

## CALENDAR

JANUARY 2011

Revised date: MONDAY, JANUARY 10

**MONDAY, JANUARY 3 NOON DISCUSSION****"The U.S.-Russia Reset: Status and Prospects"**PAUL J. SAUNDERS, Executive Director, The Nixon Center, and Associate Publisher, *The National Interest***TUESDAY, JANUARY 18 NOON DISCUSSION****"Revisiting *Life and Fate* after 50 Years: Vasily Grossman and the 'Spirit of Freedom'"**

LEON ARON, Resident Scholar and Director of Russian Studies, American Enterprise Institute

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**THURSDAY, JANUARY 20 SEMINAR (3:30-5:30 PM)****"Civil Society in Kazakhstan: Scope and Prospects"**

CHARLES E. ZIEGLER, Professor and University Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Louisville

RUSLAN KAZKENOV, Managing Director, "Civic Peace" NGO, Astana, Kazakhstan

VADIM NI, Executive Director, civic foundation "Asian American Partnership," Almaty, Kazakhstan

**MONDAY, JANUARY 24 NOON DISCUSSION****"Kazan's New Spirit: Lasting Social Effects of Tartarstan's Sovereignty Movement"**

HELEN FALLER, Independent Scholar, Philadelphia

**MONDAY, JANUARY 31 NOON DISCUSSION****"An Alien in Moscow/An Alien in New York: The Cinema of Slava Tsukerman"**

PETER ROLLBERG, Professor of Slavic Languages, Film Studies and International Affairs, George Washington University

Unless otherwise noted, Kennan Institute meetings are held in the 6th floor Flom auditorium of the Woodrow Wilson Center. Some events are broadcast live on the Wilson Center website. Please see [www.wilsoncenter.org](http://www.wilsoncenter.org) for details or to view live and archived webcasts.

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## The Great Power Rivalry in Central Asia

Vol. XXVIII No. 5 2011

The political climate present in Central Asia today is a perfect example of power play dynamics in international relations. At a 1 November 2010 discussion, **Stephen Blank**, Research Professor of National Security Affairs, Strategic Studies Institute, United States Army War College, extrapolated on the “great game” of geopolitical strategy being played in that region, and the dynamics and interests that exist at the core of relationships between Central Asian states and larger world powers. Specifically, Blank outlined the geopolitical goals that the three major hegemonies—the United States, Russia, and China—have in the region. Additionally, he explained the Central Asian states’ core strategies in working with these major powers.

The United States has five major political goals in the Central Asian space according to Blank. The first goal concerns the U.S. war on terror: in order to achieve and maintain stability in the region, America must achieve victory against terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan. In conjunction with the war on terror, Blank argued that a “fundamental geopolitical” ambition of the United States—the nation’s second goal in Central Asia—is to prevent the emergence of regional empires, such as the rebirth of the Russian empire and the potential rise of a Chinese empire. If Central Asian states become weakened, neighboring powers such as Russia and China would have an opportunity to exercise power over the region and diminish the United States’ presence in geopolitical affairs.

Blank elucidated that the U.S.’s third interest in the region focuses on the prevention of state failure due to a rise in Islamic fundamentalism. Current states with political environments that underscore this particular threat include Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; these states’ population demographics, combined with their unstable political environments, could potentially cause major shifts in leadership toward Islamic fundamentalism if the current infrastructures collapse. If any Central Asian state fails, Blank argued, the only opponent to the current types of governance in the region is Islamic fundamentalism.

The fourth major geopolitical interest that the United States has in the region concerns its economic goals. The U.S., according to Blank, wishes to maintain “unfettered market access” for the West to the energy resources of the region. Particularly, the United States wants to preserve its right to use Central Asian sources of energy while bypassing both Iran and the Russian Federation, thereby retaining leverage over these competitor countries in Central Asia. Finally, Blank explained that although the United States does care about democratization in Central Asia, when that objective comes into conflict with the power’s other aims in the region, the U.S. administration seems to “fall quiet” in working toward this goal.

As both a world power and a neighbor to Central Asia, the Russian Federation’s geopolitical interests in the region reflect the country’s unique posi-

tion in regional international relations. Blank argued that Russia has three major objectives in playing the political “great game” in Central Asia. Russia and the United States have a shared interest in Russia’s first goal in the region, namely the need to maintain state stability through the elimination of terrorism. As a neighboring country of great geographical size, Russia’s focus on state stability is directly related to concern for the safety of its own borders.

The Russian Federation’s second objective in Central Asia concerns ensuring that the status quo in the region remains intact. The United States and Russia agree that the only feasible alternative form of government in the regional states would be Islamic fundamentalism, which could potentially compromise the authority of the Russian Federation as a regional power. However, the reasoning underlying Russia’s second aim in Central Asia differs from that of the United States; while the U.S. would support democratization in the region, Russian geopolitical interests especially rely on maintaining the authoritarian governmental structures that currently exist in Central Asian states.

