

U.S.-Russian Cooperation Beyond 2012

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The relationship between the United States and Russia is on hold in 2012. The intensity of domestic political debate in Russia following disputed national elections and months of public protest, and in the United States leading up to November's presidential contest, leaves little room for bold initiatives or high-profile summit diplomacy. So for now, don't expect much progress—the best case will be if there is no backsliding, and that outcome is by no means guaranteed.

Yet productive relations with Russia are important for the United States. While Russia is no longer America's sole "superpower" counterweight, it remains a large and important country—with 147 million people, the largest land area, and vast natural resources. It is also a pivotal player in Central and Eastern Europe, in Central and South Asia, and a potential player in East Asia.

With its military and energy resources, Russia is still a nuclear superpower and heavy hitter internationally, with the ability to project influence well beyond its immediate neighborhood. The United States needs Russia's help to tackle the problems that will matter beyond 2012, such as preventing a cascade of new nuclear weapons proliferation, responding to natural and man-made disasters that overwhelm the capacities of weak states, and enhancing strategic stability as the Asia Pacific becomes the global center of gravity.

The precedent so far is positive: the United States and Russia have been able to cooperate effectively on pressing security

problems over recent years. The "reset" worked in 2009 because it served both sides' interests. For the Russian side, renewed attention from Washington helped address resentment of perceived U.S. indifference to Russian interests, especially in Russia's own "near abroad," and promised more direct strategic dialogue between Moscow and Washington despite continuing disagreements. For the U.S. side, it opened the door to more active cooperation on obviously shared priorities, such as stabilizing Afghanistan and countering the spread of violent extremism, negotiating with Iran to stop its uranium enrichment program, and ensuring that binding limits on strategic nuclear arsenals remained in force.

Yet even as both sides sustain and benefit from this cooperation, their capacity to keep momentum behind improvement in relations is coming to an end. By the time the dust has cleared from the 2012 elections, relations between Moscow and Washington will be in need of new energy and a new agenda. Even without the acute political pressure of an election year, running disputes over Syria and Russia's human rights record



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demonstrate that there will be no shortage of risk to the relationship. Thus, to sustain a productive partnership, it is essential that Moscow and Washington sign up to a shared roadmap for future cooperation, which includes sufficiently high priority interests that neither side will be tempted to hold the whole relationship hostage when the next crisis arises.

Certainly, the accomplishments of the recent past will continue to play a central role. The United States should do everything possible to preserve and continue to implement the New START treaty, which establishes binding limits on strategic nuclear arsenals and serves both sides' interests in reducing the threat to strategic nuclear stability and combating proliferation.

It must also continue to cooperate on transit of personnel and equipment through Russian territory as forces leave Afghanistan. Work must also be sustained on the multi-track Bilateral Presidential Commission (BPC), which not only enables modest technical cooperation in areas ranging from education and health to energy efficiency and emergency relief, but also encourages sustained working contact between opposite numbers in Moscow and Washington. This practical cooperation is an essential prerequisite to building a stable long-term relationship.

However, priorities for cooperation linked to current crises are likely to fade in importance over the coming years as new challenges arise, along with new areas of potential disagreement. To succeed after 2012, the United States and Russia must find common ground on a much broader agenda that clearly serves the interests of both sides.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE GOALS OF U.S. POLICY?

First, the foundation of the relationship should be strong enough to endure beyond any one presidential administration on either side. A starting point can be encouraging greater engagement between our two societies and their people. That means finally ending anachronistic Cold War style visa and travel restrictions and working toward a visa-free travel agreement that would let ordinary Russians and Americans

engage more easily. The people-to-people agenda will be set by individuals, business, and civil society groups on their own, but only if both governments drop persistent barriers to travel, exchange, and collaboration.

Building a foundation also means making cooperation between governments routine. Giving real support to the BPC, which has worked well so far largely because it has received high-level attention from both presidents, would be a significant step forward. It will work better in the future if it can stand on its own, with an independent budget and permanent coordinators, to serve as a standing channel for Russians and Americans to talk to one another outside the spotlight of international summits and treaty negotiations.

As publics on both sides are increasingly skeptical of bloated government bureaucracy, it is essential that ineffective working groups be reconstituted or cut and that resources are allocated to those groups making real progress that can be clearly communicated to both publics.

Russia's entry into the WTO, which has already prompted a debate in the U.S. Congress over repealing the trade restricting Jackson-Vanik Amendment, offers an opportunity to do this. If trade relations are normalized and protected within the framework of the WTO, U.S. firms are likely to gain ground quickly in the almost \$400 billion Russian services market.

Ford cars, Boeing airplanes, and Caterpillar heavy machinery are already favorites for fast-growing Russian industry and the middle class, and the energy and energy services sectors remain highly profitable. Normal trade relations with enhanced visa-facilitation would also quickly boost investment flows in both directions, which will mean new jobs. This is especially true in U.S. manufacturing and agriculture, where they are badly needed, and in Russia's burgeoning high-tech sector.

