



The Current Status and Prospects for the U.S.-Russia Relationship

Conference Keynote Speech

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Remarks

ANGELA STENT: Thank you very much, David. I'm delighted to be here.

I realize that I'm among a group of people who are all specialists in this area. I'm not sure if there is anything new that I can tell you, but I want to raise some provocative questions and go back to some of the themes that have already been raised this morning.

I was supposed to talk about the current status and prospects for the U.S.-Russia relationship, and the first question I'm going to raise is, is it really different this time? Have we now, with this reset, achieved something that we haven't been able to achieve in the last 20 years, which is a more sustainable relationship that is not going to be so subject to fluctuations in our own domestic politics and also within Russian domestic politics?

I just want to take you back, to juxtapose two moments, to last summer, just to show some of the complexities of the U.S.-Russia relationship. At the "[cheeseburger summit](#)," you have [Medvedev](#) and [Obama](#) in Ray's Hell Burger, which makes mean hamburgers. They are having their cheeseburgers. It's a very close personal relationship, joking. Mr. Medvedev had just come back from Silicon Valley, where he had met with a number of entrepreneurs who were going to invest and are investing in the [Skolkovo innovation project](#). He opened his own Twitter account. He met with Governor [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#). This was the reset on full display.

Two weeks later, we fast-forward to Vienna, to something that could have been a scene from the Cold War movie [The Third Man](#)—Russian and American planes parked nose-to-tail in the dead of night, exchanging spies. You all remember the spy scandal from last year, when the ten sleeper agents, the most glamorous one, [Anna Chapman](#), and the Russians that were exchanged.

The White House dealt very quickly and efficiently with this. There is an enormous amount we don't know about it, but they dealt with it, and we almost forgot about it very quickly.

It shows you the contradictions in the relationship, just to remind you that it's never linear and it's never always smooth sailing.

One of the questions that we can all raise—and some of you have raised this today—is, why has it been so difficult for the United States and Russia to develop and sustain a productive and ongoing relationship that is not subject to all of these fluctuations? It seems to be hard to get it right. For both countries, how important is this relationship for both sides, as we look into the future and even now?

If you look at U.S. history in the last 20 years—I'm not going to go back to the Soviet period; I'm sure [Jack Matlock](#) will—you have these cycles of Democratic and Republican administrations coming in with initially very high expectations about Russia, really selling it to the U.S. public, only to leave eight years later, in the case of both [Clinton](#) and [Bush](#), with a relationship almost in tatters—worse in 2008 than in 1999—but still with disillusion, and with a lot of things going wrong.

Are these mismatched expectations inevitable? Is it not possible for us to have a symmetry between our expectations and what is realistically feasible? And the second question: Is the Obama policy different enough and enlightened enough to avoid some of these pitfalls?

We are going to hear about the end of the Cold War today, but since 1991, particularly since 9/11—and we heard about some of that in the second panel—our relationship with Russia functions in a very different environment than in the Cold War period. We face the common challenges of combating Islamic fundamentalist-driven terrorism and of nuclear proliferation. Again, we have talked about that this morning, but just to say that this is the new environment.

Meanwhile, Russia has become a [BRIC](#). It's a member of a group in which it is becoming increasingly important in terms of coordination of economic policies and, as we have seen with some of these UN votes, also some international political issues. Russia is, of course, an energy superpower. It has become an important economic power in some areas of the globe, and that really has affected the way that Washington and Moscow do business.

We in the United States still face the question—and it goes back to [George Kennan](#)'s 1947 question—is there something about the then-Soviet, but you could say Russian now, domestic political system that makes dealing with Russia different from dealing with a lot of other powers? China has been mentioned a lot. It also has a very different domestic system, but it doesn't seem to affect it. But is there something about that?

Then, the subsidiary question is, how far can you go in establishing a strong and robust relationship if, in fact, the Russian internal system differs so much from Euro-Atlantic practices and values?

These are questions that we ask. We can all say that maybe our relationship should just be based on interests, and not about values. But how far can you base a relationship on interests without having values intruding? Indeed—and this is more like a university question on an exam—can you define interests completely separately from values?

