

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of

Deana Arsenian

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

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## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Deana Arsenian conducted by George Gavrilis on February 1, 2017. This interview is part of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

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Session: 1

Interviewee: Deana Arsenian

Location: New York, NY

Interviewer: George Gavrilis

Date: February 1, 2017

Q: Today is February 1, 2017, and this is George Gavrilis. This is for the Harriman Institute Oral History Project, which is being implemented by the Columbia Center for Oral History. Today I'm at the Carnegie Corporation of New York [CCNY]. I'm here with Deana Arsenian.

Now, Deana, I should note for the record that you and I have a history of oral history because you took a very prominent, and important part in the CCNY oral history, which we did a few years back. And I say that because, I don't think we need to revisit many of those themes. You put that down for the historical record. People will understand the history of this institution here. And there, you actually spoke about your foray into Russia studies or the world of Soviet and post-Soviet and Russia studies. But for the sake of a little bit of context, I think it would be wonderful to know about how it was that you first came to the Harriman and experienced the Harriman, and your early memories there.

Arsenian: Thank you, George, and I'm delighted to do that. Thank you again for doing the interview with me. So, [laughs] it's all memory, right? Memory is always fuzzy, but the way that I remember—the real facts, rather than alternative facts, was that I graduated from Barnard College in 1980, and I got a job at Columbia University working for the human resources department at Columbia because I was planning to go to graduate school, but I did not have the funding to cover the tuition. And, happened to have a friend who was also on the faculty of

Columbia who was connected with the Russian Institute at Columbia. It was the Russian Institute before it became the Harriman Institute. He knew the associate director of the Russian Institute, Jonathan [E.] Sanders, who was looking to hire somebody to help Marshall [D.] Shulman, as Marshall was transitioning from the State Department back to Columbia University, in an administrative position. My career really began when my friend, George [A.] Bournoutian—who is now a professor at Iona College—introduced me to Johnathan Sanders. Johnathan interviewed me for the position of an assistant to Marshall Shulman, and I was hired by Johnathan. That was my introduction to the Russian Institute at Columbia University.

Q: What was the atmosphere like at the time over there?

Arsenian: It was really at the very beginning. Johnathan had been there for a while, but Marshall, as I said, was coming back. I think Marshall was coming back with a lot of great ideas as to what he wanted the Russian Institute to be. Marshall often expressed his view that he wanted the Russian Institute to be similar in its scope, depth, and approach, and policy influence, to what the U.S.A and Canada Institute in Moscow had been for the Soviet foreign policy making. Marshall realized that it's a very tall order, because of course the U.S. society is not structured the way that the Soviet society had been.

In the Soviet Union they had very specific government funded and government controlled institutions that were supposed to weigh in on foreign policy matters with their advice and recommendations, as well as training. Of course, that had not been the case in the U.S. But Marshall lamented the fact that, in the United States, we do not have a leading authoritative

center for both the study and policy impact concerning the Soviet Union. He wanted the Russian Institute to become—to get as close to that function as is possible in the United States. That was his goal.

He came with the notion that he wanted to build it as both the premier training institution, as well as research, and an institution that would have voice and impact on the U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union. He had this notion, having come out of government, having served in the [James E.] Carter administration as a Soviet advisor to Secretary [Cyrus R.] Vance. He came in with a feeling that there was just not a lot of understanding of Russia—of the Soviet Union—in the administration. He had been involved in a number of famous battles, as we now know, concerning the Soviet Union, between Vance and [Zbigniew K.] Brzezinski, the National Security Advisor. Marshall commented often that he felt that there was a lack of understanding of the Soviet Union that was evident in some of the conversations, and that impacted the way the United States formulated its policies towards the Soviet Union. He wanted to change that.

Q: At the time, you're a freshly graduated student, this is one of your first jobs. How did you see it?

Arsenian: Well, I totally agreed with him. Again, having come to the United States in '75 from Moscow—I'm Armenian. I was born in Yerevan, Armenia, but I grew up in Moscow—and I immigrated with my family in '75. So, by the time I met Marshall in '82, I was completely aware of his own findings; that there was an incredible misperception in the United States about the Soviet Union, just like there had been—as I discovered having come to the United States—an

incredible misperception about the United States in the Soviet Union. Just to put it very quickly, I think each society—I should say the opinion-makers, whether it's the media or the public intellectuals or the policy makers, in each society—essentially took a slice of a society that conformed to their rather bleak and Cold-War-ish view of each other, and then projected that segment or that slice of the society onto the entire country.

The U.S. feel of the Soviet Union was then focused on this bleak, cold, authoritarian, communist, poor, backward, and aggressive regime. That's how the entire society was viewed, and the complete opposite of course—the same, I should say—on the Soviet side, where the entire United States was viewed as being very aggressive, divided between very poor and very rich, uncaring, heartless society—and again, there's an element of this in both of course. There's an element of this in pretty much every country. But the point I want to make is that one segment that they focused on formed the image of the entire country.

I should just mention—let me digress. Yesterday I was reading the *Johnson's Russia List* and there is a relevant article about a former employee of the U.S. Embassy—did you see this, by the way?

Q: No.

Arsenian: An employee of the U.S. Embassy back in early 1950s—I forgot his name—had been taking photographs of the Soviet Union in 1950s, including video and photos of Stalin's funeral procession. He had been taking pictures apparently for quite some time. He brought those

pictures back to the U.S. and they ended up some place in California. A couple of years ago, the family that owned that house was cleaning the attic and discovered these archives. They called a professor of history, who went and looked at the archives and was astounded to see what he found. He started digitizing that information. There was an article about this in yesterday's *Johnson's Russia List*. Apparently there is a major Facebook and other media flurry about this, although I have not noticed it until I read the piece yesterday.

The bottom line is that the photos show a very different Soviet Union, which is why this piece comes to mind. The photos show school kids in uniforms happily walking and laughing, they show streets full of well-dressed people. So the point is that, even under Stalin—1950s and when he died in 1953—the pictures show a different slice of the Soviet society, which really existed. But again, it was not something that was ever recognized in the U.S. And, there was a mirror image on the Soviet side, because even when I was growing up in Moscow, in the late '60s and '70s, the only image we saw in the Soviet Union was this capitalist aggressor that does not care about its own people and really wants to take over the world.

