

Abstract

The US-Russian diplomatic dialogue was officially 'reset' in 2009 under US President Obama and his Russian counterpart Medvedev, with the foreign ministers of the respective countries even pressing a symbolic reset button at a press conference in Moscow. Three years followed of avoiding unnecessary 'disturbances' in the bilateral relationship, with progress achieved on narrow issues such as the new START-agreement limiting nuclear weapons deployment, signed in April 2010. The return of Vladimir Putin at the helm of the Russian state nevertheless stopped further rapprochement in its tracks. In the past two years Moscow has not only thwarted US attempts to bring stability to the Middle East, provided a safe haven to NSA defector Edward Snowden, and promoted the BRICS grouping to constrain Western political, economic and cultural influence in the wider world. After fending off EU measures to create a more prosperous and self-confident Ukraine, Russia invaded Crimea in late February 2014 and threw relations with Washington and the wider West into a dramatic tailspin.



From Reset to Regret: The Rocky Road of US-Russian Relations

Kjell E. Engelbrekt
Associate Professor
Department of Security,
Strategy and Leadership

Overview

The Medvedev presidency

Game changer I: The 2011 Libya intervention

Vladimir Putin's third term

Game changer II: The Crimea-Ukraine crisis

Short-term repercussions and long-term considerations

March 2009: A Fresh Start...

Russian language
lesson:

perezagruzka means
'reset,'

whereas *peregruzka*,
means 'overload.'

Oops...



...and smiles all around

Faux pas (wrong-footed
diplomacy)

or

vrai pas...?



Progress on non-proliferation

- US-Russian bilateral talks devoted to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons technology and limitation of nuclear weapons arsenals in 2009 became the first test of the reset approach
- UN Security Council deliberations spearheaded by Russian and U.S. Permanent Representatives produced resolution 1887, reaffirming the non-proliferation and control of nuclear materials (as many as fifteen heads of state and government attended signing 24 September 2009).
- Russia and the United States signed a new START Treaty in April 2010, limiting ballistic missile deployment to a maximum of 6,000 nuclear warheads



North Korea Alienates Russia

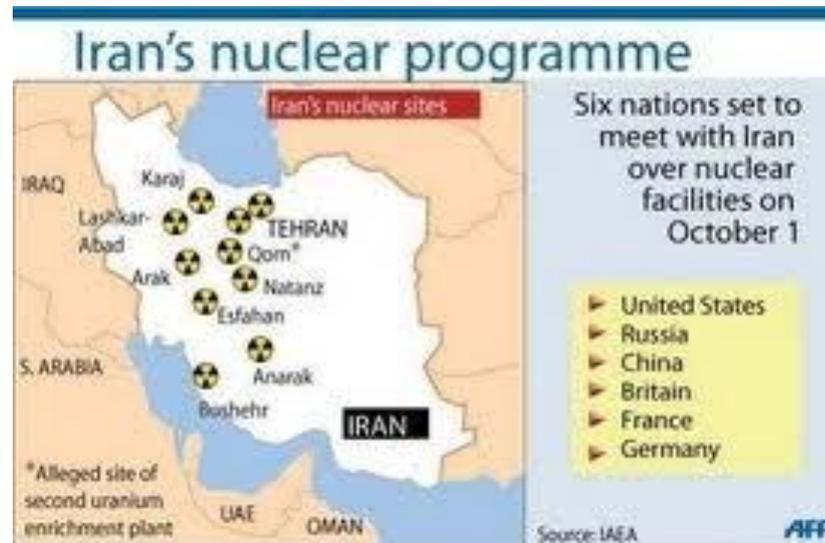
- in April 2009 North Korea tested long-range missiles, followed by UN Security Council sanctions against three domestic arms companies and Pyongyang's suspension of disarmament talks and expulsion of international observers
- shortly after receiving foreign minister Lavrov Pyongyang launched a new set of missile tests, this time close to the border with Russia