Some in Congress want to preserve the leverage they believe Jackson-Vanik offers over Russia's human rights situation. The best way to do that is to endow the BPC, (which has working groups on rule of law and civil society) with some of the almost \$70 million the United States already spends every year

on democracy promotion in Russia. The Russians do not like being told by Americans how to manage their democracy, but there has been bilateral agreement on worthwhile projects to streamline access to courts, combat corruption, and address the scourge of drug trafficking. Washington ought to meet Moscow halfway by offering concrete financial support for any of these initiatives that would serve U.S. national interests in enhanced rule of law and human rights.

Further ahead on the roadmap for U.S.-Russian cooperation, ambitions to forge a genuine partnership on the global challenges that matter most to both countries should be upgraded. In what is becoming known as the Pacific Century, the center of gravity of global trade, politics, and security will move increasingly toward the Asia Pacific region. China is now the single most important trading partner for both Russia and the United States, and both Moscow and Washington have officially declared a new strategic focus on the Asia Pacific region. Yet the United States has been reluctant to engage Russia in a discussion about responses to the emergence of a new Asia.

Moscow and Beijing do not hesitate to pursue their own strategic partnership, ranging from coordination in the U.N. Security Council, to significant military sales and infrastructure development, to joint leadership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

President Obama will not attend the September summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Vladivostok. However, Washington should signal its interest in developing a strategic partnership with Russia in Asia, by reviving proposals for U.S.-Russia energy cooperation in the Pacific region, including a trans-Bering pipeline, and by beginning a dialogue on security issues—including maritime security, counterterrorism, and a cooperative approach to ballistic missile defense in the Pacific. An obvious first step would be to make sure that appropriate lines of communication and procedures for search and rescue cooperation are established between the U.S. and Russian Pacific fleets, as both sides shift vessels to the region. In addition, why not facilitate trans-Pacific business and tourism by reviving and expanding limited visa-free travel zones for the U.S. and Russian Pacific Islands, Alaska, and

Kamchatka?

During the first decade of this century, Americans were once again reminded that oceans are no barrier to religious extremism, terrorism, or energy insecurity, which have taken their toll in blood and treasure. With its rich energy resources, simmering social and political unrest, and history of inter-state conflict, the Middle East will remain a focal point for U.S. foreign policy for the foreseeable future. The crisis in Syria has underscored Moscow and Washington's fundamentally divergent attitudes toward political awakening across the Arab world. Yet neither side has an interest in further bloodshed in Syria, failure of other already fragile regional states, or the triumph of Islamism—which would all have much broader negative implications. Even if consensus on new multilateral sanctions or intervention in Syria is impossible, the sides should seek agreement on basic principles to assist with post-conflict reconstruction and political stability.

In the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and North Africa, it is essential for Moscow and Washington to reject the anachronistic notion of dueling “spheres of influence,” which persists on both sides. Rather, Russia and the United States can easily find agreement on the need for a peaceful transition from NATO to Afghan-led security, and both sides can calibrate their investments in regional cooperation to promote Afghan stability—including Russia's leadership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, both sides' security assistance to Central Asian states, and continuing U.S. counterterrorism operations in Pakistan.

In addition, the United States and Russia each have unique capabilities to help weak states in the region respond to crises that threaten not only humanitarian disaster, but also widespread violence, the rise of militant sectarian or Islamist movements, and ultimately state failure. Finally, neither Russia nor the United States wants to see Iran acquire advanced weaponizable nuclear capabilities, which would make a new regional war more likely and more devastating. Thus, both can agree to apply maximum pressure to Iran to halt its defiance of the international community, while coordinating efforts to reassure Israel, where Russia has increasing influence.

A productive partnership with Russia in those regions critical to U.S. interests will require movement on other fronts. Russia's interests are threatened by development of a U.S. missile defense shield in Europe that excludes non-NATO participation. In addition to missile defense cooperation, Moscow has called for a fully inclusive European security architecture based on respect for the principle of "indivisible security"—that no state can increase its security at another's expense.

Washington should recognize that making real progress with Moscow on Cold War legacies in Europe will pay future dividends for cooperation with Russia globally. For the same reason, both sides should work toward resolution of protracted conflicts in the Euro-Atlantic space, such as those over Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, as top priorities. Both should also be prepared to commit significant resources to supporting deep-seated reconciliation and confidence building between societies in conflict. Concerted efforts to eliminate such sources of tension within the Euro-Atlantic security space will make U.S.-Russian cooperation far easier and more

productive. The notion of a "grand bargain" in U.S. foreign policy—with Russia or anyone else—has gone out of fashion. But that is no justification to forego strategic thinking about the United States' future interests, especially when it is under mounting pressure to manage costly commitments in far-flung corners of the world, and to do so with limited resources.

For now, domestic politics is a brake on any real progress in U.S.-Russian cooperation. But the election cycles and acute sensitivities of 2012 will pass. When they do, both sides can benefit from an ambitious agenda based on compatible—if not identical—global interests.

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