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## Results of the “Reset” in US-Russian Relations

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R. Craig Nation

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## Summary

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The administrations of Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev have committed to a process of “resetting” US-Russian relations on a foundation of mutual interests and pragmatic collaboration. In the year since the agenda was originally articulated the atmospherics of the relationship have improved considerably, and significant cooperative initiatives, such as the new strategic arms reduction accord, have been set in the works. Nonetheless, significant differences continue to divide the two parties and conflicting interests remain a potential source of discord. If progress is to continue, the reset agenda will need to become more ambitious and point toward a more profound *restructuring* of bilateral relations.

## Introduction

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The Five Day War between Georgia and the Russian Federation during August 2008 has been described as “a post-cold war nadir for US-Russian relations.”<sup>1</sup> It was also a demonstration of the accumulated failures of the US’ Russia policy. The risk attached to an adversarial relationship was harshly revealed. Moscow was able to use military force to thwart Tbilisi’s attempt to regain control over the breakaway South Ossetia region, massively damage the Georgian armed forces, break the momentum of NATO enlargement in the Caucasus, and humiliate a close US ally with virtual impunity.<sup>2</sup> US-Russian relations had disintegrated to the point where Washington had no levers at its disposal to influence Russian behavior.

By highlighting the risks of un-tempered rivalry, the conflict also effecting a kind of catharsis.<sup>3</sup> In its wake a concerted effort was made to back away from confrontational policies and, in the phrase coined by US Vice-President Joe Biden, “press the reset button” in order to place relations on a more stable, businesslike foundation.<sup>4</sup> New Russian President Dmitry Medvedev had pointed the way, describing the US-Russian relationship, in a manner quite different from his predecessor Vladimir Putin, “as a truly key relationship where friendship and understanding is absolutely essential.”<sup>5</sup> The meeting between US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in March 2009, where Lavrov accepted the gift of a button marked “reset” as the symbol of a new start in bilateral relations, was an auspicious inauguration.<sup>6</sup> At their first meeting as heads of state during April 2009 presidents Obama

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<sup>1</sup> J. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, Lanham MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, p. 104. This perception is echoed in Russian sources: “Russian-American Contradictions Reached their Apogee during the Crisis in the Caucasus in August 2008.” V. Baranovskii, et al., *Rossiia i mir: 2009: Chast’ II-Vneshnaya politika* [Russia and the World: 2008. Part II-Foreign Policy], Moscow, IMEMO RAN, 2009, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> P. Calzini, “La guerra Russo-Georgia: Il ritorno del nazionalismo russo,” *Quaderni di Relazioni Internazionali*, No. 9, March 2009, p. 4-16.

<sup>3</sup> R. Gottemoeller, *Russian-American Security Relations after Georgia*, Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2008.

<sup>4</sup> C. Whitlock, “‘Reset’ Sought with Russia, Biden Says,” *Washington Post*, 8 February 2009.

<sup>5</sup> “A Conversation with Dmitry Medvedev,” New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 15 November 2008.

<sup>6</sup> N. Krasnikov, “Lavrov i Klinton ‘perezagruzilis’,” [Lavrov and Clinton Reset], *Komsomol’skaya Pravda*, 11 March 2009.

and Medvedev emanated good will, and issued a joint statement outlining more than twenty areas of cooperation.<sup>7</sup> The US-Russian summit conducted in Moscow in July 2009 produced a series of agreements, including a commitment to negotiate a follow-on agreement to the START treaty scheduled to expire in December 2009 and facilitate transport of military personnel and equipment across Russia in support of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> The “reset” was on the way to becoming something more than just a clever phrase. The new START accord signed by Medvedev and Obama in April 2010 was the first substantial result of rapprochement, and opened the door to expanded strategic interaction. The pursuit of pragmatic collaboration has become an important vector of Western policy; the report of the group of experts designated to establish a foundation for a new NATO strategic concept, released in May 2010, unambiguously commits the Alliance to a policy of engagement with Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Over a year later, in spite of the July 2010 spy scandal, it has become clear that a serious effort to normalize US-Russian relations is underway, embodied by a number of meaningful achievements. The effort corresponds to the objective security interests of both parties, and has a strong practical foundation. But it has also become clear that moving beyond the limited goal of normalization toward a more substantial *transformation* of the relationship will be a difficult and problematic long-term undertaking. US-Russian rivalry is a product of contending world views, conflicting priorities, and significant power asymmetries. Overcoming these differences, a goal to which both sides should aspire, will require more than the modest efforts at rapprochement that the reset agenda has entailed to date.

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<sup>7</sup> P. Fedynsky, “Russia Hails First Obama-Medvedev Meeting,” *VOA News*, 2 April 2009.

<sup>8</sup> M.A. Fletcher and P.P. Pan, “US and Russia to Reduce Arsenals: Obama, Medvedev Discuss Cooperation on Missile Defense,” *Washington Post*, 7 July 2009; P.H. Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, US Department of State, “Statement Before the House Foreign Relations Committee,” Washington DC, 28 July 2009.

<sup>9</sup> *NATO 2020: Assured Security; Dynamic Engagement. Analysis and Recommendations of the Group of Experts on a New Strategic Concept for NATO*, Brussels, 17 May 2010, p. 10. Nuclear non-proliferation, arms control, counter-terrorism, missile defense, crisis management, peace operations, maritime security, and the fight against drug trafficking are specified as promising areas for collaboration.

## Pressing the Button

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In the spring of 2009, the bipartisan *Commission on US Policy toward Russia* articulated an agenda for “a strategic reassessment of the United States’ relationship with Russia with an emphasis on exploring common interests.”<sup>10</sup> From the outset, calls to recalibrate US-Russian relations have rested on the assertion that the two sides share important concerns that can only be addressed through cooperation, and that “businesslike” relations can be pursued where it is mutually beneficial despite areas of disagreement.

