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US-Russia Relations in the Obama Era: From Reset to Refreeze?

Introduction

US-Russia relations from 2009-2014 reflected the cyclical manner in which that relationship has regularly moved since the end of the Cold War. In his first months in office, Barack Obama launched a “reset” intended to move the relationship to a more positive footing following the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict, with the goal of securing Moscow’s help on issues key to the Obama administration’s agenda. The reset yielded early successes – the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) and enhanced co-operation on Iran and Afghanistan – but progress slowed in 2011.

Vladimir Putin’s return to the Russian presidency in 2012 seemed to augur a less co-operative relationship, given his view that Washington had not taken serious account of Russian concerns, such as missile defence. The US administration scaled back its expectations for progress in bilateral relations in 2013. Relations between Washington and Moscow, and between the West and Russia, plunged to a post-Cold War low in 2014 following Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Autonomous Republic of Crimea and support for separatism in eastern Ukraine.

Looking forward, the US-Russia relationship will remain difficult for the foreseeable future. One challenge will be whether, given differences over Ukraine, the two countries can sustain co-operation on areas where their interests converge, such as constraining Iran’s nuclear programme and counter-terrorism. Restoring a more positive relationship will require moving beyond Ukraine and rethinking on both sides about how to approach issues where their interests do not align.

The Reset

When Barack Obama became US president in January 2009, the bilateral US-Russia relationship sat at a low point in the aftermath of the 2008 conflict between Russia and Georgia. US-Russian relations had been on a downward slide for several years before the conflict, as the two countries differed over strategic arms control, missile defence, and NATO relations with Ukraine and Georgia. The apparently warm personal relationship between presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin did little to arrest the decline.

President Obama sought to change things with Moscow. In February 2009, his administration announced the reset, an attempt to move the bilateral relationship to a more positive and co-operative stage.

In private, administration officials said the reset aimed to secure Russian co-operation on priority issues such as nuclear arms cuts, Iran's nuclear programme, and Afghanistan. They explained that the president was prepared to invest his time and to address some issues of interest to Moscow in order to secure such co-operation. They expressed uncertainty as to whether the Russians would respond in a positive way and noted that, if Obama saw no return on his investment, he would cut his losses and turn his attention elsewhere.

Obama met then-President Dmitry Medvedev in London on 1 April 2009. By all appearances, the two hit it off. Their discussion resulted in two joint statements. One addressed the potential for co-operation across the broad relationship; the second noted their agreement to begin negotiations on reducing strategic nuclear arms.

The negotiations that eventually produced New START made rapid progress at first. In a key modification to the Bush administration's approach, Obama's negotiators offered to limit strategic delivery vehicles – intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and heavy bombers – as well as strategic warheads. The Russians had previously objected to capping only the number of warheads.

Early Successes

When Obama travelled to Moscow in July 2009 to meet with Medvedev, the reset recorded early successes. The two presidents reached agreement on key parameters for New START. Administration officials expressed hope that it might be possible to conclude the agreement before the START I treaty expired that December.

Russian officials surprised the Americans with their readiness to assist the logistics flow to US and coalition forces in Afghanistan. With transit through Pakistan difficult and sometimes suspended, US and coalition forces made increased use of the Northern Distribution Network – rail lines crossing from Europe to Central Asia and on to Afghanistan. Moscow proposed expanded use of the line through Russia and offered to permit over-flights by US transport aircraft, including those carrying lethal military equipment.

US officials proposed to help Russia accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO), something that Moscow had sought for 15 years. They also committed to secure Congressional approval of a bilateral civil nuclear co-operation agreement that had languished since being put on hold after the Russia-Georgia conflict.

The two presidents also established a bilateral commission to oversee the relationship. By the end of 2009, it had created 19 working groups, ranging from security and defence issues to agriculture to trade and scientific exchanges.

The most difficult meeting proved to be the session with then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. Putin opened with a long monologue cataloguing a list of grievances against US policy and perceived slights. Still, US officials returned to Washington in an upbeat mood, believing the reset had begun well and seeing prospects for more progress.

By the autumn, US and Russian negotiators had begun drafting language for New START and had agreed on what they would limit, though they had not yet reached agreement on specific numbers. The negotiating pace slowed in late November. US officials surmised that their Russian counterparts hoped that Obama, due to receive a Nobel Prize in December, might make final concessions in order to complete New START first. That did not happen, and START I expired.

