

## Chapter 10

### From the New World Order to Resetting Relations

### Two Decades of U.S.-Russian Relations<sup>1</sup>

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The standard message in the mainstream U.S. media is that Russia under Vladimir Putin and Dimitri Medvedev has defected from its earlier commitments to creating a liberal democracy and a true market economy and to joining the European/Western community of nations. Rather, Putin and those around him are presented as latter-day pupils of Russian and Soviet authoritarianism and imperialism committed, first, to recreating the empire that collapsed in 1991 with the implosion of the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> Periodic Russian economic pressure on Ukraine, the so-called cyber-war against Estonia in spring 2007, and the invasion of Georgia in August 2008 are presented as evidence of Russia’s commitment to reverse the geopolitical changes that occurred in post-cold war Europe and to reestablish its regional dominance and its position as a global power. There is much that is attractive – and accurate -- in such a simple and straightforward explanation for the deterioration of Russian relations with the United States and with Europe and for Russia’s much more assertive dealings with neighbouring states than that which characterized Moscow’s policy under President Yeltsin. Russia has reemerged as something of a bully in its relationships with its near neighbours and appears intent on supporting virtually any political leadership intent on challenging U.S. global dominance – such as those in Venezuela, Cuba, and Iran.

On the other hand, such an explanation virtually ignores Russian efforts in the 1990s to join the Western community – albeit on terms of equality, not as a second-class member – and the systematic rebuff that Moscow received throughout the entire first decade of its existence. Among U.S.-based analysts Stephen F. Cohen (2000) and Andrei Tsygankov (2010) have been part of the handful who have challenged the standard interpretation and presented a more nuanced assessment of what went wrong in the Russian relationship with the West.<sup>3</sup>

When President George H.W. Bush finally recognized that the Soviet leadership had abandoned its commitment to global confrontation with the capitalist West in favor of joining the global economic and political system dominated by the West, he began speaking of a ‘new world order’ in which military confrontation had been abolished and differences between states and peoples would be resolved through peaceful negotiation.

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<sup>1</sup> The following chapter draws upon Kanet (2010).

<sup>2</sup> One finds a rather extreme version of this picture in Lucas (2008).

<sup>3</sup> See also the work of Dmitri Trenin (2007) on Russian relations with Europe and the United States that points to the impact of Western actions and inactions, as well as to those of the Russian Federation, on the deterioration of the relationship. Moreover, P. Terrence Hopmann (in press), the *doyen* of American students of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, has tracked the relationship of Russia and the Western members of the OSCE in the 1990s and the systematic way in which virtually every Russian proposal was rebuffed until, even before Putin emerged as the new Russian leader in 2000, the OSCE and Russian integration into Western institutions had lost their attractiveness in Moscow..

(Bush 1990) The enthusiastic expectations of the early 1990s about the emergence of a 'new world order,' the development and likely consolidation of democracy across the former Soviet Union, as well as about the successful integration of Russia into the Western community of democratic states, have been dissolved by a combination of Western, especially U.S., triumphalism and the realities of Russian political culture and the resulting semi-authoritarian political system that has emerged in Russia.

Soon after the Soviet collapse Washington diverted its attention away from developments in Russia, as it revealed in the 'victorious' outcome of the cold war and focused on benefitting from the fruits of that victory, as well as to a whole series of unexpected challenges to stability in the Balkans, Africa, and elsewhere. Many analysts (Trenin, 2007; Cohen, 2000) have correctly noted that throughout the 1990s Russian interests were downplayed, or simply ignored, by Washington and Brussels, largely on the assumption that Russia was no longer relevant as a great power and its interests need not be taken into account when the West was making important foreign policy and security decisions. As the United States pushed through its policy preferences in a broad range of areas – the restructuring and expansion of NATO, military intervention in former Yugoslavia, a unilateral and assertive response to the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and the resulting invasion and occupation of Iraq and policy toward the broader Middle East, the emplacement of a missile defense system in Central Europe, attempts to limit or contain Russian influence on the development and distribution of natural gas resources from Central Asia, etc. – Moscow's concerns were simply left out of the policy calculations or, if raised, they were quickly brushed aside as irrelevant or hostile.

Throughout the 1990s Russian leaders often voiced their strong objections to U.S. initiatives, as when President Yeltsin stormed out of an OSCE meeting on Chechnya in 1999, but generally they were in no position to do anything more than complain, then eventually to acquiesce to those initiatives. As a result Russian-U.S. relations visibly deteriorated until they reached the point in early 2001 – just weeks after George W. Bush took over the White House – of mutual diplomatic expulsions and recriminations. Throughout the 1990s the specific issues that increasingly divided Moscow and Washington concerned matters that continue to divide the two countries today. They began with NATO expansion and the more general incorporation of former Soviet dependencies and even constituent republics, from Bulgaria to Estonia, into what Moscow views as a U.S.-dominated political and security sphere, and included NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia, criticism of Russian domestic political developments, and a series of other developments. After a brief attempt to reestablish a collaborative relationship on the basis of equality after the terrorist attacks in the United States of September 2001 and after the turnaround in the Russian economy, President Putin determined that Moscow would always be treated as an outsider by the West, not as a full partner, and that Russia should 'go it alone.' Moreover, Putin's plans for reasserting central authority across the breadth of Russia did not mesh well with the Western concept of democracy. But 'democracy' was reinterpreted as 'sovereign democracy,' a term that quickly emerged as a theoretical explanation and justification for Russia's independent, even unilateralist, approach to foreign and security policy, as well as for the top-down approach to domestic political control. By the December 2007 parliamentary elections,

‘sovereign democracy’ had become part of the political program of United Russia, Russia’s governing party now headed by President Putin himself.