All of those things obviously swim out there, particularly when we have disagreements with Russia.

These debates were reflected in the fluctuating policies of the Clinton and Bush Administrations. The Clinton Administration went on record as saying that only if there was a democratic Russia with a true market economy could the United States and Russia develop a really productive relationship. We know that by 1999 that was more or less in tatters, after the financial crisis, Russia's collapse, and then also the [Kosovo War](#).

We know what the Russian narrative of the 1990s is. Again, I'm not going to repeat it too much, but the Russian narrative, accepted by almost all sides of the political spectrum, is that the IMF, via the United States, imposed draconian economic policies on Russia that finally led to this 1998 collapse and that the Clinton Administration dealt with a small elite of people in the [Yeltsin](#) Administration, many of whom were corrupt.

Therefore, for many Russians, the 1990s still symbolize chaos and corruption, and the United States is seen as complicit in all of this. Many Russians believe that in the 1990s Russia was forced to accept an international agenda that was imposed on it by the United States and its allies.

So those are the different narratives.

When the Bush Administration first came—and we should remember this history—the premises were different, particularly after 9/11. The premises were that Russia was an ally, a partner in the antiterrorist coalition, particularly in everything that was achieved in Afghanistan. The administration equated the [war in Chechnya](#) with a fight against al Qaeda; this was a global terrorist problem. And this was going to be a pragmatic partnership based on responding to these common security threats.

That lasted until sometime in 2002, and then we know what happened afterwards. Not repeating all of the history, but from the Russian point of view, the belief was that Russia was promised things in September 2001 by not hindering the establishment of U.S. bases in Central Asia and these promises were neglected and unfulfilled by the United States. The one area where the United States and Russia are equals and could cooperate and should have done more was arms control. We have heard all about that. Clearly under the Bush Administration, these things were minimized. We heard an earlier speaker talk about the fact that they haven't gotten over the abrogation of the [ABM treaty](#) [Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty].

The other litany from the Russian point of view was the invasion of Iraq, expansion of NATO to the Baltic states, support of "[color revolutions](#)," and the list goes on.

Then, after 2004, the Bush Administration did begin to criticize Russia's domestic politics explicitly, and that made it all worse.

You know the response. You have all read [Putin's Verkunde speech](#), laying down the line that Russia was not going to allow itself to be treated like that anymore. Of course, the relationship then finally reached an all-time low, clearly, during the [Russia-Georgia War](#).

On both sides there were then feelings of mutual betrayal and mutual disrespect.

Then the question was, in 2008, we are at the beginning of another cycle, where we will have high hopes and then they will crash again.

A final word before looking a little bit more at the U.S.-Russia *perezagruzka*, the reset. It's just to remind ourselves of the more global framework in which this relationship operates. Let me just say something about the major foreign policy goals of the Obama Administration, and I will do the same for Russia.

Clearly, the key foreign policy priorities for the Obama Administration are Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, then nonproliferation—all the things that we have mentioned today. Then there is the question more recently of how to respond to the [Arab Spring](#), if that's what we are going to call it, to developments of these upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa; and also try to get, belatedly, the Israelis and Palestinians to come to some kind of negotiation. It's a huge list of priorities, and it's a very tough agenda for the Obama Administration.

Russia can be and is a partner in some of these issues, as we will see and as we have already heard. Russia is definitely seen, not as a major problem here, but as a country that can facilitate some of these goals. But Russia per se doesn't rank that high on the list of priorities. All of these other things, in terms of focus, rank before Russia, because Russia isn't really seen as a problem. I will come back to that.

Russian policy goals—I'll be very brief; I'm sure our Russian colleagues will have other things to add:

- Clearly, the major goal is to ensure that no major international decisions are taken without Russia's participation, that its views are respected, and that many of these decisions should be taken through organizations such as the United Nations, and particularly through the Security Council.
- Secondly, to maintain the status quo in the Euro-Atlantic area—no more eastern enlargement of either NATO or the European Union to any of the former Soviet states. The Balkans I'm going to leave out here, but to other former Soviet states.
- The third set of foreign policy goals is to minimize any Western kind of democracy promotion instability, destabilizing policies, as seen in Russia, and to maintain regime stability. The same goes for Russia's neighbors and the post-Soviet states to minimize the possibility of regime change, of instability in Russia's neighboring states.
- Then, finally, to promote the business interests of the Russian elite and then also, as we saw from the leaked foreign policy document last year, to enlist Western companies and technology in the Russian economy, in the modernization impact.