A January 2010 visit to Moscow by National Security Advisor Tom Donilon and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mike Mullen to meet with their Russian counterparts, Sergei Prikhodko and Nikolai Makarov, produced agreement on the numerical limits. They also resolved differences on most of the outstanding verification questions.

One last glitch arose in late February over missile defence. In September 2009, the Obama administration had announced that it would replace the Bush administration's missile defence plan with the "European Phased Adaptive Approach" (EPAA). The new plan entailed deployment in Europe of SM-3 missile interceptors, which in the initial phases would not be capable of engaging ICBM warheads and thus not threaten Russian strategic forces.

Moscow initially appeared to welcome the change. However, in early 2010, Russian negotiators in Geneva sought to include language in New START that would specify missile defence developments as grounds for withdrawal from the treaty. Washington declined, noting that the general withdrawal clause would be sufficient.

The Russians dropped their demand. Obama and Medvedev met in Prague on 8 April 2010 to sign the New START treaty. It required that each side reduce its strategic forces to no more than 1,550 deployed strategic warheads, 700 deployed strategic delivery vehicles, and 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM and SLBM launchers and heavy bombers. The treaty included an array of verification and transparency measures.

June saw Russia join the United States at the UN Security Council in approving a resolution on Iran, which among other things imposed an arms embargo on Tehran – an important step given that the Russians had been a major supplier of weapons to Iran. US officials privately allowed that, given the resolution's ambiguous language, Moscow might go forward with an already contracted sale of S-300 surface-to-air missiles to Iran. To Washing-

ton's pleasant surprise, however, the Russians announced in September that they were cancelling the sale outright and would return Iran's advance payment.

Medvedev visited California and then travelled to Washington later in June 2010 for discussions with Obama that focused on broadening trade and economic relations. Medvedev's visit to Silicon Valley underscored his interest in expanding high-tech industries in Russia, including at Skolkovo, where he hoped to replicate Silicon Valley and its success.

As 2010 neared a close, US officials were pleased with the progress of the reset, citing New START, deeper co-operation on Afghanistan and Iran, and the potential to develop bilateral economic relations. Progress even appeared possible on missile defence. Medvedev met with NATO leaders in November and agreed to explore the possibility of a co-operative NATO-Russia missile defence arrangement for Europe.

The Bloom Comes off the Rose

Having completed Congressional approval requirements in late 2010, Washington brought the civil nuclear co-operation agreement under Section 123 of the United States Atomic Energy Act of 1954 with Russia into force in January 2011. Among other things, it increased possibilities for co-operation in the area of nuclear non-proliferation. Of greater interest to Moscow, it enabled expanded co-operation in the field of commercial nuclear energy. US officials continued to work with their Russian counterparts on Russian accession to the WTO, though Moscow often adopted a tough stance in the multilateral negotiations.

After New START came into force on 5 February 2011, US officials and Russian officials began exploring the possibility of further nuclear reductions. Washington hoped to reduce the limits in New START and to constrain non-deployed strategic weapons and non-strategic (tactical) nuclear weapons as well.

US and Russian officials also held bilateral discussions on the possibility of co-operative NATO-Russia missile defence. Early exchanges suggested significant convergence in thinking as to the elements of such co-operation, on areas such as data exchanges, joint missile defence exercises, and jointly manned missile-defence centres.

The Russians, however, began to press a demand for a legally-binding agreement that the sides would not target their missile defence systems against the other's strategic offensive forces, accompanied by "objective criteria" – limits on the numbers, locations, and velocities of missile interceptors. Washington offered to provide a politically-binding assurance but ruled out a treaty. The ratification effort in the Senate for New START had proven

far more difficult than expected, and the administration doubted that any missile defence treaty could muster the two-thirds vote needed for approval.

On the eve of the May G8 meeting in France, US and Russian negotiators met in Moscow and attempted to work out principles for resolving their differences on missile defence. They reached ad hoc agreement on a joint statement for the presidents, but in the end neither side was prepared to accept it. Missile defence thereafter stood as an increasingly difficult issue on the US-Russia agenda.

In parallel, the Russians showed little enthusiasm for further nuclear reductions beyond those required by New START. They said that differences over missile defence needed to be resolved first and indicated that agreement also had to be found on issues such as long-range conventional precision-guided strike systems and third-country nuclear forces. As for non-strategic nuclear weapons, the Russians insisted that, as a precondition for any talks, the United States first withdraw its non-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe.