I think Marshall brought all of that into his vision. He wanted to be able to train American specialists on the Soviet Union who understood Soviet culture, understood history, were able to read Russian literature, and were able to really have a sensory sense of the Soviet Union, rather than what they were learning exclusively by reading the U.S. coverage of the Soviet Union.

When I took a course—later on when I enrolled at the Russian Institute and took a course with Marshall, he would open the course by basically talking about Russian culture; that you have to

appreciate Russian poetry, the soul—the Russian soul. How the Russians, Soviets again, have viewed their destiny, how they viewed their role in history, how they viewed the impact of their culture—Russian culture—on the Soviet culture. He referred to the birches, the *berezki*, and what they stood for in the Russian psyche. And how all of that is so important in order to be able to understand what the Soviet Union is, what it wants to do, what its intentions are, what it is likely to do, why does it do what it does. That is what he wanted to achieve. He wanted to create a venue for the United States to be able to train Soviet specialists that have all of those qualifications.

Q: Deana, were you the only student in those classes that was from the Soviet Union?

Arsenian: No, but there were very few of us. Again, I came to the U.S. in 1975. There were few of what are now called legacy speakers during my years at Columbia. Well, as far as I know—there might have been more—but my group included a few. Among them was Leon Aron, a Russian specialist, now at the American Enterprise Institute.

I think that when Marshall hired me—of course the fact that I spoke Russian was a factor, but again, the position was administrative assistant; it wasn't to do anything programmatic back then. Marshall interviewed me at the end and he sort of okay'd it, but I think Johnathan hired me because of my Russian, and also because he and I sort of got along very well during the interview, and I don't know, he might have liked me.



They did not really hire me for my administrative skills. I have to be honest with you. I had some, but I did not have a lot. To my credit, I was a very good typist, because back in my English-language special school in Moscow, we were taught how to type in English. And so, I came to the U.S. not only with English language proficiency, but also with very good typing skills. I also had played piano for many years, so maybe that might have helped. But when they gave me the typing test, I excelled in it. So I mean, that had something to do with it. But they also trained me at the job, both Johnathan and then Marshall. Marshall would dictate me letters, and then he would correct and edit my English. But he also looked at me—and I think both he and Johnathan—as someone who they both wanted, through my experience at the Harriman Institute, to improve, in order to make me into a scholar that they wanted to see come out of the process. And I'm forever grateful to both of them for doing that.

Q: Well, it's interesting because you were from the very place that the Russian Institute was studying. So I'm wondering, what kinds of things did you learn at the time about your own country?

Arsenian: That's an interesting question. I don't know that I learned things about the Soviet Union. I think I learned a lot about how the United States had been viewing the Soviet Union. Marshall did talk to me a lot about this—you know, the country. To some extent I guess I did help him a little bit in the research capacity. He was asking me for various articles, including Russian articles, that I would—he spoke Russian enough, but if he didn't understand I would help him translate. We were looking at the coverage of the United States in the Soviet press, and part of my job was to identify those and bring them to his attention. We were looking at the

various articles that were published by people that Marshall knew in the Soviet Union, the public intellectuals in Moscow back then who were opining or writing about the Soviet policy towards the United States. He followed their discourse very closely, and because of my Russian, I was helping him in that.

Again, what I kept discovering—learning is not the right word, but what kept coming at me, is the incredible gap in understanding. We keep coming back to this phrase, improving understanding. And I never use it at Carnegie anymore; I sort of look at it as cliché. You can say that about anything these days. But it is so true; I don't know how else to phrase this. It is an incredible gap. The problem with the gap of understanding between these two countries is that it is at the base of a whole set of policies that then build on each other; that have led us to where we are today. So if the foundation is inaccurate or incomplete, then the rest of what—the architecture that is built on that foundation is ultimately shaky. I'm afraid, that's where we are.

Even today, the lack of the foundation—not the lack, but the weak foundation, on both sides, is an issue. The reason it is weak is because we project; we bring our own interpretations, sometimes, to weigh in on facts in a way that are not factual. That is leading to narratives on both sides that are either flawed, or at best incomplete, or not entirely correctly interpreted. Those narratives drive one country's policy towards the other. And what I kept coming back to is how flawed the narratives are. Across board; whether you're talking about the nuclear, economic, societal, psychological, cultural, regional. Each of those narratives, if you unpacked how one views the other, you can discover so much that is just not entirely so, or at least should be open

to some debate before it is stated as a fact. That just kept coming up, and I think Marshall knew that. As, for that matter, did Johnathan Sanders.

Q: Okay. Since you've nicely moved us to the broader context that the Russian Institute was in at the time, I'd like to ask a little bit more about that. We haven't spoken specifically yet about the U.S. administration at the time, which was the Reagan administration, where the Cold War and the arms race intensified. What are your memories, broadly speaking, from that period?

Arsenian: Well can I just go back a little bit to the Harriman, though?

Q: Of course.

Arsenian: Before we move to Reagan, I think I just wanted to—a couple of little stories about the Harriman Institute that might be important just to record. And then I would move to the Reagan years, because for much of the Reagan term, I was already out; I was here at Carnegie. But, let's just go back to the Harriman, though. So a couple of vignettes, because I know you and the readers of the transcript might be interested in these, right?

So, my office—and you asked me this before, so let me go back to what was the atmosphere like at the Harriman. So, the Russian Institute had half of the floor of the School. Now it's SIPA [School of International and Public Affairs]. Back then it was without the public policy—School of International Affairs. My office was linked to Marshall's very large office through a door.

When Marshall decided to transform the Russian Institute into this premier institution, he went after funding.