### *Strategic stability*

Together Russia and America control over 90 percent of the world’s nuclear weapons and are the only countries that could realistically attack one another and effect decisive damage. They have a strong interest in preventing a renewal of geopolitical competition or great power warfare on the scale of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world wars, and in reinforcing strategic nuclear stability.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, “the re-igniting of a nuclear arms race and a full-spectrum competitive relationship with Russia would be a major setback for fundamental American national security interests.”<sup>12</sup> Renewing the arms control process and redefining the place of nuclear deterrence in bilateral relations has become a first step away from such an outcome. Reinforcing the non-proliferation regime, managing the egregious cases of North Korea and Iran, blocking access by international terrorist organizations to weapons of mass destruction, and coming to terms with the 21<sup>st</sup> century reality of nuclear multipolarity are challenges that can only be addressed through cooperation.

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<sup>10</sup> *The Right Direction for US Policy toward Russia: A Report from the Commission on US Policy toward Russia*, Washington DC, March 2009, p. 2. The Report asserts that “rapid and effective action to strengthen US-Russian relations is critically important to advancing US national interests” and that such action must be based upon “a shared concept of security that incorporates Russian perspectives.” *Ibid.* p. 2, 4.

<sup>11</sup> This is clearly articulated in the most recent US nuclear posture review. *Nuclear Posture Review Report*, Washington DC, Office of the Secretary of Defense, April 2010.

<sup>12</sup> D. Deudney and G.J. Ikenberry, “The Unravelling of the Cold War Settlement,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, December 2009-January 2010, p. 40.

## **Counter-terrorism**

Washington and Moscow share a common perception of the threat emerging from radical jihadist movements. Russia is struggling to come to terms with a home grown Islamist insurgency, and has been more sympathetic to US definitions of the terrorist threat than many other US allies. Twenty percent of Russia's population is Muslim and the state's southern boundary corresponds to a major "fault line" between Christian and Islamic civilizations. Russia's geopolitical situation and hard security assets (including intelligence capability, military and police forces) position it as a valuable ally in a "long war" against the terrorist threat.

## **Energy security**

Russia and the US—the world's largest producer and consumer of energy resources, respectively—have a common interest in regulating global markets to their mutual advantage, ensuring reliable supply, stable markets and predictable prices. Russia could act as a stabilizer in world energy markets, including niche sectors such as liquefied natural gas and nuclear energy, but needs access to Western technology to exploit its potential. Russia's strong position in the Arctic region, one of the most promising new sources of hydrocarbon resources, should reinforce its attractiveness as an energy partner.<sup>13</sup> The US and its European allies are seeking to diversify sources of supply, including efforts to develop the production of shale gas from domestic sources, but Russia is and will remain an essential supplier on world and regional markets.

## **Environmental management**

By 2008, Russia had become the world's sixth largest economy measured by purchasing power parity. It was simultaneously the world's third largest energy consumer and emitter of pollutants (after the US and China), with energy-intensive and inefficient infrastructure in desperate need of modernization. Enhanced cooperation on energy efficiency and efforts to manage the consequences of climate change would contribute to the US environmental agenda, open

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<sup>13</sup> C.K. Ebinger and E. Zambetakis, "The Geopolitics of Arctic Melt," *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 6, November 2009, p. 1215-1232.

markets for investment, strengthen the international regime seeking to address global warming, and help integrate Russia into the international system in an area of collective concern. Russia arrived at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in December 2009 with a pledge to cut emissions by 25 percent by 2020, which it has pledged to sustain despite the conference's inability to impose binding commitments.

## ***Eurasian security***

Eurasia has become the venue for many of the world's most intractable conflicts, and a focal point of Russian-American rivalry, but both parties have a significant interest in promoting regional stability. If the various "frozen" conflicts and points of contention that divide the region could be mitigated or resolved, all would stand to benefit. Encroachment by the US and the EU in the post-Soviet space has been a major irritant in East-West relations, but has arguably resulted in little strategic gain. Russia is threatened by instability on its periphery and needs calm international circumstances to concentrate on domestic transformation and development. The US has limited means to solve local problems in distant regions where its vital interests are not at stake. Finding a way to escape from the zero-sum logic of geo-strategic competition in Eurasia should be an essential dimension of renewed cooperation.

## ***Afghanistan***

Russia supported the original US engagement in Afghanistan and respects the goal of an independent, neutral and stable Afghanistan that does not threaten its neighbors or risk to regress into a safe haven for terrorists. The 2005 declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) against an open-ended US military presence in Central Asia, and subsequent closing of the Karshi-Khanabad facility in Uzbekistan, was a by-product of the downward spiral in US-Russian relations that both sides now seek to reverse. Russia shares concern about the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and in particular the possibility that regional instability could have an impact upon nuclear-armed Pakistan. Moscow would

like to see a successful US eventually cede its responsibility to regional actors, which is precisely the US intent.<sup>14</sup>

## **Relations with China**

The seemingly inexorable rise of the People's Republic of China creates dilemmas for both the US and Russia, but the "triangular" relationship between the three parties is not balanced.<sup>15</sup> Moscow has no choice but to pursue stable relations with its increasingly influential and sometimes intimidating neighbor.<sup>16</sup> The Sino-American relationship is vital for both partners, but also troubled by core issues—for the US, China's aggressive commercial policy and failure to support strong sanctions against Iran; for China, US refusal to compromise on issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty.<sup>17</sup> The US and Russia are both wary of China's increased assertiveness, and seek ways to bring Beijing into the process of global governance as a responsible great power.

