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## NEWPORT PAPERS

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A Series of Point Papers  
from the Naval War College and the  
Navy Warfare Development Command  
For Senior Leadership  
In Response to Critical Issues

Strategy / CONOPS / Doctrine / Decision

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United States Naval War College  
Navy Warfare Development Command  
Newport, Rhode Island

## Contents

### Newport Papers

<u>No.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Points of Contact</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Page</u>
<b><u>Strategy and Policy</u></b>				
<a href="#">01</a>	Strategy and Policy Considerations: The Terror War	Prof. George Baer Prof. Andrew Ross CAPT Robert McCabe, USN	24 Sept 01	1
<a href="#">02</a>	U.S. War Objectives	Prof. Tom Mahnken	24 Oct 01	4
<a href="#">03</a>	U.S. War Objectives: How Narrow or Broad?	Prof. Andrew Ross	25 Oct 01	7
<a href="#">04</a>	U.S. War Objectives: Near, Medium, and Long Term	Prof. Peter Dombrowski	12 Nov 01	10
<a href="#">05</a>	Terror War: Is a Formal "Declaration of War" Needed?	Prof. Nick Rostow COL Fred Borch, USA	12 Oct 01	14
<a href="#">06</a>	What Is The Kind Of War Upon Which We Are Embarking?	Prof. Bill Fuller Prof. Mac Owens	22 Oct 01	16
<a href="#">07</a>	The Terror War: Perspectives on Coalition Issues	CDR Stephen Kenny, RN Prof. Christopher Bell Prof. Bruce Elleman	28 Nov 01	20
<a href="#">08</a>	Enemy Objectives	Prof. Ahmed Hashim	11 Dec 01	23
<a href="#">09</a>	The Strategy of Usama bin Laden and <i>Al Qaeda</i> Annex A: The Worldview and Motivations of Usama bin Laden	Prof. Ahmed Hashim	19 Dec 01	26 31
<a href="#">10</a>	Potential Adversaries in the Terror War: Individuals, Groups, and States	Prof. Ahmed Hashim Prof. Geoffrey Wawro	1 Feb 02	36
<a href="#">11</a>	Russia and the Terror War	Prof. Lyle Goldstein	11 Dec 01	42

<a href="#"><u>12</u></a>	China and the Terror War	Prof. Jonathan Pollack Prof. Bruce Elleman Prof. Lyle Goldstein	4 Jan 02	46
<a href="#"><u>13</u></a>	Japan and the Terror War	Prof. Bruce Elleman	4 Jan 02	50
<a href="#"><u>14</u></a>	The Terror War: Alternative Futures	Prof. Peter Dombrowski	14 Feb 02	54
<a href="#"><u>15</u></a>	Pakistani Militant Groups: Policy Challenges and Solutions	Mr. Owen Sirrs	20 Feb 02	58
<a href="#"><u>16</u></a>	The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Terror War	Prof. Geoffrey Wawro	14 Mar 02	62
<a href="#"><u>17</u></a>	Setting Our Course in the Terror War: Symposium Executive Summary	Prof. Lawrence Modisett	2 Apr 02	66
<a href="#"><u>18</u></a>	Central Asia and the Terror War	Prof. Lyle Goldstein	1 May 02	75
<a href="#"><u>19</u></a>	NATO and the Global War on Terror	Prof. Catherine McArdle Kelleher	21 May 02	79
<a href="#"><u>20</u></a>	Grand Strategy for the Terror War	Prof. Mac Owens	22 May 02	84
<b><u>Operational Concepts</u></b>				
<a href="#"><u>21</u></a>	Maritime Homeland Security: Concept of Operations	CAPT Michael Critz, USN	25 Oct 01	88
<a href="#"><u>22</u></a>	Homeland Security: Maritime Command and Control	Prof. John Ballard, USN CAPT Michael Critz, USN	23 Oct 01	92
<a href="#"><u>23</u></a>	Maritime Homeland Command and Control: Teaching an Old Dog New Tricks	LCDR D. Scott Bauby, USCG	23 May 02	96
<a href="#"><u>24</u></a>	Employing Aerial Coercion to Combat Terrorism: Recommendations for the Theater CINC	MAJ Mark T. Damiano, USAF	23 May 02	102
<a href="#"><u>25</u></a>	Terrorist Application of Operational Art	LCDR Marc E. Tranchemontagne, USN	23 May 02	111

