small handout for forum participants included a few illustrations, some indication of the likely actions that would follow from each approach, and a list of the inevitable tradeoffs.

Approach One: Put the Safety and Security of America First

The U.S. has provided aid to Russia and it has not paid off. The U.S. has to stop trying to fix the problems of everyone else and start focusing on securing its own future, economically and politically. The enthusiasm following the end of the Cold War must not cause us to lose sight of our own interests and our own security. Russia still has nuclear weapons and, given the instability of its government, our own security cannot be assumed. Now is not the time to back off of our commitment to a strong military. We need to maintain a strong military defense and focus on foreign efforts to reduce Russia's nuclear arms and minimize its military potential.

Approach Two: Build Strong, Democratic, and Economic Partnerships

Russia is still an actor on the world stage and will have an increasingly important role in the future. A weak and unstable Russia could threaten world order. A democratic Russia with a robust economy is the best means of ensuring U.S. safety and security. The U.S. simply cannot afford to ignore Russia during this time of rapid globalization. Strategic, mutually beneficial partnerships with



Russia will ensure global peace, and an investment in Russia's transition to democracy and the free market will not only stabilize Russia, but also benefit the U.S. in the long run.

Approach Three: Be a Good Global Neighbor

The U.S. has used the end of the Cold War as an excuse to ignore Russia, but the Russian people desperately need our help. Arms escalation, within an inefficient collective economic system, left the country bankrupt and now, poverty, infant mortality, and alcoholism rates are high; life expectancy is low; and medical equipment is out of date. The U.S. must consider first the health and well-being of the Russian people and provide aid during this rough transition period, just as neighbors help each other during difficult times. It is time to focus on building relationships with the individuals, organizations, and institutions that will strengthen the foundation for Russian civil society.

The framing process took place over 12 months and involved some 50 people from 6 states. KF research staff produced the issue book for the forums and verified all of its factual statements. A moderator's guide helped ensure consistency in recording during the forums and in reporting out from them. It was also decided to incorporate a group of citizen researchers—participants in a year-long citizen-researcher workshop—to observe and report on the U.S. forums; a guide was prepared for this citizen research team to use in observing and reporting on the forums.

The first forum was held on September 10, 2001, in Oklahoma, one day before the terrorist attacks in the United States. Following the tragic events of September 11, the framing team reconvened to discuss the relevance of the framing in light of these attacks. The team decided the issue was perhaps even more relevant after 9/11 and the framing would perhaps resonate more strongly with citizens as a result of the attacks. Between that time and the preparation of this chapter in early 2003, 25 public forums were held in 18 states.

Statements by forum participants and the outcome of their deliberations are summarized in the following sections.



A Public Voice

The common perception for some time has been that Americans do not think much about international matters or foreign policy. A nation of immigrants, guided by the founding vision of the “shining city on a hill” and protected by a great ocean on each shore, Americans have preferred to focus on what is happening at home rather than abroad. A vein of isolationism may indeed run through U.S. history, but it has not stopped us from thinking, or worrying, about our neighbors. For more than half of the 20th century, U.S. policy and practice and, to a degree, domestic life, was shaped by fear—for it was no less than fear—of international communism. Now, since 9/11, the fear is of strangers whose resentment has challenged the U.S. capacity, despite all its wealth and power, to protect itself from harm. These two fears—one stemming from the old experience of the Cold War and the other more recent one from the experience of terrorism—were reflected in the forums at every point.

