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# Program Brief

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## “What Is to Be Undone? A Russia Policy Agenda for the New Administration”

A Nixon Center Briefing

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Arguing that Russia’s post-Cold War transition has come to an end, a panel of The Nixon Center’s Board members and senior staff led by Center Advisory Council Chairman James Schlesinger called for a fundamental reorientation of U.S. policy toward Moscow to address America’s twenty-first century interests and priorities. Center President Dimitri K. Simes outlined key conclusions of the Center’s new report, *What Is to Be Undone? A Russia Policy Agenda for the New Administration*; Director of National Security Programs Peter W. Rodman described the report’s specific policy recommendations. Other Center scholars discussed particular aspects of the report.

### A Former Superpower No More

Schlesinger, a former Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy, argued that the “halo effect” of the U.S.-Soviet relationship still interferes with U.S. thinking about Russia and that Americans must move beyond viewing Russia as a former global superpower. Instead, Washington should treat Russia like a normal country. In this context, he also urged U.S.

officials to recognize finally that Russia has its own unique national interests that do not necessarily coincide with American interests. These realities demand profound changes in U.S. policy toward Russia, Schlesinger said.

### Moving Beyond the Transition Agenda

Dimitri Simes explained that in developing a new policy agenda for U.S.-Russian relations, the United States must begin with an understanding that Russia’s transition period has ended. As Russia has become more stable, he said, it is less likely to face civil war or other major internal problems. Also, according to Eugene Lawson, President of the U.S.-Russia Business Council and a Center Board member, Russia has more-or-less turned the corner economically. In this new environment, Simes continued, U.S. policies based primarily on transition-related issues like democratization, economic reform, and the security Russia’s nuclear arsenal should have less priority. Instead, the U.S. should concentrate on issues more central to American interests in today’s circumstances.

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In pursuing those new priorities, Simes said, the Bush Administration should be very firm with Moscow. However, he added, America must also be flexible on matters of less importance. “We cannot realistically continue to pressure Russians on all issues and then say that because we are benevolent, Russian should not be expected to be concerned about U.S. behavior,” Simes concluded.

### **The New Agenda**

Peter Rodman, a former Deputy National Security Advisor, outlined the new agenda for U.S.-Russian relations set out in the Center’s report. The recommendations included:

- Striving to ensure that Russia and China remain more interested in their relations with America than with one another;
- Discouraging proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other sensitive technologies from Russia and making clear that Russian assistance to Iran’s nuclear and missile programs would be a “deal-breaker” in the U.S.-Russian relationship;
- Seeking appropriate modifications to the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty if possible but deploying national missile defense, once workable technology is available, whether or not an agreement is reached;
- Basing decisions on NATO enlargement on what is best for the U.S. and NATO rather than the preferences of Russia or aspiring members;
- Limiting the U.S. role in the Caspian region to preventing Russian expansionism and ensuring a level playing field for American firms operating there while allowing markets to determine energy pipeline routes;
- Communicating to the Russian government that only through its policies will it be able to win the substantial foreign investment necessary for long-term economic growth;
- Assessing all bilateral assistance programs, with input from Moscow, with a view to phasing out most programs (and recognizing

that Russia should assume gradually increasing responsibility for the security of its nuclear materials); and,

- Establishing a broader dialogue with Russian political groups and Russian society while maintaining modest expectations about the likely results.

### **Russian Domestic Developments**

Center Director Paul Saunders argued that the U.S. should be less intrusive in Russian domestic affairs, especially as past involvement has been counterproductive and American influence is declining. However, some participants asked why the U.S. should not seek to assist Russian media mogul Vladimir Gusinsky, currently under pressure from the Kremlin to divest his holdings. Dimitri Simes answered that while the United States has an interest in the continuing freedom of Russian media, it does not necessarily have an interest in defending Gusinsky, whose business empire is financially unsound and has been widely accused of corruption. Moreover, he said, the U.S. must weigh its interests in internal Russian matters against other interests and may have to make difficult choices. At a minimum, he said, the United States cannot take steps perceived in Moscow as undermining the Russian regime without risking damage to cooperation on such important matters as NMD or proliferation, where the U.S. must be quite firm.

### **NMD, Arms Control, and Proliferation**

Discussion also focused on national missile defense and the related issues of the ABM Treaty, arms control, and proliferation concerns. James Schlesinger recommended a full review of America’s nuclear requirements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century before taking any decisions on further arms cuts, especially as U.S. declaratory policy currently envisions the use of nuclear weapons to deter not only nuclear but also chemical and biological attacks.

Questioned about Russian nuclear and missile assistance to Iran, the Center's Director of Regional Strategic Programs, Geoffrey Kemp, explained that the United States should pressure Moscow to cut off technical aid despite the fact that the nuclear assistance is permitted under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. He explained that many view Iran's nuclear program as a deliberate effort to develop a threshold nuclear capability and then to withdraw from the NPT.

David Lampton expressed concern about Russian technology transfers to China and particularly the presence of an indeterminate number of specialists from the Russian military complex in the country. However, he added, the Russian-Chinese relationship is based primarily on shared concerns about national missile defense and other U.S. policies rather than common interests. While an agreement to amend the ABM Treaty would help the U.S. to manage Chinese opposition, Schlesinger urged the audience to remember that Russia has much more to lose than the United States if no agreement is reached and America proceeds to deploy NMD unilaterally.

*This Program Brief was prepared by Center Director Paul Saunders with Assistant Director Martin Hrivnak and Center intern Scot Haislip.*

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