



After the “Reset”

A strategy and new agenda for U.S. Russia policy

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Executive summary

The U.S.-Russia relationship was in tatters when President George W. Bush left office. Disagreements had spiraled out of control and the most basic issues could not be discussed. Many in both Moscow and Washington spoke of a new Cold War.

The Obama administration has begun the process of rebuilding U.S.-Russia relations. Administration officials launched an effort in the early months of the new presidency to improve the toxic atmosphere of the relationship—what they called “pressing the reset button.”

The reset button was a successful opening tactic. Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev met for the first time in April before the G-20 meeting in London and released an ambitious joint statement outlining more than 20 areas of cooperation. The presidents will follow up with a summit in Moscow on July 6-8.

This is a constructive start. The two countries are now able to discuss issues of mutual concern and manage their disagreements. But more is needed if the United States is to have a substantive and stable relationship with Russia.

The Obama administration now must move beyond the reset and adopt a comprehensive strategy for its Russia policy. The following six long-term goals constitute a strategic approach that can guide day-to-day decisions and help prevent the relationship from returning to its late-2008 nadir:

- **Building a stable partnership with Russia to address issues of shared interest.** Challenges such as arms control, instability in Afghanistan, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction affect both the United States and Russia, and Moscow has the potential to be a key partner in addressing them.
- **Preparing for challenges presented by Russia.** The United States must be ready for a variety of scenarios for Russia’s development and changes in its foreign policy. We should be prepared both to defend our national interests using diplomatic, military, and economic tools when challenged by Russia, and to manage potential risks associated with a worsening of its socioeconomic problems.

- **Facilitating Russia's integration into the international community and global economy.** The United States should facilitate Russia's integration into Western and other international institutions. Integration into these structures, rather than isolation, will require greater accountability and could address the weakness of the rule of law and democratic practices in Russia by creating incentives to adhere to norms and enforcing rules of behavior.
- **Creating a stable environment in the former Soviet region.** The United States should work to ensure stability and security in the former Soviet region. We must uphold international law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and prevent more subtle threats to the independence of Russia's neighbors. Moscow's long history of meddling in these countries' affairs demands that the United States take a leadership role. We must also work proactively to solve regional conflicts.
- **Bolstering our energy security and that of our allies.** U.S. Russia policy must reflect a broad energy security strategy, including securing stable and diverse supplies of natural gas for our European allies, increasing Russia's energy efficiency, and jointly developing alternative and renewable technologies.
- **Supporting democratic development and human rights.** The United States should promote the development of a democratic Russia that observes universal values of human rights, political pluralism, and the rule of law. This goal both reflects our fundamental values and furthers our interests, since the emergence of a full-fledged democracy in Russia can only be to our benefit.

These six goals constitute a progressive strategy for Russia policy. Such a strategy upholds progressive values and the need to protect U.S. security, while acknowledging that these objectives are interlinked—that there is no conflict between our ideals and our interests.

The Obama administration can use this strategic framework to create innovative policies that build on and expand the proposals in the London statement. The administration should consider the following nine recommendations as it prepares the agenda for the Moscow summit and in the months thereafter.

- **Reviving negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.** CFE was a cornerstone of European security until the Russians pulled out in 2007. The administration should try to revive negotiations.
- **Cooperating with Russia on climate change and energy efficiency.** The Obama administration should pursue a proactive stance on these issues, since Russia is the third largest emitter and one of the most energy-intensive economies in the world. We should more actively engage Russia on the successor to the Kyoto climate agreement and related carbon trading issues, and work with Russian scientists and the Russian government on energy efficiency.

- **Demonstrating commitment to Ukraine and Georgia.** The Obama administration should complement the “reset button” with a “recommit button” in our relations with Russia’s neighbors, particularly Ukraine and Georgia. The administration should demonstrate, with specific, concrete steps, that a better relationship with Moscow does not entail abandoning our partners in the region.
- **Facilitating Russia’s accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.** The administration should assist Moscow’s OECD membership bid. Russia’s integration into this international organization is likely to strengthen the rule of law and create incentives for reform.
- **Forging a new democracy and human rights agenda.** The democracy and human rights agenda in U.S. Russia policy has reached a dead-end. Yet we should not give up on promoting our fundamental values. The administration should work with the Russian government on its recent anticorruption and rule-of-law initiatives, promote linkages between civil society groups in both countries, and find the right balance between public and private diplomacy.
- **Finding ways to cooperate with Russia in the former Soviet region.** The Obama administration should seek to work with Russia in the region and demonstrate to policymakers in Moscow that U.S.-Russia interaction there need not be a zero-sum game. The Obama administration can help mitigate this perceived competition dynamic and further its goal of bolstering stability in Afghanistan by applying for “dialogue partner” status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—a regional grouping that includes Russia, several Central Asian states and China.
- **Developing solutions to Arctic-related challenges.** The Arctic is emerging as a key locus of both potential competition and cooperation between Russia and the United States. The administration should ensure that the United States can effectively compete in the region and create avenues for bilateral cooperation on scientific exploration and environmental issues.
- **Engaging directly with Russian society.** The United States should counter anti-Americanism and misperceptions about U.S. intentions. President Obama can begin this process by conducting a town hall-style meeting during his July visit to Moscow along the lines of his appearance in Strasbourg, France in April. Obama’s personal diplomacy has a major effect on popular attitudes toward the United States, as the Strasbourg event and his speech in Cairo have demonstrated.
- **Building a legislative compromise to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment.** This legislation was originally intended to support freedom of emigration from the Soviet Union and was an important policy tool when it passed in 1975. But now it serves little purpose and is a significant irritant in bilateral relations. Its repeal would allow the

United States and Russia to focus on critical issues such as arms control, nonproliferation, and Iran instead of rehashing Cold War-era disputes.

U.S.-Russia relations are at a turning point. The Obama administration now has the opportunity to consolidate the improvements that resulted from the reset and decrease the chances that this key relationship will revert to the dangerous state it was in during the Bush administration's final months. To do so it should adopt a comprehensive strategy and broaden the bilateral agenda. But a more effective U.S. policy is not enough to create a strong relationship between the two countries. Russia's troubling policies, both toward the West and its neighbors, need to change as well.

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