In the course of 2009 international circumstances reinforced the search for normalization of US-Russia relations. Iran's refusal to cooperate with the nuclear non-proliferation regime seemed to be creating an imminent threat that neither Russia nor America could afford to ignore. Nearly a decade into its global war on terror, the US remained engaged in costly military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, was struggling economically and strategically disoriented. The global recession hit the Russian Federation with particular severity, and exposed the limits of its prideful aspiration to play the role of "energy superpower." The new configuration of world power defined by a relative weakening of the US position, a shift in the locus of power from the Euro-Atlantic community toward Asia, and the concomitant rise of new centers of influence with independent agendas was a challenge to traditional perceptions in both camps. Confronted with a myriad of complex problems, Washington and Moscow might well have concluded that the tradition of enmity that continued to define their relations had become passé.

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<sup>14</sup> A.I. Shumilov, "Faktor antiterrorizma vo vneshnei politike administratsii Obamy," [The Antiterrorism Factor in Obama's Foreign Policy], *SShA Kanada: Ekonomika—Politika—Kul'tura*, No. 7 (475), July 2009, p. 55-66.

<sup>15</sup> B. Lo, "Russia, China and the United States: From Strategic Triangularism to the Postmodern Triangle," *Proliferation Papers*, No. 32, Winter 2010 / *Russie.Nei.Visions*, No. 47, February 2010, <[www.ifri.org/?page=contribution-detail&id=5860&id\\_provenance=97](http://www.ifri.org/?page=contribution-detail&id=5860&id_provenance=97)>.

<sup>16</sup> A.V. Lukin, "Usilit' Aziatskii vector," [Russia to Reinforce the Asian Vector], *Rossia v global'noi politike*, No. 2, March-April 2009.

<sup>17</sup> E. Wong, "Rift Grows as US and China Seek Differing Goals," *New York Times*, 20 February 2010.

## Conflicting Interests

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The reset agenda rests upon a discourse of shared interests. The problem this raises is that the concept of national interest is protean. A dominant definition of national interest is constructed and reconstructed by elites on the basis of shifting domestic circumstances; regional and global trends; and the subjective perceptions of “identity coalitions” defined by cultural context and meaning.<sup>18</sup> In both Russia and the US, pragmatic realists have pushed forward the search for common ground, but influential political forces oppose their efforts on the basis of divergent definitions of where the national interest lies.<sup>19</sup> Domestic political environments are volatile. The global economic crisis has weakened the Obama administration’s ability to impose priorities, while muted differences of emphasis between President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin may be opening space for political contention inside Russia that did not previously exist.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Discourse of Interests*

The Russian leadership responded positively but cautiously to the US call to reset relations. In Russia, the consequent thaw has not negated the deeply embedded conviction that Washington remains committed to weakening and imposing dependency upon the Russian Federation, “to encircle Russia and destroy its sovereignty” as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it in one of his last published interviews.<sup>21</sup> Hostile voices reject the US initiative as no more than “a change in rhetoric” with a “tactical” character devoid of long-term strategic

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<sup>18</sup> A.P. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, Lanham MD, Rowan & Littlefield, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> Tsygankov defines the Putin leadership as an identity coalition inspired by “great power pragmatism.” *Ibid.*, p. 129. Mark Medish divides US foreign policy schools into neo-conservatives, globalists, pragmatists, and realists, and notes that the latter two actively support “engagement and cooperation” with Russia. M. Medish, “Russia: La transition inachevée,” *Politique étrangère*, No. 1, 2006, p. 11-27.

<sup>20</sup> D. Simes and P.J. Saunders, “The Kremlin Begs to Differ,” *The National Interest*, No. 104, November-December 2009, p. 38-48.

<sup>21</sup> V. Tret’iakov, “Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn-sberezhenie naroda—vysshaya izo vsekh nashikh gosudarsvennykh zadach”, [Alexandr Solzhenitsyn-to Save the Nation is the First Priority for the State], *Moskovskie novosti*, 28 April 2006.

promise.<sup>22</sup> Others interpret the initiative as a “symptom of American decline” to which Russia need not hurry to reply.<sup>23</sup> More sympathetic analysis supports the promise of rapprochement, but notes that US and Russian interests do not always coincide.<sup>24</sup>

Disaccord is also characteristic of the US policy establishment. *Liberal Internationalists* embrace an agenda for renewal, but in the context of a purported “values gap” that limits diplomatic flexibility.<sup>25</sup> *Pragmatic Realists* (who are by and large responsible for crafting the administration’s Russia policy) emphasize the conditional promise of rapprochement, but note the need “to be somewhat sober about the prospects going forward” given the parties’ “very different visions of the post-cold war world.”<sup>26</sup> *Neo-Conservatives* insist upon “profound differences in psychology, philosophy and policy” that “sooner or later, the Obama administration will have to grapple with.”<sup>27</sup> Not to be underestimated is the large community of Russophobes for whom “fundamental differences in values, interests and outlook” and “the bear’s insatiable appetite” ensure that any attempt at rapprochement with Moscow is virtually doomed to fail.<sup>28</sup>

The legacy of suspicion and hostility that these viewpoints reflect will reemerge whenever US-Russian relations encounter a bump in the road. It is perhaps worth acknowledging the political dynamic that makes it difficult to take what might seem the most obvious first steps to attach Russia more firmly to the community of states, elimination of the Jackson-Vanik amendment and an offer of membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>29</sup> The curious remarks by Vice-President Biden at the conclusion of an official visit to Georgia and Ukraine in July 2009, which included references to Russia’s “withering” economy and desire to cling “to something in the past that is unsustainable,” sounded a false note in the orchestration

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<sup>22</sup> A. Torkunov, “Khitraia ‘perezagruzka,’” [A Cunning Reset], *Izvestiya*, 3 December 2009.

