

## Wider Europe

June 9, 2009

**Summary:** President Barack Obama's first meeting with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev brought a halt, at least temporarily, to the deterioration in bilateral relations between Russia and the United States. Next month Obama will visit Moscow, seeking to further his administration's goal of resetting and improving relations with Russia.

Improved ties with Russia are clearly in U.S. interests, as is Russian cooperation in dealing with a range of strategic issues. The key question is whether U.S.-Russian relations can improve in a serious, sustainable way? The short answer is no. Barring changes in Russia behavior and policy, Obama's efforts to reshape relations between Washington and Moscow will face serious, perhaps insurmountable, hurdles. This brief argues that the current Russian leadership does not, for the most part, share American interests, threat perceptions, or values and that as long as that is the case, extensive cooperation and significantly improved relations will be difficult to achieve.

## The Russia Challenge: Prospects for U.S.-Russian Relations

by David J. Kramer<sup>1</sup>

As President Barack Obama prepares for his visit to Moscow next month, he deserves credit for trying to reset relations between the United States and Russia. His positive first meeting April 1 in London with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev brought a halt, at least temporarily, to the deterioration in bilateral relations. Obama and Medvedev issued two joint statements: one on the way forward on further reductions in strategic arms, the other outlining a broad agenda reflecting common interests but also areas of disagreement. Upon close examination, the second broader statement may look familiar. In fact, it is very similar to a joint statement agreed almost a year before by President George W. Bush and President Vladimir Putin in Sochi. That Sochi agreement, coming at the end of those two presidencies, went nowhere due to Russia's invasion of Georgia last August. Are prospects any better for U.S.-Russian relations to improve in a serious, sustainable way as outlined in the Obama-Medvedev statement? The short answer is no, because while the United States has hit the famous "reset" button, Russia has not. But the Obama administration has an obligation to try nonetheless in case the situation in Russia somehow changes for the better.

Obama and his team entered office intent on improving U.S.-Russian relations. Vice President Biden's reference in February in Munich to the reset button under-

scored American interest in a fresh start. Improved ties with Russia are clearly in U.S. interests, as is Russian cooperation in dealing with a range of strategic issues. American officials have also voiced support for Russia's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and hope that the U.S. Congress will graduate Russia from the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. Russian officials have welcomed this change in tone from Obama and his administration but remain unconvinced that it constitutes a real change in policy from the Bush administration. And if it is a change, which aspects of the last eight years will be different? Will it, for example, be more of a "realist" approach?

As they try to discern what Obama has in mind, Russian officials have offered no reset of their own policy. Instead, they continue to cite a litany of grievances against the Bush administration and argue that the burden for improving relations is on the new team in Washington. When asked during a recent visit to Washington whether there were any lessons to be learned of Russian foreign policy over the past 20 years and what Russia might reset, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov answered in a very revealing way: "Lessons, what we would draw, I never thought of this, frankly. I don't have time to draw lessons. I will do this when I retire."

And therein lies the problem—Moscow's

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unwillingness or inability to reciprocate with its own reset button and its lack of introspection. It is as if Russia were a country with no mirrors because the elite there blame others for all problems, never themselves. Barring changes in Russian behavior and policy, Obama's efforts to reshape relations between Washington and Moscow will face serious, perhaps insurmountable, hurdles. That is not an argument for giving up on the relationship at this early stage, but it is a reason to keep expectations very modest and to approach today's Russia with eyes wide open.

## Common national interests? Not so fast

Recent reports by various think tanks and organizations advising the Obama administration on how to repair relations with Russia (a useful compilation of them can be found at <http://www.amacad.org/russiapolicy.aspx>) list areas in which the United States and Russia should be cooperating: Iran, Afghanistan, North Korea, non-proliferation, and Middle East peace. The premise behind the majority of these reports is that Russia and the United States have common national interests and can reach common understandings of how to address these challenges. The reality is that the current Russian leadership (and it is important to distinguish Russia's leadership from the general population) does not, for the most part, share our interests or threat perceptions, to say nothing of our values. As long as that is the case, extensive cooperation and significantly improved relations will be difficult to achieve.