There was some evidence that people’s concerns about national security affected how they sort through issues regarding relations between the two countries: as tensions related to world affairs and terrorism have ebbed and flowed, there have been noticeable differences in the tenor of these NIF forums. The greater the concerns regarding security, the more participants favored Approach One, and the less willing they were to trust the Russians. Similarly, the greater the participants’ sense of their own personal security, the more prepared they were to take risks to strengthen U.S.-Russian cooperation. For example, forums held on the East Coast were colored with more conversation about people’s continued grief, anger, and fear in the wake of 9/11. For people in these forums, all issues seemed to revolve around personal security, as well as national safety, and people’s sense of personal security was related to myriad issues, including, for instance, economics and health care. Americans participating in forums seemed to filter their thinking and talking about Russia-U.S. relations through these concerns about security and safety. People who expressed a strong sense of personal security often began conversations with a congenial attitude toward strengthening Russia-U.S. relations. Those who expressed a weaker sense of personal security or who felt that good relations between the two countries may not necessarily have an impact on the security and safety of Americans, began conversations with a less enthusiastic, and sometimes hostile, attitude toward Russia.



Yet, ultimately, these forum participants didn't believe that Russia was a direct threat to the U.S. and felt the U.S. relationship with Russia should be managed accordingly. They generally agreed that building economic and democratic partnerships is the best approach to working with Russia; and they were nearly unanimous in their support of the May 2002 strategic partnership agreement, signed by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir Putin.

Forum participants expressed a strong commitment to maintaining good relations with Russia. Many said the U.S. should stay engaged with Russia, no matter what. They viewed a relationship with Russia as a long-term proposition that would have its ups and downs; people assumed there would be periodic tensions between the two nations but could imagine only a few circumstances that would prompt the U.S. to curtail efforts to forge stronger relations with Russia. Throughout these forums, participants expressed four common concerns, all deeply interconnected.

Concern One: Is the Cold War Over? A Security Question

Forum participants did not view Russia as a threat to the United States. It's been more than a decade since the Cold War ended and, in some people's recollections, considerably longer since the "thaw" began.

We Americans always have a tendency to "keep fighting the last war," said a woman in Oxford, Ohio. "It is more hopeful and imaginative to imagine new relationships." Others clearly shared that view.

"It's a great opportunity to have Russia as a friend instead of an enemy," a participant in the El Paso, Texas, forum commented. And people everywhere expressed concern that anything that appeared as a heavy-handed, promilitary approach could unnecessarily isolate the U.S. from Russia, as well as from other European countries.

"Keeping Russia at arm's length was in the past, not the future," said a woman in Albuquerque. "We need not be so hawkish [toward Russia]" was the way this sentiment was expressed in Portland, Oregon.

Participants in the forums, however, were not content with expressing merely superficial points of view. They examined carefully the implications of



their attitudes. For example, antinuclear missile technology, initially designed to shield the U.S. from Russia, was one of the newly readopted practices forum participants called into question during their deliberations. Believing that the prospect of a Russian nuclear attack is low, people suggested that resources spent on a big military buildup could be better used in other ways.

“There are really big costs associated with antimissile defense,” said a woman from Oxford, Ohio. “Antimissile defense capabilities are not going to solve [terrorism]. It is irrelevant to the kinds of threats the United States faces.”

At the same time, participants in these forums were highly supportive of U.S. efforts to work closely with Russia to keep Russian weapons out of the hands of terrorists. Indeed, forum participants seemed generally to agree—although sometimes grudgingly—that spending U.S. tax dollars to make sure Russian arms don’t get into the wrong hands is a good use of money. People did not believe it was possible to completely control the spread of Russian arms, but it was clear in these forums that their greatest military concern regarding Russia at the present time is that Russian weapons of mass destruction might fall into the hands of terrorists or rogue nations.

“My biggest fear is they’re going to sell [weapons] to someone else. That’s why I say, buy them. Otherwise, they could sit on them for all I care,” said a Nashville, Tennessee, man. And in New Hampshire, one participant explained his reasoning this way: “My wife and I [talk] about the nuclear weapons in Russia. Given the state of the economy, they could provide terrorists the means to have nuclear capabilities.”

People in the forums reported they formerly had a relaxed attitude about Russia’s military potential before the terrorist attacks of September 11. But some said they were ambivalent now about whether Russia should be viewed as a possible future military threat. This ambivalence seems to have been generated primarily by concerns that have arisen since September 11—concerns that have nothing intrinsically to do with the Russia-U.S. relationship. Indeed, Americans in these forums consistently appeared to think the security of both countries is one of the primary reasons for closer Russia-U.S. relations, and many participants even expressed some concern that, should push come to shove, Russia could align with the U.S., or with its enemies. In the most recent forums, Iraq became an example of that kind of enemy.



