CF-ABN EVENT - May 23 2026 - Second Session

Hello to all, my name is Walter Zaryckyj. I have been assigned the task of moderating our second session. [Hard to match the work of the first, but with the wonderful set of experts we have....we will certainly try]

Let me begin with the theme that our session was assigned:

The discussion group is asked to focus on how Russia's war and internal decay affect regions beyond Ukraine, including Europe, the Arctic, Central Asia, and the global South. Panelists will assess whether Russia's weakening position creates new risks, new opportunities.

To set the stage for just such a discussion ---- I have a self imposed 3-5 minutes to provide a foreword

I would start by asking our assemblage to engage in an ultra quick memory check on Russian imperial history.

Let all of us remember **a famous 1980s Henry Huttenbach-Michael Rykwin assertion** "that starting in the mid 15th century - the Duchy of Moscow grow an average hundred sq kms per year at a steady pace for four centuries'; it began as a regional power during the reign of the Ivans (with pretensions for something larger using the Third Rome Construct ie the carcass of the Byzantium - E. Europe & the Caucasus) .....then moved on to the status of a continental power under Peter I and Catherine II (grabbing large chunks of Northern and Southern Europe's eastern flank while simultaneously conquering the Arctic tundra to the Urals and beyond).....and finally, with Alexander and the nation killing (unholy trinity head) Nicholas, morphed into an authentic trans-continental power by the mid 19th c. (with a reach stretching from the Balkans to Alaska)

That overstretch, especially when the vast power was not transformed into even the most minimal loyalty of the inhabitants conquered, coupled with the deeply corrupt arrogance of the metropole population (everything was always oversized) led to a management crisis -- it resulted in a series of military defeats starting with the Crimean War, continuing with the Russo Japanese War and ending with collapse of the Russian Front in WWI, followed by the signing of a humbling peace treaty that culminated in the purported 'fall' of Russian Empire, a massive class revolt and eventually an all out civil war.

Note carefully the word 'purported'. Out of the ash of revolution and civil war, Mother Russia , renamed the CCCP and armed with a new messianic zeal equivalent to its earlier Third Rome construct known as World Revolution (promising social & national liberation globally), first reconqued the territories (nations) it had let go, then did the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact - Teheran Trio two step and emerged in the post WW II (post Yalta talks) as a transcontinental power once more. The addition of a nuclear arsenal and the Sputnik "triumph" (to match or even overtake its one peer competitor - US) added a final and defining stripe to its uniform in the 1950's: Global super power - even possible hegemon.

Again, Moscow's (the Kremlin's --- the CCCP's --- or choose a term) imperial aspirations went into overstretch, especially after it's peer competitor suffered a series of setbacks from Indo China to Iran/

Afghanistan and Angola/Ethiopia in 1970s. Russia's naval presence in places like Cuba/Nicaragua and Mozambique as well as Vietnam's Cam Ranh Bay and Syria's Tartus meant that perforce Russia had influence (call it: imperial reach) anywhere in the world (heck, in space as well).

Fortunately, the overstretch again was accompanied by the sheer corrupt **(now read: increasingly Incompetent**) arrogance of the metropole population (centered in Moscoe and Leningrad) PLUS an awakened need for "national & social liberation" (how ironic) among the non Russians in the CCCP --- embodied in the predecessor of today's ABN - the Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations.

This combination of factors - when supplemented by the appearance in the West of the Reagan-Thatcher-Mulroney leadership capable of confronting the 'beast' (now labeled 'the Last Prison of Nations') led to a second and seemingly more serious dismantling of the Russian Imperial construct in the 1988 to 1992 period. First to go were various client states around the globe starting with Afghanistan, then the nations of the Warsaw Pact (a military alliance that the CCCP had conjured up in the 1950s) and finally, instigated by ABN and its friends, the 'captive nations' of the CCCP itself. [Add - by 1993, with Rutskoi & Yeltsin facing off around the Duma....Civil War II and further implosion loomed)

