RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN CRISIS: LESSONS FOR 2015
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Victoria I. Zhuravleva,
Russian State University for the Humanities

In 2014, Russian-American relations experienced a drop to their lowest level since the conclusion of the Cold War. The crisis was directly precipitated by Moscow’s actions in unifying Crimea with Russia. In the months that followed, the sanctions war and the information war have become an integral part of the crisis, deepening the level of mistrust between both sides. What’s needed now is a fundamentally new approach to U.S.-Russian relations that takes into account how both sides view the origins of the Ukraine crisis. This includes a more nuanced understanding of the historical “war of images” between both nations that has fed the rhetoric and propaganda surrounding the crisis in Russian-American relations. With that in mind, this Brief focuses on the lessons of this crisis as well as on potential ways for its resolution, including a closer look at the primary factors that will influence the ultimate success or failure of these strategies.
INTRODUCTION

The rapid deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations in 2014 was unexpected by many, even by those in the highest diplomatic circles. As recently as June 17, 2013 Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Barack Obama made a Joint Statement on Enhanced Bilateral Engagement, which stated that: “The United States of America and the Russian Federation reaffirm their readiness to intensify bilateral cooperation based on the principles of mutual respect, equality, and genuine respect for each other’s interests.” However, by March 2014, the United States and European Union had launched an unprecedented program of sanctions against Russia that stimulated a crisis in Russia’s economy that was further destabilized by the headlong drop in oil prices. This program of sanctions eventually led to counter-sanctions being coordinated by Moscow.

Within the United States, the agenda of policymakers in Washington in the following months has raised questions about the prospects for a Cold War II and the return of policies for containing Russia and Russia’s revisionist plans. In Russia, various conspiracy theories about the events in Ukraine have come to the fore, many of which have focused on the central role of the United States in leading a universal conspiracy against Russia. As a result, the relationship between Russia and the U.S. has become one of tit-for-tat actions and shrill propaganda statements. Such an approach seems irresponsible. After all, a moratorium on Russian-American cooperation will hinder or completely freeze the resolution of fundamentally important international problems, from nuclear non-proliferation to protecting environmental resources.

A crisis is always a test. Only time will tell what types of collateral damage will be inflicted on both countries and the rest of the world while Russian and American leaders attempt to pass this test. However, the sooner a serious Russian-American dialogue is begun on the causes, the nature and the lessons of this crisis, the more hope there is of their success. By understanding the root causes of the crisis, as well as how they continue to influence the policy calculations of top leaders in Moscow and Washington, we can begin to devise potential exit strategies from the crisis, taking into account its lessons.

THE ORIGINS OF THE CRISIS IN RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

The current crisis cannot simply be explained by Russia’s actions in Crimea. The reasons for the crisis have their own historical context and are linked by American perceptions that Russia is a former superpower that lost the Cold War.

NATO’s policy of expanding eastward has simply strengthened Russia’s certainty that its national interests are being disregarded. The United States, the European Union and Russia have been unable to estab-

The Ukrainian crisis is an indicator of a critical crisis in the relationship between the U.S. and post-Soviet Russia.

lish a stable European-Atlantic system for security in which Russia could play a real role. It not only could give Russia advantages, but also could impose certain obligations. In this sense, the Ukrainian crisis is an indicator of a critical crisis in the relationship between the U.S. and post-Soviet Russia, being directly connected with the broader crisis of managing global and regional processes in a post Cold War world.

Dmitri Trenin, the director of the Moscow Carnegie Center, is certain that the current confrontation between Russia and the U.S. “is the logical result of...the failure to establish a stable international order following the conclusion of the Cold War.” On one hand, Russia is asserting its right to full sovereignty and its vision of the world order. On the other hand, the U.S. is defending its leadership of an international system that was established as a result of the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union.2

Angela Stent, director of the Center for Eurasian, Russian, and East European Studies at Georgetown University, who served as an adviser on Russia under Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, has come to the conclusion that Russia and the U.S. must endure not only the legacy of the Cold War but also that of the 1990s, when the asymmetrical character of bilateral relations was established. “The recognition of the reality that Russia is less important per se, that indirectly is a continuing source of irritation to Russian officials,” she argues. “In this sense, the various American resets have represented attempts to engage Russia productively by persuading it to acknowledge and accept the asymmetries in the relationship and move forward on that basis. Putin’s 2001 attempted reset, by contrast, was a bid to establish a strategic partnership of equals, acting as if these asymmetries did not exist.”3

Likewise, former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union Jack F. Matlock has also turned to the legacy of the 1990s in his search for the root causes of the current crisis. As he explains, “following the end of the Cold War, the U.S., European countries and Russia failed to build an effective security structure for Europe which included Russia” because some Western policies – including NATO’s eastward expansion – have been seen by Russians as hostile, even though there were other motivations on the Western part. “The idea that Russia has been treated as a “defeated” nation has lodged in many Russian minds and has been encouraged by unjustified “triumphalism” in the United States – an attitude adopted by American politicians more for domestic political purposes than from an intent to demean Russia,” he said.4