A man in Los Angeles expressed the sentiments fairly typically: “The most important benefit of stronger relations with Russia is to fight terrorism. We have to be together so we could fight the global war against terrorism together.”

The tension between this sense of desire for cooperation and the vestiges of Cold War mistrust revealed an undercurrent of caution about the Russia-U.S. relationship in military matters. People in these forums sensed that Russia remains a potential world power, of which they should still be somewhat wary. There was, in fact, considerable discussion about the extent to which Russia should be considered actually or potentially a strong power. Older Americans, in particular, believed that Russia has the potential to rise again to world superpower status, while younger Americans tended to be more skeptical. Some people were concerned that sharing security information with Russia could haunt the U.S. should the relationship turn sour. And most participants appeared to acknowledge that Russia’s past history suggests it would be wise for the U.S. to be cautious. As a Nashville woman explained, “Obviously, it does both [countries] good [to work together]. But I’m wary. I think we can say we’re aiming toward being friends but I’m not going to trust, because that is our history.”

Concern Two: The Value of a Robust Russia

While one strand of thinking among the American people who participated in these forums began with recollections of the Cold War and concern about military strength, another equally strong concern took shape around the idea of partnership—a partnership based on economic ties and political sympathies. Citizens in these forums felt that both Americans and Russians would gain from economic collaboration and the development of a strong democracy in Russia. Yet participants expressed very little altruism as they considered the value of forging an economic and political relationship—for again, their awareness of America’s awkward position as the sole superpower in a world that (for good reasons or bad) resents them, clearly shaped their concerns. “I think in the world we’re looked at as a big, bad brother,” said a woman in Overland Park, Kansas. “Maybe it isn’t so bad to develop a relationship with another big party.”

But underlying this sentiment, for most forum participants, was the belief that a stable Russian economy and a democratic Russian political system are to be valued because they will benefit the U.S. economy and its national security.



“It is in our best interest for Russia to be strong,” said an Albuquerque, New Mexico, man, meaning economically and politically strong and capturing the general sentiment in these forums.

A Kansas man argued that “opening up their economy to [the U.S.] would benefit them and us.” And it became apparent as these forums progressed, that participants believed, in ideal circumstances, the effort to build closer ties with Russia would create larger markets for the U.S., provide the U.S. with access to Russian scientific knowledge, and give the U.S. an inside track to Russia’s vast supply of natural resources. With regard to the last point, citizens in all the forums were quick to latch onto the prospect of working with Russia to gain access to Russian oil supplies. They said it is in America’s interest to do all we can to decrease U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern oil; and while a handful of forum participants suggested the U.S. should do more to develop domestic oil supplies, most participants agreed working with Russia to gain access to its natural resources would make the best sense. “If we could get them to develop gas and oil,” said a man in Norfolk, Massachusetts, “this would help us as a country. It would take off the burden that we have to rely on Iraq and those other [Middle Eastern] countries to get their oil.”

Such comments were clearly responsive to concerns about problems in oil-producing countries of the Middle East and that may be why calls for expanding markets and trade were consistently accompanied by voices of caution, if not outright reservations. Would the benefits of investing in the Russian economy outweigh the costs, participants seemed to be asking themselves, while at the same time voicing eagerness for strong economic and democratic partnerships. There was concern that significant U.S. investments could ultimately lead to no long-term payoff for the U.S.—or even for Russia—because of uncertainty about Russia’s economy and the instability of its laws and political system. A Kansas man put it frankly, “I don’t know how much we really get from Russia,” he said. “I’m kind of a skeptic. It’s like we’re sending a blank check to [Russia] and to whom is it going? What’s it for? What are we getting in return?”

