

## OPINION

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# Beware Russia's motives

**Taras Kuzio**

**TORONTO** - The United States has welcomed Russia as an ally in its war on terrorism. And there are ways Russia can be helpful - not least, through its position on the UN Security Council and its influence in the Arab world and Iran.

But Washington should remain cautious; Moscow is using the terrorist acts of Sept. 11 to further four strategic goals:

\* Russia is demanding a free hand in dealing with its own "terrorists" in Chechnya. Russia would like the US and international organizations to allow it, in effect, to eradicate "terrorism" from Chechnya. This would lead to even greater human-rights abuses. The US and some of its allies have already begun to change their rhetoric on Chechnya.

Russia believes that international outrage over the Sept. 11 attacks provides a good opportunity to influence world opinion that the Chechens are not pursuing a "national-liberation struggle" but are, in reality, simply terrorists. Russian Army Gen. Anatoly Kulikov has offered to share not only Russia's experience in combating Chechen "terrorists," but also Soviet experience in fighting the "nationalist underground" in western Ukraine, western Belarus, and the Baltics after World War II. Many Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Baltic Americans remember what this antiterrorist experience entailed: ethnic cleansing, atrocities, and mass disregard for human rights in their former homelands.

\* Russia wants the US to recognize the territory of the former Soviet Union as a Russian sphere of influence, especially in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Ukraine. An important element of this reassertion of power is to prevent the US and NATO from gaining a foothold in countries that are distrustful of Russia, such as pro-US and pro-NATO Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine, which, together with Moldova, are united in a regional organization.

\* Russia wants to take the three Baltic states off the list of potential members of the second round of NATO enlargement, which will be

announced in a year at a NATO summit in Prague. In a recent foreign-policy speech in Warsaw, President Bush announced his support for continued NATO enlargement, and - unlike his predecessor - he is more willing to ignore Russian sensibilities over NATO membership for the former Soviet republics. Russia is hoping that, in return for its cooperation against terrorism, the US will agree to respect its Soviet "red line" as a NATO no-go area.

\* Russia wants to use its new alliance with the US to halt Washington's plans for a national missile defense shield.

### Russia's double standards

Although newspaper columnists in Canada and Britain have pointed out the alleged double standards the US holds on combating terrorism, there has been little, if any, acknowledgment that Russia also consistently pursues double standards.

Just as Osama bin Laden got early help from the CIA, Chechen leader Shamil Basayev got his training from Russian military intelligence in 1992-93. In the early 1990s, Russia also covertly supported separatist movements in Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, and its "peacekeeping" forces have frozen the conflict on the ground ever since. At the time, all three countries denounced Moscow's support for "terrorist" movements that continue to infringe on their territorial integrity. As a condition for resolving these conflicts, Moscow has long demanded that it turn its peacekeeping forces into forward military bases, thereby rewarding its support for separatism (or terrorism) and transforming them into geopolitical gains.

Russia (and before that, the USSR) has never had a ban on the assassination of state leaders to pursue its geopolitical goals. Georgians and Uzbeks remain deeply suspicious that three assassination attempts in the 1990s on Georgian leader Eduard Shevardnadze and one attempt on Uzbek leader Islam Karimov were the work of Russian-backed groups. Russia continually turns down Georgian demands to extradite the would-be assassins. After one of the attempts, the suspects fled Georgia in Russian military aircraft.

Don't compromise our morals

It's difficult to see how an international coalition against terrorism could be built without Russia's participation. Nevertheless, the US and its Western allies should not compromise their moral ground by agreeing to Russia's four strategic objectives. It would be indeed ironic if, in demanding that the US military response not target civilians, we agreed to accept Russia's offer of expertise in combating terrorism. Russia has been condemned by all international human rights organizations, the US, and other Western governments for its disregard for civilian lives and gross infringement on human rights.

Those who now call for the US to be restrained in dealing with Afghanistan largely remained silent when Russia destroyed Chechnya's capital, Grozny. According to Russian human-rights groups, Russia's military actions in Chechnya have led to upwards of 80,000 casualties and turned a small number of Chechen terrorists into a nation of freedom fighters. We don't need to repeat Russia's experience in our moral pursuit of terrorists in Afghanistan.

Let us therefore be cautious in choosing our allies, and be very clear about how Russia wants to use the terrorist outrages in the US to further its own narrow, strategic goals that run counter to American interests.

Taras Kuzio is a research associate at the Centre for International & Security Studies at York University.

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