
Program Brief

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A Presentation by Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov

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Speaking at a recent dinner co-sponsored by The Nixon Center and the Moscow International Petroleum Club, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov called for a broadly based global effort to strengthen international institutions and international law to combat terrorism. He also suggested that the tragic events of September 11 created an opportunity to build a “qualitatively new” relationship between the United States and Russia. The Foreign Minister was in Washington for consultations with President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell. Former Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, Chairman of the Center’s Advisory Council, presided.

Fighting Terror

Minister Ivanov strongly condemned the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and expressed his government’s sympathy and support for America in this difficult time. Though it may seem paradoxical, he continued, the modern world is in many respects less secure than the Cold War world. Ivanov considered the lack of an international mechanism to deal with the dark side of globalization—terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking—to be a major problem in this respect. He argued that these new global challenges could be addressed

only through international solidarity and mutual support.

Specifically, Ivanov urged efforts to strengthen existing international institutions, including the United Nations. The Foreign Minister also insisted that “the right means”—that is, international law and institutions—be used to fight terrorism.

Ivanov refused to speculate about Russia’s reaction to the possible deployment of NATO forces in the region surrounding Afghanistan. Remarkably, he said the issue “had not been raised” in bilateral U.S.-Russian consultations regarding responses to the terrorist attacks. The Foreign Minister denied knowledge of any agreement relating to the use of air bases in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan by American aircraft. He also suggested that the battle against international terrorism would be long and difficult and expressed skepticism about the centrality of military force. “Five or ten airplanes will not solve this problem,” Ivanov said.

More broadly, Foreign Minister Ivanov stressed the need to ensure that the war on terrorism does not create a new dividing line between the wealthier nations of the global “North” and the

relatively poorer global “South.” Dangerous North-South tension already exists, he continued, and has been growing as a result of globalization.

U.S.-Russian Relations Transformed?

Foreign Minister Ivanov argued that the considerably increased threat of terrorism against the United States and Russia has given the two countries a chance to establish “a qualitatively new relationship.” The era of confrontation is behind us, he said, and Washington and Moscow must work together in this new environment to address the challenges of the 21st century. Stronger U.S.-Russian ties will be essential in building a free, democratic, and stable international system, Ivanov added.

In this context, the Foreign Minister emphasized that while the U.S. and Russia may differ in their approaches to some issues, both countries share the same goals with respect to the majority of problems. For example, he explained, America and Russia both seek to shore up non-proliferation regimes, build peace in the Middle East and the Balkans, and control the threat from Afghanistan.

However, Ivanov also acknowledged differences in U.S. and Russian positions on some issues. He gave particular attention to ongoing discussions of American plans for missile defense and the implications of those plans for the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. The Foreign Minister argued that a solution to this problem should be found “within the existing framework” [that is, through the modification of the ABM Treaty rather than American withdrawal from the agreement] and that the outcome must be “acceptable to all.” Ivanov also implied that Russia might consider scrapping the ABM Treaty, however, when he said that Russia could not reject the accord in the absence of a “better” legal document. Still, responding to a later question, he suggested that the September 11 attacks demonstrate that ballistic missiles are not the most serious threat to the U.S.

When asked about Russian expectations vis-à-vis Washington’s attitude toward Moscow’s ongoing intervention in Chechnya—described as an “anti-terrorist operation” by the Russian government—the Foreign Minister said that there should be no “double standards” in dealing with terrorism. [Russia has long argued that some of the separatist Chechen warlords are linked to Osama bin Laden.] He added that terrorist groups recognize no law but the law of violence.

The Foreign Minister gave special attention to U.S.-Russian bilateral economic cooperation, which he said his country sees as the “most important” element of the new strategic framework. He outlined a series of economic, legal, and other steps Russia is taking to increase its attractiveness to foreign investors and urged Washington to act to facilitate commercial contacts by ending what he termed “discriminatory restrictions” on trade with Russia. [Russia has long sought to be reclassified as a “market economy” under U.S. law so as to “graduate” from tighter controls on non-market economies.] Ivanov said that such a step would be a serious signal to the business communities in both countries. He saw “huge unused potential” in the two countries’ economic ties and noted that a strong U.S.-Russian economic relationship would create a basis for progress in other areas.

This Program Brief was prepared by Nixon Center Director Paul J. Saunders.

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