

## State's Talbott Address on Russia at Harvard University

*October 01, 1999*

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*(Crisis in North Caucasus "moment of truth" for Russia, Talbott says)*

The crisis in the North Caucasus is "a moment of truth for the new Russian state, a test of its ability to overcome the burdensome legacy of the old Russian state," Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said October 1 at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Talbott termed "an ominous development" the recent round-up, detention and deportation of 10,000 people of darker complexion in the wake of terrorist bombings and said that Russia must show "restraint and wisdom" in coming days and weeks.

"That means taking action against real terrorists," he continued, "but not using indiscriminate force that endangers innocents or resuming the disastrous 1994-96 war in Chechnya. It means opening a political dialogue with the more pragmatic leaders in the North Caucasus, not antagonizing them or their populations. It means stepping up measures to prevent further bombings, but being careful not to make people from the Caucasus second-class citizens, or in any other way trample on hard-won human rights or civil liberties. It means working cooperatively with neighboring states to deal effectively with the underlying economic and security problems of the Caucasus, but not pressuring those neighbors in ways that will shake their fragile sense of their own stability and independence."

While Russia "must of course" protect its own territorial integrity, Talbott said, Russia must also "protect its nascent democracy and civil society" if it is going to ensure its ability to thrive.

Talbott began his remarks by examining the thesis that Russia had gone from being a strong state to a weak state with many apparent deficiencies. He said Russia may be undergoing "a revolution in the concept of statehood itself" -- a revolution from which Russia may regain its strength in ways that do not threaten others. "Russia has alternative futures," he added, going on to describe how the "burden of history" provides an important part of the context for understanding Russia's troublesome present.

While the birth of Russia as a post-Soviet post-Communist state has been "a rocky, messy, suspenseful, even dangerous process," Talbott said, "it has included -- and continues to include -- trends that are positive and promising, and that are all the more noteworthy given how much departure they represent from the Russian and Soviet past."

The most positive developments, according to Talbott, have been Russia's recognition of the old inter-Republic Soviet borders as the new international ones, its co-chairmanship of the

OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] mediating effort in Nagorno-Karabakh and its cooperation in the Balkans in "the diplomacy of peacemaking" and the "military implementation of the peacekeeping."

"Taken together, and if sustained over time," Talbott said, "these developments could signal a sea change: Russia may be beginning to break its centuries-old habit of presumptively and preemptively treating others as enemies."

Talbott also pointed to several hopeful signs in Russian society -- the 65,000 non-governmental organizations (NGO's), the 900,000 small businesses, the thousands of independent newspapers and hundreds of independent TV channels, as well as the preoccupation of Russians with their upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

Talbott said the outlines of U.S. policy towards Russia were provided by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in a speech at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington on September 16: "first, our effort to advance our security interests, through arms control, through cooperative threat reduction, through integrating Russia into international institutions; second, our effort to help Russia transform its own political, economic and social institutions."

More specifically, Talbott said, the United States will persist in its "long-standing attempt to persuade the Russian government to adopt an effective money-laundering bill."

In the area of security, he said the United States will ask Russia "to join us in cooperative ballistic missile defense."

To help Russia with its transformation, Talbott said, "we're working with Congress to get more funding for technical assistance programs that will strengthen many of those NGO's, start-up political parties, independent media outlets and small businesses."

Americans have "a profound stake" in the choices Russia makes for itself now, according to Talbott, an interest in that country "acquiring and consolidating the right kind of strength" so it can use its immense natural and human resources to compete and prosper in the global economy. "The key is for Russia to learn the right lessons from its chilly plunge into globalization: that means not going back into a self-isolated, autarkic shell. Instead of trying to insulate itself from the ebb and flow of capital in free markets, it should redouble its determination to make itself safe and attractive to long-term investment by Russians and foreigners alike."

Following is the text of Talbott's remarks, as prepared for delivery:

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**THE RUSSIAN STATE: BURDENSOME PAST, TROUBLESOME PRESENT, ALTERNATIVE FUTURES ADDRESS BY U.S. DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE STROBE TALBOTT**

*October 1, 1999*

The John F. Kennedy School of Government  
Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

*(As prepared for delivery)*

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Thank you, Graham (Allison) -- not just for welcoming me here today but also for being a good friend over the years and a good colleague in '93 and '94, when we logged thousands of miles together on small airplanes in far-off corners of Eurasia. Thanks, also, to several other pals from the first Administration -- John Deutch, Joe Nye and Ash Carter -- for being here today.

