

Combatting Cold War Tendencies and Rebuilding U.S.-Russian Relations

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Introduction

*It is borne in upon me by several recent events... that try as I may, try as many others may, you will never succeed in establishing in American opinion a balanced & sensible view of Russia.*²

George F. Kennan, writing at the end of 1946, predicted that negative perceptions of Russia would last long past the point of their relevance. Now, thirty years later, we see the unfortunate consequence of policymakers unthinkingly recapitulating Cold War tropes: a relationship with Russia which is strained to the point of snapping. True, the antagonism between Russia and the United States has deep historical roots, but its persistence belies deeper issues of political psychology and changing definitions of national interest and foreign policy priorities. This becomes evident through an examination of cooperative and hostile periods in the U.S.-Russian relationship.

The demonization of Russia as, at worst, evil, or at best, a pitiable, backward nation, began in earnest during the fierce ideological competition of the Cold War, though differences between the two nations had been building in the decades prior. In addition to being institutionalized in policy, Russophobia has seeped into popular culture and has remained there, virtually unquestioned, ever since. To be sure, the Russian government is propagating a steady stream of anti-American propaganda as well, and though neither side bears complete responsibility for the deterioration in relations, the United States would be wise to rethink its approach to Russia and analyze the extent to which our own behavior has driven Russia's decision-making. This will require delving into the Russian mindset in an attempt to understand

² George F. Kennan, *The Kennan Diaries*, ed. Frank Costigliola (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014), 576-7.

its motivations and interests; it will also require admitting past mistakes to ourselves—a tall order for a global superpower used to being on the “right” side of history.

Repairing relations with Russia does not mean cultivating an alliance or even a friendship. It means recognizing Russia as a serious international player and seeking to cooperate with Russia in areas of importance to the United States, such as non-proliferation, energy, and combatting terrorism. Past cooperation has shown that this is possible, as long as we recognize that we cannot mold Russia into our own image and that we will continue to disagree on certain fundamental issues. Our national interest is not served by continuing in the current trajectory of our relations; rather, a need to constantly monitor the volatile relationship drains resources that could be better spent in earnest pursuit of U.S. interests.

What Went Wrong?

The U.S.-Russian relationship has not always been so tense and dismissive, despite recent occurrences. Historical context, as well as the way the two countries approach foreign policy, serves as a useful explanation for the fluctuations of the U.S.-Russian relationship. The Revolutionary War became the first point of commonality for Russia and the American colonies. Russia, nervous about the expansion of the British Empire but not officially in conflict with them, was seen by the United States as a potential friend, as both were concerned about British naval dominance. In 1780, Francis Dana was appointed as minister to Russia and was sent there to speak to Catherine the Great about supporting the American cause, cooperating in commerce, and sharing intelligence. Catherine’s disinclination to provoke Britain, among other concerns,

prevented the meeting, and it was not until 1809, under President James Madison, that formal diplomatic relations were established, though the two countries remained friendly in the interim.³

John Quincy Adams, the first American ambassador to Russia, formed a strong relationship with Tsar Alexander I; both countries had an interest in preserving the freedom of the seas. Even as Russia increasingly came to represent the old ways of monarchic rule which were at odds with American ideology, the countries were able to resolve disputes civilly.⁴ During the American Civil War, Tsar Alexander II refused to recognize the Confederate government, unlike Britain and France. Further cooperation was cemented with the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867—a move beneficial to both an overextended Russia and a United States seeking to expand and explore prospects for trade with Asia.⁵

Despite the occasional grievance and the two countries' differing political systems, Russia and the United States had a productive relationship throughout most of the nineteenth century. Charles E. Ziegler attributes this success to a lack of public engagement, buoyed by “the limited forms of political communication in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the ability to conduct diplomacy in secrecy, and fewer opportunities for elites to mobilize public opinion.”⁶ In the late nineteenth century, when American public opinion became more relevant and news about international affairs more readily available, American sentiment toward Russia soured as the public learned about Russian labor camps and anti-Semitic pogroms. Ziegler also suggests that around this time, American foreign policy began to shift away from realism, instead embracing elements of “moral self-righteousness.”⁷ This shift would begin to

³ Charles E. Ziegler, “Russian-American Relations: From Tsarism to Putin,” *International Politics* 51, no. 6 (2014): 676-7, doi: 10.1057/ip.2014.32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 679-80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 683-84.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 686.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 685.

make way for the paradigms which guided American policy toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Indeed, the establishment of the Soviet Union, with a *raison d'être* antithetical to that of the United States, further widened the rift between the two countries, particularly after WWII, when the necessity of close cooperation against a greater enemy was no longer relevant. There were periods of reconciliation, at least rhetorically, during the Cold War—the most notable being the period of *détente* during the presidencies of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. John Lewis Gaddis argues that *détente* was not an attempt to end the Cold War, but rather to maintain stability and a fragile peace brought about by mutual agreements, including

avoiding direct military clashes, respecting existing spheres of influence, tolerating physical anomalies like the Berlin Wall and mental anomalies like the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction, refraining from efforts to discredit or undermine leaders on each side, and even a mutual willingness... to allow spying as long as it took place hundreds of miles above the earth.⁸

Though tensions between the two nations remained high, a few significant arms control measures were negotiated during the period of *détente*. Even before Nixon's presidency, the necessity of cooperation was made salient by the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, after which the "hotline" between the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union was established in hopes of staving off another nuclear scare of similar magnitude. Building upon previous international agreements, including the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty and the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) were signed by Nixon and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev in 1972. These accords represented the essence of *détente*—that is,

⁸ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 198.

an acknowledgment of Mutual Assured Destruction and a freeze of the existing nuclear order. Though SALT I was a notable accomplishment, it did not reduce arms and froze in place existing weapons imbalances. This was unsatisfactory to the U.S. Congress, however, which passed a resolution that any later arms treaties must provide for “numerical equality” of specific weapons.⁹ Talks on a more equitable SALT II began in 1972, but had been abandoned by the beginning of the Reagan administration. 1972 did, however, see the signing of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which was unlike any previous treaties in that it banned long-range missile defense systems. John Lewis Gaddis notes that this treaty was significant as the first formal recognition of the power of MAD to stabilize Soviet-American relations.¹⁰

But despite seemingly productive arms agreements, détente had an important sticking point: human rights. The 1975 Helsinki Accords, though not legally binding, established international human rights parameters. Brezhnev received Western acceptance of Eastern European boundaries as they stood, and was then in turn expected to adhere to the other standards laid out in the Helsinki Accords. If nothing else, the Accords gave hope to dissidents in the Soviet sphere who felt that they had a precedent on which to base their claims for justice, perhaps planting some of the first seeds of independence movements.¹¹ 1975 also saw the unanimous passage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment in the U.S. Congress, another way of holding the Soviet Union accountable for human rights violations. Jackson-Vanik placed pressure on the Soviet Union by denying it Most Favored Nation trade status if it refused to allow emigration—notably in the case of dissidents and those seeking to emigrate on religious grounds, many of them Jews.¹² The amendment would set a long-standing precedent for the use

⁹ Ibid., 200.