If you look at these two sets of goals, you can see that there is an asymmetry there. We have talked about this asymmetry this morning. It's an enduring factor in this relationship. Russia does not loom as large in general American foreign policy concerns as America does in Russian foreign policy concerns. There is much more of a focus on the United States per se.

Let me say a few words now about the *perezagruzka*. This is arguably the most successful aspect of Obama's foreign policy, and it's one that the Obama Administration wants to keep as very successful. It's very important for them. We have come a long way since November 5, 2008, when, the day after Obama was elected, President Medvedev made an address to the Federal Assembly where he threatened to deploy missiles in Kaliningrad if the United States missile defense deployments went ahead.

A few weeks later, he was in Washington at an [on-the-record Council on Foreign Relations meeting](#) when [Madeleine Albright](#) was interviewing him. She said, "Why did you say that? Obama had just been elected."

His response was, "Well, my speechwriters were very busy that day, and we didn't notice what had happened in the United States."

Good reply, right?

But we have come a long way since then. The Obama-Medvedev relationship has very much been cultivated by both gentlemen and their staffs. If you read what [Mike McFaul](#) says in his on-the-record briefings, again and again, after Deauville [2011 G-8 summit], this is seen to be an essential element.

We always go from close personal relations between the presidents, as you did under Clinton, as you did for a time under Bush, and then the opposite party always accuses whatever party has been in power in the United States of only cultivating close personal relationships and not doing anything to broaden the relationship. I will come back to that.

But that has been a very successful element of the U.S. reset policy.

The Obama Administration has done a very good job of managing expectations. It has not tried to promise more in the relationship with Russia than is achievable. That shows, maybe for the first time in 16 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a set of expectations about Russia that were achievable.

What are the other aspects? The Obama Administration has listened to Russian concerns, and the reset has been much more about the United States changing its policy than about Russia changing its policy, and the United States listening to Russian concerns and adjusting what it does, because it has sought Russian assistance and cooperation in some of these issues that are vital to U.S. national interests. Russia is now seen to be part of the solution and not part of the problem on many of these issues. That was the aim of the Obama policy, and it has worked pretty well.

I'm going to list what the accomplishments are, because it is actually quite a long list. I'm more of an optimist than a pessimist, so I want to inject a little bit more optimism into this discussion.

Let's start with the [New START agreement](#). I won't say much more about that, but that was the centerpiece. It was the first, most important accomplishment of this policy. Just to refer to something that was said this morning, if you talk to U.S. negotiators and you say, "What was more difficult, dealing with the Russians or dealing with the U.S. Congress?" you know the answer to that. It's not the Russians. That points again to the issue that this is a U.S.-Russian issue, but it's also an internal U.S. issue about dealing with the U.S. Congress and recalcitrant people within that.

Secondly, Iran—we heard a lot about Iran already—securing Russian assent to more robust sanctions after having presented to them evidence of the new enrichment facility at Qom was very important. I won't reiterate what was said. Even though the Russians retain a healthy skepticism about whether this will do anything to curb or temper Iran's own nuclear ambitions, they went along with it.

Then, they canceled the sale of the S-300s, which was a really sensitive point. They lost a lot of money from doing that. From the U.S. point of view, it was very much what they were seeking.

Afghanistan: I know we're going to hear more about Afghanistan this afternoon. I don't want to preempt what's going to be said. Clearly, it's not only the mechanics of the cooperation, lethal military transport and all of the other activities that we are now doing, but it's clear to many people that Russia has changed its own view about what it wants to happen in Afghanistan. It was much more ambivalent about the NATO presence there.

