An Interview with General William Odom: “Russia Must Become Part of Europe.”

Lt. General (ret.) William Odom gave the keynote address at the Current Affairs Forum on “Putin’s Russia New Friend or Old Foe?”. General Odom is a Senior Fellow and Director of National Security Studies at the Hudson Institute, former Director of the National Security Agency from 1985 to 1988, and author of award-winning The Collapse of the Soviet Military (Yale University Press, 1998). Robert Whiting, a graduate student in the Center’s MA program in Russian and East European Studies, interviewed him before the forum.

RW: What do you see as Russia’s primary security concerns in the short and long term?

WO: When one discusses Russia’s security concerns one has to differentiate between what [Russians] says they are and what they may actually be. They talk a great deal about what they call the “Islamic threat” to the south. I don’t think that is a serious threat to Russia, as long as Russia doesn’t provoke it. Their policies in Chechnya are doing a great deal to crystallize the “Islamic threat” to the south...

Russians do talk about their internal problems, the economy and such, as security concerns. There I agree with them 100%. The major security concerns for Russia are internal. One is a decaying economy, not withstanding the recent improvements in the GDP, which were the result of some specific circumstances, such as high oil prices. What growth potential there is is limited because of a lack of strong institutions, such as an effective banking system, property rights and others, that are fundamental to an effective market economy. The other is health and demography. Russia is losing somewhere between half million to a million of its population every year because of high death rate, low birth rate and the spread of disease such as HIV/AIDS...I just read a report that President Putin considers drugs a national security problem, and that I think is a very candid recognition of the severity of the problem.

Putin has a number of advisers especially in the military, the police and some political parties that see the West as a threat. I don’t think they really believe that; it’s mostly huffing and puffing on their part, and it’s understandable. Their world-class status as a Super Power has collapsed on them. Russia has declined into a classic "weak state" syndrome. A weak state is a state that is very poor at collecting taxes. The capacity to tax is probably the best way to measure the strength of the state...Weak states don’t get out of the weak state trap very easily.

They’re not even a second rank power, maybe a third rank power. That undoubtedly has had a negative effect on the psyche, and the inclination to respond in rhetoric is irresistible. I do think they have a problem with China that some Russians recognize and others don’t. Putin joined this Shanghai co-operation organization about containing radical Islam and terrorism in central Asia. Russia, since at least the 15th Century, has expanded eastward. I think...—continued on page 2, see Odom
now, with this treaty, he has acknowledged a Chinese role in central Asia, essentially reversing the trend in influence, which I think could turn out to be historically important. We might even mark that event as the beginning of a reversal of the balance of influence between China and Russia in central Asia.

So that’s what I see as the primary threats to Russia and some of their internal perceptions of those threats.

RW: Do you see any particular areas of conflict between Russia and the United States in terms of security?

WO: I see several potential areas of conflict, but rather than discuss those, I would rather address what I see as the source of the conflict.

Russia has declined into a classic “weak state” syndrome. A weak state is a state that is very poor at collecting taxes. The capacity to tax is probably the best way to measure the strength of the state...Weak political structures tend to weaken the economy as well, and if you look at Russia, you see all the indicators of a weak state...Weak states don’t get out of the weak state trap very easily.

There has been a lot of talk about the spread of democracy recently, the “third wave,” but many of these democracies are not “liberal”...It’s the liberal aspect that is most critical, and I don’t see how Russia can achieve a genuine constitutional, liberal breakthrough very soon...This means that Russia will probably be in this condition for quite a long time. But it has an elite that has the legacy of being a great power..., and they will be tempted to play a great power role without the capabilities to back them up. This will only leave Russia to be a “spoiler”, a “trouble maker”...I think it will be very difficult to find ways where Russia will participate constructively in its relationships with Western Europe and the US. It may do that for short periods of time for what are essentially tactical reasons, but I think the mix of internal weaknesses will make it very hard for any Russian leader to play a constructive role in a larger European community or the international community at large...

I’d like to make one more point about security concerns in relation to the events of September 11th. This situation has crystallized many areas of potential cooperation between the US and Russia, and I hope it will improve our chance of success in hunting down the people responsible, but there are serious risks in this as well. The Russians are already making noise about wanting to equate what we are doing with the situation in Chechnya, and it’s not the same thing at all...If we allow ourselves to equate the two, it will have severe political repercussions, and may make the entire effort politically unsustainable.

RW: So you see the current cooperation as essentially tactical in nature and not a long-term shift in Russian policy?