At the same time, Richard N. Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, while highlighting Russia’s contribution to the unfolding confrontation, does not remove responsibility for the conflict from America or the West. “Putin himself chose to consolidate his political and economic power and adopt a foreign policy that increasingly characterizes Russia as an opponent of an international order defined and led by the United States,” Haass argues. “But U.S. and Western policy have not always encouraged more constructive choices on his part... NATO enlargement was seen by many Russians as a humiliation, a betrayal, or both. More could have been made of the Partnership for Peace, a program designed to foster better relations between Russia and the alliance. Alternatively, Russia could have been asked to join NATO, an outcome that would have made little military difference, as NATO has become less of an alliance in the classic sense than a standing pool of potential contributors to “coalitions of the willing.” Arms control, one of the few domains in which Russia could lay claim to still being a great power, was shunted to the side as unilateralism and minimalist treaties became the norm.”5

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia was offered a model for engagement, implemented through the

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paradigm of “partnership without membership.” As a result, forms of cooperation arose such as the NATO-Russia Council and the EU-Russia “strategic partnership” as well as a wide variety of pan-European structures (the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, the Vienna Document, and the Open Skies Treaty). And although these structures did not satisfy completely either party, they were bridges between Russia and the West and formed a place for dialogue and cooperation until the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. The signal that aroused Russia to action was NATO’s Bucharest Summit declaration that proclaimed that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join the EU and NATO. The Russian-Georgian crisis in 2008 and the proclamation of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia dealt a serious blow to the paradigm of partnership without membership for Western-Russian relations.

It was then that the myth of a new Cold War was constructed in the U.S. thanks to the influence of neoconservatives. And although as part of the “reset” that began in 2009 and was announced by the Obama administration, the Russian-American dialogue became more balanced, no real changes have occurred in the framework of U.S.-Russia relations. The Russian gambit in Ukraine has led to a re-examination of the policy of involving Russia in European-Atlantic cooperation and, even after the Ukrainian crisis, the confrontation between Russia and the West will remain.

NATURE OF THE CRISIS: FIVE REASONS WHY THIS IS NOT A NEW COLD WAR

At the same time, regardless of the existence of this confrontation, there is no reason to begin talking about the start of Cold War II for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the Cold War was a systemic phenomenon, and Russia, ceasing to be a superpower, was no longer capable of offering the world an alternative model opposed to liberal capitalism. Secondly, with the collapse of the bipolar system of international relations, the world has become polar-centric and Russian-American relations per se no longer determine the course of international development, while being seen in its context. Thirdly, unlike the Cold War, this crisis does not have the character of a military confrontation with its inherent arms race. Instead, its main dimensions are geopolitical, geo-economic and informational. Fourthly, the Iron Curtain is absent, and it is already impossible to prevent the flow of information and the development of people-to-people contacts in the context of globalization. Fifthly, the Ukrainian crisis is one of many current crises taking place in the world in which there remains the possibility of Russian-American cooperation that doesn’t only include non-proliferation and arms control.

Consequently, we are dealing with not so much the practice as the discourse of the Cold War. Old stereotypes are mutually repeated in speeches by politicians and social figures, experts and journalists, and also visually in political cartoons on both sides of the Atlantic. The information war has become one of the most important features of the current crisis in Russian-American relations.

THE ‘WAR OF IMAGES’

In this information war, it is characteristic to disregard some facts for the sake of others. Moreover, it has led to simplistic explanatory sketches to “demonize” the enemy, the use of the “Russian card” in the U.S. and the “American card” in Russia as part of domestic political games, and finally, attempts to rewrite history. Currently, all the factors influencing the process of mutual understanding (the climate of Russian-American relations, the U.S.-Russian socio-cultural and political context, the international situation, historical legacy) are unambiguously negative. This forms the basis for the “war of images” in the context of Russian-American relations.

This war of images has a long historical tradition and is as cyclical in its nature as Russian-American relations themselves. The rapprochement between Russia and the United States and, accordingly, the rejection of simplified schemes of mutual understanding, has always happened during those periods when Russia and the United States have expanded the agenda of their relationships. This has occurred through the resistance to a common enemy or responses to global challenges and threats (like it was during two world wars, or large-scale anti-terror campaigns after the 9/11 terror attack). And this has also happened in the times of political reforms.

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and/or economic modernization in the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russia, when the U.S. exported goods, capital and technologies and Americans taught Russians the lessons of capitalism and reform.

With respect to the 20th century, one can recall the period of industrialization in the Soviet Union, the idea of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev “to catch up and surpass the United States in production,” the modernization program during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin building on the American experience, or the Partnership for Modernization program declared by then-President Dmitry Medvedev. During these periods, the U.S. has served as an example to be copied.