I don't know how Ambassador [W. Averell] Harriman emerged as a main donor. I suspect that Marshall had known him for quite some time. But both Averell Harriman and his wife, Pamela [B.] Harriman, immediately became the key individuals that Marshall was cultivating for the institute. My memory is how often they came to visit Marshall at the institute. I have one distinct memory when—and they would come through my office, often, because I was sort of the door—although Marshall had his own door. I had a chair opposite my desk, and I have this distinct memory of Pamela Harriman sitting in that chair. It's hard for me to imagine that she would sit and wait for something. She must have been waiting for Averell—and then he came in and the two of them went into Marshall's office.

The point I want to make is that Marshall really cultivated them, and he sold this new image of the institute to both of them. I think they were on board with that image. But it took Marshall some time to cultivate their full support.

I remember both of them being extremely kind. Harriman of course being very tall, and Pamela being always beautiful. But how systematically Marshall went to really expand his vision for the institution. He was so conscious of the fact that, for him to create an institute that would be at least close to ISKRAN [Institute of U.S.A and Canada of the Russian Academy of Sciences]—this Institute for U.S. and Canada study—he needed funding. And part of his problem—not problem—but part of the issue that he had to deal with was that, unlike ISKRAN that was so

fully funded by the Soviet government, he had to go and seek funding for his image. There was no government funding available for something that he wanted to build, that ultimately he thought should be of benefit to the U.S. foreign policy community. I think that was somewhat of an issue. I don't want to project too much into that, but I think that he wished that he did not have to cultivate external funding for something like that. And I should mention that Marshall's wife, Colette Shulman, was his partner in this. She shared Marshall's interest, and expertise, in Russia and today remains involved in U.S.-Russia relations.

So, that was just a bit of a digression, but a vignette.

Q: It's a wonderful digression, and one that will come up later when we talk about the crisis in funding, too. Tell me a little bit about the context; whether it was during your time there or during your time when you came to CCNY, about the Reagan era and what you mostly took out of that period.

Arsenian: The Reagan era was an era of opportunity, I believe, and again, most of my interaction already had been at Carnegie dealing with David [A.] Hamburg, who was the president of Carnegie at the time. We probably covered this. I'm not sure. I don't know how to relate that to the Harriman Institute.

Q: And that's okay. This is more a question about your broad observations about the 1980s.

Arsenian: When Reagan announced his Soviet policy in the White House, a policy that I believe was drafted by Ambassador Jack [F.] Matlock [Jr.]. I was actually at the White House, together with David Hamburg and some others, listening to this speech. The speech was tough on the Soviet Union, but it was also full of opportunities. It was sort of, let's break the barrier, let's see if we can work together. And I give a lot of credit for that to Jack Matlock, as well as to others. Reagan had people who influenced him on Soviet policy who really knew culture, who really knew what the Soviet Union is, and Jack Matlock is among them. I view him as somebody who really understands the country. He was a Soviet specialist before he was an ambassador, before he was in politics. Even today, the things that Jack Matlock writes strike me as showing complete and accurate understanding of the reality on the ground in Russia.

So that was an era of opportunity. I think a lot of things were done and were done right, and again, as always in the Soviet/U.S. relations or Russia/U.S. relations, every opportunity, unfortunately has failed; none of the opportunities so far have met their full potential. I just think that the Cold War legacy in both countries is still so strong that it's really hard to break that barrier. Again, the narratives and the media coverage tend to focus on the negatives, on the dangers, rather than the positives and the opportunities—the headwinds against doing something positive are really strong.

I think the biggest thing I want to focus on—if you're talking about the Reagan era—for me, is that the U.S. did not recognize the scope of challenges that [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev was facing in trying to revise or redefine the Soviet economic and political, and I would argue security, landscape. Gorbachev of course wanted to preserve the Soviet Union; there was no question

about that—but he did want the Soviet Union to become a different kind of a country, recognizing that it was, in many ways—if not quite falling behind, then so backward and falling so far back from the U.S. and the West, that he knew that he had to do something to change that.

We can debate whether his approach was the right one or not, but the point is that I think he needed space from the United States and the West in order to be able to transform the Soviet Union in his vision. That space—I don't think he ever got—but he needed that breathing room where the West was not on top of him constantly on issues like human rights, arms reductions, democracy, civil society. He kept saying, "Give me a year. Give me two," stop breathing down my neck. Just kind of lay back and let me see what I can do. To put it bluntly. And we never did it. We never really gave him that space. That's my interpretation of what dominated, I think, the relationship back then.

Q: Okay. This is great, and I want to ask you before we move into the 90s, a question about the past, the so-called golden years of Soviet studies, much of which predates your time at the Russian Institute and even in the field.

But when people in this oral history, they speak about the Harriman of the past, or Sovietology in the past, in the United States, they speak about the golden era of the 60s and the 70s and even part of the 80s, where you had these legendary figures like [John N.] Hazard and Shulman and others, and that there was a very steep decline in the 1990s.

So, my question to you, Deana, is, having such a commanding view of the landscape and the history of the landscape, I wonder if we're overstating the extent to which area studies ever had such resonance and power.

Arsenian: Well, that's a tough question. Let me try to unpack it a little bit, because I think that resonance and power are one thing. Whether the area studies helped produce the expertise on the region, I think that's another thing. I don't think you can make a connection, necessarily, between having the expertise, and that expertise having resonance and power. It's just—it hasn't worked in the United States historically. There's always been a disconnect between academia and policy. And while the area studies have been training people that have ultimately ended up in policy positions—most likely CIA and other intelligence offices and other agencies—there are a lot of other factors that influence the way they look at and interpret the country of their focus. Even though they might have a pretty good understanding of the region that they've studied, at the end of the day that might not be necessarily the most important element in their assessments, in the assessments that come out as part of their products.

For example, I was reading—you should probably take a look, or somebody should take a look. This was brought to my attention just recently. It's a piece by David [S.] Foglesong; he is at Rutgers University. But he wrote this piece, which I thought was fascinating. It's called *The Perils of Prophecy: American Predictions About Russia's Future Since 1881*. Basically what he's saying is that, the predictions—either done by major individuals, like Kennan and others—have not been completely accurate, or predictions done by the U.S. intelligence community have not been completely accurate, because it's always been overlaid, again, by particular narratives



or by particular viewpoints. I recommend this article to people who want to look at why predictions have not panned out so far.