We know, obviously, it doesn't like the fact that the United States still has bases in Central Asia. But it's now clear that the main Russian preoccupation is to keep NATO there as long as it can. Russia fears that if NATO/U.S. troops withdraw precipitously, there will be great instability, and Russia will have a major problem on its borders, as it did prior to September 11, 2001. So that's a real change. Afghanistan can certainly be pointed to as one of the success stories.

The [123 Agreement](#), civilian nuclear cooperation was something that was there on the books during the Bush Administration, but has only now been adopted. [Fukushima](#) isn't going to affect that very much. For the Russians, nuclear power and nuclear reactor sales are very important, and for the United States, we need some of their knowhow because we have old nuclear power plants and we don't really have generations of younger Americans who have been trained to understand all of this. So I see this as a future cooperation, irrespective of some of these other, more global questions about nuclear power.

Then we have the [Bilateral Commission](#). There were 18 commissions under the Clinton-Lavrov Commission. I believe there are now 21 since Deauville, or there will be 21.

You can ask how much they have achieved. They meet often. They have agendas. Some of them have maybe achieved more than others. They range the gamut from the most controversial civil society dialogue, the [Surkov-McFaul dialogue](#), which is in abeyance now, to energy, economics, science, technology, more cultural things.

This points to a very important and enduring problem in U.S.-Russian relations: We have never had a large group of stakeholders in this relationship. It's primarily a relationship based on security, as we have been hearing about. Security is very important, but that involves a small number of people who are involved in the relationship.

Unlike the Europeans—and this is a very important distinction—we do not have complementary economic interests with Russia. The things that Russia exports—energy and arms—we don't need. Unlike China, where we buy enormous amounts of their consumer goods and they own most of our debt, we just don't have that economic complementarity.

Trade with Russia is less than 1 percent of U.S. total trade. Yes, there are Americans investing there. They are involved in the modernization projects. Facebook is partly owned by [Alisher Usmanov](#) and his colleagues. Yes, there is obviously Russian investment in the United States, too. But there isn't really the economic potential to have this kind of deeply interconnected relationship that Europeans have with Russia because they buy Russian energy, because they are businesspeople in Russia, and because hundreds of thousands of Russian businesspeople live in Europe and travel between Russia and Europe.

In the absence of that, how do you create a constituency in the United States that wants an enduring engagement with Russia? We have been trying to do it for some time. It's very difficult, on the civil society level and on other levels. The point of these different commissions is to try to remedy that, but obviously that will take time.

What has not been achieved yet in this reset?

WTO membership. It may come at the end of this year. If it doesn't, then it's not going to come for a very long time. We have been working for 18 years on this, more than that. Tom [[Thomas E. Graham](#)], when you were dealing with this, you almost got it done. But there's always something that comes up. Now it's Georgia. Maybe one will be able to ensure that Georgia signs onto Russia joining. So it may happen, but then again, it may not happen. The administration certainly wants it to happen.

[Jackson-Vanik](#). What can one say? It should have been repealed more than 20 years ago when [Gorbachev](#) was in power and he liberalized immigration rules. But it hasn't been. There are two solutions. One of them is, if Russia joins the WTO, then the United States will be in violation of WTO rules because it hasn't granted Russia permanent most-favored-nation status. So the Congress will have to repeal it; otherwise, U.S. business will be coming in shrieking. Or—and this is being discussed now in the Congress—they will repeal Jackson-Vanik and then there will be another piece of legislation that will give Congress the ability to review the situation in Russia.

This is all under discussion now, but it's being pushed very much. Obviously, most people believe it's much better for Russia to be in international organizations, where it has to abide by internationally accepted norms, than to be outside of that system. So that hasn't happened. It may happen.

The other outstanding issue is the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. We had the Georgia War. We had President Medvedev's speech and then the Russian proposal for a Euro-Atlantic security treaty. That's going nowhere, because on neither side of the Atlantic does anyone really want that. You have the discussions within the [OSCE](#) [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe], the [Corfu Process](#) on Euro-Atlantic security. But like many OSCE issues, that moves at a very deliberate and slow pace. It goes on; they meet.