New Problems Arise

A new problem appeared on the US-Russia agenda in 2011: Libya. As chaos spread in the country, European states – led by Britain and France – argued for international action, to include a no-fly zone to ground Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi's air power. Russia (and China) chose not to block a UN Security Council resolution establishing a no-fly zone in March.

The United States joined with Britain, France, and others to conduct air operations against Libya. As the operations broadened to include strikes against Gaddafi's forces that went beyond keeping his air force from flying, Moscow became more critical. The Russians, including Putin, charged that NATO actions exceeded the bounds of the UN Security Council resolution and became particularly critical after Gaddafi was killed.

Meanwhile, concern grew in the United States about democracy and human rights within Russia. Congress began to focus on the 2009 death of Sergei Magnitsky. Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer, had been imprisoned by the very police officials whom he had accused of corruption and died in jail. Congress drafted legislation to sanction the Russian officials responsible for his imprisonment and death with visa bans and asset freezes. The Obama administration at first resisted the legislation, arguing that it had executive authority to sanction individual Russian officials.

Congress pressed ahead and linked the new sanctions to legislation to suspend the application of the 1974 Jackson-Vanik Amendment to Russia. That amendment denied the Soviet Union (and later Russia) permanent normal trade relations status until it allowed religious minorities, particularly Soviet/Russian Jews, to emigrate. Following the Soviet Union's collapse in

1991, Russia allowed open emigration. That led the Clinton administration to find Russia in compliance with Jackson-Vanik's requirements, as did the Bush and Obama administrations after it. But Congressional action was required to remove Russia from Jackson-Vanik's purview.

Election Year Difficulties

Election years have generally not been favourable times for progress in US-Russian relations, and both countries faced presidential elections in 2012.

In September 2011, Putin announced that he would run for president again (given the Russian constitution's limit of two consecutive presidential terms, Putin had stepped down as president and become prime minister in 2008, but he interpreted the constitution as allowing him to run again, perhaps for two more terms, in 2012). Putin's return to the presidency was hardly welcome news in Washington. The Obama administration understood that Putin held the real power in Moscow – Batman to Medvedev's Robin, as the US embassy reportedly described the relationship. Still, Obama and Medvedev had developed a positive chemistry. The White House had hoped that Putin might let Medvedev run for re-election while he continued to control things as prime minister.

The Russian election was effectively decided the evening Putin announced his bid. He did no real campaigning, made only one major campaign speech, declined to engage in election debates, and faced only token opposition, in part because opposition leaders such as Grigory Yavlinsky were barred from the ballot. Washington noted with concern that Putin's election campaign played on nationalist and anti-American themes.

The more than 100,000 Russians who turned out at Bolotnaya Square to protest the falsification of the results of the 4 December 2011 Duma (parliament) elections surprised both Moscow and Washington. Putin reacted badly, accusing Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of encouraging the protests. Demonstrations continued into early 2012, unnerving the Kremlin even as they raised hope in the West that public pressure might lead Putin to create more political space for civil society and the opposition.

The Russian government instead moved methodically to contain the protests, jailing key protest leaders and passing laws that raised the penalties for taking part in "unauthorized" demonstrations. Bills pushed quickly through the law-making process increased the maximum fine for illegal activities during a protest to 300,000 roubles, up from 1,000 roubles, and placed strictures on who could organize protests. These steps generated increasing criticism in Washington, from both Congress and the administration.

Russians went back to the polls on 4 March 2012 and, as expected, overwhelmingly voted to return Putin to the presidency. While there was some evidence of election fraud, most analysts concluded that Putin would

have handily won a clean election. Perhaps reflecting concern about possible demonstrations, Moscow police cleared the roads along Putin's motorcade route on inauguration day on 7 May. He drove to the Kremlin through eerily empty streets.

Putin's inauguration came on the eve of Obama's hosting the G8 and NATO summits. Although the administration originally planned to hold both in Chicago, it switched the G8 summit to Camp David. That was intended to avoid an awkward situation if Putin wanted to attend the G8 meeting but not the NATO-Russia summit. In a sign of the more difficult relations to come, Putin chose to attend neither. Administration officials downplayed what appeared to many as a snub, noting that Obama and Putin could meet on the margins of the G20 summit scheduled for Mexico in mid-June.

By spring 2012, the US presidential election campaign was on in full force. Governor Mitt Romney, who had secured the votes needed for the Republican nomination, cited Russia as the number one geopolitical threat to the United States. Obama criticized the comment but largely avoided Russia in his campaign – particularly following an embarrassing open-mic incident in April in which he had been overheard telling Medvedev (in his final days as president) to inform Putin that he would have more flexibility to deal with tough bilateral issues after the US election. The White House downplayed arms control, a signature Obama issue, not wanting it to become entangled in the campaign.