Back to your question about the Russian area studies. I think it is absolutely critical for American universities to produce experts on a country or a region. And Carnegie Corporation recognized this very early on because, as I'm sure I mentioned in my other interview, the Corporation was the founder of the field by establishing the Russian Research Center at Harvard University, back in 1947, with the initial grant. The trustees back then recognized that, after the end of WWII, we need to have a much better understanding of the Soviet Union. And we did not really have that capacity within academia, within the universities. So, the Corporation created the Russian Research Center, and then we—together with other major foundations—Rockefeller, Ford, and later McArthur—contributed to what became known as the area studies, including Soviet and others. So we have a legacy in that, and I think it's very important to recognize that expertise can only be generated within academia. What happens to that expertise afterwards is a different question, but you have to have the capacity to generate it.

You alluded to the disconnect between having deep, in-depth understanding of the area, and policymaking. I don't necessarily feel—having worked on the U.S.-Soviet and then U.S.-Russian relations professionally since 1983—that true understanding of each other's culture, intention, motives, capabilities, fits in the way each side looks at the other; or contributes to policy formation. I don't know if it's because people are trained in these area studies in a certain way, or whether something happens in this transition from trying to gain the expertise to trying, then, to be part of the community that assesses certain policies.

I think that the role of area studies in the U.S. has been important. I mean, without that, we probably would not have had people who are now populating various government agencies that are looking at Russia. But I also think the training, particularly in the past, when you did not have a lot of interactions with the Soviets, or then the Russians—was dominated by the Cold War context; looking at Russia through the prism of threats--nuclear, security, imperialist policies, etc. Again, the same on the Soviet and the Russian side. So the training in these area studies I don't think was as comprehensive as it could have been. That's what Marshall recognized. This is why he wanted to create a very different animal with the Harriman Institute.

I guess my bottom line is that, I think the area studies were very important. They should be important. And yes, they have been recently neglected, as you mentioned, because of lack of funding. Again, as Marshall said, because these rely on funding from individuals or foundations, it's always very difficult to chase that money. And universities have not made these centers their priorities in terms of their role in campaigns and fundraising. Not many universities, at least, did. So they have been neglected, particularly as the foundations have moved to other issues. Following, for example, the end of the Cold War and the crises that have emerged with ethnic and regional conflict, the foundations moved to other issues. And the federal funding, such as it was, had dried out because of various budget cuts.

So, they have been neglected, which is why now Carnegie Corporation is reinvesting in just very few universities. We made \$1million grants to three universities, competitively chosen and not by us, but by a group of four experts on Russia, in order to help reinvigorate the Russian studies

programs in these universities. We've asked twenty universities to apply, and after very comprehensive, as I said, external review process, the winners ended up being Columbia, Wisconsin, and Indiana. But the very important element, the different element in these grants, is the creation—or strengthening—of institutional partnerships that these universities have with Russian universities, because a key element of understanding any country, now more than ever—because we have the opportunity to travel, and we have the opportunities to have exchanges—the key element I believe—and others actually who have advised us believe—is the need to utilize and expand exchanges. And do so either through joint research projects or faculty exchanges or student exchanges. This interactive component is key. Part of our grant enables these interactions to take place at a substantial level. And that's new. That had not necessarily been the case with other area studies. There had been individual contacts between and amongst individual faculty members or researchers, but most centers hadn't had the kind of institutional exchanges in practice, and that's what we're trying to do.

So I'm not sure if I answered your question.

Q: No, you did. You did.

Arsenian: I think on balance—to just sort of end on this—I think the area studies had been important, they are important, but I would not necessarily—in fact, I don't think I will say, that they have weighed in on policy choices within the U.S. I don't know how the situation is in Russia. Again, they have a very different approach.

Q: Let's speak about the 1990s for a bit, if that's okay. So, in the 1990s you are—I think from 1990 to 1997, you were at Brown University?

Arsenian: Correct.

Q: And there, you become more immersed in the international affairs side of the equation, more generally speaking, with your time at the Center for Foreign Policy Development, which later merges with the Watson Institute [for International and Public Affairs], I think. It's interesting that this is your experience because, coincidentally at Columbia, there is a fight brewing between the area studies institutes and more functionally organized institutes, like SIPA, which is in ascendance and getting more and more funding. And so, I'm wondering if we look at the 1990s, as a period, in terms of area studies versus more functional ways to approach the former Soviet Union, in terms of security studies or other specific themes, what opportunities did the Russian studies institutes in the United States lose in the 1990s? What could they have done better?

Arsenian: So, let me answer it in perhaps a bit different way. I don't know that I can give an answer to your specific question, but let me add something to the history from my perspective that might be of interest to someone down the road. And again, this is because you're asking for some vignettes and personal views, given that this is an oral history.

I really had been incredibly fortunate, knock on wood, because—completely unguided; just by happenstance—I happened to not only be there at the creation of the Harriman Institute, but also to be there, not at the creation but at the very beginnings of another institution, the Center for

Foreign Policy Development, that was launched by another U.S. ambassador to Moscow, [Thomas] Tom [J.] Watson [Jr.]. So let me talk about that a little bit.

Tom Watson from IBM [International Business Machines], was an ambassador to Moscow. And the chargé d'affaires at the embassy at the time, was a career foreign service officer and a Russia specialist, Mark [J.] Garrison. And Mark is, again, another person who has so affected the field as well as my life personally. I'm forever indebted to Mark, and his wife, Betty Garrison, who passed away unfortunately a few years ago, prematurely.

When Mark and Watson returned from Moscow, they decided to create a center that would not be an area study, and this is the point I want to make. Their choice was to put a center at Brown University—which was Tom Watson's alma mater—that would be focused on foreign policy at large, but given that Russia, the Soviet Union, was such a big piece of foreign policy, of course the center would have a major focus on the Soviet Union. By the time I got to the center it was already in the makings for a couple of years, but Mark brought me in as assistant director to help him build up the center, particularly to build up the connections to the Soviet Union within the center. But there, the approach, the emphasis was not on training as much as on research, assessments, understandings and connections. Whereas, at the Harriman Institute, the way that Marshall created it, the emphasis, I believe, was on training with research, outreach, understanding following the training.

