**U.S.-Russia Relations after the Cold War**

Viktorija Kotova

Aalborg University, 2014



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**Abstract**

The title of the developed thesis is U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War. U.S.-Russia relations have always sparked an interest not only in academic circles, but also in media and broader public, since these two countries have a tremendous affect on world affairs and the development of their bilateral relations can considerably affect other players of the international system. The dissolution of the USSR and the end of the Cold War provided the two countries with an opportunity to build their bilateral relations based on principles other than deterrence and intimidation. Considering the two countries’ impact on world affairs, the author has decided to examine U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War, paying special attention to the “reset” policy that was launched in 2009. The “reset” policy allowed the two countries to achieve a breakthrough on a number of controversial issues, including the new arms reduction treaty, Iran’s nuclear problem and WTO accession talks. However, the year of 2012 already indicated disturbing developments in U.S.-Russia relations, until the Ukraine crisis erupted, leading to the adoption of sanctions by the latter. Thereby, the thesis author has raised the following research question: Why did the U.S.-Russia “reset” policy launched in 2009 fail?

To examine U.S.-Russia bilateral relations and to answer the research question the author has chosen theories of realism and liberalism, which in turn allowed the author to derive two hypotheses. The first hypothesis, which finds its roots in the realist tradition, states that U.S. foreign policy pursued after the Cold War impelled Russia to employ counterbalancing behavior to counter U.S. global hegemony, which in turn led to the failure of the “reset” policy. The second hypothesis is derived from the liberal tradition and it states that Russia’s move toward a more authoritarian regime deteriorated U.S.-Russia relations, which in turn resulted in the failure of the “reset” policy. To verify the two hypotheses the author has collected the empirical evidence not only on the development of U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War, but also on the development of Russia’s political regime, which allows the author to determine whether Russia’s slide toward authoritarianism could undermine the “reset”.

The thesis consists of four chapters and six subdivisions. In the first chapter the author outlays the research methodology. In the second chapter the author considers theories of realism and liberalism. The third chapter provides the empirical evidence, in particular, historical background of U.S.-Russia relations, development of U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War, the “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations and development of political regime in Russia. In the fourth chapter the author analyzes the empirical material by applying theories of realism and liberalism and tries to uncover the reasons of the “reset” failure. In the conclusion part the author summarizes the main results of the analysis and provides the answer to the raised research question.

After studying theories of realism and liberalism and examining the development of U.S.-Russia relations and political regime in Russia, the thesis author came to conclusion that realism is better prepared to explain the failure of the “reset”. The author has compared fluctuations in U.S.-Russia relations with fluctuation in Russia’s political regime and discovered that there is no any clear correlation in this particular case. Moreover, since 2005, Russia has been constantly ranked as “not free”, however this fact did not prevent the United States from initiating the “reset” policy in order to establish partnership relations with Russia. Thereby, the author has dismissed the second hypothesis and concluded that Russia’s slide toward a more authoritarian regime was not the main reason of the “reset” failure. The author, however, confirmed the first hypothesis that stated that U.S. foreign policy pursued since the end of the Cold War produced Russia’s counterbalancing behavior that eventually undermined the “reset”.

The United States, as offensive realism anticipated, after the Cold War was looking for opportunities to enhance its power and influence. Thus, for example, NATO’s eastward expansion and U.S. growing influence in the region can be seen as rather understandable by realists such as Mearsheimer. However, this U.S. policy was perceived as a threat by Russia, which in turn compelled Russia to look for opportunities to preserve its traditional sphere of influence. When the two countries accomplished all the goals that were set during the “reset”, their competing world order visions, that have their roots in security concerns, led to the failure of establishing genuine partnership relations. For example, the latest bone of contention between the United States and Russia, that brought their bilateral relations to the lowest point since the breakup of the USSR, became the Ukrainian crisis. However, Russia’s actions in Ukraine must be understood in strategic terms, since Russia perceived U.S. growing influence in Eastern Europe as a threat and attempted to secure its influence in the region. Thereby, U.S. power and growing influence, especially in the territories of the post-Soviet republics, produced a backfire effect from the Russian side, which eventually undermined the “reset”.

**List of Acronyms**

Acronym: Signification:

ABM Anti-Ballistic Missile Defense Treaty

EU European Union

FBI Federal Bureau of Investigation

G7 Group of Seven

G8 Group of Eight

G20 Group of Twenty

GLONASS Global Navigation Satellite System

MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NASA National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NPT Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty

NGO Non-governmental organization

New START New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

RSFSR Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

SORT Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty

START Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

START II Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty II

START III Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty III

U.S. United States

UN United Nations

UNSC United Nations Security Council

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

USAID United States Agency for International Development

WW II World War II

WTO World Trade Organization

WMD Weapons of Mass Destruction

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# Introduction

The history of United States – Russia relations is long and multifaceted, already accounting for more than 200 years.[[1]](#footnote-1) During this time period the two countries faced phases of intense cooperation and friendship and phases of strained relations or even confrontation. Referring to more recent history, humanity still remembers the Cold War period that went far beyond the framework of U.S.-Russia bilateral relations, affecting every part of the globe. During the Cold War the two countries were competing for global domination to build a desirable world order, which in turn not only caused phenomenon known as arms race, but also created a threat of nuclear war. The collapse of the Soviet Union and along with it the end of the Cold War provided hope for the beginning of a new era in U.S.-Russia relations. Russia, which was undergoing political and economic transformations, was recognized by the West as a potential ally. Some analysts and decision-makers even believed that they were lucky to witness the “end of history”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Indeed, the 1990s marked a significant progress in U.S.-Russia relations, however the end of the decade highlighted a growing tension between the two countries, thus, indicating a failure to build genuine partnership relations that could benefit both sides. Therefore, since the end of the Cold War U.S.-Russia relations did not proceed smoothly and were swinging from friendly dialogue and profound collaboration to mutual accusations and even sanctions. The thesis author covers the whole period of U.S.-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War, however, more detailed attention is paid to bilateral relations during the Obama administration, as it laid the groundwork for a unique phenomenon known as “reset”. The “reset” policy was aimed at fostering partnership relations between the two countries, which could be backed up by Washington’s concessions made to Russia that explicitly demonstrated U.S. willingness to respect Russia’s interests. Yet, in course of time U.S.-Russia relations have experienced a downturn again, which eventually resulted in the failure not just to build genuine partnership relations but to maintain them at the level necessary for adequate cooperation. Thereby, the thesis author raised the following research question: Why did the U.S.-Russia “reset” policy launched in 2009 fail?

The topic is especially of current interest taking into account the events that unfolded in Ukraine and Russia’s part in it. Besides, the United States and Russia are the two leading countries that exert a great influence on world affairs, which is why this topic will always stay important for academic research. To look for possible answers to the raised research question the author resorted to the two most prominent theories of international relations, in particular, realism and liberalism. After a literature review, the author came up with two hypotheses. The first hypothesis, which is derived from the realist tradition that is centered around power and security issues, states that U.S. foreign policy pursued after the Cold War impelled Russia to employ counterbalancing behavior to counter U.S. global hegemony, which was the reason why the United States and Russia did not manage to develop relations of partnership after the reset policy was launched in 2009. The second hypothesis is based on the assumption that the state’s political regime does entail implications for international relations and finds its roots in the liberal school of thought. Hence, the second hypothesis states that Russia’s move toward a more authoritarian regime deteriorated U.S.-Russia relations, which resulted in the failed “reset” policy. The second hypothesis is no less important, since it is necessary to pay attention to other factors that might influence U.S.-Russia relations.

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# 1. Methodology

Before tackling the raised research question, one must consider the issue of ontology and epistemology. Ontology defines the way people perceive the world and how they comprehend the essence of surrounding things.[[3]](#footnote-3) In that sense, people can choose to believe in actual structures that determine actors’ behavior[[4]](#footnote-4) or to believe that social phenomena largely depend on actors’ perception.[[5]](#footnote-5) These competing approaches are designated as objectivism and constructivism respectively.[[6]](#footnote-6) To investigate U.S.-Russia relations and to answer the research question the author has decided to apply the objectivist approach, assuming that the truth can be uncovered within an already existing structure.[[7]](#footnote-7) Epistemology in its turn determines the way one studies the world,[[8]](#footnote-8) and the thesis author is going to collect and analyze empirical evidence that can lead to an answer to the posed question.

As objectivist, the author has chosen two theories of international relations, in particular, realism and liberalism. By studying realism and liberalism the author derived two hypotheses that are tested against collected data. The first hypothesis claims that U.S. foreign policy pursued after the Cold War compelled Russia to employ balancing strategies, which in turn disrupted the chance to improve bilateral relations after the “reset” was launched in 2009, while the second hypothesis is focused on Russia’s political regime, arguing that country’s move toward a more authoritarian regime deteriorated U.S.-Russia relations and undermined the “reset”.

To verify the hypotheses the author will collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, in order to assess U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War attention will be paid to the number of annual presidential meetings, official statements, bilateral agreements and initiatives, adopted sanctions etc. To evaluate Russia’s political regime, the author will apply a quantitative rating provided by Freedom House. To collect the required data the author will use primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews, official documents such as bilateral treaties and official websites such as the website of U.S. Department of State. Secondary sources include research papers, books and mass media such as online newspapers, online magazines and television.

# 2. Theoretical Approach

## 2.1. Realism

Realism is the oldest intellectual tradition that provides an image of international relations[[9]](#footnote-9) and from its very inception has been dominant in the field. Realist reflections on international relations have been developed for centuries and can be found in the texts of prominent thinkers such as Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli and Kenneth Waltz. It is worth emphasizing that realism does not represent a single theory and ultimately three main strands of this school of thought can be identified, in particular, classical realism, neoclassical realism and neorealism.[[10]](#footnote-10) Nevertheless, the thesis author has chosen neorealism, which, in contrast to classical realism, dismissed any idea about human nature and “placed particular emphasis on international anarchy and the distribution of power in the system”.[[11]](#footnote-11) The thesis author argues that after the end of the Cold War realism still retains strong explanatory power, which can be backed up by the persisting security dilemma observed in U.S.-Russia relations. This state of affairs finds its manifestation not only in the competing policies in the post-Soviet space, but also in controversies concerning the missile defense system deployment or the conflict resolution in Syria. Thereby, realism can help to grasp the driving force behind U.S.-Russia relations and to uncover reasons of the “reset” failure.

As already mentioned, neorealism rejects normative considerations and neglects the idea of human nature, which according to classical realists is the source of conflicting interests and competition. Kenneth Waltz, who is commonly known as the founder of neorealism, in his outstanding work “Theory of International Politics” is trying to uncover systemic reasons of state behavior, arguing “that the absence of a higher authority that states can turn to in a crisis, coupled with their interest of survival, leaves states little choice but to compete with each other for power”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Thus, Waltz in his seminal work demonstrates how the international system is different from any domestic political system and asserts that the former is decentralized and anarchical, where all its parts are formally equal: “None is entitled to command; none is required to obey”.[[13]](#footnote-13) Moreover, units of this decentralized system bear similar functions, which in turn means that they are distinguished mainly by their capability to perform these functions.[[14]](#footnote-14) Thereby, Waltz dismissed factors such as states’ regime or traditions but stressed the importance of the distribution of capabilities in the so-called self-help system, where each unit has to develop “the means of protecting itself against others”.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Consequently, “in any self-help system, units worry about their survival, and the worry conditions their behavior”.[[16]](#footnote-16) The well-known balance-of-power theory, which can help to grasp the outcome of states’ behavior, says that each unitary actor’s aim is at least to ensure its survival and, at best, to reach universal domination.[[17]](#footnote-17) In pursuit of this aim states can choose between two options, in particular, to pursue either internal efforts (e.g. to improve economic and military capability or to elaborate smarter strategies) or external efforts (to weaken opponent’s alliance or to expand its own alliance).[[18]](#footnote-18) Hence, the pressure of the international system compels states to seek for more power and clever strategies in order to maintain the balance of power in the system.

John Mearsheimer, another prominent realist author, went even further and made a conclusion that even states that pursue just security because of the anarchic international system are compelled to act aggressively: “Great powers that have no reason to fight each other – that are merely concerned with their own survival – nevertheless have little choice but to pursue power and to seek to dominate the other states in the system”.[[19]](#footnote-19) Mearsheimer asserts that states are always aware about the distribution of power in the system and they seek to acquire as much of world power as possible, and this pursuit usually takes place at the expense of their potential opponents.[[20]](#footnote-20) Mearsheimer argues “that states employ a variety of means – economic, diplomatic, and military – to shift the balance of power in their favor, even if doing so makes other states suspicious or even hostile”.[[21]](#footnote-21) This factor leads to a situation in which states tend to have offensive intentions in regard to each other and to perceive this competition as a “zero-sum” affair.[[22]](#footnote-22)

However, it is especially important, that even if a great power manages to reach a prominent military superiority over its opponents, it will remain power-seeking and will not miss an opportunity to obtain more power, since it is never clear how much power would be enough to be truly secure.[[23]](#footnote-23) States can barely predict how power will be shared among actors in fifteen or twenty years.[[24]](#footnote-24) Thus, for example, the United States did not foresee that the USSR would collapse, and, similarly, nowadays it cannot foresee how much power countries such as Russia will hold in the future.[[25]](#footnote-25) Consequently, according to Mearsheimer, great powers realize their inability to determine a sufficient amount of power in order to be secure today and tomorrow, which compels them to create the situation in which neither state can challenge them.[[26]](#footnote-26) Even if a great power is unable to become a hegemon, “it will still act offensively to amass as much power as it can, because states are almost always better off with more rather than less power”.[[27]](#footnote-27) Similarly, Robert Gilpin asserts that “as the power of a state increases, it seeks to extend its territorial control, its political influence, and/or domination of the international economy”.[[28]](#footnote-28) “Reciprocally, these developments tend to increase the power of the state as more and more resources are made available to it”.[[29]](#footnote-29) Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that before employing offensive strategies each great power always considers issues such as the balance of power and possible reaction of other states, thus, determining whether the expected costs outweigh the potential gains, though due to imperfect information miscalculation is always possible.[[30]](#footnote-30)

One must be aware that offensive behavior causes other states to feel insecure and to develop counterstrategies.[[31]](#footnote-31) This phenomenon has become known as the security dilemma.[[32]](#footnote-32) As Nick Wheeler and Ken Booth explain, the fear and feeling of insecurity is conditioned by uncertainty in regard to other state’s intentions: “The military preparations of one state [can] create an unresolvable uncertainty in the mind of another as to whether those preparations are for defensive purposes only (to enhance its security), or whether they are for offensive purposes [to weaken its security]”.[[33]](#footnote-33) Thus, for example, the enlargement of a military alliance can also be perceived with distrust and fear, since intentions of one’s opponent are uncertain and an offensive move can never be ruled out.[[34]](#footnote-34) Therefore, such developments can cause not only fear in the eyes of other states, but can also produce a counterbalancing behavior.