One major result of the Russian leadership’s redefinition of Russia’s role in world affairs during the past decade has been Russia’s emergence as a revisionist power committed to rolling back some of its geopolitical losses that occurred after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and to returning Russia to the status of a major world power. This involves, first and foremost, Moscow’s reasserting its position as the dominant actor in former Soviet space, in the areas of Russia’s ‘privileged interests,’ as President Medvedev noted soon after Russia’s military intervention in Georgia in August 2008. (Medvedev, 2008a) Closely related to the reassertion of Russian influence in border areas, however, has been the commitment to challenging the global dominance – or attempted dominance -- of the United States.<sup>4</sup> Thus, since the U.S. decision to invade Iraq Moscow has increasingly and loudly criticized virtually all aspects of U.S. policy – foreign and domestic – and has gone out of its way to collaborate, at least rhetorically and symbolically, with states such as Venezuela and Cuba that share Russia’s opposition to U.S. unilateralism.<sup>5</sup>

The objective of the present chapter is to track recent Russian relations with the United States – focusing on the period since the U.S. intervention in Iraq in spring 2003 – to support the argument that Russian leaders have pursued a policy of independence, even confrontation if deemed necessary, in their relations with the United States, as well as with Europe, as part of a new assertive approach to achieving policy objectives and protecting Russia’s national interests. The following discussion of Russian-U.S. relations is divided into four sections: the first briefly outlines the deteriorating relationship in the final years of Yeltsin’s presidency; the second treats the revival of Russia as a major power under Putin and Medvedev; the next examines in some detail the impact of that revival on Russian relations with the United States; and the fourth and final section outlines possible future scenarios for the relationship.

### **1. The End of the Yeltsin Era**

President Yeltsin appointed Yevgenii Primakov as foreign minister in 1996. He emphasized more than had his predecessor Russia’s status as a great power, despite its current economic and political problems, and that its foreign policy should be based on an ‘equal partnership’ with the United States. (Primakov, 1998; Gornostaev, 1998) Primakov justified Russia’s policies in pragmatic terms of Russian national interest, not theoretical ties to the democratic West. This meant, for example, a focus on Russia’s primacy in security and political developments within the territory of the former Soviet Union – a point that remains central in Russian policy more than a decade later.

The Russians increasingly opposed U.S.-initiated economic sanctions against a number of countries viewed as important potential international partners for Russia. At the time of U.S. and British military air strikes in Iraq in retaliation for repeated Iraqi refusals to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors in late 1998, President Yeltsin spoke of ‘gross violations of the UN Charter.’ When the West began to bring pressure on

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<sup>4</sup> Former President Putin’s (2007) opposition to U.S. dominance was expressed forcefully in his speech at a security conference held in Munich in early 2007.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of recent Russian criticisms of the United States and the West in general, see Shlapentokh (2008).

Yugoslavia in 1998 over the issue of Kosovo, the Russians placed Yugoslav territorial integrity far above the issue of human rights and threatened various forms of retaliation if the West bombed Yugoslavia.

The issue that raised the most serious Russian concerns at this time – an issue that remains important a decade later – was NATO's decision to proceed with eastward expansion into former Soviet-controlled Europe.<sup>6</sup> Moscow pursued a major campaign against NATO expansion prior to the Madrid meetings of NATO in July 1997. However, when NATO invited the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to join the alliance, Russia reluctantly accepted the decision, since it had few ways realistically to oppose it. . They shifted their opposition to NATO expansion from East Central Europe to the Baltic states – but also failed to stop the inclusion of those states seven years later. The push in 2008 by the Bush Administration to extend NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine was a central factor in triggering the much more aggressive Russian response. The key difference from the earlier period in explaining Moscow's reaction was the much stronger economic and even military position from which it was operating in 2008 and the significant shift in Russia's policy orientation under Putin.

By 2000, when Vladimir Putin took over the presidency, the state of Russia's relations with the United States had reached a post-cold war low. However, given its weak position because of its economic dependence on the West, Moscow often was forced to back down when faced with U.S. opposition. While the issues that divide Russian-American relations in early 2010 have their roots in political and security developments a decade or more earlier, what has changed is the unwillingness of Moscow to accept a position of weakness or dependence in their relations with the West.

## **2. Putin, Medvedev and the Rebuilding of Russia as a Major Power**

Early in his presidency Vladimir Putin made clear his commitment to establishing Russia's position as the preeminent regional power and as an important international actor. Essential preconditions for the fulfillment of these objectives, as described in the 'Foreign Policy Concept,' (2000) were the internal political stability and economic viability of Russia. Russia had to overcome inclinations toward separatism, national and religious extremism, and terrorism. Putin moved forcefully in reasserting central governmental control in Russia. The economy showed strong signs of turning around in 1999-2001. High growth rates continued, and even expanded in the following years – not merely in the oil and gas sector, but across broad sectors of the economy. These political and economic gains, however, occurred along with growing disregard for the civil liberties and democratic processes to which Putin's government was nominally committed – developments, which both Washington and Brussels strongly criticized.