Graham has suggested that we talk about the subject on which he and I, along with John, Joe and Ash, spent so much of our time when we were in government together: Russia, what's going on there and what we should do about it. Let me put before you a thesis as a starting point for discussion.

In several fairly obvious respects, Russia has gone from being a strong state to a weak state. It's been a problem for us in both its past strength and its current weakness. Throughout the cold war, when Russia was the core of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, it posed a threat to us because of its size; its military might; its habit of intimidating and suppressing others; its doctrinal and geopolitical drive to extend its power on a global scale; its worldwide network of clients, proxies and assorted "little brothers"; its hostility to American interests and values.

That was the Russia whose strength we confronted and contained.

Now it's the weakness of the Russian state that is most apparent. Now when we list Russia's troublesome attributes, they're deficiencies -- things Russia either can't do or can't do very well: passing and enforcing effective laws; controlling crime; providing basic health care; paying soldiers, workers and pensioners; collecting taxes; stabilizing its currency; disciplining its central bank; paying its debts, keeping money in the country while maintaining open markets; and combating terrorism while protecting the rights of all citizens.

On top of all that, as we're reminded by the headlines today, the Russian armed forces have their hands full in the Caucasus coping with Chechen-based militants who have been waging a hit-and-run war against the central government.

To most Russians, that litany of woes is demoralizing and infuriating. Many are angry not only at their own government for failing them but at ours as well. They also know that when American commentators talk about Russia, they often use words like anarchy, basket case, gangster state, even failed state.

That caricature plays badly back in Russia, adding insult to injury. Moreover, it's not the whole picture. In fact, it misses what may be the Big Picture. It's true that in real and pertinent ways, Russia has, over the last decade, gone from strength to weakness. But in other, less obvious ways, Russia has begun a transformation that may, over time, take it in just the opposite direction. It's possible -- not certain, but possible -- that we may look back on the '90s as a long-overdue revolution in the very nature of the Russian state and, more than that, a revolution in the Russian concept of statehood itself. If that revolution succeeds, Russia may, in the future, not only regain its strength but it may define that strength in ways that will not threaten us -- in ways that will permit us to engage, rather than contain, Russia. In short, that huge and complex country may yet achieve the rather modest and simple-sounding hope that many of its citizens articulate when they say, as they often do, "We want to live in a normal, modern country."

So Russia has alternative futures. Its people will make their own decisions about which of those futures to embrace. The process will take time, and it will, as we've been reminded recently, be marked by uncertainties and setbacks, all the more so because of the burden of history.

That history is an important part of the context for understanding the choices that Russia has made these past ten years and those that it will be making in the months, years and decades ahead.

I'll start with what might be called, in quotation marks, Russian "foreign policy" at the end of the first millennium. Vulnerability to foreign invasions set the mold in several ways, it largely cut Russia off from Europe; it spurred the grand princes of Moscow to develop a centralized, autocratic state; it predisposed them and their czarist successors to follow the principle that the best defense is a good offense. Starting in the mid-fifteen hundreds, Russia spread out across the map at a scope and a pace that Professor Pipes has calculated to be equivalent to the size of the Netherlands every year for a century and a half. Conquering, absorbing and then guarding that much territory required a massive standing army, which in turn required heavy, often confiscatory taxation, which in turn required a state powerful enough -- and arbitrary enough in its use of that power -- to crush resistance from anyone at any level and at any corner of the realm, from serfs to nobles, from ethnic Russians to the proud, diverse peoples of the North Caucasus, like the Chechens, whom Nicholas I never brought completely to heel in the 19th century.

It was an adage of the noted historian Vasiliy Klyuchevsky that "as the state swelled, the people shrunk." The state became a world-class empire, but one where what we now think of as civil society was stunted, authority arbitrary and corruption rampant.

So there was an 800-year pedigree to two key features of Soviet statehood: first, an almost exclusive identification of the power of the state with the means to exert force; and second, a tendency of the state to define its own security at the expense of everyone else's -- that is, to pursue security unilaterally rather than collectively or cooperatively.

Now, statehood is not just about real estate; it's also about state of mind; it's about ideology -- that is, ideas as the underpinning of the state's sense of itself and of society's sense of the state. In Russia's formative centuries, geography, history and religion all came together to reinforce a deep ambivalence about the West and a tendency to think of Russia as the bearer of a superior but embattled alternative to Western ways. Russia's adoption of the Orthodox faith from Byzantium about 1,000 years ago brought Russia into Christian Europe; but it also set Russia

apart from what was then the Roman Catholic West and induced Russia to think of itself as the Third Rome, the keeper of a separate and purer flame. Peter the Great was interested not so much in joining the West (or, to use our terminology today, in integrating with it) as he was in establishing a very Russian way of meeting the challenge of the West. He sought to do so by selectively adopting Western means of making war and industrializing the economy, without diluting the power of the state and its leader.

