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SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP WITH RUSSIA

A Policy Memo

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The “reset” in Russian-American relations has expanded common ground between the two powers, yet their relationship remains wobbly. The present state of affairs resembles a Cold War era *détente*, but with notable exceptions to customary historical patterns. The most recent achievements have been primarily security-related: arms control treaties (new START), the 123 Agreement, and the Plutonium Disposition Agreement. Efforts to slow down the Iranian nuclear program and agreements to ease military transit into and out of Afghanistan are the examples of a new kind of cooperation.

Policymakers in Russia and the US should avoid adding extra padding to an invented “positive agenda” for the bilateral relationship. This strategy will not be received well at the higher levels of bureaucracies, which are probably concerned with more immediate policy issues and broader conceptions of global security. Looking ahead does not involve concocting short-term commonalities between the USA and Russia, but rather involves thinking about each actor’s strategic aims on the international arena. The US wants to see a strong, secure, stable Europe, able to sustain a robust security alliance with the US and within NATO, while Russia wants be reckoned with as a power that shares common economic and security spaces with Europe against an international backdrop of economic

interdependence, terrorist threats, and shifting power structures between West and East. Bilateral cooperation in Europe and in Eurasia (in the so-called “post-Soviet space”) will help to realize these aims. Without cooperation with Russia, the US cannot expect long-term security, stability or prosperity in this region. Without cooperation with the US, Russia, in turn, will not be able to meet its goals in Europe and Eurasia.

There is a clear asymmetry in Russian and American perceptions and priorities of various issue-areas in Europe and Eurasia. The two sides must recognize this and find a way to work together in those issue-areas where they have mutual interests. For the US, Europe is a major ally, which finds itself in a predominantly “fixed” state of security, yet which is losing economic dynamism and strategic importance in the world. Post-Soviet Eurasian countries are at different stages of economic and political development, sometimes unstable, but with no potential to challenge major American interests, with the partial exception in the area of energy. Today we witness noticeable American disengagement from European and Eurasian issues. For Russia, relations with Europe and Eurasia are much more important because they are intimately linked to existential issues of national identity, developmental models, key economic interests, numerous personal ties, and potential security challenges. Moscow believes that the main irritants in the Russian-American relationship are related to Europe and Eurasia; this includes NATO expansion, missile defense, and engagements in the post-Soviet space, all of which (with the potential exception of the European missile defense) exclude Russia and thus threaten Russia’s position as an important participant in a joint security architecture, and member of a common cultural and identity space in a greater Europe.

The following steps may reduce current and latent tensions between Russia and the United States, and ultimately serve the powers’ long-term strategic goals:

- 1) Opening a space for dialogue on Euro-Atlantic security issues that may eventually lead to a pan-European pact. President Medvedev’s European Security Treaty initiative may be viewed as an invitation for an open-ended debate. Russian dissatisfaction with the post-Cold War security architecture must be at least

addressed and acknowledged on the international political arena. The vision of a functional security community “from Vancouver to Vladivostok” must one day materialize itself.

- 2) Reforming the NATO-Russia Council to line it up with the original intention of a “29” format, rather than “28+1” format. A crucial first step towards NATO-Russia Council improvement would be strategizing to develop more transparency in the field of military planning and opening the space for dialog on such issues.
- 3) Revitalizing and institutionalizing the OSCE in the spirit of the Corfu process through giving distinct identities to each of the three “baskets.”
- 4) Negotiating a new CFE treaty to build confidence and revive transparency elements of the old agreement. Stopping large-scale military exercises near borders would be the first step in this direction.
- 5) Working on the creation of a common European missile defense system. This should go well beyond simple sharing of information and joint threat assessment. More transparency in systems’ capabilities and planning against nuclear terrorism would be the first steps to undertake in this area. Going beyond the goal of “interoperability” would be desirable.
- 6) Establishing a permanent working group on security issues in Eurasia. Commitment to sustained dialog in this area is crucial. Strategizing about worst-case scenarios in Eurasia (for example, radical Islamists taking power in a Central Asian country) and discussing possibilities for joint efforts to support development programs in the region would be helpful exercises.
- 7) The US should voice support of Russia in the event that Russia gives any sign of considering joining the EU in the future. Public endorsement of any steps that bring Russia closer to the EU will be helpful.

A sustainable partnership with Russia for the US involves reconceptualizing the Transatlantic relationship to include the possibility of an economic, security an identity space which stretches as far east as Vladivostok.