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<sup>6</sup> In a nationally televised interview in August 2008, President Medvedev stated, 'We do not need illusions of partnership. When we are being surrounded by bases on all sides, and a growing number of states are being drawn into the North Atlantic bloc and we are being told, 'Don't worry, everything is all right,' naturally we do not like it.' (Cited in Levy, 2008). At the time of the first decision to expand NATO membership eastward, George F. Kennan (1997), architect of the U.S. containment policy forty years earlier, warned that to expand NATO 'would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold war era' and 'may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations; and to impel Russian foreign policy decidedly not to [US] liking.'

Russia under Putin continued to seek allies who share its commitment to preventing a dominance global role by the United States that represents, in the words of the 'Foreign Policy Concept,' a threat to international security and to Russia's goal of serving as a major center of influence in a multipolar world. Most of the issues on which Russia and the United States disagreed already in the mid-1990s continued to plague that relationship. Until the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 there was little evidence that these disagreements would disappear soon – in particular since they derived from core elements of the two countries' respective foreign policy commitments. In fact, after a very brief hiatus immediately after 9/11 when President went out of his way to be cooperative with Washington, those issues reemerged and continue to undermine Russian-U.S. relations in spring 2010.

Putin's success in dealing with the major domestic problems challenging the Russian state meant that Russia increasingly faced Europe and the United States from a position of increased stability and strength. Putin's reassertion of central control over the territory of the Russian Federation – by conquering Chechnya, eliminating the election of provincial governors, suppressing domestic opponents and critics (especially the independent media) and by playing on the fears of Russian citizens of domestic terrorism, crime, and general chaos – played an important role in strengthening the Russian state, which at times had seemed on the verge of collapsing. Besides rebuilding the foundations of the Russian state at great cost to political liberty and democracy as a precondition for Russia's ability to reassert itself as a major power, Putin and his associates benefited greatly from the exponential rise in global demand for gas and oil – at least until the global financial collapse of fall 2008 – and the ensuing revitalization of the Russian economy. This, in turn, contributed to Russia's ability to pursue a much more active and assertive foreign policy, as many analysts have noted.<sup>7</sup> What the longer-term impact of the collapse of the global economy since late summer 2008 and the dramatic drop in energy prices will have on the Russian economy and on Russia's ability to pursue an assertive foreign policy is yet to be seen.

Thus, Putin was quite successful, and fortunate, during the eight years of his presidency in establishing the economic and political foundations for a strong centralized state as the prerequisite for Russia reasserting itself as a major player in international political and security affairs. While the voices calling for Russia to resume its role as a great, global, power in the 1990s had been strident, but not realistic, similar voices have today taken over the dominant position in Russian politics and are based upon realistic expectations of achieving many of their goals. Supporters of this policy begin with former President Putin himself, as made clear in his statement to the Russian parliament and people that 'the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.' (Putin, 2005) This comment was followed early in 2007 by Putin's broad attack on virtually all aspects of U.S. policy delivered at an international security conference in Munich that made clear Russia's new assertive and nationalistic approach

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<sup>7</sup> However, as some analysts have argued, the revived role of Russia as a regional and global political actor is based extensively on oil and gas production and exports, despite recent improvements in other aspects of the Russian economy. See, for example, Hancock (2007)..

to foreign policy, beginning with its relations with the United States. (Wagstyl, 2007)<sup>8</sup> The rhetoric emanating from Moscow after the military incursion into Georgia confirmed the image of a revisionist state intent upon reestablishing its dominant role, at least along its periphery, and one that simply will no longer deal with the rest of the world on any other terms except those that it sets. (Levy, 2008a; Medvedev, 2008c)<sup>9</sup>

By May 2008, when Putin turned the presidency over to Dmitry Medvedev, Russia had reemerged as a major player in European economic and political affairs and the dominant actor in most of post-Soviet space. The foundation of this new role has been Russia's semi-monopoly over the extraction and distribution of natural gas and oil across much of Eurasia, and the growing direct influence that this semi-monopoly provides over the economies of neighboring states. The gas war between Russia and Ukraine in January 2009 and its implications for European consumers of Russian gas made clear both the importance to Moscow of its control of oil and gas exports in the pursuit of foreign policy objectives and its willingness to use the resulting leverage that that control provided.<sup>10</sup>

Before turning to a more detailed discussion of specific developments in Russian relations with the United States in the recent past, it is important to note, at least briefly, the relationship between the growing assertiveness in Russian foreign policy and domestic political developments. As Russia's leaders abandoned the halting efforts at democratization that characterized the first decade of the Russian Federation and increasingly reestablished the institutions and policies of a semi-authoritarian state, they have also seized upon economic growth and a growing sense of Russian nationalism as the foundations on which to build support among broad segments of the population. The economic boom that resulted in more than doubling the gross domestic product per capita of the Russian population was an important element in the popularity of former President Putin and in the support for his policies.