One bright spot came in August, when Russia finally acceded to the WTO. Russian officials publicly credited Washington's support as key to making accession happen after so many years of waiting.

Otherwise, there was no news or bad news in US-Russian relations. In July, the Russian parliament passed legislation requiring that any Russian non-governmental organization that engaged in political work and received financial support from abroad declare itself a "foreign agent", a pejorative term that implied not just foreign funding but foreign control and direction. In September, the Russian government announced that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) mission at the embassy in Moscow would have to close in a month's time, claiming that USAID programmes interfered in Russian politics. That shut off US support for a range of Russian non-governmental organizations.

Washington and Moscow continued to spar over Syria. As the civil war in that country spread in early 2012, Russia and China blocked UN Security Council resolutions critical of Syrian President Bashar Assad. A June conference in Geneva produced language on the need for a political transition but no real breakthrough. Washington increasingly hardened its position that Assad had to go, while Moscow argued that it remained to be decided and expressed concern about what forces might come to power in Damascus if Assad left. In December, the United States joined with Britain, France, Tur-

key, and Persian Gulf states in recognizing the Syrian opposition's National Coalition, further cementing US differences with Moscow.

Also in December 2012, Congress passed the Magnitsky Act, which both suspended the application of Jackson-Vanik to Russia and applied sanctions on those connected to Magnitsky's death. It also provided a legal basis for sanctioning other Russian human-rights violators. In the end, Congress chose to make the law Russia-specific, turning away suggestions that it apply to a broader range of countries with human-rights problems.

Moscow objected fiercely to the new legislation, which Obama signed into law (Congress may well have overridden a presidential veto). The Russians retaliated almost immediately by barring certain American officials from travel to Russia and, in a cruel twist, by prohibiting the adoption of Russian children by American families.

No New Reset

Following Obama's re-election, administration officials expressed hope that, with the two presidential elections now past, they might restore some momentum to US-Russia relations. Topping the administration's wish list for 2013 were progress on further nuclear arms reductions, settling missile defence, and expanding trade and investment relations.

After several delays, Donilon travelled to Moscow in April. Among other things, he carried a proposal for an executive agreement on transparency regarding missile defence. US officials hoped that this would help persuade their Russian counterparts that US missile defence plans posed no threat to Russian strategic missiles or, at the least, assure the Russians that they would have several years' warning if US missile defences were to develop in a way that might be a problem. Although Russian officials promised a counterproposal, it never came.

The White House nevertheless announced on 15 April that Obama would visit Moscow in September for a bilateral summit with Putin before travelling to St Petersburg for the G20 summit. Early in the summer, however, US officials began to express frustration with what they described as Russian unreadiness to engage on the key summit issues: nuclear reductions, missile defence, and trade and investment.

On 19 June, Obama proposed a one-third reduction in New START's limit of 1,550 deployed strategic warheads. Administration officials said privately that Washington was prepared to make commensurate reductions in the treaty's limits on deployed strategic delivery vehicles and launchers as well. Moscow responded with silence.

The arrival of National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden in Moscow on 23 June following the first of his disclosures about NSA operations provoked a new mini-crisis in bilateral relations. Senior US

officials pressed the Russians to return him to the United States, something they should have known Moscow would not do. The Russians treated Snowden as a defector and intelligence bonanza. On 1 August, the Russian government gave him temporary asylum, provoking outrage in Congress, which called for various penalties against Moscow.

On 7 August, the White House announced that the president would postpone his bilateral summit with Putin, though he would still attend the G20 meeting in St Petersburg. Administration officials attributed the decision to the lack of major deliverables, not the Snowden case. That said, the White House likely calculated that Snowden would cast a large shadow over the Moscow meeting and that, absent concrete deliverables, there was little point in meeting and having to face the domestic criticism.

The two presidents had a brief meeting in St Petersburg, which resulted in one surprising bit of US-Russian co-operation. Following evidence of large-scale use of chemical weapons in August 2013 by Assad's forces in several Damascus suburbs, Obama had threatened military action, but then abruptly paused to seek Congressional approval. As Congress returned following the Labor Day recess, it became increasingly clear that it would not approve the use of force.

The brief exchange in St Petersburg, however, created an opening for the Russians to press Assad to state that he would give up his chemical arms. That in turn created the opportunity for narrow US-Russian co-operation on chemical weapons elimination. Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met to work out a programme for inventorying, removing, and destroying Syria's chemical weapons.