<sup>23</sup> “Zapadnye CMI: Rossiia—ugasayushchaia derzhava,” [Western Media: Russia is a Declining Power], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 1 December 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *Perestroika, a ne perezagruzka: Doklad k zasedaniiu rossiisko-amerikanskoi seksii mezhdunarodnogo diskussionnogo kluba “Valdai”*, [Perestroika, not Reset. Report for the Session of the Russian-American Panel in the International Discussion Club “Valdai”], Moscow, RIA Novosti, June 2009.

<sup>25</sup> S. Charap et al., *After the “Reset”: A Strategy and New Agenda for US Russia Policy*, Washington DC, Center for American Progress, July 2009.

<sup>26</sup> J. Goldgeier, “A Realistic Reset with Russia,” *Policy Review*, August/September 2009, p. 15-16.

<sup>27</sup> A. Applebaum, “For Russia, More Than a ‘Reset,’” *Washington Post*, 24 March 2009.

<sup>28</sup> D.J. Kramer, “Resetting US-Russian Relations: It Takes Two,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, January 2010, p. 61, 76. On “russophobia” see A.P. Tsygankov, *Russophobia: Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy*, New York, Macmillan, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> S. Charap et al., *op. cit.* [25], p. 44-45.

of the reset, but expressed a point of view that is widely credited.<sup>30</sup> This is the idea that a weakened Russia has no choice but to surrender the prerogatives of a great power and bend to US will, and the search for unilateral advantage can continue to serve as the primary vector of US Russian policy. This is grist for the mill of Russian national-conservatives who aspire to turn their backs on the West, and a recipe for stopping the reset in its tracks. Working beyond such assumptions and rebuilding relations on a foundation of mutual respect is a major task that is yet to be successfully confronted.

## **Ukraine and Georgia**

Geopolitical order in Eurasia has been a bone of contention in US-Russian relations since the break-up of the USSR. Moscow has consistently asserted a right to some kind of “sphere of privileged interest” in the post-Soviet space, while Washington has countered by promoting “geopolitical pluralism” implying support for the full sovereignty and independence of the new independent states as well as their right to work toward association with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.<sup>31</sup>

The most contentious aspect of this dynamic has been NATO enlargement. Moscow vigorously opposes expansion of the alliance beyond what then Prime Minister Evgeny Primakov identified in 1998 as the “red line” of the former Soviet frontier (considering the Baltic States as a special case).<sup>32</sup> The legacy of the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine during 2003 and 2004, and the US pressing to bring what were viewed in Moscow as hostile polities closer to the alliance, became a major source of friction. At NATO’s Bucharest Summit in April 2008, US efforts to secure Membership Action Plans for Georgia and Ukraine were unsuccessful, due in some measure to the purposeful opposition of Germany and France. However, in the summit declaration, the alliance welcomed Georgia and Ukraine’s aspirations to adhere and agreed “that these countries will become

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<sup>30</sup> P. Spiegel, “Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend to US,” *Wall Street Journal*, 25 July 2009.

<sup>31</sup> The concept of geopolitical pluralism is developed in Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997. Dmitri Medvedev used the phrase privileged interests in an interview with Russian Television on 31 August 2008, to describe one of the five “guiding principles” of his foreign policy.

<sup>32</sup> E. Primakov, *Gody bol'shoi politike* [Years in High Politics], Moscow, Kolleksiia sovershenno sekretno [Collection: Top-Secret], 1999, p. 246.

members of NATO.”<sup>33</sup> This rather arbitrary commitment was an important source of the tensions that culminated in the Five Day War.

Viewed objectively the alliance does not threaten the Russian Federation and is, in fact, in the business of exporting a model for security sector reform and regional stability that would work to Russia’s advantage. But there is a large consensus among Russian elites on all sides of the policy spectrum that NATO, as a military alliance and historical rival, represents an objective threat whose will to absorb strategically sensitive areas on the Russian frontier is an intolerable affront. The common assertion that sovereign states have a right to choose their associations is formally correct but politically irrelevant. NATO membership for Georgia or Ukraine is not commensurate with an agenda for resetting US-Russian relations.

## **NATO future**

Current US policy toward Russia rests on the assumption that the issues of enlargement have moved off the policy agenda for the time being and therefore become irrelevant. Disarray in Georgia following its defeat in the Five Day War, and the election of Viktor Yanukovich, on an anti-NATO platform, as president of Ukraine in February 2010, seem to have reinforced the salience of that assumption. With the issue of enlargement apparently defanged, the NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has delivered two substantial addresses evoking a “genuine new beginning” in NATO-Russian relations in close parallel to the reset agenda. This effort is to include a “rejuvenation” of the NATO-Russian Council; a joint review of 21<sup>st</sup> century security challenges; expanded cooperation in combating terrorism and drug trafficking; Russian engagement with the ISAF mission in Afghanistan; and exploration of the possibility of linking the missile defense systems of NATO, the US and Russia.<sup>34</sup> President Medvedev has reciprocated, speaking of the need for “full-fledged, competent, and mutually beneficial relations” with the alliance.<sup>35</sup>

Although the atmospherics of the NATO-Russian relationship may have changed, its substance has not. The NATO-Russian Council has never been an effective mechanism for confidence

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<sup>33</sup> Bucharest Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest, 3 April 2008, available at <[www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_text\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_text_8443.htm)>.