Public opinion polls and anecdotal information indicate widespread public support for the return of Russia to great power status; more specifically, Russians overwhelmingly supported the Kremlin's decision to invade Georgia in August 2008. (Barnard, 2008) Related to this broad sense of nationalism, the Putin-Medvedev leadership has increasingly focused on the dangers to Russia presented by foreign enemies, of which the United State is virtually always listed first. The Foreign Policy Concept (2008) issued by President Medvedev in late July 2008, immediately prior to the intervention in Georgia, represented a break with earlier versions of the Concept, even though it in effect merely codified changes that had already occurred over recent years. First, unlike the Concept issued at the beginning of the Putin presidency, it

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<sup>8</sup> What most Western commentators and analysts missed in Putin's remarks was his assertion that Russia was willing to work with the United States as an equal in areas related to the continued reduction of nuclear weapons and other arms control measures. (Putin, 2007)

<sup>9</sup> From Moscow's perspective, however, its policy goals are not revisionist, but are merely intended to reestablish Russia's legitimate position in the aftermath of the West's having taken advantage of Russian decline in the immediate post-cold war period.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that in the Ukrainian-Russian confrontation over gas supplies, as in the Georgian-Russian military conflict in summer 2008 over South Ossetia, Russia alone was not at fault. The leaders of both Ukraine and Georgia contributed significantly to the confrontations. On European reactions to the policies of these countries see Taylor (2009) and Petrovič (2009).

focuses on external, rather than internal, challenges to Russian security – with U.S. global dominance at the very top of the list. In line with the extensive discussion of ‘sovereign democracy’ in Russia, the Concept stipulates that global competition is acquiring a civilizational dimension, which suggests competition between different value systems and development models within the framework of universal democratic and market economy principles. The new FPC maintains that the reaction to the prospect of loss by the historic West of its monopoly in global processes finds its expression, in particular, in the continued political and psychological policy of ‘containing Russia.’ (‘Foreign Policy Concept’, 2008) The document emphasizes Russia’s independence and sovereignty as the foundation on which all of Moscow’s relations with the outside world must be built.

A resurgent nationalism, integrated with an almost paranoid concern for security,<sup>11</sup> underlies Moscow’s current approach to the outside world. But, Western policy has contributed to that concern. As both Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev have repeated on numerous occasions, Russia is a major power whose interests have simply been ignored by the West, especially a would-be hegemonic Washington. With the return of Russia’s power base – in particular in economic terms – Russia simply will not stand by and permit those interests to be pushed aside. It will not permit itself either to become a dependent supporter of U.S. policy initiatives or to be shunted aside into the ‘dustbin of history.’

### **3. Russia and the United States since 9/11**

In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, President Putin offered Russian support to the United States in its initial response to the attacks. This initiative opened a brief period in which relations between the United States and Russia were generally more cordial than they had been in a number of years. The divisions between the two countries were overshadowed by the obvious areas of collaboration – especially in combating terrorist threats. Russia supported the U.S. military intervention against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, in part by facilitating U.S. access to air bases in Central Asia that proved to be important in the U.S. pursuit of military operations in Afghanistan. However, by summer and fall of 2002, as the Bush Administration pushed for military intervention and regime change in Iraq, the relationship rapidly unraveled. In fact, the Russian Federation, along with key U.S. allies France and Germany, comprised the core opposition to U.S. demands for direct military intervention against Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. It is from this point that we can track the deterioration of relations between Moscow and Washington that by early 2009, at the time of the transfer of presidential power to Barack Obama, had reached the level of confrontation on a variety of issues of central concern to the foreign policy of both countries. These issues concerned, first and foremost, the relative standing and role of the two countries in the international system. More specifically, however, it concerned Russia’s lack of input in key global discussions about future security, the West’s

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to recognize that the U.S. decision to pursue a policy of *de facto* containment of Russia beginning already by the mid-1990s, as noted earlier in this chapter, has reinforced Moscow’s concerns for security and for its future role in areas adjacent to Russian territory and viewed as crucial to Russia’s long-term interests.

political, security, and economic encroachment in areas viewed in Moscow as Russia's sphere of influence, and the West's position on a whole series of important international developments. In the following pages, we will discuss briefly a number of these issues that divide Moscow and Washington and the likelihood of their resolution in the near term.

#### **a. U.S. Unilateralism and the Russian Response**

Among the most central and consistent themes in Russian foreign policy in recent years has been the call for the reestablishment of a multipolar international political system in which all major powers, including especially Russia, have an equal voice. This theme has been central to most of the major speeches of Russian leaders over the past decade, even prior to the resurgence of Russia as a major international player. The 2000 version of *The Russian Foreign Policy Concept*, for example, made the point throughout that Russia was committed to a multipolar approach to international security and that '[t]he strategy of unilateral actions can destabilize the international situation, provoke tensions and the arms race, aggravate interstate contradictions, national and religious strife'.<sup>12</sup> In his strongly critical attack on the United States and NATO presented at an international security conference in Munich in 2007, President Putin (2007) noted, 'The United States has overstepped its borders in all spheres – economic, political and humanitarian – and has imposed itself on other states. . . . One-sided illegitimate action hasn't solved a single problem and has become a generator of many human tragedies, a source of tension.' Moscow's criticism did not let up under President Medvedev, as was evident from his criticism of the United States for encouraging Georgia's 'barbaric aggression' against South Ossetia in August 2008 and for using the ensuing Russia-Georgia war as an excuse further to expand NATO. (Medvedev, 2008b)