## 2.2. Liberalism

Realism has always encountered criticism and attempts to replace it with other alternative approaches.[[35]](#footnote-35) The most prominent existing alternative to realism is liberalism, and continuous debates between these two schools have laid the foundation of the discipline known as international relations.[[36]](#footnote-36) Nowadays, liberalism is still the most viable alternative to realism and a number of transformations that took place during the last sixty years, for instance, the spread of democracy and international trade, have made this school of thought even more competitive.[[37]](#footnote-37) As is the case with realism, liberalism does not represent a single theory, and eventually four branches of liberalism can be identified, in particular, “sociological liberalism, interdependence liberalism, institutional liberalism and republican liberalism”.[[38]](#footnote-38)

However, for the analysis the author has picked only one strand, namely, republican liberalism. Considering the fact that Russia, which in the early 1990s initiated democratic reforms, diverged from the democratic path and for more than a decade was consistently creating a more centralized and less free political system, could not just give rise to concerns in the West, but also considerably damage U.S.-Russia relations. Thus, high expectations that Russia could become a truly democratic country, sharing similar norms and values with the West, were dismissed due to grim realities of Russian domestic regime. Thereby, by bringing liberal theory into analysis of U.S.-Russia relations, the author will be able to look for an alternative explanation of the “reset” failure and to determine whether the state’s domestic regime can have a significant impact on interstate relations or not.

Liberal theorists pay great attention to phenomenon such as free trade, which according to them is capable of diminishing the chances of war between states.[[39]](#footnote-39) However, liberalists regard democracy as another factor that fosters peaceful interstate relations, and theorists such as Immanuel Kant and Michael Doyle asserted that democracies “are unique in that they are able to establish peaceful relations among themselves based upon their shared values and common approach to establishing legitimate domestic political orders”.[[40]](#footnote-40) The so-called liberal peace theory takes its origin in the writings of Immanuel Kant. In the essay “Perpetual Peace” Kant laid down three basic elements or “definitive articles” that are necessary for establishing lasting peace between states,[[41]](#footnote-41) in particular, “the civil constitution in each state shall be republican”,[[42]](#footnote-42) “the law of nations shall be based on a federation of free states”,[[43]](#footnote-43) and finally “the rights of human beings as citizens of the world shall be restricted to the conditions of universal hospitality”.[[44]](#footnote-44) The idea of these definitive articles is that in a republican constitution citizens can influence the decision to launch a war, and since they are the ones who bear all the costs and miseries of war[[45]](#footnote-45) they may prevent their country from engaging in a military conflict. According to the second article, the alliance (“alliance for peace”) created among such republican states would ensure protection of states’ rights such as the right for freedom,[[46]](#footnote-46) while the principle of universal hospitality would promote communication and interaction between nations.[[47]](#footnote-47)

Further developing Kant’s idea, Michael Doyle argues that countries where interests of citizens are taken into consideration through democratic representation are usually more peaceful, as citizens of these countries are “interested in peace because they pay the price of war – in taxes, disruption of trade, material destruction, and lives”.[[48]](#footnote-48) Moreover, Bruce Russett asserts that democratic countries also apply norms such as peaceful conflict resolution to foreign policy and that the constraints existing in the democratic system can buy some time for other more peaceful conflict resolution options, which in turn explains why liberal democratic countries are perceived as more peaceful.[[49]](#footnote-49) It is argued that liberal democratic states can manage to build their own “separate peace”, since “over time, these liberal democratic states establish trust amongst each other, based on growing economic interdependence which provides material incentives for peaceful behavior, similar political institutions and values, and a history of non-violent conflict resolution”.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Nevertheless, democratic peace theory does not imply a peaceful foreign policy of liberal democratic states toward all countries in the international system. Democratic states fought a large number of wars against non-liberal states, and those wars could not always be justified as “defensive”. Liberal democratic states distrust illiberal states, since they neglect the interests of their citizens or even oppress their own people and can pursue war agenda either to get material benefits or to distract from internal problems.[[51]](#footnote-51) “In pursuit of peace, therefore, illiberal states easily become targets of liberal “missionary” policies”.[[52]](#footnote-52) Great powers, even with the liberal democratic regime, also tend to take “preventive” actions in order to eliminate “potential challengers before they become big threats”.[[53]](#footnote-53) However, many liberalists argue that international politics indeed could be pacified, which “requires the spread of liberal democracy to as yet nonliberal states”.[[54]](#footnote-54) Therefore, Doyle asserts that “the aim of a liberal foreign policy […] lies in a systemic promotion of liberal principles abroad”.[[55]](#footnote-55)

Raymond Aron is another international relations scholar who paid attention to domestic regime. Even though Aron is considered to be a realist, his theory contains a certain liberal element, which is why the author has decided to include this particular element into analysis. Aron divided the international system into two categories, namely, “homogenous” and “heterogeneous” systems.[[56]](#footnote-56) The system is homogenous “when the major powers share similar regimes and conceptions of policy”,[[57]](#footnote-57) while heterogeneous system means that “the regimes are organized according to different principles and appeal to contradictory values”.[[58]](#footnote-58) Homogeneous system is regarded as more stable, since inter-state relations in this case are more predictable owing to similar political traditions and principles of legitimacy, while heterogeneity implies not only instability and uncertainty, but sometimes even hatred between the adversaries.[[59]](#footnote-59) Thus, it is clearly seen that political regime does matter to Aron’s theory and his argument concerning the homogeneity of the international system in a certain way corresponds to the liberal theory. For example, both liberal scholars and Aron believe that the effect of anarchy can be mitigated. For Aron this would be accomplished under conditions of similarity of major powers’ political regimes, as well as for liberalists, but with an emphasis on democratic political regime.

Aron argues that power is certainly a crucial factor in comprehending international relations, however it cannot be separated from objectives pursued by major powers that in turn, to a large extent, depend on the nature of the state’s regime.[[60]](#footnote-60) Thus, Aron asserts the following: “In each period the principal actors have determined the system more than they have been determined by it”.[[61]](#footnote-61) “A change of regime within one of the chief powers suffices to change the style and sometimes the course of international relations”.[[62]](#footnote-62) According to Aron, state leaders’ perception of the world and their decision-making process is largely based on a specific system of values, thus, such factors as the ideological system and even public opinion can significantly impact decision-makers’ thinking.[[63]](#footnote-63) Moreover, the conflict between states may become intensified if they do not share common values or principles of legitimacy and can even lead to a struggle to overthrow each other’s regime.[[64]](#footnote-64) Therefore, Russia’s move toward a more authoritarian regime could worsen U.S.-Russia relations, as the two countries might have not only competing interests and world order vision, but also incompatible domestic regimes, which could lead to mutual distrust and complicated communication. Moreover, U.S. attempts to promote democracy worldwide could further intensify tension between the two countries, since it could be perceived as a potential threat to Putin’s regime.

# 3.Empirical Data

## 3.1. Historical Background of U.S.–Russia Relations

Russia and the United States share long and multifaceted relations.[[65]](#footnote-65) Official diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on November 5 (or October 24, according to the Julian calendar that was used at the time in Russia), 1809.[[66]](#footnote-66) The U.S. mission to Russia was aimed at fostering friendly relations with the country in order to promote U.S.-Russian trade.[[67]](#footnote-67) It is worth noting, that at the end of the 19th century U.S.-Russia relations could be described as friendly, which was a logical outcome of Russia’s decision to support the Union during the Civil War by sending a squadron to San Francisco and New York to provide assistance to the Union in case Great Britain and France employ aggressive measures.[[68]](#footnote-68) Thus, during the Civil War, the Russian Empire was the only great power that provided assistance to the Union.[[69]](#footnote-69) Moreover, shortly afterward Russia “sold Alaska to the United States in preference to Great Britain, which controlled adjacent Canada”.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Nevertheless, the 20th century marked a complicated and volatile phase in U.S.-Russia relations. Two Russian revolutions of 1917 not just changed the course of events in Russia itself, but later also affected the whole international order. The February Revolution eliminated Monarchy in Russia, while the October revolution initiated and led by Vladimir Lenin eventually brought victory to the Bolsheviks.[[71]](#footnote-71) From 1917 until 1922 the country was known as the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), however, on December 29, 1922, “the treaty on the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was signed by the RSFSR, Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan”.[[72]](#footnote-72)

This marked the creation of the USSR, a new type of state where the political system was organized as a one-Party rule with a ban on factions, which in fact established a totalitarian regime where the Communist Party controlled all levels of the state.[[73]](#footnote-73) The country’s economic system has been transformed into “the almost complete dominance of state ownership and enterprise; state monopoly of foreign trade and an inconvertible currency; obligatory central planning, both in physical and financial terms”.[[74]](#footnote-74) Thus, it is clear that the political and economic system of the USSR was practically opposite to that of the United States. Thus, until 1933 the United States refused to recognize the USSR and the Soviet Government.[[75]](#footnote-75) Nevertheless, in October 1933, the United States and the USSR finally established diplomatic relations,[[76]](#footnote-76) which can be explained by the desire to promote trade between the two countries that was so necessary to help to restore the U.S. economy after the Wall Street collapse.[[77]](#footnote-77)

Despite the disagreements, during World War II, the USSR and the United States fought against a common foe. Moreover, the USSR benefited from the program known as Lend-Lease[[78]](#footnote-78) through which the United States assisted its allies by providingsubstantial military aid and other supplies.[[79]](#footnote-79) However, once Germany and Japan were defeated, each country that participated in the Grand Alliance started to pursue its own national interests and agenda.[[80]](#footnote-80) “A split between the West and the Soviet Union rapidly developed into an international clash of wills, outlooks, and ideologies”.[[81]](#footnote-81) It is worth noting, that the leaders of the allied countries held a different view on the postwar world order.[[82]](#footnote-82) For example, Franklin D. Roosevelt believed that liberated Eastern European countries were free to pursue their own political course, while Stalin sought to establish pro-Communist governments in those countries.[[83]](#footnote-83)

The end of WW II and the breakup of the Alliance marked a new stage in relations between Western democracies and the USSR, in particular, the Cold War emerged between the former allies. The Cold War can be defined as an ideological and political struggle between the two so-called superpowers, in particular, the United States and the Soviet Union, that represented opposed political and economic systems.[[84]](#footnote-84) The Cold War continued from 1945 until 1991, when the two superpowers not only distrusted one another but attempted to shape the world so that it served their own interests that were rooted in opposite ideas about how society should be organized.[[85]](#footnote-85) One of the most important features of the Cold War was the arms race, when both countries started to build up their military strength in order to balance and constrain each other.

The superpowers continued to struggle for influence not just in Europe, but in the whole world. Though the military competition between the two countries has never turned into an open military confrontation, the Cold War struggle involved military conflicts in parts of the world such as Central and South America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa.[[86]](#footnote-86) Moreover, there were occasions when the United States and the USSR could have engaged in direct military conflict, for example, during the Cuban Missile crisis when the fate of the whole world was put under risk. The geopolitical, military, and economic rivalry between the two superpowers, which involved subtle espionage, violent wars in places such as Vietnam, nuclear submarines sliding through the oceans, and a strife to develop the most advanced satellites,[[87]](#footnote-87) continued until 1991, when the Soviet Union suddenly ceased to exist.

## 3.2. U.S.-Russia Relations after the Cold War

As a result of the dissolution of the USSR 15 independent states emerged on the world map and the Russian Federation was one of them. “The first task of the new regime was to declare Russia as the successor state of the Soviet Union that gave the Russian Federation the Soviet place in all international organizations, acceptance of Soviet treaties and obligations, and responsibility for the nuclear arsenal on Russian territory”.[[88]](#footnote-88) The emergence of the new Russian state provided hope that Russia would follow the Western democratic model, introduce a market economy, completely abandon Soviet ideology and would be committed to international agreements and obligations.[[89]](#footnote-89) Thus, the USSR breakup and the end of the Cold War indicated the collapse of the bipolar, ideologically divided international system[[90]](#footnote-90) and marked a new phase in U.S.-Russia relations when the former enemies had to rethink their mutual relations and to elaborate new principles of cooperation.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Even though the Cold War enemy ceased to exist, Russia was still important to U.S. interests, especially taking into account the fact that Russia still retained nuclear weapons that one way or another posed a threat to the United States.[[92]](#footnote-92) “After the demise of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Bush administration immediately reached out to Russian president Boris Yeltsin, promising aid, encouraging liberal economic and political reforms, and negotiating new security arrangements”.[[93]](#footnote-93) Andrei Kozyrev, Russia’s Foreign Minister, in turn sought for cooperation with the West.[[94]](#footnote-94) Moreover, during the time period from 1992 until 1996 relations with the United States took the prevailing place in Russia’s foreign policy.[[95]](#footnote-95)

One of the ways to evaluate interstate relations is to pay attention to official state visits and high-level meetings. Thereby, the author will count and analyze the number of Presidential meetings, which is another communication channel capable of promoting dialogue on issues of mutual concern and strengthening bilateral relations. Thus, on January 31, 1992, Boris Yeltsin visited the United States for the first time as Russia’s President.[[96]](#footnote-96) During the meeting with George H. W. Bush, the two leaders discussed issues related to the collapse of the USSR, agreed on further reduction of strategic nuclear weapons, and also discussed cooperation in the field of arms trade and cooperation on non-proliferation of WMD.[[97]](#footnote-97) The next state visit of the Russian President took place in Washington in June, 1992.[[98]](#footnote-98) During Yeltsin’s bilateral meeting with George H. W. Bush the two Presidents signed a “Charter for U.S.-Russian Partnership and Friendship” and agreed to lift restriction on the number of members of diplomatic mission.[[99]](#footnote-99) Russia also provided “Peace Corps” volunteers with the right to work on its territory and decided to open for the international community its airspace in Eastern Siberia.[[100]](#footnote-100) Moreover, in 1992, after Yeltsin’s appeal for more Western aid the United States launched the so-called “Operation provide Hope” program under which Russia received emergency humanitarian assistance.[[101]](#footnote-101) The United States also provided Russia with its support for the provision of assistance from international institutions.[[102]](#footnote-102)