During Russia’s period of stabilization with its characteristic process for consolidating power structures, growing authoritarianism and rejection of reforms, a trend arose creating the image of a hostile Russian Other in the U.S. and a hostile American Other in Russia. This, in turn, led to the rise of Russophobia and anti-Americanism, both of which can be actively deployed to achieve political goals and to revitalize nationalism. This trend appeared to its full extent during the Cold War, whose legacy influences the current crisis in Russian-American relations.

The first complete cycle of hopes and disappointments took place at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. In 1903-05, the first crisis in Russian-American relations occurred leading to the first “war of images”.

Sources of Anti-Americanism in Russia

At present, Russia is experiencing the highest levels of anti-Americanism since the end of the Cold War. This anti-Americanism is being encouraged by the government and is being used to support a siege mentality. According to a November poll by the Public Opinion Foundation, the number of Russian citizens who positively relate to the U.S. has reached a historic low, comprising 11 percent. Another 46 percent perceive the U.S. neutrally while 37 percent relate negatively to America. Since 2001, sociologists have not recorded such a large number of people relating negatively to the U.S. The majority of them (78 percent) are convinced that the U.S. today “most likely plays a negative role” in the world, while only seven percent consider it to be “most likely a positive role.” It gives hope that, according to the opinion of 62 percent of Russians, good relations between the U.S. and Russia are necessary in equal measure for both countries.

The American Other continues to be significant for the creation of Russian identity. The construction of

10 Russia’s Public Opinion Foundation (FOM). Relations between the U.S. and Russia: Monitoring Public Opinions. How Do Russians See the U.S. and Relations Between Our Countries? (in Russian) http://fom.ru/Mir/1842
At present, Russia is experiencing the highest levels of anti-Americanism since the end of the Cold War

the image of the United States as a country hostile to Russia – a country that views itself as the victor in the Cold War, that wants to impose its dictates and double standards on the whole world, and that irresponsibly played with religious extremists and radicals to achieve political goals – has now reached an unprecedented scale. Moreover, President Vladimir Putin himself encourages this political discourse. It is sufficient to look at his Valdai speech given in Sochi on Oct. 25, 2014. The appeal to the double standard in American politics has become a favorite argument to confirm the legitimacy of Russia’s actions in Ukraine. Putin’s famous thesis – “Why are they permitted and we are prohibited?” – has been taken up and broadly used by political and public figures, journalists and TV commentators.

However, what lies behind this anti-American message (which is quite persuasive for a broad layer of Russian society) is a complex range of love-hate feelings towards America, all of which are rooted in the public’s consciousness and play an important role in Russia’s identity discourse. “America is our only significant Other. The rivalry with America does not unravel in the ‘real’ world arena, but in its reflection that exists in the Russian mass consciousness,” the Russian sociologist Alexei Levinson accurately observed in 2007. “And there, it is not important that you defeat the Other. What is important is to be completely certain that we ‘are not worse than them.’ ... Examples of good relations with America are a confession that they are equal to us or similar to us, and us – to them as the only basis for mutual good feelings.”

Foremost is the image of America as a singular “dark twin” to Russia. The prevailing desire is to highlight that America has serious problems in domestic and foreign politics, that their claims to mentor Russia are ludicrous, and that Russia does not do anything of the kind in its foreign policy as the U.S. has done to establish dangerous international precedents (such as in Kosovo).

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Russian attitudes toward the United States (1990-2014)

SOURCE: LEVADA-CENTER

NATALIA MIKHAYLENKO
doxically, in the present case, Russia is attempting to legitimize its actions for its own policy of incorporating Crimea by describing them as being similar to actions whose legitimacy Russia does not accept.

Russian state-controlled media places increased attention on events in Ferguson and, in general, to the surge of racial controversy in the U.S. (and this was also commonplace for Soviet propaganda and its “whataboutism”), spy scandals and Edward Snowden’s revelations, torture in secret CIA prisons, and U.S. foreign policy from Iraq to Syria. Without a doubt, these events are a blow to America’s international status but to use them as confirmation of the legitimacy of one’s own breaches of international legal norms has its limits. They once more underscore Russia’s potential lack of preparedness to play the role of defender of global norms, which Russia cultivated with so much effort until the Ukrainian crisis.

In addition, Russian authorities, politicians and some journalists have started drawing parallels not only with current U.S. foreign policy, but also with America’s continental expansionism in the 19th century (in this case Crimea’s annexation is compared with the incorporation of Texas). Thus the arguments in favor of Russia’s policy in the 21st century are found in the American policy of the 19th century.

Parallel to the construction of the image that America is a hostile Other to Russia, Putin, in the spirit of Russian 19th century conservatives, loves to discuss Russia’s genetic makeup or talk about the unique Russian soul. This has resulted in a return to famous debates among Westernizers (zapadniki) and Slavophiles more than a century ago – debates that have been stimulated by Russia’s turn to the East. By reminding the Russian people of their civilizational and sacred roots, Putin explained the annexation of Crimea in his Federal Assembly Address on Dec. 4, 2014.