<sup>34</sup> A.F. Rasmussen, “NATO and Russia: A New Beginning?” Speech by NATO Secretary General at the Carnegie Endowment, Brussels, 18 September 2009 and A.F. Rasmussen “NATO and Russia, Partners for the Future,” Speech by NATO Secretary General at the Moscow State Institute for International Relations, 17 December 2009. Accessed from the NATO website.

<sup>35</sup> “Russia-NATO Ties Must Work, Not Just Exist on Paper—Medvedev,” *RIA Novosti*, 11 May 2009.

building. Its working groups focus on practical cooperation in operational areas several steps below true strategic engagement. NATO's unfortunate decision temporarily to suspend the Council as a form of punishment following the Five Day War called attention to its limitations as a vehicle for communication and ability to resolve of differences. The Council has been restored, but Russia is not a fully empowered participant. It continues to perceive NATO as a military bloc configured against it that is objectively reproducing the security architecture of the cold war.

The new NATO members located on Russia's periphery in Central and Eastern Europe continue to view the alliance's primary function as collective defense against a real and present Russian threat. Their sense of exposure was aggravated by cyber attacks launched against Estonia in 2007 and the assault on Georgia in 2008. They have become strong partisans of renewed security guarantees and operational planning to give NATO's Article Five commitment substance, in some ways a reversion to the logic of containment as it was applied during the cold war. In general, Russia has become particularly sensitive to what it understands as the hostile role of a "new Europe" linked to a US containment doctrine.<sup>36</sup> US efforts to provide strategic reassurance to its Central European allies against the background of the reset with Russia (NATO contingency planning, Patriot missiles for Poland, military exercises in the Baltic and Black Seas, a new missile defense architecture) risk aggravating these sensitivities considerably.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile NATO's so-called "open door" policy seems to make membership an option for all of the states of post-Soviet Eurasia except one.<sup>38</sup> The idea of offering Russia the prospect of accession has often been floated, but never convincingly.<sup>39</sup> The fatalistic conclusion that inclusion "is not a realistic proposition for the foreseeable future, if ever" fairly expresses conventional wisdom in this regard.<sup>40</sup> It is by no means clear that Russia would reject this option were it sincerely offered. A recent report by the Medvedev-friendly *Institute for Contemporary Development* proactively asserts the desirability of NATO accession (though also asserting the "minimal" requirement "to block the enlargement of NATO into the

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<sup>36</sup> I. Ivanov, "Lissabonskii dogovor i interessy Rossii," [The Lisbon Treaty and Russian Interests], *Rossia v global'noi politike*, Vol. 8, No. 1, January-February 2010, p. 134-148.

<sup>37</sup> M. Brzezinski and A. Wess Mitchell, "Growing US-Central European Ties," *International Herald Tribune*, 7 April 2010.

<sup>38</sup> R.J. Art, "Creating a Disaster: NATO's Open Door Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 3, 1998, p. 383-403.

<sup>39</sup> For a recent example see the editorial statement by Gareth Evans and Alain Délatroz, "NATO and Russia: In Need of a Bold Step," *Reuters-The Great Debate*, 2 April 2009.

<sup>40</sup> D. Trenin, "NATO and Russia: Partnership or Peril?" *Current History*, Vol. 108, No. 720, October 2009, p. 299.

post-Soviet space for the indefinite future”).<sup>41</sup> It is unlikely that the offer will be made. Tellingly, Russia’s new Military Doctrine identifies “the effort to give the military potential of the North Atlantic Alliance global missions, disregarding the norms of international law, and to bring the military infrastructure of NATO’s state-members up to the Russian border, including through the enlargement of the alliance,” as the major external threat of war.<sup>42</sup> Speaking off the podium at the February 2010 Munich *Wehrkunde*, Rasmussen almost despairingly remarked that “this new doctrine does not reflect the real world ... NATO is not an enemy of Russia.”<sup>43</sup> He was doubtlessly correct, but in international relations perceptions still matter.

Russia (together with most of its Eurasian neighbors) is objectively marginalized in the security architecture that has emerged after the cold war. The construction of a pan-European and Eurasian security framework that breaks down the East-West divide inherited from the age of the Warsaw Pact should be an integral part of the effort to cultivate and expand the agenda for resetting relations. At present there is little discernable movement in that direction. Russia’s proposals for a new, treaty-based European security system that would link East and West in cooperative forums may be flawed in its current variant, but could be understood as at least an invitation to dialogue.<sup>44</sup> “Not engaging seriously with the Kremlin on its initiative,” argue Eugene Rumer and Angela Stent, “would be irresponsible.”<sup>45</sup> Speaking in Paris in January 2010, Clinton appeared to reject the initiative *tout court*, asserting that common goals “are best pursued in the context of existing institutions.”<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to imagine how a

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<sup>41</sup> Institute of Contemporary Development, *Rossiâ XXI veka: obraz želaemogo zavtra* [Russia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Vision for the Future], in Russian, Moscow, EkonInform, 2010, p. 42 and 65. In public remarks in the background of the visit by NATO envoys to Moscow to discuss the Alliance’s forthcoming new security concept in February 2010, Secretary Clinton, asked if she could envision Russia ever joining NATO, interestingly remarked that “I can imagine it but I’m not sure the Russians can imagine it.” Cited: “Clinton Calls on Russia to Participate in Missile Defense,” *Global Security Newswire*, 23 February 2010. Imagination is perhaps precisely what is lacking on both sides.

<sup>42</sup> *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, [Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation], 5 February 2010, p. 2, available at: <[http://news.kremlin.ru/ref\\_notes/461](http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461)>.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in “Russian Doctrine Does Not Reflect the Real World,” *Reuters*, 6 February 2010.