- the Russian government responded by declaring it no longer opposes wider sanctions against North Korea
- on 12 June 2009 the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on virtually all arms-related products and gave UN member states authority to inspect land, sea or air transport cargo destined for North Korea
 - after a 2010 incident sinking a South Korean vessel killing forty-six sailors, however, Russia vetoed a resolution condemning North Korea's actions

Coordination on Iran

- concern over Iran's nuclear program, at the top of the agenda of the Bush & Obama administrations, seemingly spread to Moscow in the fall of 2009 (revelations of a secret nuclear facility at Qom can have played a role)
- talks held between Iran and the UN Security Council P5 members plus Germany led to an understanding (October 2009) that Teheran should suspend the program
- Russian arms exports were postponed and Russian officials emphasized the importance of respecting the understanding to Teheran
- perceived Iranian violations of the understanding prompted Russia to endorse targeted sanctions to constrain Iranian businesses involved in arms trade and nuclear technology (UN Security Council resolution 1929 adopted 9 June 2010)



Facilitation on Middle East Peace

- as party to the Middle East Quartet (with the UN, the EU and the U.S.) Russia is kept well informed about long-term attempts to bridge the gap in Palestinian & Israeli views and expectations
- Russia's largely consultative role in the Quartet was widened to launch a Middle East peace initiative 2009-2010
- President Medvedev met with Mahmud Abbas in Sochi to pave way for Hamas/Fatah reconciliation, as Russian diplomats investigated prospects for Moscow peace conference
- President Medvedev visited Damascus in May 2010 to probe al-Assad's view of Middle East peace, learning that the Golan Heights are key to deal
- but 'Arab Spring' events 2011 rendered Russia's diplomatic efforts moot



Cooperation on Afghanistan

- Moscow avoided interfering with renewal of ISAF-missions at the UN Security Council, despite its occasional reservations
- Russian logistics companies (such as Vertikal-T, Volga-Dnepr and Aviacon Cargo) entered into profitable contracts with Pentagon/MOD on moving military equipment into and out of Afghanistan
- the Russian government was via NATO involved in information-sharing regarding counterintelligence and counterterrorism in Afghanistan as of mid-2009
- yet Moscow remained irritated with low priority awarded by the U.S. and ISAF to combatting opium production drug smuggling



Russia's 'Near Abroad' Intact

- the 2008 August Georgia war, leading to Moscow's annexation of South Ossetia (some 20 per cent of Georgian territory) had demonstrated Russian preparedness to use military means to impose its will and repercussions still reverberated in the region
- Washington avoided provoking Moscow on sensitive issues regarding democracy, human rights and institution-building in Russia's proximity
- the Russian government engaged diplomatically on attempts to improve the OSCE crisis response mechanism
- yet in 2008-2010 Russia worked to introduce a European Security Treaty, saying it would make the continent's security 'indivisible' but downplaying that new NATO members would have to get Moscow's permission...



Click to **LOOK INSIDE!**



Russia and Europe

Building bridges, digging trenches

Edited by
**Kjell Engelbrekt and
Bertil Nygren**



Routledge Contemporary Russia and Eastern Europe Series

Copyrighted Material

Game Changer I: Libya 2011

- great concern over the economic repercussions of a long-term civil war in an oil-rich country, and the political fallout of an autocrat trying to overturn the 'Arab spring' movement on his home turf, spread in several Western capitals
- the rapid escalation of violence coupled with the naked brutality of Gaddafi's forces suggested that Libya's internal conflict could only worsen
- a number of highly belligerent statements came out of Tripoli, indicating that the regime's crackdown on rebels, in particular in the city of Benghazi, would not be inhibited and that indiscriminate force was going to be used against civilians



2011 February-March Timeline

22 February	26 February	1 March	10-11 March	12 March
Gaddafi makes sweeping threats and the UNSC inserts agenda item 'Peace and Security in Africa'	The UNSC unanimously passes resolution 1970 that extends arms embargo, travel ban/asset freeze, and International Criminal Court referral	The UN Human Rights Council suspends Libyan membership	NATO defense ministers set up three criteria: 1) demonstrable need for military action, 2) sound legal basis, and 3) strong regional support	The Arab League endorses a no-fly zone

Responsibility to protect: a critical ingredient

“Each individual State has **the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity**. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it.”

