

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

**U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS:
HOW DOES RUSSIA SEE THE
RESET?**

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JAMES COLLINS: Well, good morning, everyone. I'm very, very happy to see you all this morning. From time to time we're fortunate enough to have Dmitri Trenin join us and talk with our people who are interested in the Russian and Eurasian account.

I don't think Dmitri needs much of an introduction to any of you. First, I think most of you have – or I hope you have – a copy of his most recent article, which is – it appeared in *Foreign Affairs*. And I know Dmitri would be happy to talk about that.

But if anyone doesn't know Dmitri, he is the director of Carnegie's Moscow Center and has been at the center for well over I guess, what, 15 years now almost? He is really one of the most well-respected observers of, analysts of, and thinkers about Russia's international position, its foreign policy, and its strategic interests in its own region.

I've asked him, if he would, to reflect for us a bit this morning on how Russia is looking at reset. It's certainly clear that had we met with Dmitri a year ago, we would have been pretty much in the dumps and be looking at how we would get ourselves out of what was about the worst period in U.S.-Russia relations since the Cold War.

Certainly the atmosphere and, in many ways, the substance of relations has undergone a substantial transformation for the better, but the question really is to what extent and how deeply this is running, and how I think it's perceived on each side and whether there are some serious differences in the way it's perceived, or whether people really are sharing a vision these days, and how he would – I would like Dmitri to sort of talk a little bit about – how Moscow is looking at *perezagruzka*.

So Dmitri, I will give you the floor, and then we'll have a discussion, as usual, with what is a very familiar set of faces, I think, for you.

DMITRI TRENIN: Well, Jim, thank you so much for this warm introduction. Thank you for chairing this. It's a great opportunity of course to see some of the old friends, and this is what I cherish most from these encounters.

I do not plan to talk about the things that you might wish to read in the *Foreign Affairs* piece or in a couple of other pieces that I did this fall. The other two are in the *Washington Quarterly* on Russia's spheres, and yet another one on NATO and Russia in *Current History*.

Jim has asked me to talk about how the reset looks from the Russian side, and I will talk for a few minutes, trying to analyze the Russian – actually the changing Russian approach – to the Obama administration and to the U.S.-Russian relationship.

It's not a surprise to start by saying that the Obama election was a surprise to the Russian leadership. Well into the summer of last year they did not believe that Obama would be the next President of the United States, and we're talking about the people at the highest level, including Putin.

The Russian leadership did not embrace Obama until well after the election and well after the result was announced. You would recall the State of the Nation address by Dmitry Medvedev hours after the result of the U.S. election had become known, and he gave a very chilling description

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of U.S.-Russian relations, and he offered – in a very pointed move – he offered no congratulations to the newly elected President of the United States.

I think that the initial, this pretty icy welcome rested on the assumption that the Democratic administration would probably go back to an ideologically motivated policy and that they would have to relive a piece of the Clinton years of the United States basically lecturing Russia, the way the Russian leadership saw it.

But very soon after the Obama victory, they started getting signals that the new administration was going to be far more pragmatic and that Russian fears were not necessarily going to be realized. And yet, when it became clear that the Obama foreign policy would be markedly different, fundamentally different, from the policies of the preceding administration, the attitude I think to the emerging reset on the U.S. side was summarized by Foreign Minister Lavrov, when he basically said that: “you break it, you fix it; it’s your responsibility.”

And it’s also interesting and telling that Jim mentioned the Russian translation for reset, and I think it’s very telling that there was this hilarious moment when the Russian translation was unveiled, together with the button. And had the Russians been present at the creation, there wouldn’t have been this confusion with the translation. So it’s clear that, the whole button, the button was clearly stamped “Made in the USA” – (laughter) – and that’s very clear. But the Russians began warming to Obama almost immediately since after the inauguration. The letters that Obama sent to Medvedev got a very positive response from the Kremlin, and they started looking at the administration with a lot more interest, hoping that it would take some, I would say, specific steps to meet Russian concerns.

And of course the run-up to the April meeting in London was very positive. There were expectations rising, but rising pretty slowly, so that growth and expectations could be sustained. At London, Medvedev and Obama established a personal and yet not over-personalized relationship. And I think it’s one of the strengths of the relationship as it exists today - that the personal element is not the dominating element in the relationship. And I think you can rely on President Obama to continue along that path, and that, I think, is healthy for the relationship.

The July visit to Moscow was a very important thing, but interestingly enough, if you had been sitting in Moscow, the run-up to the visit, you wouldn’t necessarily know that the United States President was going to visit Russia. There was fairly little talk, discussion – it was not a ... – clearly everyone knew that he was coming but people didn’t really talk much about that. It was a visit like – almost like any other visit where the Chinese chairman comes to Moscow, that’s barely noticed by anyone. It’s slightly different when Berlusconi comes – (laughter) – but that’s due to the personality of the prime minister and his relationship with Putin, of course.

But this was treated in a very correct, almost diplomatic manner, and no trepidation. It was more of a chance – seen from – there were two different sides to the visit from the Russian side. One was Medvedev’s, and he wanted to establish himself as the top Russian leader who has a direct institutionalized relationship with the United States President. That was important for establishing his own stature within Russia.