The Center for Foreign Policy Development—which then merged with the Watson Institute—bypassed this quarrel, if you will, between area studies and functional studies, because Mark and

others recognized that the world is too big, and you've got to be looking at it more holistically. As important as the Soviet Union was, it had to be embedded into a larger foreign policy equation.

I was not really involved in this debate at Columbia between area studies and SIPA, but I think funding might have been an issue. If you have all these area studies and if the foundations or individual donors are not interested in funding them anymore, it forces a decision that the administrations within universities have to make in terms of funding priorities.

I guess I do want to stress that, if you look at Stanford University Center for International Security and Cooperation—used to be International Security and Arms Control [CISAC]. It never really had an area study, but it really became a predominant center for the study of international peace and security. If you look at MIT's [Massachusetts's Institute of Technology] international security studies program, with the focus, back then, on nuclear security, it became a predominant producer of experts on security in general. There are other programs like that. So at some point the area studies began, I think, to compete with these larger peace and security studies centers. Again, we probably lost something in this process.

Q: Well this is great. Let me ask another dimension of this, kind of a broader one. When we look at the 1990s for all its turbulence in Russia, Russian society, what was very fluid and dynamic and open and there were so many possibilities in a sense. So, when you look on the multiple vectors that we could have engaged with, who do you think that we should have engaged more with?

Arsenian: You mean in Russia?

Q: In Russia, yes. What were the lost opportunities, so to speak, of engagement?

Arsenian: This is the breakup of the Soviet Union? You're talking about 1990s?

Q: After the breakup, right. Exactly. Not necessarily at Harriman, or necessarily at Brown, but just generally speaking. What opportunities do you think were lost?

Arsenian: Well, the U.S. did engage extensively with the Russian society back then, so I don't know that we did not—I'm not sure that there were opportunities that we did not touch upon. I mean, remember what happened when the Soviet Union fell apart; [George] Soros went in big with support for Russian and other post-Soviet scholars, throughout the countries, with individual scholar support and the investments to create new universities or strengthen departments within existing ones. MacArthur Foundation and Carnegie entered in late 1990s, with major investments in Russian universities, and in the case of Carnegie, with support to additional universities in other former Soviet states. The Ford Foundation opened up Moscow office to offer direct support, as did many U.S. and EU federal funding agencies. So, there was a lot of external "Western" funding, both private and public for Russian higher education and civil society programs. There were also more specialized investments in promoting democracy and economic reforms. The point is that there was a lot of goodwill in the United States to engage

with as many of the Russian individuals, institutions, civil society organizations, universities, as was possible with major technical assistance and other programs.

I'm not sure that we missed opportunities or engagements. Remember also that Harvard wrote the five-hundred-day economic transition plan for Russia and provided technical assistance to strengthening Russian democratic institutions. The U.S. did it right at that period, both by funding people and institutions in dire needs, but also by focusing on the nuclear danger. The cornerstone of this work was the establishment of the Nunn–Lugar [Samuel A. Nunn and Richard G. Lugar] programs [Cooperative Threat Reduction Program] of which Carnegie and others had been part, to strengthen nuclear weapons security in Russia and other post-Soviet states. Again, so much was done by foundations and governments.

I think the problem was that, because the Soviet Union after the collapse was skating on such thin ice, and because it was in such economic, political and security disarray—economically almost near abyss, and in a chaos because institutions did not know how to function in a new environment where there was no money, no leadership, no know-how—the ground within Russia was not fertile enough to absorb all of the goodwill that came from the United States and the West.

Now, having said that, there's also no question that, with this goodwill shown both by the public and the private sector in the United States and Western Europe, there also was the U.S. government policy to contain Russia, not to allow Russia to transform into a strong power that could eventually, potentially be of a threat to the United States. So, without question, we took



advantage of Russian weaknesses—with NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] expansion, the unilateral withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, excluding Russia from key international organizations. Remember, [Vladimir V.] Putin wanted—well, I’m already jumping into Putin era.

Q: That’s okay.

Arsenian: Well, the early Putin wanted Russia to be part of the West and its structures—and [Dmitry A.] Medvedev—as well; part of U.S./E.U. security architecture, part of NATO, part of E.U. [European Union]. The guiding phrase was “from Vladivostok to Lisbon.” Russia saw itself as part of the EuroAtlantic community and kept coming up with proposals on its architecture. And of course we never took any of that seriously because, I don’t think, ultimately, we wanted Russia to rise. By “we,” I mean certain members of certain administrations. This comes across in several books about this period. So there really was an effort to contain Russia’s potential rise as a threat, while at the same time there was this incredible goodwill to help Russia navigate this very chaotic time, and reduce the risk of further disintegration of Russia that could have exacerbated nuclear proliferation dangers.

So, we helped prevent Russia’s disintegration, but at the same time, we kept Russia outside of Western institutions because we did not think that it has the capacity or the ability to be a partner, either within international structures, or as a strong, independent power. The biggest challenge we face now is that Russia in fact has risen, on its own, and had become what we wanted to prevent—a major global player.

Now, we can discuss and debate how it got to that point, or to what extent it is a global player, but there is no question in my mind, that today's Russia is exactly the kind of a country that we wanted to prevent from happening. And I would even argue that quite a lot of our policies following the collapse of the Soviet Union unfortunately have contributed to the Russia that we see today. Today's Putin is largely a product of his own making; of Russia's particular trajectory. But, I also believe that the U.S. and the E.U. policies have contributed to hardening of Russia and hardening of Putin.

Q: NATO expansion, which you mentioned, is a good example of that. Are there other examples that come to mind, that may be less well-known?