What this participant called his “skepticism” appeared as a cautious undercurrent in these forums. Russia is “not going to change over from communism to [be] a democratic country like the United States,” said a man from Norfolk, Massachusetts. But this possibility, for some participants, was good reason to



provide economic support to Russia, as well as to invest in its future. If the quality of life in Russia were to become too dire, the conversation seemed to suggest, this could give rise to a new Communist-style dictator, and that would be a major setback to the U.S. as well as to Russia itself. The fear of reversion to a Soviet-style government haunted the forums like a phantom; it was not seriously discussed, but it lurked in peoples' minds.

The most cautious voices in the forums reminded other participants that the U.S. needs to take care of its own business at home before spending to improve the health of Russia's economy. But in the long run, forum participants seemed to believe that a vibrant Russian economy could be of the utmost importance to America. They assume that Russia will have economic and political setbacks over time, and that the U.S. and Russia will disagree with one another on a broad variety of issues. Yet neither bad times nor disagreements are adequate reasons for the U.S. not to follow a long-term strategy of working in partnership with Russia.

In the words of a Kansas forum participant with a typical sense of self-interest: "If Russia goes through bad economic times, I would like to see [the U.S.] work it out with them. We need to try to keep some kind of decent relationship with Russia and help them along the way. If other countries help Russia [more effectively], the United States is out."

Concern Three: Russia Should Do More to Get Its Own House in Order

A recurring question among participants in these forums was whether the Russian government is doing enough on its own, without foreign assistance, to address the hardships and difficulties facing the Russian people. There were two recurring themes in the forum conversations: participants seemed to be concerned about both the efficiency and the moral integrity of the Russian government, yet at times, their questions seemed to suggest the search for a deeper understanding of the moral culture of Russians, as a people, in this post-Soviet era. Americans typically overestimate the amount of economic and humanitarian assistance they give to other nations and are always less than confident that the recipients use the aid wisely. This attitude was reflected in forum participants' reflections about Russia. Forum participants felt Russia



should demonstrate that the well-being of its people is a priority. Some participants in the forums cited what they believed to be large investments by Russia in space and military programs; they wondered if the nation might better redirect such resources to improve the quality of life.

“If they can [develop] technology to get into space, if they can make a war-head, they can find a way to develop an economy. [Why should we] pay for a society that made a conscious decision to stifle their own peoples’ ingenuity?” asked a man in Nashville.

Forum participants also worried about corruption and its effect on the distribution of aid. Is this money really going to help people or is it going to line the pockets of Russian bureaucrats? Many felt that any kind of U.S. aid should be contingent on guarantees that the funds reach the people who need them.

“The corruption bothers me,” said a typical participant, a woman in Vacaville, California. “How do we know that nonprofits in Russia are not a front for terrorist groups or the Russian Mafia?”

Participants tended to think that humanitarian aid treats little more than the symptoms of Russia’s problems. “[Creating] jobs is better than giving handouts,” said an observer of the forums in Rapid City, South Dakota, summing up what seems to have been an insistence among participants there that Russia attend to the functioning of its own economy. Similarly, a person in Topeka, Kansas, reported that “giving aid with no strings attached is unpopular.” If the U.S. provides money in aid, said forum participants, Russia should show measurable results and demonstrate that the money is used well.

Ultimately, though, the people in these forums seemed to think that a primary condition for a long-term relationship with Russia is that the Russian people maintain their commitment to becoming an open society, with increasingly free markets, and a democratic government. In some forums, as participants considered hypothetical situations they thought might strain the Russia-U.S. relationship, they identified a return to Soviet-era practices as a viable reason for ending a Russia-U.S. partnership, even one that is promising. An election suspended, Western journalists expelled, some kinds of nationalization of foreign companies; these ideas were on peoples’ minds when they said—as they did in forum after forum—that Russia must do more to put into place the rule of law if economic and political partnership with the U.S. is to be genuinely sustainable.



“Investors are shaky in regard to Russia because of corruption,” said a participant in Portland, Oregon. “Business will come into Russia once the legal protections are in place,” said a man from Oxford, Ohio.