Roots of anti-Russian sentiments in America
In turn, an unprecedented surge in anti-Russian feelings is being observed in the United States, much of it associated with the Ukrainian crisis. According to a poll by Pew Research Center, Americans with a negative view of Russia has risen to 72 percent in comparison to 43 percent in 2012. Furthermore, eight out of ten Americans say that they have no trust in Putin.

The media creates an image of Russia as an international villain, responsible not only for the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine but directly or indirectly, for all of “humanity’s woes” – including even the outbreak of

13 The visualization of these ideas can be seen in the cartoons of Vitaly Podvitsky who works for the pro-Kremlin RIA Novosti, a news agency now known as Rossiya Segodnya. http://podvitski.ru/
The media creates an image of Russia as an international villain, responsible for all “humanity’s woes”

Ebola. The “demonization” and even “barbarization” of Putin occurs while the image of Russia in the U.S. is personified as much as possible.

This is a long-lived trend in American perceptions of Russia. During the previous two centuries, Americans strove to consider positive and negative changes in authoritarian Russia through the prism of the actions of its leaders, from tsars to presidents. If we discuss the shaping of Vladimir Putin’s image in the American media discourse, currently the emphasis is on the continuity not only between the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia as before, but between the Tsarist Empire and post-Soviet Russia as well. Putin’s own rhetoric contributes to that perception since he likes to discourse on conservatism and Orthodoxy and he criticizes Nikita Khrushchev for giving Crimea to Ukraine. Jeff Danziger’s cartoon that reproduces the 500-ruble Tsarist banknote has the face of the “New Tsar,” Vladimir Putin, instead of the image of Peter I. Putin is creating a new Russia that will turn its back on the West.

In the context of crises, a values-based approach to the image of Russia prevails in American political and media discourse. Unlike the pragmatic approach, it correlates directly with the American socio-cultural context and is based on the certainty that Russia’s foreign policies are an extension of its domestic policies. And it is a typical outward projection of one of the basic self-representations of the American society itself, which believes that U.S. foreign policy is based on its democratic political system.

A values-based approach determines the Russian strand of American foreign policy. It is simultaneously interrelated with the domestic political situation in Russia, whose leaders, from an American point of view, should be punished for their growing authoritarianism and for their policy toward Ukraine. Russia, in turn, uses this American approach to foster the anti-American sentiments through the state-controlled mass media in order to shape the image of a hostile American Other. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger drew attention to the following important point in depicting the image of “Putin’s Russia” in America. “For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one,” he argues. “Putin should come to realize that, whatever his grievances, a policy of military impositions would produce another Cold War. For its part, the United States needs to avoid treating Russia as an aberrant to be patiently taught rules of conduct established by Washington.”

Doubtless, the Russian Other at the start of the 21st century has stopped being as significant for the American discourse of identity as it was during the Cold War and its “enemy studies,” since Russia has lost its status as a superpower. However, when necessary, the “Russian card” is actively used as before in domestic political games. This has appeared in all its conspicuousness during Barack Obama’s presidency. For example, numerous commentaries by conservative analysts, politicians, journalists and political writers on Putin’s op-ed article on Syria in the New York Times on Sept. 11, 2013 clearly showed the desire to use Putin’s address to discredit the Obama’s administration international policy and the liberal program as a whole. After the annexation of Crimea, when Putin cancelled out the achievements of his public diplomacy, the opposition Putin vs. Obama was involved in widespread criticism against the American president, initially for not being prepared to take decisive action against Russia and protect the nascent democracy in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian crisis has increased Russia’s significance among U.S. foreign political priorities, placing it in the same category as Iran, Syria and China. In this sense, Putin has succeeded in making Russia’s foreign policy one of the main factors in international relations. As a result, every action and statement by Russia’s president is widely commented on in the U.S., and

his image has not disappeared from American political cartoons.

**Attempts to rewrite history by Russia and the US**

In the information war, both parties have been involved in rewriting history. In the U.S., for example, the eminent historian Timothy Snyder attempted to rewrite the history of World War II in favor of the Ukrainians at the expense of the Russians, placing doubt on the Russian contribution to the defeat of Nazi Germany. “There was no Russian army fighting in World War II, but rather a Soviet Red Army,” Snyder assumes. “Its soldiers were disproportionately Ukrainian, since it took so many losses in Ukraine and recruited from the local population. The army group that liberated Auschwitz was called the First Ukrainian Front.”

In Russia, in turn, the history of the Cold War was being rewritten, in connection with the introduction of Soviet forces to Afghanistan. President Putin himself, in searching for the causes of Islamic extremism, pointed out that these movements had been sponsored by America to fight against the Soviet Union and their participants had “been tempered in Afghanistan.” As a result, a suggestion has been made to review the decision of the Congress of People’s Deputies of the USSR in 1989, in which the war in Afghanistan was described as flawed, morally and politically.