However, it was also important to foster cooperation and to reach consensus in the military domain, since it could help to decrease mutual suspicion and thus to promote economic ties between the two countries. On January 3, 1993, George H. W. Bush visited Moscow and following the meeting with the Russian President Yeltsin the two parties signed the START II treaty.[[103]](#footnote-103) The START II treaty followed its predecessor START I, which was initially proposed by Ronald Reagan and signed by the United States and the USSR in July, 1991, and which, at its time, was the first most significant nuclear weapons reduction.[[104]](#footnote-104) In the same manner, “START II established a limit on strategic weapons for each Party”,[[105]](#footnote-105) for example, according to the agreement the two countries were obliged to decrease the amount of established strategic nuclear warheads to 3,000–3,500 and to liquidate all the heavy Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles.[[106]](#footnote-106) Thus, the limit on strategic weapons established in the START II treaty went far beyond that which was proposed in the START I treaty.[[107]](#footnote-107)

This treaty can be perceived as a manifestation of progress in U.S.-Russia relations and it clearly shows that even in such a sensitive sphere as strategic offensive arms the United States and Russia are able to achieve consensus. At the same time, U.S.-Russia dialogue on nuclear weapons in the beginning of the 1990s was not limited only to the START II treaty. The Bush administration was highly concerned about the nuclear weapons that remained on the territory of three former Soviet republics, in particular, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus,[[108]](#footnote-108) which in turn revealed another issue that required cooperation between the U.S. and Russia. The United States and Russia in relatively short terms had managed to reach agreement with Belarus and Kazakhstan on nuclear arsenal elimination from their territories.[[109]](#footnote-109) In return all three of the newly independent countries were promised to receive economic assistance from Russia, NATO and the United States.[[110]](#footnote-110) However, Ukraine rejected to give up its third largest nuclear arsenal, since those weapons not just contained commercial value, but also provided significant security benefits.[[111]](#footnote-111)

The U.S. and Russia’s involvement in the talks led to the ratification of the so-called Lisbon protocol, which made all five of the countries bound to the START I treaty and under which Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine gave up their nuclear arsenal and joined the NPT.[[112]](#footnote-112) In return Ukraine has received reimbursement for the economic value of transferred weapons, assistance to eliminate its nuclear arsenal, and security guarantees from Russia, the United States, as well as the United Kingdom, which “became known as the Budapest Memorandum”.[[113]](#footnote-113) Thereby, U.S.-Russia cooperation on this matter allowed to reach agreement with Ukraine, thus, eliminating one of the largest nuclear stockpiles. However, it should be noted that U.S. and Russia’s interests matched in this particular case that can be described as a win-win situation, which is why the two parties managed to reach successful cooperation.

It is clearly seen that after the breakup of the USSR the United States and Russia were able to promote cooperation in the security domain. It is worth mentioning that in the beginning of the 1990s the two countries also discussed other arms control agreements, for example, “nuclear and chemical nonproliferation, conversion of defense industries, and U.S. assistance to Russia in transporting and destroying nuclear and chemical weapons”.[[114]](#footnote-114) During the Bush administration the United States and Russia also signed agreements on other issues, for instance, “Cooperation in space exploration and the use of space technology”,[[115]](#footnote-115) “Expansion of contacts between the scientific and technological communities”[[116]](#footnote-116) or “Abolition of diplomatic travel restrictions”[[117]](#footnote-117).

The two countries also reached a number of accords on trade and investments, for instance, “an agreement to extend reciprocal most-favored-nation tariff treatment to the products of each country; a bilateral investment treaty guaranteeing non-discriminatory treatment for U.S. investors in Russia; a treaty for the avoidance of double taxation”[[118]](#footnote-118) and other. These and other similar agreements have undoubtedly enhanced economic ties between the two countries. In addition, in 1992, Russia was promised to receive 4.5 billion dollars in economic help to support ongoing economic reforms in the country.[[119]](#footnote-119) However, it must be noted that U.S. aid was conditional, in particular, economic aid was either issued to support economic reforms, or restricted to humanitarian aid, or provided to foster dismantling of weapons.

Bill Clinton, who was elected new U.S. President in 1993, not only sought to promote cooperation between the two countries, but also set the objective to transform Russia into a democratic country with a functioning market economy.[[120]](#footnote-120) The first meeting of Yeltsin and Clinton took place in Vancouver, in April, 1993, which resulted in the signing of the Vancouver Declaration[[121]](#footnote-121) that confirmed U.S.-Russia cooperation and commitment “to promote democracy, security, and peace”.[[122]](#footnote-122) During negotiations in Vancouver Clinton also promised to provide 1.6 billion dollars in aid to Russia, half of which would be provided as aid and the half as credits.[[123]](#footnote-123) U.S. government provided money would cover areas such as “humanitarian aid, private sector development, promotion of democracy, energy development, environmental protection, resettlement of former Soviet officers, promotion of trade and investment, and assistance in nuclear arms reduction”.[[124]](#footnote-124) Another outcome of the Vancouver meeting was the establishment of “a U.S.-Russian Commission on technical cooperation in energy and space”,[[125]](#footnote-125) which later was called Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission.[[126]](#footnote-126)

In April, 1994, the two Presidents held a meeting during Clinton’s official visit to Russia.[[127]](#footnote-127) As a result of negotiations the two parties reaffirmed their commitment for cooperation and took further actions toward eliminating persisting elements of the Cold War.[[128]](#footnote-128) During the meeting President Yeltsin declared Russia’s readiness to take part in the “Partnership for Peace” program, but Clinton emphasized his expectation that Russia would remove its troops from the Baltic states.[[129]](#footnote-129) Moreover, the two leaders made a joint statement in which they expressed their commitment to democracy and human rights, as well as agreed on the inviolability of sovereignty of the former USSR republics and “the rights of the Russian-speaking population in the Baltic states”.[[130]](#footnote-130)

The two Presidents also discussed mutual cooperation to prevent the proliferation of WMD with an emphasis on the Middle East and the two Koreas, agreed not to “target their nuclear missiles at each other”,[[131]](#footnote-131) as well as Russia consented to convert highly enriched uranium, contained in the remaining Soviet nuclear warheads, into uranium that could be utilized in nuclear power stations.[[132]](#footnote-132) The United States in its turn provided a contract worth 12 billion dollars for the purchase of Russian uranium.[[133]](#footnote-133) The issue of nuclear proliferation was especially important to U.S. interests, since the reduction of nuclear weapons in Russia meant that tons of nuclear materials extracted from eliminated weapons still remained in Russian territory, and under conditions of economic disarray, when nuclear scientists, facility personnel and the military all experienced reduced salary or even no salary, the risk of nuclear theft, terrorism or accident increased dramatically.[[134]](#footnote-134) This is why the agreement on the disposal of highly enriched uranium was not just in Russia’s interests, but also gained major importance to U.S. interests.

It is worth mentioning other prominent events that took place in 1994, in particular, the creation of “the first U.S.-Russian Space Shuttle Mission”,[[135]](#footnote-135) the creation of a “five-nation Contact Group” that was aimed at fostering conflict resolution between Bosnian Serbs and the Federation, the signing of an agreement between NASA and the Russian Space Agency that made Russia a partner in International Space Station projects and Yeltsin’s visit to Washington in September, 1994,[[136]](#footnote-136) which resulted in a joint statement on the issue of strategic stability and nuclear security and a joint statement on the principles and promotion of trade, economic and investment cooperation.[[137]](#footnote-137) The two presidents signed three commercial agreements amounting to one billion dollars and pledged to achieve Ukraine’s accession to the NPT.[[138]](#footnote-138)

Thus, it is clearly seen that such high-level meetings became regular, for example, in May, 1995, Clinton again visited Moscow to commemorate the victory in WW II.[[139]](#footnote-139) During this visit Clinton expressed his support for democratic development in Russia, called to settle the Chechen conflict, and pledged to develop “a special relationship between NATO and Russia”.[[140]](#footnote-140) During the meeting Yeltsin agreed to join the “Partnership for Peace” program and also pledged not to sell nuclear technology or additional weapons to Iran.[[141]](#footnote-141) The two leaders also discussed the necessity to achieve early ratification of the START II treaty.[[142]](#footnote-142) The dialogue between U.S. and Russian leaders was also actively promoted in the framework of various summits, for instance, G7 and later G8 Summits, the Sharm al-Sheikh summit or the Summit on Nuclear Safety and Security.[[143]](#footnote-143)

It can be argued that high-level bilateral meetings that became so frequent in the 1990s could help to promote mutual cooperation and consensus on a number of issues. It is worth mentioning, that during the Clinton administration U.S President Clinton and Russian President Yeltsin met at least 18 times,[[144]](#footnote-144) “nearly as often as their predecessors had met throughout the entire Cold War”.[[145]](#footnote-145) All in all, during the time period from 1992 to 1996 Russia and the United States signed around 100 interstate and intergovernmental agreements, which accounts for more than a half of all similar U.S.-Soviet agreements signed between 1931 and 1991.[[146]](#footnote-146) It is clearly seen that interstate agreements signed by the two countries were not limited solely to military issues, but also included cooperation on economic, scientific and technological issues.[[147]](#footnote-147)

It should be also noted that Clinton was supportive toward Yeltsin and his policies, regardless of a number of events indicating Russia’s internal problems that should have attracted much larger U.S. attention or even criticism, for example, Russia’s constitutional crisis of 1993 and Yeltsin’s order to shell the opposition-controlled parliament or the military conflict on the territory of Chechnya that started in 1994.[[148]](#footnote-148) Despite these disturbing occurrences Clinton continued to support Yeltsin and his camp in the parliamentary elections of 1995 and the presidential elections of 1996, which can be explained by his intent not to undermine Yeltsin’s reputation and domestic support.[[149]](#footnote-149) In this regard, realists would claim that, when state’s national interests are involved, issues such as democracy and human rights matter less, which is why U.S. officials did not criticize heavily these disturbing developments in Russia.

In 1997, the two Presidents met in Helsinki where they discussed further cuts in nuclear weapons and decided to start negotiations on the START III treaty once the previous START II treaty was ratified by both sides.[[150]](#footnote-150) Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to foster Russia-NATO cooperation, however they disagreed in regard to NATO enlargement to Eastern European countries.[[151]](#footnote-151) Nevertheless, a month later Russia and NATO signed the so-called “NATO-Russia Founding Act”, which stated that the two parties do not regard each other as enemies and “established a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council”[[152]](#footnote-152) in order to promote collaboration on issues of mutual concern.[[153]](#footnote-153) The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was created with the aim to provide Russia with a voice in NATO, thus, mitigating Russia’s objections in regard to NATO expansion.[[154]](#footnote-154)

In the subsequent years President Clinton repeatedly raised the issue of ratification of the START II treaty, since the United States ratified the treaty in 1996.[[155]](#footnote-155) However, in protest to NATO expansion[[156]](#footnote-156) the Russian State Duma denied the ratification of the treaty until April 2000.[[157]](#footnote-157) Besides, in the National Security Concept of the Russian Federation of 1997 NATO expansion to the East and the possibility of occurrence of foreign military bases near Russian borders was regarded as one of the main threats to Russia in the international sphere.[[158]](#footnote-158) Thus, the National Security Concept explicitly highlighted the security dilemma perceived by Russia after NATO’s eastward enlargement.

It is also worth mentioning that in February 1990, James Baker, the Secretary of State, visited Moscow to discuss the issue of German reunification and during the meeting Baker assured Gorbachev that NATO enlargement to the East would not happen if Moscow supported Germany’s peaceful reunification.[[159]](#footnote-159) Thus, Jack Matlock, the U.S. Ambassador to the USSR, reflected on the issue: “We gave categorical assurances to Gorbachev back when the Soviet Union existed that if a united Germany was able to stay in NATO, NATO would not move eastward”.[[160]](#footnote-160) Though, these words were not put in any written agreement[[161]](#footnote-161) and later were refuted by the West, Russia has referred to these promises numerous times in regard to NATO expansion. It is especially important that NATO expanded not just to former Warsaw Pact countries such as Hungary, Check Republic or Poland, but that it went even further and admitted three former Soviet republics, in particular, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Another event that negatively affected U.S.-Russia relations was NATO’s decision to start bombing Yugoslavia.[[162]](#footnote-162) At the time when NATO launched bomb attacks on Belgrade Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov was on a plane heading to the United States to discuss the issue of additional financial aid, however, the Prime Minister ordered to turn the plane around and head back to Moscow, which was a symbolic act that indicated a new chill in relations between the two countries.[[163]](#footnote-163) Moreover, Russia decided to withdraw from the “NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council”.[[164]](#footnote-164) Therefore, NATO enlargement and the Belgrade bombing considerably damaged U.S.-Russia relations and provoked “deeply negative attitude to the United States among the Russian elite and broader public”.[[165]](#footnote-165) Besides, the Kosovo crisis led to the prospect of a military clash between NATO and Russia, when on June 12, 1999, Russian military forces without any warnings seized the Pristina airport.[[166]](#footnote-166)

As a result, a survey of 1999 on Russia’s attitude toward the United States showed that 53 percent held negative attitude toward the country, while only 33 percent held positive views.[[167]](#footnote-167) It is also worth noting that although in 1999 the U.S. and Russian state leaders met on margins of G8 and OSCE Summits, there was only one foreign bilateral visit, a working visit to the United States of Russian Prime Minister Sergei Stepashin in July 1999.[[168]](#footnote-168) These data, to some extent, also indicate the deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations, since during the time period from 1992 to 1998 the United States and Russia arranged at least two foreign high-level bilateral visits a year.[[169]](#footnote-169)

The beginning of the new Millennium was marked by a significant political development, in particular, on New Year’s eve 1999, President Yeltsin announced his resignation and appointed Vladimir Putin as Russia’s Acting President, but on March 26, 2000, Putin won presidential elections and became a legitimate President of the Russian Federation.[[170]](#footnote-170) It is worth mentioning that Putin proclaimed that his main objective in the international sphere is the restoration of Russia as a great power, moreover, Putin described the breakdown of the USSR as “the greatest geopolitical disaster of the century”.[[171]](#footnote-171)