The implication, clearly and consistently, was that peoples’ concerns about economic development and political (democratic) stability in Russia are both linked and fundamental.

Concern Four: Competing Needs, a History of Mistrust

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Americans in virtually every forum expressed a recurring concern that the U.S. may be too arrogant in how it approaches world relations, including relations with Russia. An Oxford, Ohio, man said, “We expect everyone to look at relations the way we look at things.” And a Los Angeles man commented, “We do have a myopic view about our way of life [being best].” This strain of self-critical introspection about reasons for a dislike or mistrust of the U.S. has deepened in the time since September 11, 2001.

In these forums, participants’ concerns about possible U.S. arrogance uncovered deeper tensions. They were perplexed about how to fulfill the moral obligations that go along with being the lone superpower in the world, while addressing U.S. priorities (especially domestic ones) at the same time. The United States, as a rich and powerful country, has a moral obligation to help other countries and help ensure international stability, they said. Yet, they were aware—and sometimes have poignantly experienced—social ills in this country that need to be addressed, such as homelessness, poverty, ill health, children without parents, and racism. A woman in Nashville, offered another opinion: “I’m torn. Giving money to Russia—I guess that’s what we’re supposed to do. Helping others is what I’ve learned through my church. But we have hungry children and orphanages full of kids that aren’t being adopted.”

Even people who expressed mistrust of Russia felt it was important to maintain close ties with Russia. “The safety and security of America is important. . . . We need to be engaged with other countries,” said a Columbus, Ohio, man. Yet the existence of pressing domestic needs, for some, tended to dull the sense of obligation to other countries. And, although people generally supported humanitarian aid, they often lacked enthusiasm for it and sometimes expressed resentment regarding it.



“They’re not going to look at us as a fellow neighbor if we’re not doing something to help them stabilize their humanitarian problems,” a man in Overland Park, Kansas, pointed out.

“I hear a good deal of concern for the Russian people as fellow human beings,” observed a Vacaville, California, woman. “But we are struggling with just how to help improve our relationship with Russia, while not sacrificing our nation’s security.”

A man in Philadelphia, put the matter in pragmatic terms: “I think it is a good thing to [help] Russia because we know they [could] go to Iran or Iraq, and then on to North Korea. If we’re [with] Russia, then we don’t have to fear these other countries too much.”

These forums suggested that many Americans feel it is not yet possible for the U.S. and Russia to be genuine friends or even, simply good neighbors. There is too much history of mistrust and too great a sense of need and insecurity at home.

As a woman in Massachusetts observed, “If our attitudes are [mistrustful], their attitudes toward us must be the same way. Anybody 30 or older must have the same attitudes toward America.”

Despite this feeling, forum participants said the key to changing this mistrust to trust and to getting on the path toward genuine friendship is to build relationships between members of the U.S. and Russian publics.

“The key to all of these issues,” said an Oxford, Ohio, man, is “a two-way street of being equals, learning together, sharing together, listening together, and becoming friends.” A woman in Columbus, Ohio, said, “Nothing will ever take the place of people talking to each other.”

Generally, forum participants felt it is always better to work with as many nations as possible when dealing with issues like terrorism. But, working with many nations does not mean all nations, all of the time. Americans in these forums made it clear they are prepared for the U.S. to act unilaterally under certain circumstances, even if that might temporarily affect matters such as the strategic partnership with Russia. A man in Columbus, Ohio, was typical of many in his argument that “the U.S. needs to work with the United Nations, the European Union, and other such bodies rather than going alone”; but so, too, was the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, man who said, “If the United States



and Great Britain . . . feel that we should invade Iraq, why should we care what Russia thinks?"

Yet these Americans' commitment to maintaining good relations with Russia appeared strong. Participants who had traveled to Russia spoke well of the Russian people, and many other forum participants took note of Russia's cultural and historical accomplishments. The way the U.S. relates to Russia was important to them. Forum participants, in fact, recognized for Russia the same standards of self-interest as their own in matters of national security. In some forums—in which Americans were sorting through the problem of Chechnya, for example—participants consistently concluded that Russia must do what it thinks is in its own best interest. Many participants clearly shared the sentiments of a Los Angeles man who said, "We can't just walk into their country and tell them how to do it."