Professor Pipes has stressed Russia's all-pervasive patrimonialism: the ruler owns everything. This feature of Russian statehood carried directly over to the USSR in two respects: economics and law -- or, more to the point anti-economics and official lawlessness (what the Russians call *proizvol*), which often meant the reign of terror.

The Soviet Union's status as a superpower derived primarily from its regime's capacity to use force against its own people and the rest of the world. But it was both militarily muscle-bound and economically anemic: its arsenal of 53,000 tanks, 5,000 combat aircraft, 200 combat divisions and 10,000 intercontinental range nuclear warheads consumed 40 percent or more of GDP.

Even the signature "successes" of the Soviet state -- in science, engineering and education -- were byproducts of the drive to attain military advantage. As such, they backfired, since many of those scientists, engineers and *intelligenti* increasingly balked at the diktats of the party-state and, of course, its ideology. In the end, it was this critical mass of educated citizenry that spawned, then backed the reform-from-above of Mikhail Gorbachev. That, in turn, led to the revolution-from-above of Boris Yeltsin and the end of Soviet Communism.

That brings us to the birth of Russia as a post-Soviet Post-Communist state. It's been a rocky, messy, suspenseful, even dangerous process. But it has included -- and continues to include -- trends that are positive and promising, and that are all the more noteworthy given how much departure they represent from the Russian and Soviet past.

First, there's the fairly fundamental issue of how the state in question wants to be known to geographers -- how it appears on the map: statehood as real estate. At the time of the breakup of the USSR, President Yeltsin made an historic decision: he affirmed the old inter-republic borders as the new international ones. By and large, he resisted the temptation of irredentism that has been such a curse to the Balkans.

Not that the Russian record has been perfect in this regard. Far from it. In the early '90s -- and Graham and I worked on this problem together -- Russia indulged in some heavy-handed and short-sighted interference in the hotspots of the so-called "near abroad," especially in the ethnically Russian region of Transnistria in Moldova and the secessionist region of Abkhazia in Georgia (a misadventure that blew back into Chechnya, with obvious reverberations today).

But those episodes, while serious and consequential, stood in sharp contrast to the constructive role Russia showed it could play in early '94, when it entered the Trilateral Agreement with Ukraine and the United States: Ukraine gave up its Soviet-era nuclear weapons in exchange for Russia's full recognition of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. (That accord, by the way, is a lasting credit to the hard work of Graham Allison and Ash Carter.) Later that same year, Russia pulled its troops, on schedule, out of the Baltic states.

Russia's co-chairmanship, with the United States and France, of the OSCE mediating effort in Nagorno-Karabakh is another welcome break with the past.

But the most dramatic bellwether is the Balkans, where Russia has participated, through the Contact Group and the G-8, in the diplomacy of peacemaking and, through IFOR, SFOR and KFOR, in the military implementation of the peacekeeping. Those cooperative ventures have been all the more significant coming, as they did, amidst vociferous Russian opposition to the enlargement of NATO and to the Alliance's resort to force against Yugoslavia.

Taken together, and if sustained over time, these developments could signal a sea change: Russia may be beginning to break its centuries-old habit of presumptively and preemptively treating others as enemies.

That is happening in part because of the interplay between Russian foreign policy and Russian domestic politics. Just as the Russian state is no longer preoccupied with a global mission, its average citizens and politicians alike realize that job one on the home front is dealing with pressing social and economic problems. There is a growing recognition that, just as real national security often depends on cooperative diplomacy, so real national strength depends on establishing and defending the rights of citizens to develop their own lives and potential, with the state serving as guardian of these rights. In other words -- in Klyuchevsky's formulation -- as the state shrinks, the people swell.

Certainly outlets for public activism and expression have swelled in the past decade. As recently as 1991, power was concentrated in one institution, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Now it's dispersed among numerous competing entities: federal, regional and local; the executive and legislative branches of government; and the numerous factions, parties and coalitions vying for votes and public support. In '91, there were practically no NGO's in Russia; now there are 65,000, at least 15 percent of which have received U.S. assistance. There are also now approximately 900,000 small businesses.