Other factors play a role in Russian decision-making such as corruption and personal interests. Non-transparent, murky, behind-the-scenes deals in arms sales, the energy sector, and domestic policy highlight the role of corruption and extend to co-opting (or buying) Western accomplices who advocate on Russia's behalf. The double-hatting of many Russian officials where, in addition to their top government jobs, they also hold senior positions in Russian companies – for example, Medvedev was chairman of Gazprom while serving as chief-of-staff to Putin, and Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin is also chairman of Rosneft—raises questions about what motivates officials' decisions and actions. The extent to which corruption plays a role in Russian decision-making is hard to quantify and even harder to deal with if other governments try appealing to Russian officials on national interest grounds when personal interests may be more dominant factors. But what seems clear is that the Russian elite pursues its own interests, including hanging onto power and the perks that come with it, over the pursuit of the country's overall

interests. By its actions, the elite demonstrates its fundamental distrust of the population at nearly every turn.

Recovering Russia's wounded sense of pride and place on the world stage as a global power also explains its leadership's behavior. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the loss of the Warsaw Pact, and then the chaos and weakness of the Yeltsin years trouble many Russians to this day. Putin famously described the collapse of the USSR as the "biggest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under his leadership, thanks mostly to the rising price of oil, Russia was able to bounce back, flex its muscles again, and gain the respect of other countries around the world. The crowning achievement marking Russia's return was hosting the G8 meeting in 2006; winning the right to host the Olympics in Sochi in 2014 is also a source of pride, especially to Putin.

With this renewed sense of pride comes an arrogance, cockiness, assertiveness, self-confidence, and even aggressiveness that is combined at the same time with paranoia, insecurity, and hypersensitivity. This is a bad, even combustible, combination that reflects a Russia that is both strong and weak at the same time. It is certainly a stronger country than during the 1990s, but it also is a country facing massive demographic, infrastructure, and social problems that, if not addressed, will pose many economic challenges for its leadership and for other countries. Indeed, the Putin years, for all their hype, may be viewed in 20 years (or less) as a time of real missed opportunity for the lack of investment in the country at a time when Russia's central bank held the third largest hard-currency reserves in the world.

From attempting to undermine the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) over its emphasis on democracy and human rights and trying to block NATO enlargement to criticizing the EU's new Eastern Partnership and decrying missile defense, Russia's leaders seek to drive wedges between and among NATO and EU members and between the United States and Europe. To the extent that they have a strategy (and the jury is still out on that), it is a counter, anti, or negative strategy. To some degree, this strategy has worked:

- Georgia and Ukraine were not offered a Membership Action Plan (MAP) in Bucharest in April 2008 as Russia had feared (they were offered the prospect of eventual membership, but Russia, fixated on the MAP possibility, didn't focus on that);

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- In proposing a vague new European security architecture, Russia has distracted attention from its failure to abide by existing security agreements such as the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) and last August's Georgia ceasefire agreement; and
- Russia emerged virtually unscathed vis-a-vis NATO despite its actions last August against Georgia because NATO allies were unable to agree on how to respond.

Moreover, Russian officials hope that by persistently and loudly raising objections to certain U.S. policies, specifically missile defense and policy toward Russia's neighbors, the United States will unilaterally compromise on its policies. They do this by linking a post-START agreement to the future of missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. An arms control deal, deemed possible just two months ago—"low hanging fruit" is how one senior U.S. official described it in April after the Obama-Medvedev meeting—is looking less likely unless Russia budes from this linkage position (or, worse, the U.S. yields). Agreement on a post-START arrangement is in U.S. interests, but it is in Russia's interests much more, for Moscow cannot afford to maintain its aging nuclear weapons nor could it compete with the United States in any new arms race. That would seem to provide the U.S. side with more leverage, but the Obama administration has indicated its strong desire for an agreement by the end of the year to demonstrate that relations are back on track. In the process, it has created the impression that the United States is the demandeur, forfeiting its leverage. Still, the more that Russian officials insist that the United States back down on missile defense, the harder it will be for the Obama administration, skeptical about missile defense to begin with, to do so to avoid appearing to cave to Russian pressure.

## The values gap

A number of the American think tank reports significantly downplay the importance of Russia's deteriorating domestic situation, overlooking the fact that the United States' best relationships are with countries that are democratic and share its values. Russia's leadership, alas, is moving in the opposite direction. Countries that share U.S. values are much more likely to share U.S. interests, even if they don't always agree with their policies, as demonstrated with the Iraq war in 2003 when Germany and France (countries with whom the United States share common values) strongly disagreed with its policy; those disagreements,

however, did not mean a fundamental rupture in bilateral relations. As Obama said in his June 4 speech in Cairo, democratic systems of government are "ultimately more stable, successful, and secure."

With Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 1999 (first as prime minister and then as acting president), Russian authorities launched an aggressive campaign to control national television—and thus the flow of information for the majority of Russians—and to narrow the space for independent media organizations. The example made in 2003 of Russia's richest oligarch, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, left an unmistakable impression on the other oligarchs, who, during Yeltsin's time, had significant influence over policy and resources. Elimination of gubernatorial elections in 2004, authorities' heavy-handed response to any sources of opposition and criticism, and efforts to ensure a rubber-stamp parliament are evidence of a concerted move away from the central elements of democratic governance. Unsolved murders of journalists, human rights activists, and lawyers—including critics living outside of Russia—have renewed a real climate of fear.

For the United States, the values gap is a serious problem because not only is Russia moving in the wrong direction domestically, it is actively opposed to Western efforts to help its neighbors democratize as well. Not even China, protective of its own domestic developments, plays such an aggressively negative role against our efforts at democracy promotion in other countries. Especially after the "color" revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, Russian leaders view such democracy promotion activities as a threat, as Putin made clear in his bellicose speech at the Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007.

The outlook for Russia's political development is not bright because the current economic crisis is likely to make the authorities more inclined toward tighter control to snuff out any potential sources of unrest and opposition. Barring a restructuring toward a more accountable, representative system of government, prospects for improvement of the situation are dim. Hopes that Medvedev would represent a more liberal approach are so far wishful thinking, and the evidence points to a widening gap between the West and Russia's leaders that is bound to have an impact on the possibilities for real cooperation and better relations. Obama and his team deserve credit for raising with Medvedev the case of Lev Ponamaryev, a human rights activist who was beaten the night before the London meeting. When he travels to Moscow next month, Obama should send a strong signal of support for

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Russia's democratic development by spending time with civil society activists and human rights defenders such as Ponamaryev.

## Possible trouble ahead

A values gap combined with a Russian leadership that isn't necessarily pursuing policy based on the country's national interests increases the possibilities of undesirable developments. Two in particular are Iran and "the neighbors."

### *Iran and S-300s*

Russia does not want to see Iran become a nuclear-weapons state, but Moscow does not share the U.S. threat assessment of Iran's potential danger. Russian officials are not interested in getting tougher toward Teheran (a position they have stated publicly, and unhelpfully, on numerous occasions) and would much prefer for the United States to play the role of bad guy. Russia has too much at stake in its relationship with Iran—from maintaining stability in its northern Caucasus to interests in arms sales, nuclear reactors, energy, and trade—to risk a tougher approach itself.

In fact, Russian leaders could make the situation exponentially worse if they transfer S-300 missiles to Iran. If and when such a transfer might occur is unclear but Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mahdi Safari was quoted April 15 as saying that the deal struck in 2007 between Moscow and Teheran for the sale of these weapons was still on track. Russian denials have simply focused on the fact that the missiles have not yet been transferred, not on the fact that Russia should not be sending them in the first place.

Asked about the transfer during a press conference with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Geneva March 6, Lavrov offered little reassurance. "We supply our partner [Iran], first of all, non-destabilizing types of weapons," he said. During a public appearance on May 7 at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, Lavrov was asked again about the possible transfer. "Whatever we sell to Iran or to any other country is not covered by any prohibitions, internationally or nationally, in the Russian Federation, and we have one of the strictest export control legislation," he replied. "And whatever we sell to Iran in particular is only of defensive nature. ...But as I said, and I want to emphasize it, whatever we do in the area of military technical cooperation with Iran is absolutely legal and, which is also very important, the weapons we sell to Iran have never been used against any one country."

Russia's track record on the sale of such weapons is not reassuring either. Several years ago, over U.S. and Israeli protests, Russia sold and transferred to Iran less sophisticated missiles, the Tor-M1, for a reported \$700 million. Given its current economic crisis, Russia is in less of a position to turn down the nearly billion dollars the S-300 sale would produce. Should Russia transfer the superior S-300s, which can shoot down cruise missiles and aircraft from 120 miles away, there has been speculation in public sources that the new Israeli government might strike Iran before it acquired the protection these missiles would afford. That, needless to say, would change the entire dynamics in the Middle East and beyond—and blame for that would lie at Russia's doorstep.