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Summary

There was significant agreement among NIF forum participants that the best way to approach Russia-U.S. relations is through building stronger economic and democratic partnerships. Yet, forum participants disagree about how much of a threat Russia might be to the U.S., how closely the U.S. government should work with the Russian government, and what levels of U.S. humanitarian aid are appropriate for Russia. Some forum participants concluded simply that common sense suggests it is good to have better relations with Russia. Still others expressed anger and hostility when discussing the idea of working with Russia, even though they concluded this may be the best thing for the U.S. to do.

Beneath the surface of apparent judgments about the best approach to Russia-U.S. relations, these Americans still appeared to have many questions. Vestiges of the Cold War linger: while Russia is not perceived as a foe, neither is it perceived as a great friend. People felt that the U.S. should work with Russia, but also be wary. Furthermore, they expressed concerns about Russia's economic and social capacity to become a vibrant and stable democracy. And people remained preoccupied with the security and domestic challenges they confront every day.

This left many people who participated in the NIF forums wondering. Is it really possible for Russia to become a genuine economic and political partner of the U.S.? Is it, in fact, wise for America to get too close to Russia, given



recent history and that nation's potential instability? Does it make sense to invest significant resources in Russia-U.S. relations when we have our own problems at home?

People did begin to identify the complex nuances of relating to a changing Russia in today's global economy and terrorist-ridden world. And they did not back away from the complexities. While American security and safety was consistently the primary filter for sorting through this issue, people did begin to imagine what things might be like from a Russian point of view. In the end, NIF forum deliberations suggest that American support for a strong Russia-U.S. relationship is broad but shallow. Many forum participants seem quite content to allow time to take its course and expressed little sense of urgency about accelerating a new relationship. Yet participants indicated that, as long as Russia continues to pursue an open and more democratic society, the U.S. should seek a strong relationship with Russia.

They could imagine that the transition from a communist to a democratic nation with free markets must be extraordinarily difficult. They could imagine that the conditions inherent in the transition period are a breeding ground for corruption, as well as other social problems. But this potential for setbacks paradoxically reinforced many forum participants' view that the U.S. and Russia should stay closely engaged.

Citizens in these forums seemed to have a clear framework suffused with ethical coherence and commonsense judgments about how they want to see the U.S. conduct itself in relations with Russia. They recognized that Russia has the potential once again to become a global power and felt the U.S. should make every effort to ensure democratic Russia becomes our ally, not our competitor. In the course of their deliberations, participants articulated a relatively coherent and interconnected set of norms they feel should inform and guide U.S. policy in developing our relationship with Russia:

- **Treat Russia with Respect**

America must treat Russia with respect, as a diplomatic and political equal. Demonstrating respect will give Russians the message that their country matters to the United States, that we take it seriously. "We want to interact with Russia without them losing their dignity and self-respect," emphasized a participant in Vacaville, California.



• Listen to the Russians

America should learn to listen to what Russians need and want, rather than act as if we know best what Russia needs to strengthen its economy, develop its democracy, and provide for its defense. This does not mean the United States should ignore its own interests. Rather, this suggests those interests are best served by policies that take into account, to the fullest degree possible, the interests of our partners, including Russia. Through careful listening, America can develop a more subtle and complex understanding of the limiting factors in the relationship between the two countries. Through listening, the United States and Russia may both come to understand the interdependency of our interests. We may also come to perceive the synergetic power that can result when our interests reinforce each other.

Listening and acting with respect, to be effective and have a long-term positive impact on the relationship requires a deep, multilayered, and sustained process of engagement with Russia.

