Spring 2015 ISKRBAN Student Visit to CISSM

From March 30, 2015 to April 6, 2015, the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM) hosted a group of eight students and a faculty member from Moscow’s Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies (ISKRBAN). This was ISKRBAN’s twelfth annual visit to CISSM. The visit was part of the joint Collaborative Education and Security Project, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, to develop and foster the next generation of Russian and U.S. leaders in security policy and foreign affairs. CISSM and ISKRBAN launched the Collaborative Education and Security Project in 2004, with the generous support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Over the past 12 years, more than 100 students have participated in the project and have been given the opportunity to travel to the United States to exchange ideas and establish connections with American students and experts in their field of study.

Each year during their visit, ISKRBAN students receive hands-on policy making experience working with Maryland School of Public Policy (MSPP) students on joint policy memoranda, meeting with experts and policy-makers from leading think tanks and institutions in Washington, D.C., and participating in seminars with MSPP faculty.

This year, the ongoing challenges in U.S.-Russian relations arising from the political crisis in Ukraine reinforced why dialogue between the two countries is necessary to develop a mutual understanding of the issues behind current disagreements. Both ISKRBAN and MSPP students emphasized the need for U.S.-Russian dialogue to overcome political crises and to find cooperative solutions to international security problems. Their friendships also demonstrated the role that the next generation of leaders will play in resolving the conflicts of the new century by bringing in fresh perspectives.

Joint Policy Exercise

The joint policy exercise was the focal point of the visit, as it provided a forum for the students to exchange ideas on particular, current issues. In advance of the visit, MSPP students exchange “food for thought” memoranda with their Russian counterparts. This year the students addressed two issues: (1) U.S.-Russian cooperation against the Islamic

Joint policy-making exercise group meeting.
Once the ISKRAN students arrived in Maryland, the Russian and American students continued their dialogue by reviewing some of the general themes and events that serve as a backdrop to U.S.-Russian relations. On March 31, the ISKRAN students attended a session of Professor Nancy Gallagher’s course on International Security Policy, in which the American students participating in the exercise were enrolled. The first half of the class involved a lecture and discussion focused on the issues currently facing the two countries, e.g., the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran, the Ukraine crisis, and the overall strategic principles guiding U.S.-Russia relations. The ISKRAN students explained how a dominant Russian perspective on foreign policy, the “Russian world” concept, supports traditional values, nationalism, and moral duty to protect compatriots. The group then moved onto discussing nuclear weapons and the possibility of future reductions in U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals. The students related this discussion back to the larger political relationship between the two countries, arguing that both sides could go down to much lower numbers of weapons while maintaining deterrence were it not for political obstacles in both countries. The class discussion showed how a loss of diplomatic dialogue between the United States and Russia poses a danger to the resolution of conflicts that veer from or challenge areas of past understanding.

After the lecture, the students had a working lunch and moved their attention to the specific issues on which the policy exercise was focused. The Syria group identified the ISIS crisis, the fight against terrorism, and the establishment of peace and stability in the Middle East as common interests of both the United States and Russia. The group focused on the potential for U.S.-Russian cooperation to provide humanitarian aid, e.g., medical supplies, food, and water, to Syrian civilians and on the countries working together to pass a U.N. Security Council resolution in support of humanitarian aid in the region. The group also proposed establishing a joint commission led by U.S. and Russian officials to bring together regional actors, such as Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. The students agreed that since neither country supported sending military troops into Syria to fight ISIS, the countries should use soft power to fight ISIS through counter-propaganda, by cooperating on counterterrorism and sharing intelligence, by putting pressure on countries supplying weapons to ISIS, and by countering criminal trafficking.
The INF group approached the compliance issues with the treaty as both military and political problems. After evaluating the possible consequences of withdrawal for both the United States and Russia, the students argued that if either country withdrew, both would perceive the other as a greater threat and that the demise of the treaty would harm the overall bilateral relationship. As an alternative, the students proposed the resumption of verification inspections, the establishment of a special verification committee, the creation of a glossary of definitions, and reinvigorated communication between technical experts.

The policy exercise involved additional group meetings where joint proposals were refined. Each group made a presentation about its proposal at an April 3 event attended by MSPP and ISKRAN faculty and staff, during which the groups had a chance to critique each other’s recommendations.

**Washington, D.C., Meetings**

During their visit, the ISKRAN students met with a range of Russian policy experts, diplomats, and government officials around Washington, D.C. These meetings allowed the students to hear a variety of perspectives, ask questions on U.S.-Russia relations, and further discuss their group projects while learning from the experiences of distinguished experts in the field.