In June 2000, Clinton visited Moscow and during a meeting with the newly elected President of Russia the two parties discussed issues such as further arms reduction, economic growth and reforms in Russia, climate change, corruption and the situation in Chechnya, among other things.[[172]](#footnote-172) Nevertheless, arms control issue was the main theme of their dialogue, since the United States sought to reach amendments to the ABM treaty in order to start testing its new national missile defense system.[[173]](#footnote-173) Russia was skeptical on the issue, in particular, Moscow was worried about U.S. hidden agenda and Russia’s inability to maintain the corresponding number of nuclear weapons.[[174]](#footnote-174) Thus, in June, 2000, Putin declared during his media interview that the United States and Russia could combine their efforts to establish a joint missile shield that would counteract threats against the United States, Russia and their allies in Europe.[[175]](#footnote-175) This can partially explain why the State Duma has finally ratified the START II treaty, since Putin did not want to provide the United States with an additional opportunity to withdraw from the ABM Treaty.[[176]](#footnote-176)

At the same time, after the June Summit Russian politicians were waiting to see Clinton’s successor.[[177]](#footnote-177) It is worth noting that U.S.-Russia relations did not become the primary issue during the election campaign, even though the Republicans criticized Clinton for his naive pro-Yeltsin policy.[[178]](#footnote-178) The new Bush administration did not attempt to have a good start in relations with Russia.[[179]](#footnote-179) For example, in December, 2000, Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s national security advisor, stated: “It would be foolish in the extreme to share defenses with Moscow if it either leaks or deliberately transfers weapons technologies to the very states against which America is defending”.[[180]](#footnote-180) Moreover, in February 2001, in an interview with a French newspaper “Le Figaro” Rice declared: “I believe Russia is a threat to the West in general and to our European allies in particular”.[[181]](#footnote-181)

Such a harsh position can be explained by the fact that in 2000, Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov notified the United States that Russia would not adhere to the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement and would resume its arms sales to Iran.[[182]](#footnote-182) According to the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement that was reached in 1995 Russia agreed to complete already existing arms sales contracts with Iran and to cease all weapons transfers by the end of 1999.[[183]](#footnote-183) In return the United States would not impose sanctions against Russia as envisaged by U.S. law authorizing sanctions for arms sales to countries that are classified by the United States as sponsors of terrorism, and Iran was included in that list.[[184]](#footnote-184) The Russians claimed that because of the 1995 agreement Russia’s loss of profit from the arms trade accounted for five billion dollars.[[185]](#footnote-185) Another unpleasant incident that happened in relations between the two countries in February 2001 was the disclosure of Robert Hanssen, an American FBI agent, who was spying for the Soviet and later for the Russian intelligence agency.[[186]](#footnote-186) The United States responded to the incident by expelling 50 Russian diplomats, which became the largest diplomatic expulsion since 1986.[[187]](#footnote-187) Russia reacted by expelling the same number of U.S. diplomats.[[188]](#footnote-188)

The first meeting of George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin took place in Slovenia in June 2001.[[189]](#footnote-189) During the meeting the two Presidents discussed “bilateral cooperation on economic, commercial, regional, and security issues”.[[190]](#footnote-190) In spite of the previously mentioned incidents, the atmosphere during the meeting was friendly and the leaders committed themselves to develop bilateral partnership and mutual respect, though the Russian President emphasized that U.S. unilateral actions would become an obstacle to this process.[[191]](#footnote-191) During the second meeting on margins of the G8 summit in July 2001, the two leaders discussed U.S. plans to build a missile defense system, as well as decided to foster dialogue on strategic arms reduction.[[192]](#footnote-192) Additionally, the two Presidents announced a new initiative, namely, a Russian-American Business Dialogue[[193]](#footnote-193) that would deal with the problems of global economic integration, e.g. investment climate, cooperation in multilateral institutions and others.[[194]](#footnote-194)

The dramatic events that happened on September 11 undoubtedly shook the world, however it simultaneously provided an opportunity to improve relations between the United States and Russia.[[195]](#footnote-195) “Putin was the first leader to telephone Bush with condolences and an unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist act”.[[196]](#footnote-196) Russia, which itself experienced numerous terrorist attacks, expressed genuine support for America and its people. The 9/11 terrorist attacks provided a practical ground for cooperation between the two countries, in particular, to unite their efforts in fighting terrorism. Thus, during Putin’s trip to the United States in November 2001 the two Presidents discussed their commitment to reconstruct Afghanistan and to fight terrorism, which also included bilateral efforts to combat “organized crime and drug trafficking”.[[197]](#footnote-197) Moreover, during the presidential summit the two leaders made a joint statement not only declaring their determination to cooperate on global security issues, but also emphasizing a new phase in U.S.-Russia relations: “The United States and Russia have overcome the legacy of the Cold War. Neither country regards the other as an enemy or threat”.[[198]](#footnote-198)

Therefore, following the 9/11 events Russia provided the United States with intelligence assistance to combat the Taliban[[199]](#footnote-199) and allowed the United States to deploy its military bases in Central Asia in order to foster U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, which was a crucial signal taking into consideration geopolitical importance of the region.[[200]](#footnote-200) Another indicator of improved U.S.-Russia relations was the decision to establish a NATO-Russia Council to cooperate on projects of common interest such as nonproliferation and counter-terrorism, civil emergencies or cooperation in the military sphere.[[201]](#footnote-201) Another proof of improving U.S.-Russia relations is a number of Presidential meetings in 2002, in particular, U.S. and Russian Presidents met at least five times in 2002,[[202]](#footnote-202) which became a record number (see Appendix 1 and 2).

It is especially significant that although in December 2001, the United States announced its withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, Putin’s reaction was rather cold: “I fully believe that the decision taken by the president of the United States does not pose a threat to the national security of the Russian Federation”.[[203]](#footnote-203) The next day Russia declared its withdrawal from the START II Treaty.[[204]](#footnote-204) That step should be perceived as rather symbolic, since the treaty never entered into force,[[205]](#footnote-205) especially considering the fact that in May 2002 the United States and Russia signed a new arms reduction treaty, in particular, the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT), which limited the number of strategic nuclear warheads to 1,700-2,200 per each country.[[206]](#footnote-206) Among other things, in 2002, the United States and Russia signed a Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and held the first Commercial Energy Summit to discuss global energy issues and impediments to trade and investment in this sector.[[207]](#footnote-207)

However, in course of time Russia became concerned with the development of U.S. foreign policy[[208]](#footnote-208) and its impact on U.S.-Russia relations. First of all, in the end of 2002 it became clear that the second round of NATO expansion was unavoidable, however especially unpleasant for Russia was the admission of the three Baltic States. Russia attempted to undermine chances of the three Baltic countries to become NATO members.[[209]](#footnote-209) For instance, Russia refused to settle territorial disputes with Latvia and Estonia and did not sign a border treaty with any of them.[[210]](#footnote-210) Nevertheless, Russia’s position on NATO expansion was rather mild, thus, for example, in 2002 Putin declared that “NATO membership is a sovereign right of any country”.[[211]](#footnote-211)

Another irritating development for Moscow was the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, which not just violated international law, but also clearly demonstrated to Moscow that the United States did not need Russia or Russia’s consent for its unilateral agenda.[[212]](#footnote-212) Moreover, Moscow was dissatisfied that Russia lost eight billion dollars “that Iraq owed for past arms deliveries, and its old contracts to develop Iraqi oil fields”.[[213]](#footnote-213) Russia publicly criticized the United States for its unilateral actions. For example, on March 20, 2003, Putin made the following statement: “The military actions are carried out in spite of global public opinion, contrary to the principles and norms of international law and the UN Charter”.[[214]](#footnote-214) Thus, NATO enlargement and U.S. invasion of Iraq might further disturb Russian side and intensify the security dilemma, since those actions clearly indicated U.S. dominant position in the system.

U.S. operation in Iraq was not the only stumbling stone in U.S.-Russia relations. The next incident that affected U.S.-Russia relations was the 2004 Presidential elections in Ukraine, when after mass protests referred to as the “Orange revolution” previous election results were canceled and in the revote a pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko defeated his pro-Russian opponent Viktor Yanukovych.[[215]](#footnote-215) Though Putin never blamed the United States or other Western governments for helping to promote “Orange revolution”, he mentioned that NGOs operating in Ukraine were funded by the West.[[216]](#footnote-216) Thus, in November 2005, State Duma passed a law that allowed for broader control over overseas-funded NGOs, in particular, the law authorized conduction of check-ups to investigate NGOs’ activities and compliance with their stated objectives.[[217]](#footnote-217) Changes in Russia’s political regime undoubtedly caused concern in Washington, however Moscow’s decision to interrupt gas supply to Ukraine caused harsher U.S. criticism. For instance, in May 2006, Dick Cheney, the U.S. Vice President, declared: “No legitimate interest is served when oil and gas become tools of intimidation or blackmail, either by supply manipulation or attempts to monopolise transportation”.[[218]](#footnote-218)

In summer 2006, there was one positive development in relations between the two countries, in particular, Russia and the United States were discussing the signing of the protocol that would finally allow Russia to become a member of the WTO.[[219]](#footnote-219) Nevertheless, the United States and Russia did not manage to make a deal, which again disrupted Russia’s chance to join the WTO.[[220]](#footnote-220) Thus, in 2006 German Gref, the Minister of Economics, warned the United States that Russia might cancel all the export preferences for U.S. agricultural products, including meat, if the United States does not sign the agreement on Russia’s accession to the WTO in three months,[[221]](#footnote-221) but in autumn 2007, Russia “banned the import of chicken and pork from 30 U.S. facilities”.[[222]](#footnote-222)

By this time deterioration in U.S.-Russia relations became rather prominent, especially, taking into consideration U.S.-Russia rhetoric. Thus, for example, in a speech delivered on May 9, 2007, Putin ambiguously drew an analogy between U.S. policies and the Third Reich: “Moreover, in our time, these threats are not diminishing [...] they are only transforming, changing their appearance. In these new threats, as during the time of the Third Reich, are the same contempt for human life and the same claims of exceptionality and diktat in the world”.[[223]](#footnote-223) Another example is Putin’s speech during the Munich Security Conference in February 2007: “[…] the United States has overstepped its national borders in every way. This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations”.[[224]](#footnote-224)

Such a harsh rhetoric could also be induced by the Bush administration’s intention to establish a missile defense shield in two Eastern European countries, namely, Poland and Czech Republic.[[225]](#footnote-225) The Russian side was deeply concerned with the issue, since the United States had never before deployed its objects of strategic potential beyond its national territory and in such proximity to Russian borders.[[226]](#footnote-226) Even though the dialogue on military-political issues continued in 2007, the two countries did not manage to agree on new arrangements in the arms control field or on U.S. plans to deploy a global missile defense in Eastern Europe.[[227]](#footnote-227) Besides, in November 2008, the Russian side emphasized that the missile shield deployment in Europe would entail reciprocal measures.[[228]](#footnote-228) For example, in the Kaliningrad region Russia would establish not only a missile complex “Iskander”, but also equipment to produce electronic suppression of the new U.S. missile defense system objects.[[229]](#footnote-229)

In March 2008, the whole world was paying special attention to Russia’s internal politics, since Russian citizens voted to determine Vladimir Putin’s successor. The election results showed that Dmitry Medvedev, the candidate who was supported by Putin, became Russia’s new President. Soon it became clear that the changes in the Kremlin would not bring significant shifts in Russia’s foreign policy. It was especially important that Putin was appointed Prime Minister, which in turn raised concerns of how much actual power Medvedev possessed. For example, right after the elections Medvedev declared: “We will be able to preserve the course of President Putin”.[[230]](#footnote-230)

At the same time, one must specify the fact that before the “reset” policy was initiated the United States and Russia did cooperate on certain issues. Thus, a report of 2006 issued by a bipartisan task force on U.S.-Russia relations argues the following: “Although President Putin is presiding over the rollback of Russian democracy, the United States should work with him to keep Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and to keep terrorists from attacking either his country or ours”.[[231]](#footnote-231) However, the report also says that cooperation between the two countries is rather exceptional than the norm: “U.S.-Russia relations are now marked by a growing number of disagreements. The partnership is not living up to its potential”.[[232]](#footnote-232)

In regard to U.S.-Russia cooperation, it should be mentioned that in 2005 the two countries signed an agreement on cooperation to strengthen control over Man-portable Air Defense Systems that if acquired by terrorists could put global aviation under threat, but in 2006 the two Presidents launched a joint initiative to prevent nuclear terrorism.[[233]](#footnote-233) It is worth emphasizing that terrorism is a sphere in which U.S.-Russia cooperation is the most successful. Thus, even in 2008, the year that elicited growing tension in relations between the two countries, the United States and Russia continued their cooperation to prevent nuclear and other forms of terrorism.[[234]](#footnote-234) The two countries maintained dialogue and cooperation on a number of other issues in the framework of international summits.[[235]](#footnote-235) For example, the two parties cooperated on Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stabilization of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as on combating maritime piracy.[[236]](#footnote-236)

Yet the dialogue on nonproliferation issues, namely, the nuclear problem of Iran and North Korea, was complicated due to “U.S. sanctions against Russian companies for their cooperation with Iran […] in the military-technical field”.[[237]](#footnote-237) Particularly, on October 24, 2008, the United States adopted sanctions against Russia’s “RosOboronEksport”, as allegedly it supplied technologies for production of WMD to Iran.[[238]](#footnote-238) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced that U.S. actions were unlikely to change Russia’s position on a number of issues, including Iran’s nuclear problem.[[239]](#footnote-239) Lavrov also emphasized that the decision made by U.S. policy makers is unacceptable by stating the following: “All our trade and economic activities in Iran, all the military-technical cooperation with Iran is conducted in strict compliance with the existing rules of international law, in accordance with our international obligations and export control regime that exists in the Russian Federation”.[[240]](#footnote-240) At the same time, in the “RosOboronEskport” U.S. decision was regarded as a manifestation of unfair competition.[[241]](#footnote-241) It is also worth mentioning that in 2006 the United States introduced similar sanctions against three Russian companies that produce military equipment, including “RosOboronEksport”.[[242]](#footnote-242)

Yet the events of August 2008 led U.S.-Russia relations to their lowest point. Russia’s actions in August 2008 clearly showed Russia’s ambitions and foreign policy aims. It can be argued that such a harsh reaction was caused not only, as Russia asserted, by the necessity to protect its citizens, but also by the desire to demonstrate its sphere of influence and to prevent countries such as Georgia from entering NATO. Prior to the events that occurred in August 2008, Russia was deeply concerned with U.S. policy in regard to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia, in particular, the Bush Administration encouraged its partners to provide both countries with a Membership Action Plan.[[243]](#footnote-243) It is also worth mentioning that after Kosovo’s independence was recognized by most Western countries, including the United States, Russia established legal ties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which in turn meant recognition of all documents issued by the governments of the two provinces.[[244]](#footnote-244)

The United States condemned Russia’s actions on the territory of Georgia, for example, Bush declared: “I've expressed my grave concern about the disproportionate response of Russia and that we strongly condemn the bombing outside of South Ossetia”.[[245]](#footnote-245) Moreover, Bush emphasized: “These actions jeopardize Russians' relations [...] with the United States and Europe”.[[246]](#footnote-246) It should be noted that following the events of August 2008 the United States did not impose actual sanctions against Russia. Nevertheless, U.S.-Russia relations have deteriorated significantly. For instance, the United States canceled joint military exercises with Russia[[247]](#footnote-247) and the Bush administration made the decision to withdraw the bilateral agreement on peaceful nuclear cooperation from the U.S. Congress.[[248]](#footnote-248) Moreover, the MFA of Russia emphasized that after the 2008 conflict the United States attempted to initiate some collective pressure on Russia, increased anti-Russian rhetoric, suspended activities in the framework of the NATO-Russia Council, limited interaction with Russia in the “Group of Eight” and in regard to the issue of Russia’s accession to the WTO, disregarded Russia’s foreign policy initiatives (specifically, Russia’s proposals concerning a European Security Treaty), among other things.[[249]](#footnote-249) Hence, when Barack Obama took office in 2009, U.S.-Russia relations were at a very low point.

## 3.3. The “Reset” of U.S.-Russia Relations

In 2008, Presidential elections took place not only in Russia, but also in the United States, since in November 2008 American people voted to decide who would be the next President. According to the election results the next head of the state became Barack Obama, a candidate representing the Democratic Party, which in turn might bring new opportunities and challenges to U.S.-Russia relations.[[250]](#footnote-250) The Obama Administration did initiate change in bilateral relations, thus, at a meeting in Geneva on March 6, 2009, Hillary Clinton presented Sergey Lavrov a symbolic button with a label “reset”, implying the beginning of a new phase in relations between the two countries.[[251]](#footnote-251)

The “reset” of U.S.-Russia relations implied a number of mutual concessions that would meet interests of both countries.[[252]](#footnote-252) Thomas Graham, former assistant to the President, noted that the “reset” was intended to demonstrate Washington’s readiness to respect Moscow’s interests, though the Obama administration has never explicitly mentioned this.[[253]](#footnote-253) According to Graham the White House planned to take a number of steps, in particular, to agree on a new nuclear arms reduction treaty with Russia, to reconsider the deployment of its missile defense in Europe, to lower relations with Ukraine and Georgia and to soften U.S. criticism of Russia’s internal policies.[[254]](#footnote-254) The United States also planned to complete the work on Russia’s accession to the WTO.[[255]](#footnote-255) In exchange Washington hoped to receive Russia’s support for Obama’s vision of a nuclear-free world and U.S. policy toward Iran and Afghanistan.[[256]](#footnote-256) Considering previously mentioned concessions offered by Washington, the Russian side later emphasized that the current administration was willing to foster U.S.-Russia cooperation “based on the principles of equality and mutual respect”.[[257]](#footnote-257)

In order to further develop U.S.-Russia relations in July 2009, the two countries agreed to establish the Bilateral Presidential Commission, which included eighteen working groups covering fields such as counterterrorism, military cooperation, health, agriculture, economic relations, energy and others,[[258]](#footnote-258) thus, integrating various bilateral contacts into a single mechanism.[[259]](#footnote-259) The Obama administration’s priority list included the issue of disarmament, thereby, the arms control working group was also established in the framework of the Bilateral Presidential Commission.[[260]](#footnote-260) It is worth mentioning that the arms control issue has traditionally been one of the main elements in relations between Russia and the United States, which is why the necessity to reach a new arms reduction treaty could become the basis for starting a constructive dialogue between the two countries. The START treaty was expiring in December 2009, which impelled the two parties to start drafting a new agreement to further reduce strategic offensive weapons.[[261]](#footnote-261) Thus, in April 2010, the two presidents signed the New START treaty that obliged the two parties to make a 30 percent cut in their strategic nuclear warheads reaching 1,550 over seven years and to halve the amount of devices such as submarines, missiles and bombers delivering these nuclear warheads.[[262]](#footnote-262) It should be mentioned that compared to the previous bilateral treaties the New START treaty has ensured the largest nuclear arms reduction. Moreover, the new treaty also envisaged verification measures such as on-site inspections and data exchanges.[[263]](#footnote-263) The treaty has been ratified by both countries and entered into force in February 2011.[[264]](#footnote-264)

As previously mentioned, the arms control issue has traditionally been one of the most important aspects in relations between the two countries and this is why the necessity to forge a new treaty could be used as an opportunity to improve deteriorated bilateral relations, since a new agreement would benefit both sides. However, the “reset” in U.S.-Russia relations was not limited to the signing of a new arms reduction treaty. Thereby, “the Obama administration re-submitted the U.S.-Russian agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation to Congress on May 10, 2010”.[[265]](#footnote-265) This agreement, which was initially signed in 2008 and withdrawn from Congress after the 2008 conflict, enabled “the two countries to trade nuclear materials, technology and services”.[[266]](#footnote-266) Moreover, in September 2009, Obama announced abandonment of “Pentagon plan to build a missile defence system in Europe”,[[267]](#footnote-267) which earlier became one of the major controversies in U.S.-Russia relations, and emphasized that instead the United States “would focus on the threat posed by [Iran](http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran" \o "More from the Guardian on Iran)'s short- and medium-range missiles, rather than its intercontinental nuclear capabilities”.[[268]](#footnote-268) However, Russia’s reaction was rather cautious, since Moscow was uncertain if the new system would pose a lesser threat to its national security.[[269]](#footnote-269)

After the reset policy was launched in 2009, the two countries made a breakthrough in a number of other controversial issues. Thus, in 2010, Russia that once continuously opposed tighter sanctions against Iran finally supported UNSC resolution 1929 authorizing stricter sanctions against Iran.[[270]](#footnote-270) The sanctions were targeted at Iran’s nuclear and ballistic missile program, as well as conventional military, which was a major issue for Russia that had arms contracts with Iran.[[271]](#footnote-271) In exchange, the Obama administration lifted previously imposed sanctions against Russian arms producing companies.[[272]](#footnote-272) Additionally, Russia along with the United States endorsed UNSC resolution 1874 that was produced as a response to the nuclear test conducted by North Korea.[[273]](#footnote-273) Another major issue after the “reset” was joint efforts on Afghanistan, in particular, Russia has provided air and ground transit through its territory, thus, “over 2,200 flights, over 379,000 military personnel, and over 45,000 containers of cargo have been transported through Russia in support of operations in Afghanistan”.[[274]](#footnote-274) The two countries also renewed bilateral military cooperation and have collaborated on anti-piracy operations.[[275]](#footnote-275)

The United States and Russia also sought to foster bilateral economic cooperation. In 2010, the two countries made a major breakthrough, in particular, they managed to resolve a number of controversies and to reach an agreement that led to Russia’s accession to the WTO.[[276]](#footnote-276) This became a significant achievement for Russia, especially taking into account that Russia had been pursuing WTO membership since the 1990s. Moreover, the completion of WTO negotiations with the United States removed an additional irritating element in relations between the two countries. At the same time, prior to the completion of WTO talks Russia and the United States agreed on the removal of obstacles to resume previously banned exports of U.S. poultry to Russia.[[277]](#footnote-277) As previously mentioned, in 2006 Russia and the United states failed to reach agreement on Russia’s accession to the WTO, which led to Russia’s decision to ban meat imports from certain U.S. companies, which indicates to what extent such issues are politicized in relations between the two countries.

The United States and Russia have also managed to foster cooperation in areas such as democracy and human rights.[[278]](#footnote-278) The Obama administration sought ways to support Medvedev’s initiative to eliminate corruption and strengthen the rule of law, thus, the two countries not only organized discussions between U.S. and Russian officials, but Obama administration officials have also met with Russian civil society and increased “financial support through the [...] USAID for programs on rule of law, human rights, civil society, media, and political processes”.[[279]](#footnote-279) Nevertheless, Washington continued to criticize human rights violations and political regime in Russia.[[280]](#footnote-280)

Even though since 2009 the two countries have managed to improve bilateral relations substantially and to achieve a breakthrough on a number of issues, already in 2011 there were some disturbing developments that could negatively affect U.S.-Russia relations. Thus, for example, the two parties did not resolve controversies in regard to U.S. and NATO plans to establish a missile defense in Europe. Although U.S. and NATO partners assured Russia that the future missile defense system would not be targeted against them, Russian officials perceived those assurances skeptically.[[281]](#footnote-281) The Russian side asked to provide an objective evidence base to ensure that the new missile system would not undermine nuclear parity with Russia, yet the United States did not react to this initiative accordingly.[[282]](#footnote-282) The missile defense issue was still not solved by 2012 either, which is why Russian officials declared that “the Russian side would have to take corresponding measures to ensure their own security”.[[283]](#footnote-283)

In the field of “contacts between people” the two countries made some progress, as in 2011 the United States and Russia agreed to ease visa regime for tourists and businessmen, however Russian officials emphasized unsatisfactory situation in regard to the rights of adopted Russian children and extremely rigid sentences for Russian citizens convicted in the U.S. on doubtful grounds.[[284]](#footnote-284) Thus, Russian officials asserted that a Russian pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko and a businessmen Victor Bout were convicted with multiple violations of international law but the litigation itself was biased and politicized.[[285]](#footnote-285) Another factor that had a negative impact on bilateral relations was 2011-2012 Presidential elections, for example, the main republican candidate Mitt Romney declared that Russia is “America’s geopolitical enemy number one”.[[286]](#footnote-286)

Even though in 2012 there was a positive development in U.S.-Russia relations such as continuation of cooperation on Afghanistan and the decision to lift the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which finally normalized bilateral trade, the relations between the two countries became strained following the adoption of the so-called Magnitsky Act by the U.S. Congress that envisaged visa and financial sanctions against a number of Russian officials who were accused of human rights violations by U.S. officials.[[287]](#footnote-287) Russia in turn accused Washington of trying to impose their “mentoring” and in response to the Magnitsky Act ceased all operations of USAID and adopted the so-called Dima Yakovlev Law that excluded a number of American citizens from entering Russia who according to Russian officials were guilty in violating human rights of Russian citizens.[[288]](#footnote-288) Moreover, Russia annulled the 2011 bilateral ”Agreement regarding cooperation in adoption of children”.[[289]](#footnote-289) Thus, it can be argued that issues such as political regime and human rights did provide an additional irritation moment in U.S.-Russia relations.

Simultaneously, the Russian side was rather critical in regard to U.S. practice to introduce sanctions that go beyond UNSC resolutions against companies maintaining business ties with Iran and Syria and warned that any kind of such restrictions against Russian companies or banks would damage bilateral relations significantly.[[290]](#footnote-290) Russian MFA also emphasized that “Russia does not recognize the extraterritorial application of U.S. regulations, including the law on unilateral sanctions against other countries, and will not adjust to it”.[[291]](#footnote-291) It should also be noted that Putin’s return to the presidency negatively affected U.S.-Russia relations, since he continuously criticized the United States for their attempt to interfere in Russia’s domestic politics.

However, an especially unpleasant incident for the United States was Russia’s defiant decision to provide U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden with asylum, which led to Obama’s decision to cancel his meeting with Putin in the framework of the G20 summit.[[292]](#footnote-292) The Russian side has also noted that after the incident the United States warned about a possible “pause” in bilateral relations, however these allegations proved to be untenable considering Russia’s leading role in world affairs.[[293]](#footnote-293) Nevertheless, U.S. experts warned that such situations, when one side is shutting done all the channels, especially at the highest level, can lead to failure or even crisis.[[294]](#footnote-294) Robert Legvold, a political scientist from Columbia University, mentioned that when state leaders do not invest in improving mutual relations, in case of conflict or any danger situation in the post-Soviet space, similar to that of 2008, it threatens serious deterioration of bilateral relations.[[295]](#footnote-295)

It is worth emphasizing that a high-level dialogue has always been the main element in cooperation between the two countries.[[296]](#footnote-296) According to the MFA of Russia, in 2009, the two countries organized five presidential meetings,[[297]](#footnote-297) which reached the number of presidential meetings held in 2002, thus, indicating the improvement of bilateral relations (see Appendix 1 and 2). Such a high number of presidential meetings could be explained by joint efforts to launch the “reset” policy and to normalize bilateral relations. The subsequent years showed a fewer number of presidential meetings, in particular, there were approximately two presidential meetings a year. However, one must also pay attention to the quality of such meetings. Thus, for example, in 2010 President Medvedev made an official three days long visit to the United States with a special focus on the expansion of economic and innovation cooperation.[[298]](#footnote-298) Though during the last couple of years the United States and Russia still organized regular high-level meetings, there could be seen some tendencies pointing at the deterioration of bilateral relations, for example, there could be mentioned not only the cancelation of Obama’s meeting with Putin in 2013, but also Obama’s decision not to attend the Olympic Games in Sochi. Moreover, the U.S. Olympic delegation did not include neither first lady, nor vice president, nor Obama’s Chief of Staff.[[299]](#footnote-299)

Despite deteriorating bilateral relations, the United States and Russia continued their cooperation on a number of strategic issues. For example, in 2012 the two countries maintained cooperation on Afghanistan and Russia continued to provide air transit through its territory.[[300]](#footnote-300) The two countries also intensified their cooperation in the Arctic Council.[[301]](#footnote-301) However, the United States and Russia held a different view on the crisis resolution in Syria, thus, Russia along with China has vetoed any UNSC resolution that called for sanctions against Syrian government and continued to criticize the West and the United States, in particular, for its intention to interfere in internal affairs of sovereign countries. Nevertheless, despite differences in positions on the Syrian crisis the two countries managed to find a common ground on the issue, namely, in September 2013, the United States and Russia “reached a groundbreaking deal on a framework to eliminate Syria's chemical weapons”.[[302]](#footnote-302)