The information war between Russia and the U.S. clearly demonstrates how long and difficult the process of mutual demythologizing will be and how easily familiar images and stereotypes of perception are used in the official and public levels, how strong a position they occupy in the media discourse. In Russia, the main problem lies in the fact that the state-controlled media deliberately constructs an anti-American discourse that is advantageous to the authorities. In the U.S., the executive branch – while being dependent on Congress, the party-political struggle, and public opinion – may become a hostage to the “demonic” images of Russia, that have become prevalent in an American society in the period of U.S.-Russia confrontation.

**LESSONS OF THE CRISIS IN US-RUSSIA RELATIONS AND WAYS FOR ITS STABILIZATION**

Understanding the lessons of the current crisis in Russian and American-Western relations is directly connected with finding a resolution to the crisis. Here are possible ways for finding an exit to the crisis, taking into account its lessons.

**#1: EMPHASIZE A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS**

The Ukrainian crisis has clearly demonstrated that the legacies of the Cold War and the 1990s pose a threat to the development of regional crises and help to skew Russian-American relations. At the same time, the weak integration of Russia into the European-Atlantic

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security system leaves Russia room for unilateral action. In this case, there is a fundamental discrepancy at the policy level of action and counteraction, when Russia’s attempts to resist the expansion of NATO and the EU eastward in order to protect its geopolitical interests are treated in the West as an attempt to restore the Soviet empire and to suppress democracy in the post-Soviet space.

The situation will only change when, in the course of diplomatic negotiations, a solution can be found for the Ukrainian question that takes into account the interests of both Ukraine and Russia, subject to international legal norms. That is why the appeal by three former U.S. ambassadors to Russia – Jack Matlock, Thomas Pickering and James Collins – to give diplomacy with Russia a chance is so timely. They emphasized that, “Sanctions and further efforts to escalate political and military pressure, and reliance on unilateral action without accompanying diplomacy, would all but assure continued suffering for the people of Ukraine.”

The expert community has encouraged a series of sensible propositions to resolve the crisis, taking into account its lessons. One of these has been suggested by Samuel Charap of the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Jeremy Shapiro of Brookings. “The West’s continuing insistence that the only path to stability and security in Europe is for Russia’s neighbors to be absorbed into Euro-Atlantic institutions is now begetting threats to stability and security in Europe,” they argue. “In practical terms, sanctions must be accompanied by an offer to negotiate new institutional arrangements.”

According to Richard N. Haass, “a mixture of efforts” is necessary “to shore up Ukraine economically and militarily, strengthen NATO”, sanction Russia and offer Moscow “a diplomatic exit”, that would include assurances that Ukraine won’t become a NATO member or enter into exclusive ties with the EU.

#2: CREATE A NEW PRAGMATIC AGENDA FOR BILATERAL COOPERATION

The crisis in Russian-American relations has clearly demonstrated that, both in the U.S. and in Russia, there is no carefully delineated strategy for building bilateral relations. The clearest evidence of this is the formulation of policies in the form of actions/counter-actions and sanctions/counter-sanctions, accompanied by increasing confrontation. The creation of such a coordinated bilateral strategy is a complicated process and sufficiently problematic in the face of a serious crisis of trust and the absence of an institutional structure for Russian-American relations, in which the personal connection (or its absence) between the leaders of the two countries plays a crucial role.

To begin with, both sides need to give up the position of criticizing each other’s double standards and claiming to teach each other the principles of proper foreign policy behavior. They need to begin to develop a new step-by-step pragmatic agenda of bilateral relations, focusing on existing possibilities for cooperation and integration of Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security system, primarily through the creation of intermediate pan-European structures.

The traditional agenda in Russian-American relations that developed after the Cold War in a system of selective partnership along the lines of nuclear non-proliferation, anti-terrorist activities and Afghanistan, can be made more specific and can really be extended taking into account global and regional processes, challenges and threats.

Regional security partnerships

Russia and the U.S. are equally interested in cooperation in Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Middle East, Asia-Pacific and the Arctic. Russian-American collaboration in Afghanistan will not lose its relevance, in particular taking into account the withdrawal of American troops.

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The Middle East is the region where, despite different approaches to solving the Syrian issue, curtailing cooperation on the issue of its political regulation and a different interpretation of the events of the Arab Spring, there is great potential for Russian-American cooperation. Both sides are equally interested in the fight against transnational jihadist terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and conflict prevention and resolution.

The Arctic, according to the president of the Council on U.S.-Russian Relations, Derek Norberg, can serve as a platform where the two countries will strengthen their mutually beneficial contacts.28 Russia and the U.S. pursue similar objectives in the Arctic and cooperate on a number of areas related to Arctic shipping, the development of Arctic fields, protection of ecosystems and natural resources.

New counter-terrorism initiatives

Despite the fact that in November, 2014 the West refused to coordinate counter-terrorism responses with Russia on the Islamic State of Iraq and the Greater Syria (ISIS), Russian-American anti-terrorist cooperation maintains its primary significance on the pragmatic agenda of bilateral relations. There is no doubt that the period when it flourished remains in the past. As Nadezhda Arbatova, the Head of the Departments of European Political Studies at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, highlighted, the annexation of Crimea led to curtailment, at NATO’s initiative, of all collaborative projects with Russia on Afghanistan, terrorism, drug trafficking and piracy.

