
U.S.-Russia Relations

By

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The German Marshall Fund is an indispensable organization, especially for our transatlantic alliance, but increasingly for our partnerships beyond Europe as well. So thank you for the great work that you do in fostering unity of thought, unity of purpose, and unity of action. These are the elements that the United States and Europe need more than ever today. You have made an immeasurable impact in helping us to reaffirm and strengthen our nation's ties with Europe these past few years. And so, again, thank you very, very much. I'm honored to be here.

Now, this is actually the first time that I have spoken at the German Marshall Fund as Secretary of State. And I venture to say, given our short time in office, that it is likely the last. I have come here today to speak with you about a subject that's been on everyone's mind recently: Russia and U.S.-Russian relations.

Most of us are familiar with the events of the recent past. The causes of the conflict—particularly the dispute between Georgia and its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia—are complex. They go back to the fall of the Soviet Union. And the United States and our allies have tried many times to help the parties resolve the dispute diplomatically. Indeed, it was, in part, for just that reason that I traveled to Georgia just a month before the conflict, as did German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, among others.

The conflict in Georgia, thus, has deep roots. And clearly, all sides made mistakes and miscalculations. But several key facts are clear:

On August 7th, following repeated violations of the ceasefire in South Ossetia, including the shelling of Georgian villages, the Georgian government launched a major military operation into Tskhinvali and other areas of the separatist region. Regrettably, several Russian peacekeepers were killed in the fighting.

These events were troubling. But the situation deteriorated further when Russia's leaders violated Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and launched a full scale invasion across an internationally-recognized border. Thousands of innocent civilians were displaced from their homes. Russia's leaders established a military occupation that stretched deep into Georgian territory. And they violated the ceasefire agreement that had been negotiated by French and EU [European Union] President Sarkozy.

Other actions of Russia during this crisis have also been deeply disconcerting: its alarmist allegations of "genocide" by Georgian forces; its baseless statements about U.S. actions during the conflict; its attempt to dismember a sovereign country by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia; its talk of having "privileged interests" in how it treats its independent neighbors; and its refusal to allow international monitors and NGOs [Non-Governmental Organizations] into Abkhazia and South Ossetia, despite ongoing militia violence and retribution against innocent Georgians.

What is more disturbing about Russia's actions is that they fit into a worsening pattern of behavior over several years now. I'm referring, among other things, to Russia's intimidation of its sovereign neighbors, its use of oil and gas as a political weapon, its unilateral suspension of the CFE [Conventional Forces in Europe] Treaty, its threat to target peaceful nations with nuclear weapons, its arms sales to states and

groups that threaten international security, and its persecution and worse of Russian journalists dissidents and others.

The picture emerging from this pattern of behavior is that of a Russia increasingly authoritarian at home and aggressive abroad.

Now, this behavior did not go unnoticed or unchallenged over the last several years. We have tried to address it in the context of efforts to forge a constructive relationship with Russia. But the attack on Georgia has crystallized the course that Russia's leaders are now taking; and it has brought us to a critical moment for Russia and the world—a critical moment, but not a deterministic one.

Russia's leaders are making some unfortunate choices. But they can still make different ones. Russia's future is in Russia's hands. But its choices will be shaped, in part, by the actions of the United States, our friends, and our allies—both in the incentives that we provide and the pressure that we apply.

Now, much has been said recently about how we have come to this point. And some have attempted to shift the responsibility for Russia's recent pattern of behavior onto others. Russia's actions cannot be blamed, for example, on its neighbors like Georgia.

To be sure, Georgia's leaders could have responded better to the events last month in South Ossetia; and it benefits no one to pretend otherwise. We warned our Georgian friends that Russia was baiting them and that taking this bait would only play into Moscow's hands.

But Russia's leaders used this as a pretext to launch what, by all appearances, was a premeditated invasion of its independent neighbor. Indeed, Russia's leaders had laid the groundwork for this scenario months ago—distributing Russian passports to Georgian separatists, training and arming their militias, and then justifying the campaign across Georgia's border as an act of self-defense.