Yet that turn of events saw still another corrective. The dismantling of the CCCP (and therefore of the RU imperial construct) was not completed. Fifteen nations went free but with the so-called Russian Federation remaining, another several dozen nations remained trapped. When Ichkeria tried walking out in the mid 90s, it was outdueled in a 5 year war; no one helped. Tatarstan seeing the pain of the Chechens stepped back. The revanchists (centered in the old sword and shield of the Empire, the KGB) seeing that success, got their man Vlad ("victor over the Chechens") into power. And over the next two decades, using the devices of hybrid warfare and splendid lil wars, Vlad managed to (at least virtually) restore the image of RU as a transcontinental Power; nay .....with his military ventures in Georgia, Crimea, Donbas, Syria, the Central African states and his clever Dezinform laced diplomacy and election manipulation spez-ops, by 2022 on the eve of the UA invasion, he was posing as a Global Power player.

In effect, a spike had not been driven through the heart of the beast!! Putin, in invading Ukraine fully and openly and without remorse was saying "We're Back.....bigger and better than ever."

And yet again (one more time), the Kremlin has gone into overstretch - has begun an unwinnable war (if capturing Kyiv was the game) and has worsened matters with its perennial corrupt arrogance. So here lies one modest perfunctory preface to our session question. Opportunities for reshaping --- Yes!! Risks in not getting it right -- ie --- finishing the task (finding a way back to the era of the Duchy of Moscow) and hence seeing an even uglier RU imperial structure appear--- From this quarters --- Equally YES!!

Hope the aforementioned is a nice place to start!!

Now on to our distinguished panel:

Akhmed Zakaev is the Prime Minister of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria's government-in-exile. Initially trained as an actor, he became the chairman of the Chechen Union of Theatrical Actors in

1991. A veteran of the First Russian-Chechen War, Zakaev was a signatory of the 1997 Russian-Chechen Peace Treaty and subsequently served as the Chechen Deputy Prime Minister. In 2002, when Russia attempted to implicate him in the Moscow theater hostage crisis, the British court rejected Moscow's extradition request, and Zakaev was granted political asylum in the UK the following year. Today, Zakaev leads a political movement that opposes both the Islamist shift in Chechen militancy and the current Russian-backed government of Ramzan Kadyrov. Between the two Russian-Chechen wars, he co-authored *Wahhabism: The Kremlin's Remedy Against National Liberation Movements*, which posits a link between Soviet-era support for terror groups, dictatorial states and the rise of political Islam.

Luke Coffey is a senior fellow at Hudson Institute focusing on foreign policy issues. Prior to joining Hudson, Mr. Coffey worked at the Heritage Foundation as a research fellow and Director of the Foreign Policy Center. Mr. Coffey previously served at the UK Ministry of Defence as senior special adviser to the British Defence Secretary. He was the first non-UK citizen appointed to this position by the prime minister to provide advice to senior British ministers. He also worked in the House of Commons as an adviser on defense and security issues for the Conservative Party. His work in British politics followed his service to the United States as a commissioned officer in the U.S. Army—deploying to Afghanistan. In 2024, he was awarded the Order of Merit Third Class by President Zelensky for his work on supporting U.S.-Ukrainian relations.

Jean-François Ratelle is an affiliated researcher and a professor of conflict studies and human rights at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) at the University of Ottawa. Professor Ratelle has conducted over fifteen years of field research in Russia involving ethnic and religious minorities, security services, and insurgent and terrorist organizations. His work also extends to North Caucasian diasporas in Western Europe, Turkey, Ukraine, and Georgia.

AT THE END: Q & A - Question to ponder further:

Suggested moderator questions:
- [?] What is the current state of affairs in Russia and why it's important for policy makers?
- [?] How does Russia's internal instability translate into external behaviour toward neighbouring regions?
- [?] What risks of escalation or spillover should policymakers anticipate as Russia's imperial model erodes?
- [?] How should Canada, the US, and the EU respond to a Russia that weaponizes economic interdependence and insecurity?
- [?] Does engagement with exiled Russian opposition figures help manage regional instability, or does it risk misreading the nature of the regime?
- [?] What lessons should democratic states draw from Ukraine's role as a frontline defender of European security?