¹⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹¹ Ibid., 190-91.

¹² Ibid., 182-84.

of sanctions against Russia, which continue, albeit in different incarnations and for different reasons, to this day.

Détente, while it lasted, succeeded if indeed its goal was to prevent an all-out war between the two superpowers; it also proved that diametrically opposed foes could come together to negotiate on issues of mutual importance. But long-term, détente ultimately failed to improve relations; it perpetuated the stagnant Cold War relationship until a breaking point: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Reagan administration did not try to revive détente—as Gaddis points out, Reagan believed that “because détente perpetuated—and had been meant to perpetuate—the Cold War, only killing détente could end the Cold War.”¹³ Indeed, Reagan nearly doubled U.S. military spending in five years, and his Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) “challenged the argument that vulnerability could provide security.”¹⁴ In fact, both Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, though butting heads over SDI in their October 1986 negotiations in Reykjavik, shared a desire to eventually rid the world of nuclear weapons.

The relationship between Reagan and Gorbachev is illustrative of the increasing significance of personal relations between U.S. and Russian leaders in shaping the relations of their countries as a whole. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin built a personal rapport which encouraged friendly relations between the two nations. Of course, the power dynamics between the United States and Russia had changed—no longer ideological enemies, the United States saw a newly-independent Russia as an opportunity to bring democracy and hopefully stability to the region. Support for Russia came in the form of humanitarian aid, loans and Western economic counseling, and the promotion of democratic civil

¹³ Ibid., 217.

¹⁴ Ibid., 226.

society with the aid of Western NGOs.¹⁵ It is important to note that Russian and American perceptions of the 1990s were not equivalent; Americans tended to view the period in Russia positively, while Russians remember a time of instability and economic uncertainty. Because the West, and particularly the United States, was so involved in Russia's transition, this instability was attributed in part to Western economic and political pressure, which soured Russian perceptions of the West and democracy. No longer considered a great power by the West, Russian expectations were dashed when they realized their global influence would be marginalized,¹⁶ as Dmitri Trenin puts it, by "association rather than integration."¹⁷ This bitterness still resonates today as Russia determines to reassert itself on the world stage.

The post-Soviet honeymoon was short: various issues began to divide the United States and Russia as the 1990s wore on—the expansion of NATO to countries on Russia's periphery and subsequent NATO involvement in Yugoslavia and Kosovo, U.S. opposition to Russian intentions to pursue closer ties with Iran and China, American criticism of the first and second Chechen War, and Russian criticism of the bombing of Serbia by NATO.¹⁸ Even so, U.S.-Russian relations in the 1990s were generally productive, and the decade brought with it significant progress in arms control—in 1994, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine agreed to abide by the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) and the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) agreement, and worked to transfer weapons from these post-Soviet states to Russia, which would cooperate with the United States to reduce these arsenals.

¹⁵ Dmitri V. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 86-7.

¹⁶ Roger E. Kanet, "From Cooperation to Confrontation: Russia and the United States since 9/11," Research of the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, May 2009, 1,

<http://acdis.illinois.edu/assets/docs/434/FromCooperationtoConfrontationRussiaandtheUnitedStatesince911.pdf>

¹⁷ Dmitri V. Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 89.

¹⁸ Roger E. Kanet, "From Cooperation to Confrontation," 6.

As Paul Starobin aptly notes, “It’s always easier to be kind to the feeble: Russians were said to recover their humanity and decency precisely when their national power was at a historic ebb.”¹⁹ Indeed, as Russia increased in power under Putin and increasingly distanced itself from the Western way of doing things, the U.S.-Russian relationship began to deteriorate once more. Despite initial positive personal relations between President George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin and fruitful post-9/11 anti-terror cooperation, American involvement in Iraq highlighted the differing worldviews of Russia and the United States as regards international involvement:

two issues became particularly contentious: the use of military force to effect regime change and the legitimacy of undertaking military intervention without United Nations sanction... Moscow insisted on the principle of sovereignty and non-intervention in other countries’ internal affairs, while Washington justified the use of military force to unseat a regime that it viewed as a threat to world security. The core of these divergences involved the issue of regime change in the greater Middle East and, by implication, elsewhere.²⁰

Iraq, a reminder to Russia of the United States’ capacity for meddling in the internal affairs of other nations, was only the starting point for the post-9/11 wave of increased tensions. Russia was further antagonized by a burst of NATO expansion right up to its borders, beginning in 2002 with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania and continuing in 2004 with Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.²¹ The 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004-05 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, in which leaders were overthrown by citizens in protest of unfair elections, also stoked Russian fears that such

¹⁹ Paul Starobin, “The Eternal Collapse of Russia,” *The National Interest*, no. 133 (2014): 24.

²⁰ Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014), 82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

uprisings could occur in their own country; a common and still well-circulated theory is that these color revolutions were orchestrated by the United States in an attempt to constrain Russia's sphere of influence. On the American side of the post-9/11 years, policymakers were beginning to express concern about internal developments in Russia, particularly in the case of human rights and treatment of dissidents. Angela Stent notes that the latter half of the Bush administration saw foreign policy pragmatists overcome by those who privileged moral concerns as the driving factor for interactions with Russia.²²

By 2007, it had become clear that any improved relations with Russia after 9/11 had been lost. Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference was a vituperative critique of U.S. hegemony and interference in the affairs of other nations. Riding high on a wave of oil revenues and increasing in strength, Putin's speech was a reminder to the world that Russia would not unthinkingly accept the United States' role in the world.²³ Confrontation with NATO over the future of Kosovo in 2008 contributed to deteriorating relations, but perhaps the severest blow was the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. When the unabashedly pro-Western Mikheil Saakashvili became president of Georgia after the Rose Revolution, with the goal of NATO and EU membership and reintegration of the breakaway territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, he was largely embraced by U.S. leadership. Russia was rankled by this, and compounding their dismay was the presence of U.S. troops training Georgian troops for combat alongside them in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁴ Both Georgia and Russia escalated tensions by increasing military buildups, and on August 7, violence broke out as Georgia attacked Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, killing some Russian peacekeepers and Ossetes. Russia responded by entering

²² Ibid., 137.

²³ Ibid., 147-9.

²⁴ Ibid., 168-9.

Georgia, despite the presence of U.S. troops there. There is still a dispute about responsibility for the war, though as Stent notes, the immediate Russian and U.S. responses were rather one-sided:

U.S. media in the days and weeks following the war were almost uniformly hostile to Russia... After a few months, the narrative began to shift in the West, and a more critical view of Georgia's role in the conflict emerged... the Russian media from the beginning was uniformly hostile to both Georgia and the United States. Both Putin and Medvedev insinuated that Washington had planned and orchestrated the war.²⁵

The aftermath of the war was the death knell for U.S.-Russian relations until the Obama administration's "reset."

The presidency of Dmitri Medvedev opened the lines of constructive communication once again between Russia and the United States. Perhaps because political circumstances had changed on both ends, Washington showed a willingness to engage Moscow in various areas, and it was clear that Obama and Medvedev cultivated a much better personal relationship than would Obama and Putin. Stent attributes this thaw in part to a willingness on the part of the United States to keep quiet about Russia's domestic politics, especially since Medvedev himself was open about issues plaguing Russia, such as corruption.²⁶ The reset began in part with a fruitful cooperation between the two countries on Afghanistan—a 2009 agreement provided for transport of U.S. goods through Russia to Afghanistan, as well as joint anti-heroin trade cooperation. Obama and Medvedev also negotiated the New START treaty, which set limits for deployed missiles and bombers, deployed warheads, and deployed and non-deployed launchers.

²⁵ Ibid., 174.

²⁶ Ibid., 218, 221.

2009 also saw the creation of the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission, with numerous working groups headed by American cabinet members and advisors and their Russian counterparts. Certain groups were more effective than others—for instance energy, education, and cultural/youth exchanges. Angela Stent focuses, however, on the process as the most important element of the Commission:

Even if measurable outcomes were elusive.... Given the limited number of venues for U.S.-Russian interaction and the continuing mutual suspicion on both sides, an ongoing endeavor that involved hundreds of people could one day become the nucleus of a broader platform for something more extensive.²⁷

The widespread protests spurred by the 2011 legislative elections and 2012 re-election of Putin brought an element of suspicion into U.S.-Russian relations, as Putin openly blamed the West for stirring up Russian opposition. In response, the Russian government enacted broad foreign agent laws meant to single out and diminish the influence of NGOs receiving foreign funding, as well as limiting some internet freedoms. Some American programs, such as USAID, were banished from Russia.²⁸ The United States was once again publicly taking issue with Russian internal politics—particularly in the case of human rights. Though Jackson-Vanik was repealed in 2012, it was replaced by the Sergei Magnitsky Accountability and Rule of Law Act, which penalized Russian officials with connections to human rights violations. The Russian Duma responded with the Dima Yakovlev Law, which placed a ban on American adoptions of Russian children.²⁹

Today's relationship is most tainted by Russian involvement in Ukraine and Syria. Russia's occupation and subsequent annexation of the Crimean peninsula provoked Western

²⁷ Ibid., 244.

²⁸ Ibid., 245, 253.

²⁹ Ibid., 252.

outrage. The United States also quickly condemned Russian support for Eastern Ukrainian separatists. When Russia began military involvement in Syria in September 2015 at the request of the Assad regime, the United States lambasted Russian strategy and refused cooperation with the Russian military. Both instances were a significant reminder to the West—whether intentional or not—that Russia had become willing to take decisive action through active hard power intervention. These two events further inflamed American fears of a bold, resurgent Russia challenging the world order, and contributed heavily to today’s strained relationship.

Anti-Russian Rhetoric and Attitudes

Russian stereotypes permeate multiple layers of American society, from journalism to late-night TV. For an example of the latter, Olya Povlatsky (played by Kate McKinnon), a recurring character on *Saturday Night Live*’s “Weekend Update,” presents the quintessential Russian stereotype: a frumpy, headscarf-wearing woman with a thick accent who hopes fervently that someone or something will kill her and end her misery. “Like all Russians, Colin,” she addresses the host in one segment, “I have been planning my funeral since I was a little girl.”³⁰ A recurring gag centers around Olya complaining about her miserable life, with the host returning with “Russia can’t be *that* bad...” only to be regaled with an even more terrible story.³¹

Typically, Olya is called in to comment on a current Russia-related news item, from fighting in Ukraine to the late 2015 doping scandal. Her comments range from personal matters (most of them tragedies—her favorite pick-up line is “Did you fall from heaven? If so, *please*

³⁰ *Saturday Night Live*, “Weekend Update: Olya Povlatsky on the Russian Economy,” NBC video, 3:30, March 28, 2015, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-olya-povlatsky-on-the-russian-economy/2855730>

³¹ E.g., *Saturday Night Live*, “Weekend Update: Olya Povlatsky on the Sochi Olympics,” NBC video, 4:08, January 25, 2014, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-olya-povlatsky/n45573>

tell me my babies are up there!”³²) to political commentary (“Who wants to trade with Russia? Our only exports are homophobia and snow!”³³) Of course, stereotypes make for good comedy because there is often a nugget of truth in them. But it is hard not to argue that Olya is an embodiment, though fictional, of popular perception of Russia—certainly not a positive one.

Actual Russians received a similarly disparaging treatment at the hands of Jason Jones of *The Daily Show with John Stewart*. In a series of segments aired during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, comedian Jason Jones traveled to Moscow (“Sochi-ish”) in an effort to explore real Russian life. Similar to Jones’ 2009 “Behind the Veil” series about Iran, Jones spends his time talking to both average Russians and significant political figures, including opposition leaders. But though the premises of the Iran and Russia series are similar, they have very different tones. Jones sets off to Iran while assuming the character of a man who believes firmly that Iran is a disaster and an evil country full of isolated people hostile to America and American values. His character finds that, despite his original mistrust and suspicion, the Iranians he meets are remarkably sympathetic, hospitable, and knowledgeable, and are more than willing to denounce any kind of radicalism. The series ends with video of the 2009 Iranian presidential election protests, as Jones solemnly intones:

I know that somewhere in that sea of faces are the same people I had met. People who were gracious enough to take me into their homes and schools and coffee shops. People who indulged my asinine questions. People I hope will be safe,

³² *Saturday Night Live*, “Weekend Update: Olya Povlatsky,” NBC video, 3:50, November 14, 2015, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-olya-povlatsky-on-russias-track-team/2937466>

³³ *Saturday Night Live*, “Weekend Update: Olya Povlatsky on Ukraine Attacking Russia,” NBC video, 4:09, May 3, 2014, <https://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/weekend-update-olya-povlatsky-on-ukraine/2779225>

and not be harmed or arrested for the simple act of wearing green and wanting a voice.³⁴

No such kind words were set aside for Russia, despite initial hopeful aspirations. After speaking with—and in some cases openly mocking—Sergey Markov, a Russian professor within the Kremlin’s circle of influence, about his views on homosexuality, Jones takes to the streets of Moscow to hear the more enlightened views of the average Russian. He is dismayed to find that even among various age groups, they have the same sentiments as Markov, and express support for Russia’s 2013 law prohibiting the distribution of homosexual propaganda to minors. “God, this country was stuck in the dark ages!” Jones bemoans.³⁵ He does manage to find a few souls in Moscow with whom he can have an intelligent conversation, including a lone rainbow flag-wielding protestor and a group of gay (and yet, to Jones’ surprise, confoundingly patriotic) Russians. But Jones makes it clear that these people are outliers in a sea of “backward thinking.”³⁶ The series is full of painfully culturally inconsiderate moments like these, such as calling a devout Orthodox businessman “the costumed mascot for this right-wing wonderland” in a voiceover.³⁷ Unlike his treatment of Iran, viewers come away with stereotypes about Russia largely confirmed: “Russians are bonkers. They do crazy shit.”³⁸ It is telling that Jones never asks any Iranians about their attitudes toward sexuality or religion and never mocks their culture

³⁴ *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, “Jason Jones: Behind the Veil- The Kids are Allah Right,” Comedy Central video, 5:47, June 25, 2009, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/eqvniu/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-jason-jones--behind-the-veil---the-kids-are-allah-right>

³⁵ *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, “Jason Jones Live from Sochi-ish- Behind the Iron Closet,” Comedy Central video, 6:39, February 12, 2014, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/wxwuti/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-jason-jones-live-from-sochi-ish---behind-the-iron-closet>

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, “Jason Jones Live from Sochi-ish- Better Off Red,” Comedy Central video, 5:17, February 19, 2014, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/4xigsc/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-jason-jones-live-from-sochi-ish---better-off-red>

³⁸ *The Daily Show with John Stewart*, “Jason Jones Live from Sochi-ish- No Safety Nyet,” Comedy Central video, 6:06, February 24, 2014, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/30gza6/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-jason-jones-live-from-sochi-ish---no-safety-nyet>

(except in jest when he is in character). It would be too politically incorrect. It wouldn't fit his narrative.

Russia is also an easy target in American news media. A notable recent example was the coverage of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Julia Ioffe, a Russian-American journalist, frequent Putin critic, and self-proclaimed "fine practitioner of mocking Russian ridiculousness,"³⁹ drew attention to the glaring disparities between media treatment of Russia and other host nations. There was plenty of evidence that Sochi was not totally prepared for the Olympics: tweeted photos of unfinished hotel rooms, brown water coming out of faucets, etc. But the coverage of these foibles was almost gleeful in the Western media, according to Ioffe:

There's a fine line between fair criticism and schadenfreude, and the Western press has been largely well on the side of the latter... there's something chauvinistic, even Russophobic in it. The Europeans may not be ready for their Olympics, but, okay, we'll give them the benefit of the doubt and hope for the best. The Chinese prepare for theirs ruthlessly, but we don't understand them so whatever. We railed on Romney for daring to criticize the preparedness of our British friends, and we wrote in muted tones about Athens not being ready in time for their Olympics, but with the Russians, we gloat: Look at these stupid savages, they can't do anything right.⁴⁰

Indeed, news outlets ranging from *The Washington Post* and *The Week* to the Heritage Foundation's *Daily Signal* used Sochi as an example of Russian corruption and incompetence. Indeed, there were plenty of things that went wrong in Sochi, corruption included. But according

³⁹ Julia Ioffe, "Russians Think We're Engaging in Olympic Schadenfreude. They're Right," *New Republic*, February 6, 2014, <https://newrepublic.com/article/116507/russians-hit-back-west-cool-it-olympic-schadenfreude>

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

to David Wallechinsky, president of the International Society of Olympic Historians during the 2014 Winter Olympics, the sorts of problems encountered in Sochi were not uncommon in previous Olympic Games, yet were not so widely publicized (@SochiProblems on Twitter amassed more followers than the official Sochi Olympics account.)⁴¹ Julia Ioffe's accusation of schadenfreude does not seem altogether baseless.

As would be expected from these examples, average Americans tend to view Russia in a negative light. 67 percent of Americans surveyed expressed either a "very" or "somewhat" unfavorable opinion of Russia, according to an August 2015 Pew Global survey; 22% rated their opinion of Russia as "very" or "somewhat" favorable. Unfavorable attitudes were highest in the spring of 2014, likely due to the Ukraine crisis.⁴² In an open-ended Gallup poll in February 2015 in which participants were asked "What one country anywhere in the world do you consider to be the United States' greatest enemy today?" 18% of respondents named Russia, making Russia the number one answer, surpassing North Korea, China, and Iran.⁴³ In the 2016 iteration of the survey, Russia was the second most frequent response, with 15%, only one percentage point behind North Korea.⁴⁴ Overall, Gallup found that there was an improvement in American perceptions of Russia from 2015 to 2016, from its lowest point at 24% favorability to 30% favorability, but the totals are still low, considering the highest rating in recent history was 66%

⁴¹ Mark Sappenfield, "Are problems at Sochi Olympics being blown out of proportion?" *Christian Science Monitor*, February 8, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Olympics/2014/0208/Are-problems-at-Sochi-Olympics-being-blown-out-of-proportion-video>

⁴² Pew Research Center, "Russia, Putin Held in Low Regard around the World," August 5, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/08/Pew-Research-Center-Russia-Image-Report-FINAL-August-5-2015.pdf>

⁴³ Gallup, "Americans Increasingly See Russia as Threat, Top U.S. Enemy," February 16, 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181568/americans-increasingly-russia-threat-top-enemy.aspx>

⁴⁴ Gallup, "Four Nations Top U.S.'s Greatest Enemy List," February 22, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/189503/four-nations-top-greatest-enemy-list.aspx>

in 2002.⁴⁵ One possible explanation for this spike is sympathy and solidarity with the United States after the 9/11 attacks from a country which had also experienced terrorism.

When divided by age group, the picture changes slightly, and the results have important implications for the future of U.S.-Russian relations. Only 21% of Americans aged 55 and older had a favorable opinion of Russia, with 30% of 35- to 54-year-olds and 43% of 18- to 25-year-olds expressing favorability. With one small exception, this age-related discrepancy has replicated itself for four consecutive years.⁴⁶ It would appear that personal experience with the Cold War plays a role in perceptions of Russia—18- to 34-year-olds would either have been born after the fall of the Soviet Union or were too young to remember any antagonism between the two nations. Another possible explanation for the age discrepancy arises when one considers the significance of Russia today. The suspicion toward Russia prevalent in older Americans may reflect the fact that the Soviet Union was a relentless presence in world affairs, whereas today's younger Americans are not exposed to constant news about Russia in the same way as their parents and grandparents. Another interesting finding is the consistency of views across the political spectrum. Favorability ratings among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents over four years show no real consistent pattern, other than three out of four most negative evaluations came from Republicans, and even then not by huge margins.⁴⁷ In a time of extreme polarization in American politics, cross-party attitudes are remarkably similar—and remarkably negative.

