

Prof Says Russia, United States Can Learn from Each Other in Fighting Terrorism

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When the United States stepped up efforts to thwart terrorism after Sept. 11, 2001, it was moving into what has become familiar territory for Russians, according to a foreign policy expert at Kansas State University.

Dale Herspring is a professor of political science and faculty member for K-State's security studies program. A leading expert on Russia, Germany and Eastern Europe, Herspring has written books on civil-military relations in the United States, Poland, Russia and East Germany.

In his coming book on Russian presidential authority, he examines how Russia is dealing with terrorism. "The High Command and the Kremlin: Presidential Authority from Gorbachev to Putin" is due in October 2006 from the University Press of Kansas.

Terrorism plays a predominant role in the book, Herspring said, because it's a major concern for the country and a problem to which Russian President Vladimir Putin has paid a lot of attention.

Herspring said Russians view the unrest in Chechnya as an incubator for terrorism. Since 9/11, incidents like a Moscow subway bombing, crashing jetliners, a hostage crisis in a theater and the siege of a school in southern Russia have kept fighting terrorism on the minds of Russians and their leaders, he said.

Russians feel like they're in the same boat with the United States when it comes to terrorism, Herspring said, noting that both countries are

concerned about terrorism stemming from radical Islam. That means the United States and Russia can learn something about fighting terrorism from each other, he said.

"They've been doing this longer," Herspring said of Russia. "They've been fighting the mafia, too. They've had a much worse time. That's the reason why you work together."

At the same time, Herspring said the Russians are learning that terrorism is different from World War II and the Cold War.

"They're used to putting tanks on a line and smashing the other guy's tanks," Herspring said. "You need different kinds of forces."

Herspring said Putin is leveraging Russia's army, secret police and interior ministry to step up the struggle against terrorism while changing the country's military doctrine to make fighting terrorism a big part of it. Similarly, Herspring said U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld is trying to transform the U.S. military while at the same time trying to fight terrorism.

The two countries' leaders may agree to disagree about the details of fighting terrorism, but Herspring said Putin and Bush maintain a congenial relationship. The professor points out that the first call Bush received from a head of state after 9/11 was from Putin.

"He and Bush, up to this point, have had good relations," Herspring said.

Herspring spent more than 20 years in the U.S. State Department's Foreign Service and 32 years in the U.S. Navy, both in active and reserve duty. As a member of K-State's security studies faculty, Herspring is part of an interdisciplinary program that prepares students for careers in research, teaching and international affairs through a broad exploration

of issues relating to international study.

Source: Kansas State University

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