What has made this a much less contentious issue now is that the Obama Administration has backed away from some of the policies of the Bush Administration in terms of pushing for Georgian and Ukrainian membership in NATO. Ukraine has really taken care of itself. It's not interested in joining NATO under [Yanukovych](#) and it's moving closer to Russia. You saw in Kyrgyzstan U.S.-Russian cooperation last year, concern about [what was happening there](#). So you get the glimmerings of more cooperation.

The one outstanding issue is Georgia. Not much has happened in terms of the hostility between Georgia and Russia and the potential for conflict since 2008. Obviously, the terms of the agreement that [Sarkozy](#) initially brokered have been violated. People are leaving it de facto. Nothing is going to happen, but people do worry that this could be an area where there could be conflict.

So what one would argue—and many of us have argued this for many years—is that we have to have a concerted system of dialogue with the Russian government and Russian people on the post-Soviet space, on defining interests there, on defining the ways one can cope with it. In the Bush Administration such a dialogue was started, and it was difficult. I don't know whether the circumstances are any better. It's a huge unresolved issue, and one where we even don't quite know how to begin.

This was the easy part. *Perezagruzka*, reset, all of these accomplishments were the easy part. Is there going to be a phase two? With Ambassador Mike McFaul now, maybe there really is going to be a phase two. On the face of it, I would look at this and say I don't see how there is a phase two. There was phase one; there are these accomplishments. It's not really clear how much further you can go.

As we heard this morning, missile defense/arms-control negotiations are going to be more complicated than it has been up to now. I won't say anything more about that. How do you go forward?

People used the word "theological" this morning for missile defense. I've always heard the words "faith-based system." But the problem is that there are enough constituencies in the United States who believe in missile defense and believe it can work, so it will go on. But that's going to be much more difficult. I don't see any other areas where it's going to be much easier to move the relationship in a qualitatively different direction.

For this administration, given its general foreign policy goals, the reset has worked well. Russia has helped the United States in pursuing its core interests in terms of Iran, Afghanistan, and these nonproliferation issues. From the Russian point of view, I would have thought the Russians were also fairly satisfied. There has been no more talk of eastern enlargement of any of these institutions. That's been kind of dead, for a number of years, I don't know how many more. The United States did negotiate a major arms-control agreement with Russia. It is taking Russia's views into account. There has been cooperation.

I come back to the point that if you want the relationship to move forward, you do have to create a larger group of stakeholders. That is still an issue. It's very problematic to figure out how you do that.

Two other issues, as we move forward:

The Middle East. What's interesting is not only that Russia abstained in [UN Resolution 1973](#), even though the Russian leadership has been critical of some of the things that are happening in Libya, but now the United States and Russia both realize that they are faced with this unstable situation there. It's unpredictable. Nobody knows what kinds of governments are going to come into power there. Are they going to be military? Are they going to be Islamic fundamentalist? They are probably not going to be democratic. Are they going to be a mixture of populists? How do you cope with it? I'm not saying anyone has solutions. This is a problem that we both face.

Meanwhile, what has really changed for the United States is that Russia has become a much more active and influential player in this region. The Russian-Israeli relationship is much closer. Russia deals with Hamas. It recently had Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in Moscow to talk about their recent agreement. So what Russia has is the ability to deal with all of these countries, an ability that the United States doesn't have because of its different policies. Therefore, even though Russia does not want any regime change in Syria and wouldn't support anything there, it still has more to give, and it's an area where one could cooperate more.

Then the other country, the potential threat that dares not speak its name, is China. This is an area where we both face a rising China. We are affected by it differently because we have very different relationships. But we both see our relative power declining vis-à-vis China. How do we cope with that? That's obviously something that one can discuss.

As we look out to the next year—and I'm not going to go beyond 2012—let me just throw two more things out. We have elections coming up in both countries. Nothing is really going to happen in the U.S.-Russian relationship until those elections are over. We have heard that January 2013 maybe is the time.

I don't think Russia is going to play much of a role in the U.S. election campaign, not as it did in 2008, when candidate [McCain](#) accused Obama of being soft on the Russians because of the Georgia War.

The question is, will America play any role in the Russian election campaign? Will there be a need to have some kind of external enemy to justify various things?