<sup>44</sup> *Proekt dogovora o evropeiskoi bezopasnosti* [Draft Treaty on European Security], 29 November 2009, cited from the Russian Presidential Website at <<http://news.kremlin.ru/news/6152>> and the evaluation in *K novoi arkhitekture evroatlantskoi bezopasnosti: Doklad rossiiskikh ekspertov k konferentsii diskussionnogo kluba “Valdai”*, [Towards a New Euro-Atlantic Security Architecture: Reports of Russians Experts for the Conference of the Valdai Discussion Club], New London, RIA Novosti, 8-10 December 2009.

<sup>45</sup> E. Rumer and A. Stent, “Russia and the West,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 2, April-May 2009, p. 98.

<sup>46</sup> H. Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State, “Remarks on the Future of European Security,” US Department of State, 29 January 2010, accessed at <[www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/136273.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/136273.htm)>.

meaningful Russian-American security dialogue can be taken further on such a basis.

The reset has been accompanied by some improvement in NATO-Russian relations. There is an effort underway to give the NATO-Russian Council more substance, “progressively enlarge the extent of questions where Russian can join the allies for discussions on a basis of equality,” and make Russia more of a stakeholder in the alliance itself.<sup>47</sup> Russian cooperation with the ISAF mission in Afghanistan is expanding. The possibility for some kind of formal association between NATO and the new collective security forums of post-Soviet Eurasia that include Russia as a member (the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization) has been broached, though it is far from becoming a reality. But the challenge of attaching Russia in a more substantial way to Euro-Atlantic security structures remains to be confronted. To do so constructively will at some point mean moving beyond the institutional legacy of the cold war by creating a real common space of external security of which the Russian Federation is an essential part.

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<sup>47</sup> T. Graham, “Les relations États-Unis/Russie: Une approche pragmatique,” *Politique étrangère*, No. 4, 2008, p. 755.

## Outcomes

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### *The Corridor of Crisis*

US and Russian policies toward the Adriatic-Caspian corridor rest upon broad and bipartisan consensus concerning its strategic relevance. They cover an amorphous sub-region that stretches from Southeastern Europe, across the Anatolian peninsula and greater Black Sea area including the Caucasus to the Caspian Sea and beyond. A large portion of the area's population is Muslim, and there are several insurgencies and latent conflicts involving Muslim communities, including the increasingly violent confrontation inside Russia's North Caucasus region.<sup>48</sup> From a traditional national security perspective the possibility for Islamist organizations to find havens in "ungoverned spaces," and project a physical threat of jihadist terrorism is a legitimate concern. For the US, maintaining strategic access as a means for projecting power into potential trouble spots in the "Greater Middle East" including Afghanistan and Pakistan is a particular imperative. A stable post-Soviet regional order is yet to be established, as demonstrated by the destructive Chechen wars and separatist conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh. The Caspian basin's hydrocarbon potential makes it a subject of intense geopolitical competition, in which both the US and Russia have been parties.<sup>49</sup> Overseeing the interests of US business concerns in the region; securing access to the Caspian's oil and natural gas reserves for the US and its allies; isolating Iran; and opposing Russian efforts to maintain the area as a kind of *chasse gardée* have been powerful motives for US engagement.<sup>50</sup> The US

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<sup>48</sup> Russian sensitivity to the destabilizing potential of this phenomenon is acute. See A. Beluza, "Kavkazskaia kukhnia: Problemy i perspektivy novogo federal'nogo okruga," [Caucasian Cuisine: Problems and Perspectives of the New Federal District], *Izvestiia*, 8 February 2010 and A. Malashenko and M. Brill Olcott, "Is Russia Losing the Caucasus?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 15 December 2009, <[www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=2800](http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=2800)>.

<sup>49</sup> S. Mahnovski, "Natural Resources and Potential Conflict in the Caspian Sea Region," in O. Oliner and T.S. Szayna (eds.), *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army*, Santa Monica CA, RAND, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> G. Hall and T. Grant, "Russia, China, and the Energy-Security Politics of the Caspian Sea Region after the Cold War," *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Spring 2009, p. 113-137.

*National Energy Policy* drafted in 2001 cites diversification of energy supply for the US and its allies as a critical priority, and the US *Silk Road Strategy Act* of 2006 emphasized the relevance of US involvement, including democracy promotion, conflict resolution, and support for economic cooperation and trade.<sup>51</sup> These priorities have been reasserted forcefully by the Obama administration's special envoy for Eurasian energy issues, Richard Morningstar.<sup>52</sup>

Both US and Russian policies in the region are crafted in the context of a zero-sum contest for influence and leverage.<sup>53</sup> US policy has been consistently supportive of the construction of multiple pipelines linking the Caspian to world markets, to prevent "any other country from establishing a monopoly on energy resources or energy transport infrastructure ... that may reduce United States access to energy resources."<sup>54</sup> Russia has opposed these efforts, not primarily on economic grounds but as incursions into a Russian sphere of influence. The resultant competition has been accompanied by confrontational rhetoric. The Chair of the Russian parliament's foreign affairs committee Konstantin Kosachev described the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project as a pretext for American military deployments on Russia's border, a bluff that the Russian military incursion into Georgia may have been designed to call.<sup>55</sup> Speaking in Brussels in April 2006, then Polish Minister of Defense Radek Sikorski flamboyantly described the Nord Stream project, intended to expand Russia access to the German natural gas market while bypassing Poland, as "the energy version of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact."<sup>56</sup>

The resultant "war of pipelines" has essentially been an effort by the Western powers to break the near monopoly of access that Russia inherited from the former Soviet Union. From a US perspective, the results have been modest—a full 90 percent of Caspian resources continue to move into world markets through pipelines that transit Russia. Moscow has been relatively successful in bolstering its position in the region by negotiating bilateral purchasing arrangements with major producers, using its financial resources to buy up equity in regional energy infrastructure as well as "downstream" assets in Western Europe, and developing its "own" pipelines to supplement the systems inherited from the Soviet Union as alternatives to Western-sponsored projects. But the contest for access continues unabated. The plan for the Nabucco pipeline,

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<sup>51</sup> *National Energy Policy: Report of the National Energy Policy Development Group*, Washington DC, US Government Printing Office, May 2001.