On April 1, the group first met with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear and Strategic Policy, Anita Friedt, at the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance (AVC). Friedt informed the students about the main responsibilities of AVC and other State Department bureaus involved in the implementation of arms control agreements. She argued that although the United States and Russia have disagreements on the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty,
the transparency and predictability about nuclear capabilities permitted by the New START Treaty proves that arms control can be effectively executed despite differences on political issues, i.e. Ukraine situation. Friedt also underlined that advanced verification technology is needed for further disarmament and to ensure that both sides can reduce and dismantle warheads without revealing national secrets. She talked about how the State Department was actively working to establish technical working groups toward these goals. During their discussion with Friedt, the ISKRAN students asked questions related to their INF group project and to how the United States and Russia can enhance transparency between the two country and address compliance issues with the treaty.

After visiting the State Department, the ISKRAN group went to the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP) and met with Dr. Lauren Van Metre from USIP’s Center for Applied Research on Conflict; Ambassador Bill Taylor, the former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine; Jim Rupert, a longtime news reporter and journalist; and Renata Stuebner, a senior specialist on Balkans. At USIP, the group discussed the current political crisis in Ukraine and possible pathways to the peaceful transformation of the conflict, including by conducting open dialogue in the global community.

Later in the afternoon, the students met Dr. Lori Esposito-Murray, vice president of the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), who talked with the students about how NTI contributes to public understanding of the importance of reducing the role of nuclear weapons in post-Cold War world politics. Murray addressed student questions relating to U.S.-Russian cooperation against the Islamic State and the calls for collaboration on humanitarian efforts and to cooperation on the INF treaty, which she called the “bedrock of arms reduction efforts” to move forward with deeper cuts. She argued that both the United States and Russia should move away from heightened rhetoric on verification efforts, and she called for advanced cooperation on nuclear safety and the security of materials.
The last stop on the first day of D.C. meetings was with Prof. Angela Stent, director of Georgetown University’s Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies. Stent discussed her most recent book on U.S.-Russian relations, the limits of partnership, and a set of three outstanding issues between the two countries: the Snowden case, the Syrian civil war, and the Ukraine crisis. She argued that both sides have a mismatch between their expectations and their level of trust of the other. To address this mismatch, she suggested that the two needed to engage in a “broad, honest” conversation.

On April 3, the ISKRAN students visited the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Washington, D.C., and met with Aydar Aganin, the minister counselor, and Igor Prokopiev, attaché. Aganin and Prokopiev emphasized that, despite the current deadlock in diplomatic relations, Russia’s dialogue with the United States remains the most important factor in ensuring international security. The group discussed several issues relating to the Syria conflict, including the fight of opposition groups against the Assad regime, and the broader fight against ISIS and radical ideologies. The visit also included discussion of the INF treaty and U.S. and Russian concerns about violations.

Later that morning, the group met with Amb. James Collins, the director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Collins addressed the fundamental issues at stake in the current Ukraine crisis and compared U.S. and Russian views and threat perceptions. Pointing to the Minsk agreement as a platform for diplomacy, Collins suggested that working on the Ukrainian economy is a joint interest with potential for multilateral cooperation.

The ISKRAN students later visited the Atlantic Council of the United States (ACUS) to meet with Fran Burwell, the vice president and director of Transatlantic Relations. Burwell analyzed the Ukraine crisis from the angle of EU-NATO relations. Burwell’s interpretation led to debate among the Russian students and highlighted nuanced differences among their viewpoints.

After lunch, the students went to the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). At NRDC, the group listened to Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Hoffman of The
Hoffman shared his views on the disparities between U.S. and Russian threat perceptions and on the role of news media in contributing to these differences. He also answered the students’ questions about his book, *The Dead Hand*, which is translated into Russian. NRDC Senior Scientist Matthew McKinzie, the director of the nuclear program at NRDC, and Christopher Paine described their ongoing projects on nuclear weapons de-alerting, nuclear safety, fuel cycle development, and citizen radiation monitoring.

**Seminars with MSPP Faculty**

The annual ISKRAN visit allows the Russian students to experience what it is like to be a graduate student in the United States by arranging for seminars with distinguished MSPP faculty members. This year the students had five seminars with MSPP faculty on a range of topics, and the experiences prompted several students to express interest in applying to MSPP graduate programs.

On March 31, the ISKRAN students had a seminar with Prof. Catherine Kelleher, who spoke to them about ballistic missile defense and provided an overview of the research projects in which she is currently involved. Kelleher emphasized the differences between U.S. and Russian definitions of missile threats, the technical difficulties of successfully intercepting ballistic missiles, and, most importantly, the budgetary limits on defense spending brought about by sequestration. Since the United States and Russia have converging interests on limiting the impact of newly emerging nuclear weapons states with small numbers of missiles and of non-state actors, she argued that the two countries could jointly devise transparent procedures to divide responsibilities for protection and work toward a cooperative solution.