I have a question now for the Russians, and I'm going to have a question for the Americans, too. For the Russians, I just phrase the question that we heard this morning: Why, given strategic realities, if you read official Russian documents, is the number-one enemy, the *glavni protivnik*, the United States and NATO? China doesn't really figure very much there. And if you look at the actual facts, it's hard to understand why there is such an asymmetry in the focus on different threats.

So that's one question.

Another question for everyone is, since the Obama-Medvedev relationship has been the cornerstone of the *perezagruzka*, if indeed the next president is Vladimir Putin—and one assumes it's going to be Obama; I assume it is—how does that change the dynamic? That would be a huge question mark.

Then I would say to the Americans, as we think about moving beyond this kind of limited partnership that we have with Russia, which is, albeit in much better shape than it was three years ago, as we move beyond that and we try to create something more multidimensional, do we have to rethink our verbal and actual policy toward the post-Soviet space? Do we need to come closer—although we have de facto, to some extent—to recognizing that this is a sphere of—I hate to use the word—privileged Russian interest? Is that something we should be thinking about?

The other question that we have to also think about is, to what extent should we still be in the democracy-promotion business in Russia, if, as we have seen, it hasn't had much impact and it can be a great irritant?

A final point. I was watching a few months ago on television all the celebrations for Gorbachev's 80th birthday. You realized at that point this heroic phase of U.S.-Soviet relations at the end of the Cold War—the falling of walls, the promise of a new partnership—yet, we haven't, since the Soviet Union collapsed, been able to really come up with any new global security system or even a new way of looking at the broader context of our relations with Russia.

That's our major challenge. But the challenge between now and the end of 2012 is maintaining the momentum that we have in this relationship and not letting it slip again.

Questions and Answers

PARTICIPANT: Angela, I thought that was a wonderful summary, and well-rounded. But I want to ask your opinion on one matter. I keep hearing people say in Washington that we have to remove Jackson-Vanik before Russia can be a member of the WTO. I know the Jackson-Vanik amendment very well. I was director of Soviet affairs in the State Department when it was forced on us by Congress. I was instructed [inaudible] to the Soviet Union in early spring of 1991 to tell Gorbachev officially that if they would pass the law on freedom of immigration and implement it, Jackson-Vanik would not apply.

The fact is, the law does not name the Soviet Union. It names no country. The law applies to countries which have non-market economies and restrict freedom to immigrate, neither of which applies to Russia. So why does it have to be removed?

By the way, [Richard Perle](#) agrees with me 100 percent. I don't think any federal court would sustain applying it to Russia, because Russia is now a market-economy country. Why is it that a political issue? Has it really been examined? Have people really looked at the text?

ANGELA STENT: It's a very interesting question. Obviously, Richard Perle says you don't have to remove it, in that sense, or that it could be done by presidential decree.

The reason, really—it's always politics, right?—it's telling the U.S. Congress, "how about not having a piece of legislation where you can use it to beat Russia over the head," to put it bluntly. That's the real issue. That's what the negotiation is about. That's why they may get agreement to lift it, but there will be some other kind of legislation. You may be quite right on the legal aspects of it, but politically it's not doable, or they don't believe it is.

Tom, you probably know more about this.

THOMAS GRAHAM: No, but you're absolutely right. We actually looked at this in the Bush Administration in 2002, 2003, in part because of Richard Perle. The decision was made because of prerogatives Congress believes it has in trade issues, and the range of trade matters that we wanted to bring before the Congress. We were not going to upset and irritate Congress over the Jackson-Vanik amendment by doing it by executive order. I would imagine the Obama Administration has come to the same conclusion.

ANGELA STENT: It's politics. You're quite right.

PARTICIPANT: You gave a very positive review of the reset from the American point of view. Clearly it's not so positive on the Russian side. How do the Russians see it, and why is there such a different perspective?

ANGELA STENT: The Russian view—and maybe some of our Russian colleagues will say something else—I think it's more mixed. Certainly the START treaty and some of these other issues, when they are brought into the decision making, they are seen positively. Some of the Russians will blame the United States for the lack of the WTO membership, which at this point is actually not true.