As we have seen, age plays more of a role than political affiliation—an unfavorable disposition toward Russia seems to be inbred—the millennial generation, by virtue of being born later, has been to some extent vaccinated against it, though tension over Ukraine may change

⁴⁵ Gallup, "Americans See Russia Less Negatively, as Less of a Threat," February 18, 2016, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/189284/americans-russia-less-negatively-less-threat.aspx>

⁴⁶ Gallup, "Americans See Russia Less Negatively, as Less of a Threat"

⁴⁷ Gallup, "Americans See Russia Less Negatively, as Less of a Threat"

these opinions over the long term. It is fair to assume that most people in political office or involved in policymaking are over age 35, which may explain some of the persistence of Russophobic attitudes. Other explanations are more deeply psychological and cultural, and have strong roots in the Cold War mindset.

Psychology and Policy

Various scholars and commentators have pondered the reasons for the seemingly intractable feud between the United States and Russia. Andrei Tsygankov has attributed it to a hegemonic struggle for resources and influence.⁴⁸ Anatol Lieven has theorized that the assumptions under which U.S. foreign policy is conducted play a role, including assumptions—sources of irritation to the rest of the world—that “America is not only wise but also objective, at least in its perceptions: that U.S. policy is influenced by values, but never by national prejudices.”⁴⁹ Part of the antagonism could be traced to a view of Russia as a cultural threat, as Paul Starobin suggests, building on a history of “long-standing anxieties about despotic Russia as a kind of repository of the primitive in the human condition—dangerously and infuriatingly resistant to higher and hard-won European values.”⁵⁰ Russia may be Western in some respects, but not enough to feel like a comforting presence—there is a nagging sense that something is off, and this creates frustration.

Political psychologists have been studying the U.S.-Russian relationship since the Soviet era. Attribution theory has played an important role in the discussion, most notably the

⁴⁸ Andrei Tsygankov, “The Russophobia Card,” Atlantic Community, May 19, 2008, http://www.atlantic-community.org/index.php/Open_Think_Tank_Article/The_Russophobia_Card

⁴⁹ Anatol Lieven, “Against Russophobia,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 1, 2001, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2001/01/01/against-russophobia/iv7>

⁵⁰ Paul Starobin, “The Eternal Collapse of Russia,” *The National Interest*, no. 133 (2014): 22.

fundamental attribution error—an opponent’s troubling behavior is attributed to their character, the fundamental elements of who they are, not as a natural, logical reaction to their environment or a pursuit of their national interest. In contrast, when an enemy behaves in an unexpected, positive way, the opposite is true—the behavior is explained away, interpreted as a fluke. In that vein, we tend to attribute our positive behaviors to our positive character, and our negative behaviors to the necessity of circumstance. In short, we apply different standards to others than we do to ourselves.

Attribution errors and similar biases occur in both the personal and political realms—the process is the same. Though it seems like common sense, the creation and maintenance of mental constructs come so naturally to us that we often do not consciously realize that it is happening. This can lead to problems in the political realm. In 1962, political psychologist Ole Holsti applied the “inherent bad faith” model to the thinking of former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles regarding the Soviet Union. Holsti argued that Dulles’ perception of the Soviet Union was so firmly and unchangeably negative that he tended to view any positive developments on the part of the Soviet Union as signs of weakness in order to maintain and confirm his own cognitive schemas.⁵¹ Douglas Stuart and Harvey Starr, in a reexamination of Ole Holsti’s study, proposed that Henry Kissinger and President John F. Kennedy did not fit the inherent bad faith model and instead were more open to modifying their beliefs and behaviors based on new and changing information and recognizing that relations with the Soviet Union did not have to be zero-sum.⁵² Though the 1990s and early 2000s saw a more pragmatic and open

⁵¹ Douglas Stuart and Harvey Starr, “The ‘Inherent Bad Faith Model’ Reconsidered: Dulles, Kennedy, and Kissinger,” *Political Psychology* 3 no. 3/4 (1981-82): 1-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 13.

approach to Russia, the inherent bad faith model is still alive and well and plays an important role in how U.S. policymakers interpret and respond to Russian behavior.

The prevalence of the inherent bad faith model in the policy community creates a set of conditions that stifle healthy debate about the U.S. approach to Russia. The general Congressional consensus is to treat Russia with a mixture of suspicion and hostility, an attitude which is pervasive in recent Russia-related legislation. There are few, if any, voices in Congress or in the upper echelons of the current administration who are advocating for a reexamination of U.S. policy toward Russia. Instead, the same generalizations are repeated ad nauseam and have been immortalized in the form of recent policies, a few of which merit closer inspection here.

Perhaps the most notable piece of legislation specifically targeting Russia is the 2012 Sergei Magnitsky Accountability and Rule of Law Act, designed to impose travel bans and U.S. asset freezes on Russian officials linked to the detainment without trial, torture, and death of whistleblower lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in 2009,⁵³ or to any other cases of officials involved in related cover-ups or disregard for the rule of law. The Magnitsky incident is referred to in the law as “emblematic of a broader pattern of disregard for the numerous domestic and international human rights commitments of the Russian Federation and impunity for those who violate basic human rights and freedoms.”⁵⁴ Despite the encouraging repeal of the long-defunct Jackson-Vanik amendment and subsequent restoration of permanent normal trade relations with Russia, the inclusion of the Magnitsky Act in the repeal law essentially undid any chance of an improvement in U.S.-Russian relations that the repeal might have offered. The ties between the

⁵³ The circumstances surrounding Magnitsky’s death and whistleblowing, which have been widely circulated by Magnitsky’s former employer, William Browder, and generally accepted in the West, have been seriously called into question; see, for instance, Andrei Nekrasov’s fascinating and controversial documentary investigation, *The Magnitsky Act: Behind the Scenes* (2016), which suggests that Magnitsky was not a hero as supposed, and instead implicates him as being complicit in a massive tax fraud scheme orchestrated by Browder.