This source of division between the United States and the Russian Federation has been at the root of many of the other areas of disagreement for more than a decade and is one that will be difficult to resolve. It concerns the very way in which the leaderships of the two countries view themselves and their dealings with the rest of the world. Despite the change in administration in Washington and the abandonment of the most egregious elements of a unilateralist and assertive U.S. nationalist foreign policy, U.S. decision makers will continue to view the United States as an 'exceptional' state, one destined to provide global leadership, as they have for more than two centuries.<sup>13</sup>

Such an approach to dealing with Russia will continue to bring with it problems, for in very many respects the Russians have a similar view of themselves as unique masters of their own destiny, completely independent actors, and a legitimate global power. This is the message that Putin, Medvedev and other Russian leaders have been so insistent in conveying in recent years. 'Sovereign democracy,' as the theoretical

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<sup>12</sup> The 2008 version of *The Foreign Policy Concept* (2008) echoes these points: 'The unilateral action strategy leads to destabilization of international situation, provokes tensions and arms race, exacerbates interstate differences, stirs up ethnic and religious strife, endangers security of other States and fuels tensions in international relations.'

<sup>13</sup> There is an extensive literature dealing with this topic, some of which is cited in Kanet (2008). . The foreign and security policy team surrounding President Obama shares this perspective of its predecessors, although not its view of the appropriate means to be used to achieve it. Writing on this topic for a Russian audience, Andrei P. Tsygankov (2008) has summarized the arguments concerning 'American Exceptionalism'.

underpinning of the Russian political system, calls for Russian unilateralism in foreign and security policy, in so far as that is possible.

### **b. Moscow and the U.S.-EU Challenge to Russia's Sphere of Influence**

Quite a number of the conflicts between Russia and the West result from what Russia views as a deliberate attempt by the West to undermine Russia's legitimate interests and the attempt to limit and contain Russia's revival as a great power. This reaction relates to the dramatic shift in the status of the territory between the Russian Federation and Western Europe, all of which was at one time a part of a Soviet-dominated 'empire' – either internal or external – and most of which is now integrated into Western economic, political and security institutions. NATO and EU expansion eastward has been viewed in Moscow as the result of purposeful Western programs aimed at expanding the West's geopolitical dominance in Europe and directly undermining Russia's role and its long-term security. The Russians ignore the fact that the initiative for inclusion came from the Central European peoples themselves – in part because of forty years of Soviet domination in the region -- and that the West was, in fact, responding to these initiatives. Of course, this also fits well with EU and U.S. objectives of expanding Western institutions throughout the region.

Ever since the most recent expansions of NATO and EU membership relations between Russia and those organizations have deteriorated significantly. In part, this stems from the much more assertive efforts of Moscow to reestablish its influence in the broader Central and East European region. On the other hand, the entrance of postcommunist members into the EU has added a significant level of complexity to EU-Russian relations, as new members such as Poland and the Baltic states demanded that the organization take a stand on a variety of issues that have challenged Russian policy. (DeBardeleben, 2009) Poland, for example, stymied efforts to renegotiate a new EU-Russian Partnership and Cooperation Agreement for more than a year in response to Moscow's embargo of the importation of Polish meat products, which the Poles viewed as politically motivated. (Lobjakas, 2007)<sup>14</sup>

Some of the new members of the European Union have been strongly critical of bilateral deals negotiated with Russia by other EU members to build new gas pipelines from Russia to Europe that will bypass their territory. Once again Poland has been the most vocal in its criticisms of the implications of such a pipeline for both its interests and for the future development of a common EU energy policy. Among the new challenges to the Russian-EU relationship, however, perhaps the most visible have related to the active role that Poland, Lithuania, and other postcommunist states played in supporting political reform in Ukraine, Georgia and even Belarus – political reform that has generally been interpreted by Moscow as a challenge to its interests.<sup>15</sup> During and after the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in late 2004 the Polish government was among its most active advocates and supporters in Europe. (Kuzio, 2004) Postcommunist EU member

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<sup>14</sup> Similar Lithuanian objections to resuming negotiations were finally overcome in November 2008.

<sup>15</sup> President Medvedev (2008c) pointedly noted: 'We really proved – including to those who sponsored the current regime in Georgia – that we are able to protect our citizens.' First, and primarily, he was referring to the United States, but also Poland and other postcommunist states that had supported the Saakashvili government. In like vein, Prime Minister Putin also presented the Russian intervention in Georgia as a response to cold-war style provocations by the United States. (Cited in Levy, 2008b)

states also backed developments in Georgia associated with the Rose Revolution of 2003 that brought to power in Tbilisi a Western-oriented government. (Whitmore, 2008)