Implementation of the programme got off to a good start. It did not succeed, however, in generating broader US-Russia co-operation towards an overall solution for the conflict in Syria. As Assad appeared to stabilize and strengthen his position, the Russians grew more confident in their support for him.

The achievement in November of an interim agreement in the European Union (EU) 3-plus-3 (Britain, France, and Germany plus the United States, Russia, and China) talks with Iran regarding Tehran's nuclear programme offered good news on the nuclear non-proliferation front. But it did not generate any particular momentum in US-Russian relations.

By the end of 2013, administration officials had significantly downsized their expectations for the bilateral relationship. Moscow offered little hope of progress on further nuclear arms reductions or on other issues that were important to Washington's bilateral agenda. Likewise, the Kremlin seemed to have low expectations, showing little interest in seeking US co-operation on particular questions.

Ukraine and Crimea Bring Relations to a Post-Cold War Low

2013 closed with Ukraine mired in internal crisis. Large numbers of demonstrators protested against Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich. The demonstrations took a violent turn in early 2014. After more than 100 demonstrators were killed in February, Yanukovich signed a political settlement with the principal opposition leaders. It is not clear whether the demonstrators would have accepted the settlement, but the issue became moot when Yanukovich immediately fled Kyiv (and then Ukraine).

In the last week of February, Ukraine's Rada (parliament) appointed an acting government, which promptly made clear its desire to conclude an association agreement with, and draw closer to, the European Union. Almost immediately, soldiers without insignia – later acknowledged by Putin to be Russian – seized Crimea. Two weeks later, following a referendum in Crimea that was riddled with flaws, Russia formally annexed the peninsula, making Ukraine a major issue between the West and Moscow. Russia's action violated its commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity under the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, and the 1997 Ukraine-Russia Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation.

Beginning in April, Russia supported armed separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, providing at first funding and leadership and then heavy arms, possibly including the surface-to-air missile system that shot down Malaysia Air Flight 17 in July. When Ukrainian military forces made significant advances against the separatists in August, the Russian military intervened directly in eastern Ukraine. A ceasefire was agreed in September, but it was shaky at best, and many of its terms remained unfulfilled at the end of 2014.

The United States and the EU responded to Russia's seizure of Crimea and its subsequent actions in eastern Ukraine by ratcheting down political relations, replacing the planned June G8 summit in Sochi with a G7 meeting (minus Russia), and imposing visa and financial sanctions on Russian individuals, followed by broader sanctions on the financial, energy, and defence sectors of the Russian economy.

At the end of the year, relations between the United States and Europe, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, had plunged to their lowest point since the end of the Cold War. The United States had put into place a three-part policy, seeking to bolster Ukraine, assure NATO allies made more nervous by Russia's actions, and press Russia to defuse rather than escalate the crisis in Ukraine, and Washington was conducting a fundamental review of policy towards Russia. Sanctions appeared to affect the Russian economy, which also suffered from the consequences of a dramatic fall in the price of oil, and many analysts predicted that the economy would contract in 2015.

The political impact of the sanctions – on getting Putin to alter his policy regarding Ukraine – was less clear.

Looking Forward

Looking forward, the immediate challenge for Washington and Moscow will be to maintain lines of communication and co-operation on areas where the two countries' interests converge while trying to contain the damage caused by the Ukraine crisis – though the possibility of West-Russia relations becoming more confrontational due to Ukraine cannot be ruled out. The areas of converging US-Russian interests include nuclear arms control, non-proliferation, and Afghanistan.

Despite the worsening of the Ukraine situation, both the United States and Russia continued to implement the New START treaty. By capping the sides' strategic nuclear forces as well as providing transparency and predictability, the agreement sets bounds to the competition in the strategic nuclear area. Both sides appear to appreciate that.

With the EU 3-plus-3 negotiations with Iran on a permanent settlement regarding Tehran's nuclear programme having been extended into 2015, Washington and Moscow, as well as the three participating EU states plus China, continue to share an interest in finding a solution that prevents Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Western diplomats reported that the Russians were participating constructively.

A third area for co-operation will be Afghanistan, with US and coalition forces having made a significant withdrawal in 2014, leaving behind a relatively small residual force to assist the Afghan army and national police. The West and Russia share an interest in a stable Afghanistan that can prevent renewed civil war and the return of the Taliban and terrorist groups.