Nonetheless, experts remain optimistic due to “the absence of Russian security forces in the U.S. ‘blacklist’, [a fact] that could be interpreted as Washington’s intention to keep alive the possibility of cooperation with Russia.” Cautious optimism and hope that, despite the present schism, Russia and the West still perceive the common threat (albeit in the background) are inspired by the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution on Aug. 15, 2014, providing for the imposition of sanctions against individuals linked to the activities of Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra (the al-Nusra Front) in Iraq and Syria.29 “It is the first resolution since the start of the Ukrainian crisis to be backed by all fifteen members of the Security Council – including Russia,” underlines Arbatova.30

Economic partnerships and bilateral trade

Great opportunities still exist in the area of economic cooperation between the two countries. However, any economic cooperation still depends on political relations. Russia’s accession to the WTO and the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik amendment gave a new impetus to economic cooperation, but sanctions struck again. However, even before the imposition of sanctions, there were serious obstacles for Russian-American economic cooperation, related to the fact that Russia and the U.S. are targeting different markets and have different roles in the global economy. The U.S. is an active participant in economic globalization, and Russia is a passive object, acting mainly as a developing country (86 percent of total Russian exports to the U.S. are accounted for by the following product groups: oil, liquefied natural gas, non-ferrous metals, ferrous metals, and fuel for nuclear reactors).

However, for Russia, the value of trade and economic relations with the U.S. is not confined to quantitative indicators, as the Deputy Director of the Institute of USA and Canada Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Viktor Supyan, points out. According to him, the following factors – U.S. investment opportunities, the American role in the global market for new technology and America’s role in international economic and financial organizations – are much more important. At the same time, for the U.S., trade and economic links with Russia are much less significant. Yet, “taken in perspective, these links might hold a significant place in America’s external trading links” because “Russia is as a huge potential consumer and capital market” for the U.S.31

The U.S. has been and remains an important source of technical and technological innovations for Russia and is necessary for modernizing Russia’s economy. Sanctions have struck a blow against the so-called “innovation vector” of Russian-American relations in the nuclear and atomic energy fields, as well as the space and military-industrial complex. However, it is encouraging that cooperation is being maintained among the universities of the countries in the sphere of innovation.

Finally, the key to the normalization of bilateral relations remains joint space exploration, the development of humanitarian contacts, scientific, educational and cultural ties and projects addressing environmental disasters and epidemics.

The confrontation in Russian-American relations has damaged all real and potential spheres of their cooperation. The whole history of U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War has obviously shown with what effort and what price this partnership was established. So, is it worth putting it at risk?


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Volume of trade between Russia and the United States in 2013

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<th>Top U.S. exports to Russia ($ million)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aircraft, space vehicles and components</td>
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<td>Motor vehicles</td>
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<td>Equipment spare parts</td>
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<td>Automobile components</td>
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<td>Poultry products and by-products</td>
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<th>Top Russian exports to the U.S. ($ million)</th>
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<td>Semi-finished products from iron and plain steel</td>
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<td>Aluminum</td>
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Russia’s share of U.S. trade in 2013 amounted to 1%, making the country the 24th largest trade partner of U.S.
#3: BRING MORE ACADEMIC EXPERTISE INTO THE FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT

The current crisis in Russian-American relations has clearly demonstrated that losing interest in the serious study of other countries is fraught with errors in foreign policy expertise and has potential long-term negative consequences. America’s specialists on Russia were the first to raise the alarm.32 The American press unveiled a discussion about the critical state of Russian studies in the U.S., which has led to the loss of an entire generation of specialists and a reduction in knowledge within the U.S. government about Russia. There were several reasons explaining the failure in expert knowledge about Russia in the U.S., with the following points mentioned most often.

Firstly, there were financial problems associated with closing the Title VIII program (State Department) and Title VI (Ministry of Education), which provided grants for studying Russia and attracted students and post graduates to Russian studies. Moreover, private foundations also reduced their financial support. Secondly, there are narrow opportunities for career growth, although there are positions available for American specialists on Russia in think tanks and universities. Thirdly, there is a generation gap, according to experts of the older generation. This is associated with a decline in the level of researchers themselves as the best brains go into Arabic and Chinese studies. However, the young professionals themselves do not agree with this statement, pointing out that the reduction in the budget has led to an increase in quality, as competition has intensified. Also, opportunities for field research have been greatly enlarged. Yet knowledge of Russia has ceased to be multifaceted and comprehensive. Furthermore, many U.S. experts speak Russian poorly, and this limits their circle of friends and influences the quality of their expertise. Fourthly, there is the challenge of university environment. There is a priority being placed on traditional sciences in university programs, where studying languages and regional courses take a back seat. Despite this, American specialists on Russia are not as bad as their critics may claim; however, quality expert opinions do not necessarily transfer into good policies. For these reasons there is a problem in the system of making foreign policy decisions.