We have focused on the impact of EU expansion into what the Russians view as their legitimate sphere of interest and influence. Although this development obviously does not impinge directly on the Russian-American relationship, it has clear implications for it. First, there is the fact that all the new member states of the EU also joined NATO since 1998. Moreover, as a group they have generally supported U.S. foreign and security policy – for example, in the run up to the Iraq War and militarily in contributing to the U.S.-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The position of these countries in backing the United States is quite understandable, given the history of the second half of the twentieth century and the concern that some of their governments have about the impact of the revival of a strong Russia for their future security.<sup>16</sup> It is important to recall that, in addition to U.S. and European attempts to take advantage of Russia's weakness during the 1990s to push eastward to contain the revival of Russian influence – which is the predominant Russian interpretation -- the countries of the region also vigorously pursued membership in both NATO and the EU as part of their escape from Russia and 'return to Europe'. The most recent illustration of Russia's reactions to what is viewed as challenges to Russian honor, or Western incursions into legitimate Russian spheres of influence, have been the so-called cyber-war conducted against Estonia in 2007,<sup>17</sup> the mounting pressures against Georgia that culminated in military intervention in August 2008 and the ensuing diplomatic recognition of the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the gas war with Ukraine in January 2009. All of these developments were more complex than this simple listing implies. But, the element that ties them together is the attempt by an increasingly assertive Russia to make clear to its near neighbours that on issues on which Moscow has a strong position it is willing to use the capabilities at its command – capabilities that have increased over the past decade – in order to accomplish its goals. Whether the matter concerns what the Russians view as dishonor to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War and an interpretation of the 'liberation' from Nazi domination seen as demeaning to Russia, as in the case of Estonia, or the growing friction between Georgia and Russia ever since the shift in Tbilisi to a government committed to closer ties with, even integration into, Western institutions, the leaders in Moscow will no longer simply watch Western influence increase. In the case of both Ukraine and Georgia, the added factor of Washington's pushing for admission of the two states into NATO in spring 2008 no doubt played an important role in the Russian decision to forestall such a development.

From Moscow's perspective, U.S. actions in Central Asia in conjunction with the Russian-backed expansion of military involvement after 9/11 as part of the war on terror also raised concerns about U.S. meddling in an area of special Russian interest. Yet, the expulsion of the Americans from Uzbekistan in 2005 and the ensuing solidification of

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<sup>16</sup> National debates about joining NATO made clear that for virtually all those countries requesting membership, concerns about Russia and their own future security played an important role. (Maddox and Rachwald, 2001)

<sup>17</sup> In 2007 after the Estonian government decided to move a Soviet war memorial from the center of Tallinn to its international military cemetery Russians in both Estonia and in the Russian Federation mounted attacks on the Estonian government and its embassy in Moscow. This was followed by the cutting off of Russian oil and coal deliveries, a massive cyber attack that virtually closed down the information technology sector of this former Soviet republic. (Dempsey, 2007; 'A Cyber-Riot, 2007).

Russian relations with most of the countries of the region have weakened the United States as a competitor for influence in Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> However, from Moscow's perspective, the issue of the U.S. role in undermining Russian influence in neighbouring states and facilitating, even encouraging, their entrance into Western institutions, especially NATO, remains a serious impediment to improved Russian-U.S. relations.

### **c. Russian Charges of a U.S. Military Threat**

Distinct from, but closely related to, the matter of U.S. and Western challenges to Russia's sphere of influence is the Russian charge that the United States and NATO represent a serious threat to Russian security because NATO's placement of forces in countries immediately along Russia's borders undermines the level of mutual trust and, thus, requires Russia to respond in like fashion. The Bush Administration's decision to go ahead with the development and placement of the first stage of an anti-missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland, and the decisions of the two Central European countries to finalize the agreements despite Russian opposition, provide clear evidence of the serious divisions in Russian relations with the United States, but also of the nature of Moscow's relations with its former client states. Washington has simply not taken seriously Russian leaders' regular assertions that they view the placement of an anti-missile system, even one as modest in size as that currently planned, as a challenge to their own long-term security. Nor have the Russians accepted Washington's arguments that the system is meant solely and exclusively as possible protection against rogue states – read Iran – that might develop nuclear weapons. On the other hand, the speed with which the Poles and Czechs finally ratified the agreements with the United States in August 2008 – after long domestic debates – made clear that the Russian military intervention in Georgia and revived concerns about the long-term nature of their relations with Russia played a major role in their decisions.<sup>19</sup> No doubt President Medvedev's announcement in his address to the Russian Parliament on 5 November 2008 reinforced concerns throughout Central Europe as he announced the likely deployment of Russian missiles in the Kaliningrad Region along the Polish border and that capabilities for electronic warfare against NATO would be expanded in the area. (Medvedev, 2008c) Soon after the new Obama administration made overtures toward improving bilateral relations, including modification of the proposed missile-defense system, the Russians reversed themselves on this matter. ('Russia Ready', 2009; MacAskill and Traynor, 2009)

Thus, the issues of NATO expansion and the absorption of additional former Soviet republics, as well as the introduction of U.S. anti-missile defenses into Central Europe, appear to be non-starters in terms of their impact on the possibility of a normalization of Russian relations with the United States. Only a complete change in the way that the Russians view these issues, or a U.S. decision that the cost involved in continuing to pursue them is too high, is likely to remove them as serious hindrances to

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<sup>18</sup> The uncertainty in early 2009 concerning the renewal of permission for the U.S. use of an airbase in Kyrgyzstan, including Russia's large new loan and the U.S. financial counterproposals, evidenced the ongoing competition for influence in the region. (Barry and Schwartz, 2009)

<sup>19</sup> The final Polish and Czech decisions to sign agreements for the placement of radar and anti-missile systems in their countries occurred soon after the Russian intervention in Georgia and were, no doubt, influenced by concerns about Russia's more assertive role in the region. See Kulish (2008).

improved relations. There is now good evidence that the Obama administration is not committed either to developing a missile defense shield or to further NATO expansion.