“In this context, **we are prepared to take collective action**, in a timely and decisive manner, through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, **on a case-by-case basis** and in cooperation with relevant regional organizations as appropriate, **should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing** to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”

(UN World Summit Outcome Document, A/RES/60/1, 24 October 2005, paragraphs 138-9).

UN(SC) Constituencies

assertive interventionism → the United Kingdom, France, 'the pro-R2P constituency' (*inter alia* Australia)

moderate interventionism → the United States, the majority of West European states, some Arab Gulf states

ambivalent interventionism → the majority of Arab and Islamic states, Brazil, India, Germany, China

reluctant interventionism → Russia

Resolution 1973 (17 March)

‘Authorizes Member States [...] to take **all necessary measures** [...] to **protect civilians** and civilian populated areas [...] while **excluding a foreign occupation force** of any form [...]’ [paragraph 4]

‘[...] requests the Member States of the **League of Arab States** to cooperate with other Member States in the implementation of paragraph 4 [...]’

‘Decides to establish **a ban on all flights** in the airspace of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in order **to help protect civilians** [...]’ [paragraph 6]

‘Authorizes Member States that have notified the Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, acting nationally or **through regional organizations or arrangements**, to take all necessary measures **to enforce compliance with the ban on flights** imposed by paragraph 6 above’

Amb. Churkin's justifies abstention

“...We participated actively in the discussions on the draft resolution. Unfortunately, work on that document was not in keeping with standard practice in the Security Council. In essence, a whole range of questions raised by Russia and other members of the Council remained unanswered. Those questions were concrete and legitimate and touched on **how the no-fly zone would be enforced**, what the rules of engagement would be and **what limits on the use of force there would be**.

Furthermore, the draft was morphing before our very eyes, transcending the initial concept as stated by the League of Arab States. Provisions were introduced into the text that could **potentially open the door to large-scale military intervention.**”

(UN Security Council, 17 March 2011)

Putin Is Back...



- in November 2011 Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia signed an agreement to create a Eurasian Union by 2015
- Russia's stance at the UN Security Council became increasingly defiant, Putin having been opposed to the Libya intervention as well
- Putin's administration drew heavily on the BRICS countries to elevate the country's visibility in international diplomacy
- Russia pursued, and gained, recognition for its engagement in global policy issues during 2013 via the G20 presidency
- the run-up to the Sochi Winter Olympics provided multiple additional opportunities for top-level meetings with world leaders

...as America's Chief Critic



- Putin has championed officials and advisors who during the Cold War period Russian were trained and conditioned to counter anti-communist and anti-Soviet rhetoric, with American opposite numbers perceived as primary addressees
- there is no anti-capitalist rhetoric or major trade dispute, but energy exports and infrastructure (gas pipelines in particular) remain causes of friction
- there is continuity regarding strategic designs that Moscow ascribes to the United States for hemming in Russia's freedom of action in its vicinity, as well as stationing of advanced military hardware near Russian borders
- controversies over international conflicts wax and wane, especially in the Middle East and Russia's 'near abroad'

...as promoter of 'multipolarity'

- the term 'multipolarity' is featured in individual statements by Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov in the mid-1990, and brought to the fore during the 1998-1999 NATO campaign in Kosovo
- in 1999 and 2000 Putin reinvigorated military ties with former Soviet republics in Central Asia
- the Commonwealth Security Treaty was upgraded to a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a defense alliance
- the BRICS constellation was launched and consolidated with Russian leadership



...to exert soft power *à la Russe*

- Russia has explicitly espoused Joseph Nye's term 'soft power,' which has been taught at MGIMO (diplomatic service school) and elsewhere
- the Kremlin is working to control the narrative at home (closing down RIA Novosti news agency in late 2013) and muffling opposition leaders (such as Andrey Navalny)
- the Kremlin is seeking to influence the narrative abroad, expanding the Russia Today state media organization. RT's coverage does not aspire toward impartial news reporting: <http://rt.com/news/kerry-russia-us-pretext-494/> OR <http://on.rt.com/57zps7>
- the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) has been reactivated as a think tank and a mouthpiece of foreign and security policy, though on a much 'tighter leash' than counterparts in the West

Putin, straight talker

The New York Times

'I carefully studied his address to the nation on Tuesday. And I would rather disagree with a case he made on American exceptionalism, stating that the United States policy is "what makes America different. It's what makes us exceptional." It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation.'