<sup>52</sup> S. Balmasov and V. Trukhachev, "USA's Interest in Caspian Sea Oil Brings More Trouble to Russia," *Pravda Online*, 5 June 2009.

<sup>53</sup> B. Jackson, "The Soft War for Europe's East," *Policy Review*, No. 137, June/July 2006.

<sup>54</sup> *The Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006*, sec. 202.

<sup>55</sup> Cited in C. Karpat, "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan: Pipeline of Friendship or War?" *Global Challenge Research*, 15 October 2005.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in S. Castle, "Poles Angry at Pipeline Pact," *Independent*, 1 May 2006.

encouraged by the US and EU, to move natural gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan across Georgia, Turkey and the Balkans into central Europe is a direct rival to Russia's South Stream project, understood in Moscow as part of a "pattern to outflank the Russian state" in the Caspian region.<sup>57</sup>

Moscow's willingness to leverage the energy dependence of its weaker neighbors to improve its commercial position has led to concerns about its reliability as an energy supplier. These concerns are particularly strong in Europe, Russia's major external market. The decision by Russia's state-controlled natural gas monopoly, Gazprom to temporarily cut supplies to Ukraine as a result of non-payment in January 2009, disrupting transit to Central, Southeastern and Western Europe, led to a revival of interest in the Nabucco project. This is despite its falling into some disfavor due to the high price tag and uncertainty about access to sufficient natural gas supplies to make it commercially viable.<sup>58</sup> The bottom line, however, is that no matter how successful Europe might be in opening up alternative sources of energy supply, dependency on the Russian Federation will remain a fact of life for some time to come. In 2007 approximately 50 percent of Europe's natural gas and 30 percent of oil imports came from Russia.<sup>59</sup> Even if completed and utilized to full capacity, the Nabucco pipeline would be capable of carrying only about 10 percent of Europe's future import needs.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, dependency is mutual. Moscow currently exports two-thirds of its natural gas exports to Europe and does not have attractive alternatives in the medium-term. Buyers and sellers arguably have a shared interest in maintaining stable markets and sources of supply at predictable prices—the essence of energy security in practical terms. If this is so, the pursuit of a competitive and politically driven energy security strategy in the Caspian region makes little sense. Russia perceives the West's inroads as an assault upon its vital national interests—its ability to modernize and develop will depend upon oil and gas revenues for some time to come. But it also needs Western investment to reinvigorate its production capacity.<sup>61</sup> Europe cannot do without Russian resources, and Russia

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<sup>57</sup> A.G. Sander, "US-Russian Energy Security in the Caucasus: The Prospects for Conflict in the National Interest," *Vestnik: Journal of Russian and Asian Studies*, 24 October 2006 and V. Pop, "Energy Security: South Stream vs. Nabucco Gas Pipeline," *SE Times*, 14 February 2008.

<sup>58</sup> A. Krupski, "Gas Wars: Russia Strikes but Poland Escapes," *Krakow Post*, 5 February 2009.

<sup>59</sup> J. Mankoff, *op. cit.* [1], p. 175.

<sup>60</sup> E. Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 176.

<sup>61</sup> This is clearly stated in the *Russian Energy Security Strategy through 2030* issued in August 2009. See S. Blagov, "Russia Seeks to Sustain its Energy Security," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 6, No. 221, 2 December 2009, and P.A. Enstfeld, "Novye formy organizatsii postavok gaza," [New Forms of Gas Supply Organization], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 10 November 2009.

needs Western markets. The interests of all would be well served by respecting the free play of markets unconstrained by political interference, manipulation, and posturing. Energy Security is in general an area of opportunity that can contribute to a dynamic of cooperative security: "The greater the level of East-West energy cooperation, the greater will be the emphasis placed on economic versus geopolitical factors."<sup>62</sup> There are alternatives to the zero-sum geopolitical competition that has dominated the politics of the Adriatic-Caspian corridor in the post-Soviet period. In order to pursue them, the reset agenda will need to move from tactical adjustment to strategic reorientation—a process that will require degrees of coherence and political will that have not yet been demonstrated by either party to what should be considered an infamous "new great game."

### ***The arms control agenda***

On 8 April 2010 presidents Obama and Medvedev met in Prague to sign the text a new START accord, intended as a legally binding and verifiable agreement that will reduce both sides' deployed strategic nuclear warheads to 1,550 and strategic delivery systems to 800 deployed and non-deployed (no more than 700 of which may be deployed at any one time). The document defines a robust verification regime including on-site inspections and exhibitions, data exchanges, and use of national technical means for monitoring, but does not limit missile defense systems (embraced by the Obama administration in its Nuclear Posture Review) or long-range conventional strike capabilities.<sup>63</sup> The conclusion of an agreement, after lengthy negotiations, is correctly regarded as an essential step toward renewed US-Russian cooperation, but it is only a small step. In order to come into force, the treaty must be ratified by the Russian Duma and the US Senate. On the US side in particular this could prove to be politically difficult.

Though the warhead and delivery vehicle limits are over 50 percent lower than those defined by the 1991 START Treaty, significant differences concerning the strategic role of nuclear weapons remain unresolved. The US seeks to reinforce deterrence and strengthen defensive programs, including missile defense systems. Russia highlights the relevance of nuclear strategic systems as an active component of national defense, fears that robust US missile defensive capacity could eventually call its deterrent capacity

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<sup>62</sup> R.K. Matzke, "Russia and the United States: No Longer Rivals, Not Yet Partners," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 2007, p. 378.