Arsenian: Well, I think they can be divided into a number of categories. At their core, there were unilateral actions, taken by the U.S./EU with no concern about Russia's view of its national security. NATO expansion was one, the ABM abrogation was the other. On these and a few others, we basically said, we're going to do it and there is nothing you can do to stop us. But also and fundamentally, there was the matter of U.S. prioritizing its engagement with former Soviet states over its relationship with Russia, with Georgia and Ukraine as the prime examples, though this approach was applied to other post-Soviet states as well.

We can talk about that forever, but I think that the U.S. policies towards the former Soviet states had been rather aggressive from the get-go, in that we both wanted to encourage the states to be more independent of Russia, and also to be more democratic and oriented towards the West. And

we did that without paying any attention to how that's going to play out in Russia, or, I would argue, for that matter, without really thinking hard in terms of what that policy, should it fail, would mean for these states' relationship with Russia, which is the largest neighbor, had been the largest trading partner, and all that.

Now, what I do want to stress—I don't want to be misconceived—I mean, absolutely these states and others did reach out to the West. They were the ones that created the environment that enabled the United States to play off. There had been traditional mistrust among them towards the Soviet Union and Russia. They logically and rationally wanted to be more associated with the West, which of course is their right. But it could have been handled a bit differently. How do I put this in a way that I think will be factually accurate? We probably could have played on these states' desire for greater distance and independence from Russia in ways that would not have been so irking and so frustrating to Russia itself, because Russia too—at that time—also wanted to have closer and stronger relationship with the United States and E.U. We did not necessarily needed to emphasize the separation between Russia and Georgia, or between Russia and Ukraine, or Moldova and all others.

Q: This is great. So, this brings us to the present, in a sense. And so, I think we can now talk about your own preferred strategies of engagement and how to change things in the future. And so, this is a question partly about your role as a grant-maker, partly as an expert of the field and having this broad view that we spoke about before. So, what is the best way to move forward?

Arsenian: Well, I mean, you asked me at the beginning whether I think that this U.S.-Russia—the Putin-Trump courtship, whether it could lead to marriage, and [laughs] if the marriage will then be sustainable.

So, let me offer some observations. The bottom line answer is of course, I don't know. Nobody knows. But, the history of U.S. engagement with Russia since the end of the Soviet Union shows that every U.S. president came to office with intentions to fundamentally change the relationship, and left the office with the relationship worse off. I mean, this is true from—[George H. W.] Bush to [William J.] Clinton, of course [Barak H.] Obama. And somebody should be writing a dissertation, or more, on why. I think it's a critical question, because understanding why every administration that came to office has left the relationship worse off is a very important question in trying to figure out how to move this forward.

I think that the burden here is on the U.S. side, because on the Russian side there really has only been just Putin. I mean, Yeltsin, yes, but he didn't last that long and did not function all that well. And then Medvedev was simply an extension of Putin. So, we'd seen steady Russian leadership since 2000, and seventeen years later somebody needs to take a look to see why the relationship did not work out on the U.S. side. And also, as I said before, whether or not some of our policies have led to Putin of today, which is not Putin of 2000, in my mind, not even close to Putin of 2000.

So, the way I look at what lies in the future, there are a couple of things I want to just put out there. I think first and foremost—by the way, this also is the context in which I believe we need

to train the next generation of Russia experts in the United States, as well as the kind of engagements and research the Harriman and other similar institutions need to be focusing on, moving forward. So that's the context of the comments that I want to make.

I think the first one is that we are, of course, dealing with a very different world. No need to elaborate on that. No single country, no matter how powerful, can dictate the global trends the way the United States might have been able to do immediately following the collapse of the bipolar, U.S.-Soviet world. So that's kind of an obvious point, but I want to state it as number one.

Number two is that it's also the world where the non-state actors are predominantly active, whether they are terrorist organizations, ISIS and such, or whether they are legitimate institutions and multinationals. The point I want to make is that there are many players in today's global environment, including political actors at non-state levels. That makes the world a very different world moving forward.

I think the third is that the alliances have—it's not that they've shifted, but certain alliances have become stronger than others. So, you might look at the Euro-Atlantic Security alliance, NATO being at the foundation of it, and say maybe it's weaker than it used to be. You might want to strengthen it, or revise it, whatever your view is on that. But we are not looking at how the Asian alliances are strengthening. I don't just mean Russia-China. I mean a host of Asia-led security blocks, economic blocks, political alliances that include Russia, China, and other major regional players. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Asia development banks are among them. They may or may not compete with Western led alliances, such as the World Bank and the IMF

[International Monetary Fund], but the point is that they're evolving and might be strengthening. Somebody needs to take a look at whether or how these blocs are changing today's landscape.

Fourth, is of course, the shift toward Asia in both the demographic growth and the purchasing power. Again, it's obvious—but it's a major element that needs to be stressed as the global growth opportunities, including economic, are not in the Euro-Atlantic area.

And then there is Russia. The main point I want to make here is again, as I've been saying, that today's Russia is not your old Oldsmobile. It's a very different country. I don't want to say that Russia's future is very rosy; I think it's uncertain. But there's no question that under Putin Russia is more self-assured of its destiny and its place in the world, and has a capacity to project force. Certainly not at the global scale, nothing even close to what the U.S. can do, and I don't think it necessarily aspires to that in the immediate future. But at the regional level, yes. And now we see that it can project force in the Middle East and through stronger and deeper alliances with Asian powers, it might go broader still.

I fundamentally disagree with those who say that Russia is a weak power, a power in decline, and one that does not matter. Russia had not been weak for quite some time, so viewing it as such today is a major misperception. Any country that can be both part of the solution, or be part of the problem—which I think Russia is—cannot be dismissed as weak or ineffective. So Russia today is a very different country.

All of this is to suggest that we need to interact with Russia differently. Now, what does that mean? Number one, what Russia wants the most is to be recognized as a great nation. It's a symbolic recognition that even [George F.] Kennan recognized as an important one. I think that if there could come a proclamation, "We recognize that Russia is a global power," it would set the tone for a lot of things. But, it's not easy to do that [laughs].

