

“The US-Russian Relationship & the Fight Against Terrorism”

Captain Robert Brannon (USN, National Security Fellow, Kennedy School of Government & Former Naval Attaché to US Ambassador James Collins in Moscow)

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Davis Center for Russian Studies, Harvard University

Summary by Melissa Griggs, Master’s candidate in Regional Studies: Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia

Associate Director Lisbeth L. Tarlow introduced Captain Robert Brannon by mentioning that he is a 30 year veteran of the US Navy, has spent three years at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and most recently served three years as the Naval Attaché for Ambassador James Collins at the US Embassy in Moscow, where he was unjustly accused of spying by the FSB. His current project as a National Security Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government focuses on the US-Russian relationship in a world of terrorism.

Despite Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinsky’s critical response to President Bush’s state of the union address (“The weak must shout to be heard whereas the strong can afford to whisper”) and Washington’s recent abdication of the ABM treaty, Brannon believes that since 9/11, the United States and Russia have been in a strong state of cooperation (scenario #4 in the chart below). Brannon offered a matrix of four possible ways to characterize the US-Russian relationship as it develops over the coming years. However, if the US continues with what Brannon called its “exaggerated yawn” approach to dealing with the Russians during a time of war, the relationship could become more volatile (scenario #3). In Brannon’s view, scenario planning, shown in the chart below, can be a very useful tool to “see what life is like on the other side”.

	I Nascent Nirvana	II Cold War Redux	III Powder Keg	IV Arm in Arm
Political	Strong president Democratic (A+) Open & transparent Western integrated	Strong president Autocratic Secretive & opaque Mistrustful of west	Strong president Dictatorial Duplicitous Anti-western	Strong President Democratic (A-) Open access Allied with west
Military	Weaker but capable Reforming Loyal, subordinate Intl Law compliant	Weaker, capable Unreformed Loyal but forceful Usually compliant	Weaker, capable Corrupt Disloyal Independent	Weaker, capable Reforming Loyal & reliable Cooperative
Economy	Stable and robust Market integrated Debts under control Positive investment	Weak but stable Single dimensional Debt & stagflation Limited investment	Weak and shaky Narrow spectrum Debt & inflation Capital flight	Stable but fragile Oil dependent Debt restructured Better investment
Technology	Inclusive access Anti-proliferation	Limited access Some proliferation	Very ltd access Full proliferation	Open access Controlled WMD
Environment	Close cooperation Steadily improving	Some cooperation Stable but unknown	No cooperation Deteriorating	Full cooperation Resource limited
Social	Open & supportive Human rights ++ Inclusive Freedom	Closed and restive Human rights -- Exclusive freedom	Widescale unrest Human rights -- No freedom	Suppressed fear Human rights -- Limited Freedom

In the current context, Brannon feels that we want to move from Scenario IV toward Scenario I. He believes that we should implement options involved with Scenario IV, including support in Chechnya, and push for Russian membership in NATO and the EU. As we move from war to peace, we need to evaluate the utility of the Central Asian bases, including such questions as how long we might need them and under what circumstances. Without a doubt, however, Brannon feels that Russia should be the lead negotiator on the base rights issue. In general, Brannon argued that we must take an inclusive approach in matters that concern Russia. "If I look at the world the way I want to see it in 2010, then we need to include Russia".

The question and answer period focused on Brannon's personal experiences as the Naval Attaché in Moscow under Ambassador Collins, with a focus on the Kursk tragedy on August 12, 2000. Brannon was very disappointed when the US was accused of being a possible culprit in the accident, though he expressed his belief that most Russian naval officers knew that the United States was not at fault. The accident was probably caused by the mishandling of a new type of torpedo on board. Brannon also expressed surprise at the Russian government's lack of attention to the accident when it first occurred.

Finally, Brannon showed an outrageous brief clip of the Russian news in which he was accused of being a spy. One always hears of these false accusations, Brannon said, "but it is different when it is you."