WO: Absolutely. Let me give you a larger strategic perspective on where I think Russia is going. The most difficult thing for Russia is to come to terms with its third rank power status and to try to westernize as much as it can and as fast as it can and to try and set up a liberal regime. There aren’t many liberal regimes that have many national minorities on their territories...Russia has 22 or 23 separate ethnic federal units, so I don’t see how it can keep all of those, especially those in the Caucasus, and become a liberal state. They have to overcome that. They have to become part of Europe, part of the West. That is the most promising route. Psychologically, that is very difficult. They have to come to terms with the fact that their status is not the fault of the West, but the fault of 70 years of Communist rule, and to some degree the decisions of Tsarist rule before that. The propensity among Russian elites is to blame us. Not all of the Russian elites believe this, but many do.

What will it take for Russia to join the West? I think it will take a long time. There are a number of factors present. To the extent they stir up the Islamic threat and repress them, it will make it difficult to join [the West]. The challenge of growing China may push them in our direction. Internal concerns, like health, may sober them and get them to realize it’s better to [deal with] their pride and try to join the West.
UI/Ford Program “Area Studies, Identity, and the Arts”

It has often been observed in recent years that world areas have become more porous and less fixed and transnational processes increasingly powerful. Area studies have been criticized as poorly aligned both with this reality and with major intellectual trends in academia, such as the emphasis on rigorous disciplinary and theoretical knowledge over area knowledge as well as the heightened recognition of the fractured, multivalent, boundary-breaking, and contradictory nature of the world. As area specialists, committed to the notion that deep area knowledge enriches how we understand transnational phenomena or think comparatively, we have important contributions to make to these discussions. At the same time, these trends also challenge us to rethink what we do as area studies programs.

In this spirit, for the last three years, the University of Illinois has been the location of an exciting interdisciplinary learning program on area studies, identities, and the arts (funded in large part by the Ford Foundation as part of its initiative “Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies,” and supported generously by the colleges of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Fine and Applied Arts, the provost, International Programs and Studies, and many individual departments and centers). The idea of the program has been to involve students, faculty, and community members in a program of comparative cultural study that explores, around annual themes, the complex interactions of the global and the local, of disciplinary and interdisciplinary methods, of theoretical and area-based knowledge. The program features public lectures, performances, exhibits, workshops, and films; graduate/faculty and undergraduate interdisciplinary seminars in the fall; a research seminar and art practicum with a visiting scholar and artists in residence in the spring; and international fieldwork experiences in the summer. The Russian and East European Center has been actively involved in this project.

This year’s theme is “Arts of the Sacred.” The director of the Russian and East European Center is one of the two coordinators of this year’s program and many of our faculty and students are involved. Among the visitors to the program this year will be Vera Shevzov (speaking about icons) and Jaroslav Pelikan (on the Russian Christ). From our own faculty, Donna Buchanan will speak about lament and gender in southeastern Europe and Jonathan Fineberg will discuss Kandinsky and the mind. Aleksei Kurbanovskii, an art historian working at the Russian museum in St. Petersburg will spend spring semester here as a visiting scholar. The year will conclude with a summer study tour in Russia led by Kurbanovskii and Mark Steinberg. More information about the program can be found at www.ips.uiuc.edu/ific/ford.

Letter from the Director

by Mark D. Steinberg

In these current difficult times in the world, many of us are reminded why the work of learning, reflecting, and teaching is so important. Knowledge, it has been said, is power—not only to dominate and control, but also to liberate and inspire. As educators and students, we are committed to the ideal that wisdom (including practical wisdom) comes from greater knowledge and critical thinking. As specialists on Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe, we know how much harm can result from silencing debate, willful ignorance, and prejudice.

As you will see in reading through this issue of the Center News, the Russian and East European Center continues its efforts to foment knowledge, thinking, and discussion. This year features a regular succession of visiting and local lecturers in our “directions” colloquia and in the noon bag-lunch series, films from the region, a public forum on “Putin’s Russia” (featuring some very distinguished scholars), an international conference on religion in prerevolutionary Russia, and other events. Finally, the Center is continuing its efforts to involve Russian and East European area specialists in comparative discussions with specialists in other areas. Many Center faculty and students have been involved in the activities of the local Ford Foundation program on revitalizing area studies, about which you will read in the above article. And we are working with the other area studies centers to plan a symposium on understanding and engaging terrorism.

It is people who make possible all that the Center does. Thus, it is important, and a pleasure, to note the new faculty who joined the university this year: Harriet Murav and Lilya Kaganovsky in Slavic, John Randolph and Maria Todorova in History, Shannon O’Lear in Geography. You will be reading about them all in new faculty profiles in this and coming issues.