Russia’s third ambition, Blank explained, is to maintain the “neocolonial status quo” in the region—that is, by maintaining the existing authoritarian governmental systems, Central Asian states’ infrastructures are a “direct correlate of the nature of the regime” in today’s Russia. This power dynamic allows the Russian Federation to exercise notable political leverage over its smaller neighbors, especially in terms of regulating trade and commerce in and out of the region. As Russia has established itself as a major energy supplier to the West and the Far East, the demand for the country’s resources currently outpaces the actual supply. By maintaining the neocolonial status quo in Central Asia, Blank concluded, the Russian government retains a dominant position in the regional energy market.

Finally, Blank outlined China’s main geopolitical interests in the Central Asian space. Preservation of China’s state integrity is the foremost concern, as the Chinese government does not want “crosspollination of influence” between its country and Central Asian states. Second, the Chinese share the desire to ensure regional stability with the U.S. and Russia, as they seek to maintain a “zone of stability and peace” around China. In addition, the Chinese share the aforementioned security concern over the potential introduction of Islamic fundamentalism to Central Asia political infrastructures. At the same time, Blank argued that China wants to increase its political and economic leverage over the region. If China achieves this objective, it would be able to reach its fifth goal: gradually supplanting the Russian Federation as the main commercial presence in Central Asia. Blank concluded that “the great game [in Central Asia] is not going to go away... in fact, I think it’s going to intensify.”

By Amy Shannon Liedy



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Book Discussion: *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*

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About 17 million noncombatants were killed by the Nazi and Soviet regimes between 1933 and 1945, said **Timothy Snyder**, Professor of History, Yale University at a 10 November 2010 lecture at the Kennan Institute. "The striking thing I noticed as a historian of Eastern Europe is that 14 million of that group died in a relatively confined bit of territory – between Berlin and Moscow, and between the Baltic and Black Sea; the lands that I call the Bloodlands." Snyder said that in his book, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, he tried to explain an event that had not been explained before.

One reason the history of this region and this period had not yet been written is that we are now in a moment in time when it could be written, Snyder explained. It has been twenty years since the revolutions of 1989, and the archives of East Europe, as well as the Soviet archives, are vital to understanding not only the countries of the region, but Nazi Germany as well: "All of the major sites where the Germans killed in significant numbers fell behind the iron curtain."

Shortcomings in the three major branches of historiography covering this region and period (East European, Soviet, and Holocaust) also help explain why this story has not yet been told in full. Historians who study East Europe usually focus on one country. Historians of the Soviet era have made great progress in understanding the causes and consequences of episodes such as collectivization and the Great Terror, including how many died. However, Snyder stressed, these historians have not adequately recognized that Soviet citizens killed under Stalin were disproportionately located in the same territory Nazi Germany invaded in WWII. Holocaust history is arguably the best developed of the three. Yet this historiography is almost always based on German sources, which is very useful for understanding decision-making in Berlin, but less useful for understanding the lands and people where the Holocaust took place.

Snyder emphasized in his book the difference between concentration camps and death facilities, whether Nazi or Soviet. "My figure of 14 million killed does not even include people who died in camps," stressed Snyder. Death facilities, "whether a Soviet shooting pit or Treblinka," were places where people were deliberately starved, shot, or gassed. Snyder advocated the notion of "plural causality," that one cannot reduce events to any one cause: "One cannot understand a national tragedy only in national terms," he said.

Snyder described several episodes detailed within the book. He noted that documents now show that Stalin made deliberate decisions in 1932 that he knew would lead to the deaths of more than 3 million Ukrainians

because of their nationality. The Great Terror, often thought of in terms of show trials of party members, actually fell hardest on the *kulak* peasants during collectivization. The second largest group of victims of the Terror was ethnic minorities. About 250 thousand minorities were killed on the basis of their ethnicity, including approximately 110 thousand Poles shot for being spies for Poland. During their joint occupation of Poland, the Nazi and Soviet regimes each killed about 100 thousand civilians using demographic profiling so similar that they often targeted the same family.

The bloodiest part of the history, Snyder continued, commenced in 1941 with the German invasion. German war planning was much worse than the reality of the invasion, Snyder reported. In addition to cleansing Europe of Jews, Germany imagined they would starve 30 million Soviets to death in the first year of the war, then begin a process of colonization, called Generalplan Ost, at the end of the war in which tens of millions more people would be assimilated, enslaved, or killed.

The first major killing action in the Soviet Union by the Germans was the execution and planned starvation of over 3 million Soviet prisoners of war. Snyder described the history of the Holocaust in the Bloodlands in three parts: the shooting campaign of communities in Ukraine; the combined shooting and anti-partisan campaign in Belarus; and the death factories, including Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Auschwitz, where about 1 in 6 of all Jewish victims died, started off as a camp and became a killing facility in the late years of the war; it operated longer than the others because it was so far west.

Snyder concluded that to write the history of such a complicated and tragic period, it is necessary to come to terms with making comparisons: "If we understand these crimes better, we will then have a more solid basis to make comparisons... People have a clear conception of who was worse and who did what, and that prevents them from seeing some of the factual material." At the same time, one has to get over the taboo that you can't compare Hitler and Stalin, or Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Snyder observed that people in the Bloodlands had to decide whether to resist the regimes, to collaborate, or do neither—they compared the two regimes all the time. "And if we extract comparison in the sense of experience of both regimes, we are denuding historical reality of something that is very important. In this basic sense, to try to impose a taboo on comparison is to falsify the lives of the people who died in this region."

By F Joseph Dresen

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