But for Putin it was more of a chance to vent his feelings and frustrations; and not a chance to listen, really. And Mr. Putin spent lot of time doing that famous breakfast outside Moscow, and

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he was very frank, candid, I think, also very personal in what he had to say. And I think he appreciated that President Obama listened very carefully to what the Prime Minister of Russia had to tell him.

It's also interesting and telling that the speech that President Obama made in Moscow, it's not that it didn't – that it fell on deaf ears, no, but it did not create the kind of stir that the other speeches created. I would say that basically the audience was missing. I mean it was there, but they were not there. And hopefully that speech will be reviewed later on and will be an important input into the thinking process of the Russian leadership as it examines and reexamines Russia's foreign policy, its place in the world, and America's attitude to these things. But it didn't have an immediate impact like so many other speeches that the President made this year.

And I would say that right up until mid-September, reset was seen by the Russian leadership as more of a promise to put a nice face on that, than the reality. The atmosphere was certainly different. There were good feelings exchanged. The relationship had become normal, for whatever normal means under these circumstances, but Prime Minister Putin – and he is, in so many ways, a much more faithful and adequate exponent of Russia's foreign policy and Russian thinking on these issues. He was openly questioning the content of the reset. He was basically saying, “reset? What reset?” And an American participant in the Valdai Club discussions shared his impression later on that somebody almost had to remind Prime Minister Putin that the name of the President of the United States of America was no longer George W. Bush.

But it all changed abruptly with President Obama's decision on ballistic missile defenses in Central Europe, and exactly the same person who was questioning the reality of the reset congratulated President Obama on his courageous decision. Now, “courageous” says a lot, and coming from President Putin who sees politics as a manly game and who appreciates masculine qualities in politicians, even of both sexes, if you like, that is a high degree of approbation. And also I think it betrays a degree of surprise because, basically, I think, there were very strong doubts in Prime Minister Putin's soul that the President of the United States of America could take a decision like that against the opposition, as Putin must have seen it, coming from different quarters in this lovely town. And yet, the decision was made, and it was taken as the first real result of the reset.

Now, this led to a subtle and yet palpable change on Iran. And I would say that the Russians – it's not that the Russians changed their approach toward Iran. It's not that they changed their interests all of a sudden, but they certainly make a conclusion that they could do business with that administration in Washington, D.C. They were not sure about that under the previous administration in its later years. So it's not just the change in Russian approach toward Iran - which is basically not changed, but, on the other hand, it's not basically opposed that approach to the approach taken by the United States and Europe toward Iran. But they certainly changed their attitude toward the U.S. administration, and they came to a different conclusion about the degree of collaboration they could expect and could pursue with Washington. So there is a subtle and yet palpable change, as I said. And I think that Tehran should be under no illusion that Russia would be used again as a pretext for those people within the Iranian leadership who don't want an accommodation with the international community. Russia will not – at least as things stand today, Russia is not in that position. I understand there has been a phone call from Moscow to Tehran, and the Russian position was explained to the Iranian leadership at the highest level and in no uncertain terms.

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Now, so far so good. There is going to be, as my friend and colleague and predecessor Rose Gotemoeller said, there is going to be a new treaty which could be termed because this is a hybrid between START and SORT, and there is obviously a discussion about how to call this new treaty. There's one entry in the competition which comes from Rose's husband, Ray, who basically has two versions of how the new treaty could be called. It could be called "SORT of START" or "START of SORTS". (Laughter.) Whatever it's called, it's likely to be concluded pretty soon, although I understand there are serious technical issues here. But what encourages me is that, clearly, this is not a central element in the relationship; this is a relationship where – I'm talking about the nuclear relationship – strategic nuclear relationship between Russia and the United States where the United States and Russia could actually be more flexible than they could have been, could have afforded to be in the past.

One is also gratified to see that the United States and Russia have reached some kind of an agreement to disagree on Georgia, and Georgia does not look like it's going to be an explosive issue in the near future.

On Ukrainian elections, it may be that these elections will proceed in a somewhat better context than the elections of five years ago. And, obviously, there have been Russian missteps, and I would refer to President Medvedev's unfortunate statement on Russian-Ukrainian relations attacking President Yushchenko, but I don't believe it's going to be anything like a repeat of 2004. I think that lessons have been learned, and we can hope to have a decent – let's say a non-explosive – situation in Ukraine.

There will be questions – there are questions with regard to the new configuration of missile defenses, but this is far less problematic than the previous design was, as seen from the Russian side.

But, the further one looks, the more concerned one becomes. Georgia is not going to accept Abkhazia's and Ossetia's independence. It does not accept Russian presence in those areas. Ukraine will be moving, under the new leadership, it will continue moving westward. NATO may not be a topical issue, NATO membership for Ukraine, in the foreseeable future; but the European Union is, and will be even more than it is today.

We don't know how the thing with Iran will eventually turn out. And if you look at ballistic missile defenses from a global perspective, by 2015 - 2020, Russia could have even more concern with the implications of a global system.