Russia's behavior cannot be blamed either on NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] enlargement. With the end of the Cold War, we and our allies have worked to transform NATO, to bring it from an alliance that manned the ramparts of a divided Europe to a means for nurturing the growth of a Europe whole, free, and at peace and an alliance that confronts the dangers, like terrorism, that also threaten Russia.

We have opened NATO to any sovereign, democratic state in Europe that can meet its standards of membership. We've supported the right of countries emerging from Communism to choose what path of development they pursue and what institutions they wish to join.

And this historic effort has succeeded beyond imagination. Twelve of our 28 neighbor NATO allies are former captive nations. And the promise of membership has been a positive incentive for these states: to build democratic institutions; to reform their economies; and to resolve old disputes, as nations like Poland and Hungary and Romania and Slovakia and Lithuania have done.

Just as importantly, NATO has consistently sought to enlist Russia as a partner in building a peaceful and prosperous Europe. Russia has had a seat at nearly every NATO summit since 2002. So to claim that this alliance is somehow directed against Russia is simply to ignore recent history. In fact, our assumption has always been—and it still is—that Russia's legitimate need for security is best served not by having weak, fractious, and poor states on its borders—but rather peaceful, prosperous, and democratic ones.

It is simply not valid, either, to blame Russia's behavior on the United States—either for being too tough with Russia, or not tough enough, too unaccommodating to Russia's interests, or too naïve about its leaders.

Since the end of the Cold War—spanning three administrations, both Democratic and Republican—the United States has sought to encourage the emergence of a strong, prosperous, and responsible Russia. We have treated Russia not as a vanquished enemy, but as an emerging partner. We have supported—politically and financially—Russia’s transition to a modern, market-based economy and a free, peaceful society. And we have respected Russia as a great power with which to work to solve common problems.

When our interests have diverged, the United States has consulted Russia’s leaders. We’ve searched for common ground. And we have sought, as best we could, to take Russia’s interests and ideas into account. This is how we have approached contentious issues—from Iran, to Kosovo, to missile defense. And I have traveled repeatedly to Russia, the last two times with Defense Secretary Robert Gates, to try to foster cooperation.

Increasingly, Russia’s leaders have simply not reciprocated. And their recent actions are leading some to ask whether we are now engaged in a new Cold War. No, we are not. But it does beg the question: Where did this Russia come from? How did the Russia of the 1990s become the Russia of today?

After all, the 1990s were, in many ways, a period of real hope and promise for Russia. The totalitarian state was dismantled. The scope of liberty for most Russians expanded significantly—in what they could read, in what they could say, in what they could buy and sell, and what associations they could form. New leaders emerged who sought to steer Russia toward political and economic reform at home, toward integration into the global economy, and toward a responsible international role.

All of this is true. But many Russians remember things differently about the 1990s. They remember that decade as a time of license and lawlessness, economic uncertainty, and social chaos—a time when criminals and gangsters and robber barons plundered the Russian state and preyed on the weakest in Russian society—a time when many Russians, not just elites and former apparatchiks, but ordinary men and women, experienced a sense of dishonor and dislocation that we in the West did not fully appreciate.

I remember that Russia because I saw it firsthand. I remember old women selling their life’s belongings along the old Arbat—plates and broken teacups, anything to get by. I remember that Russian soldiers returned home from Eastern Europe and lived in tents because the Russian state was just too weak and too poor to house them properly. I remember talking to my Russian friends—tolerant, open, progressive people—who felt an acute sense of shame during that decade—not at the loss of the Soviet Union, but at the feeling of not recognizing their own country anymore: the Bolshoi theater falling apart, pensioners unable to pay their bills, the Russian Olympic team in 1992 parading into the games under a flag that no one had ever seen, and receiving gold medals to an anthem that no one had ever heard. There was a humiliating sense that nothing Russian was good enough anymore.

