

Impact of Political Culture on U.S-Russian Relations in the Beginning of the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

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Over the past decade U.S.-Russian relations have experienced dramatic shifts. Cooperation has not been easy even though after 9/11 it seemed that both countries were on track to become real partners. Over the years, numerous foreign policy events have resulted in conflict and condemning rhetoric from both sides. This is surprising considering that both countries share numerous interests such as antiterrorism, nonproliferation and arms control. What accounts for this tension in U.S-Russian ties? The answer is political culture. Aside from holding common interests, United States and Russia have very different views of the world and the state. U.S and Russia are two different nations with unique and distinct political cultures. Thus, each government is limited in working inside that framework which leads to differences in understanding and ultimately disagreement.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, relations between United States and Russia have experienced numerous ups and downs. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we have witnessed instances of cooperation as well as disagreement between the two countries. Immediately following 9/11, Russia decided to pursue a strategic partnership with the U.S. pledging to cooperate in Afghanistan, that is allow NATO cargoes via Russia, while downplaying its long-standing opposition to NATO expansion. Shortly after, the relationship soured as Russia vehemently opposed the U.S.-led invasion in Iraq. Again, during Vladimir Putin's second presidential term, U.S.-Russia relations grew tense when U.S. announced its plans to build an anti-ballistic shield in Poland. Since the plan was abandoned, relations have warmed but numerous succeeding international crises have set U.S and Russia on opposing sides regarding key foreign policy decisions. Of course, in the present anarchic international system conflicts are inevitable. Historically, United States has been and is currently involved in numerous conflicts around the world. However, the frequency and oftentimes the overly-aggressive responses to the disagreements in U.S-Russian relations are striking and frightening considering the many real similarities that exist between the two states that should help them find common ground.

United States and Russia share many common strategic interests, including national security, global terrorism, nuclear nonproliferation and arms control. Washington and Kremlin both understand the need to address the problems that arise

in these areas and have tried to so on numerous occasions. An issue that many hoped would draw U.S and Russia closer together was the willingness of both countries to fight global terrorism. An evident shift toward improving U.S-Russian relations came immediately after September 11 terrorist attacks in New York City. During their first meeting in 2001, former President George W. Bush famously commented about Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be straightforward and trustworthy."¹ These kind words resounded throughout the country and were extensively published in multiple media outlets. Nevertheless, this feeling was remarkable short-lived. This is surprising considering that Putin strongly supported Washington's initial decision to overthrow the Taliban regime in Afghanistan responsible for harboring the perpetrators of September 11 terrorist attacks. During the time, it seemed that Bush and Putin were united in the anti-terrorist front and this cooperation would eventually extend to other areas. Unfortunately, this cooperation was very brief. Already in 2003, Russia adamantly opposed America's War in Iraq and the decision of the Bush Administration to carry out a pre-emptive strike against the regime of Sadaam Hussein.

United States and Russia's bilateral ties after 9/11, in Afghanistan for example, clearly reveal that global terrorism is just one area where the strategic interests between the countries align. Other areas of cooperation have historically focused on nuclear nonproliferation and arms control. However, it is also evident that just converging in these areas is not enough for the countries to become real partners or political allies. Having a common interest may lead to cooperation in one area but there

¹ Alastair Gee, "Not a Cold War, but Certainly a Chill Wind." *U.S. News & World Report*. Vol.144. Issue. 5 (February 18, 2008); 31.

is no underlying fabric that binds the two countries together beyond the need to address the present disagreement. After 9/11, one country that also supported American military initiative in Afghanistan was United Kingdom. However, when Russia decided to oppose the Bush Administration's decision to go into Iraq, United Kingdom remained supportive. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister continued to defend his alliance with United States even when other countries and even his own people decided to turn away. He summed up his position in the following statement: "We should remain the closest ally of the US... not because they are powerful, but because we share their values."² The alliance between George W. Bush and Tony Blair seriously damaged the prime minister's standing in the eyes of his constituency. Thus, his unwavering stance with regards to the American cause suggests a deep binding commitment to the very values of the United States that go beyond simple national interests. Blair continued to support Bush even when his own people decided it was time to back away. Contrary to the above example in American-British relations, as soon as different visions of a problem arose between U.S and Russia, there was nothing that committed them to converge their interests and compromise; the two fundamental requirements of a partner relationship.

Dmitri Simes, the President of the Nixon Center and an expert in Russian foreign policy said it best. "Putin and his advisers accept that the United States is the most powerful nation in the world and that provoking it needlessly makes little sense. But they are no longer willing to adjust their behavior to fit U.S preferences particularly at

² "U.S and UK: A Transatlantic Love Story?" *BBC*. November 17, 2003, accessed October 10, 2011, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/3264169.stm#btp

the expense of their own interests.”³ This is precisely the reason why Russia was able to oppose the Iraq War in 2003 even though both countries were corroborating on the anti-terrorist initiative just two years prior.

Since 2003, Russia and America have made little progress in resolving their differences beyond merely realizing the fact that they share certain common strategic interests. In 2008, President Bush and Putin met in Sochi and formulated a “U.S.-Russia Strategic Framework Declaration” that outlined key areas where Washington and Kremlin can work together to address particular global needs. Addressing these needs would also help them ensure their own national interests are protected. Since Barack Obama became U.S. President, he has tried to build on that cooperation and reset the relationship with Russia. However, bilateral improvements have been limited because aside from sharing common interests, United States and Russia have very different views about the world and the state. And it is this difference in perspective that is responsible for the high level of tension and disagreement in U.S-Russian relations. These opposing perspectives are a result of distinctive nationalisms that evolved in each state and are now manifested in their respective political cultures. This paper will try to answer the following three questions. How does Russian political culture, framed in nationalism, affect its global perspective? How does Russian political culture differ from the American conception of nationalism? How do these differ and affect U.S-Russian relations?

In the modern era people often define themselves by nationality, as they connect to a people occupying a certain territorial community, a nation, perhaps even many

³ Dmitri K. Simes, “Losing Russia.” *Foreign Affairs*. Vol.86. Issue. 6 (Nov/Dec2007): 36.

miles away from their place of residence. The nation is a fairly recent creation with some scholars arguing that United Kingdom was the first true nation. Nationalism first emerged in England in the sixteenth century as a unique form of collective consciousness. Under nationalism, society is imagined as a “nation”, a sovereign community of fundamentally equal members. Nations emerged as people with similar histories, languages, customs and cultures began to identify with an entity that is larger and even beyond themselves. At the same time, they attached their personal sense of dignity with that entity. The nation framed the peoples’ identity and in turn allowed them to shape their ideas about how to best organize society. Thus, each nation has its own distinct political, economic and social culture.

“In fact, a society is defined by its culture; each society (and this is true of a nation as much as it is true of any self-conscious subgroup within a national population) is, in the first place, a reflection and embodiment of a particular image of or “model for” social order. In this sense, it is more accurate to say that every society is a culture.”⁴ A nation has its own distinct culture, and it is this culture that has the most affect on the nation’s global perspective.

⁴ Liah Greenfeld, “The Political Significance of Culture.” *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*. Vol. IV. Issue.1 (Winter/Spring1997): 188.

CH 1: RUSSIAN POLITICAL CULTURE

Understanding Russian political culture framed in nationalism is much more helpful in explaining the reason for its strained relationship with the United States than looking at specific instances of disagreement. Nationalism also helps us understand why there is competition between nations. As national identity emerged, it gave people a sense of pride. Citizens of a particular nation became invested in the dignity of their nation as a whole, that is its prestige, and assessed it in relation to the status of other nations, and that is why nationalism implies international competition. Thus, the focus of this section is on identifying and analyzing Russia's political culture as it emerged from nationalism. Further chapters will look at America's political culture, the differences between the two and their implications on foreign policy decisions.

Before analyzing Russia's political culture and its relationship with the United States, it will be helpful to look at its present status in world politics. Russia is one of the most important international players in the global arena and not just because it covers the largest amount of space on the map. It is a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council. It is one of the few states that enjoys veto power making it very hard and controversial for other UN member states to pass any decision that Russia opposes. Since the fall of communism in the 1990's, the Russian economy has undergone significant liberal reforms and continues to grow, even if it is slower than predicted. According to the CIA World Factbook, its GDP in terms of PPP (purchasing

power parity) calculated in 2009 is 2.116 trillion USD. That number ranks Russia in the top ten largest economies of the world, number eight to be exact.⁵ Russia is also considered to be a powerful military force and along with the United States, is the world's largest holder of nuclear weapons. Russia and the United States are the only two countries who have a large enough nuclear arsenal to completely obliterate the planet and their own nations in the process. Historically, Russia has drawn great pride from its military and technological capabilities. During the Cold War, Russia's obsession with enlarging its military complex led it to sacrifice its economic well being in the process.

More recently, Putin expressed great pride in the country's aviation system that in January of 2010 tested the first prototype of the fifth generation fighter plane and the new tank made by Uralvagonzavod this year. "Experts say that the mere fact that Russia can put a T-5 jet into the air announces Russia's return to the global stage as a first-rank military and technological power... Prime Minister Putin praised the T-50's first flight as a "big step" in restoring Russia's traditional place as a global military power."⁶

Besides having and exercising serious hard power, Russia is also concerned with building its soft power or the ability to influence behavior of other countries without using outward measures of force. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, officials in

⁵ "Central Intelligence Agency Publications: Russia." World Factbook, accessed September 15, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>.

⁶ Fred Weir, "Russia Flexes Muscle Power With 'Futuristic' Fighter Jet." *The CS Monitor*, January 29, 2010, accessed Sept 9, 2011, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2010/0129/Russia-flexes-military-power-with-futuristic-fighter-jet>.

Kremlin continue to exercise control over Ukraine, Belarus and other post-Soviet republics. Russia recently used its soft power in the strategically important Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan during a series of uprising in the beginning of April in 2010. At the time acting President Bakiyev tried to play Moscow and Washington against each other but Kremlin used the Russian media to run a negative campaign against Bakiyev. Bakiyev was ultimately ousted and Vladimir Putin was the first foreign leader to recognize Roza Otunbayeva as the new Kyrgyz leader. A news commentator explains why Kyrgyzstan was so vital for Russia. "Given its strategic location, control of Kyrgyzstan offers the ability to pressure Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China. Kyrgyzstan is thus a critical piece in Russia's overall plan to resurge into its former Soviet sphere."⁷ Russia employs similar tactics to convince other former Soviet republics to want to do what Russia wants.

Enough cannot be said about the present need for American foreign policymakers to better understand Russia's unique political culture. United States will have to reorient its thinking about Russia especially if it hopes to secure its own national interests at home and abroad. Post-Cold War Russia has emerged as a serious and determined player in the international stage. It is guided by certain values that American politicians still fail to realize dictate Russia's behavior more than just the occasional desire to frustrate America. Recently, present Prime Minister Vladimir Putin "predicted that by 2020, Russia would be not only among the richest and most powerful

⁷ Lauren Goodrich, "Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Resurgence." *Stratfor*, April 13, 2010.

states but also one of the most progressive and dynamic.”⁸ Such claims point to Russia’s real ambitions to regain its lost superpower status and speak even more loudly about the kind of political culture that has been fostered throughout the country’s history.

Unlike the underlying values of human rights inherent in American foreign policy, Russian foreign policy is largely about power. Of course, the case can be made that United States also cares a great deal about power but the kind of nationalism that emerged in Russia was and continues to be fundamentally what Liah Greenfeld terms “collectivistic” where amassing power and respect is the primary concern of the state. Greenfeld, a leading expert in nationalism and Professor of Sociology and Political Science at Boston University, distinguishes between three kinds of national identities; individualistic civic, collectivistic civic, and collectivistic ethnic. These are useful concepts to analyze since they will later frame the discussion of the type of political culture that was formed in Russia as opposed to the United States.⁹

According to Greenfeld, the original type of nationalism is individualistic civic. The will of these nations is expressed by the will of the majority of their citizens. These nations strive to organize their political systems according to a liberal democracy framework where the central government cherishes individual rights and establishes institutions to safeguard those values. The second type of nationalism is collectivistic civic. This type of model envisions the nation as a collective individual that takes precedence over the individual people who compose it. Here, the elite represents the

⁸ Walter Laquer, “Moscow’s Modernization Dilemma: If Russia Charting a New Foreign Policy?” *Foreign Affairs*. (Nov/Dec2010): 154.

