

The Foreign Policy Association
of Harrisburg, Inc.
P.O. Box 60665
Harrisburg, PA 17106

Russia and the West

Scribed by Devon Malloy
Student of Global Studies and Digital Communications
Lebanon Valley College

Retired Brigadier General Peter B. Zwack addressed the Foreign Policy Association of Harrisburg on March 23 on the subject of Russia and its relations with the United States and the rest of the world. There were 144 FPA members and guests present.

General Zwack, a former U.S. defense attaché to the Russian Federation, said there was little doubt in his mind that Russia had hacked into the Democratic National Committee's computers during last year's presidential campaign. At the same time, he did not believe that Russian interference altered the outcome of the election.

To fully understand Russia, one must be cognizant of Russian history and the great loss of life and suffering its people endured from the German invasion in World War II, General Zwack said. Most Russians feel threatened by the West and particularly by NATO.

General Zwack noted that while Russia is by far the largest country in the world in land area, nearly twice the size of the U.S., it ranks only ninth in population. The country is spread across much of Europe and Asia.

Russia has a long border with China, a border that seems secure for now, allowing the Russians to focus their attention and resources on other matters - a situation that General Zwack feels the West should keep an eye on.

A main Russian concern is NATO. Russians believe that the NATO defense alliance should not extend eastward to countries that once were part of the Soviet Union, General Zwack said. The Russians felt justified moving into Crimea, even though it was part of Ukraine, because more than 60 percent of the Crimean population are ethnically Russian. He said that if provoked, the Russians also could move into Belarus.

Russian intervention in Syria probably saved the regime of President Bashar al-Assad although it put Russia in direct conflict with U.S.-backed rebels seeking the overthrow of the Assad government.

General Zwack said the Russians have become experts at cyber warfare and the use of information control as a means of coercion. He said Russian elites are becoming increasingly anti-American and that Vladimir Putin's personality cult is finding favor with Russian youth.

He predicted that Putin would win another four years as Russian president, portending future tense relations between Russia and the West.

2017 Program Topics / Schedule

- April 27** South China Sea Geopolitics
- May 10** Bus trip to the Polish Embassy and the U.S. State Department in Washington, DC
- May 18** Future of U.S. - Iranian Relations

2016-2017 FPA Officers

- President:** Dr. Michele Sellitto 717-968-1995
msellitto@comcast.net
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hcdavison@verizon.net
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2geegee@msn.com
- Treasurer:** Frank Matunis 717-526-4747
frankx912@verizon.net

Membership: Ann Glasscock 717-695-2738
hglasscock07@comcast.net

Newsletter: John L. Taylor 717-545-5027
jolata@pa.net

Web Editor: Lou Thieblemont 717-763-0522
lou.lynn@comcast.net