Secondly, I think we need to recognize that Russia has its national interests. Some of them might be okay with us, some of them might give us a pause. But like the U.S. and every country, Russia has its national interests and, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we have been ignoring those. Russia is now telling us that you can no longer ignore us because we're actually willing to do something about our national interests. And this is an element in Russia's actions in Ukraine, Crimea, Georgia, Syria, etc. We need to understand what those interests are, just like they need to understand what the U.S. national interests are. We need to come to the same page on what these are and how we deal with them.

Third, is that we need to acknowledge that Russia's policies could have direct consequences to the U.S. There are costs to the U.S. for certain Russian behavior. Up till now, the costs were mostly on the Russian side as they had to deal with the consequences of U.S. policies that have affected Russia, including post-Crimea sanctions, for example. Now, with the presumed hacking during the U.S. elections, it is evident that Russia, if it chooses, could bring about costs to the U.S. with certain policies that are detrimental to the United States. This is a rather new and dangerous phenomenon, born, I believe, out of Putin's frustration with U.S.'s "punitive" measures against Russia.

The fourth, is to recognize that we cannot mold Russia in the U.S. image. We've tried that since the end of the Soviet Union. Some of our policies that have promoted democracy and civil society unfortunately have backfired, because Russia is now less democratic and certainly less open to civil society. Again, the blame is not on the U.S. or the E.U. or the West, but there are some policies that I think have contributed to that. Russia is a fundamentally different society. Outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg, it is a conservative country. It has very different traditions, and here is where the understanding of what Russia is and what Russia is not is fundamental.

So we need to stop molding Russia into what we want it to be. That absolutely has to be at the cornerstone of our policies moving forward. We have to recognize Russia for what it is and we have to deal with Russia as it is. To restate something that others have been pointing out, Russia is unique in terms of how we have prioritized Russia's political system and have made it a factor in our ability to engage with Russia. We don't put that litmus test to most of the other countries, and yet, we've held it consistent for Russia. So I think that needs to fundamentally change.

And then, we need to—at the end, the U.S. and Russia, maybe U.S. and the E.U. and Russia, need to take a look at the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and see whether it needs to be revamped in light of these global challenges that are different than the challenges of the Cold War era.



The challenges facing Europe now—again, maybe Russia is a challenge—I’m not convinced that it is; others believe that it is. I think there are more important challenges to European security, including non-state actors, demographics, economic competitiveness, social cohesion, a lot of factors are weighing in on European security. So how does Russia fit into them? If you think that Russia is a threat number one, then okay fine, you build up NATO, bring it closer to the Russian borders. But remember that Russia is going to retaliate in kind. I mean, it can be provoked easily and things could escalate. What I’m saying is that the Euro-Atlantic security architecture needs to be rethought, with Russia in mind, not only as a threat—or I would say, not even necessarily as a threat—but how Russia might possibly enhance the security architecture, and might even help deal with some of the fundamental challenges that the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia are now facing.

And then if you look at the world broadly, again, there are some instances where we do have a common objective and there are some where we don’t. But that’s true with all countries. We don’t need to agree with Russia on everything, but the areas where we do agree, we need to figure out how to work with the Russians.

Q: So Deana, as a grant maker, what is your strategy in bringing us closer to this ideal?

Arsenian: Let me first say that the [Carnegie] Corporation has had a consistent policy towards the Soviet Union going back, as I said, to 1947. The policy has been that the United States needs to deal with the Soviet Union and needs to deal with Russia effectively in order to mitigate the risks and increase the opportunities for addressing global peace and security challenges. That’s

been the policy back then; it's the policy today. When the Corporation began this systematic program looking at the Soviet Union, called "Avoiding Nuclear War" back in 1983, that was exactly the policy; that you have to engage with Russia in order to reduce the risks of nuclear war. Now, I think we're looking at the fact that we have to engage with Russia in order to reduce, not only nuclear threat, but global threats in general.

So, our policy is multi-pronged as a foundation. I think first is to really improve the understanding of Russia in the United States. This is our support to think tanks that are working on that, as well as investments in the Russian area studies at American universities. Number two, to promote engagements and linkages at the levels of faculty, researchers, think tank experts, former government officials, on specific issues that need to be addressed. Number three, we strive to mobilize and bring forth the objective, evidence-based, factual expertise on Russian domestic issues, Russian regional policies and intentions, and Russia's foreign policy aspirations to the American public and the media. A lot of the discourse today about Russia is not based—again, as I said before—on facts or accurate narratives.

Q: Deana, when I think about some of the grants that you've given most recently to the Harriman and other places, I can see how it's compatible with all of these goals, but I also see it as a little bit of a long-term process, that it takes a while to train people, that it takes perhaps an even longer time to get them placed and to change the narrative. I think you've said this to me before, perhaps in the previous oral history, but you've said that a lot of your work, a lot of our work, is intangible in terms of measuring and seeing its impact. So how do we—how will you know that your money is getting a return?

Arsenian: Yes. I think I can try to answer that, George, but I need to take a bathroom break. Can we do that?

Q: Yes, absolutely.

[INTERRUPTION]

Arsenian: All right, so, that's an important question, George, and the bottom line answer is that there are different projects with different time-tables, if you will. If you just take the university grants, the three that we made—or for that matter any other investments that we as a foundation are making into universities on all kinds of issues, not just Russia—they are aimed at strengthening human capacity, and that is a long-term task. Our investments in training today, whether it's at the level of MA, or PhD or post-doc, are intended to make a difference down the road, through better expertise that could be important for the U.S. foreign policy making. This is, again, Marshall Shulman's approach to training that ultimately seeks a paradigm shift on both sides, moving from viewing each other as a primary adversary, to viewing each other as potential collaborators on issues of mutual concern, or shared objectives.

Part of a paradigm shift is the generation of accurate information and assessments, as I mentioned earlier. In today's crazy world of facts and alternative facts, it's a long haul because every view can be challenged. But to the extent possible, we as a foundation have always been for the promotion of knowledge and understanding. We want to help generate and disseminate

narratives and ideas that are driven by facts and reality, not myth and fiction. So that's at the research level.