It was only against the background of the Ukrainian crisis that the U.S. again remembered about its former programs (now closed) to finance Russian studies. As one highly placed source in the White House said in an interview to the Russian journal Vlast, “now programs for

financing Russian studies will probably be restarted, and perhaps even increased... Now we have something we can thank the Kremlin for.”33 And indeed, taking into account that Russia is again at the center of America’s foreign policy, the State Department is beginning to extend financing of Russian programs.

Awareness of the need for a multifaceted study of each other, as well as expanding opportunities for academic knowledge to influence the foreign policy expertise and the media, is essential. It is necessary to place the issue of enhancing our mutual knowledge of each other into the agenda of Russian-American relations, as happened during the period of the First World War.

Throughout the history of the two countries there is much that Russians and Americans can thank each other for and can even take pride in. And if we are to talk about the historical past and present of Russia and the U.S. in a comparative context, then there is no need to break the principle of historicism and distort historical facts for the sake of political expediency.

WHAT WILL INFLUENCE RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN THE FUTURE?

There are three main factors that continue to influence the development of Russian-American relations: The domestic situation in Russia, the domestic situation in America, and the situation in international relations.

Factor #1: Russia’s internal political situation

If we are to discuss Russia, then it is worth highlighting the “Crimean Consensus” that placed Putin and his popularity at the center of the political system. The level of support for his policies remains close to 85 percent. Furthermore, television has become an important element for consolidating his position.34 This means that the degree of anti-American rhetoric in the near future will not be reduced, since the image of the U.S. as an external enemy will be used by the authorities to consolidate society; with external pressure, it is generally typical for society to rally round the country’s leader.

It is another matter that it is quite difficult to keep society in this state of mobilization for any length of time. According to a poll by the Levada Center carried out between Dec. 19 and Dec. 22, when asked to name the most memorable events of the previous four weeks, 62 percent of those questioned said the fall in the value of the ruble, 33 percent said Putin’s press conference, 28 percent said the continuing drop in global oil prices, and only 25 percent said the incorporation of Crimea.35 As Dmitri Trenin of Carnegie Moscow Center accurately observed, “the conclusion to the Russian-American confrontation will be determined not in Ukraine or Syria, but largely in the sphere of economics, science and technology, social development, and more broadly - Russia’s domestic situation.”36 Russia needs to diversify its economy and increase processes for modernizing key areas in social and economic development, as Putin so often and emotionally says in his public speeches. Ultimately, this is what will provide the basis for the implementing Russia’s foreign policy ambitions, as well as multilateral cooperation in various fields, both in the East and in the West. The main issue at present is to what extent will Russia take a constructive position for regulating the conflict in Southeast Ukraine.

Factor #2: America’s internal political situation

In the U.S., among the factors affecting foreign policy towards Russia it is necessary to name competition between the political parties in the context of upcoming presidential elections, and the confrontation between of supporters of values-based and realistic approaches relating to Russia and the issue of how to resolve the Ukrainian crisis.

Angela Stent wrote in her book The Limits of Partnership: “There is a recurring – and unresolved – debate in the United States about how best to handle Russia. Those favoring an approach based on realism and national interest argue that the relationship is most productive when Washington concentrates on pragmatic...
foreign policy cooperation with Moscow, limits criticism of its domestic system, focuses on the resolution of common problems, and treats Russia with respect. Critics of Realpolitik on the right and left – including some members of the U.S. Congress – argue that the United States should link its foreign policy cooperation to Russia’s domestic system.37

Given that Republicans now control both houses of the U.S. Congress, any attempt by Barack Obama’s Democratic administration to transition from a values-based approach to a pragmatic approach will likely result in a storm of criticism.

The Ukraine Freedom Support Act of 201438 is evidence that a values-based approach is dominant for Russian policy. Signed on Dec. 18 by U.S. President Obama, this law enables him to introduce new sanctions against Russia and also provide military assistance to Ukraine. This document has enabled the American president to introduce sanctions relating to Crimea identical to those introduced by the European Union.

The only encouraging point is that Obama has left open the possibility of diplomatic negotiations and the lifting of sanctions in compliance with the Minsk agreements. There is also the fact that a point assigning Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova the status of “main, nonaligned U.S. allies” was removed from the Act.

Furthermore, there is one other factor that might influence the development of Russian-American relations. Russia’s policy in Ukraine, the actions of the Islamic State, the situation in Libya, Chinese provocations in the East and South China Seas – they all bring to the foreground the question of America’s foreign policy principles as a whole. This is actively discussed in the expert community on both sides of the Atlantic in the context of the fall of the United States’ international authority and crisis management in regional and global processes.