I want to conclude by thanking Carol Leff for her excellent work as acting director last year, while I was on leave.
Shannon O’Lear joined the faculty in the Department of Geography this fall. She comes to the UI from Illinois State University where she was a faculty member in the Department of Geography-Geology and served as the Director of the Environmental Studies Minor for undergraduates.

She received her PhD in Geography from Syracuse University in 1997 where she wrote her dissertation on “E-Mail Use in the Contexts of Place, Social Networks and Empowerment: An Examination of Grassroots Environmentalists in Estonia and Russia.” She received her BA in Geography and Russian and her MA in Geography from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Her current research interests focus on the Caucasus and Central Asia and encompass political geography, environmental security and vulnerability, and human dimensions of global change. Through grants, such as from the National Academy of Sciences/National Research Council (NAS/NRC), she has conducted research in Azerbaijan and Armenia since 1999, including a trip this past summer involving work on human and environmental security in Azerbaijan.

In September O’Lear attended a conference of the International Geographical Union, held in Stravropol and Kislovodsk, Russia, which are located near Grozny, the capital of Chechnya. The attendees of the conference had a military escort for much of their travel through the region since a bus had been hijacked in the area a month earlier. On the first night of the conference, September 11th, she and her colleagues learned of the terrorist attacks in the United States by watching Russian and other international television stations. They wondered which place was more safe: Chechnya or the U.S.

This year O’Lear is teaching courses on “Russia and Eurasia” and “International Conflicts.” She also hopes to teach a course on environmental policy in the near future.
Mortenson Center’s Small Town Libraries in Russia Project
by Jerrie C. Merridith
Program Outreach Coordinator, Mortenson Center

Since the end of the Soviet era, libraries in Russia have been facing the enormous challenge of transforming themselves from institutions promoting state ideology to active information centers for their communities.

To address this need in its ongoing mission to promote international peace, education and understanding, the UI Mortenson Center for International Library Programs, along with the Illinois State Library and the Rudomino School of the Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow, has developed a project to aid small-town public libraries in Russia to become vital centers of their communities. Funded by the Soros Foundation in Russia as well as the organizing institutions, the project brings together public library directors and local government officials from various regions in Russia to address the role of the public library in a changing social and cultural environment. The Rudomino School laid the groundwork for the training program by conducting seminars in small towns within the regions to evaluate and determine the skills and knowledge that would provide the most benefit to the groups in this effort. Results of these seminars were used to develop a two-week training program at the Mortenson Center at the U of I in May.

A diverse group of specialists—librarians, archivists, museum employees and municipal government officials from various regions in Russia—were chosen to participate in the program. During their stay at the U of I, the participants met with area librarians and officials in a wide range of governmental and non-governmental institutions. They met with mayors and city managers from several communities in central Illinois to learn how local governments support public libraries. They visited small rural libraries as well as large, urban libraries such as the Chicago Public Library to observe library management on different scales. They also toured ADM and the Chicago Tribune to understand the corporate side of information access.

Participants returned to their regions with the knowledge and skills to begin to develop and implement educational programs to promote youth, government, and rural services and to partner with other governmental entities to create cooperative and strong infrastructures within the small towns.

For more information on the Mortenson Center, visit www.library.uiuc.edu/mortenson

Genieva Receives UI Honorary Doctorate

Ekaterina Genieva, president of the Soros Foundation in Russia, was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters from the University of Illinois at spring commencement in May 2001.

Genieva’s contributions to the dissemination of knowledge in Russia and her efforts to build and support open society are truly monumental. Under her leadership, the Soros Foundation in Russia has distributed hundreds of millions of dollars to support science, education, the arts and culture, and civil society initiatives, and dramatic and highly significant changes are taking place in the spheres of education, culture, and access to information.

The path she has chosen has not been an easy one, and she has pursued it at considerable risk at times. But this is no surprise to those who know her. Genieva has never been afraid of unpopular and dangerous paths. As a student at Moscow State University in the early 1970s she wrote her dissertation on Ulysses, then banned in the Soviet Union. She has spent nearly three decades at the Library for Foreign Literature in Moscow, a safe haven in Soviet times for intellectuals forbidden to work elsewhere. A religious believer, she supported the liberal priest, Father Alexander Men, until his murder (almost certainly by the KGB) in 1990 and has memorialized him with international conferences and publications each year since his death. She mounted exhibitions on anti-Semitism and other uncomfortable subjects, and during the coup attempt of August 1991, she defied the KGB and made the Library’s printing press available to publish banned newspapers.