This does not excuse Russia’s behavior, but it helps to set a context for it. It helps to explain why many ordinary Russians felt relieved and proud when new leaders emerged at the end of the last decade who sought to reconstitute the Russian state and reassert its power abroad. An imperfect authority was seen as better than no authority at all.

What has become clear is that the legitimate goal of rebuilding the Russian state has taken a dark turn—with the rollback of personal freedoms; the arbitrary enforcement of the law; the pervasive corruption at various levels of Russian society; and the paranoid, aggressive impulse, which has manifested itself before in Russian history, to view the emergence of free and independent democratic neighbors—most recently, during the so-called “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan—not as a source of security, but as a source of threat to Russia’s interests.

Whatever its course, though, Russia today is not the Soviet Union—not in the size of its territory, the reach of its power, the scope of its aims, or the nature of the regime. Russia’s leaders today have no

pretensions to ideological universality, no alternative vision to democratic capitalism, and no ability to construct a parallel system of client states and rival institutions. The bases of Soviet power are gone.

And despite their leaders' authoritarianism, Russians today enjoy more prosperity; more opportunity; and in some sense, more liberty than in either Tsarist or Soviet times. Russians increasingly demand the benefits of global engagement—the jobs and the technology, the travel abroad, the luxury goods, and the long-term mortgages.

With such growing prosperity and opportunity, I cannot imagine that most Russians would ever want to go back to the days, as in Soviet times, when their country and its citizens stood isolated from Western markets and institutions.

This, then, is the deeper tragedy of the choices that Russia's leaders are making. It is not just the pain they inflict on others; but the debilitating costs they impose on Russia itself—the way they are jeopardizing the international credibility that Russian businesses have worked so hard to build, and the way that they are risking the real, and future, progress of the Russian people, who have come so far since Communism.

And for what, Russia's attack on Georgia merely proved what we had already known—that Russia could use its overwhelming military advantage to punish a small neighbor. But Georgia has survived. Its democracy will endure. Its economy will be rebuilt. Its independence will be reinforced. Its military will, in time, be reconstituted. And we look forward to the day when Georgia's territorial integrity will be peacefully restored.

Russia's invasion of Georgia has achieved—and will achieve—no enduring strategic objective. And our strategic goal now is to make clear to Russia's leaders that their choices could put Russia on a one-way path to self-imposed isolation and international irrelevance.

Accomplishing this goal will require the resolve and the unity of responsible countries—most importantly, the United States and our European allies. We cannot afford to validate the prejudices that some Russian leaders seem to have: that if you press free nations hard enough—if you bully them and you threaten them and you lash out—they will cave in, and they'll forget, and eventually they will concede.

The United States and Europe must stand up to this kind of behavior and to all who champion it. For our sake—and for the sake of Russia's people, who deserve a better relationship with the rest of the world—the United States and Europe must not allow Russia's aggression to achieve any benefit, not in Georgia, not anywhere.

We and our European allies are, therefore, acting as one in supporting Georgia. President Sarkozy, with whom we have worked very closely, is especially to be commended for his leadership on this front. The transatlantic alliance is united. Just this week, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer led all 26 of our alliance's ambassadors on a mission to Tbilisi to demonstrate our unwavering support for the Georgian people. The door to a Euro-Atlantic future remains wide open to Georgia, and our alliance will continue to work through the new NATO-Georgia Commission to make that future a reality.

We and our European allies will also continue to lead the international effort to help Georgia rebuild—an effort that has already made remarkable headway. The United States has put forward a \$1 billion economic support package for Georgia. The EU has pledged 500 million Euros, and it is preparing to deploy a large mission of civilian observers and monitors to Georgia.

In addition, with U.S. and European support, G-7 [Group of Seven, finance ministers from seven industrialized nations] foreign ministers have condemned Russia's actions and pledged to support Georgia's reconstruction. The Asian Development Bank has committed \$40 million in loans to Georgia. The IMF

[International Monetary Fund] has approved a \$750 million stand-by credit facility. And the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] is making plans for expanded observers, though Moscow is still blocking this.

Conversely, Russia has found little support for its actions. A pat on the back from Daniel Ortega and Hamas is not a diplomatic triumph.

At the same time, the United States and Europe are continuing to support—unequivocally—the independence and territorial integrity of Russia’s neighbors. We will resist any Russian attempt to consign sovereign nations and free peoples to some archaic “sphere of influence.”

The United States and Europe are solidifying our ties with those neighbors. We are working as a wider group, including with our friends in Finland and Sweden, who have been indispensable partners throughout this recent crisis. We are backing worthy initiatives, like Norway’s High North policy. We are working to resolve other regional disputes, such as Nagorno-Karabakh, and to build with friends and allies like Turkey a foundation for cooperation in the Caucasus. And we will not allow Russia to wield a veto over the future of the Euro-Atlantic community—neither what states are offered membership, nor the choice of states that accept it. We have made this particularly clear to our friends in Ukraine.

The United States and Europe are deepening our cooperation in pursuit of greater energy [independence]—working with Azerbaijan and Georgia and Turkey and the Caspian countries. We will expand and defend open global energy in the economy from abusive practices. There cannot be one set of rules for Russia, Inc.—and another for everyone else.

Finally, the United States and Europe, as well as our many friends and allies worldwide, will not allow Russia’s leaders to have it both ways—drawing benefits from international norms and markets and institutions, while challenging their very foundation. There is no third way. A 19th century Russia and a 21st century Russia cannot operate in the world side by side.

To reach its full potential, though, Russia needs to be fully integrated into the international political and economic order. But Russia is in the precarious position today of being half in and half out. If Russia ever wants to be more than just an energy supplier, its leaders have to recognize a hard truth: Russia depends on the world for its success; and it cannot change that.

Already, Russia’s leaders are seeing a glimpse of what the future might look like if they persist with their aggressive behavior. In contrast to Georgia’s position, Russia’s international standing is worse than at any time since 1991. And the cost of this self-inflicted isolation has been steep.

Russia’s civil nuclear cooperation with the United States is not going anywhere now. Russia’s leaders are imposing pain on their nation’s economy. Russia’s bid to join the World Trade Organization is now in jeopardy, and so too is its attempt to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

But perhaps the worst fallout for Moscow is that its behavior has fundamentally called into question whose vision of Russia is really guiding that country. There was a time recently when the new President of Russia laid out a positive and forward-looking vision of his nation’s future.

This was a vision that took into account Russia’s vulnerabilities: its declining population and heartbreaking health problems; its failure thus far to achieve a high-tech, diversified economy like those to Russia’s west and increasingly to Russia’s east; and the disparity between people’s quality of life in Moscow and St. Petersburg and in a few other cities, and those in Russia’s countryside.

This was a vision that called for strengthening the rule of law and rooting out corruption and investing

in Russia's people and creating opportunities not just for an elite few, but for all Russian citizens to share in prosperity.

This was a vision that rested on what President Medvedev referred to as the "Four I's": Investment, Innovation, Institutional Reform, and Infrastructure Improvements to expand Russia's economy. And this was a vision that recognized that Russia cannot afford a relationship with the world that is based on antagonism and alienation.

This is especially true in today's world, which increasingly is not organized around polarity—"multi-", "uni-", and certainly not "bi-". In this world, there is an imperative for nations to build a network of strong and unique ties to many influential states.

And that is a far different context than much of the last century, when U.S. foreign policy was, frankly, hostage to our relationship with the Soviet Union. We viewed everything through that lens, including our relations with other countries. We were locked in a zero-sum, ideological conflict. Every state was to choose sides, and that reduced our options.

Well, thankfully, that world is also gone forever; and it's not coming back. As a result, the United States is liberated to pursue a multidimensional foreign policy. And that is what we are doing.