### *The neighbors*

Policy toward Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and the five Central Asian states is arguably the most sensitive issue between Moscow and Western governments and institutions (NATO and the European Union). Russian officials talk about "privileged interests" with their neighbors and a sphere of influence. Reflecting their zero-sum thinking, they view expansion of U.S. and Western interests and presence in the region to be counter to Russia's interests. Even though it should be in Russia's interests to see Afghanistan become more stable, Moscow pressured Kyrgyz President Bakiyev to close the Manas air base, vital to U.S. and NATO efforts for the campaign in Afghanistan. Russian leaders evidently concluded that it was more important to drive the U.S. military out of Kyrgyzstan, making the job of stabilizing Afghanistan, a top priority of Obama's, that much harder. Notwithstanding Russian offers for overflight rights for non-lethal materiel, Russia wants cooperation on Afghanistan to be on *its* terms and with nobody else. The European Union has also come under attack from Moscow for its recently unveiled Eastern Partnership—involving Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia—viewed in Moscow as an effort to lure these countries away from Russia. And NATO's Partnership for Peace exercises in Georgia that ended June 1 got on Russian leaders' nerves, with President Dmitri Medvedev describing them as "dangerous" and an "overt provocation."

Obama administration officials, much like their predecessors, reject the notion of a Russian sphere of influence and zero-sum thinking often found in Moscow. To their credit, they have stated explicitly that countries have a right to decide their own future. Obama was crystal clear on this in a March 23 meeting

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with outgoing NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, when he said: “We’ve also discussed the role that NATO plays with respect to Russia and how this administration, my administration, is seeking a reset of the relationship with Russia, but *in a way that’s consistent with NATO membership and consistent with the need to send a clear signal throughout Europe that we are going to continue to abide by the central belief that countries who seek and aspire to join NATO are able to join NATO.*” (emphasis added) Obama’s comments offer a much better policy than a particularly odious recommendation in one of the recent think tank reports suggesting “consideration of institutionalizing a form of Ukrainian neutrality, or ‘Finlandizing’ Ukraine, to ease Russian concerns about Ukraine’s joining a potentially anti-Russian security organization...” Ukraine should have a say in its own future. There is no question that narrowing differences on the neighbors will likely be the most difficult task ahead of both governments.

While Russian-Ukrainian relations could pose a serious test, it is Georgia where tensions with Russia are most palpable. Reports of an attempted coup there on May 5 by a rebellious battalion which Georgian authorities initially blamed on Russia—they later backtracked from these accusations—and ongoing opposition protests calling for the resignation of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili are a reminder of the tinderbox that exists there. Recent talks between Saakashvili and the opposition were a positive step, but the government in Tbilisi has accused Moscow of playing a role in the protests and in funding the opposition.

The opposition demonstrations, in fact, are mostly an indigenous manifestation of dissatisfaction with the Georgian leader, but Russia has engaged in provocative actions of its own. In an April 30 ceremony with the separatist leaders of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Medvedev agreed for Russia to assume responsibility for formal control of their de facto borders with Georgia proper; Russia recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states following its invasion of Georgia last summer. Russia has also been building up its troop presence in the region, in clear violation of last year’s ceasefire agreement brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Placing Russian and Georgia troops closer to each other increases the chances of an incident, intentional or otherwise, between Russian or separatists forces and Georgian forces.

Sadly, the ingredients are there for the situation between Russia and Georgia to once again spin out of control. The West should avoid getting sucked into domestic battles in Tbilisi and should warn the mercurial Saakashvili in the clearest terms possible that any provocations on his part will be met with condemnation, not support. At the same time, Washington needs to make crystal clear to Moscow that reckless actions against Georgia would lead to serious consequences and badly damage, if not destroy, prospects for a better U.S.-Russian relationship.

## Threats and enemies

“We demonstrated weakness, and the weak are beaten. Some want to tear off a big chunk of our country. Others help them to do it. They help because they think that Russia, as one of the greatest nuclear powers of the world, is still a threat, and this threat has to be eliminated...”

— Vladimir Putin, September 4, 2004

We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law... One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? In international relations we increasingly see the desire to resolve a given question according to so-called issues of political expediency, based on the current political climate. And of course this is extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasize this – no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course such a policy stimulates an arms race... I am convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security.

— Vladimir Putin, February 10, 2007

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What, one might wonder, is the relevance of excerpts from two speeches from 2004 and 2007 by then-president (and current prime minister) Putin for the challenges faced by Obama and his administration in dealing with today's Russian leadership? The answer is simple: they reflect a strong current of Russian elite thinking that prevails to this day of the existence of "threats" and "enemies" from the West. The two speeches—the first delivered in Moscow days after the terrorist attack against an elementary school in Beslan that killed more than 300 people and the second delivered in Munich at the annual security conference—represent the Kremlin's justification for its way of governing and decision-making. The existence of such threats and enemies enables the leadership to justify its anti-democratic measures and to act aggressively against its neighbors out of a sense of self-defense.