After discussing ballistic missile defense, the students met with Nobel Laureate and Distinguished University Professor Emeritus Professor Thomas Schelling, who addressed the question of why we haven’t had a nuclear terrorist attack yet. Schelling argued that, although stealing fissile material is relatively easy, any smuggler would have great
difficulty getting a nuclear bomb to a customer. ISKRAN students enjoyed this thought-provoking analytical exercise and worked through possible theft scenarios with Professor Schelling, focusing particularly on the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

Later in the afternoon, the students had a seminar with Professor Steve Fetter, Associate Provost for Academic Affairs at UMD. As Fetter formerly served as the assistant director at-large in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, he gave the ISKRAN students a perspective on his government experience with large policy reviews on arms control agreements, the U.S. nuclear posture, ballistic missile defense, energy, and environmental policy. He emphasized U.S.-Russia cooperation on climate change in the Arctic and in space, yet argued that collaboration in science is impacted by the deterioration of the bilateral political relationship.

On April 2, the students met with Professor I. M. “Mac” Destler and discussed Iran’s nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 countries and related economic sanctions. An expert on Congressional politics, Destler spoke to his sense of what the U.S. Congress needed to be a part of a final deal to support it. Underlining the fact that the United States and Russia are on the same side of the table during these negotiations, he suggested that the

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<th>From the students</th>
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<td>“I really enjoyed our collaboration with the American students and the seminar with Professor Gallagher. It was exciting to share my ideas and to listen to others’ opinions.”</td>
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<td>- Daria Makarova, ISKRAN student</td>
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<td>“The importance of communication was the key takeaway from the policy-making exercise. When discussing potential solutions to the issue of INF noncompliance, everyone agreed that the reason the United States and Russia continually have problems trusting one another is because sustainable communication channels have not been established and maintained. This shared perspective was the basis for our entire recommendation about how to ensure INF compliance moving forward.”</td>
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<td>- Allison Smith, MSPP student</td>
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<td>“Meeting the American students who study Russian was probably the most surprising thing for me during the visit. I used to believe that our language was impossible to master, but they spoke it perfectly (and had very good knowledge of Russian culture, too).”</td>
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<td>- Irina Smirnova, ISKRAN student</td>
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<td>“The joint policy exercise was a great learning experience. I learned about how Russia thinks and about how my fellow students view the conflict with ISIS. It was also helpful to get practical experience with conflict negotiations, and to learn what skills I need to work on.”</td>
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<td>- Robyn Nikkel, MSPP student</td>
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<td>“In Moscow we don’t have universities as big as UMD, with so many buildings. This place inspires study, spending days in the library and visiting interesting lectures.”</td>
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<td>- Mayya Nguyen, ISKRAN student</td>
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sanctions regime could impact the Iranian economy, yet with no clear indication of a policy change, might also prove ineffective.

Later that morning, the students met with MSPP’s Dean, Robert Orr, who joined the school in Fall 2014. Orr, who was formerly the U.S. Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Planning, talked to the students about the need for multilateral cooperation on global issues such as terrorism, energy security, and climate change. He emphasized the importance of public policy making being a multi-stakeholder process—how governments, the private sector, and civil society need to work together to create values and incentive structures to address issues that states alone cannot resolve. Orr pointed to the need for U.S.-Russian cooperation to build a sustainable global economic policy. He also argued that the United States and Russia have joint responsibility for the future of nuclear weapons and for peace and security in the Middle East. During their discussion with Orr, the students raised questions about their joint policy-making projects.

**Extracurricular Activities**

The ISKRAN visit typically occurs during the transition from winter to spring, a transition that is accompanied by sunshine and blooming flowers. Amidst their busy schedule of meetings and classes, the ISKRAN students had many chances to interact with MSPP and UMD students and to make American friends. In the past, these interactions have proven as valuable to the student as learning from experts.

This year, Professor Zhanna Vernola, a distinguished lecturer of Russian from the UMD School of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, hosted a tea hour for the ISKRAN students and introduced them to her students. The students practiced their Russian language skills and discussed the similarities and differences of living and studying in Russia and the United States. The tea time was followed by the CISSM tradition of hosting a pizza and movie night featuring “A Walk in the Woods,” a televised play based on private discussions between U.S. negotiator Paul Nitze and Soviet Delegate Yuli Kvitsinsky during 1982 arms control talks in Geneva.
On April 2, MSPP faculty and students and the ISKLAN group gathered for a farewell dinner party at Professor Gallagher’s house. The students reflected on their visit, activities, and meetings, and generally enjoyed a night out on the patio. The informal setting also permitted them to exchange contact information with each other in order to stay in touch in their personal and professional lives. The next day, the ISKLAN students also attended a happy hour organized by MSPP’s ISEP Council, a student group.

Before heading back to Moscow, the students enjoyed two days of sightseeing and shopping in Washington D.C., visiting the White House, the Capitol, and the National Mall’s monuments and museums. They also enjoyed the cherry blossoms and the fireworks around the Tidal Basin during the National Cherry Blossom Festival. On their final morning in the United States, they took a walking tour of the campus to help them exercise before the long flight and to learn about sundry UMD traditions, such as rubbing the nose of Testudo, the bronze sculpture of a Maryland terrapin.