As the President of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, Jessica Tuchman Mathews, argues, “In the Cold War, America’s role in the world was self-evi-

dent – to lead the fight against the Soviet Union and communism worldwide. Individual decisions weren’t obvious, and there were often agonizing tensions between that overriding goal and American values. But Americans largely shared a commitment to what they understood to be their country’s necessary purpose abroad.” According to Mathews, the end of the Cold War brought with it a number of unresolved questions, with the domestic debate being couched in terms of regime change vs. nation building, obeisance to international law vs. exceptionalism, unilateralism vs. multilateralism, or interests vs. values. “But behind the varying terminology is the same search for a guideline or framework for deciding when and where to commit money, blood, or political capital,” Mathews argues.39

Among American politicians and experts, there are many who are aware that the United States cannot change Russia, that the reform of its society depends on the Russians themselves, that the worldview of Russia and the United States is significantly different, and this situation will continue for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the best way to develop relations with this vast and important country, possessing a hybrid political and economic system and experiencing serious internal problems is the development of pragmatic cooperation in areas where it is possible.

Will the relationship between the supporters of the values-based and realistic approaches to policy towards Russia change, and in what direction, only time will tell.

Factor #3: The international context

If we are to talk about the impact of the international context on the development of Russian-American relations, it is necessary to pay attention to such factors as the fall of the role of international institutions, regional crises and global threats, oil prices and fluctuations of the world economy, the dynamics of Eurasian integration, and the position of Europe connected with the answer to the question: “Does Europe need a weak and embittered Russia or will Europe do everything possible to facilitate the exit of Russia from the Ukrainian crisis and its integration into security structures?”

The current crisis has clearly demonstrated that a united Europe under Berlin’s direction is playing the role of a geopolitical rival to Russia, while remaining its economic partner. This means that Europe is interested in restoring a dialogue with Russia on the condition that it returns to the international legal framework to a greater extent than the United States, and is also more willing to take into account Russia’s security interests. At a time when even the partial stabilization of the Ukrainian question can play a positive role, Russia should pay particular attention to the EU and its individual members. The current confrontation between Russia and the U.S. cannot be reduced to the Ukraine and will remain even after the situation in the southeast has stabilized, and, consequently, it is Europe that will be an important link between Russia and the West.

CONCLUSIONS

The current crisis does not mean that Russian-American relations are irreversibly broken – only that they are at the start of their next cycle after having reached a new low point. This state of crisis will be maintained for the next few years. However, the crisis will eventually be overcome, because in today’s poorly managed polycentric world, Russia and the U.S. have to resolve too many common problems, and, consequently, their strategic alliance is inevitable.

The question remains: How much will Russia, America and the rest of the world have to pay to find a way out of this crisis? The answer to this question depends on the will and wisdom of politicians and lawmakers, the actions of diplomats and the effort of the experts and the academic communities of both countries. And, given the ability of the information war to alter how both sides view each other, it also depends on the professional activities of people who form the media agenda and are involved in replicating the image of another country on both sides of the Atlantic.

About the Author

Victoria I. Zhuravleva is Professor of American History and International Relations, Director of the Program on American Studies and Vice-Chairman of the Department of International Relations and Area Studies at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow, Russia. Her research interests include American history, American foreign policy and Russian-American relations. She wrote the book “Understanding Russia in the United States: Images and Myths 1881-1914” (Moscow, 2012), “World History of the 20th Century” (Moscow, 2002, co-authored with Igor Dolutskii), contributed to “Russia and the US: Diplomatic Relations 1900-1917” (Moscow, 1999), and edited the following three volumes on Russian-American relations and American history: “Russian-American Relations in Past and Present: Images, Myths, and Reality” (Moscow, 2007); “Russia and the United States: Mutual Representations in Textbooks” (Kennan Institute, Volgograd, 2009, co-edited with Ivan I. Kurilla); and “Abraham Lincoln: Lessons of History and the Contemporary World” (Moscow, 2010). She is an alumna of the Fulbright Program and the Kennan Institute Program.
RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND ARTICLES ON RUSSIA-US RELATIONS


7. Vladimir Rukavishnikov. Cold War, Cold Peace. Public opinion in the USA and Europe about the USSR/Russia, foreign policy and Western security. Moscow: Akademicheskiy proyekt, 2005. (in Russian)


TOP 10 TWITTER ACCOUNTS FOR #RUSSIA AND #US

@KremlinRussia_E
Official news directly from the Kremlin (in English).

@SpeakerBoehner
John Andrew Boehner is the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and a member of the Republican Party. He was one of the nine U.S. officials banned entry to Russia in March.

@mfa_russia
Official Twitter account of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.

@JohnKerry
Tweets from U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

@RusEmbUSA
Tweets from the Russian Embassy in the United States.

@USEmbRu
News updates from the U.S. embassy in Moscow and U.S. Ambassador John Tefft.

@ECAatState
Tweets from the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

@russiabeyond
News and updates from Russia Beyond the Headlines.

@USRIC_en
The US-Russia Innovation Corridor (USRIC) provides assistance to start-up companies, innovative projects, and universities wishing to explore U.S.-Russia collaborations and partnerships around commercializing innovations.

@Russian_Council
The Russian International Affairs Council, a think tank which covers issues related to Russian foreign policy and Russia-U.S. relations.
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