Maintaining collaboration on these issues could sustain a degree of US-Russia co-operation, though it may be subject to stress by US (and European) differences with Russia over Ukraine and Russia's more assertive stance toward Europe. It is not clear how quickly the Ukraine crisis will stabilize; progress on that is likely a prerequisite for some recovery in the US-Russia relationship. Much will also depend on what Putin's recent assertiveness in defending the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers means for Moscow's policy towards other neighbouring states with such populations.

Sustaining the arms control channel could be important for broader reasons. During the Cold War, arms control offered a key channel – at times the only working channel – between Washington and Moscow. Progress on arms control generated momentum that led to progress on the broader US-Soviet relationship, as was evident in the late 1960s when progress in the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) talks prompted a broader détente, and again in the mid-1980s, when progress on reducing intermediate-range and stra-

tegic nuclear forces led to a more positive overall relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. (In a like manner, early progress on New START helped spur an improvement in the bilateral relationship in 2009-2010.)

Arms control could play a similar role in the future, though it was at something of a standstill even before the Ukraine crisis broke out. For at least the remainder of the Obama administration, the US government will continue to be interested in further bilateral nuclear arms reductions and prepared to consider Russian concerns on some related questions. It is not clear, however, where Moscow wants to go in the area of arms control.

One area of specific interest is confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in the European region. The Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty regime appears to be dead. However, the Vienna Document on CSBMs and the Open Skies Treaty remain in force and have been applied with some useful effect during the Ukraine crisis.

With levels of NATO and Russian military equipment in Europe below the limits allowed under either the CFE or Adapted CFE treaties, it would make sense to focus any immediate discussion of conventional arms control in Europe on enhancing transparency and predictability. Possible steps might include lowering the thresholds for notification of military activities and increasing the number of inspections permitted under the Vienna Document. Progress on this might create a better atmosphere for later discussion of limits on arms, which may need to constrain weapons and capabilities that go beyond the types of equipment limited by the CFE treaty.

More broadly in Europe, Russian actions regarding Crimea and Ukraine have badly damaged the order established in 1975 by the Helsinki Final Act. They have also raised concern among Russia's neighbours, including Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, and Georgia (and, though not voiced publicly, in other countries with significant ethnic Russian minorities, such as Kazakhstan). The Ukraine crisis has reopened previous tensions with Russia over American and European interactions with and in the post-Soviet space.

The United States and NATO have responded to rising concern among NATO's eastern allies, particularly the Baltic states, with military deployments to those states, including the deployment of US Army companies to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. The Pentagon has described these as "persistent" deployments that could last for as much as a year. Moscow may call foul, citing NATO's 1997 commitment not to permanently station "substantial combat forces" on the territory of new NATO member states. Washington, however, does not regard four companies as approaching the "substantial" threshold. Some NATO member states have suggested that, in light of Russian actions against Ukraine, the commitment itself should be revisited.

One question is whether a broader discussion within the OSCE might lead to some new European security agreement. Russia's President Med-

vedev proposed such an agreement in 2008, but the particulars of the Russian proposal – which among other things appeared to make issues such as NATO or EU enlargement subject to a Moscow veto – generated little interest among other OSCE participating States. Whether such a discussion is worth renewing would depend in part on whether the approaches of Russia and other participants yielded more common ground than was the case in 2008.

One area of US-Russia relations that remains woefully underdeveloped is bilateral trade and investment relations. The paltry level of trade does not provide enough ballast to exercise a stabilizing effect on the broader relationship, in the way that the large US-Chinese trade numbers do for that relationship. Washington and Moscow have expressed interest in developing this aspect of their interaction. Whether it can play a role in improving the relationship will depend in part on how far financial and economic sanctions go – they may have the effect of discouraging the Kremlin from greater interaction with the global economy – and on the level of interest among US and Russian companies. The ability to increase investment relations also will depend importantly on steps that Russia takes regarding its business and investment climate.

Democracy and human rights will remain a difficult issue for US-Russia relations. Putin has built an increasingly authoritarian political model in Russia, while democracy promotion remains a core US interest.

One final challenge for the United States and Russia, once they get past the current crisis, is whether they can sustain any progress they make towards an improved bilateral relationship. The Obama administration has found, to its frustration, that the up-and-down nature of its relations with Moscow has followed the pattern of US-Russia relations during the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. If Washington and Moscow wish to avoid repeating this cycle, they need to consider how they approach some of the challenging questions on their bilateral agenda and how they might lock in – and sustain – positive developments in their relations.