⁹ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992),190-274.

larger will of the nation. Finally, a collectivistic ethnic nation is ultimately rooted in the idea that a nation is a people who have a shared common destiny manifested in similar biological and ethical traits. Contrary to an individualistic civic nation, the will of the individuals in an ethnic nation is nonexistent; the sovereignty of the nation is defined as merely freedom from foreign domination. In this nation, nationality is considered to be an inherent, genetic characteristic transmitted by blood and independent of one's own will.

These three different visions of nationalism allow us to clearly see where both Russia and United States ultimately fall in terms of these concepts. Present-day Russia is a collectivistic ethnic nation while the United States national identity is much more individualistic and centered around peoples liberties. In *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* Greenfeld agrees that a civic national identity never took root in Russia. She traces the long history of Russia's emerging nationalism from Peter the Great to the Bolshevik Revolution and ultimately argues that it was Peter the Great and Catherine II who instilled the idea of the nation and national dignity in the Russian elite.

Peter the Great failed to mold Russia into a civic nation that would value individual rights. Instead, he embedded people's dignity in the larger successes of the nation. "But, though Peter did not give his subjects the sense of individual dignity (fundamental to civic nationalism), he made them proud of being the subjects of such a strong and famous ruler and members-even if slaves- of a tremendously powerful empire. He gave them a cause for national pride which would be put to use by succeeding generations and provide the seedbed of a most passionate nationalism."¹⁰

¹⁰ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 197.

Peter the Great used the nation's many achievements to build his own image as a powerful ruler and then displayed those achievements in order to foster peoples pride in the greater accomplishment and prestige of the nation. "The achievement of Peter the Great and the change in the international position and, in many ways, internal image of Russia were so tremendous as to border on fantastic, which greatly contributed to the sense of confidence and pride of the first nationalists, all of whom were "Peter's men." Russia of their time was indeed a wonder in the eyes of the world, and they were justifiably proud of belonging to it. They were proud of Russia's greatness... Their confidence was the confidence that Russia was a European state, and this was the chief foundation of their national pride..."¹¹ Today, many Russians continue to compare Russia to Europe and term Russian progress as Western advancement. This has prompted leaders, like Putin, to talk about the Russians being ultimately Europeans. "Will we once again search for Russia's special path? You don't have to search for anything, it's already been found. It's the path of democratic development. Of course, Russia is a very diverse country, but we are part of Western European culture. No matter where our people live, in the Far East or in the south, we are Europeans."¹² By labeling Russians as Europeans, Putin eases his burden of constantly having to defend Russia's status as a Western state.

As the Russian national identity steadily continued to develop, Russia became a collectivistic ethnic nation, where only a few members of the ruling elite including the

¹¹ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 224.

¹² Vladimir Putin, *First Person: An Astounding Frank Self-Portrait by Russia's President*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 169.

strong ruler, determined the will of the people. This group considered themselves to be the rightful bearers of the collective will. The original nationalism that evolved and ultimately solidified in Russia was built by strong rulers who saw the state as an extension of their person. Peter the Great was such a ruler and to this day Putin believes he knows what is best for Russia. During his term, he chose to unilaterally expand his powers as president. He made himself a forceful president by assuming the power to determine the will of the people.

Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center, a leading sociological centre, explained that Putin's high approval ratings in Russia are a result of his strong personality. "People's trust in Putin isn't based on his practical actions: it's more complex in nature. Putin's high rating is made up of hopes...the role he plays is symbolic, not practical."¹³ Like the case with previous Russian rulers, Putin believes he can govern the state as he sees fit. Shortly after being "elected" or more correctly appointed President by the ailing Boris Yeltsin, Putin was asked to share his thoughts about the powers of the President. . "If there are exceptional rights in the section on the powers of the president, then we should think about reviewing them. I believe this should be the subject of a broad discussion. But from the very beginning, Russia was created as a supercentralized state. That's practically laid down in its genetic code, its traditions, and the mentality of its people."¹⁴ Putin does not shy away from expanding his powers as president in order to rule the country.

¹³ Svetlana Babaeva, "What The West Thinks About Us Is Not Necessarily True." *Russia: Beyond the Headlines*. April 2, 2009, accessed October 17, 2011, http://rbth.ru/articles/2009/04/02/020409_nottrue.html

¹⁴ Putin, *First Person*, 186.

It is evident that ethnic nationalism, defined as rule based on a strong individual along with a small elite of officials, continues to prevail in present-day Russia. Svetlana Babayeva, a RIA Novosti US bureau chief writes in an article for *Russia: Beyond the Headlines*, a branch of Russian state-owned newspaper *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, “We musn’t forget that for centuries Russians have associated the power of the country with the power of the state. Russians have grown accustomed to measuring their country’s power in terms of victories. Russian victories came in times of strong rule—from Peter the Great to Stalin. Its people are afraid of weak rule because they believe weakness leads to chaos, and that means injustice and even greater poverty and lawlessness.”¹⁵ To date, the Russian president is a powerful figure. He has the ability to centralize control and expand his power as he sees would most benefit the nation. As of now, even though Putin is no longer the reigning President, although he is expected to return to the post in 2012, he is still largely in control of the political environment in Russia. One cannot talk about Russia or the progress it has made in any meaningful manner without mentioning Putin, the two are synonymous. Some have even gone so far as to compare Putin to his self-stated role model, Peter the Great, whose portrait hangs in his office. Dmitri Trenin, deputy director of the Carnegie Moscow Center and expert on contemporary Russia, argues that: “Politically, Russia is still an autocracy, presided over by a czarist president.”¹⁶ It is clear that Putin believes in the need for a strong presidency and will take necessary measures to consolidate control of Russia. He

¹⁵ Babaeva, “What the west thinks about us is not necessarily true.”

¹⁶ Dmitri Trenin, *Getting Russia Right*. (Washington D.C: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007), 104.

believes that a strong presidency is necessary for Russia to move forward in the twenty first century.

With regards to being an influential leader like Peter the Great, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev applauded Putin with pulling Russia out of chaos and assuring himself a place in history.¹⁷ On the other hand, there is a view among Russians that Putin has not done all that much to restore Russia domestically and internationally. “When evaluating what Putin achieved as president, the results are fairly modest “ a Russian political analyst writes. However, “he was tremendously successful in creating the perception of great achievements, both domestically and internationally...The impression of success is due not only to powerful, omnipresent government propoganda, but also to Russians’ desire to overcome their complex of having lost the Cold War.”¹⁸ How Putin pulled Russia out of chaos and if it was justifiable remains a contested question.

A major study by the Russian Academy of Science’s Sociology Institute that was conducted in the spring of 2011 under the direction of Mikhail Gorshkov and in cooperation with the German F. Ebert Foundation, asked the Russian public to evaluate Putin’s reforms. Most of the people questioned said that compared with the 1990’s reforms, the 2000’s provided better opportunities for people to improve standards of living, engage in business, develop professionally and even to participate in the

¹⁷ Doug Struck, “Gorbachev Applauds Putin’s Achievements.” *Washington Post*, December 5, 2007, accessed November 11, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/04/AR2007120402218.html>

¹⁸ Fyodor Lukyanov, “An Early Assessment of Putin’s Foreign Policy.” *St. Petersburg Times*, April 22, 2008, accessed September 20, 2011, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=25788

country's social and political life. However, having access to those opportunities did not mean they were able to achieve them. "The decade under Vladimir Putin only compares favorably to the 1990s, but on its own the 2000s are not considered a period of progress. Public opinion gave unqualified high marks to the current regime on only two points- strengthening Russia's position in the world and restoring order at home."¹⁹

Also, the West often criticizes Putin for turning the country away from democratic development. In an address at the International Security Conference in Munich in February of 2007, Putin defended accusations from the West that he was rolling back democratic institutions. "We are constantly being taught about democracy" he said "but for some reason those who teach us do not want to learn themselves."²⁰ The plethora of criticisms regarding the lack of democratic development in Russia also comes from within the country. Putin has numerous critics who oppose the way he is running the country. Historically, the Putin Administration has disregarded those remarks and has found ways to silence the opposition.

During the seventeenth century, Peter the Great planted a sense of national pride in the hearts of his people by embedding it in the achievement of the polity. His policies of expansion and modernization transformed the Tsardom into a huge empire and a great European power. His military accomplishments were especially impressive

¹⁹ Vladimir Ryzhkov, "Why the 2000s Were Better Than the 1990s." *St Petersburg Times*, August 30, 2011, accessed September 21, 2011, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/why-the-2000s-were-better-than-the-1990s/442857.html>

²⁰ Carl Schreck, "Putin Lashes Out at U.S. Foreign Policy." *The St. Petersburg Times*, February 13, 2007, accessed October 7, 2011, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=20347

as Peter created a strong navy. He did a lot to Westernize Russia and used the country's elevated status to build national pride. It can be argued that Putin is largely using Peter's methods to restore Russians current pride in Russia. During his presidency, Putin designed and implemented many policies in an attempt to modernize the Russian economy that many have argued successfully brought order to the country. "Given the decrepit institutional framework that Putin inherited, his administration has a remarkable track record on reforming Russia. Tax reform, land reform, reforms of the customs system, budget stability, a viable stabilization fund and the initial stages of pension reform, banking reform and utility sector reform are all notable successes...The reward for his policy success is a stable Russia that is attracting the domestic investment and consumption which are now the main drivers of economic recovery."²¹ Like Peter, Putin has been able to implement reforms that have strengthened Russian domestic position and in return have elevated its status in relation to other countries.

However, no matter what Putin may have been able to achieve he still has a lot of critics. Putin is most often criticized by businessmen and those in the military and security services. The list of grievances is long. "However, despite all this criticism, the public continues to be fond of its young and energetic president. He has, after all, restored stability in the country and promises to restore order. Moreover, he is not a source of embarrassment."²² This comment from Putin's second term in office clearly shows that the Russians are resilient people. They are willing to exchange some

²¹ Roland, Nash, "Rhetoric and Reality." *St. Petersburg Times*, May 28, 2004, accessed November 1, 2011, http://www.sptimes.ru/index.php?action_id=2&story_id=610

²² Olga Kryshstanovskaya, "Putin's People." *Vedomosti*, June 30, 2003.

measure of personal liberties for stability. People support Putin because he is a strong ruler who was able to bring greater order to the country that was lacking during the 1990's.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia had to re-imagine itself and Putin worked tirelessly to continue rebuilding Russians previous lost notion of belonging to a great and invincible nation. The dissolution of the Soviet Union dealt a severe blow to Russian identity in numerous respects. Joseph Nye, Professor of International Relations at Harvard, expresses Russia's woes in the following statement. "The end of the Soviet Union left Russia significantly shrunken territorially (76 percent of the USSR), demographically (50 percent of USSR's population), economically (45 percent of USSR's output), and in terms of military personnel (33 percent of the USSR's armed forces)."²³ In the beginning of the 1990's, the defeat and identity challenge that many Russians experienced as their nation abruptly shifted from an expansionist empire into a resurgent state cannot be overstated. "The sudden transformation of a country that had once controlled the fate of millions to a country that perceived itself to have lost control of its fate created a radical sense of vulnerability" (312).²⁴ However, contemporary Russia is in many respects, a very different Russia than it was a decade ago. As a collectivistic nation, Putin has embarked on a mission to reinvigorate the country and bring Russians success under the greater umbrella of the nation.

²³ Joseph S. Nye, "Can Russia Be Great?" *The Korea Times*, September 10, 2010, accessed June 5, 2011, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2010/09/160_72866.html

²⁴ Bruce W Jentleson, *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century* (3rd Ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2007), 312.

Putin and his allies realize that Russia's political culture is founded on the notion of collecting power by the president individually and the state as a whole. Moreover, they do not shy away from stating it. Kremlin's decisive shift from electing to appointing governors in the republics is an example of how Putin is centralizing power. Vladislav Surkov, Putin's top aide justifies the move in the following statement. "The new procedure of the appointment of governors was seen as an arbitrary act of the supreme authority. But we simply insured ourselves from certain idiotic things. Pardon me, but we are not cultured enough. It's not the question of distrusting the people. We simply don't want a Wahhabi to be elected in Daghestan."²⁵ Other Russian officials criticized this decision by Putin implemented in the wake of the Beslan school siege and the hijacking of two airlines in September of 2004. Russian governor, Vladimir Tikhonov who has been regarded as politically friendly toward the president told *The Telegraph*, "From the point of view of development of democracy this is a step back." He called the proposals that were part of a reform package to increase security and "unify state power" undemocratic and unconstitutional.²⁶ This criticism from a Putin supporter suggests that there are other opponents who disagree with the way he is running the country. However, their voices belong to a minority. Clearly, Russia's concern with

²⁵ Afanasy Sborov, "We Were the First." *Kommersant*, Sept 29, 2004, accessed September 7, 2011, http://www.kommersant.com/p595761/r_1/%E2%80%9CWe%E2%80%9D_Were_the_First/

²⁶ Tom Parfitt, "Putin's Reforms Are Undemocratic Says Governor." *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2004, accessed Sept 10, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/1472134/Putins-reforms-are-undemocratic-says-governor.html>

gaining and exuding power is manifested in the domestic sphere but it stretches toward the international realm as well.

In dealing with other countries, Russia's beliefs about politics remain unchanged. Simply put, as is the case with Russian domestic politics, Russian foreign policy is also largely about gaining and expanding power. Russian foreign policy makers often talk about restoring Russia's respect and becoming a larger presence on the world stage. In his first address to the nation, Dmitry Medvedev talked extensively about Russian values with justice being one of them. In the few lines on justice, Medvedev presented Russia's ambition to achieve a prominent position in IR as a matter of justice. "Justice is embodied in practice as social guarantees and the fight against poverty and corruption, the efforts to give each individual a decent place in society and *give the Russian nation as a whole a **worthy** place in the system of international relations.*"²⁷ This obsession in Russian foreign policy with prestige and recognition presents a stark opposition to United States beliefs about what should govern international affairs. Even though there are a lot of realists in American politics, U.S. foreign policies tends to be much more ideological and based on support for democracy and free markets, something that is going to be described in more detail in the following section. This difference in perspective about what should govern foreign policy accounts for the reason why oftentimes United States and Russia cannot see eye to eye. They have very different value systems in politics. Understanding of their nation's role in the world is deeply rooted in their respective political cultures. Russia is not so much concerned with

²⁷ Dmitry Medvedev, "Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation." President of Russia official web portal. November 5, 2008, accessed December 2, 2011, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/texts/speeches/2008/11/05/2144>

spreading its ideology in the world as rebuilding its own prestige and power in the eyes of the international community. This is one of the reasons why Putin and his administration have been so critical of American foreign policy and so focused on their own image . “By the end of his second term, Putin had developed a penchant for making sharp, provocative remarks aimed at the West and then sitting back to watch the subsequent commotion. But confrontation with the West was hardly Putin’s goal. More likely, he was striving to put Russia on equal footing with the West by re-establishing its superpower status.”²⁸

So, even before engaging in any kind of foreign affairs, Russian officials may already come in with such a power perspective. Russian policy-makers tend to have a very realist view of the world and intent on using any interaction to gain more prestige and power for their state. Russia’s ambitions to be a strong power and catch up with the United States are as real today as they were during the Cold War. In the following statement by Sergei Markov, a conservative parliamentarian from Putin’s United Russia Party, we clearly see Russia’s desire for power. “What Russia wants is to be recognized as a great power in the region, a power that defends all its regional interests.”²⁹ Russian political leaders want to see Russia on top and so they are threatened each time United States tries to intervene in countries that Russia believes still belong to their sphere of influence. Moreover, Russians feel threatened each time United States does something that it believes will somehow impinge upon or diminish Russian quest for power and

²⁸ Lukyanov, "An Early Assessment of Putin’s Foreign Policy."

²⁹ Simon Shuster, "U.S-Russia Relations: In Need of a New Reset." *TIME*. March 16, 2010, accessed Nov 11, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1971651,00.html>.

self-realization. In a TIME magazine article that named former Russian President “Person of the Year”, Vladimir Putin frankly stated that he “wants Russia and America to be partners but feels the U.S. treats Russia like the uninvited guest at a party. ‘We want to be a friend of America’, he says. ‘Sometimes we get the impression that America does not need friends’ but only ‘auxiliary subjects to command.’”³⁰ Determining whether or not these feelings are a bit dramatized, which may very well be the case, is not as important as understanding how Russia envisions itself in relation to United States and the West.

In an interview given to a Russian newspaper in 2004, Vladislav Surkov, reiterates Putin’s thoughts about the West’s feelings toward Russia. “Their [the West] aim is to destroy Russia and fill its enormous expanses with numerous non-viable quasi-state formations. Unfortunately, they have not only the aims, but also the means...The main aim of the interventionists is the destruction of Russian statehood...The detonation of our southern borders as a means to weaken Russia was repeatedly used in the 19th and 29th centuries. We should remember this... The false liberals and real Nazis have much in common. They have the common sponsors of foreign origin, and common hatred for “Putin’s” (as they say) Russia. But in actual fact, they hate Russia as such.”³¹As the main ideologist in the Kremlin, Surkov shares Putin’s belief that the West is purposefully trying to create a negative view of Russia. Their bold views are shared by many others in Russia. Daria Chernyshova a commentator for The Moscow Times examines the image of the bear as a symbol of Russia. She writes, “The

³⁰ Adi Ignatius, “A Tsar is Born.” *TIME*. (Dec2007/Jan2008): 47.

³¹ Sborov, “We Were the First.”

negative perception of Russia is imposed on the West at every opportunity. A bear is often used in the media to describe Russia, but rarely favourably... Punch in "Russian bear: into your Internet search engine and negative articles will pop up." She then defends Russia and draws a different picture. "But Russia isn't a hunter, it prefers a 'vegetarian diet'; and it rarely kills people unless provoked. A brutal and clumsy animal has a different face."³²

Vladimir Putin is a savvy politician that wisely chooses his words. In the above remarks from the TIME interview, we can be sure that he considered what he said with great care and thought. His words clearly illuminate his beliefs, especially if we consider that he was being interviewed by an American magazine that he knew was largely read by an American audience in the United States. In that issue, Putin was sending a strong message to the American public. From these short phrases we can extrapolate Russia's clear concern and perhaps even obsession with power. Matthew Rojansky, a Russia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace clearly defends this assertion. "Putin's way is security, stability and power-and don't mess with Russia."³³

Moscow officials realize that currently United States holds more power than Russia so they assume a very defensive rhetoric, that is close to paranoia, when it comes to dealing with the U.S. Another instance where there is a tasting of paranoia in Russian politics addressed to the United States comes from the same TIME issue published just

³² Daria Chernyshova, "Bear Hugs!" *The Moscow News*, Sept 19, 2008, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.themoscownews.com/columnists/20080919/55347556.html>

³³ "U.S. Expects 'Reset' to Carry On With Putin in Charge." *The Moscow Times*, September 26, 2011, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/us-expects-reset-to-carry-on-with-putin-in-charge/444278.html>

a few years ago. Asked by an American journalist if he wants to correct any U.S. misconceptions about Russia and its people, Putin firmly replied that he did not believe these were misconceptions at all. "I think it is a purposeful attempt by some to create an image of Russia based on which one could influence our internal and foreign policies. This is the reason why everyone is made to believe...[Russians] are a little bit savage..."³⁴ Russian foreign policy toward the United States is significantly affected by the beliefs that are embedded in this mentality and given expression in these lines. Russia's evident vulnerability or inadequacy in its own eyes is masked and then revealed in its quest for power, something that was true in Tsarist Russia and continues to be relevant in post-Cold War Russia.

To summarize, the collectivistic national identity framed Russia's political culture in ways that are still visible today. We saw evidence of this in the previous commentaries from political officials, academics and journalists in the United States and Russia. Nationalism allowed for the emergence of dignity, but in Russia's case that dignity was never individual but rather collective, and so Russia's domestic policy has never been extremely concerned with individual or human rights. Rather, Russians national pride is closely embedded in the achievements of their nation and this supersedes the individual will. Russians value respect and want to be respected by other countries. One way that Russians believe they can secure this respect is by restoring and securing a dominant position in the world. Vladimir Kustikov, the General Director of NTV, one of Russia's top broadcasting stations in an interview with Vladimir Putin said: "What we see today is that some are trying to strip Russia of its leading role,

³⁴ "The TIME Interview. Putin Opens a Window on His Life." *TIME*, (Dec2007/Jan2008): 50.

of its status as a great power...In fact, you know, this even has a negative effect on domestic affairs, because our people are accustomed to living in a great country. Psychologically, they are not ready to live in a second-rate country that plays soccer with Andorra.”³⁵ Vladimir Putin agrees with Mr. Kustikov and at one point blatantly states that Russian people have a “special mindset. “ Here he also alludes to and criticizes United States with being a “world policeman”, a widespread term often used to refer to America’s role in world politics. “But the same is true of foreign affairs: we should always feel confident and understand what our national interests are. I agree, Russia is a country that simply cannot exist any other way. Our people have a special mindset. But I repeat: it would be a big mistake if we put on the robe of a superpower and start dictating terms to others over matters that have nothing to do with us. Of course, if a certain matter affects our interests, we will definitely fight to the end. But there is no need for us to pose as a world policeman. If somebody likes that role, let them do it. We all know what is happening in the world today. We all can connect the dots. I think nothing will come out of it except damage to those countries.”³⁶ Russia does not see a need to promote its ideology abroad like the United States. Moreover, Putin criticizes Washington with meddling in the affairs of other countries that have little to do with them. This meddling includes America’s obsession with spreading freedom abroad through the promotion of human rights and other core American values that Washington believes will better other societies.

³⁵ “We Thought Over Plan We Are Offering Voters.” *RT*, October 17, 2011, accessed October 25, 2011, <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/putin-interview-politics-russia-051/print/>

³⁶ “We Thought Over Plan We Are Offering Voters.”

However, what matters the most to Russia Putin says is “to help our country develop and improve the living standards of our people.” Even though Russia is not where it wants to be in terms of economic development, it is evident that Russian politicians are still preoccupied with the need to be respected. This fixation of respect is evident throughout Putin’s interview. “In the early 1990’s, many started treating Russia with disdain, but intelligent politicians who think about the future have always respected us” he says. In an address to those countries that want to strip Russia of its leading position and see Russia remain weak, Putin has this to say. “Russia is not the kind our country you can treat like that. On the other hand, we are not imposing; if we are not welcome, we don’t insist. Why should we?” He believes that the only way Russia can secure its interests abroad and become a prominent player in world affairs is first through Russia’s internal development. “...once we have a stable political situation and an effective developing economy, once the growth rate of our economy makes it possible for us to boost our defense and ensure our security, we will automatically acquire such a standing [leading position] in the world...”³⁷

To date, Russia continues to assess its national prestige in relation to other countries and so its foreign policy has understandably been about consolidating power abroad and strengthening its domestic structures through centralization. In international affairs, any action that United States undertakes is automatically filtered through this lens and is either labeled threatening or not threatening by Kremlin. When it is labeled threatening, meaning that there is possibility of Russia losing power, then conflict arises between the two countries, but this discussion is best left for later.

³⁷ "We Thought Over Plan We Are Offering Voters."

CH 2: AMERICAN POLITICAL CULTURE

United States is undoubtedly the world's leading superpower and has been for some time now. In fact, United States assumed its leadership position after the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1990's. In the midst of the breakup, Russia emerged as the largest and most powerful remnant of the Soviet Union. Since then, no single power, not even Russia has been able to subvert America's hegemonic status or counter-balance it to the degree that the Soviet Union was able to during the Cold War. Instead, a number of countries have recently emerged, the so called BRIC states, Brazil, Russia, India and China that have the will and potentially the means to multilaterally challenge United States' power globally.

America has an impressive resume and it is not hard to see why it holds the dominant position in world politics today. America's power is both hard, a term used in international relations to describe a state's ability to use military and economic means to influence the interests and behavior of other states, and soft. Soft power is a term that Joseph Nye, a leading scholar in International Relations, coined in the 1990 book *Bound to Lead*. It refers to a kind of co-optive power a country has that comes from its history, diplomacy and culture. So, in order for one country to successfully influence the behavior of other countries, it needs to have both. Simply put, hard power is when a state is able to get others to do what it wants while soft power is the ability of a state to make another state want to do what it wants. Without a doubt, United States has both,

even though recent scholarly debates and literature regarding America's decreasing or waning soft power have increased.

In the introduction of *Bound to Lead*, Nye states that, "Power is relative, depending in part on what is happening at home and more so on what is happening outside."³⁸ So, when we look at the United States we see that not only is it a strong country domestically but the scope of its international power is astounding. When all the countries in the world are sorted by GDP (purchasing power parity), a statistic that the World Bank is responsible for monitoring, United States ranks as the second largest economy in the world, trailing behind the European Union only and China is closely in third.³⁹ GDP means that the U.S. is producing a lot of stuff and is a high-income country. All those dollars translate into America's privilege to have the monetary means to be one of the largest providers of humanitarian and economic assistance worldwide.

Also, United States has significant leverage in a number of international institutions and organizations. In the International Monetary Fund (IMF), an organization of 187 member states that work to foster monetary cooperation worldwide, United States gets 17 percent of the vote. In the agency, the votes are allocated in proportion to financial donations, so United States' vote outweighs all others by more than three times. Basically, United States is "running" the institution and it can get others to want to do what it wants when it comes to decision-making.

³⁸ Joseph S. Nye. *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 15.

³⁹ "Central Intelligence Agency Publications: United States", World Factbook, accessed September 20, 2011, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>

America's ability to successfully use soft power to influence international affairs has been impressive.

America's economic might translates into real military dominance as well. According to data collected by the CIA, America spent more than four percent of its GDP on military expenditures in 2005. Similarly to Russia, it holds the world's largest supply of nuclear weapons and warheads. U.S and Russia are both invested and interested in nonproliferation but even this commitment to destroy the world's nuclear capabilities has more than once faced significant roadblocks. The grueling journey to get the new START treaty ratified, which will be discussed in further detail later on, is just one example of the kind of obstacles both countries have to overcome in order to pass legislation that they both strongly support.

Sharing common interests and being invested in a shared goal is not enough for two countries to get along and ultimately become close allies. There has to be something deeper that binds the two together and keeps them committed in corroborating even when their interests diverge. The reason it is so difficult for United States and Russia to cooperate is because they have very different global outlooks. How America sees the world contrasts sharply with the way Russia understands global events. Each country's perception is shaped in many vital ways by its distinctive political cultures.

The history of the United States of America traditionally starts with the signing of the Declaration of Independence by the colonies in 1776. Compared to other European countries and Russia, American history is fairly recent, covering a short 250-year period. American history is not as rich as the history of other countries, but the

roots of American nationalism can be traced back to Great Britain, a country with a long existence. In “Nationalism” Greenfeld argues that “the story of this development [emergence of the American nation], is a direct continuation of the process begun in England in the sixteenth century...”⁴⁰ This is important to understand because the fact that Americans inherited the ideas and values of the English nation directly influenced the kind of “nation” that America ultimately became.

The American colonists who first settled the North American continent across the Atlantic were still highly devoted to and considered themselves part of the English nation. In their minds, they carried with them the ideals upon which English nationalism was built. Liberty, equality and reason were the core values they cherished. These served as the foundational building blocks of the individualistic-civic nationalism that was transplanted in New England and spread westward. “American society was exemplary in its devotion to the English ideals: it turned them into reality. Liberty and equality, for Americans, became self-evident...The sense of exemplary devotion to and implementation of English values was shared by the colonists everywhere and became a central element in the local American identity. Not only were they, indubitably, English, but they were better English than the English.”⁴¹

This American commitment to the English ideals of the nation explains why not long after settling in New England, the colonists sought independence from England. The answer may seem paradoxical at first but it is actually quite understandable after giving it some thought. It is because American national identity was first of all English.

⁴⁰ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 402.

⁴¹ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 409.

They were loyal to the values inherent in the English nation, among which was the belief in independence and self-government of every Englishman. “Thus, the colonists’ very Englishness, which they took such pains to stress, served as a cause and a justification for the resistance of the colonies to the British government...”⁴² The colonists who considered themselves true Englishmen, could not reconcile the every day experience of being treated as second-rate, underrepresented citizens, especially since they considered themselves to be more of Englishmen in New England than Englishmen in England.

After the American colonies won independence from the British crown, they were still far from being united under one American identity. Every American still strongly identified himself with his state of residence. A man from Virginia, was foremost a Virginian not American or as the Spanish language says “estadounidense”, the literal American translation being “Unitedstatian”. In her case study titled “Unfolding of Nationalism in America”, Greenfeld outlines several factors that contributed to the formation of a sense of American unity. The settlement of the West, immigration from Europe and the desire for equality in the economic arena played a role in distinguishing Americans from the people of other nations. “Like the West, immigration helped to put certain uniquely American qualities into sharper relief. It reinforced and gave a new meaning to the claim that America had a universal mission, and that the American nation itself was a universal nation, the nation of mankind.”⁴³

⁴² Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 413.

⁴³ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 437.

These were all vital developments that helped unite the individual people of the American states under one people of the United States of America.

Achievement of American unity was crucial for the formation of a United States of America. Before all the above-mentioned events took place, Americans did not conceive themselves of as belonging to a single nation, people or state in terms of an overarching entity. It is true that in international affairs Americans presented themselves as the "United States" but this was more of a façade than anything else. "For, while Americans agreed that presenting a single national façade to the world had certain advantages, they were far from being persuaded that a single nation at home would promote the great cause of liberty."⁴⁴ Americans were worried about what would happen to individual rights if everyone were to be united under one central government. Since then, American people continue to be very weary of big government and feel threatened when they believe government is infringing upon their individual liberties. This love for liberty is a unique quality of American nationalism along with the belief that America has a universal mission and is a nation by man and for man.

The unique political culture of the United States was formed on the basis of American nationalism. Nationalism and political culture are directly related. Greenfeld writes that: "Nationalism is best approached as a type of socio-political ideology, similar to a type of religion-for instance, monotheism-and representing a set of basic principles which, within certain limits, lend themselves to various interpretations and, as such,

⁴⁴ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 426.

may serve as the foundations of different and, from certain points of view, even contradictory cultural systems.”⁴⁵

The ideas of nationalism as it emerged in America laid down the foundation for its political culture. Because the United States is a *civic- individualistic nation*, American political culture is also highly focused on the *individual*. The political system in the United States is based on freedom and respect for the individual as well as the belief in America’s universal mission to spread this freedom abroad. In his second Inaugural address, former President George W. Bush reminds the American public of their nation’s core beliefs and interests, and unites them into one. “America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one. From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and earth. Across the generations we have proclaimed the imperative of self-government, because no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave.”⁴⁶

In this short fragment, we can clearly see America’s preoccupation with individual rights. However, what is even more interesting is that in addition to advancing these human rights at home, America believes in spreading these rights abroad, to every society in every corner of the earth. Later on in his speech, Bush says, “Advancing these ideals is the mission that created our Nation. It is the honorable achievement of our fathers. Now it is the urgent requirement of our nation’s security,

⁴⁵ Greenfeld, “Political Significance of Culture”, 191.

⁴⁶ “President Bush’s Second Inaugural Address.” *NPR*, January 20, 2005, accessed October 19, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4460172>

and the calling of our time. So it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁴⁷ The former leader of the United States believed that only a democratic form of government would be able to ensure that individual rights are protected. It matters little how culture may affect society’s understanding of government rule as long as the political structure is democratic. This is a very narrow-minded view of the world that helps us see why U.S. may see Russia and other states as undemocratic, threatening international order and thus unreliable partners. However, during his presidency, Bush was optimistic and believed that the world is increasingly united by common interests and values, even if not every country is a democracy.

In the introduction to the National Security Strategy in 2002 Bush briefly spoke about Russia and China. “Russia is in the midst of a hopeful transition, reaching for its democratic future and a partner in the war on terror. Chinese leaders are discovering that economic freedom is the only source of national wealth. In time, they will find that social and political freedom is the only source of national greatness. America will encourage the advancement of democracy and economic openness in both nations, because these are the best foundations for domestic stability and international order.”⁴⁸ Sadly, the world is not as united under a specific U.S set of values as Bush predicted. Russia does not believe it needs to be a democracy like the U.S in order to be a great

⁴⁷ “President Bush’s Second Inaugural Address.”

⁴⁸ “National Security Strategy.” Washington: The White House, George W. Bush. September 17, 2002, accessed September 20, 2011, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/nssintro.html>

power. Moreover, Russia is not a democracy and it does not believe in spreading democracy abroad. Democracy requires that a government be committed to protecting the individual, a belief that is not inherent and has never been part of Russia's political culture.

On the other hand, America's attention on the individual has certain concrete implications for the kind of foreign policies Washington pursues abroad and how it defines its national security agenda. In the National Security Strategy presented before Congress after September 11, we clearly see the same belief in liberties that was present at the time of the nation's conception. "These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society-and the duty of protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages."⁴⁹ In addition to the unchanging values over time, what may have perhaps intensified in America is its increasing obsession with advancing its own ideals abroad. The notion of spreading democracy has become a consistent aspect of America's political culture in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Although, it may be argued that from its very conception, the founders of the United States believed they had a duty to build a country that would be a "city on a hill" and able to defend its beliefs.

Former President Bush like so many politicians today, believed that America presents a model of society that should be copied and replicated by other countries. This feeling especially intensified after 9/11 when a non-democratic and non-capitalist country attacked the U.S. Although it is important to remember that the people behind

⁴⁹ "2002 National Security Strategy."

the attacks belonged to an extremist terrorist organization that did not represent the attitudes of the Afghani majority. After September 11, President Bush stated; “Finally, the United States will use this moment of opportunity to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe. We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade to every corner of the world. The events of September 11 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states.”⁵⁰ The U.S. post-9/11 security strategy strongly reflected America’s core political beliefs.

As implied earlier, American political culture is deeply rooted in its colonial experience and the American Revolution. American people value equality of rights, democratic rule and civil liberties. From the very beginning, America saw itself as having the responsibility to protect individual freedoms and establish itself as a sovereign political body. It can be argued that the independence of the colonies from Great Britain, solidified universalism as the hallmark of American national identity because American independence presented every man with the right to dignity and respect. “The significance of American independence, wrote Jefferson in what was probably his last letter, lay in that it opened the eyes of all “to the right of man.”⁵¹ The founding fathers of the American political system, Thomas Jefferson being one of them, advocated the establishment of political institutions that would safeguard the rights of man. He further instilled the value of the individual in the defining document of the United States, the American Constitution.

⁵⁰ "2002 National Security Strategy."

⁵¹ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 423.

Moreover, the American success and independence not only “opened the eyes of all to the right of man”, but presented all with hope that this could be possible. Because Americans understood themselves to be fighting for a natural right to self-government, they expanded the notion of self-government; it was mankind’s birthright and not just an English liberty. “...the identification of America with the best hope of humanity, and specifically with liberty, had a long tradition...”⁵² So, one of the main distinguishing qualities of an American political culture is its sacred belief in the individual and respect for human rights. American society and national identity is founded upon the belief in the individual. Americans value individualism above all else and their political system represents their beliefs. In the U.S., the will of the individual is foremost represented by the government. Unlike the political culture in Russia that values the interests of the state above individual rights, American people value the individual will above the will of the nation.

This is a critical distinction between the two countries. It also explains why American politicians are so troubled and complain when they see human right abuses in Russia while the Russian government is able to overlook and even excuse those actions if it believes the greater wellbeing of the state is at stake. The belief of the Russian nation regarding the state’s role in both domestic and international affairs greatly contrasts with an American understanding of politics. Every nation has certain ideas and understandings about how the world works that are influenced by culture. This is truly the case in the United States and Russia. Both countries are very different nations whose cultural differences, manifested in national ideology, play a decisive role

⁵² Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 423.

in world affairs. Thus, looking at specific distinctions in political cultures between countries is vital. It is a significantly better indicator to use when determining if any two nations can realistically become long-term partners than merely looking at a set of interests they may share at a given point in time. Those convergent interests are not able to produce long-standing mutual bilateral relations. We saw U.S and Russia share common interests after 9/11, but the cooperation upon which relations were built was short-lived. This greatly contrasts with warm and enduring American-British relations that are bound by cultural factors.

Each nation represents a distinct culture and is an embodiment of an ideology. "It has been the fate of the American nation, it is said, "not to have ideologies but to be one.' In a way this is true of every nation, for a nation is first and foremost an embodiment of an ideology."⁵³ Russian ideology as we have looked at it through the lens of political culture, does not share the same level of preoccupation with the individual as American ideology. From its early days of formation, American political culture has valued individualism to a point of obsession that has made it difficult for Russian officials to understand America. Russian political culture has always been based on power and strong autocratic rule while American political system ultimately strives to be and spread democracy.

During his campaign for Presidency, Barack Obama ran on a platform that was all about distinguishing himself from the incumbent Bush. He promised the American people a new foreign policy and a deeper commitment to addressing domestic issues. However, in his inaugural speech and in many speeches afterwards, we can see that

⁵³ Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, 402.

advancing democratic freedom remains a priority of the Obama Administration. Again, this points to the deep, sacred commitment to values inherent in America's political culture that no political leader can completely separate himself from. "The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit..." Obama said, "to choose our better history; to carry forward the precious gift, that noble idea passed on from generation to generation; the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness."⁵⁴ Although, nowhere in his speech does Obama use the specific words "spreading democracy" as was common for Bush, he does talk about it. Obama refers to it as a gift America was endowed with and now has the responsibility to bring for humankind. He ends his speech with the following words. "Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations."⁵⁵ The great gift of freedom is something that United States believes it possesses and moreover now has the duty to share with others. This is an idea that is based on America's exceptionalism and related to Americans belief in its country's universalism.

So, the second unique quality of American political culture is the belief that individual rights belong to all mankind. Throughout history, American statesmen have tended to believe in America's universalism. It is often defined as the mission of the

⁵⁴ "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address." *The White House Blog*. January 21, 2009, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address/>

⁵⁵ "President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address."

American people to spread the values upon which their own society is founded on. This has proven to be a hard task but nonetheless a goal that America has been pursuing since the day of its birth to the present; excluding perhaps only the short interwar period when the U.S pursued noninterventionist policies. In the above pages we have seen that in the twenty-first century, American President Bush was an adamant believer in America's mission to spread its ideology to the ends of the world. What is remarkable though is that the current President holds the same belief even though he initially ran as the "not-Bush" for office.

Previously we looked briefly at Bush's NSS and now we will analyze Obama's National Security Strategy. Unlike his inaugural address, in this document there are plenty of references to the need in promoting human rights and democracy in order to ensure world peace and prosperity. "In all that we do, we will advocate for and advance the basic rights upon which our Nation was founded, and which people of every race and region have made their own...And we reject the notion that lasting security and prosperity can be found by turning away from universal rights-democracy does not merely represent our better angels, it stands in opposition to aggression and injustice...As a nation made up of people from every race, region, faith and culture, America will persist in promoting peace among different people...." As was the case with Bush's NSS, Obama believes that the future for every country and the world as a whole lies in democratic development. However, it is important to note that Obama has tried to move away from explicit statements referring to the American mission to spread democracy. We have seen this during his inaugural speech where he refers to democracy as a "gift" and here he distances himself from those explicit terms by placing

more emphasis on universal rights and commitment to “welcoming all peaceful democratic movements” and “supporting the development of institutions within fragile democracies.”⁵⁶

The American media has caught on to this and according to two Washington correspondents to the Times, Obama’s NSS, “does not make the spread of democracy the priority that Mr. Bush did, but it embraces the goal more robustly than is typical for Mr. Obama.” They argue that this is a “reflection of a struggle in his administration about how to handle a topic so associated with Mr. Bush.”⁵⁷ Inevitable, Obama does share Bush’s belief that the world would be safer with democracies, open markets and societies that value individual rights above all else. It is true that Obama is not as vocal about his support for democracies as was typical for Mr. Bush. Some have even doubted his commitment to democratization when in 2009 his Administration remained silent in supporting the democratic Green Movement in Iran. Also, Mr. Obama was uncharacteristically slow and careful in backing the democratic uprisings during the Arab Spring in 2011. He did not quickly jump to support Egypt’s protests against Mubarak and only after the opposition grew did he acknowledge America’s support for the democratic campaign. If we look at America’s National Security Strategy papers from this century, we see that American leaders believe that the greatest threat facing their nation today is the existence of numerous undemocratic nations, the Russian Federation some may argue, being one of them. So, America’s greatest security concern

⁵⁶ David Sanger and Peter Baker. “New U.S. Strategy Focuses on Managing Threats.” *New York Times*, May 28, 2010, A8.

⁵⁷ Sanger and Baker, “New U.S. Strategy Focuses on Managing Threats,” A8.

and the underlying principle behind its foreign policies lies in promoting democracy while securing its own interests by remaining the most “prosperous, powerful nation on Earth”⁵⁸, America’s current position according to Obama.

During the Cold War, America had the same kind of concerns that have to-date preoccupied the minds of American leaders. The Cold War, a term historians use to describe the period after WWII and until the Soviet dissolution, significantly impacted the way United States and Russia relate to each other today, although those are minor compared to the underlying differences in political cultures that ultimately affect present-day relations. Most scholars describe the Cold War as the high point during which the United States tried to preserve and at the same time spread its liberal, free market ideology abroad. However, Greenfeld argues that, “The Cold War was not a confrontation between the embodiments of two universalist ideologies, Communism and Liberalism, but of two nations whose identities are to this day defined by two contradictory types of nationalism.”⁵⁹ In other words, the Cold War was never completely about Marxist ideas of communism defended by the Soviet Union versus English liberalism. It was rather a period of time when two powerful nations had the capacity and the will to display and exercise the main features of their political cultures as never before seen in history. During this period, Americans revealed that their national identity is deeply individualistic while Russia, the largest remnant of the USSR, is a collective nation. This difference is manifested in the type of governments the two nations established. The Soviet Union followed a super-centralized model where to

⁵⁸ "President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address."

⁵⁹ Greenfeld, "Political Significance of Culture", 194.

each was given according to need while America solidified its democratic structures and pressed for capitalist, open market economic policies. These contradictory ideals of how to best organize society were born during each country's period of nationalism and are inherent in their respective political cultures. Russia and the United States are two different nations with opposing political cultures and this dictates their behavior more than any other concern or interest.

America's belief that it is a nation of man and for man dictates, first of all its urge to spread its ideals abroad and second of all, determines the kind of ideals it hopes to instill in other countries. Nowhere in Russian political culture is there evidence of the same kind of determination with spreading Russian ideology abroad. Thus, Russian foreign policy is largely realist and focused on strategic power concerns, while American foreign policy agenda is much more ideology-centered and based on support for democracy, human rights and free markets, all those core beliefs that distinguish the United States of America from other countries.

CH 3: CRISES IN U.S-RUSSIAN RELATIONSHIP

This may seem self-evident but it is crucial to understand the differences between the American and Russian nation. Not only do they occupy two separate geographical locations on the map and are thus two distinct territorial polities but United States and Russia are two nations with opposing political cultures. Russia is a nation whose very identity is concerned with the collective wellbeing of the state while American nationalism values the individual above all else. As a result, Russian leadership has historically been focused on reinvigorating the state and using its accomplishments to build the people's pride in their nation. This has been the mission of Vladimir Putin and thus his foreign policy has been consistently concerned with power and respect. On the other hand, United States foreign policy has traditionally been more focused on values such as freedom, capitalism and human rights.

The countries distinctive nationalisms are rooted in their political cultures that continue to prevail today. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the four leaders to dominate U.S-Russia relations have been constrained, understanding world events through the lens of their country's political culture. The states have disagreed not only because they have had conflicting interests, but more importantly because they differ in their understanding of events. Their attitudes diverge since their worldview is grounded in their respective opposing political cultures. Thus U.S and Russian policymakers are constrained in using their own political culture's language to describe political events. The conflicts that ensue are founded in the different worldviews.

John Reppert, former executive director of the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard, argues that how Russia perceives certain issues is extremely telling of how it will act. "The current and future behavior of the Russian state is most likely to be understood if these perceptions [security threats] are examined in more detail in terms of how the leadership of Russia understands the issues."⁶⁰ However, Russia's understanding is inevitably limited since it will automatically adhere its understanding to the principles laid down in its political culture. In the same way, American politicians are constrained to see the world through the lens of an America political culture that values democracy and individual rights. The United States will be guided by those values in dealing with international affairs while Russian officials have difficulty understanding why United States said this or did that. In the same way, American officials are puzzled when Russia acts in a way that contradicts the American worldview and goes against the principles inherent in the American system of government. These cultural differences are present on both sides and help explain why conflicts arise between U.S and Russia.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia has lost a great deal of political clout in world affairs. The transition to 'democracy' and market economy has been challenging, but the hardest part has been creating a coherent foreign policy. In light of all these challenges, Russian leaders have consistently turned to the memories of Russia's great past as motivation to catch up with America. Russia understands that it is no position to subvert or surpass American power. Russia does not have the means to do so; instead Russian politicians have stressed the need for multipolarity in world

⁶⁰ John Reppert, "Russia's Threat Perceptions." *Russia's Policy Challenges: Security, Stability and Development.* Ed. Stephen K. Wegren. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 5.

affairs. The attitude is such that if Russia cannot rival American power than it can at least advocate the need to be up to par. In an article for the Washington Post, Dmitri Medvedev upholds this belief. "Today, effective leadership must be collective, based on the desire and ability to find common denominators for the interests of the international community and major groups of state. The G-20 summits are a major step toward this."⁶¹ In a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in 2007, Vladimir Putin, was refreshingly unapologetic in blaming the U.S. for exercising too much single-handed control, defined as unipolarity. "What is a unipolar world?" he asked. "It is a world in which there is one master, one sovereign. And at the end of the day this is pernicious not only for all those within the system, but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within... I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world...Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centres of tension." In the following statement Putin also openly condemned United States for using military force to address crises. "Today we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force-military force-in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts...We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law...One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political,

⁶¹ Dmitri Medvedev, "Building Russian-US Bonds." *Washington Post*, 31 March 2009, accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/30/AR2009033002443.html>.

cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations.”⁶² Such a condemning address toward the United States clearly reveals how Russia views the U.S and its foreign policy commitments.

Dmitri Medvedev, like his predecessor Putin is guided by a political culture that sees the state as the most important player in the global arena. Both cringe when United States unilaterally intervenes in the internal affairs of another state. The “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” published during the summer of 2000; before the U.S. disregarded United Nations and invaded Iraq, already spoke of Russia’s fears of an “increasing tendency toward the creation of a unipolar world under the economic and military domination of the United States...” Russia feared that the U.S. had too much power and would meddle in the affairs of another state. Surely this attitude was more of an attempt to bridle American power than a genuine fear that the U.S. would invade the Russian state. However, this attitude reflects Russia's deeper political values. Russia is also concerned about the emergence and dominance of non-state actors in the global arena. It has argued that the main consequence of heavy reliance on non-state actors in international relations has been to “downgrade the role of the sovereign state as the fundamental element in international relations, creating the threat of arbitrary intervention in internal affairs.”⁶³ This aspect of Russia's political cultures helps us see

⁶² Vladimir Putin, “Speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.” February 10, 2007, accessed October 10, 2011, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml

⁶³ Herbert J. Ellison, "Russian-American Relations." *Russia's Policy Challenges: Security, Stability and Development*. Ed. Stephen K. Wegren. (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 88-89.

why Putin was so opposed to the Iraq invasion after fully backing the U.S. and its actions in Afghanistan after 9/11.