### *National Security Decisions*

<a href="#"><u>61</u></a>	Navy Decision Making in the Terror War: "Home Games" vs. "Away Games"	Prof. Jim Giblin	26 Oct 01	124
<a href="#"><u>62</u></a>	Justice as a U.S. War Aim: The Legal Implications	COL Fred Borch, USA	14 Nov 01	131
<a href="#"><u>63</u></a>	The Use of Force in the War on Terror: A Legal Perspective	COL Fred Borch, USA	05 Dec 01	134
<a href="#"><u>64</u></a>	U.S. Naval Reserve: The Navy's Team for "Home Games"	Prof. Jim Giblin	16 Dec 01	136
<a href="#"><u>65</u></a>	How Are We Doing? Assessing Progress in the War on Terrorism.	Prof. Tom Mahnken	16 Dec 01	140
<a href="#"><u>66</u></a>	Military Support to Civil Authorities: "Navy Roles and Responsibilities in Domestic Support Operations"	CAPT Steve Morris, SC, USN	18 Dec 01	144
<a href="#"><u>67</u></a>	Carrier Deployments: One Option (Classified paper, view on: <a href="http://www.nwdc.navy.smil.mil">www.nwdc.navy.smil.mil</a> )	Prof. Jim Giblin	17 Dec 01	NA
<a href="#"><u>68</u></a>	Economic Dimensions of the Terror War	Prof. Peter Dombrowski	1 May 02	152
<a href="#"><u>69</u></a>	Technological Mobilization for the Terror War	Prof. William Martel	21 May 02	157
<a href="#"><u>70</u></a>	Pakistani Madrassahs and the Spread of Militant Radicalism	Mr. Owen Sirrs	22 May 02	162
<a href="#"><u>71</u></a>	How Now Shall We Fight? The Relevance of the Law of Armed Conflict to the United States and Its Coalition Members in Light of the Terrorist Attacks of 11 September 2001	LCDR Tony F. DeAlicante, JAGC, USN	23 May 02	165



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**Newport Paper: 11**

**RUSSIA AND THE TERROR WAR**

**Purpose:** To explore Russia's contribution to the war against terrorism.

**Background:** President Vladimir Putin has vigorously supported the U.S. war on terrorism. Indeed, during his November trip to the U.S., he reportedly told Bush: "The mission [in Afghanistan] must be completed ... It [is] more important than ever ... that the U.S. stay the course and finish the job of rooting out terrorism from Afghan soil." Given prior tensions on issues ranging from Chechnya to Kosovo to missile defense, Putin's offer of broad cooperation is somewhat surprising. Moreover, the Russian President is going against strong currents in Russian military and public opinion that favor a position of neutrality.

**Discussion:** It is important to determine what capabilities Russia brings to the war on terror, the durability of Russian cooperation, Russian objectives, and the price of Russia's support in the war.

***What capabilities is Russia providing?*** Russia has provided support in three areas: diplomatic, intelligence, and military.