• Engage the Russians

At the governmental level, engagement means “creating, sustaining, and utilizing permanent channels for informal as well as formal exchanges of views, or dialogue, about the entire range of issues pertaining to the relationship.” Topics of ongoing dialogue might range from our common interests in the struggle against terrorism to policies governing our economic relationship and security, processes for strengthening democratic practices and institutions, and Russian concerns about the impact of American culture on Russian society.

In the past 15 years, our governments have, in fact, made great progress with regard to engagement, but more needs to be done. Through the process of dialogue, our governments can gradually begin to develop common scenarios, first for addressing the sore points and weaknesses in the relationship, and then for putting to global good use the new power that arises from a constructive, sustainable relationship. The first scenarios need to address the residual fears and distrust that each country has of the other. They need to articulate the limits on the relationship and develop ground rules for respecting these. Later, scenarios can focus on identifying the synergies in the relationship and



strategies for mobilizing them to create a more stable, peaceful, and productive world.

Democracy as the Limiting Factor

Americans today interpret the actions of others through the filter of how those actions affect Americans' personal and national sense of security. Americans seem willing and able to accept that each country will act in its own interest, but they will judge those actions in light of whether they seem intended to harm Americans. It is in this context that people who participated in the forums supported Russia's democratic development. Americans, they said, feel compatible with an ally over the long-term only when it shares a commitment to basic democratic values and practices.

Danger signals will arise and the relationship will be jeopardized if Americans see disturbing evidence that Russian leaders, the government, and its people are turning away from the democratic political and economic practices that have made a closer relationship possible since the end of the Cold War. This will be a delicate judgment: Americans fully recognize, and seem prepared to accept, that Russian democracy must reflect Russian culture and may differ from the U.S. form of democracy. There are, however, certain principles of individual freedom and civil rights that Americans will use in judging whether the fundamentals of democracy exist. For Americans, Russian compliance with these norms sets the primary limitations on the relationship between the two countries.

Specific Policy Implications

Forum participants also identified specific kinds of policies they felt the United States should pursue with respect to Russia:

- **Act multilaterally**

People participating in the forums expressed strong support for the idea that, in defending and promoting its national interests, America should act multilaterally, in concert with friends and allies, including Russia. Underlying this point of view was the belief that superior power alone is insufficient to guarantee America's military security in today's complex world. Only if our



friends and allies feel secure can America's security be ensured over the long term. Deciding and acting together against threats is seen as the best way to make sure our friends' security is not compromised by our actions. The most important threats to our security today, such as terrorism or international crime, can only be addressed through cooperative action.

• **Help secure Russian nuclear weapons**

Citizens in forums worried not that Russia will attack America or its interests, but rather that Russian weapons of mass destruction may get into the hands of terrorists as a result of weak or insufficient control over these weapons. Few were aware of the Nunn-Lugar Act, which is designed to provide financing for reducing the numbers and strengthening the security of remaining Russian weapons of mass destruction. Most of those who spoke supported substantial expenditures and American involvement to achieve these ends. Further action in this area, including perhaps dismantling of deactivated warheads should find similar strong support among the deliberative public. Progress in these programs may result in continuing reductions in this residual distrust or fear of Russia.

• **Encourage Russia's economic and democratic development—but only as asked**

Americans who participated in the forums about the Russia-U.S. relationship saw a robust Russian market economy and a developing democratic polity as very much in America's interests. Indeed, a continuation of current positive trends was seen as essential to a long-term cooperative relationship. Yet, participants resisted the idea that the U.S. can or should tell Russians how to organize or run their country. Rather, they supported the idea of working with Russia to help it achieve its own developmental goals. They felt the U.S. should neither exploit Russia nor become excessively involved; we should not appear to be trying to deny Russians control over their own destiny.

In conclusion, citizens in forums insisted that America's relationship with Russia, as with all friends and allies, be based on the norms of respect, restraint, and engagement. They preferred that the U.S. act multilaterally and looked forward to Russia becoming a long-term ally. They felt policies that are respectful



and responsive to Russian needs and interests and that preserve both Russia's sense of identity and autonomy, while helping ensure America's security, were the best means to achieve these ends.