This case clearly demonstrated that cooperation between such influential countries as the United States and Russia is required to forge solutions for problems of international importance. Thus, in 2013 the two countries continued their cooperation on Afghanistan and Iran’s nuclear program in the framework of the six-country group.[[303]](#footnote-303) Besides, the two parties signed an agreement on scientific cooperation in nuclear and energy spheres and continued to conduct consultations on international security between ministries of foreign affairs and ministries of defense.[[304]](#footnote-304) The two countries also continued cooperation on space exploration, though the United States prohibited deployment of Russia’s GLONASS measuring stations in the territory of the United States.[[305]](#footnote-305) Nevertheless, the Russian side emphasized that they faced numerous threats emanating from the United States to block all financial transactions of those Russian companies that maintain business ties with Iran, Syria and North Korea.[[306]](#footnote-306) Besides, the two countries have not found common ground on the missile defense issue and Russian officials stated that “Washington along with its NATO allies continued to pursue the deployment of a global missile defense system without taking into considering Russia’s interests”.[[307]](#footnote-307) In addition, Washington neglected Russia’s initiative to introduce a visa-free regime for short-term trips.[[308]](#footnote-308)

The latest Ukraine crisis has strained U.S.-Russia relations significantly, to say the least. Following the deployment of Russian troops in Crimea President Obama during his public speech on February 28, 2014, warned Russia that “there will be costs to any military intervention in Ukraine”,[[309]](#footnote-309) which sparked furious reaction from Russian officials. For example, the Chairman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviyenko not only declared that Obama has threatened Russia, thus, showing his disrespect toward Russian people, but also asked Putin “to recall Russia’s ambassador to the United States”.[[310]](#footnote-310) After a disputed Crimea referendum that provided Russia with a chance to annex the peninsula, which in turn can be seen by realists as a strategic move to designate its sphere of influence and to preserve its naval base in the Black Sea, the United States took actual measures and started discussing with its European partners a three-stage sanctions. The United States and Obama, in particular, were insisting on the necessity to isolate Russia internationally, thus, on March 26, 2014, Obama declared: “So long as we remain united, the Russian people will recognize that they cannot achieve the security, prosperity and the status that they seek through brute force”.[[311]](#footnote-311)

Before introducing sanctions, the United States suspended commercial and military cooperation with Russia.[[312]](#footnote-312) Thereby, the United States canceled not only trade and investment talks with the country that were aimed at deepening bilateral commercial ties, but also military cooperation, including “exercises, bilateral meetings, port visits and planning conferences”.[[313]](#footnote-313) Afterward, the United States along with its partners cancelled the G8 summit in Sochi and on March 24, 2014, suspended Russia’s participation in the G8.[[314]](#footnote-314) On March 17, the United States also introduced sanctions against a number of Russian officials and businessmen, but on March 20, the United States expanded this sanctions list by including 20 other Russian high level officials and the Bank of Russia.[[315]](#footnote-315) Besides, Obama signed an executive order allowing Washington to impose sanctions against Russia’s key industries.[[316]](#footnote-316) Russia in turn warned the United States that any sanctions against Russia would lead to an adequate response, thus, on March 20, 2014, Russia responded by denying entry permit to nine U.S. officials.[[317]](#footnote-317)

Nevertheless, following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, on March 27, the United States proceeded with sanctions and banned “the issuance of licenses for the export of defense items and defense services to [Russia](http://www.reuters.com/places/russia?lc=int_mb_1001)”.[[318]](#footnote-318) U.S.-Russia deteriorating relations have also influenced bilateral anti-drug cooperation, thus, on March 28, the United States suspended collaboration “with Russia in fighting against drug trafficking”,[[319]](#footnote-319) which would hit Russia in the first place, since the United States is much more affected by drug smuggling from Latin America.[[320]](#footnote-320) Furthermore, on March 30, the United States “suspended operation of the Bilateral Presidential Commission […] but money for the implementation of its projects would be redirected to Ukraine”.[[321]](#footnote-321) Dmitry Peskov, Presidential Press Secretary, noted that this decision has eliminated the two-way communication channel for various issues of mutual interest.[[322]](#footnote-322) The next step undertaken by Washington was suspension of any consultations with Russia in the missile defense sphere and suspension of cooperation in space, except the International Space Station project.[[323]](#footnote-323) The United States went further and halted U.S.-Russia cooperation on a number of peaceful nuclear energy projects and cooperation under the Nunn-Lugar program that was engaged in nuclear security issues.[[324]](#footnote-324) In addition, Russian researchers were denied access to Energy Department facilities, including Fermilab and Brookhaven National Laboratory.[[325]](#footnote-325)

On April 28, 2014, in connection to the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s alleged role in it, the United States introduced new sanctions against seven Russian high-level officials and 17 Russian companies whose assets would be frozen.[[326]](#footnote-326) Expanded sanctions targeted officials and businessmen close to President Putin, for example, all 17 companies that came under U.S. sanctions are controlled by only four businessmen, the President’s close associates.[[327]](#footnote-327) Moreover, the United States also banned export of high-tech commodities to Russia that could help to increase Russia’s military strength.[[328]](#footnote-328) Simultaneously, Obama expressed his satisfaction with Europe’s willingness to exert pressure on Russia and declared that “Russia has never been more isolated”.[[329]](#footnote-329)

It can be clearly seen that U.S.-Russia relations worsened significantly and the “reset” policy has run out if its potential. However, the deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations that could be observed since 2011, though this time bilateral relations were damaged even more seriously, is nothing new in relations between the two countries. Something similar could be observed in the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s after an attempt to improve bilateral relations in light of September 11 events. Hence, U.S.-Russia relations could be described as rather volatile, swinging from friendly dialogue and intensified cooperation to mutual accusations and even sanctions. However, one must not overlook the fact that even during periods of tensed relations the two countries continued to cooperate on a number of issues, including cooperation in the strategic area.

## 3.4. Political regime in Russia after the Cold War

### 3.4. 1. The end of the Cold War

In this section the author will provide some insight into political regime in Russia, in particular, how Russia’s political regime changed and evolved after the end of the Cold War. A political regime can be defined as “the formal and informal structure and nature of political power in a country, including the method of determining office holders and the relations between the office holders and the society at large. These relations could or could not involve accountability of office holders to the demos and likewise could involve various freedoms granted to society or, conversely, none at all”.[[330]](#footnote-330) Thereby, state’s political regime can be determined by a variety of parameters, including such aspects as human rights, free speech, the independence of media, the state of political parties, movements and associations and the real separation of power, among other things.[[331]](#footnote-331)

The end of the Cold War not only indicated the triumph of capitalism over communism, but also brought changes to Russia’s political regime. The liberalization process that started in the early 1990s could help to improve bilateral relations between the United States and Russia, since it is easier to foster cooperation between countries with similar political regimes, especially taking into account that issues such as regime legitimacy or human rights violations would not become an additional stumbling stone in bilateral relations. Nevertheless, in course of time it became clear that Russia diverged from the democratic path, thus, by comparing changes in U.S.-Russia relations and Russia’s political regime the author will be able to determine whether Russia’s move toward a more authoritarian regime could become an impediment to partnership relations between the two countries. The political regime in Russia is a broad and complicated issue, nevertheless in this section the author will attempt to cover main trends in the development of Russia’s political regime, including evaluation of data provided by a non-governmental organization Freedom House, which measures the state of political rights and civil liberties in the country.

### 3.4.2. The Level of Democracy and Freedom in Russia

The breakdown of the USSR resulted in the emergence of fifteen independent states, including Russia, which led Western decision-makers to believe that the country will start a process of liberalization and establish democratic institutions. Nevertheless, the transition from authoritarian to democratic political system did not proceed smoothly. Presidential elections of 1991 resulted in Boris Yeltsin’s winning, however a new constitution had not been adopted until June, 1993, which is why the country continued its operation based on the Soviet document that left “an unclear relationship between the newly-created position of the President, on the one hand, and the Supreme Soviet and the Congress of People’s Deputies, on the other”.[[332]](#footnote-332) After elections of 1991, Yeltsin pursued implementation of his economic reforms, however he faced strong opposition from the Parliament, especially from Communist Party members, which became a prominent obstacle to Yeltsin-initiated reforms, since “under the 1978 constitution, the parliament was the supreme organ of power in Russia”.[[333]](#footnote-333)

Yeltsin sought to enhance his executive powers, however in order to avoid providing the President with more power the Parliament rejected Yeltsin’s proposal on a plebiscite to decide how power would be divided between the two branches.[[334]](#footnote-334) Moreover, Yeltsin and the Parliament failed to agree on the text of a new constitution, which resulted in Parliament’s rejection of a proposed draft.[[335]](#footnote-335) Thus, Yeltsin “illegally dissolved the Supreme Soviet, in violation of the Russian Constitution; legislators responded by seeking to replace Yeltsin with his vice President, Alexander Rutskoy”.[[336]](#footnote-336) Yeltsin resorted to radical means by “ordering the military to shell and forcibly seize the Russian Parliament building in October 1993”.[[337]](#footnote-337) Yeltsin’s actions were unconstitutional and violent, which resulted in the death of 150 people and about 400 more were injured.[[338]](#footnote-338) Actions of the President were obviously in contradiction with democratic principles, nevertheless Western policy makers, including Bill Clinton, did not express harsh reaction, but on the contrary accepted it as a necessary step to remove the opposition obstructing Yeltsin’s reforms.[[339]](#footnote-339)

As previously mentioned, the constitutional crisis resulted in the dissolution of the legislature and forcible seizure of the premises. Parliamentary elections were organized in December, 1993 and brought victory to Yeltsin’s opponents, in particular, communists and nationalists.[[340]](#footnote-340) However, Yeltsin managed to achieve adoption of a new constitution, which was accepted “at national voting on December 12, 1993”.[[341]](#footnote-341) In order to evaluate political regime in Russia it is necessary to pay detailed attention to the new constitution, since it is the basic legal document that determines state’s structure.

The first section of the constitution states that “Russia is a democratic federal law-bound State with a republican form of government”.[[342]](#footnote-342) Thus, the country has chosen to pursue democratic development, which has been confirmed in the constitution. The constitution also claims that “the only source of power in the Russian Federation shall be its multinational people”[[343]](#footnote-343) and that “man, his rights and freedoms are the supreme value”[[344]](#footnote-344) that is protected by the state.[[345]](#footnote-345) The ways the people can exercise their power are also stipulated, namely, “through the bodies of state power and local self-government”[[346]](#footnote-346) and directly through referendum and free elections.[[347]](#footnote-347) At the same time, the constitution recognizes ideological and political diversity in Russia that sharply contrasts with the Soviet Union, where the only official ideology was Marxism-Leninism and political power was completely monopolized by the Communist Party.

The constitution also ensures “the equality of rights and freedoms of man and citizen”[[348]](#footnote-348) and any discrimination is prohibited.[[349]](#footnote-349) Besides, the constitution bans censorship, ensures “the freedom of ideas and speech”,[[350]](#footnote-350) the right to associations and “the right to […] hold rallies, meeting and demonstration”,[[351]](#footnote-351) among other things. Economic freedoms such as property rights “and the freedom of economic activity”[[352]](#footnote-352) are also guaranteed by the law. Therefore, the Russian constitution guarantees basic human rights and freedoms that are inherent to any liberal democratic country. The constitution also envisages that the state power is not concentrated in the hands of one faction, rather, it is “exercised on the basis of its division into legislative, executive and judicial power”.[[353]](#footnote-353) Thus, the state power is “exercised by the President of the Russian Federation, the Federal Assembly (the Council of the Federation and the State Duma), the Government of the Russian Federation, and the courts of the Russian Federation”.[[354]](#footnote-354)

However, it is crucial to pay attention to checks and balances between these branches and experts emphasize that the new constitution “created a president-dominant system which emasculated the legislature, legitimized the precedent of legislating by degree, and created the institutional framework for the centralization of power by the Kremlin”.[[355]](#footnote-355) Indeed, the constitution grants the President formal legislative power by stating that “the President of the Russian Federation shall issue decrees and orders”[[356]](#footnote-356) that are “obligatory to fulfillment in the whole territory of the Russian Federation”.[[357]](#footnote-357) Besides, the president “has the power to appoint, pending parliamentary confirmation, and dismiss the prime minister”.[[358]](#footnote-358)

Another critique of the constitution is that it did not arise from a compromise and deliberation, but was rather imposed by the victor of the constitutional struggle, which allowed to eliminate many checks and balances.[[359]](#footnote-359) Moreover, the previously mentioned Yeltsin’s decision to remove his opponents by force demonstrated his reliance on the “power ministries”.[[360]](#footnote-360) Thus, the new constitution that made the President a dominant figure in Russia’s political system and the strengthening of the power ministries’ role created conditions that later enabled Putin to establish an authoritarian rule.[[361]](#footnote-361) Nevertheless, comparing to the Soviet political system, the new constitution decentralized power significantly and created institutions that would operate as a balance to the executive branch.[[362]](#footnote-362)

The evaluation of the Russian constitution adopted in 1993 clearly shows that Russia has made a progress in terms of democratic development, since the constitution includes all basic elements, for example, human rights or the separation of power, that are inherent to any liberal democratic country. However, the adoption of a new constitution that established democratic institutions and ensured respect for human rights does not necessarily mean that these principles are applied in practice, especially taking into account the fact that the constitution considerably strengthened the power of the president. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that certain elements required for a future democracy were developed in the 1990s, for example, “an independent-minded media, active civil society groups, and a politically diverse legislature”.[[363]](#footnote-363)

Indeed, in the 1990s media gained unprecedented freedom, and even though many influential newspapers and television channels were owned by oligarchs who maintained “cozy” ties with Yeltsin, they still provided objective information and criticism of the governing elite.[[364]](#footnote-364) Another positive trend was an overall conclusion that “the 1995 parliamentary elections and the 1995-1997 gubernatorial elections generally followed democratic norms.”[[365]](#footnote-365) Thus, for example, the OSCE decided that “Russia’s parliamentary elections was a multi-party, multi-candidate contest”[[366]](#footnote-366) that could be evaluated as free and fair,[[367]](#footnote-367) which in turn let Communists to gain a majority of seats.[[368]](#footnote-368)

At the same time, examining Russia’s political regime in the 1990s, one must remember Yeltsin’s decisions that became not just an impediment to democratic consolidation in Russia but made a serious damage to it. One of these decisions was to start “a war against the tiny breakaway republic of Chechnya”,[[369]](#footnote-369) which led to thousands of deaths among civilians and military personnel,[[370]](#footnote-370) not to mention destroyed infrastructure and increased violence in the region. The 1996 presidential elections uncovered other significant flaws in Russia’s democratic development.[[371]](#footnote-371) It became clear that Yeltsin, who by 1996 had become extremely unpopular due to adverse economic situation and massive impoverishment, corruption, war in Chechnya and increased criminal activity, could be defeated by the Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov.[[372]](#footnote-372) Many foreign observers were satisfied just by the fact that multiple candidates participated and that no violence occurred during those presidential elections, however they turned a blind eye to another important aspect, the election campaign, which proved to be highly undemocratic and uncompetitive.[[373]](#footnote-373)