1. *Diplomatic.* The sensitivities of deploying U.S. forces into Pakistan and the need for staging areas in ex-Soviet territory north of Afghanistan elevated the importance of Russian cooperation in the war. Moscow has used its substantial influence in Central Asia to forge a consensus behind supporting U.S. efforts in the region. This influence derives primarily from economic and security dependence, but also from cultural, historical, and linguistic ties. While the U.S. should not underestimate the capacity of Central Asian states to act independently, having Moscow's support, on balance, increases the pace of decision and action in Central Asia. Of all the Central Asian states, none are more closely aligned with Moscow than Tajikistan. When Kabul suddenly fell to the Northern Alliance, the U.S. was on the verge of deploying significant numbers of aircraft to Tajikistan. Moscow expects gratitude for its role in making that possible. Russian air corridors have also likely played an important role in the U.S. buildup. Moscow's diplomatic role has also included serving as a go-between with Iran, as the U.S. undertakes military action in close proximity to this long-time adversary. Finally, Russia's involvement provides the political advantage of having an anti-terrorism coalition that is truly global, and not simply composed of traditional western allies.
2. *Intelligence.* Despite the Soviet Union's defeat in Afghanistan during the 1980s, Russia has a long tradition of efficient intelligence collection in Central Asia.

Indeed, the Russian secret services have been strong in precisely the domain where U.S. intelligence has long been criticized: human intelligence. Contacts derived from collaboration with Russian intelligence seem to have been important to structuring effective relations with the Northern Alliance, which had received Russian assistance for several years. Indeed, Russian weapons (and military training) appear to have been a crucial element in the recent battlefield successes of the Northern Alliance. That Russia's intelligence agencies have monitored and targeted terrorist groups in Afghanistan becomes evident when it is considered that the Kremlin debated whether or not to conduct air strikes in May 2001 in response to Taliban provocations against various Central Asian states. Russian intelligence is apparently sharing vital information on the disposition and layout of various cave complexes in Afghanistan. Intelligence coordination could also prove important to the wider war on terror by increasing U.S. abilities to interdict the financial networks of terrorist groups.

3. *Military.* In Tajikistan, Russia fields the 8,000-man 201<sup>st</sup> Motor Rifle Division, in addition to 11,000 border guards, many of whom are Tajiks. These forces have shored up Tajikistan's government against Islamic militants over the last decade. If the U.S. makes significant use of airfields in Tajikistan, they will also provide an important line of defense, insulating the American bases from the still fluid and unstable situation in Afghanistan. Russian forces in Tajikistan have also reportedly been placed on alert to undertake search and rescue operations, if called upon by U.S. forces. During the battle for Kunduz, Russian troops played an important deterrent role, ensuring that the trapped Taliban (foreign) elements did not attempt an otherwise feasible breakout into southern Tajikistan.

***Is Russian support for the war on terror sustainable over the long-term?*** Despite domestic unease concerning Putin's pro-American orientation, his unchallenged position in Russian politics suggests that Russia's support for the U.S. in the war on terror is relatively stable. Putin is likely to be Russia's President until at least 2008. If the U.S. widens the war on terror to pursue other state sponsors, Putin is most likely to object if Russian economic interests are threatened. For example, Russia is owed billions by Iraq and sees a potentially lucrative market there, as in Iran. However, if Putin is convinced that Russia will benefit more from following the U.S., he will pursue that course. Without any *quid pro quo*, there could be some backsliding to the obstructionist position vis-à-vis the United States of the mid-1990s.

***Russia's Strategic Objectives and the Price of Its Cooperation*** The salience of the Chechen issue in Russian domestic politics and its evident significance for Putin personally—he rose to prominence in Russian politics on this issue—suggest that it is one of the most important determinants of Russia's policy toward the war on terrorism. Moscow is seeking a way to legitimize, both at home and abroad, its war in Chechnya. This is evident in Moscow's continuous efforts since 11 September to tie those attacks to groups active in Chechnya. Some of these alleged links appear to be credible. That senior U.S. officials are conscious of the importance which the Kremlin attaches to this issue is suggested by a number of statements taking a more lenient view of Russian

actions in Chechnya. Here, the U.S. must be vigilant: first, that Russia does not use this reprieve from criticism to assert greater control over the so-called "near abroad," for example, in Georgia; and second, that the issue does not add to the perception that the war on terror is a war on Islam.