In a TV address on September 25, 2001 Putin promised to help United States' effort in Afghanistan. He offered "the cooperation of Russian special services and the provision of information available in Russia on the whereabouts of terrorists and terrorist training facilities. He also offered the use of Russian airspace by aircraft delivering humanitarian supplies...and Russian support in international search-and-rescue operations." ⁶⁴ All of these were concrete promises and point to a high level of commitment that Russia had towards fighting global terrorism. Putin offered his country's cooperation in Afghanistan and expected multilateral corroboration in return. However, as Putin soon found out, United States did not need much support in the region. Instead, United States chose to pursue Afghanistan unilaterally although it did acknowledge Russian support.

Many believed Russia's willingness to help the U.S in Afghanistan would serve as the basis for long-term cooperation between the two countries. But as we soon learned, cooperation was relatively short-lived. The U.S. decision regarding Iraq in 2003 did not so much surprise the Russians as disappoint them. When United States decided to invade Iraq and overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein, Putin immediately blasted the Bush Administration. Putin saw this move as another instance of unbridled exercise of U.S. power that goes against Russian conception of proper foreign policy. This disagreement strained the relationship because Russia could not agree with the American rationale behind launching a pre-emptive attack against Iraq, a sovereign

⁶⁴ Ellison, "Russian-American Relations," 91.

nation. Unlike the United States, Russian was and continues to believe in working with societies as they are while United States has been actively involved in intervening and spreading its liberal values abroad in order to help societies become more 'democratic' and 'free.' Iraq is a clear example of this U.S. mission.

In the case of the Iraq crisis, we can see how each leader's political culture shaped the way they described the event. We can also see how the differences in language led to real disagreement in practice. George W. Bush announced the beginning of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" in a televised address to the nation on March 19, 2003. "My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger....And helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country will require our sustained commitment...We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace. We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail."⁶⁵ This short segment reveals the Administration's rationale behind the need to invade Iraq. It is about bringing freedom and democracy to Iraq, the core values of American political culture that emerged nearly 250 years ago.

America's justification for the Iraq invasion as a freedom mission never sat well with Russian foreign policymakers. Russia saw America's actions as illegitimate and undermining state sovereignty, a fundamental value in Russia's political culture. Shortly after Bush's address, President Putin said. "Nothing can justify this military action—neither accusations of Iraq of supporting international terrorism (we have never had

⁶⁵ George W. Bush, "President Bush Addresses the Nation: The Oval Office." March 19, 2003, accessed December 12, 2011, <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html>

and do not have information of this kind) nor the desire to change the political regime in that country which is in direct contradiction to international law and should be determined only by the citizens of this or that state.”

Russia also opposed the Iraq war because United States made a unilateral decision about Iraq with no regard for international law. “If we allow international law to be replaced by ‘the law of the fist’ whereby the strong is always right and has the right to do anything and in choosing methods to achieve his goals is not constrained by anything, then one of the basic principles of international law will be put into question, and that is the principle of immutable sovereignty of a state. And then no one, not a single country in the world will feel secure.”⁶⁶ Even though both countries agreed to fight global terrorism together just two years prior, the Iraq war was a defining moment that worsened U.S-Russian relations. Russia could not agree with Americas’ stated need to free the Iraqi people. The justifications that U.S. provided contradicted the core beliefs inherent in its political culture. Many years have passed since the Iraq war but Russia refuses to accept intervention missions with the primary intent of regime change.

Recently, Putin has also expressed concern about the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). He believes it oversteps its boundaries in interventions. “According to the founding documents, in the humanitarian sphere the OSCE is designed to assist country members in observing international human rights

⁶⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Statement by President Putin on Iraq at a Kremlin Meeting.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. March 20, 2003, accessed December 13, 2011, <http://www.in.mid.ru/bl.nsf/5d5fc0348b8b2d26c3256def0051fa20/7b840a710d91637343256cef004aa0e5?OpenDocument>

norms at their request. This is an important task. We support this. But this does not mean interfering in the internal affairs of other countries and especially not imposing a regime that determines how these states should live and develop.”⁶⁷ On the other hand, United States has often insisted that countries follow an American model of development, in the political as well as economic sphere. The mission to democratize Iraq is the ultimate example of U.S. trying to reform a country according to its own image. United States also supports developments in countries that adhere to U.S. values of free markets and capitalism. As the world's superpower, the U.S holds a great deal of clout in international economic organizations that promote liberal economic policies in the developing world. The IMF and the World Bank are just two non-state actors that are considered to be the pawns of the United States as it is their largest financial contributor. Established at the end of WWII, these organizations promote American and Western values in the less developed regions of the world.

Another crisis in Russian-US relationship during the Putin era ensued when former US President Bush announced plans to station an anti-ballistic missile system in the regions of the former Soviet Union. In 2007, Bush had signed deals to build a missile defense shield in Poland along with a radar station in the Czech Republic. Washington justified this installation on the basis that it would protect the United States and Europe from a nuclear threat posed by rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. Not surprisingly, Russian officials reacted aggressively to this announcement. They viewed this move as a hostile intrusion onto their sphere of influence and promised that if United States goes through with this plan, Russia would be forced to consider targeting

⁶⁷ Putin, “Speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy.”

its own missiles at Poland and the Czech Republic. In an interview with G8 newspaper journalists in June 2007, Putin stated that “if they put a missile defence system in Europe -- and we are warning this today -- there will be retaliatory measures. We need to ensure our security. And we are not the proponents of this process.”⁶⁸ Later in the speech Putin clarified what those retaliatory measures might be. “It is clear that if part of the United States’ nuclear capability is situated in Europe and that our military experts consider that they represent a potential threat then we will have to take appropriate retaliatory steps. What steps? Of course we must have new targets in Europe.”⁶⁹ It was after these specific remarks that the media, politicians and academics reinitiated discussion of a new cold war between the U.S and Russia. However, what many people failed to realize is that the Russian government was never afraid of being bombed by Americans. It never even seriously considered retaliating militarily if the U.S was to carry out the plan. Its respect was on the line and that is what mattered the most to the leadership in Kremlin. Of course no Russian official would admit this but Putin’s response to the announcement reveals Russia’s main concern with the plan. “There is no justification whatsoever for installing a missile defence system in Europe,” Putin said. “Our military experts certainly believe that this system affects the territory of the Russian Federation in front of the Ural mountains. And of course we have to respond to that...But as professionals we both understand that a missile defence system for one

⁶⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Member Countries.” June 4, 2007, accessed December 20, 2011, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/06/04/2149_type82916_132716.shtml

⁶⁹ Putin, “Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Member Countries.”

side and no such system for the other creates an illusion of security and increases the possibility of a nuclear conflict.”⁷⁰ What Putin was worried about is the U.S. expanding its power in the region. If the U.S. were to have a nuclear station so close to Russia than it had the potential for exercising more control in a region that Russia considered to be its backyard. Russian politicians believed that if Americans gained more clout than it would mean that they lost power. Because Kremlin views international dealings as a zero-sum game, one’s loss is inevitable another’s gain and vice versa. The missile defense system would significantly strengthen U.S position while diminishing Russian power and respect.

Mr. Putin framed this issue as a national security concern and the Russian Foreign Ministry picked up on his attitude. The ministry radically responded stating that if the missile-defense complex agreement was to ratified, the Russian government “will be forced to react not with diplomatic, but with military-technical methods.”⁷¹

Why was the Russian government so vehemently opposed to this plan? This was a case of bruised Russia’s respect and perceived threat of diminishing power. Russia saw the U.S plan as threatening their national security because the installation was to be stationed in what Russia considered to be its sphere of influence. Dmitry Medvedev in his first State of the Nation speech clearly addressed this concern. “I would add something about what we have had to face in recent years: what is it? It is the construction of a global missile defence system, the installation of military bases around

⁷⁰ Putin, “Interview with Newspaper Journalists from G8 Member Countries.”

⁷¹ “Russia Warns of Military Response if U.S-Czech Missile Defense Agreement Approved.” *Fox News*, July 8, 2008, accessed November 15, 2011, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,378065,00.html#ixzz1ckXL2GTR>

Russia, the unbridled expansion of NATO and other similar 'presents' for Russia-we therefore have every reason to believe they are simply testing our strength."⁷² Russia's understanding of this particular event among many in a series of "U.S. actions testing Russia's strength", clearly reveal Russia's fundamentally defensive outlook, even though its language was highly aggressive. Russian officials understood the establishment of the missile system as an American plan to infringe upon their power in the region. However, the Russians exaggerated this threat because at the time, Poland and Czech Republic were no longer Soviet allies but independent nations. Moscow was aware of this but was not prepared to hand over control of what it believed to be its strategic playing field. After looking at Russia's response we can see that it was opposed to the plan not because it believed the installation, if implemented, would pose a serious military threat but that it would undermine Russian respect in the region and the world. Zbigniew Brzezinski, an expert in American foreign policy, labels American missile defense plan as a mere irritant for the Russians. "The U.S. should avoid careless irritants, like its clumsily surfaced initiative to deploy its missile defenses next door to Russia."⁷³ The Russians were more irritated by the U.S. plan than fearful of its military implications. Kremlin officials were upset that Washington disrespected Russia by assuming it could establish such a system without Russia's opposition.

When President Obama came to power in 2008 wanted to distance himself from the Bush policies of the previous years. He was only semi-supportive of the missile

⁷² Medvedev, "Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation."

⁷³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "How To Avoid a New Cold War." *TIME*. July 7, 2007, accessed December 27, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1630544,00.html>

complex and in September 2009, the White House scrapped this specific plan. This move was welcomed by Russia as a sign of victory. Putin called it a brave and courageous move by Obama but hoped that he would do more to address Russia's interests. "The latest decisions by President Obama to cancel plans to build the third positioning region of the missile-defense system in Europe inspires hope and I do anticipate that this correct and brave decision will be followed by others," Putin said.⁷⁴ However, the Obama administration was not ready to give up the idea totally and promised to restructure the plan. Mr. Obama's decision to augment the program was a gesture of goodwill and a sign of respect for Russia's regional position. It was yet another step in his cause to reset the relationship. "The new plan alleviates some concerns of Russian leaders, who strongly opposed the positioning of the ground-based interceptors and radar system so near its borders...Still, defense officials said it is likely Russia will not fully embrace any U.S. plans for a missile defense system in Europe."⁷⁵

The missile defense system is a sensitive subject for Russia. Washington maintains that the plan is set up to guard against a potential Iranian threat. However, Kremlin is not satisfied with this answer. In a recent speech to the citizens of Russia, President Medvedev remembered Obama's decision to revise his predecessor's plan as a positive step but made it clear that America and NATO has failed to ameliorate Russia's security concerns. "Rather than showing themselves willing to hear and

⁷⁴ "Russia's Putin Hails U.S. Shield Move, Calls For More." September 18, 2009, accessed December 5, 2011, http://www.rferl.org/content/Putin_Says_US_Shield_Decision_Correct_Brave/1825747.html

⁷⁵ Fred W. III Baker, "Obama Announces Changes for European Missile Defense." September 17, 2009, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=55887>

understand our concerns over the European missile defence system at this stage, they simply repeat that these plans are not directed against Russia and that there is no point for us to be concerned. That is the position of the executive authorities, but legislators in some countries openly state, the whole system is against Russia.” Russia is extremely worried about maintaining its respected position in the region and so it does not want to give in easily to America’s plans. “If our partners show an honest and responsible attitude towards taking into account Russia’s legitimate security interests, I am sure we can come to an agreement. But if we are asked to ‘cooperate’ or in fact act against our own interests it will be difficult to establish common ground.”⁷⁶ The U.S. defense officials were right. It will be extremely difficult for Russia to support this plan because compliance will require that Russia give up its hard-line position on the issue. Giving in will also mean that Russia give up some of its perceived respect in the region, something that Kremlin is not ready to accept. Meanwhile, the United States is pressing for this plan because it truly believes that it will help protect it and its allies from Iran. Thus, U.S. and Russia cannot agree on missile defense because they understand the issue differently.