⁵⁴ *Russia and Moldova Jackson-Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012*, Pub. L. 112-208, 126 Stat. (2012), <https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ208/PLAW-112publ208.pdf>

United States and those implicated in the Magnitsky Act are insignificant enough that the Act is reduced to a mere political statement—as Dmitri Trenin points out, “[o]ne does not need an act of parliament to ban certain foreign nationals from entering a country, nor to own assets there.”⁵⁵

Putin responded directly to the Magnitsky Act in April 2013:

Why on earth did they need to do this? ... There used to be the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which discriminated against the Soviet Union, limiting its trade with the United States. It was introduced decades ago because Soviet Jews were not always able to move to Israel. What is the situation now? Russia is being accepted into the World Trade Organisation with the help of the United States, for which we are grateful to the Obama Administration.... It was an excellent opportunity to leave the Cold War behind and move on. But no, they had to think up another anti-Russian law, the Magnitsky Act.... Why was this done? Just to show off who is the toughest here. What for? It is an imperialist approach to foreign policy.⁵⁶

The most unsettling Russian reaction, however, came in the form of retaliatory anti-American legislation; the Russian parliament banned American adoptions of Russian children, placed political NGOs receiving American funding under greater scrutiny, and created its own list of sanctioned U.S. officials.⁵⁷ The use of disadvantaged children as political tools is not only unreasonable, but despicable. Even so, it is a senseless response to what Russians viewed as a senseless American attack. This in no way excuses the behavior, but serves to partially explain

⁵⁵ Dmitri Trenin, “Political Tit-for-Tat Threat for US, Russia,” *Global Times*, December 13, 2012, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/750035.shtml>

⁵⁶ “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” Kremlin.ru, Transcript, April 25, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17976>

⁵⁷ “Russia’s Putin Signs Anti-U.S. Adoption Bill,” CNN, December 29, 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/28/world/europe/russia-us-adoptions/index.html>

it. It is an example of the importance of thinking through the consequences of our behavior toward Russia.

The Magnitsky Act is in the process of being expanded beyond Russia to people responsible for human rights violations in other countries. The Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act passed in the Senate in December 2015, and its companion bill is currently under consideration in the House. The decision to expand the Magnitsky Act to targets beyond Russia is indeed an important symbolic gesture, at minimum. It tacitly acknowledges that Russia is not the only country with a human rights problem (and indeed, there are many other nations where rights are under even stronger attack.) The dubitable efficacy of the act and its iterations aside, there is something to be said for the change. Congressman Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) launched an argument for dropping the word “Magnitsky” from the title of the act, citing it as an unnecessary antagonism to the Russians, but the idea was vehemently denounced by colleagues of both parties during the markup session in the House Foreign Affairs Committee.⁵⁸ Some of these comments were absurdly disproportionate to the situation under discussion, as in the case of Rep. Scott Perry (R-PA):

When [Rep. Rohrabacher] says we’re not sure of the facts [surrounding the Magnitsky case]... Let me tell you what facts we are absolutely sure of. We’re sure of the facts of the terror famine in the 1930s where the Russian government murdered, by starvation, up to six million Ukrainians and took their land. We’re sure of the facts of the Katyn Forest massacre... we’re sure of the facts of up to 45 million untimely deaths at the boot of communism and socialism under the

⁵⁸ “Markup: H. Res. 374, H. Res. 650, H. Con. Res. 129, S. 284, and S. 1252 (EventID=104944),” YouTube video, 1:25:12, posted by “House Foreign Affairs Committee,” May 18, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVBctbSbFdc>.

Russian government, and we're sure of the fact that Vladimir Putin is a former KGB agent... I think it's our duty to remind the American people every single day that we can until they change their ways what the Russian government, what the USSR has stood for, what communism and socialism has [sic] meant for the world.⁵⁹

Yes, freedoms are undoubtedly restricted in Russia. But to compare the Stalinist atrocities which occurred under the Soviet Union to today's Russia—also, notably, no longer communist—is irrational. Yet the tone among those opposed to Rohrabacher's amendment was not far from Perry's. The degree to which some lawmakers are focused on the past and unable to think outside of Cold War paradigms is unsettling, and perhaps indicative of intransigence in other areas, as well, even outside of Russia policy.

Within the realm of U.S. policy toward Russia, sanctions remain another instance of knee-jerk Russia policy which persists despite evidence of its counter productivity. As Emma Ashford notes, the post-Crimea targeted sanctions put in place by the United States and the European Union appear to be working because of the simultaneous oil crisis which is damaging the Russian economy. In reality, however, sanctions have not caused Russian political elites to change their behavior to something more amenable from the U.S. perspective (i.e., fully implementing the Minsk agreements and relinquishing Crimea).⁶⁰ Rather, the sanctions have given Russia added pretexts for blaming the West—in particular, the United States—for their economic problems, thus fueling pre-existing anti-American sentiment. Sanctions have also forced Russia to invent alternate pathways to accomplish its national interests, by, for example,

⁵⁹ Ibid., beginning at 1:21:25

⁶⁰ Emma Ashford, "Not-So-Smart Sanctions: The Failure of Western Restrictions Against Russia," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2016): 114.

turning to economic cooperation with China instead of the West and developing financial institutions outside of Western constraints.⁶¹ Additionally, sanctions discourage Russians who wish to conduct business with the West, and vice versa, from making such connections. None of these consequences are good for American interests in the long term, but the sanctions are packaged as a way to stand up to Russian aggression, and so their symbolic value is emphasized over their efficacy. In truth, much of the way we deal with Russia assumes that symbolic gestures of strength, rather than mutually honest engagement, are enough to constitute a relationship. The lack of opposition to this mindset is a serious obstacle to building a mutually beneficial association.

A Two-Way Street: Russian Anti-Americanism

It is naïve to assume that deterioration in Russian-American relations is solely the product of the behavior of one party. It is, as in most personal and political conflicts, an interlocking pattern of behavior and response which escalates tensions, as we know from the history of U.S.-Soviet relations. We must give up the idea that we can substantially alter Russian behavior, and, in particular, its internal politics. Rather than attempting to change Russian policy, we must start with our own policy toward Russia, in hopes of mitigating some of the antagonism coming from the other side. It is not altogether ludicrous that Russia should be wary of the United States. As previously discussed, the historical U.S.-Russian relationship has left a legacy of mistrust which is not easily shaken. But, as in the case of the United States, history, differences in political culture, and political expediency serve to fuel antagonisms to new

⁶¹ Ibid., 117, 120.

heights. Because bilateral relations must be cultivated by both parties, it is worth examining the extent to which anti-Americanism motivates Russian policy.

Anti-American rhetoric is a fixture of Russian government, and, by extension, Russian state-sponsored media, where most Russian receive their news. Years of Pew Global polling show that anti-American sentiment spiked significantly in 2014. The Ukraine crisis and ensuing Western sanctions and strong anti-Western rhetoric from the Russian government in response undoubtedly contributed; the percentage of Russian respondents viewing the United States either “somewhat unfavorable” or “very unfavorable” increased from 40% in 2013 to 71% in 2014, and then again to 81% in 2015. The lowest unfavorability rating was only 33% in both 2002 and 2010—the variation is astounding.⁶² The 2015 findings correlate with Levada Center polls in December 2014 and October 2015. With the opportunity to give multiple answers, over half of those who believed the West was pursuing a hostile policy in relation to Russia mentioned sanctions as representative of that animosity—the most common answer given.⁶³ Clearly, sanctions policy is creating a strong assumption of hostility on the Russian end; the United States then responds with more hostility, and the cycle of mutually reinforcing tensions continues.