Chechen separatists and foreign terrorists once represented the main threat; after the situation in Chechnya was brought more or less under control through the ruthless leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov, new enemies were needed. The West in general and NATO and the United States in particular filled the void. The threat from NATO enlargement was cited by Medvedev in February when he unveiled his plans for military modernization. Another commonly cited threat stems from U.S. plans for missile defense installations in Poland (ten interceptor missiles) and the Czech Republic (a radar site). Russia's "National Security Strategy Until 2020" unveiled May 12 noted both threats:

"The potential to maintain global and regional stability will be substantially narrowed with the deployment of elements of the United States of America's global missile defense system in Europe...The unacceptability for Russia of the plans to advance the Alliance's military infrastructure to Russia's borders and attempts to impart global functions to it, which run counter to the standards of international law, will remain the defining factor in relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization."

The sense of outside threats is fed by Kremlin-supported anti-American propaganda on Russian television which for years has polluted the minds of Russian viewers by hyping the supposed danger posed by American unilateralism, the role of the United States in the "color" revolutions in neighboring Ukraine and Georgia, and American interest in seeing a similar revolution in Russia itself. Even Russia's current economic crisis is blamed on the United States. It is in dealing with these threats, among other responsibilities, that Russia's leaders argue that they, and they alone, know best how to run the country, reflecting their deep distrust of their population.

The Obama administration's recent overtures to Russia make it more difficult for the Kremlin to perpetuate these myths, but that has only meant a lowering of the volume on state-sponsored anti-American rhetoric, not an end to it. Absent a U.S. decision to cancel deployment of missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic and continued support for neighboring states, especially Georgia, the propaganda is likely to resume full blast. Failure to agree on a post-START arms treaty may also lead the Kremlin to conclude that the new American administration is no different than the old one.

## Medvedev: Continuity or change?

All of these issues will likely be on the agenda when Obama sits down with Medvedev in Moscow. More than a year into the job as president, Medvedev has acquired a reputation in some circles as a liberal, at least more liberal than Putin, partly because he is not from the KGB, unlike his predecessor. He also likes to talk about his background as a lawyer (of course Putin earned a law degree, too). At the same time, it is important to remember that Medvedev has ridden on Putin's coattails for nearly 18 years, served under him in senior positions in the Kremlin, and completely owes his current position as president to Putin's endorsement of his candidacy in December 2007 (had Putin that day endorsed Sergei Ivanov, for example, Ivanov would likely be president of Russia today). Medvedev was in the Kremlin and head of Gazprom while Mikhail Khodorkovsky was being persecuted and his Yukos company was being dismantled and sold off. And despite rumblings of disagreements between the presidential administration and the prime minister's office, there are no signs that real change is in the offing. Even Medvedev's talk against "legal nihilism" and about rule of law is reminiscent of Putin's early years (though Putin mostly referred to "dictatorship of laws," he also used the term "legal nihilism" in a speech to Russian judges in November 2000). Medvedev's anti-corruption campaign also resembles an earlier, half-hearted and superficial effort by Putin.

Still, those hoping for better times under Medvedev cite his April 13 interview with the newspaper *Novaya gazeta* (often critical of the Kremlin and several of whose journalists have been murdered); his April 15 meeting with members of the previously moribund Council for Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights; the April 21 release from prison of Khodorokovsky lawyer and mother of three Svetlana Bakhmina; and his expressed desire to revisit certain pieces of legislation affecting non-governmental organizations and criticism of the government. Offsetting these hopes, however, is significantly more evidence that little in fact has really changed since Medvedev became president.

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Under Medvedev, Russia has:

- Invaded Georgia and recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states; it remains in violation of last August's ceasefire agreement;
- Pressured (or bought off) the Kyrgyz government to close Manas air base;
- Threatened to install Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad and threatened to target Poland and the Czech Republic if U.S. missile defense plans proceed in those countries (Medvedev notably made the Iskander threat within hours of Obama's election victory last November);
- Justified military modernization because of the "threat" of NATO enlargement;
- Cut off gas to Ukraine in January (Ukraine bears some responsibility for not paying its bills);
- Proposed a rapid response force in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to be "comparable" with NATO forces;
- Engaged in provocative maneuvers in South and Central America with the likes of Venezuela and Cuba;
- Witnessed more unsolved murders of human rights defenders and journalists; and
- Amended the constitution to extend the presidential term from four to six years.

More recently, after raising hopes on the NGO legislation, first deputy head of the presidential administration Vladislav Surkov, one of the architect's of Putin's "sovereign democracy" policy and of the original NGO law, was put in charge of the review, equivalent to the fox guarding the chicken coop. On May 19, in a decision chillingly reminiscent of Soviet times, Medvedev announced creation of a special commission tasked with countering efforts to rewrite history to the detriment of Russia. He has also proposed appointing the head of the Constitutional Court, an effort to deepen Kremlin control over the judiciary. All this runs counter to the image of a leader looking to liberalize society.

Overcoming Putin's legacy would be too much to expect from a new president in one year, and none of this is to imply that Medvedev should be written off. Russia's economic crisis is likely to get worse before it gets better and that could produce unforeseen developments, including at the highest political levels. Rising pressure from society or unforeseen external catalysts could also push Medvedev to act more forcefully. At the same time, Medvedev's room for maneuver, were he so inclined, is very limited as long as Putin remains prime minister. Medvedev continues to be widely viewed as the weaker of the ruling tandem with Putin and has made very few appointments to his inner circle of people linked only to him and not from the Putin camp. Many people around Medvedev, in fact, are close Putin allies likely there to keep an eye on the new president. All this makes Medvedev a virtual captive of the system in which he played a key part (Putin is a captive of it, too, for that matter). It does not mean that Medvedev can never lead Russia through real change, but it does mean that continuity rather than change is more likely under his stewardship and as long as the current prime minister stays in place.

## Recommendations

Agreement on a post-START treaty was never going to be easy, and that may be the best the United States and Russia can agree upon this year. But Obama and his team have loftier goals for the U.S.-Russian relationship, and if all they accomplish this year is a new arms control agreement, it will be hard to justify Obama's further deep engagement on Russia policy, given everything else on his plate. His advisers are quick to note that they are approaching relations with Moscow with their eyes wide open, that they have no illusions about the prospects for a real turnaround in relations, but that they have to give this their best shot. They are right to do so. And as they move forward, here are some recommendations:

- Stick with the broad principle of working with Russia wherever possible, while pushing back on Russia whenever necessary;
- Coordinate very closely with allies so that Russia hears the same message from Berlin, Paris, and London as it does from Washington: develop a common strategy toward the Russian government but also toward Russian society;
- Work with the Europeans about getting more serious about energy diversification;

- De-link a post-START agreement to other issues such as missile defense;
- Deepen relations with Russia's (and the EU's) neighbors, avoid doing so through a Russia prism, and stand firm in rejecting any Russian sphere of influence or de facto vetoes with extra attention on discouraging renewed conflict between Russia and Georgia;
- Insist on Russian compliance with existing Euroatlantic security agreements, including CFE and the Georgia 6-point ceasefire as a prerequisite for discussions on a new European security architecture;
- Underscore to Russia the devastating impact the transfer of S-300s to Iran would have on the Middle East and bilateral relations;
- Avoid U.S. government promotion of trade: American companies that want to do business in Russia are more than welcome to do so (and many have done very well there in the past decade) but the U.S. government should not get into bed with many of Russia's companies and their leaders;
- Support Russia membership in the WTO in the spirit of greater Russian integration into rules-based organizations but after checking that Russia truly is interested in joining and lifts damaging and arbitrary bans on exports from its neighbors;
- Back graduation from Jackson-Vanik (Russia has been in compliance with the original purpose of the Act dealing with Jewish emigration since the break-up of the USSR) ;
- Raise concerns both publicly and privately about human rights violations and the direction Russia is heading in politically and make certain to meet with civil society and human rights activists whenever in Russia;
- Review visa policy to make it easier for young Russians and various stakeholders to come to the United States for visits and exchange programs; and
- Don't surrender to Russian threats, whether on missile defense or NATO enlargement; at the same time, avoid policies that only serve to provoke Russia: pursue U.S. national interests and explain these interests to Russia in hopes of narrowing differences.

### **David J. Kramer, Senior Transatlantic Fellow, GMF**

As a Senior Transatlantic Fellow, David J. Kramer works on issues related to Russia/Eurasia and wider Europe as well as democracy and human rights. He came to GMF after more than eight years at the U.S. State Department in various capacities, most recently as assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights, and labor. Before that, he was a deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian Affairs, responsible for Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus affairs, as well as regional nonproliferation issues. He also served in the Office of Policy Planning and as senior advisor to the Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs.

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