If you look at the Russian national security strategy, it's closer to the end of it, but there is an important paragraph, which basically says – I paraphrase: that the biggest external military threat to the Russian Federation comes from the United States acquiring the first-strike capability against Russia through global ballistic missile defenses.

Now, that's all reality. How do we deal with that reality?

The problem with Russia in its relations with the United States is that it's probably the only big country in the world that cannot mentally accept American dominance. Other countries would accept it, even China, I would posit, but there is something still in the mentality of the Russian elites that prevents that. And the Russians place themselves in a difficult situation when they know that

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they are so much inferior to the United States in so many areas, but they wouldn't accept a relationship which is anything less than an equal relationship. That is a problem.

A way out of that situation, I think, lies along the path of looking at the strategic basis for U.S.-Russian relations. No amount of START treaties will change the nature of the relationship. It will continue to be based on mutual assured destruction [MAD], at lower levels, and yet it's going to be MAD, MAD, MAD. And even those levels will not be able to go much more from the levels that will be achieved under the new treaty, however you call it.

I think that one area where the nature of the strategic relationship could be transformed fundamentally is the area that outwardly presents the biggest threat to the relationship. And, again, I am talking about ballistic missile defenses. If one imagines that at some point there can be cooperation between Russia and the U.S. in strategic defenses, and progressively this grows – it doesn't have to be a joint system from the beginning. It could start with information exchange, could start with the reactivation of the Center for Data Exchange that was agreed upon during Clinton's – not Secretary Clinton's, but President Clinton's – visit to Moscow back in 2000. If Russian technologies could be married to American technologies at some more advanced stage – something actually that President Putin, when he was President, was advocating, then we could have a different relationship. Then we could have a relationship where this paragraph in the Russian National Security Strategy will no longer be current.

If the United States and Russia find a way to collaborate on strategic defense issues, then it's no longer MAD. It's something else. And that to me is the one big hope for the relationship. And I think that the window of opportunity is now. Essentially, I think it's the lifetime of this administration. And hopefully this window of opportunity will be seized upon, and we can have a more sound foundation for the relationship. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. COLLINS: All right, thank you very much, Dmitri. I'm glad you at least end on something of a hopeful note. Can I simply open by saying that one thing you did not mention is what is probably the predominant national security in this town today, which is Afghanistan? And I think it would be helpful if you could at least share a few thoughts about how Russia sees the way it is approaching the U.S. vis-à-vis Afghanistan today, which is rather different from what we have seen, say, over the last several years, because it is another area where, at the moment at least, cooperation seems to be at least in the testing phase. And then we'll open up to the audience.

MR. TRENIN: All right. Jim, you asked me to present, say, the Russian –

MR. COLLINS: Yes.

MR. TRENIN: – Russian views on reset. Afghanistan does not feature, as you know, as prominently on the Russian mind as it does in this setting. I think that the Russians realize that the United States and its allies are doing something in Afghanistan that is very important for Russia's national security.

This is not to say that the Russians agree with everything that the United States is doing in Afghanistan or the way the United States goes about its business in Afghanistan. One big concern and one big complaint from the Russian side is that there has been a huge increase in heroin and

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opium production in Afghanistan. A lot of that goes north to Russia and there is a lot of – there are a lot of consumers on the Russian side, and that's a very big concern.

They see Afghanistan, I believe, as more of a chance to help the Obama administration, and Putin sees international relations – I'm coming back to Putin because he is the central player, remains the central player, even though formerly foreign affairs is somebody else's formal responsibility. And I think that they see foreign relations essentially as a transactional business: You do something for me, I do something for you. And I believe that they realize that the reason for President Obama's opening to Russia was to actually get Russian support for the issues of prime concern for the United States. And, as Jim has just pointed out, Afghanistan comes at the top of that list. And, clearly, the Russians saw that on Afghanistan, as well as on Iran. They have to be cooperative in order to get American collaboration on the issues where they feel they need American support or American acquiescence. So, there has been some, as you know, there has been some movement to help with the transit rights and stuff like that.

I should say at the same time that Russia's assets in Afghanistan are not that big, and there is not much that Russia can do. It will not be sending troops. A) It doesn't have troops to send. B) It still reels from the experience. C) It doesn't believe that troop levels mean anything in a situation like Afghanistan's. When you ask Russians to take a longer view of what happens in Afghanistan, they are at best agnostic. A lot of them will say the West will leave, and that, I think, is their assumption from which they proceed.

So they will be helpful within the limits of their assets. They will not do the things that would be problematic to them when the U.S. leaves, as it will one day. But they would be progressively more interested in being involved in political arrangements for Afghanistan because I think that from the Russian perspective it's not about troop – again, it's not about troop levels – it's not about so much military action as about political action, as about political engineering, as striking deals and making sure that Afghanistan basically minds its own business. That, I think, is the core Russian attitude toward Afghanistan.

MR. COLLINS: Okay, well – all right, let's start. Let's see, let me start with Gene (sp).

Q: Dmitri, thank you very much for your very interesting presentation. Let me follow up on the question of Afghanistan. Are you suggesting that situations such as earlier this year with Manas, when apparently the Russian involvement with the Kyrgyz government put our presence at that airbase at risk, those situations will no longer be repeated? Is this part of the bargain?