Another major strainer in U.S.-Russian relations has been the Iranian nuclear program. For a long time, Iran has been considered a key Russian ally in regional issues. The two nations have a long history of geographic, economic, and socio-political interaction. In the past, Russia has chosen to maintain close relations with the state in order to constrain America’s power in the Middle East. By limiting American

⁷⁶ “Statement by Dmitry Medvedev in Connection with the Situation Concerning the NATO Countries’ Missile Defence System in Europe.” Official site of the President of Russia. November 23, 2011, accessed December 15, 2011, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/3115>

hegemony, Russia believes it is preserving more power for itself. For Kremlin, the controversy over Iran has been about maintaining leverage, while Washington sees Iran's nuclear ambitions as a real threat to national and global security. The United States considers Iran a rogue and dangerous state and has pushed for numerous economic sanctions against the country in order to deter it from acquiring nuclear capabilities. It has urged Russia to support its plans. Russia however has not easily persuaded to support the sanctions. In fact, Russia is actively involved in facilitating Iran's development of nuclear technology and it has long scolded and frowned upon America's call for tougher sanctions against the state. Although Russia is not one of Iran's largest trading partners, it does sell military hardware to Iran and is currently helping Iran build its own civilian nuclear power plant.

In the 1990's, Russia formed a joint research organization with Iran to provide Iran with Russian nuclear experts and technical information. This agreement was part of a larger commitment to outline potential areas of economic, industrial and scientific cooperation. In 1992, the Russian Federation agreed to help Iran finish the construction of a nuclear power plant at the Bushehr site. The \$800 million dollar deal was based on Iran's self-stated commitment to a civil use of nuclear energy. Since then, Iran has continued to state that the goal of its nuclear program is peaceful atomic energy. It denies any allegations that it is building a nuclear weapon. However, United States among many other Western states continues to be highly critical and suspicious of Iran. It does not believe Iran's ambitions are purely peaceful. Despite America's growing concerns, Russia continues to help Iran develop its nuclear program. In September 2001, Russia announced that it would assist Iran in constructing more reactors at

Bushehr. These announcements from the Iranian government regarding plans to build additional reactors continued for numerous years with Russian help.

However, despite all the announcements regarding the building of additional reactors in Iran, the dream only became a reality in 2011. Mismanagement, financial difficulties, a computer virus, U.S. pressure, supply glitches and technical problems are all to blame for delaying the opening of the reactor at Bushehr by a decade. In August 2010, the Iranians tried to orchestrate a premature launch of the nuclear plant. As many suspected, this attempt proved to be a huge failure as a vital piece of machinery broke down. Yet last year, Ali Akbar Salehi, the current Iranian foreign minister who was then the country's nuclear chief, said, "Despite all pressure, sanctions, and hardships imposed by Western nations, we are now witnessing the start-up of the largest symbol of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities."⁷⁷ In September 2011, the plant was successfully reloaded with fuel and connected to the nation's power grid. The plant was officially launched on 12 September 2011. "The Bushehr reactor will generate two percent of Iran's electricity output, which pales in comparison with the 18 percent waste in the country's transmission lines."⁷⁸ It is evident that the reactor is more of a symbol of Iran's gained prestige rather than a significant source of Iran's nuclear power.

In addition to building the nuclear power plant, Iran has been actively involved in enriching nuclear fuel and the main controversy has been centered around the question to what purpose. Iran continues to state that its plans are peaceful and thus has been successful in soliciting Russia for technical advice. Russia is also invested in

⁷⁷ Ali Vaez, "Waiting for Bushehr." *Foreign Policy*, September 11, 2011, accessed December 7, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/09/11/waiting_for_bushehr

⁷⁸ Vaez, "Waiting for Bushehr."

helping Iran develop nuclear energy capabilities because of monetary profit. Kremlin has been selling military hardware to the Tehran government for over a decade now. The American government however is acutely aware of Iran's role in terrorism and its involvements in Iraq. The previous Bush and now Obama Administration are highly concerned about the possibility of Iran acquiring nuclear capabilities. They believe that if Iran were to acquire a nuclear bomb than there would be nothing to stop it from selling the weapons to terrorist organizations. National security and global terrorism are two issues high on America's priority list so it is not difficult to see why the issue over Iran's nuclear program is so controversial. America's fears about Iran have long been fueled by findings of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). For years, the agency has noted Iran's violations with regards to nuclear energy developments as stated under the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Security Council Resolutions. Just a few months ago, in November 2011, the agency released its harshest condemnation of Iran to date. In the report, the Director General said, "The Agency has serious concerns regarding possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear programme. After assessing carefully and critically the extensive information available to it, the Agency finds the information to be, overall, credible. The information indicates that Iran has carried out activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device. The information also indicates that prior to the end of 2003, these activities took place under a structured programme, and that some activities may still be ongoing."⁷⁹ It is unclear

⁷⁹ "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran." IAEA, Report prepared by Director General, (November 8, 2011), 10.

whether or not Iran already has a nuclear weapon or is close to it but what is clear is that its ambitions are real. Previously, Russia has chose to deny such claims but since the reset, it may be argued that Russia is finally getting on board with regards to supporting sanctions against Iran meant to deter it from developing nuclear weapons. Medvedev has been clear in stating that Iran must cooperate with IAEA. "This is an absolutely indubitable thing if it wishes to develop its nuclear dimension, nuclear energy programme." he said. "This is a duty and not a matter of its choice." When asked if Russia's commitment conflicts with its deals to sell anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems to Iran, Medvedev said no. "We have never supplied and will not supply to Iran anything that is beyond the valid system of international law. What we have supplied and what we are going to supply, it has been and always will be the defense complex and this is our firm position."⁸⁰ To date, Russia continues to assert that its relationship with Iran is in accordance with international law. Russia's close ties with Tehran occasionally displease Washington but recently this has been changing.

Following the "reset" there has been a shift in Moscow's attitudes toward the U.S. In an attempt to build warmer ties with the U.S., Russia is slowly turning away from Iran. Already during the last year of the Bush Administration, Putin said that he agrees with President Bush that it would be unacceptable for Iran to have nuclear weapons but was hopeful that a solution would be reached that did not require threats or the use of force. In an interview in 2007 he said, "As you can see, we are working together with all the members of the UN Security Council to look for mutually acceptable solutions, and

⁸⁰ Dmitry Medvedev, "Interview with CNN." September 20, 2009, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://eng.new.kremlin.ru/news/1622>

we feel the highest degree of responsibility for this work.”⁸¹ Russia was not yet willing to support strict sanctions against Iran but was ready to come up with an alternative solution to appease the U.S.

Clifford Levy, Moscow bureau chief for the New York Times in 2009 sensed a warming in U.S.-Russia relations but realized that Russia would not easily support the United States policy toward Iran because he rightly believed it is a matter of pride for the Russians. “Moreover, the Kremlin might go slowly because it senses that in a world where it has less influence than it did during Soviet times, it can use its veto power in the Security Council to ensure attention and respect. If Russia were to accede right away to calls for a crackdown, it would risk becoming just another country lining up behind the United States. The Kremlin’s pride would almost certainly not allow that.”⁸² U.S.-Russia relations with regards to Iran remain tense because Russia does not want to give up its long-standing position. Russia has certain leverage and benefits to gain by cooperating with the Tehran government that it is not willing to give up so easily.

Another factor that has led Russia to support the U.S. is increased integration into the international community. Russia is becoming increasingly integrated into the West and it is thus gradually becoming more vulnerable to western pressures in trying to curb its ties with Tehran. In 2009, after meeting with Obama, the Russian president continued to advocate for a peaceful nuclear program in Iran. Obama also said he supports Iran’s ability to obtain peaceful nuclear energy but insisted that Iran forsake

⁸¹ Putin, “Interview with G8 Newspaper Journalists.”

⁸² Clifford J. Levy, “Warmer U.S.-Russia Relations May Yield Little in Action Toward Iran.” *New York Times*, September 28, 2009, A8.

its nuclear weapons, something that Medvedev did not mention in his statement at all. “I hope that as a result of our joint efforts with Iran, we will be able to reach agreements we’ve anticipated earlier and Iranian program will be peaceful and will not raise as many questions as our countries and the international community has at the moment” Medvedev said. “ In this case, our goal is clear: it is transparent, up-to-date, peaceful program—not a program that would raise questions and concerns from the international community.”⁸³ Although the two leaders seemed to agree, President Medvedev and Obama were still divided about Iran. Russia continues to believe and advocate that Iran’s nuclear program is purely civilian while the U.S. continues to have doubts. Nevertheless, some success came in 2010 when both U.S and Russia agreed on a package of UN sanctions against Iran. The aim of the sanctions is to ultimately halt Iran’s nuclear ambitions. However, compromise was possible only after the Obama administration gave into Russia’s two demands: the first, lifting U.S sanctions against the Russian military complex and second, agreeing not to ban the sales of Russian anti-aircraft batteries to Tehran. These concessions point to the current administrations’ willingness to build closer U.S-Russian bonds after years of disagreement. Cooperation in this area suggests that there are realistic possibilities for further warming in U.S-Russian relations as each party learns to talk to each other in mutually comprehensible ways. Warmer bilateral relations will also require willingness from both sides to realize and accept that cultural differences exist but that they need not be obstacles to cooperation.

⁸³ “Statements by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia After Bilateral Meeting.” The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, November 15, 2009, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statements-president-obama-and-president-medvedev-russia-after-bilateral-meeting>

CONCLUSION: THE RESET AND WAY FORWARD

Obama and Medvedev vowed to "reset" U.S-Russian relations during a G20 London Summit in April 2009. After President Bush left office, he left U.S.-Russian relations severely deteriorated. U.S-Russian relations in the last years of Bush presidency had been plagued by disagreement and both countries were just coming out of significant relationship failures. The conflict in South Ossetia, the missile defense shield and Iran's nuclear programme were fresh crises on the agenda. So when Obama came to power, reestablishing decent relations with the Russians was one of his highest priorities. Hence, Obama's foreign policy toward Russia has been based on dialogue and finding common ground. Although Mr. Obama is still largely tied down by an American vision of politics, he has tried to approach Russia with understanding and optimism. He recognizes that Russia has serious grievances against the U.S. and has tried to ameliorate those concerns. The "reset" was a step in that direction but whether or not the reset has been successful is yet to be determined.

Obama has invested a lot of time and energy into building a friendlier but more importantly a pragmatic relationship with Medvedev. State Department spokesman Mark Toner, like Obama, believes the reset is in everyone's best interest. "We believe clearly that it's in the mutual interests of the United States and Russia and the world that we do work closely together."⁸⁴ Few will oppose the idea that it is beneficial and

⁸⁴ Michele Kelemen, "Will U.S-Russian Reset Survive a Putin Presidency?" *National Public Radio*, September 28, 2011, accessed October 29, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/09/28/140857428/will-us/russa-reset-survive-a-putin-presidency>

even necessary for U.S and Russia to cooperate but whether or not they have been successful is the more pressing question. Some foreign policy critics have said that the 'reset' has worked as the overall atmosphere between the countries has improved while others are skeptical. Mr. Obama himself has said that he believes his foreign policy toward Russia has worked. After a bilateral meeting in November of 2009, President Obama said, "And I have found, as always, President Medvedev frank, thoughtful, and constructive in his approach to U.S-Russia relations. And I am somebody who genuinely believes that the reset button has worked and that we are moving in a good direction."⁸⁵ It should not surprise us that Obama speaks favorably about his foreign policy achievements but what is interesting is that Medvedev also believes that the reset has been effective.

During a 2011 meeting in Washington with the American public, academic and political circles, Medvedev spoke positively of U.S-Russian relations. "I am truly happy to see that our cooperation is now producing concrete results. I would go further and say that I am happy that over this last year and a bit we have succeeded in changing the climate in Russian-American relations. This does not mean that there are no longer any problems in our relations and these relations are absolutely perfect, but the climate has improved and we are seeing the results now. It makes me very happy indeed to be a part of this change."⁸⁶ The optimistic and hopeful tone present in Medvedev's as well as

⁸⁵ "Statements by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia After Bilateral Meeting."