We are charting a forward-looking agenda with fellow multiethnic democracies like Brazil and India and with emerging powers like China and Vietnam—relationships that were once colored by Cold War rivalry.

We are transforming our alliances with Asia—in Asia with Japan and South Korea, Australia and the Philippines, [and] with other countries of the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations]—and expanding them for platforms for our common defense as catalysts for fostering regional security, advancing trade, promoting freedom, and building a dynamic Asia-Pacific region.

We are rebuilding relations with countries like Libya, whose leaders are making responsible choices to rejoin the international order.

We are deepening partnerships, rooted in shared principles, with nations across Africa to support the new African agenda for success in the 21st century. We've quadrupled foreign assistance to promote just governance, investment in people, fighting disease and corruption, and driving development through economic freedom.

We are moving beyond 60 years of policy in the broader Middle East which, during the Cold War, led successive administrations to support stability at the price of liberty, ultimately achieving neither.

And we are charting a hopeful future with our friends and allies in the Americas—from whom we were, at times, deeply estranged during the Cold War. Here, we have doubled foreign assistance. And now, we are pursuing a common hemispheric vision of democratic development, personal security, and social justice.

Anachronistic Russian displays of military power will not turn back this tide of history. Russia is free to determine its relations with sovereign countries. And they are free to determine their relationships with Russia—including in the Western hemisphere.

But we are confident that our ties with our neighbors—who long for better education and better health care and better jobs and better housing—will in no way be diminished by a few, aging Blackjack bombers visiting one of Latin America's few autocracies, which is itself being left behind by an increasingly peaceful and prosperous and democratic hemisphere.

Our world today is full of historic opportunities for progress, as well as challenges to it—from terrorism and proliferation to climate change and rising commodity prices. The United States has an interest in building partnerships to resolve these and other challenges. And so does Russia.

The United States and Russia share an interest in fighting terrorism and violent extremism. We and Russia share an interest in denuclearizing the Korean peninsula and stopping Iran's rulers from acquiring the world's deadliest weapons. We and Russia share an interest in a secure Middle East where there is peace between Israelis and Palestinians. And we and Russia share an interest in preventing the Security Council from reverting to the gridlocked institution that it was during the Cold War.

The United States and Russia shared all of these interests on August 7th. And we share them still today on September 18. The Sochi Declaration, signed earlier this year, provided a strategic framework for the United States and Russia to advance our many shared interests.

We will continue, by necessity, to pursue our areas of common concern with Russia. But it would be a real shame if our relationship were never anything more than that—for the best and deepest relationships among states are those that share not only interest, but goals and aspirations and values and dreams.

Whatever the differences between our governments, we will not let them obstruct a deepening relationship between the American and Russian people.

So we will continue to sponsor Russian students and teachers and judges and journalists, labor leaders and democratic reformers who want to visit America. We will continue to support Russia's fight against HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis. And we will continue to support all Russians who want a future of liberty for their great nation.

I sincerely hope that the next President and the next Secretary of State will visit Russia and will take time to speak with Russian civil society and will give interviews to Russia's diminished but still enduring independent media, just as President Bush and I have done.

The United States and our friends and allies, in Europe but also in the Americas and Asia and Africa and the Middle East, are confident in our vision for the world in this young century; and we are moving forward. It is a world in which great power is defined not by spheres of influence or zero-sum competition or the strong imposing their will on the weak—but by open competition in global markets, trade and development, the independence of nations, respect for human rights, governance by the rule of law, and the defense of freedom.

This vision of the world is not without its problems, or its setbacks, or even its significant crises—as we have seen in recent days. But it is this open, interdependent world, more than any other in history, that offers all human beings a greater opportunity for lives of peace, prosperity, and dignity.

Whether Russia's leaders overcome their nostalgia for another time and reconcile themselves to the sources of power and the exercise of power in the 21st century still remains to be seen. The decision is clearly Russia's—and Russia's alone. And we must all hope, for the good of the Russian people and for the sake of us all, that Russia's leaders make better and right choices.