(President Vladimir Putin, *New York Times* op-ed, 12 September 2013)

Russia leans on post-Soviet Neighbors

- trade and energy policy are used as 'sticks' that serve to keep neighboring countries in the south and southwest in check (EU and NATO members have much more room to maneuver)
- occasional public diplomatic statements, including by heads of missions, amount to overt intimidation of smaller neighboring countries (cf Dmitriy Rogozin toward Moldova)
- Russia's cyber command systematically 'probes' the security systems of companies and government authorities in neighboring countries
- invitations to join the ambitious Eurasian Economic Union project are offers 'you cannot refuse' if you want to sustain trade relations with Russia.

Game changer II: The Crimean Standoff

- in late February 2014 Moscow raised its voice to loudly protest the takeover of power in Kiev
- on Feb. 27th-28th Russia deployed some 15-20,000 troops to augment Crimean 'self-defense units'
- Putin refused to restrict the operation to Crimea proper, creating the impression that eastern Ukraine might join the Russian Federation if there were uprisings and armed clashes to create a justifiable pretext.



Amb. Churkin/Power exchange

Mr. Churkin (Russian Federation): “...The President of Russia therefore went before the Federation Council to request that the Russian armed forces be permitted to deploy in the territory of Ukraine until the civic and political situation there has been normalized. On 1 March, the Federation Council supported that appeal, which we hope will sideline the radicals. I repeat, **the issue is one of defending our citizens and compatriots, as well as the most important human right — the right to life...**”

Ms. Power (United States of America): “Listening to the representative of Russia, **one might think that Moscow had just become the rapid response arm of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights...**”

(UN Security Council, 3 March 2014)

Likely outcome of the Crimea crisis



Reversal?

→ Not with Putin in office, probably not with a successor either

Escalation?

→ Depends on domestic situation in Ukraine and specifically relations between pro-Moscow and pro-Kiev communities and political organizations

Deep 'freeze'?

→ This is very much the way the Russian Federation handled Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia situation in the past

Short-term repercussions

--an unlikely but hypothetical winner in this situation might be Russian minorities in some countries, in that they might receive more of a fair hearing of their legitimate concerns. But they may have to clearly demonstrate their loyalty toward their host country, or else they may be suspected of harboring ulterior motives.

--the immediate effect is that the crisis negates the goodwill generated by having successfully organized Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, and leaves the Kremlin isolated in the international community. EU countries will be wary of any demands that Russian politicians express in the immediate future, and neighbors will be concerned that Putin may again create pretexts for claiming territories and privileges for Russian-speakers.

--for the United States to trust Russian government officials again nothing short of regime change is probably necessary. This may or may not happen. If Putin wins another election in 2018, he could serve until 2024.

Long-term considerations

--a key question is what the Russian public makes of Putin's actions and whether they consider them legitimate and justifiable. Many Russian citizens are likely to support him, as has been the case through controversial matters in the past. But there will be others who rather resent his heavy-handed approach and preparedness to jeopardize Russia's relations to Ukraine, other neighbors and the world at large.

--another key question is what will happen to the political and security order in Europe if the Crimean land grab stands. If most governments stand together Russia's behavior may be interpreted as an aberration. At any rate, the centrality of NATO as a bulwark against Russia is reaffirmed and Europeans may finally be prepared to pay for defense.

--a third important question concerns international law and Russia's membership in international organizations, such as the G8, the UN Security Council and its OECD candidacy. The latter will likely be put on hold indefinitely, and the G8 may revert back to a G7 (they already met to condemn Russia's actions). How will this play out in terms of Russian behavior as permanent member in the UN Security Council?