The Kremlin not only exceeded allowed campaign spending, disregarded transparency rules, provided financial support to regional authorities and even voters or allegedly falsified some votes, but seriously damaged Russia’s future democracy by maintaining strong ties with the new oligarchs.[[374]](#footnote-374) Thus, “top oligarchs and media moguls openly assisted Yeltsin’s campaign by turning all of their resources toward his reelection, providing Yeltsin with consistently positive television coverage and blatantly demonizing his opponents”.[[375]](#footnote-375) Especially disturbing was the so-called “loans-for-shares” deal that enabled a narrow group of people to acquire highly valuable state-owned assets for a relatively negligible amount of money that were so necessary for Yeltsin’s presidential campaign.[[376]](#footnote-376)

Previously described political developments definitely produced a negative impact on Russia’s incipient democracy, which can also be backed up by the Freedom House data. As shown in Table 2 (see Appendix 3), Russia has never been ranked as a liberal democracy and even during the 1990s it was classified as “Partly Free”. Besides, already in 1998 and 1999 Russia’s freedom rating deteriorated, reaching score 4 and 4.5 respectively, comparing to previous years when Russia’s freedom rating stood at 3.5. Russia’s deteriorating performance in terms of political and civil liberties could be connected to the resumption of large-scale military activities in Chechnya and massive security checks mainly targeted at Chechens and other Caucasian peoples that were launched in Moscow following violent terrorist attacks.[[377]](#footnote-377) It is worth mentioning that the military operation aimed at obliteration of Chechen militants significantly increased Putin’s popularity, who became prime minister in 1999.[[378]](#footnote-378) Freedom House also emphasizes that the media provided only one-sided coverage of the second war in Chechnya favoring government actions.[[379]](#footnote-379) Among other problems Freedom House mentions strict electoral rules that were used to disqualify candidates from the 1999 parliamentary elections, media bias during the election campaign, pervasive corruption and human rights abuses by police.[[380]](#footnote-380) Another factor that contributed to Russia’s deteriorating freedom rating was a 1997 law that introduced barriers for operation of certain religious groups, in particular, the law stipulates that in order to register churches must “prove that they have existed for at least 15 years”,[[381]](#footnote-381) which in turn privileges Orthodox churches and complicates functioning of other religious groups.[[382]](#footnote-382)

The year 2000 marked a crucial turn for Russia’s future democracy. Putin, who became Yeltsin’s successor, won a landslide victory in the 2000 presidential elections.[[383]](#footnote-383) The elections were not without violations, since international observers referred to irregularities such as “the use of some election commission staff to distribute campaign materials”[[384]](#footnote-384) and “the use of federal and regional government staff members to campaign for Putin”.[[385]](#footnote-385) Among other issues that have contributed to Putin’s victory could be noted the shortened campaign period and exclusively positive media coverage of Putin by state-controlled networks, especially the ORT channel.[[386]](#footnote-386) At the same time, it must be acknowledged that Putin’s victory could not be declared as an absolute fraud, since he did enjoy a great popularity and mass support at that moment.

However, after taking the office in 2000, Putin has consistently pursued policy toward power centralization, simultaneously trying to diminish the business community’s influence and to take control over the mass media. Yet in 2000, Putin unleashed a number of tax raids targeting the most influential business groups and companies such as Lukoil, AvtoVaz, Norilsk Nikel and other, including media tycoons.[[387]](#footnote-387) For example, in 2000, Vladimir Gusinsky, the owner of an independent media network Media-Most, was charged with fraud and as Gusinsky later confessed he was forced to sell his media empire to the state-controlled company Gazprom in exchange for withdrawal of charges.[[388]](#footnote-388) While Putin claimed that government actions were aimed at fighting corruption, many experts evaluated those events as an effort to silence the independent-minded media and to outlaw “inconvenient” for Kremlin oligarchs.[[389]](#footnote-389) Moreover, a number of attacks on journalists, mostly those reporting on corruption cases, were recorded throughout the year.[[390]](#footnote-390)

The government went even further by exerting pressure on two Media-Most outlets, in particular, Gazprom made decision to liquidate the newspaper Segodnya and to dismiss the staff of the newspaper Itogi.[[391]](#footnote-391) Besides, Gazprom “took control of NTV television, part of the country’s leading independent media empire”.[[392]](#footnote-392) After the takeover, many NTV employees had left the television station and joined the last nationwide independent channel referred to as TV6, however, in January 2002, TV6 was also liquidated based on a Moscow court’s order.[[393]](#footnote-393) Consequently, as of June 2003, all the private nationwide television stations were either liquidated or taken over by state-controlled companies[[394]](#footnote-394) such as Gazprom.

Even though the Russian constitution provides freedom of association, in course of time the authorities tightened the rules around this matter, for instance, a 2002 law enabled the government to suspend the operation of NGOs and political parties in case their members face charges of extremism.[[395]](#footnote-395) It is worth mentioning, however, that the law defines extremism very broadly, thus, allowing to suppress opposition groups.[[396]](#footnote-396) The rules concerning the operation of NGOs have become even stricter in subsequent years, thus, a 2006 law made NGO registration and operation requirements excessively burdensome by demanding to provide detailed information on each founder and to submit annual financial reports and by allowing government authorities to monitor NGO activity.[[397]](#footnote-397) In 2012, a new law obliged NGOs “financed from abroad and involved in political activity to register as “foreign agents””.[[398]](#footnote-398) Under this law, NGOs are also obliged to provide both financial and activity reports.[[399]](#footnote-399) Besides, Russia’s government not only exerted pressure on NGOs, but also toughened penalties for unsanctioned protests[[400]](#footnote-400) in response to mass demonstrations that unfolded after the 2012 presidential elections. Thereby, sharply increased fines, arrests and police crackdowns have suppressed any unsanctioned protests, albeit the Kremlin’s supporters can demonstrate freely.[[401]](#footnote-401) An especially disturbing development was the creation of nationalist organizations such as “Nashi”.[[402]](#footnote-402) Established in 2005, “Nashi” is a youth organization based on anti-Western sentiment and extensive support for Putin, which harasses Putin’s opponents and labels them as “traitors”.[[403]](#footnote-403)

Since Putin’s arrival to power, Russia’s political system has systematically been distorted favoring Putin and his supporters and simultaneously destroying Russia’s young democracy.[[404]](#footnote-404) After the pro-Kremlin party Unity gained a substantial number of mandates in the 1999 parliamentary elections, the incumbent and his allies took decisive steps to make the next election more predictable.[[405]](#footnote-405) The first move was to create a legal environment that complicates the formation of political parties.[[406]](#footnote-406) During the 1990s a political party could participate in elections if it had more than 100 members, however in 2001 that number was increased up to 10,000 with a stipulation that the party was joined by at least 100 members from each region.[[407]](#footnote-407) In 2006, the total number of required party members was raised up to 50,000.[[408]](#footnote-408)

Apparently, the new legislation created a number of substantial obstacles to creating new political parties, thus, limiting the number of potential Kremlin’s rivals.[[409]](#footnote-409) Besides, in 2001, a new pro-Kremlin party, United Russia, was established, which in subsequent years eliminated any power-sharing in the State Duma.[[410]](#footnote-410) For example, the 2003 parliamentary election brought an absolute victory to United Russia that gained over 300 mandates out of 450.[[411]](#footnote-411) Furthermore, prior to the 2007 parliamentary elections United Russia with the majority of seats in the parliament adopted additional legislation to increase the minimum barrier up to 7 percent instead of prior 5 percent.[[412]](#footnote-412) Simultaneously, political parties were prohibited from forming electoral coalitions.[[413]](#footnote-413) Yet another law eliminated the practice of single-seat districts, thus, preserving only proportional representation, which in turn successfully excluded smaller opposition parties from representation and minimized “the connection between voters and their representatives”.[[414]](#footnote-414) In 2004, Putin went even further by introducing constitutional changes that provided the president with the right to appoint governors instead of being elected by local population, which in fact gave the President an opportunity to influence the composition of the Federation Council.[[415]](#footnote-415)

Meanwhile, Russian elections have been constantly criticized by international observers, but during the 2007 parliamentary elections the OSCE “decided not to observe the elections because it felt that its monitors did not have the freedom to work professionally”.[[416]](#footnote-416) The 2007 elections, in which United Russia captured 315 mandates, proved to be unfair, including obvious falsification.[[417]](#footnote-417) For example, turnout in Chechnya, Dagestan and Mordovia ranged between 80 and 90 percent, though the average accounts for about 64 percent, and United Russia gained abnormally high support, namely, between 81 and 99 percent.[[418]](#footnote-418) During the 2008 presidential race the OSCE again rejected to monitor the elections, referring to restraints imposed by the government.[[419]](#footnote-419) Even though the elections of 2008 resulted in the victory of Putin’s successor Dmitry Medvedev, there were no real changes in official policy line, especially considering the fact that Putin immediately became prime minister.[[420]](#footnote-420) Shortly after, the Duma adopted constitutional amendments to prolong the presidential term up to six years and the Duma term up to five years,[[421]](#footnote-421) thus, making it easier for Putin and his associates to retain their power.

After the 2011 Duma elections, that again attracted a lot of criticism on the part of OSCE observers, mass demonstrations erupted calling “for annulment of the election results, an investigation into vote fraud, and freedom for political prisoners”.[[422]](#footnote-422) In order to pacify protesters, in 2012, Medvedev supported a number of liberal reforms, substantially easing party registration rules and restoring gubernatorial elections.[[423]](#footnote-423) Nevertheless, Russia has been criticized for constant changes in country’s electoral law, arguing that the changes are solely “cosmetic” and still benefit current incumbents.[[424]](#footnote-424) For example, in regard to gubernatorial elections, candidate can participate in the election campaign only if he or she manages to enlist “support of municipal deputies and heads of municipalities”.[[425]](#footnote-425) Consequently, the new law ensured effective exclusion of Kremlin’s opponents, taking into account the fact that municipalities are mainly controlled by United Russia. Thus, it would be imprudent to expect genuine liberalization and substantial changes in Kremlin’s policy under Medvedev’s presidency, whose main role was to help Putin to avoid constitutional violation.[[426]](#footnote-426) Yet in 2011, Medvedev declared that he would not participate in the upcoming presidential race, thus, providing the way for Putin’s reelection in 2012.[[427]](#footnote-427)

As previously mentioned, Russia has never been regarded as a liberal democracy and yet during Yeltsin’s presidency Russia’s performance in terms of democratic development showed some deterioration. After Putin took over presidential powers, Russia’s political system has been further eroded by gripping full control over the mass media, changing legislation to prevent the appearance of opposition parties and to further empower the executive branch, suppressing civil society and eliminating disloyal or politically dangerous businessmen. As can be seen from Table 2 (see Appendix 3), throughout the 1990s and in the beginning of 2000s Russia’s status constantly remained as “Partly Free”, however in 2005 Freedom House ranked Russia as “Not Free” and so it remains to this day. Consequently, the policy conducted by the President Putin made Russia’s political regime more authoritarian, though during Yeltsin’s presidency Russia’s political system already faced a number of significant flaws usually ignored by Western policy makers. Yet no positive changes occurred even when the presidential post was taken by Dmitry Medvedev, since he ensured continuation of Putin’s policy line. Thus, during Medvedev’s presidency Russia’s freedom rating remained at the same level, in particular, 6 points were assigned for political rights and 5 points - for civil liberties, which in turn classified the country as “Not Free”.

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# 4. The Analysis of U.S.-Russia Relations after the

# Cold War and the Failure of the “Reset” Policy

This part provides an analysis of U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War, paying special attention to the “reset” policy that was initiated by the Obama administration in 2009. The aim of the “reset” was to normalize U.S.-Russia relations and to turn them into a mutually beneficial partnership. Nevertheless, the attempt made by Washington suffered a setback and resulted not just in a chill, but in a serious damage of their bilateral relations with Russia. The deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations could be observed already in 2012, however the latest Ukrainian crisis has further worsened relations between the two countries, leading to mutual condemnation and exchange with sanctions. Therefore, the thesis author has decided to uncover reasons of why the “reset” policy has failed and why the two countries are currently at the lowest level of their bilateral relations. After exploring theories of realism and liberalism and gathering empirical evidence, the author will try to demonstrate which of the two theories can better explain this phenomenon.

Liberalist theory, namely, republican liberalism focuses on a states’ political regime, arguing that democratic states tend to conduct peaceful foreign policy toward each other, however they also tend to employ aggressive measures in their relations with nondemocratic states. Thus, liberal states often distrust illiberal ones, which can be explained by different political traditions and values. Moreover, liberal states, especially the most powerful ones, can pursue liberal imperialism to spread democracy worldwide that can further strain relations between democratic and nondemocratic states. Hence, taking into account that states’ political regime may have implications for international relations, the author has decided to verify whether Russia’s slide toward a more authoritarian regime could deteriorate bilateral relations and become the reason of the “reset” failure. To verify this hypothesis the author was tracing U.S.-Russia relations during the whole time period since the end of the Cold War, highlighting both phases of improved relations and deepened cooperation and phases of tense relations. Simultaneously, the author was tracing changes in Russia’s political regime starting from 1991 until 2014. Thus, by comparing fluctuations in U.S.-Russia relations and Russia’s political regime the author could determine whether changes in Russia’ political regime had an impact on bilateral relations.

Analyzing U.S.-Russia relations after the end of the Cold War, the author discovered that relations between the two countries did not proceed smoothly. During the 1990s, the two countries made a huge progress in their bilateral relations, which can be backed up by the increased number of high-level meetings and bilateral agreements in various areas, including cooperation in the strategic area, aid provided to Russia by the United States or Russia’s admission to the G8. However, the deterioration of bilateral relations could be observed as soon as 1999. The two countries made an attempt to improve their bilateral relations, first in 2001, when after the 9/11 terrorist attacks the United States and Russia launched strategic cooperation on global security issues, and a second time, when the Obama administration launched the “reset” in order to improve United States relations with Russia.