The third level in this paradigm shift is that you also, then, have to create opportunities for people—particularly on both sides that might have expertise on a given issue but really different viewpoints—to come together in what we call track two or track one-and-a-half meetings. So, to create linkages. For example, take Syria. We have promoted a number of exchanges; ongoing working groups between American and Russian Syria specialists, who come together and try to figure out what exactly is going on in Syria, what could be done about Syria, whether the two countries agree on any aspect of what is happening in Syria. The hope is that the track two would feed into the government policies. We do it with an intention for it to fit in. Whether it will ultimately make an impact or not, of course, is more difficult to tell. So that's our approach.

Then there is the public outreach, the dissemination element—reaching out to the public and the media with these products. The one thing we started, and I will alert you for the sake of legacy—is a new website, together with Harvard University and a dozen other partner institutions. It is called [RussiaMatters.org](http://RussiaMatters.org). The idea is to create the go-to site for assessments of Russia. It offers analyses and facts about and has a widely used section on contestable claims. The idea is to have a website with real expertise on Russia, that is not ideologically driven, or that is not based on “I heard somebody said something.” And, we want to reach out to the media, because the media drives a lot of the discourse, and some of what the media says is accurate, some of what it says is subjective. So we want to connect the media with the people that are looking at Russia on the ground.

Now, the paradigm shift of course will take two to tango. So we're focusing on the U.S. That's our mandate. The Carnegie Corporation charter is to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding among the people of the United States of America. But of course, you have to change the Russian minds as well, and we really cannot do that for many reasons. It's got to be done by the Russians. But we are funding institutions that are working to provide a more accurate information about the United States within Russia, with the aim of fostering a paradigm shift, if you will, from the Russian end.

But that's what it's going to take. It's going to take a paradigm shift. If I were to come back to Putin-Trump, the best that I think we can hope for is that they will set the stage towards developing a roadmap that if traveled, would gradually lead to this paradigm shift. But in the near to immediate term, the purpose of embarking on such a roadmap should be to avoid direct U.S.-Russia confrontation, and enable the two countries to work productively towards mitigating some of the global threats that exist today. In the absence of that path, and it can only be created now by the two presidents, the two sides will proceed in the complete opposite directions. That for me is full of catastrophic mine fields. These could include unintended military actions in the Euro security space, could lead to direct engagements militarily in and around Syria, could lead to confrontations in Asia in and around North Korea. The consequences are just mind-boggling.

Going back to Russia, and back to the point that I don't believe those who say Russia doesn't matter. The one point I want to stress is that, even if you believe that Russia is on decline, and/or is a regional power, the fact is that Russia is a regional power in every region that matters to the

world today. It's a regional power in Asia, it's a regional power in Eurasia, it's a regional power in Europe. That's what makes Russia so pivotal for the United States, and so important for the U.S. to get Russia right.

Going back to the Harriman, to Marshall, to Tom Watson, to Mark Garrison, to George Kennan and this article that David Foglesong has written, the United States for some reason, even up until now, has not been able to get Russia right. We just haven't been able to do that. Of course, the same on the Russia side. The Russians have not been able to get the U.S. right at all.

Q: That's a wonderful observation, and so I think we can conclude with just one question, since you brought it back to the Harriman, too. The grant that you recently gave them is a huge vote of confidence in the institute, and its resonance in the future. So, rather than ask you what its strengths are or why you gave the grant, I would like to ask you what you think Harriman can be doing even better.

Arsenian: Again, let me just go back, and I think I want to also record this for posterity. I think it must have been about two years ago, when the U.S.-Russia relationship was on a path of steep decline that the U.S. scholarly expert and academic community started to talk about the lack of Russia expertise in the country. The sentiment was, "we don't have Russia area studies, there's no funding for them, we're losing this capacity," and a lot of people started to opine and write about this, and bring this to the attention of the policy makers, the public and the media. So there was a buzz in the field that you have to strengthen the Russia area studies.

Reacting to that buzz in the field, we commissioned a needs assessment from the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies [ASEEES], the umbrella organization for Russia area studies. We asked them to conduct a study on the state of the field; to see if the buzz was justified or not.

ASEEES then asked a sociologist, Ted [Theodore P.] Gerber, to conduct the study. Together with ASEEES and Ted, we developed the terms of reference, the questions, we wanted the study to shed light on strength, weaknesses, who are the faculty, what are the fields that are being emphasized, what are the gaps, what exchanges are working, how much funding is there to support programs, what kinds of degrees are being pursued? We created questions to give us a comprehensive picture of the Russia studies field, derived through interviews, surveys, and research. At the end, Ted produced a study that was then approved by ASEEES<sup>1</sup>, which gives a very granular look at the Russia area studies as it stands today—well as it stood two years ago when the study was completed.

We then took the study, and asked the Kennan Institute to organize a meeting of key stakeholders in Washington to review the results. After that, we decided to proceed to help revive the field by addressing the key challenges identified by the study. This led to the RFP [request for proposal] to twenty universities, out of which three had been chosen by an external selection committee of four academic experts on Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> It's on ASEEES's website, so is a public document

Now, what do we hope throughout this process to accomplish, and how the Harriman fits in. We cannot strengthen—by we, I mean the philanthropic and the nongovernmental community—the Russia area studies across the nation that will enable most leading universities to have top Russia programs. We don't have the capacity, or the funding. I'm not even sure there is a need for that.

I think it is important to have a few nationally spread centers of excellence on Russia, so that, if you're an undergrad but you really want to become a Russia specialist, you know that there are four or five or six universities that you really need to go to get the best education on Russia in the United States. So the idea is to create these peaks.

My hope for the three RFP winners, and for the other several universities where we support Russia relevant programs, is that they will emerge as centers of excellence in training and research. And offer a comprehensive approach to the study of Russia; one that is void of the Cold War baggage and legacy; and one that can ultimately lead to that illusive paradigm shift.

Q: Okay. Well wonderful. Is then a good place to stop?

Arsenian: Thank you, very much. Yes, it is.

Q: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]