Russia has gone from being a closed and hierarchical system to an open and increasingly horizontal one, a "network society." There are 28,000 commercial web sites, with 1.5 million Russians regularly logging on. The Internet links the center to the periphery and Russia to the rest of the world -- including, as we've recently been reminded, to plenty of foreign banks.

There are now thousands of independent newspapers and hundreds of independent TV channels. Virtually all of them are giving full, if not always cool-headed, coverage to crime and corruption.

There's also been a revolutionary change in the Russian attitude toward ideology -- that is, statehood as state of mind. In Russia today, what I'll call the ideology of needing an ideology is fading. Three years ago, President Yeltsin established, with much fanfare, a blue-ribbon commission to define Russian national identity. The project petered out. I'd suggest that that is a good thing. The 1993 constitution, which President Yeltsin himself sponsored, prohibited "a state sponsored or mandatory ideology." But more important, it's a positive development for a state when its society and polity are diversified enough, pluralistic enough and above all free enough not to have to, or even be able to, agree on an ideology.

Russia, in short, after a thousand years of relying on hard power of the most brittle and brutal sort, is beginning to discover the utility of what Joe Nye has dubbed "soft power": the where-withal to achieve a desired outcome not by force but by inducing others to want the same thing.

One of the principal generators of soft power is democracy. When I was last in Moscow, three weeks ago, I was struck, yet again, by the preoccupation of virtually everyone I met with the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections. For the first time in their history, Russian citizens are now voters; they can register their grievances and express their desires through the ballot box -- or, for that matter, on a soap box. And they do energetically. Their grievances prominently include disgust with crime and corruption; their desires include competent, honest governance, as well as the need for physical safety, equal treatment under the law, clean drinking water, decent schools and health care. In short, the stuff of life in a normal, modern state.

Many in the Russian media warn that one crisis or another could provide a pretext for postponement or cancellation of elections. But the sheer momentum of the electoral process, along with its critical importance to Russian politicians of all stripes, seems to make that prospect unlikely. That's a change even from '96, when General Korzhakov, then part of the Kremlin inner circle, pushed behind the scenes for the presidential elections to be called off. There now seems to be a fundamental commitment of major politicians -- you could even call it a social contract -- to sorting out their differences through electoral democracy.

The more firmly established that mechanism becomes, the longer it continues to, function, the greater the chance of having a government -- and a state -- more responsive to the needs of the citizenry. This would be something new under the Russian sun.

Now, as several of you have pointed out in your own writings, democracy and democratization are often not pretty, predictable or "liberal" in the kind of leaders they produce. Among the worries many of us hear from our Russian friends is that the people, voting in the midst of another *smutnoye vremya*, or "Time of Troubles," will choose ultra-nationalist demagogues, men on white horses carrying red or brown flags. Of course that danger exists, and we could, if we're not careful, contribute to it by playing to suspicions that we're out to humiliate and even dismember the Russian Federation.

But public-opinion polling over the last several years indicates that many - perhaps most -- Russians have a healthy mistrust of politicians who pretend that there are easy fixes to the country's problems. We'll see on December 19, when a hundred million registered voters can go to the polls to elect 450 representatives to the Duma.

A well-known figure of an earlier era, Vyacheslav Molotov, once famously remarked that democratic elections were a fine thing; the only problem was you never knew who would win. That certainly goes for the ones coming up in Russia. But many Russian analysts are predicting that the next Duma will be more pragmatic, more "businesslike," than the two previous ones, and that next year's presidential election will, in distinction to '96, not be a referendum whether to restore the Communists to power; rather, it will be a contest among different visions of post-Communist Russia -- in other words, among Russia's alternative futures.

We Americans have a profound stake in what choices Russia makes for itself. That brings me to the question posed by Chernyshevsky and expropriated by Lenin, "What is to be done?" as it applies to U.S. policy toward Russia.

Two weeks ago, in a speech at the Carnegie Endowment, Secretary Albright divided the answer into two parts: first, our effort to advance our security interests, through arms control, through cooperative threat reduction, through integrating Russia into international, institu-

tions; second, our effort to help Russia transform its own political, economic and social institutions.

In both areas, we have an interest in Russia acquiring and consolidating the right kind of strength as a state, so that Russia can utilize its immense natural and human resources to compete and prosper in the global economy. The key is for Russia to learn the right lessons from its chilly plunge into globalization: that means not going back into a self-isolated, autarkic shell. Instead of trying to insulate itself from the ebb and flow of capital in free markets, it should redouble its determination to make itself safe and attractive to long-term investment by Russians and foreigners alike.