MR. TRENIN: I don't know, I mean. We may have different views and different information about these things. My take – and I do not claim to know the truth about Manas – but Manas looks to me as a game in which the Kyrgyz government managed to get the best of both worlds. They came back to the Russians and said that they agreed with the Russian demand of last year, the Bush era demand, and they wanted to get something for doing that. They got that something.

The Russians were slightly embarrassed that they had to support their own demand, which was no longer relevant, in their view, because there was a different administration in Afghanistan, and they were going to be helpful to that administration, but they couldn't say to the Kyrgyz, and the Kyrgyz knew that the Russians would be able to say that to them.

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And then the Russians could have used the situation to lean on the Kyrgyz and present Manas on a silver platter to President Obama during his visit in Moscow and say, “you know, we’ve just used our influence with the sovereign state of Kyrgyz and now this is Exhibit A of how we feel for your concerns and problems in Afghanistan.” They did not do that. So they simply I think allowed Kyrgyzstan to play its game, which was basically about money, and that’s where we are. It was not, in other words, there was no dedicated Russian pressure on Kyrgyzstan, A, to do what the Kyrgyz announced they would do at the beginning of the year – i.e. to close Manas – nor was there any pressure later on.

So I think it’s a very bad – it’s an example of pretty bad – foreign policymaking on the Russian side. I mean, you shouldn’t allow people to do these things to you, and yet they did.

MR. COLLINS: Mike?

Q: Super presentation, as usual. Thank you, Dmitri.

Sixteen months ago in a speech in Berlin, President Medvedev called for a new European security architecture, and he’s followed it up in several speeches since then, and Russian diplomats bring it up constantly at international conferences.

It would be easy to dismiss it as sort of 1950s language, which it really echoed, by the junior player in the diarchy, but because of the Greek chairmanship and office of the OSCE, it’s taken on an organizational life of its own in something called the Corfu Process. It’s not clear whether or not the Russians are still intending to push for a legally binding document, which I think would be a nonstarter in the U.S. Senate. It just simply isn’t clear to me where it’s going.

The EU has an internal paper which talks about it, which is almost identical to U.S. position, so I think the goal of dividing Europe and the United States is going to be very difficult for the Russians to achieve. And I wonder if you could give us a sense of where this is going, if anywhere at all.

MR. TRENIN: Well, Mike, I said it in a different setting, but Medvedev’s so-called proposal is a headline without a story, or with a story yet to be written. Having said that, I wouldn’t dispute the importance of the headline. I would stand by the headline. What the headline tells us is that 20 years after the fall of the wall, Russia and – and actually many of its members – are not integrated into meaningful European security structures. Now, that creates problems.

What problems it did create we saw last fall in the Caucasus. What problems it could create we also saw roughly at that same time when we looked at the Crimea. So that’s serious. The “problems,” of course, in this context, are a euphemism for war. So I think that Mr. Medvedev has his finger on the problem. He has no solution. I don’t think that they’re getting any closer to a solution. I don’t think that the treaty will reach the U.S. Senate because it will never be signed.

I hope Mr. Medvedev will realize that, but, having said that, it doesn’t mean that the issue does not exist. It does exist. And, unfortunately, we cannot hope to solve it either through continued expansion of NATO and the European Union, primarily NATO, because I think the safe limits for NATO’s enlargement to the east have been reached. It’s not that all limits have been

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reached, but safe limits have been reached. Nor can we fantasize about Russia's inclusion into NATO. That, I think, is not ahead of us, that that's behind us. We missed two opportunities, one in 1992; another one in 2001-2. I'm not sure that there's going to be a third opportunity anytime soon. So we have to think about something else.

Basically, we have to deal with two paranoias here. One paranoia is Russia's with regard to the United States. And Exhibit A in that paranoia is NATO enlargement. Exhibit B is ballistic missile defenses; Exhibit 3, U.S. actions in the Caucasus and, basically, the reality that the previous administration allowed its ally to do whatever. And to the Russian leadership, it looked as if the administration here or elements within the administration were using Saakashvili as the tip of the spear to harass the Russians. And is this paranoia? It is paranoia. Is it real? It is real. Can it be ignored? No.

The other paranoia could be illustrated by a personal anecdote. I visited Poland two weeks after the war in the Caucasus, and when I arrived in Warsaw, I got a newspaper report about the poll of the Poles, seventy percent of whom feared a Russian armored invasion of Poland, NATO membership notwithstanding.

If you go to the Baltic States you see how adamant they are that something be done about resurgent, imperialistic, expansionist Russia. And, basically, we see two very similar things: Russia's paranoia vis-à-vis the U.S. and Russia's neighbors' paranoia vis-à-vis Russia. Can that be ignored? No. What can be done? I don't know. We're thinking.

I don't believe that the governments alone would be able to do that - to come up, what the governments can come up with, you've seen that. Medvedev has come up with an idea of yet another treaty to restate the things that - but if Medvedev were allowed to write a treaty, really a treaty that he would be happy with, the treaty would contain perhaps just one clause, and that clause could read something like this: "No political military alliance in Europe shall expand its membership without the express consent of all participants of that treaty." End of article, end of treaty. That would be a good treaty for Mr. Medvedev. Unfortunately there is no way it can be drafted and signed. So we have a major problem, and to believe that, as a lot of people in Europe, and I suspect a lot of people on this part of the Atlantic, believe that since we have NATO and the European Union and 20 years of peace, and whatever, that Europe is safe, think again.