The Russian government has been able to capitalize on the Western response to the Ukraine crisis and annexation of Crimea by reminding the public that the West’s conduct is indicative of underlying attitudes toward Russia. The United States has emerged as Russia’s favorite scapegoat when things go awry—from the suggestion that the assassination of Kremlin critic Boris Nemtsov was a CIA attempt to make Russia look bad, to Putin’s accusations that the

⁶² Pew Research Center, “Russia: Opinion of the United States,” *Global Indicators Database*, Updated August 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/indicator/1/country/181/>

⁶³ Yuri Levada Analytical Center, “Russia-West Relations,” November 6, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/russia-west-relations>

State Department engineered the Russian election protests of 2011-12.⁶⁴ And the Russian government has responded in kind when it feels it has been wronged by the United States—for instance, the anti-adoption law as a response to the Magnitsky Act and retaliatory sanctions on the West.

The desire for reconciliation on the Russian side appears to be there, despite the persistent anti-American propaganda coming from the Kremlin. According to a Levada Center poll, when asked whether Russia “need[s] to repair its relations with the United States and other Western countries,” about two-thirds of Russians surveyed answered either “definitely yes” or “probably yes,” even at the height of U.S.-Russian tensions in September 2014 to September 2015.⁶⁵ At the level of the average Russian, a shift in attitudes seems within the realm of possibility. But in the upper echelons of Kremlin politics, public opinion is not a sufficient vehicle to influence policy. Improved relations with the United States must be cultivated between governments first, and the United States can influence these conditions by approaching Russia from a position of strength.

Policy Prescriptions and Prognosis

Part of bilateral relations is responding to events as they occur. But the United States lacks an overarching approach to Russia which leaves room for circumstance yet reflects a coherent strategy. Before even considering policy changes, however, we must monitor our expectations. As we saw in the 1990s, democracy does not happen overnight. Seventy years of

⁶⁴ Michael Birnbaum, “Russia’s Anti-American Fever Goes Beyond the Soviet Era’s,” *The Washington Post*, March 8, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-anti-us-sentiment-now-is-even-worse-than-it-was-in-soviet-union/2015/03/08/b7d534c4-c357-11e4-a188-8e4971d37a8d_story.html

⁶⁵ Yuri Levada Analytical Center, “Relations with Other Countries,” October 9, 2015, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/relations-other-countries-0>

the Soviet system cannot be expected to be eradicated in 25 years, and it is not our job to force Russia into a system which it is either unprepared for or unwilling to accept. We must learn from the mistakes of the 90s, the legacy of which has conditioned Russians to be wary of Western institutions and influence, thus opening an opportunity for creeping authoritarianism to make its way back into Russian politics. This will only be exacerbated should we continue to try to change Russian internal politics. We are free to condemn Russian injustices and behavior which violates our national conscience, but we must make sure that we do not do so from a place of hypocrisy, which will only serve to confirm Russian suspicions. We must also make sure that any condemnation is a proportional response to the gravity of the situation and not simply an excuse to antagonize Russia. Because it is naïve to expect every country with which we have relations to share our values, we must approach Russia with realism and pragmatism, working with them where we can on areas of mutual interest.

According to the Obama administration's 2015 National Security Strategy, the "top strategic risks to our interests" are as follows:

- Catastrophic attack on the U.S. homeland or critical infrastructure;
- Threats or attacks against U.S. citizens abroad and our allies;
- Global economic crisis or widespread economic slowdown;
- Proliferation and/or use of weapons of mass destruction;
- Severe global infectious disease outbreaks;
- Climate change;
- Major energy market disruptions; and

- Significant security consequences associated with weak or failing states (including mass atrocities, regional spillover, and transnational organized crime).⁶⁶

Subsuming the first two risks into the broader category of combatting terrorism, nearly all of these priorities are relevant to both Russia and the United States. We cannot pretend that Russia is irrelevant to our interests as outlined in the National Security Strategy. As Dmitri Trenin notes, “A world without Russia is a fantasy. It would be wrong to describe Russia’s current state as decline simply by comparing its raw power and international influence with that of its Soviet predecessor.”⁶⁷ Even by virtue of its tremendous acreage, natural resources, and military might alone, Russia merits our attention. And because of these factors, it behooves us to have a positive—or at least non-confrontational—relationship with the country.

It would be prudent to start building trust through increased cooperation in some global issues which are perhaps less political than others—for example, health, environmental, and space initiatives. Unlike China, Russia has ambitions to address global health problems and climate change, making them a potentially valuable partner. Additionally, continued cooperation with Russia is imperative for the U.S. space program, as we rely on Russia for access to launch sites and collaboration on the International Space Station.⁶⁸ As space is a common area, countries with space programs have a responsibility to work together in a nonpolitical fashion for the benefit of humankind. Thus far, this partnership has been productive, and there is little reason to believe it will cease to be so.

⁶⁶ The White House, *National Security Strategy*, February 2015, 2, https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy.pdf

⁶⁷ Dmitri Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 29.

⁶⁸ Matthew Rojansky (director, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars), in discussion with the author, June 1, 2016.

Non-proliferation is another area in which negotiations between the United States and Russia have been fruitful, even during the Cold War era. New START is a good start, but we should ensure that non-proliferation treaties are frequently revisited to account for changes in technology and to ensure compliance with treaty terms. Willingness to enter into non-proliferation agreements with Russia should not override common sense, however. Both countries should be held strictly accountable for adherence to said terms and should be willing to participate in frequent inspections to ensure transparency.

Another historically successful area of cooperation for the United States and Russia of the utmost importance to U.S. interests is the international fight against terrorism. Despite differing foreign policy goals, the United States and Russia have both experienced terrorism firsthand and therefore share a desire to protect their homelands from terrorist attacks and the flourishing of terrorist networks. As in the wake of September 11, we should actively cooperate with Russia against the spread of the Islamic State, whether in the form of sharing intelligence and transport routes, or in finding a resolution to the Syrian crisis in an effort to stabilize the region, a process which is already underway.

As Russian support for the Assad regime in Syria has shown, we have—and will continue to have—differences with Russia regarding the conduct of foreign policy. To deny these differences, even in a good-faith effort to reconcile U.S.-Russian relations, is foolish. Rather, understanding why these differences exist is an important element of crafting policy toward Russia. One particularly relevant situation is the Russian relationship with Ukraine. The West views Russia's annexation of Crimea as illegitimate. Russia, however, sees it as a return to regular order, as the Crimean peninsula has historically been a part of Russia. Crimea is already well into the process of being integrated into Russia once again, and any negotiations which

hinge on the return of Crimea to Russia are fool's errands and obstructions to pursuing U.S. interests. The United States does not have to officially recognize the legitimacy of Russian Crimea, but harping on the same hopeless theme is likely to make Russia hold on even more tightly to the territory. Any assumption that, short of military force, the West can pressure Russia into relinquishing Crimea, is grossly overstating the ability of the West to change a widely popular Russian policy.