⁸⁶ Dmitry Medvedev, "Meeting with Representatives of US Public, Academic and Political Circles." President of Russia, April 14, 2010, accessed December 4, 2011, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2010/04/14/0300>

Obama's voice is encouraging. It is evident that the two leaders are speaking to each other in a common language. It is also evident that they are not only talking but actually listening to each other. The rhetoric that they use to describe the relationship is strikingly similar. For example, the phrase "working together" frequently appears in the leaders statements. We can see that Medvedev is responding positively to Obama's promise to improve relations and refrains from using the kind of hostile language that Putin is famously known for. In an article written for the Washington Post, Medvedev concludes with the following words. "Long ago, Alexis de Tocqueville predicted a great future for our two nations. So far, each country has tried to prove the truth of those words to itself and the world by acting on its own. I firmly believe that at this turn of history, we should work together. The world expects Russia and the United States to take energetic steps to establish a climate of trust and goodwill in global politics, not to languish in inaction and disengagement. We cannot fail to meet those expectations."⁸⁷ It seems that the Russian leadership is sincerely determined to cooperate with the U.S. It is exciting to see this kind of commitment especially considering the deadlock that had resulted between the countries at the end of the Bush administration.

However, there are critics who argue that the apparent warming in relations is temporary and in order to be sustainable will require a new commitment by both parties. The reset was successful but only because it had a limited agenda. Fyodor Lukyanov, editor-in-chief of the *Russia in Global Affairs* journal agrees, but believes a new deal may be reached only after the presidential elections in Russia and the United

⁸⁷ Medvedev, "Building Russian-US Bonds."

States.⁸⁸ Recently, there has been a setback in US-Russia relations directly related to the process of democratic elections. Russia held parliamentary elections on December 4, 2011. Vladimir Putin's party, United Russia won the most votes but still suffered big losses. The elections were immediately condemned as fraudulent by both international and Russian observers. After the criticism of alleged voter fraud and large anti-election demonstrations, Putin personally accused U.S. Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, for inciting unrest in Russia. "I looked at the first reaction of our U.S. partners," Mr. Putin said. "The first thing that the secretary of state did was say they were not honest and not fair, but she had not even yet received the material from the observers." The anger over elections prompted a large protest where thousands chanted "Russia without Putin." Mr. Putin believes U.S. had a role in instigating the protests. "She [Mrs. Clinton] set the tone for some actors in our country and gave them a signal. They heard the signal and with the support of the U.S State Department began active work."⁸⁹

Putin's reaction to alleged U.S. interference was harsh to say the least and unfounded. Mrs. Clinton made remarks about Russian elections after reviewing a preliminary report from OSCE that cited deep structural problems and blatant stuffing of ballot boxes, in some cases in plain sight. The Secretary of State did not respond to Putin's remarks immediately but later said that Washington values the bilateral relationship. "At the same time, the United States and many others around the world have a strong commitment to democracy and human rights. It's part of who we are. It's

⁸⁸ Fyodor Lukyanov, "Interview with Fyodor Lukyanov, Participant of the VIII Summit of the Valdai International Discussion Club." August 11, 2011, accessed September 29, 2011, <http://valdaiclub.com/politics/34260/printedition/>

⁸⁹ David. M. Herszenhorn and Ellen Barry. "Putin Contends Clinton Incited Unrest Over Vote." *New York Times*, December 9, 2011, A1.

our values. And we expressed concerns that we thought were well founded about the conduct of the elections. And we are supportive of the rights and aspirations of the Russian people to be able to make progress and to realize a better future for themselves, and we hope to see that unfold in the years ahead.”⁹⁰ Putin’s strong condemnation of the U.S. and the alleged role that it played in inciting unrest that ensued in Russia after the elections is not surprising. Putin is infamous for using hostile rhetoric to blame the Americans for what he believes is a lasting practice of intervening in Russia’s internal affairs. We can also explain his reaction by remembering Russia’s political culture and the high value it puts in sovereignty. Whenever Putin sees U.S. is meddling in the affairs of his country, he feels threatened and assumes an aggressive position. We can clearly see this dynamic play out in the above case.

It is ultimately Putin who controls Russia and he already expressed plans to run for presidency this year. This comes as no surprise to U.S. policymakers. But the pressing question at hand is will a U.S.-Russia reset survive a Putin Presidency. U.S.-Russia relations since the beginning of the century have been built on Presidential personalities. When discussing U.S.-Russia ties, we are essentially talking about the relationship between Putin and Bush and Medvedev and Obama. The reset was forged under the leadership of Obama and Medvedev, who were able to develop a rapport that will be difficult to replicate with Putin and Obama. In June 2010, Obama and Medvedev bonded over burgers in Virginia where Obama described the Cold War approaches to dealing with Russia as outdated. “It’s time to move forward in a different direction,” Obama said. “I think Medvedev understands that. I think Putin has one foot in the old

⁹⁰ Herszenhorn and Barry, “Putin Contends Clinton.”

way of doing business, and one foot in the new.” David Kramer, a former State Department official who dealt with U.S.-Russia relations, believes those are words Obama is now like to regret.⁹¹ Obama and Medvedev were able to develop a business-like relationship, devoid of hostile rhetoric. It is useful then to conceive of cooperation between United States and Russia in terms of deals as a business-like partnership. This is a very pragmatic and necessary approach and one that Obama has used successfully in dealing with Russia. U.S. and Russia are not friends and before they can establish a history of good relations, they should work together to build relations on a deal by deal basis. This is an approach that was implemented by Medvedev and Obama that allowed both countries to sign the new START treaty.

During a meeting in Sochi and shortly after coming to power, Obama and Medvedev realized that the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was soon to expire and agreed to draw up another treaty. They used this opportunity to launch the first ‘bilateral deal’ under the reset. In April of 2010, President Obama together with Medvedev signed the new nuclear arms reduction treaty. The main purpose of this agreement was to reduce Russian and U.S. stockpiles of nuclear weapons by a third in a period of seven years. However, the pact witnessed a short setback in November when the number two republican in the Senate blocked ratification of the treaty. Senator Jon Kyl’s announcement surprised the White House. Biden responded by stating that the failure to pass the new START treaty would endanger U.S. security, calling the treaty a ‘fundamental part of American relationship with Russia’. Obama also assured Medvedev

⁹¹ Kelemen, “Will U.S-Russia Reset.”

that the pact would remain a top priority of his administration.⁹² So, despite the setback, the agreement was ultimately passed because of the determination in the White House to carry out the deal. This is the kind of determination that is required of the American and Russian government in order to trudge past disagreements and forge new areas of cooperation.

During a meeting at a leading U.S think tank, President Medvedev's remarks revealed the fundamental difficulty in U.S-Russian relations. "Our countries have different histories and our peoples often differ in their interpretation of events."⁹³ This paper has tried to provide evidence of this fact and show that the past matters for the present. The way in which nationalism evolved in each country significantly influenced each nation's political culture. Russia and the United States have a complex history encompassing instances of outright hostility to warm embraces but their relationship today can and should be built on dialogue and cooperation.

Mr. Medvedev argues that Russia needs time to catch up to the West. "The USA has been developing a market economy for almost two centuries now, while our country, in the twentieth century at least, went through a series of severe trials, economic upheavals and experiments. I therefore believe very strongly that Russia now requires several decades of calm and stable effort to build an effective political and economic system. Only then will the differences that exist, even at the level of our mentalities, become a thing of the past." Medvedev proposes that: "for this to happen,

⁹² Jonathan Weisman, "Russian Arms Pact Faces New Obstacle." *Washington Post*. November 17, 2010, accessed August 30, 2011, online.wsj.com/article/SB1000142405274870431250457561866015128.html

⁹³ Medvedev, "Meeting with Representatives."

we must not lecture each other on how to live, but need simply to keep talking to each other, maintain regular, direct contact, and not try to paint the situation in this or that tone of our own.”⁹⁴

Recently Medvedev has tried to focus Russia’s attention on forging economic ties with the United States and the West. The underlying belief is that Russia needs to establish closer ties with the wealthy world, especially with the Americans and the E.U in order to modernize its economy. Medvedev along with senior economic officials, businessmen and academics at the Institute of Contemporary Development in Moscow where Medvedev is the nominal chair, have discussed the possibility of “modernization alliances”. Under this deal, Russia promises to offer investment opportunities and greater political cooperation to countries in exchange for foreign capital and know-how. Medvedev is adamant about securing Western investment and technological expertise in order to reduce Moscow’s dependence on oil and natural gas exports. This is an area where he believes U.S and Russia have the most work to do and one area where cooperation can be broadened. “I was especially happy that my last conversation with President Obama began not with the Iranian situation or the Middle East, and not even with the START Treaty” Medvedev said, “but with the question of economic cooperation between our two countries... We have put dynamism back into our relations, have revived normal contacts and put things on a constructive track once again. President Obama and I have established friendly ties, but we have yet to see the economic results.”⁹⁵ It is true that trade between U.S and Russia is astoundingly low. In 2009, U.S-

⁹⁴ Medvedev, “Meeting with Representatives.”

⁹⁵ Medvedev, “Meeting with Representatives.”

Russian bilateral trade amounted to only 25.3 billion USD, which is less than one-twentieth of U.S.-Chinese trade. Also, only four percent of total Russian FDIs (foreign direct investments) in 2008 came from the United States.⁹⁶ These numbers are shockingly low considering Russia's size and U.S.'s stated commitment to restart the relationship. Perhaps this discussion is best left to economists but its important to note the prospect of economic cooperation between the two countries since it is such a big concern on Medvedev's agenda and seems to be missing in the U.S. government.

One of the reason's why cooperation has been limited in the economic arena between U.S and Russia is the lack of commitment on the American side that is necessary for forging a deal with Russia. It is during these times that speculations about U.S. wanting to keep Russia weak arise. However, Medvedev himself understands that business is business. "Of course, I realize that business is business, and that it functions according to its own needs and laws I realize that there is no forcing it into anything, but we can certainly establish the conditions for its development."⁹⁷ U.S. political commentator, Walter Laquer also believes that United States has an interest in Russian reform. "Washington should certainly welcome outstretched hands [Russia] in the interest of world peace. If it does not do so, it will be blamed by critics for decades to come for having missed unique opportunities."⁹⁸ Nonetheless, effective negotiations can

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Changing Course in Moscow: Is Medvedev Serious About a New Vision for Russian Foreign Policy?" *Foreign Affairs*, September 7, 2010, accessed December 3, 2011, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/66743/jeffrey-mankoff/changing-course-in-moscow?page=2>

⁹⁷ Medvedev, "Meeting with Representatives."

⁹⁸ Laquer, "Moscow's Modernization Dilemma,"160.

be forged and implemented only when U.S. and Russia talk to each other in meaningful ways using a common language to understand each other's goals and values in a particular venture. If there is no common understanding of how to forge the deal and what it ought to achieve, then it is highly likely to fail. United States and Russia differ in their underlying mentality of how the world works so they cannot count on a mutual understanding to absorb the disruptions when an agreement does not go as planned. That is why communication is so essential for U.S-Russian relations when it comes to describing and analyzing events. Washington and Moscow cannot make the mistake of simply assuming that one side will understand the other.

Russia and the United States will never be close friends or even close political allies as U.S. is with England. It would be foolish for Obama or the next American president to draw up some grandiose plans of friendship between U.S and Russia without understanding the real cultural differences that exists between them. U.S. and Russia have very different political cultures that stem from the way in which nationalism emerged in each country many years ago. Leadership in Russia and the U.S. oftentimes perceive world events in opposing ways and then describe the events in a language that is specific to their nation. This disconnect prevents effective dialogue and forces each country to assume a defensive position rather than one that seeks to understand the position of the other side. Instead of being quick to judge, each country should learn to speak to the other in mutually comprehensible ways. Yes, America and Russia are two very different nations. One values the rights of the individual and the other the national prestige above the individual. This often leads to conflicting mentality about domestic and foreign policy, but that does not mean that they cannot

get along. It may be harder for them to find common language but it is a must if the two countries are serious about working together and building a safer world for themselves and future generations. It is evident that Mr. Medvedev realizes the importance of amicable U.S-Russian relations and the role language plays. "It is important" he says, "since it is crucial that we still speak a similar language...The most important thing is to make an effort to understand each other."⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Medvedev, "CNN Interview."

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