MR. COLLINS: Wayne (sp)?

Q: Dmitri, you have very ably addressed Russian official perceptions of American official policies and actions. I'd like you to widen that a little bit to Russian official perceptions of American elite group attitudes towards Russia, because I think if you look at major elite media - the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal - very little actually has changed in the last year.

Now, not abstracting from the fact that the Russian government is its own worst enemy, still, I think if you look - if I were at the Russian embassy here in Washington reporting back to Moscow - I think I would say that the pro-Obama media in the United States are in some ways, if anything, even more hostile to Russia than the more Republican-leaning media, and that this will have an impact on things like potential ratification of a new strategic arms treaty and anything else

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that requires action outside of the executive branch, which in the American side is practically anything and everything beyond the most narrowly construed.

So do you think they're even looking at this broader kind of – to what extent do they see the Obama administration as isolated in its own political context in terms of trying to reset the relationship?

MR. TRENIN: Wayne, I think that – well, I would assure you that the view of the United States is largely bleak. There is very little, in the good sense, that they expect coming from the United States. So there have been a few rays of light coming with the present administration, but also this – Putin's phrase about courage, Obama's courage, tells it all, right?

There is a Web site that the Kremlin has – the Kremlin started five years ago – and it's one of the more successful Web sites that the Kremlin has been sponsoring, it translates into Russian. Most of the op-ed pieces, most of the articles that are written about Russia, primarily, in the Western world – and the more critical the article, the more outrageous the criticism of Putin and Medvedev, the more chance it has of getting into that. So it's a complete reversal of Soviet practices, as you can imagine. So it's called inosme.ru (ph). Inosme stands for foreign media. And translations are almost – you know, almost instantaneous. So today's article in the New York Times could be available today in Russian.

So they are under no illusion. It takes a lot of effort, when you're talking to a senior Russian official, to start – I wouldn't say to convince him, but even to start an argument – that you can do business with the United States of America. That's where we are today. I'm sorry to report that. So

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MR. COLLINS: Steve?

Q: Dmitri, you've given a somewhat, in my view –

MR. COLLINS: Just wait for the mike, okay?

Q: You started out, it seems to me, giving a somewhat hopeful analysis, and then in the question and answer period moved to what I think is closer to where we are. That is to say, I think that we will see some movement on arms control and START because the Russians see that in their interest. But on a host of other issues, particularly, related to the post-Soviet space and Iran, it seems to me that there hasn't been and is not likely to be very much progress because the views of the two sides are quite apart.

I was surprised to hear you say that you thought that there had been some change in the Russian policy on Iran. I would say there has been more waffling but I don't really see any major change. Lavrov has said sanctions are – one time – the last resort, another time counterproductive, hardly music to the ears of the Obama administration and not very encouraging.

Can you say where you see the change in Iran policy? And how about the question of post-Soviet space where we are very far apart and obviously – and you've said this in other articles yourself – the search for a sort of sphere of influence recognition by the West for a sphere of

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influence seems to me not likely that that's going to go anywhere. So can you kind of – where is the window of opportunity here?

MR. TRENIN: Steve, I – well, first of all, I was – I was – “encouraged” is not the right word. I was slightly, I was somewhat – well, “optimistic” isn't the right word. I don't know. (Laughter.) What I said at the beginning has to be put in a context. We were bouncing back from a period which could only be compared to something like 1983-1984. So we came back from a high possibility of a collision between Russia and the United States. It's one thing to be called non-partners; it's another thing to be on a colliding course. I think we were on a colliding course in a very real and material way in '08. We bounced back from that.

Is it a good thing? It is a good thing – a hugely good thing. Is there some will to, some willingness, to work with the Obama administration? Yes, there is. There was no willingness to work with the Bush administration this last year. There was no willingness whatsoever. It was written off since about '07 or even '06. Obama you can do business with. And you do business with the U.S. administration; you did not do business with the elites. We understand that elites could be hugely influential and an op-ed in the Post could mean a lot.

But that's – Russia can't do anything about that, nor the United States can do anything about the things inside Russia. So you just factor that in. But you work with the administration. You work with the people you meet across the table. And the people you meet across the table have actually been, from the Russian perspective, far better than their predecessors, and that's the conclusion that they have made. Again, it's not an ideal America that the Russians are encountering, in their own view, nor can it be an ideal Russia in whoever's mind here in the United States. That's not in the pipeline.

Let me talk about Iran and sanctions. Sanctions, from the Russian perspective, is something like troop levels in Afghanistan; it's a hugely important element, but it's not a strategy. So just applying more sanctions does not guarantee that you will have a result that you're looking for. If you drive the Iranian leadership into a corner, the Russian leadership would argue, you will complicate things, not do much to reach your goal.