The wrenching economic transition that Russia has endured over the last decade ensures that Moscow places economic gains near the top of its wish list. World Trade Organization membership is one Russian priority that U.S. leaders have recognized and accelerated. Repeal of the dated Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions is another. Debt rescheduling and incentives for U.S. corporations to invest in Russia, perhaps as part of a future aid package, are also on Russia's economic wish list. Russia expects as well to benefit from its emerging role as a valuable alternative to Persian Gulf oil supplies. Russia is the world's second largest exporter of oil, and its disinclination to cooperate with OPEC favors U.S. interests. Indeed, heavy investment in infrastructure may boost Russian exports by 20 percent over the next four years. A Russia that is well integrated into global trade is more likely to cooperate in setting a fair price for oil.

Putin's alignment with the anti-terrorism coalition also must be viewed in the context of his strategy to reassert Russian influence, both in Central Asia and in Europe. In Central Asia, Moscow seeks to control and limit Western influence by interposing itself as a broker. Russian officials have been engaged in a vigorous shuttle diplomacy between the various capitals, attempting to "synchronize watches," with varying degrees of success. American leaders face potentially difficult trade-offs between the diverging interests of these coalition partners: Moscow would prefer guarantees that the U.S. military presence be limited and temporary, while Uzbekistan, America's closest Central Asian partner, has requested longer term guarantees of security.

Tensions between Uzbekistan and Russia could plausibly favor U.S. interests. After all, Uzbekistan pulled out of the Moscow-dominated CIS security organization in 1999 and has pursued close contacts with NATO, as an active member of the Partnership for Peace program. Uzbek-Russian tensions, however, should not be exaggerated. In fact, the root of these tensions appears to have been mismanagement and drift under Yeltsin. One of Putin's first foreign policy successes in 1999-2000 was reaffirming good relations with Uzbekistan. Indeed, the Uzbek and Russian presidents have been in close contact concerning the war in Afghanistan. Moreover, any attempt to play the "Uzbek card" risks arousing genuine Russian fears about a new "Great Game" competition among the great powers in Central Asia. As it gauges American intentions, Moscow will be keenly aware of the extent to which the U.S. is willing to coordinate military and economic initiatives in the region. A potential point of unity with the Russians concerning the geopolitics of the region is a joint interest in limiting Chinese influence, which has risen steadily during the 1990s.

Russia is, of course, attempting to influence the political end game in Afghanistan. Russian officials were the first foreign representatives to arrive after the Taliban were ousted from Kabul. However, these representatives appear to be acting in conformity with an apparent agreement reached at the Crawford summit. While Russia has backed



leaders of the Northern Alliance, the Kremlin seems to appreciate the need for a diverse post-Taliban government. Former Afghan King Zahir Shah visited Moscow as recently as June 2001.

Putin's October 2001 tour of Western Europe included a number of unprecedented events, including a speech before the German *Bundestag* and a meeting with NATO's Secretary General in Brussels. This outreach to Europe could be interpreted cynically as part of a campaign to foster opposition to the U.S. deployment of missile defenses. But there is no evidence that Putin has tried to link cooperation in the terror war to concessions on missile defense. At Crawford, both presidents agreed not to allow the missile defense issue to inhibit cooperation in other spheres. Rather, it appears that Putin is seeking a qualitative transformation in Russia's relationship with the West. Consistent with such a transformation, Moscow has secured Washington's support for negotiating with NATO to form a new and invigorated Russia/North Atlantic Council. The new forum would take the lead in structuring cooperation in the fields of counterterrorism, WMD proliferation, and peacekeeping. A genuine restructuring of East-West security arrangements will facilitate Russian cooperation in the continuing war on terror.

**Recommendation/Action:** As U.S. policymakers move to take advantage of the capabilities that Russia brings to the war on terror, they must be aware of Russia's objectives and the price to be paid for Russian cooperation. If the focus of the war effort shifts away from Central Asia, Russia's cooperation may become somewhat less important. But as long as the U.S. seeks to project power into Central Asia, Russian support will remain vital.