<sup>63</sup> *Key Facts about the New START Treaty*, Washington DC, The White House, 26 March 2010.

into question, and has reserved the right to withdraw from the START agreement if it deems US missile defense systems in Europe a threat.<sup>64</sup> These priorities are expressed in official documents, including the February 2010 *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, where nuclear weapons are regarded as “an important factor for the prevention of the outbreak of nuclear conflicts and military conflicts that use conventional assets” with a first use commitment in cases where “the very existence of the state comes under threat.”<sup>65</sup>

The new START accord is intended as the prelude to a second round of negotiations, where more intractable issues will be on the table.<sup>66</sup> These will include the challenge of tactical nuclear weapons, stockpiled weapons, US global strike capacity, preserving the strategic balance in light of third country nuclear systems, and missile defense, all areas where Russian and US interests diverge. It is likely that the Kremlin will continue to rely on nuclear weapons as a foundation for national defense, hold fast to its tactical systems, resist deeper cuts in its strategic arsenal that could call deterrent capacity into question, and oppose any US sponsored missile defense initiatives. For these reasons the prospects for strategic arms control to contribute to an *ongoing* dynamic of rapprochement appear problematic.

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<sup>64</sup> V. Isachenkov, “Russian General: US Missile Defense a Threat,” *Army Times*, 9 February 2010.

<sup>65</sup> *Voennaia doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, *op. cit.* [42], p. 3-4.

<sup>66</sup> S. Piper, “After START: Hurdles Ahead,” *Current History*, Vol. 108, No. 720, October 2009, p. 304-310.

## Conclusion

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One year into the reset process, it would be a mistake to underestimate what has been achieved. Hostile rhetoric has been toned down, though not eliminated. The atmosphere of US-Russian relations has improved considerably since the low point reached in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war. The relationship has been placed on a more stable, professional, and importantly, less personalized foundation. The new START accord is a solid basis for expanded strategic cooperation. Missile defense, though a point of controversy, can also become an area of positive coordination.<sup>67</sup> Cooperation in addressing the threat posed by the Taliban in Afghanistan is developing. Despite its conflicting interests in maintaining positive relations with Tehran, Moscow seems ready to line up with the US-led effort to impose enhanced sanctions and break the momentum of proliferation.<sup>68</sup> The threat posed by the process of NATO enlargement has become less acute and the alliance is striving to place its special relationship with Russia on a more stable and substantial foundation. Public diplomacy and civil society initiatives designed to break down stereotypes and encourage understanding are a promising new direction.<sup>69</sup> Areas of particular controversy, including mutual stereotyping and human rights, are now being addressed in a serious and formal manner.<sup>70</sup> Both sides confront major challenges, not least the need to manage the rise of an ever more assertive China, and have become more sensitive to the common goals that give them a vested interest in pragmatic cooperation. The “tactical adjustments” associated with resetting have made the Russian-American relationship more mature and productive.

Is the new direction in US-Russian relations leading beyond tactical gambits toward a more fundamental change in the *structure* of association? Nothing could be less sure.

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<sup>67</sup> O. Thränert, “NATO, Missile Defence and Extended Deterrence,” *Survival*, Vol. 51, No. 6, December 2009-January 2010, p. 63-76.

<sup>68</sup> C. Sweeney, “Russia ‘Very Alarmed’ at Iranian Nuclear Stance,” *Reuters*, 19 February 2010.

<sup>69</sup> A. Samarin, “Moskva i Vashington: Lomka stereotipov,” [Moscow and Washington: Breaking Stereotypes], *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 29 January 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Notably the US-Russian Bilateral Presidential Commission on Civil Society Working Group, sometimes referred to as the McFaul-Surkov Group. “Interview: McFaul on US, Russia Stereotypes and His Controversial Co-Chair,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 6 April 2010.

Flowerings of US-Russian détente and “strategic partnership” have come and gone in the past. The brief periods of enthusiasm for US-Russian cooperation that followed the traumas of 1991 and 2001 were short-lived. The policy establishments in both countries are filled with old and new cold warriors. Despite professions to the contrary, both parties still respect outmoded concepts of security based upon zero-sum competition, territorial control and spheres of influence. Initiatives to improve relations have been real but also modest. The interest-driven process of redefinition will eventually run into intractable issues where interests diverge (in fact this is already happening).

Asymmetries also come into play. Russia has sought to redefine itself as an independent strategic actor in a concert of powers inspired by multi-polarity, but it is not and cannot aspire to become a reincarnation of the Soviet superpower. Russia’s interest should be concentrated on domestic transformation and in its immediate neighborhood. The US, despite its own profound domestic dilemmas, seeks to preserve its status as global leader, including an activist and expeditionary orientation that almost inevitably brings it into periodic conflict with aspiring regional powers. Many of the issues that continue to divide Russia and the US are concentrated on the Russian periphery, where Moscow tends to view US involvement as a threat to vital interests and its room for maneuver is small.

If the US-Russian relationship is to be steered between the Scylla and Charybdis of *conflicting* interests, the reset agenda will need to be embedded in a more substantial re-conceptualization of national policy that looks beyond bilateral ties to the underlying trends that are reshaping the 21<sup>st</sup> century strategic environment. In this brave new world security is indivisible and only broad-based cooperation will allow effective confrontation of the most pressing global challenges. A *restructured* US-Russian relationship can contribute to this type of evolution. Resetting is a good start, but much more needs to be done.