#### **d. Russian Gas and Oil Exports and U.S. Efforts at Economic Containment**

Already in the mid-1990s, as part of an overall approach toward Russia that had much in common with a strategy of containment, the United States began to advocate the development of oil and gas pipelines to Western Europe that would skirt Russian territory and, thus, reduce the potential of Russia's gaining further leverage over either Central Asian exporters or the Western purchasers of energy. (Ebel and Menon, 2000; Ziegler, 2005) During the past decade, as Moscow began to use the supply of gas and oil to neighboring states as an explicit foreign policy tool,<sup>20</sup> Washington became even more concerned about Western energy dependence on Russia and renewed its role in encouraging the development of alternative routes for the delivery of energy, especially natural gas, from the new fields in Central Asia to the West. The Russians, understandably, have viewed this U.S. initiative – especially in conjunction with the expansion of NATO eastward – as a continuation of a policy of containment.

U.S. efforts since the 1990s to contain Russian influence over the delivery of energy to Europe have failed to accomplish their objectives; Russia has effectively outmaneuvered the United States in its relations with the oil and gas producing countries of Central Asia. Although several pipelines have been completed that avoid Russian territory, Moscow has been successful in reestablishing solid political and economic relations with the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. They have signed new agreements with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan that will result in expanded supplies of gas and oil destined for European consumers through the existing and planned pipeline network that crosses Russian territory. (Hahn, 2007; Kramer, 2007) At the time of the Russian intervention in Georgia, Moscow signed new agreements with Central Asian producers for the expansion of their gas exports through Russia, rather than via southern pipelines favored by the United States. (Bhadrakumar, 2008) This is all part of a Russian effort to increase control over the flow of oil and gas to Europe as a prelude to being in a position to influence, indirectly at least, the political orientation of key European governments on issues such as the status of secessionist regions of Moldova and Georgia, Russian policy in Chechnya, etc.

Russia and important Western partners – especially Germany and Italy -- have also put into place plans for the future distribution of oil and gas to Europe that will greatly reduce the possible interference of current transit states such as Ukraine and Belarus by avoiding those transit states altogether. The so-called gas war between Russia and Ukraine in January 2009 provides probably the best evidence, from a Russian perspective, that it has to reduce this dependence. The planned Nord Stream pipeline under the Baltic Sea directly from Russia to the coast of Germany, as well as the more recently announced South Stream pipeline that will run under the Black Sea from Russia directly to Bulgaria and on to Italy, will expand Russia's domination over the gas markets of Europe, while reducing the possibility of countries such as Ukraine, Belarus or Poland disrupting those flows. Overall, Russia has positioned itself effectively to control the

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<sup>20</sup> The most comprehensive treatment of Russia's political use of energy supplies to neighbouring states, as part of a policy in which economic tools have complemented more traditional military capabilities can be found in Nygren (2007). -

production and distribution of energy across almost the entirety of former Soviet space and, thus, to Europe as well, as part of former President Putin's commitment to reestablish Russia as a major global actor. The dependence on external sources for virtually all gas and oil needs of some countries in the European Union, and their willingness to cut bilateral deals with Russia outside the context of a common EU policy (notably Germany), has greatly aided Russia in its attempt to employ energy as a foreign policy tool. It has also contributed to the divisions within the European Union and between the United States and key EU member states on the issue of the future of EU energy policy. However, the impact of the January 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas war has, at least for the time being, influenced European states to reconsider the implications of their dependence on Russia for energy. ('EU Urged to Reconsider Strategic Energy Goals,' 2009)

#### **e. Other Outstanding Disagreements**

In addition to the issues discussed here, a long list of other policy disagreements divided Moscow and Washington as the new Obama Administration took over control of U.S. foreign policy. These included a number of outstanding territorial issues such as Russia's refusal to recognize the Western-supported independent state of Kosovo, but its recognition – in part, in retaliation – of the independence of the Georgian breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and subsequent *de facto* incorporation of the two into the Russian Federation. In both of these cases the United States and Russia have taken opposing positions. But this issue, as we have already noted earlier, is part of the much broader concern of Russian and U.S. policy toward those states in Eastern Europe that have declared that it is their intention to join NATO and the European Union. The status of both Russian-Georgian and Russian-Ukrainian relations and the impact on their conflicts on Moscow's policy toward Washington remain toward the top of list of priorities – although the change of governments in Ukraine in early 2010 has already resulted in an improvement in Ukrainian-Russian Relations. (Harding, 2010)

Just as important, however, is the divergence between Moscow's and Washington's assessments to date on carrying out the 'war on terror'. Although the matter of U.S. policy in Iraq no longer dominates bilateral relations as it did immediately prior to and after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the two countries continue to differ seriously on this issue. The matter of Russian treatment of the former breakaway republic of Chechnya has also been an issue of some importance, since the United States – as well as the European Union – has periodically condemned the Russians for their brutal treatment of both insurgents and the population at large. But, the manner in which the United States has conducted its 'war on terror' without real input or consultation with other states, including especially Russia, has contributed to the friction between the two states.

Over the past several years, the Russians have also pursued a very visible policy of establishing closer ties with states openly critical, even hostile, to the United States and to U.S. interests. This includes the expansion of economic ties with Cuba and Venezuela, accompanied by showy collaborative military exercises, (Levy, 2008c; Schwartz, 2009; Blank, 2010) vetoes of Western efforts in the United Nations to expand pressures on the murderous regime in Zimbabwe and to bring a halt to the ethnic cleansing in Sudan.

Finally, Moscow has begun to 'show the flag' far from Russian territory, as illustrated by its collaborative military operations with the Venezuelan and the recent

flexing of its military muscles with the resumption after more than fifteen years of naval and air patrols off the northern coasts of Scandinavia and the planting of the Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic. ('Intelligence Brief, 2007) These activities, along with the regular, very critical attacks on the United States and on U.S. policy, appear to have several purposes. First, to reaffirm the position that Russia is an independent and an important world actor that can and will pursue its own interests and, second, to build – or rebuild – a set of relationships with states that share Russia's opposition to Washington's policies and will support it in various international venues.

#### **4. Toward the Future**

Where is this relationship likely to go in the near term? Analysts agree that for both countries an improvement is important, if they are going to be able to deal with issues of importance to their national interests. First and foremost, the issues of international terrorism and the challenges from militant Islam are matters of concern to both governments, and cooperation in dealing with them remains important. In fact, despite the serious deterioration in relations during the Bush administration and the heightened hostile rhetoric, collaboration in this area, in particular concerning military operations against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan continued. The solution of other matters of mutual interest to Moscow and Washington, such as the possible development of nuclear weapons by Iran, an important issue on which the two countries have not agreed, are likely possible only with an improvement in bilateral relations and a less confrontation approach than that which we have witnessed in recent years. In some respects, Russian-U.S. relations in recent years have followed a path illustrated best by the cycle of escalation described as a 'security dilemma.' After each decision by one side or the other to pursue a particular policy – whether the U.S. decision to begin building a protective missile shield, or the Russian decision to 'solve' its problems with Georgia by military intervention – the level of mutual hostility rose and led to a retaliatory action on the part of the other side.

Although most of the issues that divide the two sides are matters viewed as serious and central to interpretations of national interest and, thus, not easy to resolve, the election of a new U.S. president committed to implementing a new approach to relations with the rest of the world has provided opportunity for a new start in Russian-U.S. relations. In fact, after closed discussions on 26 January 2009, the Russian ambassador to NATO implied that Russia and NATO were in the process of regularizing relations suspended in the wake of the Russia-Georgia war of summer 2008. (Baker, 2008; Mass, 2009) This information, added to the announcement that Russia will not deploy Iskander missiles targeted on U.S. facilities in Poland and/or the Czech Republic and considered within the context of a possible new orientation in U.S. foreign policy under President Obama, raises hope of possible improvement in relations between the two countries.

One issue in the Russian-U.S. relationship that had to be handled almost immediately concerned arms control, a matter largely ignored during the entire Bush administration. For example, the Bush Administration decided to let the START treaty of 1994, which monitored and limited a variety of nuclear weapons, simply expire in 2009 rather than negotiate a renewal or an extension of the agreement. (Boese, 2008) In fact, President Obama has made the reduction of the nuclear threat a centerpiece of his

security policy, and the Russian Federation and the United States signed a new arms control treaty on 8 April 2010. (Baker and Bilefsky, 2010)

The new tone of cooperation in American foreign policy has already helped to improve the environment in which Russian-U.S. interactions.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, there exists a substantial area of the overlapping interests between the Russian Federation and the United States relating to other aspects of arms control, international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and now the global economic slowdown. However, there is one set of issues where U.S. and broader Western compromise would appear to be impossible, without their abandoning principle. Russia cannot be permitted to veto the continuation of the development of close ties between former Soviet republics and clients with the West. The rush to membership in the EU and NATO that began with the collapse of the external and internal Soviet empires two decades ago was not orchestrated in Washington or Brussels – even though it was welcomed there -- but rather in the countries that had just escaped half a century, or more, of Soviet domination.

Whether Moscow's newfound assertiveness in its relations with its near neighbors will undercut prospects for improved relations will depend almost entirely on Moscow's flexibility in dealing with these countries as sovereign equals and not as a part of a revitalized 'Greater Russia.' What is clear is that the areas of mutual interest exist between Moscow and Washington where both sides could benefit by renewed cooperation, that the new administration in Washington seems willing to back off from some of its predecessor's policy initiatives deemed most unacceptable in Moscow, and that the leadership in Moscow seems willing to test a return to a less assertive approach to the Russian-U.S. relationship.

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<sup>21</sup> In the early weeks of his presidency, Barack Obama sent a letter to his Russian counterparts suggesting that he would not proceed with the deployment of a new missile defense system in Europe, if the Russians would help in bringing pressure on Iran to stop the development of nuclear weapons. (Baker, 2008)

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