Then you have to go back and question, what is it that the Russians would have wanted? Obviously, the United States hasn't recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It still says formally that NATO membership is open for anyone who wants to join. So there are things like that where it hasn't changed it. And there are always resentments against the United States.

On the other hand, if you listen to quite a lot of the things that President Medvedev says, he puts a pretty positive spin on it, because that's his thing.

[Sergey \[Rogov\]](#), give me a different view of this.

PARTICIPANT: I agree with almost everything that you said, except one point. I'm just responding to John's question. You oversimplified when you said that Russian official documents and statements identify the United States as their opponent. Russian official documents don't contain such terminology anymore.

There are negative characteristics of NATO enlargement and ballistic missile defense. But you overdid it when you said that on the official level Russia states that the United States is their enemy.

You are correct that there is a lot of suspicion and presumption that the United States is creating problems for Russia. But I must tell you that there was a very significant change of opinion in the last two years. The Obama Administration did a lot to remove at least some of the suspicion and to regain Russian trust. By 2008, the perception was that the United States never delivers what it promises, the United States always violates its commitments, et cetera. While there is a lot of residual anti-American sentiment and anti-American suspicion, be careful when you characterize the Russian official position.

ANGELA STENT: Okay, I stand corrected.

PARTICIPANT: Angela, great presentation. I wanted to address one of your questions about the Putin-Medvedev plan. I don't think it's going to make that much of a difference. How you approach the question—you have to get to what your assumptions are about how the tandem behaves. My operating assumption has always been and continues to be that Vladimir Putin is the senior partner and there are no major decisions that are taken without his explicit or implicit approval.

The more important factor, rather than who the Russian president is, is what, in fact, the United States does. The Obama Administration's policies in the past couple of years have helped to address, assuage, and deflate this image of the United States as the enemy. Part of it was simply that NATO expansion was taken off the table. Of course, there was a different decision taken on missile defense. But what we do is much more determinant of Russian behavior than who is the president.

I would be curious to hear if any of our Russian colleagues disagree.

The other point is, what are the Russian incentives for a reset? Ours were Iran, number one; Afghanistan, number two; security, number three. We had to address that one first because of the urgency of the demise of the [START I treaty](#).

For the Russians, they came out of the global economic crisis, and suddenly their view of themselves as invulnerable and an island of stability has been destroyed. Who comes out as the winner in the global economic crisis? It's China. That heightened perception is in the background driving—it would drive me if I'm in Moscow, Having such a terrible, unconstructive relationship as Moscow had with the United States at the beginning of 2009 [inaudible].

ANGELA STENT: Good second point.

On your first point, I agree with you. Obviously, what we do is more important than these other things. But again, in the absence of a broad group of people who are involved in this relationship, so far in the last 20 years, the

personal relationship between the two presidents has been very important in driving some of this and getting it achieved. President Obama has spent hundreds of hours either in person, on the phone, and on the videoconference, with President Medvedev working these things out. He has met with Prime Minister Putin once and that meeting was, let's say, a little testy.

It doesn't mean that the thing couldn't move forward, but it would mean that if the leaders so much drive this relationship, in the absence of a stronger network of people and issues that drive it, there would be some getting-used-to. It doesn't mean that they couldn't forge a better relationship, but you couldn't just take off at the same level that the Obama-Medvedev relationship has had.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Final word, please.

PARTICIPANT: I would claim that Russia, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, being in such tremendous disarray was a status-quo problem, not a revisionist problem. Most of the problems in Russian-American relations happened because the United States was changing the status quo by use of military force in Kosovo, in Iraq, et cetera. That was perceived as being done at Russia's expense, and detrimental to Russian interests.

The Obama Administration in the last two years didn't do anything which looks like changing the status quo against Russian interests. The only exception in Russian behavior was the recognition of [inaudible] in Ossetia independence in 2008. But [Saakashvili](#) didn't stop it. Russia for 16 years didn't recognize their independence, and we wouldn't recognize their independence for another 160 years because we don't care much.

This is something which will help to create a much more positive attitude and provide credibility to Obama's administration in Russia.

ANGELA STENT: Thank you.

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