Partly to that end, we will persist in our long-standing attempt to persuade the Russian government to adopt an effective money-laundering bill. The premise of our engagement on this subject is that financial malfeasance, like organized crime in general, is a common problem, a common threat, and we should work out common approaches.

Another, more complicated example is ballistic-missile proliferation. Russia has been part of that problem, since some of its most lethal technology has leaked to Iran. But Russia could be part of the solution if it uses its newly established export controls to crack down on those who are selling out Russia's own non-proliferation objectives for pennies on the dollar.

It's precisely because ballistic missile proliferation threatens the Russians at least as much as us that we are asking them to join us in cooperative ballistic missile defense. In recent weeks, we've begun intense discussion of this subject with the political and military leadership in Moscow. To put it mildly, we have our work cut out for us on this issue. But we've now got a serious process underway, and a serious -- and I believe compelling -- set of positions to bring to the table.

As for the second task that Secretary Albright identified -- helping Russia with its transformation -- we're working with Congress to get more funding for technical-assistance programs that will strengthen many of those NGO's, start-up political parties, independent media outlets and small businesses. There is considerable bipartisan support on Capitol Hill for beefing up exchange programs, such as the one that Jim Billington, a source of much wise counsel to the Administration and Congress alike, launched this past summer and also the one that Senator Dick Lugar has proposed to train Russians in business management, accounting and marketing.

A policy of engagement will work only if it entails candor in addressing the dark spots on the Russian horizon. None is darker than what is now happening in the North Caucasus.

From one perspective, the conflict underway in Chechnya and Dagestan -- which may have reverberated, in the form of lethal bombings, deep inside Russia and in Moscow itself -- is a manifestation of the two greatest scourges of the late 20th century: terrorism and ethnic conflict. In that sense, it dramatizes just how important it is that for the United States and Russia work together in fighting terrorism and to cooperate in peacekeeping. We are doing both.

But the crisis in the North Caucasus is also a moment of truth for the new Russian state, a test of its ability to overcome the burdensome legacy of the old Russian state. Part of that legacy is the misery, resentment, alienation and hostility of the people who live in the North Caucasus, including those whose parents and grandparents were the so-called "punished people" Stalin deported en masse to Kazakhstan -- and in many cases to their deaths. Successive gov-

ernments in Moscow, under czars, commissars and post-Communists alike, have consistently failed to provide basic social services and economic development for the region. That's part of the root cause of the extremism there today.

In recent days, the vicious cycle has taken another turn. Some officials in Moscow are blaming people of darker complexion for depredations originating a thousand miles to the South. The round-up, detention and deportation of 10,000 people in Moscow this past week demonstrates how easy it is for Russia -- when it feels threatened -- to fall back on old stereotypes and jeopardize basic principles of due process.

This too is not just an ugly and atavistic development but an ominous one -- and, I believe, profoundly contrary to Russia's own interests. Healing the wounds of Chechnya and Dagestan -- wounds that run all the way from Grozny to Volgadonsk and Moscow -- requires not just looking to the safety of the Russian heartland in the short run but also making the people of the North Caucasus feel as though they are invested in Russia's future.

The latter is a long-term task, a task for the coming decades. But for there to be any chance of success, Russia must show restraint and wisdom in coming days and weeks. That means taking action against real terrorists, but not using indiscriminate force that endangers innocents or resuming the disastrous 1994-96 war in Chechnya. It means opening a political dialogue with the more pragmatic leaders in the North Caucasus, not antagonizing them or their populations. It means stepping up measures to prevent further bombings, but being careful not to make people from the Caucasus second-class citizens, or in any other way trample on hard-won human rights or civil liberties. It means working cooperatively with neighboring states to deal effectively with the underlying economic and security problems of the Caucasus, but not pressuring those neighbors in ways that will shake their fragile sense of their own stability and independence.

In short, the Russian government faces not just a test but a dilemma. Having so admirably defined the real estate of its own statehood in a way that respects the independence and frontiers of its now-sovereign neighbors, the Russian Federation must of course also protect its own territorial integrity. But if it is going to ensure its ability to survive, and thrive, within its internationally recognized borders, Russia must, at the same time and with equal vigor, look to its state of mind; it must protect its nascent democracy and civil society. That means protecting the rights of minorities, moving forward in instituting the rule of law and building up those forms of governance that will enable the Russians to continue transforming their country from an empire and totalitarian monolith to a normal, modern, democratic and federal state. Those are their words, not ours. They reflect their aspirations. But their attainment of those aspirations would coincide with our interests. That's why we must persist in helping them succeed.

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**Source: The U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.**