Basically, I think the Russian attitude could be summarized as follows: In the 21st century, a country like Iran, with its potential, with its self-image, with its history, with many other things, if that country decides to become nuclear, it will. There is nothing you can do about that except occupy it. Is there an option of occupying Iran? Probably not. An option of strikes will set them back by a few years, guarantee that they will have a nuclear weapon, and that that nuclear weapon will be aimed at those who try to disarm Iran. So the only way you can solve the Iranian issue, from the Russian perspective, is to reach an agreement with Iran that would ensure that Iran starts at a distance from the nuclear threshold – not a very big distance – in exchange for its reintegration, abolition of sanctions, and U.S. sanctions, et cetera.

And Iran would be enjoying the fruits of not making the final step, and the international community would be able to police Iran through the IAEA to make sure that it's not making that step. But if either side decides that – let's say, if Iran believes that the West is not living up to its part of the bargain, it will make that fateful step. It wouldn't have to, but it would have the option, and that would allow it to live with the terms of that accommodation. And Russia wants to be a party to that accommodation, to that agreement. That I think is more or less the Russian strategy.

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You can only reach a deal with Iran by a combination of stick and carrot. And, clearly, if the Russians support the U.S. and the rest of the international community, Iran would have far less of a choice to play with the international community because the Chinese, unlike the Russians, they don't enjoy isolation. The Russians would cast vetoes. The Russians would stand up against the United States. The Russians would do Munich speeches. The Chinese will not. And that's the major difference.

So that, I think, is the Russian approach, and to them, playing a game with the United States, in coalition with the United States, to make sure that Iran does not produce nuclear weapons, which would be a problem for Russia, but which would ensure that Russia has a certain role in Iran and with regard to Iran is more or less the Russian policy.

There are some people who – some crazies in Russia, who basically welcome a tougher U.S. approach toward Iran, going all the way to the war. There are people who root for war between the U.S. and Iran on the Russian side. But the good thing is that most of these people are not in the government, and if they are in the government, they are not in the decision-making loop.

The post-Soviet space – I basically think that all this talk about spheres of influence is very dated. People in those places, as you know yourself, are deciding for themselves. Georgia wants to be part of the West. Georgia wants to join Europe. And that's a reality; there is no way you can change that. And I think that they will, over time.

Ukraine – Ukraine is disunited on NATO, but it's united on Europe, and I think that they will be moving toward Europe. And there is no force in the world that could prevent them from that, except their own ineptitude, except their own inability to, you know, get their act together. But they're learning, and they're doing good things, and you know, they're holding elections, and they haven't – there hasn't been a conflict in their territory in the 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It's not a small thing.

Belarus, I think it will go the Europe way, which will be a good thing for Russia because Russia finally will be able to concentrate on itself. (Laughter.) That is Russia's mission. It's Russia. It's not deciding where Ukraine belongs. It's deciding whether Russia is a modern country or whether it slips down, and eventually disintegrates.

So I would not exaggerate the conflict potential in the post-Soviet space because it's not the 19th century. It's not the Russian Empire versus the British Empire, and Turkistan is a prize – Afghanistan. It's about those countries, and those countries are making their own choices, and God bless them.

MR. COLLINS: Jim?

Q: Thanks. Thanks, Dmitri. I wanted to just follow up on your comments on the missile defense decision. I'm interested that you described the surprise on the Russian side. It seemed like for months it was fairly clear that Obama was looking for a way out of the deployments in Poland and the Czech Republic, and that the administration was going to try to decide things on technical grounds. I mean, perhaps the surprise in fact was the robustness of the plan, and I'm wondering why that isn't more of an issue for the Russians. I mean, this is far bigger than anything that the Bush administration seemed to have imagined, and it may be that the SM-3s are less worrisome,

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even if they're in Poland, than the Bush plan was, but, in fact, I've been waiting for the left part of the Democratic Party to notice how robust the missile defense plan is.

And then also wondering, with respect to missile defense, what the Russians made of the American stressing that Russia didn't factor into the decision at all. You know, part of this of course may simply have been an effort by the administration to bend over backwards to say that, you know, they weren't sacrificing Poland and the Czech Republic at all, and, in fact, if they had actually rolled the thing out better, I think they could have avoided all that problem to begin with. But, I mean, it seems strange to me that on a decision of this magnitude the United States wouldn't be considering Russia at all, but I wonder whether that was noticed on the Russian side.

MR. TRENIN: Jim, it was noticed on the Russian side, clearly. One reaction to that of course is that if it's a decision taken exclusively on internal American discussions, then we don't owe the United States anything for that. It's their decision. Fine.

But, actually, it's a good thing that it's not – it's been a U.S. decision and not a result of some grand compromise, as some people suggested in the past. It can stand on its own feet. It can stand on the arguments that the administration is advancing. And even if those arguments are challenged, they will be challenged in an American context, and Russia will not be part of that. That I think is good.

The robustness of the system is not an issue. I don't think that the Russians believe that they can dictate U.S. force development. It's up to the U.S. to do that, and the Russians clearly realize how huge the gap is between their military capability today, and the U.S. military capability today, and they also are under no illusion about how fast the gap is becoming even bigger. And they're more or less relaxed about that, interestingly enough. You have Russia with the weakest military in a century, or more. And not that anyone cared that much. They just started the military reform to optimize the system. And, basically, one of the things that they wrote into the new military doctrine is, actually, it's in the reform plan but it will be written into the doctrine that Russia doesn't expect to be engaged in a major war with anyone. That's deterrent states, but big wars – cannot wage them.