As for the situation in Eastern Ukraine, the goal of seeking a peaceful resolution requires both Ukraine and Russia to hold to any commitments. The West must be careful not to glorify Ukraine as a nation on the cusp of democracy, if only it could break free from Russia's clutches. Ukraine has many internal problems of its own, which, like Russia's, stem from its lengthy Soviet past. Therefore, the United States should not unthinkingly supply arms to Ukraine, lest the conflict degenerate into a proxy war against Russia, which will give Russia a rationale for increased military aggression against the West. The recent government shakeup in Kiev has shown that, despite any wishful thinking, Ukraine still has a long way to go to reach the kind of political stability necessary to, for instance, join the EU. It is also important to remember, especially for the United States, that Ukraine is not a member of NATO, and we therefore have no obligation to intervene there. Again, it is tempting to come to the aid of the underdog against the bully, but we must question whether our interests are such that we cannot afford to be uninvolved in the conflict, or whether it is more appropriate for Europe to take the lead in negotiating a settlement.

International organizations are a sensitive topic in relations with Russia. According to Dmitri Trenin, Europe and the United States have historically "used international institutions and bilateral relations to manage [Russia's] weakness and help soothe Russian wounds, but not to

integrate it.”⁶⁹ In 1998, Russia was admitted into the G8, even though it was by no means a developed nation on the level of the other group members. The suspension of Russia from the G8 in 2014, which is unlikely to be rescinded, only contributed to the Russian narrative of being targeted by the West. NATO in particular has been a sore spot for Russia. Russia feels threatened by NATO as its membership expands toward its border. As Russia feels threatened, it increases its aggression. As it increases its aggression, NATO responds by boosting its defense capabilities, which in turn irritates Russia, and the cycle continues. The current toxic NATO-Russian dynamic must be addressed, as each gesture interpreted as threatening by either side leads to increased tensions and a greater risk of full-on conflict. Because it is highly unlikely that Russia will be welcomed back into the G8, it would be beneficial for Russia and the West to have regularly scheduled dialogues in another forum. NATO is an established institution which has changed very little in its underlying purpose—that is, to keep the Soviet Union (and now Russia) from exerting its influence elsewhere. It has become an anti-Russian club where the only strict requirement for entry, it seems, is distaste for Russia. Nearly all NATO members fall short of the target limit of 2% of GDP dedicated to defense spending. Additionally, according to the treaty terms, NATO members should display a commitment to free institutions. In practice, these requirements are not stringently adhered to, particularly in the case of new recruits, such as Albania, and those in talks of accession, such as Montenegro and Macedonia—perhaps a case of quantity over quality of membership. This is not to say that NATO is useless, but its recent expansion seems to be less about members committed to collective security and more about collecting countries into the secure Western fold away from Russia’s grasp. It would be wise to

⁶⁹ Dmitri Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*, 71.

think seriously about the downsides of further NATO expansion, lest the group become fragmented, unwieldy, and unproductive.

We have already touched on the deleterious effect of sanctions for both the bilateral relationship and our national interests. Because sanctions have inspired retaliatory actions from the Russian government, have not been successful in changing Russian behavior, are based in part on a geopolitical situation which is not likely to change in the near future, and have contributed to furthering anti-American hostility, the United States should seriously consider lifting sanctions on Russia, with the stated condition that they will also lift their retaliatory sanctions. And rather than encouraging Europe to continue its sanctions, we should allow them to make their own decisions as they see fit—after all, Russia and Europe are far more important trading partners than Russia and the United States, and thus Russia's retaliatory sanctions have been more burdensome for Europe. Strategically speaking, Western sanctions have caused Russia to seek other outlets for cooperation—notably, China. A stronger Russia-China partnership is not in the interest of the West, and pushing them further in that direction is inadvisable.

The final and perhaps most fundamental elements of the U.S.-Russian relationship are cultural and political. Politically, human rights disagreements have caused resentment on Russia's end and frustration on America's. Russia quite legitimately points out that the United States is to some extent willing to turn a blind eye to human rights conditions in nations with which it deals extensively, like China and Saudi Arabia, but seem to concentrate extra scrutiny on Russia. It is true, and deeply unfortunate, that political and personal freedoms in Russia are under attack, whether subtly or dramatically, by an increasingly authoritarian state. But on the spectrum of human rights abuses, Russia ranks below other nations that we criticize far less.

Clearly, we are capable of working with other nations without endorsing their policies and while condemning their behavior when appropriate. And we are certainly capable of cooperating pragmatically with them without holding them to our standards. Russia knows this, and this is why legislation such as the Magnitsky Act is so rankling.

Working to eliminate cultural ignorance and cognitive biases in the U.S.-Russian relationship is a difficult task which will take much longer to resolve than merely political problems. On the U.S. side, cultural and historical education should be strongly encouraged for legislators and staff. This would be beneficial in the case of many non-Western countries, as it is easy to assume that every nation has the same values which would emerge were they not fettered by an oppressive government. This assumption is particularly intransigent in the case of Russia, however, perhaps because Russians are generally white Christian Europeans, and there is an implicit expectation that they should think and behave “like us.” When they do not meet this expectation, then, it is easy to dismiss them as backward or underdeveloped rather than shaped by a unique culture, history, and geography. This attitude is a serious impediment to rebuilding productive relations between the two countries, and it can only be overcome through education.

Breaking down barriers to understanding can also come in the form of bilateral programs. The United States and Russia should continue to expand international exchange programs for students, businesspeople, and the like, in order to expose people to the authentic cultures behind national propaganda. Additionally, further contact between high-level government functionaries would encourage free communication and build trust between the governments of the two countries. This could be facilitated by reviving the U.S.-Russian Bilateral Presidential Commission, whose activities were suspended in April 2014. If both parties agreed to

participate, the effort would, at the very least, be a way for U.S. and Russian policymakers to build personal and professional relationships.

Obviously, improving relations cannot be unilateral. Without Russian support of any U.S. overtures, and accompanying appropriate changes in conduct, there will be no progress. The United States should be fair in its treatment of Russia, but, as the more powerful nation, does not need to give away everything for free. There must be some expectation of concessions on the Russian side that are favorable to our national interest, but which also coincide enough with Russian interests to be palatable to the other party. Generally, Russian foreign policy is pragmatic, and it is likely that if mutual interests are made clear and nationalistic bravado is put aside, Russia would be open to cooperation. The United States, by virtue of being a global power, has grown accustomed to achieving its goals without having to compromise, but this is an uncommon and inadvisable method of conducting international relations. Though Russia has arguably been singled out for particularly harsh treatment, a larger issue is at play—the entrenched mindset of a U.S. foreign policy without humility. It is time for a new generation to rethink the zero-sum policies of the Cold War era, eschewing prejudice and hyperbole for a realistic assessment of the intersection of Russian and American interests.

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