The liberalization process that started in Russia in the 1990s was perceived by many Western policy-makers as a chance to improve U.S.-Russia relations and transform them into mutually beneficial partnership, however it would be incorrect to assume that Russia’s move toward authoritarianism became the main impediment to partnership relations between Russia and the United States and, consequently, was the reason of the “reset” failure. First of all, during the 1990s the world could observe the rapprochement between the two countries, however already then Russia manifested undemocratic trends, such as the 1993 constitutional crisis, the war in Chechnya or flawed presidential elections of 1996, that were not subjected to severe U.S. criticism and the two countries maintained friendly relations. Since 1998 Russia’s political regime was constantly deteriorating and in 2005 the country was eventually ranked as “not free”. From 2005 until 2014 Russia continued to be ranked as “not free”, and, even though in 2008 the Presidential post was taken by Dmitry Medvedev, Russia did not make any progress in terms of democratic development. Besides, it was clear that Putin’s policy line would be maintained, since Putin and Medvedev just switched places to bypass the constitutional rule regarding the presidential term.

Nevertheless, in 2009 the United States and Russia launched the “reset” in their bilateral relations and have achieved a breakthrough on a number of issues, including such problematic issues as sanctions against Iran, Russia’s accession to the WTO and the missile defense in Europe. Even though Russia’s regime still remained authoritarian, the two countries managed to improve bilateral relations and successfully cooperated on many directions. It is especially important that the United States was the initiator of the “reset” policy, which in turn indicates that Russia’s authoritarian political regime did not deter Washington’s willingness to improve its relations with Russia. Consequently, if Russia’s political regime that remained at the same level since 2005 did not restrain the United States from making substantial concessions to Russia in order to develop partnership relations with the country, it could not become the main reason of the “reset” failure. Besides, throughout the whole examined time period, fluctuations in U.S.-Russia relations do not coincide with fluctuations in Russia’s political regime, which indicates the absence of correlation in this particular case. Simultaneously, one must wonder if changes in U.S. domestic politics could affect U.S.-Russia relations significantly. Even though Russian elite prefer to see a Democrat at the presidential post, it can be argued that both Democrats and Republicans strive to achieve the same foreign policy aims, for instance, to remain the strongest power in the system, albeit they may employ different tactics and rhetoric. The U.S. foreign policy remains consistent regardless of which party is in office, for example, the world could observe NATO eastward expansion during both Democratic and Republican administrations and ups and downs in U.S.-Russia relations occurred regardless whether there was a Democrat or a Republican in the administration. Thereby, the author believes that realism can better explain the failure of the “reset” policy.

After the dissolution of the USSR and along with it the end of the Cold War, the United States remained the only superpower in the international system. Russia, the successor of the USSR, in the 1990s faced not only political instability, but was also overwhelmed by economic transformations known as “shock therapy” and enormous external debts left from Soviet times. As a result, the country appeared to be weak and, even though Russia inherited the majority of the USSR property, including nuclear weapons, Russia’s population became impoverished, corruption and criminal activity flourished while military capabilities decreased significantly. This was the time when the new Russian state was reconsidering its relations with Western countries and was looking forward to receiving required aid from the West. The 1990s indicated the rapprochement between the two countries, including provision of U.S. aid to Russia. However, the decisive factor was that U.S. assistance was not simply conditional, but was also used to exert pressure on Russia as in the case of Russian troops’ withdrawal from the Baltic States when U.S. aid was linked to the progress on the issue.[[428]](#footnote-428) Besides, Jeffrey Sachs noted that Russia has not received genuine aid such as debt relief or grant aid that was necessary to save the country from dreadful consequences of initial reforms.[[429]](#footnote-429)

Russia’s weakness and dependence on foreign funding during the 1990s could be used by other international actors as a leverage to get concessions from Moscow and to promote their national interests. This could be observed not only in the case of troops’ withdrawal from the Baltic countries, but also in the case of Russia’s arms sales to Iran when under U.S. pressure Russia stopped exporting military goods to this country, which resulted in at least five billion dollar loss. Nevertheless, this development did not cause significant damage to U.S.-Russia relations compared to Washington’s decision to support NATO enlargement to the East, which was perceived by Russia as a serious threat, considering the possibility of appearance of NATO military forces near Russian borders. The NATO expansion of 1999 was not the last one and the next 2004 enlargement turned out to be even more traumatic for Russia, since the three Baltic States were also admitted to the military alliance. Thereby, the preservation of NATO helped the United States not only to maintain its influence in Europe, but also to expand it by admitting new European members. This move can be seen by realists, and especially analysts such as Mearsheimer, as rather understandable, since each great power is seeking for dominance, considering the fact that state cannot accurately predict how much power will be necessary to stay secure after a lapse of a decade or two. This is especially important in the case of Russia, since after the end of the Cold War Russia was not defeated completely and it still retained valuable means such as nuclear weapons or profitable raw materials that in course of time could help the country to restore its might. Thereby, it can be argued that the United States was behaving in an offensive realist manner, which was conditioned by the necessity to maintain its power and influence and to prevent the appearance of a potential “challenger”.

Consequently, by supporting Baltic states’ membership in NATO the United States has shrank Russia’s traditional sphere of influence. However, the United States did not rule out the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO, thus, in 2008 Bush supported their aspiration to join the alliance, which became the last straw in the eyes of Russia and ultimately resulted in the August 2008 conflict. Apparently, Russia faced a threat of being surrounded by NATO military bases. Deborah Miller, the Chief of Political-Economic Section of the U.S. Embassy in Riga, asserts that the United States sees benefits from cooperation, which is why Washington started the “reset” policy and that countries such as Georgia or Ukraine should decide for themselves which side to choose.[[430]](#footnote-430) However, Miller emphasizes that Russia still perceives the world as a zero-sum game.[[431]](#footnote-431) According to Miller, Russia’s aim is to preserve its sphere of influence, which is why it would be advantageous for Russia to keep countries such as Ukraine destabilized so that it could not fulfill its commitments and join the EU and NATO.[[432]](#footnote-432)

Considering the preservation of NATO after the Cold War, Miller believes that it was the right decision to maintain the alliance, since in a case of emergency the United States has not just allies in Europe but forces that have been trained and know how to cooperate and fight together.[[433]](#footnote-433) Simultaneously, Miller stresses that Eastern European countries, including the Baltic States, have joined the alliance voluntarily. Indeed, it should be admitted that for many Eastern European countries and former Soviet republics a prospect of NATO membership became very attractive.[[434]](#footnote-434) In this case it can be argued that the United States were employing economic and diplomatic means to attract new allies in the system, as, according to Mearsheimer, states can use a variety of means “to shift the balance of power in their favor”.[[435]](#footnote-435)

From Russia’s perspective, expansion of the alliance happened at Russia’s expense, especially taking into consideration the fact that Russia was not anymore a superpower in the international system. Russia’s move on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which became a bone of contention between Russia and the United States that led to the adoption of sanctions by the latter, can be explained by Russia’s aspiration to retain its influence in the territories of the former USSR. Thus, for example, in 2013, Russia provided Ukraine with gas discounts and loans to keep the country in its orbit and to convince Yanukovich not to sign Association Agreement with the EU. Yanukovich’s consent led to the Maidan protests that were supported by the West and the United States, in particular, that resulted in the expulsion of the pro-Russian president Yanukovich. This outcome was perceived as a threat by Moscow. Thus, for example, on May 30, 2014, during the Moscow Conference on International Security, Russia’s high level officials such as Sergei Lavrov, Sergei Shoigu and Valery Gerasimov expressed their concern in regard to the West’s and especially U.S. support for protesters in order to change opposing or unfavorable governments.[[436]](#footnote-436) Hence, the seizure of Crimea should be seen as a strategic move, taking into account the geopolitical importance of the territory and Russia’s ability to keep its naval base in the Black Sea. The change of Ukraine’s government caused anxiety in Russia, since, in course of time, Russia could lose access to Sevastopol naval base. For example, already in 2008 the Ukrainians did not want to prolong the lease, however they succumbed to the offer of lower gas prices.[[437]](#footnote-437)

Thereby, NATO expansion and U.S. growing influence in Europe was perceived as a real threat by Russia, since no state can be guaranteed that military preparations or expansion of a military alliance would not be used against it. In addition, another moment of irritation for Moscow became U.S.-NATO plans to establish a missile defense in Eastern Europe and the refusal to provide any evidence that the system would not be used against Russia and would not undermine its nuclear parity. Thus, the issue of the missile defense system was not resolved neither in 2011, nor in 2012, nor in 2013 and Russia continued to express its concerns and suspicions about Pentagon’s plans.

Miller emphasized that the reason for the missile defense deployment is solely Iran and North Korea, but not Russia. However, even though that U.S. missile defense plans may indeed be targeted against Iran and North Korea, these preparations could be perceived by Russia as unfriendly, thus, causing the security dilemma. Russia’s recent actions in Ukraine can be seen as aggressive by the international society, however Russia’s logic is stemming from defensive considerations. After the end of the Cold War, the United States has not only retained its position in Europe, but has also expanded its influence to Eastern Europe, thus, shrinking Russia’s sphere of influence. The fear of losing other former Soviet republics, and especially Ukraine, from Russia’s orbit was perceived by Moscow as a geopolitical weakness. Thereby, Russia is trying to produce counterbalancing behavior in order to preserve its power in its traditional sphere of influence, which in turn becomes a bone of contention between the United States and Russia.

After the “reset” was launched, the two countries achieved goals that have been set before, for example, signed a new START treaty, completed WTO talks, imposed stricter sanctions against Iran etc. However, the two countries lacked common interests to turn the “reset” into genuine partnership, while controversial visions concerning Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space led to serious frictions between the United States and Russia. In regard to the lack of mutual interests, one can recall Russia’s position on Syria, which was obviously in contrast with that of the United States and could be explained by Russia’s economic interests in the country, for example, arms sales or infrastructure projects. This also became the reason of Moscow’s grievance when the United States took unilateral actions against Iraq or adopted sanctions against Russia’s companies that had business ties with Iran. Therefore, U.S. dominance and attempts to promote its world order vision, especially in regard to the Post-Soviet space, is unacceptable for Russia whose latest actions in Ukraine should be seen as an attempt to ensure its dominant role in these territories. Consequently, these competing policies that find their roots in security issues resulted in the failure of the “reset” policy.

**Conclusion**

The aim of the thesis was to examine U.S.-Russia relations and to understand why the “reset” policy that led to a number of significant achievements in bilateral relations has ultimately failed. To find the reason of such an outcome the author was tracing U.S.-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War and as a guidance for understanding this phenomenon has chosen two theories, namely, realism and liberalism. After reviewing the two theories and analyzing U.S.-Russia relations along with the evolution of Russia’s political regime, the author has come to conclusion that the first hypothesis, which claimed that Russia’s move toward a more authoritarian regime deteriorated the bilateral relations and resulted in the failure of the “reset”, was rejected by means of empirical test.

The second hypothesis, however, was confirmed by the author. U.S. dominant position in the system and disregard of Russia’s national interests and security concerns since the end of the Cold War compelled Russia to resort to counteracting measures to preserve its traditional sphere of influence and eliminate any probability of further expansion of U.S. influence in the post-Soviet space. When the United States and Russia completed the goals that were set during the “reset”, their conflicting world order visions and policies resulted in the failure of launched “reset” policy. The latest Ukrainian crisis brought U.S.-Russia bilateral relations to the lowest point, however Russia’s actions should be seen in strategic terms, since Russia perceived U.S. growing influence in Eastern Europe, notably near its borders, as a potential threat. Nowadays Russia is not as weak as it was in the 1990s, largely owing to the boom of oil and gas prices, which is why Russia could take a chance to oppose U.S. growing influence in the region and to demonstrate that Russia’s interests must be taken into consideration.

Nevertheless, despite the failure of the “reset” and significant damage made to bilateral relations, the author predicts that the two countries will maintain a dialogue and that bilateral relations can be normalized again in course of time. This position can be explained by the fact that both countries have a great impact on the international system and threats such as Iran’s and North Korea’s nuclear program or nuclear terrorism can be prevented only by combining efforts and by exerting collective pressure. Deborah Miller also stressed that Russia’s isolations is not in U.S. interests, considering Russia’s role in world affairs.[[438]](#footnote-438) Besides, Russia possesses one of the largest nuclear weapons stockpiles and this Cold War legacy has always provided a common ground for a dialogue, since reduction of nuclear weapons is in interests of both countries. This can explain why the two countries continue cooperation in certain areas and why they did not abandon the New START treaty.

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# Appendix

**Appendix 1**

**Table 1**

**The Number of Presidential Meetings between the United States and Russia,**

**1992-2013**[[439]](#footnote-439)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **The Number of Presidential Meetings** |
| 1992 | 3 |
| 1993 | 3 |
| 1994 | 3 |
| 1995 | 3 |
| 1996 | 2 |
| 1997 | 3 |
| 1998 | 2 |
| 1999 | 2 |
| 2000 | 3 |
| 2001 | 4 |
| 2002 | 5 |
| 2003 | 2 |
| 2004 | 1 |
| 2005 | 3 |
| 2006 | 2 |
| 2007 | 3 |
| 2008 | 3 |
| 2009 | 5 |
| 2010 | 2 |
| 2011 | 2 |
| 2012 | 2 |
| 2013 | 2 |

**Appendix 2**

**Grapgh 1**

**The Number of Presidential Meetings between the United States and Russia,**

**1992-2013**[[440]](#footnote-440)

**Appendix 3**

**Table 2**

**Freedom House Rating for Russia, 1991-2014**[[441]](#footnote-441)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Political Rights | Civil Liberties | Freedom Raiting | Status |
| 1991 | 3 | 3 | 3 | Partly Free |
| 1992 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1993 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1994 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1995 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1996 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1997 | 3 | 4 | 3,5 | Partly Free |
| 1998 | 4 | 4 | 4 | Partly Free |
| 1999 | 4 | 5 | 4,5 | Partly Free |
| 2000 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| 2001 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| 2002 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| 2003 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| 2004 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Partly Free |
| 2005 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2006 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2007 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2008 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2009 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2010 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2011 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2012 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2013 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |
| 2014 | 6 | 5 | 5,5 | Not Free |

\*The Freedom House evaluates the state of political rights and civil liberties in a country and assign a numerical rating ranging from 1 to 7, where “1 indicates the highest degree of freedom and 7 the lowest level of freedom”.[[442]](#footnote-442)

**Appendix 4**

**Graph 2**

**Freedom House Rating for Russia, 1991-2014[[443]](#footnote-443)**

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