So U.S. deployments, if they do not – or plans of deployments, if they do not threaten Russian assets in a demonstrable way, essentially - no problem. When Lavrov was asked about Patriot missiles in Poland, he said it's a bilateral Polish-U.S. decision and we don't feel we have to comment on that. They have no plans of invading Poland, whatever some people in Poland may think. So it's fine. That's not a problem.

However, when the U.S. deploys something with a potential – very far-fetched but, yeah, potential of doing damage to Russian strategic systems in Poland, and if there are few scientists in this country who can somehow prove that, under certain circumstances, if you do something like that with those systems they could reach and hit a couple of Russian missiles en route to the United States, well, people are paying attention.

But if the U.S. is deploying systems that have no use against Russian ICBMs, then why should they worry? And that I think is what I would – yeah.

MR. COLLINS: Yeah. Could you identify yourself? Yeah.

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Q: Erica Marat from Voice of America, Russian Service. My question is, you talked about the perception among elites of the United States. My question is about the Russian public, general public, and especially Russian youth in their 20s and 30s who have a good education but still have some anti-American sentiments. How much, do you think, the sentiments depend on what elites have to say, and how much do they have a life of their own? And is there any opportunity to transform them at some point? Thanks.

MR. TRENIN: The Russian youth are of two minds about the United States, and actually the Russian elites as well.

At one level, they take the United States for an example to follow – U.S. lifestyle. You know, there are very few capitals around the world with a passion for SUVs higher than in Moscow. (Laughter.) And if there's any other nation whom the Russians consider to be their peers, that's the United States. You may say it's preposterous, whatever, but that seems to be a fact. So there is a real desire to be, in their own way, a little bit like Americans and to act a little bit like Americans.

On the other hand, there is a high degree of political anti-Americanism, which is – for example, if you – just to give you a comparison, the things that – some of the things that my colleague Bob Kagan wrote in his book, “Dangerous Nation” – and the title of the book itself – were reminiscent of the textbooks that I read when I was a cadet at the Russian Soviet Military Academy about U.S. foreign policy, its goals, its methods, et cetera.

When Russian youth reaches out for a Russian translation of George Friedman's “The Next 100 Years,” that's a picture of America that sounds very familiar to him. So there is a lot of resentment, also coming from a generation which – the Russian youth have not lived through the Soviet Union. They do not have a direct experience of living in the Soviet Union, and all the undersides of living in the Soviet Union. But what they remember from school is that there was once a mighty empire, and that empire vied with the United States for world primacy, and then that empire suddenly disappeared. And there is that resentment, and they believe that it was a completion that ended unfairly or something like that.

I wouldn't exaggerate the degree of anti-Americanism or anti-Westernism. The worst and most effective punishment against anti-Americans, anti-Western forces in Russia is denying them visas to come to Europe and the United States of America. The leader of Nashi is full of complaints that the European Union has denied him a chance to visit the Schengen counties, and the only country he can freely visit in that part of the world is Switzerland. And that speaks volumes, you know. I wouldn't exaggerate that. There is a lot of resentment but there are ways of dealing with that.

MR. COLLINS: Mary?

Q: Thank you. Mary Beth Sheridan from the Washington Post. I wondered if you could comment a little more on the Russian perspective toward the START talks, and whether you see – what likelihood there is that an agreement can be signed by December 5th? I noticed, yesterday, Foreign Minister Lavrov said they were waiting for the U.S. position on the interrelation between offensive and defensive weapons, and my sense says that's one of several areas where there is still quite a difference.

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MR. TRENIN: Well, there are a few differences here. I think that there's a strong commitment, both by President Obama and President Medvedev to have the treaty in hand by the time it expires December 5. I think that they are now in conversation about how to make it happen. There are technical difficulties.

I think we need to realize that we're dealing with a relationship there where an instrument, a product of the Cold War and an instrument in the Cold War became under a different set of circumstances became a policy driver. It was once that competition led to the Cold War and the Cold War led to nuclear confrontation, a nuclear standoff. But now that there is no competition, really, there is no Cold War in any meaningful sense, it's those missiles and the infrastructures that exist on both sides that are driving policies, at least, as far as the Russian side is concerned when they look at the United States. So we need to realize this is an afterglow of something which has been extinct for the past almost 20 years. It's not a central relationship, and the U.S.-Russian relationship is no longer the central relationship for the world.

So that should give both sides, I would say, a huge amount of flexibility. In the days of START I – and I spent several years on staff in Geneva – that was – it had a lot of actual importance, all these things. Today, we're dealing with something which is very different. I would say that the United States has a combined military potential that is so formidable that, I would imagine, the United States could be flexible on some issues. The United States is not dealing in Geneva now with the Soviet Union. The United States is dealing with a very different country. Not that it's a democracy – we're not talking about that – but in military terms, political terms, it's a very different country; and that I think needs to be factored in. Also, the Russians need to be a little bit more relaxed about a few things. But I talked about paranoia in Russia; I didn't talk about paranoia in the United States of America. That means that the United States, I think, can show the way; can be in the lead of the process.