Since 1990 Genieva has had a strong Uof I connection through her collaboration with Marianna Tax Choldin, director of the Mortenson Center for International Library Programs. Thanks to this partnership she has helped libraries of all kinds throughout the former Soviet Union to provide high-quality service to their users and has been instrumental in opening access to research resources for students and scholars from the U of I and other institutions throughout the US and the world.
Faculty News

Dmitry Bobyshev was awarded a LAS Faculty Travel Fund to participate in an international conference, “Saint Petersburg and Problems of ‘Open Culture’” in St. Petersburg, Russia, June 2001, where he presented a paper, “Dusha Peterburga v nebesnom i zennom voploscheniiakh.” He also published poems, “la zdes;,” Oktiabr’ (2001) and “Kraski vremeni,” Ierusalimski zhurnal (2001).

Robert H. Burger has been appointed as the Associate University Librarian for Services, which is a new position responsible for internal and external services in the 42 departmental libraries.

Jihua Che presented “Soft Budget Constraints and Financial Dual Track” at the annual conference of Transition Economics at the William Institute at the University of Michigan Business School in Potoroz, Slovenia, last summer.

Marianna Tax Choldin was the first recipient of the UI’s newly established Distinguished Faculty Award for International Achievement. She also received the Library Quarterly award for excellence in refereeing.

Jonathan Fineberg received the Distinguished Teaching of Art History Award from the College of Art Association.

Zsuzsa Gille received a 2001 REEC course development grant for a new graduate seminar on “Power, Identity and Commodification in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.”


Richard Jaehne was invited to Eureka College to give its annual Social Science and Business lecture. His lecture was entitled “Transnational Security and the Four National Security Paradigms.”

Diane Koenker received a William and Flora Hewlett Summer Research Award from the UI Office of International Programs and Studies to conduct research in Moscow and St. Petersburg for the project “Everyday Life in the Soviet Union, 1918-1991” in May 2001. She was chosen as the chair of the European Section of the American Historical Association for 2000-2001.

Jonathan Z. Ludwig presented “‘Bots in the Bloc: Capek, Lem, and the Lure of Technology” at the annual meeting of the Canadian Association of Slavists in Quebec in May 2001. He was awarded a Kennan Institute short term Grant for July 2001 to conduct research at the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Library of Congress on Shakespearean influences in Russian literature. He also received (with Richard Tempest) a 2001 REEC course development grant for a new undergraduate seminar, “Pop Goes the Bloc.”

Peter Maggs presented “Application of International Law and Treaties by Constitutional Courts” at the AASS convention in November. He will hold the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Law at the University of Trento in Italy during the spring semester 2002. He will be lecturing there on the law of Russia and its neighbors.


Temira Pachmuss presented “Dostoevsky’s Ideas in the Works of Zinaida Hippius and Dmitry Mereshkovsky” at the 11th International Dostoevsky Symposium in Baden-Baden, Germany, in October.

Anke Pinkert received a Postdoctoral Fellowship in the Humanities at the University of Chicago for 2001-02. She presented a lecture entitled “Neocolonial Fantasies: The Rhetoric of Race and National Identity in Recent German Literature” at UI German Department in September.

John Randolph presented “The Priamukhino Harmony Revisited: The Bakunin Family and Russian Social Thought, 1780-1840” at the Midwest Russian History Workshop in DeKalb in October.

Jan Schwarz presented “Poetics of Resistance: Abraham Sutzkever’s Ghetto Poems, 1941-1944” at the conference “Beyond the Shtetl: Yiddish Language and Culture in 20th Century Eastern Europe” at Indiana University in October. The conference was co-sponsored by REEC.


Mark Steinberg, returning as Director of REEC, completed two books during his leave last year: Voices of Revolution, 1917, due out this fall from Yale University; and Press, and Proletarian Imagination, Self-Modernity and the Sacred in Russia, 1910-1925, which has been accepted for publication by Cornell University Press.


Visiting Scholars Fall 2001

Evgenia Ivanova (Moscow, Russia), Fulbright Fellow at REEC

Kun-Sun Kim (South Korea), Slavic Languages and Literatures

Oleg Rodin (Voronezh, Russia), USIA-RSEP scholar at REEC

Ekaterina Sirotina (Perm, Russia), Mortenson Center Associate

Oleh Volokhin (Kirovohrad, Ukraine), Mortenson Center Associate

Seung-Nam Yoo (South Korea), Slavic Languages and Literatures
Student News


Charles Michael Elavsky (communications research) presented “Touched ... From Here to Who Knows When: Identity in Transition in the Czech Republic” at the Couch-Stone Symposium at the University of Miami in Coral Gables.