And I hope that the treaty will be signed. If not, then, at least, I hope that it will be signed before the NPT Review Conference next spring because it's unthinkable for me to imagine the United States and Russia showing up at the NPT conference and saying, you know, we tried but we failed but we want you guys to do whatever – that's impossible, I think.

MR. COLLINS: The second table there. Yes.

Q: Thank you, Dmitri. About 45 minutes ago my question would have been about Iran and sanctions. I think you've answered that as fully as possible, but I think it's going to be very interesting to see how the internal dynamics work out in Moscow on this issue, and what decisions they make regarding reprocessing, and their relationship with China with regard to sanctions. So I'd like to just make two quick comments, and you don't need to respond if you don't wish to.

I flew into the Manas Air Base – the Manas International Airport, about three weeks ago, and it was striking – on an Air Turkish civilian airliner – and you land and there you have these huge American cargo aircraft loading, unloading, and so on. And it really isn't an American base at all. It's their airport, and then we have what they call a transfer facility, which is, you know, all it is. And asking questions about it when I was in Bishkek, I had the impression that most people were sort of pleased by the outcome, a little puzzled exactly what took place. The American Ambassador told me that there are only about four or five people, of whom she was one, who really knew exactly

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what the deal was. And, although this wasn't her implication, I think, the general implication of the Kyrgyz people was, you know, there's a lot of money here and who knows who's ever going to see it? And that's part of that deal.

Another place I visited was Hungary, which admittedly is not polar to the Czech Republic but the missile defense issue came up, you know, very, very strongly.

Now, you mentioned that the Russians are absolutely very pleased with the outcome, and so the inference is that they saw this as a political decision. I think we here saw it as a technological shift, which made a lot of sense. But this really has led, as I'm sure you're aware of, to a really – a bad atmosphere in parts of Central and Eastern Europe between the way they look at us, because they say, are we sort of not paying interest to their concerns about potential Russian might, and growth, and influence, and so on? In that sense, I think, the Vice President's trip last week has helped a great deal. But I was struck by the depth of the spread of feelings in NATO countries, in Central Eastern Europe, regarding the fact that they have been let down in this decision. And I just make that as a comment, you know.

MR. TRENIN: And I could only add that the date the decision was made I was en route to Brussels also to hear from Sandy Vershbow, who just made a trip to Poland and the Czech Republic. And I saw an e-mail from Newsweek Poland that asked me several questions, the gist of which was that the United States is betraying us. Your comment?

MR. COLLINS: I'm going to use the prerogative here to ask the last question, which stems really from listening to this entire discussion, which I find interesting, which is no one has mentioned anything east of the Urals during the entire process. And yet some of the biggest changes we are likely to see in the coming decades are going to take place in Asia and South Asia.

Could you say anything, Dmitri, about whether the Russian thinking elite is even focused on this issue? And if they are, what are they thinking about it? And is the American dimension of this at all relevant, when it comes to Asia, the Far East, and so forth? Because, you know, we're talking all about Europe, and yet that in many ways isn't where the action is going to be.

MR. TRENIN: Jim, I agree wholeheartedly with that, but since I was analyzing what other people think, rather than what I think, I didn't mention that.

I believe that I could summarize my answer to your question by saying that Asia looms very much on – more and more - on the Russian political mind. I think that they realize that the fate of Russia will be decided east of the Urals, not west of the Urals. And if you count the number of trips that Putin and Medvedev are making to the region, you will see that there – and their ministers, you will see that there is a steady growth of these things.

However, having said that, I would add that the Russians are yet to discover the United States east of the Urals. When they look at Asia, they are overwhelmed by China, and that's the biggest factor they're dealing with. And there was a – the biggest change in Russian – in Russia's view of the world, was not America's rise to the position of a unique superpower – the Russians have always been looking up to the United States, even during the Cold War, it didn't change that much.

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But what did change is the rise of China, because the Russians have been looking down at the Chinese ever since the two countries have first come into contact at the end of the 17th century, and they now see this giant, which is more dynamic, better connected, better armed, about to move even more, and they just don't know. And they also don't know much about China.

It's a very good relationship. They treasure their relationship. They want to expand their relationship. They want to use it to develop the Far East and Siberia, but they're also very concerned that when China becomes more of an actor on the Russian side of the border, the Russians will not be able to protect their interests very well.

I, personally, was very much struck in a totally friendly conversation with a Chinese colleague – we were not on the podium, we were not sharing a panel, we were just riding in a minibus somewhere in China. And we talked about nature and the environment, and the issue of Baikal came up and my Chinese friend said, with an amiable smile, “Well, it's our common heritage of course, you know.” (Laughter.) You know, that clarifies so many minds.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. TRENIN: Thank you, Dmitri, very much, and thank you all for coming. As always, it's great to hear your thoughts, Dmitri, and your perspectives, and you bring us a very wise and, I think, judicious assessment of your fellow countrymen's thinking at the moment. Thanks very much.

(END)