Irina D. Gigova (history) received a dissertation fellowship from the American Association of University Women for 2001-02. She is a Visiting Assistant Professor in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Miami in Coral Gables.

Matthew Rosenstein (Slavic) is the new major with accounting)

Matthew Tittle (history) presented “Intrigue, Superstition, and Peril: The Image of the Balkans in Post-Expressionist Film” at the annual Ohio Valley History Conference in Bowling Green, KY.

Incoming REES MA Students 2001-2002
Lindsay Shaw, Raymond Hrniko

2000-2001 Graduates
PhDs: Jung Ah Kim (Slavic) Dennis Grammenos (geography) is an assistant professor of geography at Northeastern Illinois University. Irene Kolchinsky (Slavic) Lynnea Magnuson (history) Djavid Novrouzov (educational policy studies)

Susan Smith (history) is a post-doctoral fellow at Rutgers University. Matthew Tittle (educational psychology) is the Assistant Director of the Campus Honors Program and adjunct assistant professor of educational psychology at UI. Natalia Tolstikova (communications) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Maine.

MA: Krista Mantsch (LIS); Marija Markovic (linguistics); Wendy Shelburne (LIS)

BAs in REES: Katarzyna Lesinski (double-major with Political Science); Alexander Zavin (double-major with accounting)

FLAS Recipients Summer 2001
James Bang (economics)—advanced Russian Amy Blau (comparative literature)—advanced Yiddish Sharyl Corrado (history)—advanced Russian Natasha Kipp (music)—advanced Russian Ross Musselman (history) through IPS—Serbian/Croatian Katherine Sredl (advertising) through IPS—Serbian/Croatian Robert Whiting (REES)—Serbian/Croatian

Academic Year 2001-2002
James Bang (economics)—advanced Russian Sharyl Corrado (history)—advanced Russian Julia Cortinas (music)—advanced Russian Adam Malamane (REES)—intermediate Bulgarian Kate Meehan (history)—intermediate Serbian/Croatian Charles Picton, III (law)—advanced Russian David Reid, Jr. (Slavic)—advanced Czech Cristofer Scarboro (history)—advanced Bulgarian

Slavic Review Editorial Assistants 2001-2002
Charles Michael Elavsky, Cristofer Scarboro, Heather Tafel

Alumni News

Susan T. Linz (PhD ’80, economics) was selected as Distinguished Professor at Taganrog State University for Radio Engineering in June 2000 and is a recipient of the IREX individual advanced research in Russia for 2001-02. She is a professor of economics at Michigan State University.

Thomas Trice (PhD ’99, history) received a grant from IREX for individual advanced research in Russia for 2001-02. He is a professor of history at Glenville State College in West Virginia.

Send Us Your News!

We would love to hear from REES-related alumni. Please send us your news along with the degree(s) earned and year and your current affiliation to the email or street address below.

Russian and East European Center News
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Lecture Series—Fall 2001

Brown Bag Lecture Series

August 28
"University Students in Russia Today"
Elena Schepkina (Center for Sociological Research, Moscow State University)

September 4
"Civic Culture in Poland: The Case of Galicia"
Jacek Lubecki (Political Science, Millikin University; REEC Regional Faculty Associate)

September 11
"US-Russian Networking Programs at the UIUC: High Performance S&E and Civic Networking"
Greg Cole (MIRnet, NCSA)

September 25
"Divided We Stand: Explaining Russia’s Survival and the USSR’s Collapse Through a Logic of Collective Action"
Henry Hale (Political Science, Indiana University)

October 9
"Priamukhino Through the Broken Window: Revisiting the Birthplace of Mikhail Bakunin"
John Randolph (History, UI)

October 30
"Creating National Martyrs in Late Imperial Austria"
Nancy Wingfield (History, Northern Illinois University; REEC Regional Faculty Associate)

November 6
"The Impenetrable Goalkeepers of the New Soviet State: Soviet Cinema in 1936"
Lilya Kaganovsky (Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative Literature, UI)

November 27
"The Practice of Journalism in a Post-Communist Eastern Europe"
Nancy Benson (Journalism, UI)

Distinguished Lecturers Colloquium Series

Thursday, September 20
"The Soviet Union and the Polish Crisis of 1980-1981: A Reassessment"
Mark Kramer (Harvard Project on Cold War Studies, Harvard University)

Friday, October 12
"‘The people with the strongest nerves will win’: Khrushchev and the Politics of Nuclear Crisis"
David Holloway (Institute for International Studies, Stanford University)

Friday, November 9
"Enforcing Court Judgments in Russia: The Myth and the Reality"
Kathryn Hendley (Law and Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison)