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**Jakub Honzík**

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Jakub Honzík

# **US and Russia: Resetting relations**

**International cooperation from geopolitical  
perspective**

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**Author: Jakub Honzík**  
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## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této teze je analyzovat potenciál pro mezinárodní spolupráci mezi Spojenými Státy a Ruskou Federací. Tato práce použije analyticko-empirický přístup a zaměří se na geopolitickou perspektivu na bilaterální vztahy mezi těmito dvěma zeměmi. Součástí práce je analýza Ruských a Amerických geopolitických cílů a strategií a následná identifikace oblastí, ve kterých se jejich zájmy shodují, stejně tak jako oblastí, ve kterých si odporují. Následně je poskytnuta analýza vývoje vzájemných vztahů během éry prezidentů Bushe a Putina a během éry prezidentů Obamy a Medvěděva, s cílem popsat strategie, které tyto země používají v přístupu ke vzájemným vztahům. Práce se zaměřuje na popis dopadů jednotlivých politických iniciativ na vzájemné vztahy z geopolitické perspektivy. Při analýze těchto dopadů se tato práce opírá o geopolitické myšlení a strategie obou států. Hlavní cíl práce potom spočívá v analýze potenciálu pro mezinárodní spolupráci mezi Ruskou Federací a Spojenými Státy a také v analýze hlavních překážek, které této spolupráci brání. Zároveň bude poskytnuta analýza dopadu složení vlád na schopnost zemí překonat tyto rozdíly v jejich přístupu k geopolitickým otázkám.

## **Abstract**

This work aims to provide an analysis of the potential for international cooperation between the United States and Russian Federation. It will employ analytical and empirical approach and will introduce a geopolitical perspective on bi-lateral relations between the two nations. It will include an analysis of geopolitical objectives and strategies of the two nations and identify areas where their respective interests converge as well as those where they diverge. Then, it will provide an in-depth analysis of the development of mutual relations during the era of Bush-Putin presidencies and during the era of Obama-Medvedev presidencies, in order to determine the various strategies that these two nations employ in bilateral relations with one another, as well as results of such strategies. This work will focus on the different impact of various policies on relations between the countries from a geopolitical perspective and will refer to geopolitical thinking, strategies and objectives of these two nations while analyzing various political initiatives. The overall purpose will then be to evaluate the potential for international cooperation as well as main obstacles to it. It will also assess the impact of leadership composition on the ability of these two nations to overcome differences in their approach to geopolitics.

## **Klíčová slova**

**Rusko, Spojené Státy, Obama, Putin, Medvěděv, mezinárodní vztahy**

## **Keywords:**

**Russia, USA, Obama, Putin, Medvedev, foreign relations**

**DECLARATION:**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work, based on the sources and literature listed in the appended bibliography.

I also declare that I agree with publication of this thesis for study and research purposes.

Finally, I declare that this thesis was not used to obtain any other academic titles.

The thesis as submitted is 186 217 keystrokes long (including spaces)

Jakub Honzík

Date

*I am grateful to Markéta Židková Ph.D. – Charles University in Prague; for all her help and support.*

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE**  
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## US and Russia: Resetting Relations

### International cooperation from geopolitical perspective

**Subject definition:** Geopolitical perspective on the development of international relations between The United States and Russian Federation

**Reason why this topic was chosen:** The "reset" in relations between the US and Russian Federation proclaimed by the Obama Administration in 2009 signifies willingness to cooperate and improve bi-lateral relations. However, both countries face different geopolitical challenges and it is likely that many of their geopolitical objectives will often be divergent, if not outright conflicting with each other. An in-depth analysis of this political initiative can provide a better understanding of contemporary dynamics of US and Russian foreign policies and evaluate potential for these nations to engage in meaningful and durable international cooperation.

**The aims and objectives of this work can be summarized as follows:**

*To provide a theoretical understanding of Russian and American foreign policy.*

*To describe main geopolitical objectives of these two countries and identify geopolitical strategies they have chosen to attain them.*

*To analyze development of bi-lateral relations between the US and Russian Federation during the era of Bush-Putin presidencies.*

*To analyze the impact of the "reset" in relations proclaimed during the Obama-Medvedev presidencies.*

*To predict possible future developments of bi-lateral relations after Putin's 2012 return to presidency.*

*To evaluate the potential for international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation.*



**Hypothesis:**

*US and Russia have different geopolitical objectives which often contravene each other and will therefore not be able to achieve any significant and durable improvement in bi-lateral relations.*

**Secondary research question:**

*To what extent can a composition of leadership of the US and Russian Federation influence the potential of the two nations to cooperate despite their conflicting geopolitical objectives?*

**Suggested Structure:**

The methodological approach will be analytical and empirical. Therefore, chapters will follow a logical order. First chapter will provide a theoretical background for Russian and American foreign policies to identify their geopolitical objectives and strategies. Following chapters will provide an analysis of two specific time periods of US-Russian relations. These will be characterized by the administrations in place, firstly the Bush-Putin administrations and secondly, the Obama-Medvedev administrations. Therefore, it will be possible to compare approaches to geopolitics of bi-lateral relations employed by these two nations in time periods characterized by different composition of leadership. The final chapter will also make a prediction of possible future developments in relations based on findings in this and previous chapters.

**Research Limitations:**

One of the research goals of this work is to determine whether a favourable composition of leadership on both sides could enable the US and Russian Federation to overcome possible obstacles to international cooperation caused by the differences in their respective geopolitical objectives. However, in case of Russian government, the role of premier Putin during the presidency of Medvedev is a source of much

speculation about the extent to which president Medvedev can independently set the foreign policy course of Russian Federation. This issue is avoided by this work because it is not a topic of this research and it is therefore assumed that president Medvedev can pursue his independent foreign policy.

Additionally, the aim of this work is to make an accurate and well funded prediction of possible future development in bi-lateral relations between these two nations. As is a nature of any predictions, they can be founded on collected data and analysis of previous developments, but they will always leave a large space for error due to inaccurate data or biased approach. Therefore, the author will have to make sure to stay unbiased and objective during his research.

### **Literature Analysis:**

The literature used to research the topic of this work has been divided into three parts. The core literature includes basic texts from acknowledged authorities outlining foreign policy formulation in both US and Russia. Authors like Robert E. Kanet and Jeffrey Mankoff provide deep insight into Russian foreign policy and its development since the cold war. Like with most books in my list, the biggest shortcoming is that some of the information included is not up-to-date and reflects upon post-cold-war rather than 21st century geopolitical reality. Books by L. F. Shevtsova have been used mostly to gain better understanding of Russian internal political mechanisms, especially about the distribution of political power. Books by distinguished scholars Robert Jervis and Michael Lind have been used in a similar fashion to research developments in the US foreign policy since the cold war until the present. I have also chosen Viotti's American Foreign Policy to gain more recent source of material for this topic.

Most important books from my supporting literature included works by V. Aggarwal and Paul Viotti, which helped me to gain knowledge about American foreign policy and general dynamics of foreign relations with Russian Federation. As nuclear policies play an important role in my work, I have also included a book by Nina Tannenwald that exclusively focuses on political tradition of (non)use of nuclear weapons.

Finally, I have included a list of additional literature that has been studied, but did not yield any directly relevant information. These include works by S. Huntington whose

idea of future clash of civilizations, despite relatively outdated today, helped me to make more accurate predictions, while his book about America's national identity was extremely useful in gaining further knowledge about American society and wide scale of factors influencing the public opinion.

**Note: I also intend to reference articles published on web pages of respected think tanks. So far, I have focused on articles published by the Centre for European Reform (<http://www.cer.org.uk/>) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (<http://carnegieendowment.org/>)**

**List of literature (disregarding internet based sources):**

Core literature:

1. Roger E. Kanet: Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century
2. Roger E. Kanet: A Resurgent Russia and the West: The European Union, NATO and Beyond
3. Edward A. Kolodziej, Roger E. Kanet: From Superpower to Besieged Global Power: Restoring World Order after the Failure of the Bush Doctrine (Studies in Security and International Affairs)
4. Jeffrey Mankoff: Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics
5. Lili'ia Fedorovna Shev'tsova, Antonina W. Bouis: Putin's Russia (Revised Edition)
6. Lilia Shevtsova: Lonely Power: Why Russia Has Failed to Become the West and the West is Weary of Russia
7. Michael Lind: The american way of strategy
8. Robert Jervis: American Foreign Policy in a New Era

Supporting literature:

9. Vinod K. Aggarwal, Kristi Govella: Responding to a Resurgent Russia: Russian Policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States

10. Paul Viotti: American Foreign Policy (WCMW - War and Conflict in the Modern World)
11. Nina Tannenwald: The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945
12. Oskar Krejčí: *Zahraniční politika USA'*

*Additional reading:*

13. George Friedman: The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century
14. George Friedman: America's Secret War: Inside the Hidden Worldwide Struggle Between America and Its Enemies
15. Paul Kennedy: The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict From 1500 to 2000
16. Edward Lucas: The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West
17. Aaron L. Friedberg: A Contest For Supremacy (China, America, and the struggle for mastery in Asia)
18. Petr Drulák a kol.: Jak zkoumat politiku: Kvalitativní metodologie v politologii a mezinárodních vztazích
19. Samuel P. Huntington: The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order
20. Samuel P. Huntington: Who are we? : the challenges to America's national identity

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## **Introduction**

In the increasingly multipolar world, it is increasingly difficult to pursue unilateralist foreign policies. There is an ever increasing stress on reaching consensus on issues of geopolitical importance. United States and Russian Federation are two countries with often conflicting geopolitical interests and strategies. Relations between the US and Russian Federation have been relatively unstable since the end of the Cold War, oscillating between their peaks and lows and from crisis to crisis. However, since the coming to power of president Obama, there have been numerous proclamations of "hitting the reset button" and improving bi-lateral relations.

Given the significance of mutual relations between these countries and their impact on the development of world affairs in general, this work attempts to evaluate the potential for cooperation between these two nations from a geopolitical perspective. The aims and objectives of this work can be summarized as follows:

*To provide a theoretical understanding of Russian and American foreign policy.*

*To describe main geopolitical objectives of these two countries and identify geopolitical strategies they have chosen to attain them.*

*To analyze development of bi-lateral relations between the US and Russian Federation during the era of Bush-Putin presidencies.*

*To analyze the impact of the "reset" in relations proclaimed during the Obama-Medvedev presidencies.*

*To predict possible future developments of bi-lateral relations after Putin's 2012 return to presidency.*

*To evaluate the potential for international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation.*

The main research goal of this work is to evaluate the potential for international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation from geopolitical perspective. Additionally, there will be a secondary research question which is: To what extent can a composition of leadership of the US and Russian Federation influence the potential of the two nations to cooperate despite their divergent geopolitical objectives?

Given the history and nature of Russian and American geopolitical strategies, the author expects to find out, that despite achieving some superficial improvement in the general atmosphere of relations, they will not be able to overcome the differences in their respective geopolitical thinking and interests. Hence the following hypothesis:

***US and Russia have different geopolitical objectives which often contravene each other and will therefore not be able to achieve any significant and durable improvement in bi-lateral relations.***

Author's starting position is unbiased and not based on any one theoretical or philosophical direction. Rather than on political theories, this work is based upon sources of various authors who are respected authorities in the field of geopolitics and international relations. They include L.F. Shevtsova, Bobo Lo, R. Sakwa or R.E. Kanet who are notable experts on Russian politics and P. Viotti, R. Jervis or M. Lind who provided a lot of material for the study of American geopolitical thinking. These and other authors provide basis for the analysis of American and Russian geopolitical strategies as well as an overview of the historical development of their respective foreign policies.

The approach to this work is empirical and analytical. Its chapters follow in a logical order where first, the general basis and historical development of each country will be described from the geopolitical perspective in order to determine areas where there is space for international cooperation as well as main obstacles to it. These findings will then be used to analyze the development of relations in two time periods defined by different composition of leadership, namely the Bush-Putin era, and the Obama-Medvedev era. Approaches to bi-lateral relations were different in these two time periods, therefore it is useful to analyze both of them in order to evaluate results of different approaches to mutual cooperation. While the first period of Bush-Putin presidencies can be defined by the unilateralist approach of the Bush Administration and pragmatic policies of president Putin, the second period of Obama-Medvedev presidencies can be described as an attempt at more constructive approach to international cooperation on topics of mutual interest.

Therefore, first two chapters provide a separate analysis of Russian and then of American geopolitical objectives and strategies. This will provide an overview of areas where their respective geopolitical objectives converge and where the two nations could



engage in a constructive international cooperation. Similarly, it will provide an overview of the largest obstacles to mutual cooperation caused by differences in geopolitical objectives. The third chapter builds upon the findings of the first two chapters in order to describe how the US and Russian Federation dealt with these differences between their geopolitical strategies and what impact did it have on the state of their bi-lateral relations during the Bush-Putin era (2000-2008). The purpose of this chapter will be to outline the geopolitical interaction between the two nations, and it will be limited to this time period only. Finally, the fourth chapter analyzes the "reset" in relations which was proclaimed by presidents Obama and Medvedev in 2009. This chapter provides an overview of results of various political initiatives aimed at improving bi-lateral relations in order to determine whether it is possible for these two nations to engage in a constructive international cooperation despite the fact, that their geopolitical objectives often contravene each other. Findings of this chapter will also be used to provide a general prediction of future development of bi-lateral relations based on their state in May 2012 before the announced return to presidency by V. Putin.

Additionally, to answer a secondary research question, comparison between approaches to international relations by the two sets of administrations in the US and Russian Federation will attempt to determine what impact does the composition of leadership have on the potential of the two nations to cooperate.

The topic of relations between the US and Russian Federation is often commented upon and there is a large amount of literature which deals with foreign relations of these two nations both in bi-lateral and multi-lateral context. However, as far as results of the recent policies by the Obama-Medvedev administrations are concerned, that topic is relatively fresh and many of these political initiatives have not yet had time to reach their goals. Therefore, analysis of this time period of bi-lateral relations will be based mostly on articles and short essays by respected authors which were mostly obtained from web pages of think-tanks, namely the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the Centre for European Reform.

The literature used to research the topic of this work has been based on works by authors who are respected in fields of political science and international relations. The core literature includes basic texts from acknowledged authorities outlining foreign policy and geopolitical approach of the US and Russian Federation. The above

mentioned authors like Shevtsova or Bobo Lo provide an insight into Russian foreign policy and its development since the cold war. Perhaps the largest weakness of this choice of literature lies in the fact that some of the information included is not up-to-date and reflects upon post-Cold War rather than 21st century geopolitical reality. Books by L. Shevtsova have been used mostly to gain better understanding of Russian internal political mechanisms, especially about the distribution of political power. Books by distinguished scholars Robert Jervis and Michael Lind have been used in a similar fashion to research developments in the US foreign policy since the cold war until the present. I have also chosen Viotti's *American Foreign Policy* published in 2010 to gain more recent source of material for this topic.

This work will be limited in its scope to bi-lateral relations between the US and Russian Federation, therefore it will not take into account another intervening variables such as the impact of the rising power of China or the Third World in General on Russian and American bi-lateral relations. It will also avoid the question of the influence that Russian president Medvedev actually had on Russian foreign policy. This question is somewhat controversial given the unique nature of Russian government and the uncertainty about the authoritarian role of V. Putin, who is often described as a figure of ultimate influence despite the theoretical limitations on his power imposed by Russian Constitution.

## **1. Theoretical foundations of Russian foreign policy**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of key historical factors influencing Russian geopolitical thinking as well as a theoretical understanding of competing foreign policy approaches of contemporary Russian political system. This theoretical background of Russian foreign policy will be complemented by similar theoretical basis for the US foreign policy provided by the next chapter and then used in the final chapter of this work to explain the underlining dynamics of the US-Russian relations from a geopolitical perspective in order to determine the potential for international cooperation. This chapter is divided into two subchapters where each one follows a specific research goal.

The first subchapter provides a historical perspective on Russian approach to foreign policy. Its research goal is to provide for a theoretical understanding of main factors that influence Russian perception of Russian geopolitical position in the world. It is often difficult to precisely evaluate Russian goals and interests given the uniqueness of Russian culture and complicated history. Therefore, this subchapter deals with multiple topics such as Russian isolationism or Russian alienation from Europe. These factors can play a key role in the formulation of Russian interests and their understanding can provide an insight into contemporary Russian geopolitical objectives and strategy, which in turn is necessary for analyzing the potential for international cooperation between the Russian Federation and the US.

The second subchapter deals with the mainstream foreign policy approaches that developed in the Russian Federation during the 90s. This was a formative period of post-Soviet Russian political system which generated various competing approaches to foreign politics based on different interpretations of Russian identity and Russian geopolitical role. The research goal of this subchapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of these competing approaches to foreign policy. The findings outlined by this subchapter can then be used in following chapters to analyze Russian geopolitical objectives and explain Russian choices of a geopolitical strategy used to achieve them.

## **1.1 Russian foreign policy - historical perspective**

The historical perspective can be useful in identifying the persistent interests of Russian foreign policy-makers that shape nuances of Russian foreign policy independently of what is its current regime. As stated above, the research goal of this subchapter is to provide for a theoretical understanding of main factors that influence Russian perception of Russian geopolitical position in the world. This will be achieved by drawing from the research of Robert Legvold, a professor at the Columbia University and an expert in Russian foreign policy. In his book *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*,<sup>1</sup> he identifies four factors that influenced the historical development of Russian geopolitical thinking: Russian insecurity within its fragile and ever-changing borders, Russian tendency to resist decentralization of power even at the cost of undermining its own economy, Russian inability to define its national identity, and finally, Russian alienation from both Europe and Asia.

According to Legvold, these factors, closely linked to the history of Russian empire and its socio-economic features, significantly influence Russian approach to foreign actors. Following parts of this subchapter will deal with these factors one by one and will draw upon Legvold's findings in his book which will be accompanied by references to other respected authorities in the field of Russian politics, such as Richard Sakwa, Bobo Lo or Lilia Fedorovna Shevtsova.

### **1.1.1 Russian insecurity and its influence on Russian geopolitical thinking**

This part examines the effect of Russian expansionism on its geopolitical thinking. Specifically, how a fast territorial expansion by the Russian Empire in the past led to a feeling of insecurity and encroachment by foreign cultures, a feeling which translates into hostile perception of other countries.

Since the times of the early expansion of Muscovite State, the expansion of Russian territory has been distinct from that of any other power. Being a fringe power, Russian Empire could expand eastwards and southwards virtually unobstructed by any

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<sup>1</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007.

competing power. The effect of "gunpowder empire"<sup>2</sup> soon left Russia with a huge territory spanning from the Pacific in the east to its borders with European civilization in the west and including vast portions of central Asia in the south. This rapid expansion unavoidably had negative effects on the stability of the Empire. Firstly, control of huge territories severely strained central Russian bureaucracy in St. Petersburg and since Russia was an absolutist state with strong bias against decentralization, the result was a massively inefficient and repressive government. This was both a feature of Russian cultural heritage, as well as necessity dictated by the fact that conquered territories often included culturally distinct populations. Also, inclusion of Siberia and vast territories in Central Asia put Russia on completely different track than that of European nations, forever branding it as the odd European country with different government philosophy, economic priorities, social concerns and neighbours. Legvold points out that "*Russia's nineteenth century expansion in the Far East added to the country's vulnerability by leaving it with isolated outposts distant from the main population and production centres and within reach of "culturally" distinct peoples, soon themselves victims of Europe's encroaching powers.*"<sup>3</sup> Long borders with Muslim and Asian civilizations as well as inclusion of culturally distinct populations did not only strengthen Russian internal authoritarianism, a typical feature of a multinational state, but changed its geopolitical thinking and set stage for Russian national identity crisis. In consequence, Russia learned not to view itself as a typical European power but rather as a power with Euro-Asian mission and distinct, if not "unique" characteristics.

The sheer size of the Russian Empire, its lack of internal coherence and infrastructure, and growing feeling of vulnerability along its incredibly long borders required development of strategies that would help the country to defend itself from potential threats. "*Russian leaders have eased Russia's physical disadvantages by maintaining an acute sense of strategic distance.*"<sup>4</sup> This strategy is described as viewing Russia's surroundings as a set of concentric circles where conflicts would always be avoided except for those cases that are near concentrations of Russia's military strengths. This approach has forced the fast expanding Russia to seek even further territories to put

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<sup>2</sup> The effect of gunpowder empire was attributed to the expansion of Russian Empire by numerous historians including Paul Kennedy in his book *The Rise and Fall of Great Powers* (see bibliography)

<sup>3</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 21

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22

additional buffer zones around its ever expanding frontiers. Therefore, it can be argued, that Russia's size is closely linked to its sense of vulnerability and insecurity which is only further reinforced by the fact that while other European powers competed amongst themselves, Russia's expansion put it at odds with entirely distinct civilizations.

The collapse of the USSR inevitably led to even further deepening of these feelings of insecurity which strengthened the tendency of the newly established Russian Federation to view its neighbours with suspicion. *"In 1991 Russia's military-strategic expansion not only ended but collapsed, and the 'gathering of lands' went into reverse as the rump Russian state in the West was reduced to not much more than Muscovy under Ivan the Terrible in the sixteenth century."*<sup>5</sup> Scholars such as Legvold describe Russia as post-imperial in its political perception of smaller neighbours and often compare it with the situation of the Great Britain after the WWII when it lost its empire and had to redefine its approach to former colonies. The stark contrast between the approach of present United Kingdom and Russian Federation towards these territories is linked closely to Russian authoritarian tradition. Hence Russian tendency to use soft power (economic control, political pressure, even implied military threats) on its weaker neighbours in an effort not so much to establish direct control, but most importantly to keep influence of competing powers (mostly the United States and other countries seen as members of the "West"<sup>6</sup>) from encroaching on Russian borders.

Resistance to "meddling of the west" in Russian immediate neighbourhood has been the defining characteristic of Russian foreign policy since Putin came to power. This could be observed in cases of Russian reaction (often seen as rather hysterical from European perspective) to western-originating activist support to "coloured revolutions" in the Ukraine or Georgia. According to Legvold, *"Russia is again without what might be called 'strategic frontiers,' since its new de jure borders offer weak parapets from behind which to plan a forward defense."*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that Russian feeling of insecurity in its post-USSR borders can make Russian foreign policy makers particularly sensitive to any cases of foreign involvement in countries that used to fall

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<sup>5</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *Russian politics and society*, Fourth Edition, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 376

<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this work, the term "West" refers to countries of North America and Western Europe characterized by their embrace of liberal society and individual freedoms, which were culturally influenced by either catholic or protestant religion. For more details, see *The Clash of Civilizations* by Samuel P. Huntington (see bibliography)

<sup>7</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 27

within the territory of Russian Empire, an approach clearly reflected in Russian policy towards its "near abroad."<sup>8</sup>

### **1.1.2 Russian authoritarianism and its influence on Russian foreign relations**

Russian authoritarianism is today a matter of extensive scholarly debate. It is difficult to precisely describe the type of government in present day Russian Federation. In each case, Russian contemporary resistance to democratic reforms is often a source of friction in its relations with the West. However, if Russian authoritarianism is strongly rooted in Russian tradition of government, any attempts by Western entities (whether government agencies or NGOs.) to criticize it may result in complication in foreign relations as well as strengthening of Russian aversion to foreign influence, described in the previous part.

Legvold argues that Russian tradition of government shows a resistance to any kind of decentralization of power even at the cost of severely undermining Russian economy. Russia has a long tradition of authoritarian and centralized government. It is in part a direct result of Russian expansionism. *"From Ivan IV to Stalin, Russian expansionism swept within the country's de jure and strategic frontiers an ever-expanding number of non-Russian peoples, most of whom remained on patrimonial lands, and in the process created a further internal source of vulnerability. This in turn tied the fate of the autocracy to the country's security."*<sup>9</sup> This argument provides an explanation for why Russian leaders may perceive various nations living within Russian territory as a potential threat and authoritarianism as a means to controlling this threat. For example: Putin's approach to Chechnya reflects Russian elite's fear of the domino effect where a fall of Chechnya could condemn the whole Northern Caucasus and later instigate the whole Muslim population within Russia. Hence Russian aversion to liberal tendencies pushed on Russia by various international organizations and practical realities of a globalized economy.

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<sup>8</sup> The term "Near Abroad" is used to describe what Russia perceives as its exclusive zone of influence. It includes former states of the Soviet Union and sometimes extends to former satellite countries.

<sup>9</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 100

This has had a tragic effect on Russian economy which is undermined by lack of democratic reforms. Although Russian economy has seen a solid growth in recent years despite being hit by the 2008 financial crisis because of plummeting oil prices, it is seen as technologically backward, lacking solid investment structures, suffering from overly restrictive and corrupt bureaucracy, insufficient legal and justice system enforcing the rule of law and still vastly dependent on raw material extraction and exports (contributing circa 40% to Russian revenues). Additionally, Russian corruption rate has been judged as one of the highest in the world.<sup>10</sup>

The relationship between Russian authoritarianism and the poor state of Russian economy has been explained in depth by L. F. Shevtsova which described Putin's government as technocratic - liberalizing the market while resisting democratization in fear that reforms would destabilize the country. "*...market authoritarianism has been Putin's basic philosophy. He renewed the market reforms stalled under Yeltsin while centralizing his power. Putin's choice of regime can be explained by his distrust of democracy.*"<sup>11</sup> While stable economy is a necessary precondition for political stability and therefore perceived as a matter of national security in Russia, according to Shevtsova, Russian economy will be unable to fully develop before democratic reforms improve the business environment which today is corrupted by privileged oligarchy and inefficient bureaucracy. "*A combination of authoritarianism and economic liberalization may be perfectly adequate to drag a peasant country onto the road of industrialization. To meet postindustrial challenges, however, to move towards high-technology society, a new type of regime is needed, one that makes room for social initiatives, local self-government, and individual freedom.*"<sup>12</sup> Today, we can see rise of social activism in Russia where growing middle classes demand more political freedom. However, these initiatives are often dismissed by the Kremlin, which often labels such political activists as agents of the west.

Russian inclination to authoritarianism has often put it at odds with western political activism promoting liberalization and democratization. While the ideas of liberal democracy are seen as absolute and universal in the west, in Russia they are seen as less

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<sup>10</sup> Russia ranks 143rd out of 178 according to the Transparency International's *Corruption Perceptions Index 2011*, accessible at <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/>, accessed on 10.05.12

<sup>11</sup> Shevtsova, Lillia Fedorovna. *Putin's Russia*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2005, p. 325

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 402



important than overall internal stability which can be secured by strong centralized government. After all, Russian experience with complete dissolution of order during the Yeltsin years in the 90s, when Russian economy was being liberalized and government began to decentralize, is still a strong reminder to many Russians that Russian Federation may simply not be ready for active civil society and liberal reforms. The chaos that Russian Federation had to endure, puts Putin's centralizing initiatives (e.g.: appointments of governors from the centre) into a rather positive light from the point of the view of average Russians, while from the western perspective they tend to be shunned as authoritarian and therefore unjustifiable. *"Vulnerable and insecure, Russia has sought to do everything in its power to stabilize its political environment and minimize outside interference. President Putin insisted on Russia's right to decide for itself the pace, terms and conditions of moving towards democracy and he warned against attempts to destabilize the political system by any unlawful methods of struggle."*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded, that authoritarianism is Russian reaction/solution to Russian social, geographical, demographical and political realities and seen by Russian elites as a necessary tool for preservation of internal stability.

This inclination not only undermines Russian economy which is therefore still dependant on raw material exports, but also often introduces friction into Russian relations with the west. In fact, the US critique of the lack of democratic reforms in Russia was a significant issue during the resetting of relations between these two countries during an era of presidents Obama and Medvedev. It can therefore be argued, that Western criticism of Russian authoritarianism can be a result of fundamental misunderstanding of Russian social, economical and geographical as well as cultural realities and can become an obstacle to international cooperation.

### **1.1.3 Russian search for identity and its role in determination of geopolitical objectives**

Russia's struggle to define its national identity has a significant influence on Russian approach to foreign policy and subsequently on the determination of Russian geopolitical objectives. The country has been in turmoil since the introduction of

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<sup>13</sup> Aggerwal, Vinod K. *Responding to Resurgent Russia. Russian policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012, p. 43

*perestroika* under Gorbachev, then during the chaotic 90s during Yeltsin's reforms of the economy and all the way until Putin's coming to power in December 1999. When the country finally stabilized, Russians had to deal with the loss of their empire and had hard time with redefining their new geopolitical role. Russian leaders were faced with an urgent need to quickly draw up new foreign policy objectives that would be suited to Russian federation. The problem was that such goals usually reflect national perceptions and values which in turn stem directly from national identity.

In Russian case, this was difficult since Russian national identity has been thoroughly standardized to fit communist ideology during the Soviet Era. The debate about Russian identity in the post-cold war world had many aspects. According to scholar Bobo Lo: *"Perceptions of identity - Slavic, European, Eurasian - have been central to the debate about the part Russia should play in the post-Cold War global environment, whether it should attempt to reinvent itself as a 'modern' power or continue to emphasize, within reasonable limits, its traditional strengths of military power and international influence-brokering."*<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Russian Federation had to make a decision whether it wants to continue to be a major geopolitical power or resort to a status of a regional power. Bobo Lo goes on to state that *"Russia's global outlook is intimately connected with the issue of its imperial identity - not so much Moscow's imperial ambitions, but the extent to which the country's imperial past - tsarist and communist - has moulded conceptions of nationhood."*<sup>15</sup> This is a crucial factor in Russian geopolitical thinking. Russian post-imperial thinking is reflected in many of its actions on international scene such as those connected to its claim to an exclusive sphere of influence. Russian military incursion into Georgia without much regard for international law could be an example of this approach. Russian Federation claimed that it is protecting the safety of Russian nationals in South Ossetia and sent its army deep into Georgian territory. Similarly, Russian rhetoric concerning its Diaspora in the Ukraine, most notably the Sevastopol area suggests, that Russia is willing to protect its interests both within and outside of its borders.

Indeed, there were vigorous discussion in the country after the establishment of the Russian Federation about whether "Russia" should be limited to its de jure boarder, or

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<sup>14</sup> Bobo Lo. *Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: reality, illusion and mythmaking*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002, p. 19

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20

whether as far as foreign policy is concerned, "Russia" should be defined as Russian Federation and those areas in former Soviet Union inhabited by either ethnic Russian or Russian language speakers.<sup>16</sup> Such broad definitions of Russian state would be completely ignoring international conventions and defying post-Cold War order for sake of re-establishing Russian Federation as a unique state with Euro-Asian mission.

Present day Russia led by the government of Vladimir Putin forms its foreign policy according to a mixture of nationalist and pragmatic approach (competing foreign policy orientations will be dealt with in the next part of this work). Russian foreign policy-makers insist on Russian sovereignty and independence and generally refuse to be bound by international law and conventions in cases where it would go against Russian interests. Russian Federation does not seem to aspire to expansion of its territory anymore, but it still seems to proudly protect its influence in ex-soviet states. Putin's government has developed variety of means to exert such influence through various "soft power" methods often centred around strategic investments, abuse of Russian position on the energy market, implied military threats or economic incentives.

This can be used to explain the harshness of some reactions by Russian officials in cases where the US spread their influence into ex-Soviet territory such as e.g.: the ABM projects in Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, when analyzing Russian positions during negotiations with the West, it is always important to keep in mind Russian imperial past and present identity crisis, both of which may distort Russian foreign affairs optics in ways, that are hard to understand from the point of view of Western diplomats.

#### **1.1.4 Russian alienation from both European and Asian culture and its role in determining Russian geopolitical strategy**

The final pattern identified by Legvold in his book is the alienation of Russia from both Europe and Asia. It was already mentioned that due to its fast territorial expansion, Russian Empire quickly found itself bordering Asian and Middle Eastern civilizations. This contact had a profound influence on Russian view of the world and Russian place

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<sup>16</sup> The debate about defining Russian identity and scope of Russian nation is closely examined by scholars and historians, such as Nicole J. Jackson in her book *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions* (see bibliography)

in it. Although most Russian Tsars sought inspiration in European civilization, it has often been the case that Russians felt both part of Europe and at the same time standing aside from it. This feeling of alienation strengthens Russian inclination to pursue its unique way of achieving its geopolitical objectives.

Historically, Russian Tsars, being absolutist monarchs, were suspicious of European social developments and of European political values. Therefore, while Russians often sought to import European technology and culture, there was never so much enthusiasm about European values. This only reinforced Russia in developing separately from the rest of Europe. *"Russia's most instinctive response has been to seal its borders, whether exemplified by the tyrannical blessing required of Ivan IV for even the most privileged to travel abroad, or Nicholas I's suffocating regulations governing foreign education and travel, or the Soviets' attempts to build a hermetic barrier against alien goods, ideas and radio waves, no less."*<sup>17</sup>

Since Russians have different values and culturally and politically stand partially aside from western civilization, separated by different history, language, governmental tradition and religion (Russian Federation being an Orthodox country), it is no surprise that they refrain from blindly accepting liberal market tradition of the west based mostly on Christian/Protestant values. Furthermore, Russian elites will be hesitant promoting such values as they are incompatible (perhaps with exception of liberalizing the market to a certain degree) with contemporary government style of 'bureaucratic authoritarianism.'<sup>18</sup>

Legvold goes on to state that *"the notion of Russia as a European player above or outside European norms is hardly new, and the goal of making Russia a market economy by privileging a "strong, centralized state" becomes simply the latest version of Russia's long assumed exceptionalism."*<sup>19</sup> This difference in values solidified by Russian elites' insistence on Russian uniqueness (with the exception of the so-called "westernists" supporting the notion of Russia becoming a "normal" European country), is reflected by Russian society, economy, culture, politics and eventually - its foreign policy. As stated above, all of these are linked since foreign policy objectives are based

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<sup>17</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 22

<sup>18</sup> Term used by L.F. Shevtsova to describe the form of Putin's government in Russia

<sup>19</sup> Legvold, Robert. *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century and the Shadow of the Past*. New York: Columbia University Press 2007, p. 27

on national identity and values. Therefore, Russian government is operating on different principles than any typical European government, i.e.: it continues the Russian government tradition. There have been multiple symbolic gestures of this such as e.g.: re-introduction of old Imperial Flag after the fall of the USSR or preservation of national anthem despite changing its lyrics, etc.

On the other hand, this does not automatically mean that Russian foreign policy makers would automatically reject everything "western." In fact, there was quite close cooperation between Putin's Russia and president Bush's administration on the war on terror in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in New York. However, such *ad hoc* cooperation must never be mistaken for any fundamental change in Russian foreign policy towards the west. According to Shevtsova "*the inclusion of Russia in the Western orbit on the basis of certain coinciding geopolitical interests could be situational and merely temporary. Only a commonality of values would guarantee the genuine integration of Russia into the Western community Russia would have to fully embrace liberal democratic principles, rejecting attempts to tailor democratic institutions to the needs of personified power and bureaucratic state.*"<sup>20</sup> It is also necessary to realize that globalization has taken its toll on Russian self-perception. Today, national borders become less significant and new generation tends to think of itself as being part of a global community first and a specific nation second. This has a very strong effect on Russia and especially on the nationalist elements of its society. "*Globalization is associated with the destruction of national identity. In a country still searching for its identity, globalization tends to elicit a fiercely negative reaction.*"<sup>21</sup>

In conclusion, Russian alienation significantly influences Russian self-perception as a country that needs to define its own values and pursue its own geopolitical agenda. This results in a strong need for being treated as an equal partner, particularly in their dealing with the USA. Additionally, as stated above, there will always be a strong sentiment about Russian uniqueness (meaning that Russian Federation cannot be treated the same way as any other country), and finally, Russia will always employ special approach to countries of former Soviet Union - territory that it still tends to

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<sup>20</sup> Shevtsova, Lillia Fedorovna. *Putin's Russia*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2005, p. 398

<sup>21</sup> Aggerwal, Vinod K. *Responding to Resurgent Russia. Russian policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012, p. 31

consider as its old imperial holding. This is especially significant in understanding Russian sensitivity to US aspirations to global leadership.

## **1.2 Competing streams of Russian politics and their impact on Russian geopolitical thinking**

As stated above, the second subchapter will deal with the mainstream foreign policy approaches that developed in the Russian Federation during the 90s. In this time, foundations of current Russian political system were laid and it is therefore important to understand the differences between main political streams. These streams differ according to their perception of Russian state and its role in the world, relationships to the collapsed USSR and foreign policy strategy towards ex-USSR territory, towards the West and towards the US. The research goal of this subchapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of these competing approaches to foreign policy. The findings outlined by this subchapter will later be used to analyze contemporary Russian approach to geopolitics, Russian geopolitical objectives and strategy. Resources for this chapter include references from literature by renowned experts on Russian politics and research by Nicole Jackson outlined in her book *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions*.<sup>22</sup>

This subchapter will consist of three parts which will analyze political orientations that dominated Russian political scene during the 90s. The first part will describe the liberal westernist political stream which was prominent in the Russian Empire since Peter I and after the collapse of the USSR was embraced by the Yeltsin government. Second part will describe other political streams including Russian nationalists, Eurasianism as well as Slavophilism. Finally, the last part will focus on the Eurasian philosophy which was later in a revised form embraced by Russia's current government. Russian contemporary relations with the United States will be put into perspective of these political streams in following chapters.

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<sup>22</sup> Jackson, Nicole J. *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions*. New York: Routledge 2003

### 1.2.1 Russian Westernism and its role in relations with the West

This part describes Russian Westernism - a political stream that sought to integrate Russian Federation within Western international structures. The research goal of this part is to describe what role can Russian Westernism play in Russian-American relations.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was necessary for Russian policy-makers to develop new foreign policy that would reflect values and geopolitical objectives of the newly established Russian Federation. In order to do that, it was necessary to take into account the new military-economic reality. Sakwa states that: "*From an imperial point of view, the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the USSR was a defeat for Russia ... It is against this background that the debate over Russian foreign policy unfolded.*"<sup>23</sup> Russia had lost its warm water ports and with them access to the Baltic and Black seas. In the chaos of the aftermath after the collapse of the USSR, Russian economy followed suit and collapsed, after key state property was privatized by a group of oligarchs who exchanged free reign over Russian economy for their support to Yeltsin's government. Furthermore, Russia found itself without reliable allies, its imperial dream shattered and struggling to rediscover its geopolitical mission.

Westernism was a political orientation whose popularity in post-Soviet Russia lived and died with the government of Yeltsin, the first president of Russian Federation. Westernism can be defined as a political will to align Russia with western structures and establish Russian Federation as a normal state. It represented complete abandonment of Russian uniqueness and establishment of normal relations with all neighbours that would be unburdened by the past. In fact, the collapse of the Soviet Union would be viewed by the so-called "zapadniki" as a positive thing. They would not seek any special kind of relations with countries of the former Soviet Union (mutual non-interference).

The fundamental difference between westernist and most other political approaches lies in the fact, that westernist political orientation promotes the view of Russian Federation as a "Western" state (as opposed to Eurasian state with a special role), without any extraterritorial or imperial ambitions. Furthermore, westernist ideas would

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<sup>23</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *Russian politics and society*. Fourth Edition, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 376

promote the establishment of liberal democratic society and of free market that would be fully incorporated within global economy, i.e.: Russian Federation would fully participate in international institutions, even those dominated by the United States. Furthermore, Russian Federation would not insist on receiving a prominent position within these institutions (such as e.g.: its position of a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations).

Westernism has been strong under Yeltsin's government which offered unqualified support to the west on all political issues in exchange for much needed economic aid. Yeltsin received support from the West which later associated him with free market and democratic reforms. However, Yeltsin's attempt to reform Russian economy according to the western template brought severe devastation to Russian economy and his popularity plummeted. Today, the chaos that took place in Russia during the "wild 90s" is commonly associated with liberal reforms. Ironically, government of President Putin, often strongly contrasted with that of President Yeltsin, despite its frequent anti-western rhetoric, carries some features of westernist orientation as well. For example, while centralizing power, Putin actually finished many reforms started by his predecessor that were aimed at liberalizing Russian market. He also attempted to normalize relations with the West and today supports participation of Russia in many international institutions, e.g.: supported the creation of the NATO-Russia council.

According to Shevtsova, Putin's initiative to improve relations with the west despite fierce opposition from his political advisors was one of the defining features of his foreign policy at the beginning of his presidency. Shevtsova notes that *"Putin even risked noting that if NATO were to develop as a political rather than military union, Russia would not object to its new round of enlargement. He even hinted a possible Russian interest in NATO membership."*<sup>24</sup> However, these steps and statements must be taken with reserve and should not be confused with some crucial change in the direction of Putin's political thinking. In fact, scholars often see such apparently pro-western elements of Putin's foreign policy as a merely pragmatic strategy of increasing Russian influence. Such approach will be crucial in analyzing contemporary Russian foreign policy and Russian political perception of relations with the US and will therefore be analyzed in detail further below. It can, however, be argued that overall

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<sup>24</sup> Shevtsova, Lillia Fedorovna. *Putin's Russia*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2005, p. 210



influence of westernism on contemporary Russian foreign policy is minimal and the idea of integrating Russian Federation into western structures has been abandoned.

### **1.2.2 Slavophilism, nationalism and Eurasianism in Russian politics and their influence on Russian foreign relations**

The goal of this part is to describe various streams in Russian politics which emerged as a reaction to westernist policies of the Yeltsin government. They usually include elements of nationalism or its later variant - Slavophilism. These approaches can still have an impact on contemporary Russian government and thus have an influence on Russian foreign relations, namely on relations with the West and the US. Slavophilism also strongly influences Russian perception of its geopolitical position and can influence formulation of Russian geopolitical objectives. Understanding the role of Slavophilism in contemporary Russian politics is therefore crucial for assessing the potential for cooperation between Russian Federation and the US.

Up until today, Russian political spectrum offers both extreme-left and extreme-right movements. Russian Slavophilism emerged in strength during the 90s as a reaction to westernist policies against which it put itself in opposition. Unlike westernist ideas, Russian Slavophilism, as a type of nationalism, strongly emphasizes the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a bad thing, because unlike westernists, they see the Soviet Union as a political entity promoting Russian interests (which is ironically in contrasts to Leninist idea of Soviet Union as a brotherhood of nations working together to promote world revolution of the proletariat).

Russian Slavophiles have much in common with Russian nationalists, but place higher stress on the goal of uniting Slavic nations under Russian guidance. They are antagonistic towards the west and see collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of western political agenda aimed at undermining the Russian Empire. They see Russian Federation as a unique state with a "divine mission," predestined to achieve status of a Great Power and to have an Empire. Furthermore, nationalists and Slavophiles see Russia as a country surrounded by hostile states and perceive any foreign influence as something that must be aggressively repelled. They see the West as a threat and they usually tend to promote the rule of a strong hand as the only way of protecting Russia

and reinstating it as a world power. Therefore, nationalists and Slavophiles tend to stand against liberalization of market and society, rejecting those as western ideas. Russian nationalism also contains elements of anti-Semitism, xenophobia, traditionalist approach and political realism, i.e.: viewing foreign policy as a zero-sum game where Russian interests can only be promoted at the expense of others.

According to Sakwa, "*Russia's nationalism is of a peculiar sort.*"<sup>25</sup> He goes on to say that Russian imperial and multinational history prevented Russian nationalism from developing around the concept of ethnicity. Instead, the concept of Russian nation as it is viewed by Russian nationalists is very inclusive and focuses on adherence to Russian civilisation and its political tradition. It is a statist view that did not change much during the Soviet era. In later stages of the Soviet Union, shortly before its collapse, nationalist movements emerged and demanded the self determination of Russian people and after the Union collapsed, a split occurred amongst Russian nationalists. The new type of nationalists called themselves the Patriots and they draw upon the tradition of Slavophilism. They refuse pure nationalism and just like Marxism, they label it as something non-Russian that is imported from the West. While endorsing rights of nations for self-determination, the idea of Slavophilism is centred around the supranational community of Slav nations. In such a community, Russian nation would play the role of an elder brother and protector.

Therefore, Slavophilism reflects into the foreign policy as a divine mission to reunite and protect Slav nations. In practice, this means increasing Russian influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union, eliminating any cultural or political influence of the West and eventually, reincorporating some of these countries within the newly restored benevolent Russian Empire. The re-establishment of the Russian Empire is perhaps the most crucial influence of Slavophilism on Russian foreign policy.

According to Bobo Lo "*An emphasis on Slavic identity also has critical consequences in determining foreign policy priorities. Not only does it presuppose the minimization of political and economic dependence on the West, but it is also premised on a*

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<sup>25</sup> Sakwa, Richard. *Russian politics and society*. Fourth Edition, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 214

*correspondingly increased interest in traditional Slav areas, notably the former Soviet Union.*"<sup>26</sup>

There are some elements of Slavophilism in contemporary Russian government, reflected mostly by attempts at the promotion of integration in the Slavic community of nations through various international institutions and initiatives (which often reflect other Russian interests), and occasional anti-western rhetoric (e.g.: supposed meddling of western agents in Russian elections). Russian Federation also often reacts strongly to any spreading of western influence into former countries of the Soviet Union such as e.g.: supposed western involvement in the orange revolution in the Ukraine.

However, it is important not to confuse some Russian policies with Slavophilism where in fact, they may follow the line of pragmatic Eurasianist political approach. The difference between these two orientations is that Eurasianist approach allows for market liberalization, does not include imperial elements, but merely a promotion of Russian interests, seeks balance of power with the west as opposed to viewing the West in purely hostile terms and is generally more pragmatic rather than based upon the idea of messianic responsibility towards all Slav nations. The pragmatic Eurasian orientation of contemporary Russian government is described in further detail below. It is necessary to realize, however, that pan-Slavism is a political card often played in Russian domestic politics (e.g.: despite Slavophilism does not endorse the idea of communism, Russian communists often accuse the ruling elite of being pro-American and pro-Western for its pragmatic policies such as cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan). Therefore, Slavophilism is a strong determinant in Russian foreign policy and while it is occasionally abandoned for pragmatic reasons, it is nonetheless a strong colorant of Russian political rhetoric.

Furthermore, Slavophilism has many common goals with the Eurasian approach, it can be argued that Slavophilism often seeks the same thing, but for a different reason e.g.: according to Slavophilism, Russia should increase influence in Slav countries of former Soviet Union because it has a divine mission to reunite, guide and protect Slav nations in Eurasia. The pragmatic Eurasian approach, on the other hand, also seeks to increase influence in these nations, but because it merely seeks to promote specific

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<sup>26</sup> Bobo Lo. *Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: reality, illusion and mythmaking*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2002, p. 16

interests of Russian nation and rather than a Slav Empire, it seeks to create a power bloc that could balance out the West. It can therefore be argued that while the Slavophile political movement can have an influence on Russian politics and certainly on Russian domestic political rhetoric, its practical effects can be hard to differentiate from pursuits in line with objectives set by Eurasian political philosophy.

### **1.2.3 Putin's choice: (pragmatic) neo-Eurasianism**

The purpose of the following part of this work is to outline the ideological stream of Eurasianism, its role in Russian politics, and its impact on contemporary Russian government. At the beginning of the 90s, the government of Boris Yeltsin was influenced by the westernist political approach that sought to establish Russia as a "normal power" with close relations with the West and as a member of western international organisations. This approach has also been labelled as Euro-Atlanticism and it included receding from Russian sense of uniqueness and sought adoption of western values. As Yeltsin's government became weaker, this political approach was gradually replaced by the so-called Eurasian political philosophy that stood in opposition to Euro-Atlanticism. As far as foreign policy is concerned, Eurasianist approach intends to establish Russian Federation not as part of the western civilization, but rather as its equal partner in a multipolar world. This approach is strongly opposed to the unipolar perception of the world after the end of the Cold War where the USA remains as the sole superpower and instead seeks to balance out the western influence and establish multiple power circles that would be equal in their right to self-determination - with Russia at the political centre of Eurasian landmass, being the link between the West and the East.

The concept of Eurasianism emerged from Russian nationalist circles. The idea was not new, it was developed by Russian exile intelligentsia after the Russian Revolution and during the 90s it was revived by A. Dugin in his book, *Foundations of Geopolitics*,<sup>27</sup> where he described the political philosophy that gained favour amongst Russian political elites and was later openly endorsed by the government of V. Putin. Shortly after being elected president of the Russian federation, Putin said that "*Russia*

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<sup>27</sup> Dugin, Aleksandr. *Osnovy geopolitiki: Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*. Moscow: Arktogeya 1997

*has always perceived of itself as a Eurasian country.*"<sup>28</sup> It should be noted that the fundamentalist Eurasian worldview as it was described by Dugin is a rather extremist version of political Eurasianism, but it is used in this work to illustrate the potential impact that this political ideology can have on Russian foreign policy. Dugin's Eurasianism includes series of geopolitical premises and strategies aimed at transforming present unipolar world dominated by the United States into a multipolar world consisting of several power-blocks which would include the Eurasian block dominated by Russia. Europe has been described as the primary objective because it is dominated by western international institutions as well as collective defence organisations, which are seen as detrimental to Russian interest.

Therefore, Dugin suggest using various types of soft power (he places very little importance on actual use of military force) to destabilize Euro-Atlantic political and military cooperation and push the US influence out of Europe. Germany and France are countries with dominant position within Europe and especially the European Community and they have strong anti-American tradition, therefore, Dugin suggests allying with these countries first economically and then politically in order to eventually establish German and Russian spheres of influence in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the ultimate geopolitical objective presented by Dugin is the complete "finlandization"<sup>29</sup> of Europe.

Although Dugin can be described as an extremist, it is a fact that Dugin's aforementioned book is used by various Russian education institutions including the General Staff Academy of the Russian Military. Additionally, the International Eurasian Movement, founded by Dugin, receives generous government sponsorship.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, to what extent is Putin's government actually following the fundamentalist or Eurasian approach as it was outlined by Dugin is a matter of some discussion. Despite some references to the Eurasianist geopolitical worldview at the beginning of his presidency after being elected in 2000, pragmatic concerns, such as economic and military weakness, prevented Putin from fully committing the country to

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<sup>28</sup> President V.V. Putin, November 2000

<sup>29</sup> Finlandization is a term describing the neutralization of a small country by a superpower, using conciliation, as the former Soviet Union did in relation to Finland. Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition. Retrieved April 04, 2012, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/finlandization>

<sup>30</sup> Dunlop, John. *Aleksandr Dugin's Foundations of Geopolitics*, p. 10, accessible at [http://www.princeton.edu/~lisd/publications/wp\\_russiaseries\\_dunlop.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/~lisd/publications/wp_russiaseries_dunlop.pdf), downloaded on 25.03.12

the idea of dismantling the post-Cold War unipolar world straight away. In fact, after the events of September 11th 2001, Putin engaged in some political initiatives that seemingly went directly against the orthodox ideas of Eurasianism. Putin's government started to cooperate with NATO forces in Afghanistan and even facilitated cooperation of the Northern Alliance consisting of tribes living in northern Afghanistan with NATO forces. Furthermore, Russia established energy cooperation programmes with the US and started to participate in the Council of NATO and Russia which symbolized reconciliation.

These steps go directly against the geopolitical objective presented by Dugin which is to weaken the Atlantic solidarity, undermine NATO and prevent spread of the US influence. However, it would be unwise to describe these trends as a fundamental change in Russian political orientation. "*Certain manifestations of Atlantism in the Russian policy do not mean integration with the West, these could rather reflect a new form of Neo-Eurasianism. Russia does not reject the vision of a multi-pole world and its ambition to restore the imperial power.*"<sup>31</sup> Putin's new neo-Eurasianism can be described as a pragmatic version of Dugin's orthodox Eurasianism. The overall geopolitical objectives remain the same, however, cooperation with the West on common issues such as the rising power of China or international terrorism (most importantly the Islamic fundamentalism) is possible and Putin does not hesitate to involve Russian Federation in western international institutions in order to increase Russian international influence.

It can therefore be argued, that Eurasianism plays an important role in contemporary Russian foreign policy and many of its goals have been adopted as Russian geopolitical goals such as e.g.: the promotion of a multi-polar world, preservation of influence in the "near abroad" or an opposition to Western dominance of international politics. It must also be noted that Putin's Eurasianism is not the orthodox version such as the one presented by Dugin, but rather a pragmatic version which does not reject cooperation with the West on issues of mutual interest. In each case, it has an influence on the formation of Russian geopolitical goals and because it is based on balancing out the US power in the world while emancipating Russian Federation as an equal geopolitical

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<sup>31</sup> Zapolskis, Martynas. "Russian geopolitics: between Atlanticism and Neo-Eurasianism", *Geopolitika.lt*, published on 01.22.07, accessible at <http://www.geopolitika.lt/?artc=36>, downloaded on 18.03.12

player, it can prove to be a limiting factor in case of Russian and American international cooperation.

## **2. Theoretical foundations of the foreign policy of the United States**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical understanding of the key factors influencing American geopolitical thinking. The main research question is what are the main objectives of American geopolitical strategy. There are also three secondary research questions which will deal with various aspects influencing the US geopolitical strategy. The first one is: what is the role of the ideology of American exceptionalism in the US foreign policy? This question will focus on American tendency to export liberal values and on the way in which this topic influences the makeup of the US foreign policy objectives. The second research question is: what is the role of the concept of hegemony in the US foreign policy and how can it affect relations with the Russian Federation? Similarly to the previous question, it will focus on an important feature of the US geopolitical thinking concerned with the position of the only superpower in which the US found itself after the end of the Cold War. Finally, the last research question is about the role of nuclear weapons in bilateral relations between the US and Russian Federation.

This chapter will be divided into three parts where each will deal with one of the above mentioned research questions. Following chapters will then build upon the theory outlined in this chapter in order to outline the US geopolitical strategy and objectives, which can then in turn be compared with those of the Russian Federation in order to determine the feasibility of international cooperation between the two nations.

### **2.1 The role of Liberalism in the US foreign policy**

This part answers the above stated research question about the role of the ideology of American Exceptionalism in the foreign policy of the US. Liberalism is an important part of the US identity and it has had a strong influence on the formulation of American geopolitical objectives. The export and promotion of liberal values and setting an example to the rest of the world has always been an important factor in the US foreign policy, because *"American liberalism is the ideological core of American exceptionalism."*<sup>32</sup> The sources of American exceptionalism and moralism will be examined as well as the way in which these affect the US approach to geopolitics. This

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<sup>32</sup> Viotti, Paul R. *American foreign policy*. Cambridge: Polity Press 2010, p. 113



part will also focus on the evolution of US policy of non-involvement and isolationism, which will be analyzed and contrasted with the post-war US institutionalism which has origins in Wilsonian idealism. All of these topics are relevant to the topic of Liberalism because they outline the way in which the US pursues its interests in the world and can therefore be used in the final analysis of US geopolitical strategy and objectives.

The US has a unique culture that stems from colonial and revolutionary experience. It is this experience that gave birth to the ideals of the US exceptionalism and to the accompanying theme American moralism. Paul Viotti states that "*openness to commerce, coupled with militancy toward adversaries abroad, are recurrent themes deeply set in the American experience.*"<sup>33</sup> These are the main motives behind the US foreign policy that are used by the US presidents as a justification for their policies. The foreign policy of the United States is defined by every new administration that comes to power, however this is always done while bearing in mind the basic tenets of the US political culture. These precedents and norms stem from the revolutionary birth of the republic and still play a crucial role in the definition of US national interest. Strong presidency and militancy as well as a strong focus on security, both internal and external, are just some traditional features of the US foreign policy reasoning.

The tradition of the approach of the US to the world can be traced to the first president Washington's farewell address. This document was a "*summary of prescriptive norms for the new republic. Their repetition in speeches and documentary references over the coming centuries effectively wove these shared understandings into a foreign-policy fabric or tapestry used selectively to justify or legitimate policy choices made in different times and circumstances than Washington ever could have imagined.*"<sup>34</sup> In this document, Washington advocated a realist policy of temporary ad hoc alliances rather than permanent ones that could get America entangled in foreign conflicts. He advised to avoid the balance of power politics that was in his time typical amongst European powers. This general policy of non-involvement coupled with the enlarging of US commercial empire stayed in place until the Great War, where the US participated in such temporary alliance in order to defeat the Central powers. The crucial change came after the war ended in 1918, when president Wilson introduced his idealist post-world arrangements (in his 14 points), and set America at a course of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 106

international institutionalism with the aim of institutionalizing international relations. Since then, the biggest question for the US was to what extent should these institutions be set for utilitarian purposes of merely enabling other countries to participate on the geostrategic objectives of the US.

For example, during the Cold War, in accordance with the Truman Doctrine, the US engaged in an ideological struggle with the USSR and started to focus on exporting its liberal values and containing its adversary. In order to help this, various security treaties were signed around the globe such as NATO, CENTO or SEATO. After the end of the Cold War, the US foreign policy became increasingly unilateral, which culminated in the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive unilateralism. Today, again, the main problem for political elites in Washington DC is to determine the right amount of involvement in world affairs and the correct balance between taking unilateral actions in accordance with the unique position of the US as the sole global superpower, and using diplomacy and consensus in line with Wilsonian Idealism in order to achieve a global security community in which the US commerce could thrive.

The crucial feature of the US involvement in world affairs has always been the American idea of exceptionalism. Similarly to Russian self-perception as a chosen country to unite all Slav nations under its banner, the US is founded on the idea of the universality of its liberal values. Furthermore, the US exceptionalism is closely tied to religious scriptures and the idea of a divine, messianic mission of the US to be the shining beacon of freedom in the world. "*Quite apart from how others in foreign lands might see and understand them, Americans like to see themselves as morally superior. It is as if God has singled out the country and its inhabitants as the model republic for the rest of the world to emulate.*"<sup>35</sup> This feeling of a moral superiority is often used by the US policy-makers to justify various policies both at home and abroad. As mentioned above, the core of this exceptionalism lies in the US liberal values, which the US seeks to spread around the world. Viotti states that "*It is strong national, liberal-republican, moralist ethnocentrism that continues to influence American thought patterns in the making and implementation of the country's foreign policy.*"<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.112

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 118-119

However, this idealist spreading of liberal values often comes at odds with different interpretations proposed by various administrations, that are always concerned with practical needs arising during their respective terms. For example, during the Cold War the US did not shy away from supporting less than democratic regimes on the premise that these provided their support against the USSR. After the Cold War, there was a revival of American universalism (explained in detail by Huntington in his book titled *The Clash of Civilizations*<sup>37</sup>) during the time of the Clinton Administration. The administration of president Bush that came after Clinton represented the peak of US unilateralism which materialized with the determination to fight global war against terrorism irrespective of borders or citizenship. As for the idea of liberalism that represents the core of these policies, it has also evolved. Viotti differentiates between the classical and the progressive interpretation of liberalism, where the classical liberalism has its roots in civil liberties and laissez-faire oriented economy as it was promoted by the original American Federalist Party. The progressive liberalism, on the other hand, dates back to the New Deal policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who instead advocated a much stronger role of the State in national economy and broader social and economic rights realized through intensified social welfare programs.

Today, the Obama Administration has defined itself in stark contrast to the Bush Administration and has sought less unilateralism and more multilateralism in its approach to the foreign policy but it would be wrong to assume that it has completely abandoned the idea of American exceptionalism and resigned to spreading of western liberal values. Instead, it merely seeks more efficient ways that would not be so taxing on American economy and damaging to the US diplomatic clout worldwide. The politics of reset also played a role in reversing the American approach to geopolitical challenges. However, even president Obama can be said to still merely seek international consensus on such policies, that are in line with the US aspirations to global leadership. Furthermore, because of globalization, it is no longer necessary to secure foreign territory in order secure these commercial interests abroad (i.e.: open markets for US goods and investment). Instead, all that is needed is to persuade foreign governments to open their countries to forces of globalization and liberalize their markets (and ideally, their societies as well).

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<sup>37</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: First Simon and Schuster, 2003

In conclusion, it can be argued, that today, the US is in a stage of very active participation in various international institutions, in which it often occupies the position of a leading country. Its international activism is often justified by the necessity to spread liberal values, democracy and civil freedoms. However, in cases where security interests are at stake, the US foreign policy has a tradition of making pragmatic compromises, such as in cases of allying with undemocratic regimes for sake of important geopolitical concerns. It can therefore be argued that Liberalism plays a vital role in the US approach to foreign actors and is therefore likely to cause friction in relations with relatively authoritarian Russian regime. On the other hand, it is possible that such concerns will be set aside for sake of progress on various security issues which are likely to play a decisive role in any consideration of international cooperation between the US and the Russian Federation.

## **2.2 American hegemony in the world and its impact on the US foreign policy**

The research question of this subchapter is: what is the role of hegemony in the US foreign policy and how can it affect relations with the Russian Federation? The US is a superpower with nuclear arsenal and the biggest GDP of all countries in the world. It has by far the most powerful military when measured by defence spending and power projection capabilities. Additionally the currency of the US has a privileged position in the global economy and the US enjoys a position of primacy in many influential international organizations (e.g.: is the largest contributor to the UN budget and has a permanent seat at the Security Council). Therefore, it can be argued that after the end of the Cold War the US achieved a historically unprecedented position of a global hegemon. This subchapter will focus on explaining how this position influences American foreign policy and how can it translate into relations with the Russian Federation.

Hegemony of the US was a geopolitical reality of the post-Cold War world. *“With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the failure of Europe to unite, no state is in a position to challenge the United States in terms of material power, widespread influence, ability to set the framework for debate, and the capability – although in many*

*areas not a willingness – to provide public goods.*”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is logical that the largest concern of American policymakers was a potential emergence of another competing power. This was very clearly stated in the Wolfowitz Doctrine,<sup>39</sup> which presented foreign policy strategy based on preventing any country in the world from becoming a regional power and harnessing enough resources to compete with the United States. In order to achieve this, the US foreign policy is to achieve three objectives. Firstly, it must provide leadership in international initiatives and openly accept responsibility for global political stability. Secondly, it must cater for economic and political needs of other countries so that the US will not be perceived as limiting their development in order to remove any incentives to aspire to global leadership and engage in conflicts for resources. Lastly, the US must employ strong deterrence and keep outspending other countries in military and defense budgets in order to make sure that no other country will even consider matching the US in military capabilities.

The contemporary US foreign policy seems to take these objectives very seriously. The US has indeed taken leading role in many international institutions and initiatives, although often without consent of its allies. The war in Iraq can be an example of this. The US built the Coalition forces that included token forces of other countries, although with the exception of the UK these forces played only marginal role in the war effort. It can therefore be concluded that the mission in Iraq which could be achieved by the US alone included forces of other countries amongst other reasons to allow these countries to demonstrate their acceptance of some sort of US leadership on world affairs. Of course, there was a strong opposition to the Iraq war such as e.g.: from France but this opposition was always limited to diplomatic rebounds. *“No other great power has been willing or able to risk a direct military confrontation with the United States since the end of the Cold War. Instead of competing with the United States in the military arena, major regional powers including China, Russia, France and Germany have preferred to try to checkmate the United States in the diplomatic arena by means of what has been called “soft balancing.”*”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Jervis, Robert. *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Books, Inc. 2005, p.1

<sup>39</sup> Wolfowitz doctrine was an unofficial name for the strategy outlined by the US Undersecretary of Defence for Policy Paul Wolfowitz in 1992, notably a document called Defence Planning Guidance which he authored and which was widely criticized for suggesting that the US engage in crudely imperialist policies abroad

<sup>40</sup> Lind, Michael. *The American way of strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006, p.146

As for military deterrence, in line with the Wolfowitz recommendations, the US has sought to be the dominant power in all world's regions in order to prevent the rise of any regional powers. This can be seen in Asia where the US has various military bases encircling China. It is even further demonstrated by the American military presence in the Middle East and attempts to economically penetrate the region of Central Asia. The expansion of NATO has also been a useful tool to make sure that countries of Central and Eastern Europe will bind their security to an organization where the US clearly has the most important say. In order for this strategy to work, the US must be able to provide security guarantees to its allies and make sure that their economic development is not undermined by the present international system for which the US carry the largest responsibility. E.g.: Japan is still not allowed by its own constitution to build offensive forces and is legally dependant on the US for its defense.

This approach may be criticized as imperialist. According to M. Lind the international role of the United States has been described by neoconservative writers W. Kristol and Robert Kagan as a "benevolent global hegemony."<sup>41</sup> He further states that this strategy which is based on the US position of a world hegemon, is based on three main factors, which are the dissuasion, reassurance and nonproliferation. This line of reasoning is similar to that of the Wolfowitz Doctrine and represents a guideline for the US to preserve and maintain their position of the world's only superpower. The policy of dissuasion is about preserving the US military superiority and technological edge. Reassurance is based on giving credible reassurances to the allies of the United States and provision of incentives to cooperate on US international policies. Lastly nonproliferation is a crucial objective which was an important part of the US foreign policy since the collapse of the USSR.

It is necessary to realize that this strategy has some inherent weaknesses. Most notably, it will lead to passive opposition from countries that choose to be allies because of offered benefits, but still offer a lot of diplomatic opposition to some of the US policies that are seen as imperialist, e.g.: French and German opposition to the Iraq War. Apart from that, maintaining global hegemony represents a huge strain on the US economic and political resources. According to Lind: "*The three elements of the U.S. global hegemony strategy, the policies of dissuasion reassurance, and non-*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.129

*proliferation, share two characteristics in common. First, all three are essential to the success of the project of establishing and maintaining U.S. global hegemony on the basis of enduring U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, Asia and Europe as well as North America. Second, none of these three policies can be explained honestly to the American people.*"<sup>42</sup> This is an important factor to consider. The policy of dissuasion means a high cost on military spending to preserve and maintain military potential in a world without serious opponents. Especially during the time of economic crisis, it is a challenge for US politicians to explain to the public the necessity of securing against potential future threats. Similarly, the policy of reassurance requires a rationale for spending American resources, including American lives, on defense of interests of foreign countries (e.g.: by giving security guarantees to Japan where North Korea is a threat to Japan but not to the US or by protecting Taiwan from China). Lastly, it would be hard to explain to the public that the underlining reason for imposing non-proliferation on regimes which seek to become regional powers and do not directly threaten the US, is to make sure that these, often very weak countries, can be invaded by the US at low risk.

The United States are a democracy and all major policy decision need to keep public support or they may prove unsupportable in the long term. The crucial problem of the Bush doctrine was that it lost public support and created a political demand for its reversal. "*Contrary to the common impression, democracies, and especially the United States, do not find it easy to sustain a consistent line of policy when the external environment is not compelling.*"<sup>43</sup> This means that there needs to be an external factor that can be used as a political rationale for policies that would otherwise prove unpopular. For the Bush Doctrine, this was the war on terror. The Bush Doctrine has also been defined by a very strong assertion of American hegemony. It was based on various unilateral actions and caused the US to lose a lot of moral credit on the global political stage. While the US is able to provide strong incentives for others to cooperate on its initiatives, some may become less willing over time. This was the case of the so-called "Old Europe,"<sup>44</sup> especially France and Germany which formally cooperate with

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 167

<sup>43</sup> Jervis, Robert. *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Books, Inc. 2005, p.112

<sup>44</sup> "Old Europe" is a term used by Donald Rumsfeld in 2003 to refer to European countries that opposed the war in Iraq, most notably Germany and France.

the US and consider themselves allies, but diplomatically represent passive opposition to various key US policies.

The American assertion of the position of the world's hegemon is bound to invite a lot of passive diplomatic opposition. According to R. Kanet, there are two main approaches how to deal with it. First one is what he describes as the "*timeless move of divide and conquer*."<sup>45</sup> According to Kanet, the US has employed this strategy most blatantly during the Bush era when they used issues such as the war in Iraq to divide their allies, e.g.: those in Europe and then reward those who were participating and punish those who were not. This went in line with the US policy to prevent much regional integration on security matters - so e.g.: the EU is tolerated as an economic entity but would not be tolerated as a single military bloc. The second part of the hegemony strategy described by Kanet was the ability to set rules and break them at the same time. According to Kanet "*The logic of American power goes much further than inducing other states to bandwagon on American policies. A self-proclaimed benevolent hegemon is obliged to repudiate or relax international constraints that impede its historic mission of peace and prosperity for all states and people*."<sup>46</sup> In other words, the US must not be shy to break its own rules, because its position in geopolitical arena is special. This approach can be illustrated by the US promoting non-proliferation, but giving access to its nuclear technologies to India and allowing Israel to arm itself with nuclear weapons. Furthermore the US refuses to sign the Kyoto Protocol because it would impede its economic output which is crucial for keeping up its military superiority. In case of relations with Russia, the US backed out from the ABM treaty which was a clear sign that it is willing to break from the MAD paradigm and pursue a path of being a hegemon. This was and still is a crucial source of disagreement between the US and Russian Federation and the politics of reset attempt to deal with this.

There are various theoretical explanations for the US hegemony strategy. It depends on what norms do we choose to identify as the core feature of it. The US idea of exceptionalism and universality of its ideas can be seen as a constructivist approach seeking to establish a global community of shared values and norms which would in

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<sup>45</sup> Kolodziej, Edward A. and Roger E. Kanet. *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 2008, p. 13

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6



effect lead to peace and prosperity. The liberal explanation would point to the beneficial effects of international interdependence, especially in the economic sense. There is also a strong historical presumption that democracies rarely go to war with each other. The realist explanation would be centered around balancing out the threat. This is a source of friction between the US and its allies, which do not necessarily recognize a threat posed by countries like Iran or Iraq, which are labeled by the US as members of the axis of evil (which is a term that is illustrative of American feeling of moral superiority). All of these are compatible with Kanet's argument about the "benevolent hegemony." This can result in some of the US policies being perceived as imperialist. These policies are perceived by American foreign policy-makers as part of the "divine mission" which is comparable to the divine mission which is propagated by Russian Slavophiles.

Unlike Russia, however, the US is *"not defending traditional national interests, let alone vital ones, but is seeking what Arnold Wolfers called "milieu goals": upholding values like democracy, self-determination, and rejection of coercion as a means of changing the status quo. These may be deeply held both for their intrinsic value and for their role in maintaining America's worldwide reach, but they are more akin to the concerns of imperial powers than to sources of conflict between equal major powers."*

<sup>47</sup> US aspiration to global leadership and universalization of its values is incompatible with Russian ambitions of regaining the status of an independent and equal geopolitical player. This incompatibility between geopolitical objectives can have a crucial impact on bi-lateral relations between the two nations.

### **2.3 The nuclear challenge - role of nuclear weapons in the foreign policy of the US**

In order to answer the research question about the role of nuclear weapons in bilateral relations between the US and Russian Federation, this subchapter will analyze the US approach to some crucial contemporary geopolitical challenges such as nuclear deterrent and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. These are topics that US policy-makers have in common with their Russian counterparts and which greatly influence the relationships between the two nations. Therefore, an understanding of a role that

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<sup>47</sup> Jervis, Robert. *American Foreign Policy in a New Era*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Books, Inc. 2005, p.14

nuclear weapons can play in Russian-American bilateral relations is crucial for assessing a potential for future international cooperation.

While during the Cold War the tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons enforced by the doctrine of mutually assured destruction helped to preserve peace between the two superpowers, after the Cold War ended the US, as the only remaining superpower undertook to enforce non-proliferation of these weapons in order to safeguard geopolitical stability. Today, nuclear weapons play a primary role in many foreign policy considerations including the politics of the so-called "reset" in relations. While for the Russian Federation, its inherited nuclear arsenal is considered one of the most important symbols of its great power status, the US foreign policy focuses on preventing proliferation of nuclear weapons and establishing a "taboo" on their use. *"With the end of the Cold War, nuclear proliferation replaced super-power conflict as the major threat to the tradition of nuclear non-use."*<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the US undertook a policy of offering help with development of peaceful nuclear technologies in exchange for countries giving up ambitions of having nuclear weapons.

At the present, the US officially keeps nuclear attack as a "last resort" retaliation against non-nuclear attacks, but the role of tactical nukes in military planning seen some drastic reduction since the end of the Cold War. Arsenals of strategic nuclear weapons have also been reduced and kept by countries mostly for deterrence, e.g.: by the Russian Federation. Sharp cuts at the strategic levels have been brokered by treaties between Russian Federation and the US such as the START 1 in 1991 and START II in 1993. On the other hand *"in 1993, Russia formally abandoned the Soviet no-first-use policy, first declared in 1982. This move likely reflected the weakened conventional strength of Russia following the end of the Cold War. It was unclear whether the policy change had any real effect on operational planning and it may have been mostly a political message to the West."*<sup>49</sup> Nina Tannenwald describes the tradition of non-use of nuclear weapons between nuclear armed states such as the US and Russian Federation as a nuclear "taboo". She defines this as a constitutive norm that defines the "civilized states." She further speaks about a non-proliferation regime enforced by the US that distinguishes between responsible and irresponsible countries and thus decides on who

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<sup>48</sup> Tannenwald, Nina. *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2007, p. 327

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p.378

may possess them without repercussions from an international community. Furthermore, she claims that the link between civilized responsibility and handling of nuclear areas creates a political pressure on leaders to engage in activities that lead to reduction of nuclear stockpiles or rules enforcing their non-proliferation. There is also of course a strong inhibition on the use of nukes which would lead to serious political repercussions. Both political and normative reasons thereby constitute the nuclear "taboo".

On the other hand there is a discussion on whether the nuclear taboo is an absolute prohibition, a sort of *just cogens*, or a natural law that is universal and still valid regardless of any transgressions against it, or whether it is merely a tradition - a tradition of non-use which can easily be overturned if violated. Furthermore, the role of the nuclear taboo in relations between Russian Federation and US is often accentuated during talks. *"In January 2000, the Russian government released a new nuclear policy statement, which indicated a heightened sense of conflict with NATO and the United States on nuclear issues, and an increased reliance on the use of nuclear weapons, not only in response to a nuclear attack but also to a conventional attack."*<sup>50</sup> This was possibly a reaction to deteriorating state of Russian conventional forces or invitation for the US as the chief guarantor of nuclear non-proliferation and non-use for bi-lateral talks that would acknowledge Russia's status as an equal partner.

Indeed, the US is seen as the most powerful state with increased responsibility for the world order and nuclear issues are considered a world-class issue. However, according to the Hobbesian ideology, the US would be entitled to assert the position of a leviathan in world politics and break restraining rules that it enforces on others. According to Tannenwald, the US development of ABM systems after its unilateral termination of the ABM Treaty in June 2002 speaks in support of such argument. This would clearly go against Russian interest of reasserting itself as an equal partner to the US.

Furthermore, by developing a working missile shield system, the US would effectively undermine the system of mutual deterrence provided by the nuclear weapons and remove an important material inhibition on its own first use of nuclear weapons (although there would still be strong moral and political considerations). *"The development of a Leviathan interpretation of US nuclear weapons would be extremely*

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

*troubling. Fortunately, several factors, both realist and normative, militate against it. Concerns about setting undesirable precedents for the use of nuclear weapons – the negative consequences of demonstrating their utility (realist) and legitimacy (normative) – will remain powerful restraints for many US leaders.*"<sup>51</sup> N. Tannenwald implies that the "taboo" on the use of nuclear weapons is a part of the US identity and that there will always be a strong bias against their use.

However, the ability to use nuclear weapons first without any fear of nuclear retaliations due to a working anti-missile systems could significantly increase the US assertion of a homogeny and would clearly make it difficult for any other nuclear power such as China or Russia to use their nuclear arsenals as a political tool to contain American power and discourage unilateralist policies. The ABM projects today constitute one of the largest issues between Russian Federation and the US because they are illustrative of the US aspirations to establishment of global hegemony, which is against Russian interests. Therefore, it can be concluded that the topic of nuclear weapons provides both an opportunity for international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation as well as a possibility of becoming an obstacle to it.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.386

### **3. Development of relations between the US and Russian Federation during presidencies of G. Bush and V. Putin**

The research goal of this chapter is to analyze the development of relations between the US and Russian Federation during the presidency of Putin and Bush from a geopolitical perspective. The wider purpose of this analysis is to outline the geopolitical interaction between the two nations and describe how they dealt with the differences in their geopolitical objectives and strategies. The chapter is divided into two subchapters.

First subchapter describes the geopolitical interaction between the two nations from the Russian perspective and answers the research question: what was the Russian geopolitical strategy in its relations with the US during the presidency of V. Putin? The purpose of this subchapter is to describe Russian approach towards the US during Putin's presidency which started in 2000, with a focus on where the two nations share mutual interests and what are the main obstacles to their cooperation.

Second subchapter will deal with geopolitical strategy of the US towards Russian Federation during the Bush and Obama presidency and answer the research question: What was the effect of the Bush Doctrine on international relations with the Russian Federation? Additionally, it will also assess the way in which American foreign policy towards Russian Federation changed under the Obama presidency and how did this affect their geopolitical interaction. Therefore, a second research question for this subchapter is: How did the Obama doctrine change American approach to foreign relations with the Russian federation? Conclusions from this chapter will be used in the final analysis to determine the possibility of international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation and identify areas of mutual interest as well as areas where their respective geopolitical objectives diverge.

### 3.1 Russian perspective on relations with the US during Putin's presidency in 2000-2008

As stated above, the main purpose of this subchapter will be to provide an overview of Russian approach to relations with the US during the time of the first Putin's presidency (May 2000 - May 2008). The research question is: what was the Russian geopolitical strategy towards the US during the presidency of V. Putin in 2000-2008? There will be a focus on determining the areas where Russian Federation is willing to cooperate with the US and where their geopolitical objectives differ too significantly.

After President Putin got elected as the president of the Russian Federation in 2000, despite the influence of Eurasian geopolitical worldview on his administration, pragmatic concerns forced him to seek better relations with the United States. His determination later manifested in his reactions to the 9/11 attacks in New York in 2001, when he immediately offered the United States unambiguous and seemingly unconditional aid in their yet undeclared war on terror. This was described by Shevtsova as a crucial shift in Russian foreign politics. *"In 2001, in joining an alliance against terrorism formed by the United States, Russia for the first time in its history recognized the hegemony of another state and voluntarily chose to play junior partner."*<sup>52</sup> By doing this, Putin gained favour amongst liberal-oriented Russians seeking reconciliation with the west, and at the same time set stage for increasing intensity of the fight against terrorism within Russian Federation. Relations between Putin and Bush administration were reserved, but forthcoming.

However, this situation changed later when Russian economic situation improved and NATO engagement in the middle east started to fast lose its popular support. Additionally, Russia and United States fell into disagreements about methods used in the war against terror. This applied especially to Russian efforts in the Caucasus and its increasingly hostile towards Georgia which it accused of harbouring terrorists. *"By late 2002, some clear signs had appeared that the White House was not prepared to tolerate Russia taking any initiative in the Caucasus and would only work with Moscow if it followed Washington's agenda. It was one thing for the White House to announce its determination to hunt terrorists wherever they are, yet it was an entirely different*

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<sup>52</sup> Shevtsova, Lillia Fedorovna. *Putin's Russia*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2005, p. 205

*matter to allow the Kremlin to do the same.*<sup>53</sup> Perhaps under pressure from anti-Atlanticist elites, or merely seeing opportunity to yet again define Russia's interests in stark opposition to western hegemony, Putin started to reverse his pro-western policies. In line with Eurasian geopolitical objectives, he started to reassert Russian authority in the ex-USSR space.

Furthermore, Russia started to use its energy supplies as a political tool, e.g.: in cases of resource transit through Belarus and Ukraine. The full-scale military conflict in Georgia also drove a wedge between Washington and Kremlin and increased political tension as Russia started to openly challenge the Bush Doctrine and resumed stark opposition to any further NATO enlargement. These are all policies that are in line with the Eurasian geopolitical approach and follow its general objective of balancing out the US homogeneity. *"Although the two nations have learned to cooperate on some issues, their relationship can be described as limited engagement with elements of rivalry, rather than cooperation."*<sup>54</sup> President Putin has always tried to base the relationship with Washington on a cooperation on security issues, an area where both countries shared some common goals, but this effort was undermined when the US started to criticize Russia's lack of democratic reforms and Putin's proposals for further centralization for sake of ensuring internal stability. These disagreements, coupled with other factors such as Russia's opposition to the US increasing its military presence in Europe (ABM projects) and Middle East led to reversal in Russian foreign policy towards the aim of balancing out the US power through the means of soft-balancing. These issues often stem from the unilateral application of the Bush Doctrine (explained in detail in the next subchapter dealing with relations from American perspective), and their solution was the principal reason for Obama's proposals for reset in relations in 2009.

In order to balance the power of the US, Russian Federation started to create various international organizations along the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) lines in order to set foundations to global anti-American alliance. The chief objective was to gain favour of countries that feel opposed to the US hegemony. Dugin's political treatise suggests the approach consisting of axis Moscow-Tokyo, Moscow-Tehran and

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<sup>53</sup> Aggerwal, Vinod K.. *Responding to Resurgent Russia. Russian policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States*. New York: Springer Science+Bussiness Media, LLC 2012, p. 39

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

Moscow-Berlin. Apart from that, Putin's government engaged in various other foreign initiatives, whether it was the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which aims to strengthen relations between Russia and China, its potential geopolitical competitor for primacy in Eurasia. Russia has started to provide help to the regime in Iran and refuses to back any military operation against Iran in the UN security council. Similarly, despite pressure from the US, Russia refuses to support operations against Syria. It did support the creation of the no-fly zone in Libya which in effect led to the toppling of colonel Gaddafi's regime only to find itself disfavoured by the new regime and now Russian Federation is unlikely to repeat that mistake again. For similar reasons, Russian Federation is now increasing its economic cooperation with Venezuela, one of the most anti-American countries on the South American continent. Furthermore, in line with Eurasian strategy, Russia started to push Americans out of Central Asia, where the two nations competed for natural resources located in Central Asian Republics and in Caspian Sea.

Lastly, in order to successfully undermine present western unilateralism, Russia must overcome its institutional framework. Russian approach to international institutions had been largely defined by the fact, that after the Collapse of the USSR, Russian Federation was not given a prospect of fully integrating in main western institutions - the EU and NATO. This led to disappointment of those in Russia, who believed that Russian Federation will be given a status of equal partner to the United States or at least that of a secondary power within the west. *"Though Russia was incorporated into groupings such as the G7, the NATO-Russia Council, and the Council of Europe, for example, none of these arrangements emerged as transformative or even as particularly effective means of socializing Russia into the a system still clearly dominated by the US and Europe."*<sup>55</sup> This led to Russian adoption of a foreign policy that is more in line with Dugin's Eurasian approach, that is, to oppose the agenda set forth by these institutions seen as promoting western interests that are often seen as anathema to Russian interests. Hence the great Russian dissatisfaction after NATO enlargement to the east, well into the Russian sphere of influence. *"Given this reality, Russia's*

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<sup>55</sup> Aggerwal, Vinod K. *Responding to Resurgent Russia. Russian policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012, p. 126



*approach has been to promote and protect its position in those institutions where it can be seen to play a leading role, such as the UN Security Council.*"<sup>56</sup>

Additionally, Russian Federation has greatly stepped up its effort to establish its own international framework of institutions such as the CSTO - the Collective Security Treaty Organization where Russia and mostly ex-Soviet Republics aim to establish a balancing organization to NATO. More importantly, CSTO is clearly led by Russia. Another important organization is the above mentioned SCO - the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which from a large part copies the membership of CSTO, but also includes China. The largest Russian asset as far as international institutions are concerned is its membership in the Security Council of the United Nations, an entity that Russia wants to keep at the centre stage of global politics precisely because it is its important member with a privileged position equal to that of the US and despite the fact that UNSEC does not really promote Russian interests exclusively (e.g.: does not condone Russian arms sales). Lastly, Russian ascension to the WTO has seen almost two decades of negotiations. Although there was some ambivalence towards the WTO present in Russia before the financial crisis in 2008, today, such enthusiasm cooled notably because of concerns about what full WTO membership would do to traditional Russian industries. Again, although membership would objectively bring positive effect on Russian economy, membership might weaken Russian economic sovereignty and endanger its traditional industries that are strongly bound to the state sector. It is necessary to realize that these industries, particularly the energy sector, are seen as in Russia as objects of national interest. *"Russia views energy as a tool for achieving its larger modernization objectives. As explained by Putin, the role of the energy sector is to work with the state to promote these objectives. Relying on market forces is essential but insufficient."*<sup>57</sup> Out of concerns for WTO membership weakening Russian absolute control over foreign investment into its own energy sector, negotiations with WTO are now slowing down. A clear sign that in its approach towards international institutions, Russia may prefer its ability to oppose foreign influence and balance out Western homogeneity to material or economic utility.

According to the balance of power theory, sovereign states will attempt to find a way to balance the power of stronger nations either by bandwagoning together, by ensuring

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 46

neutrality, detente, or by establishing coalitions and power blocks. In the anarchy of sovereign states, Russian foreign policy in line with the Eurasian worldview is attempting to achieve just that. Russian Federation seeks to gain global support for the anti-Atlanticist camp, especially in Europe, where Germany is an obvious candidate for becoming the Trojan horse for Russian influence to permeate into Europe. However, Putin's pragmatic policies diverged from the orthodox Eurasianism and permit to cooperate with the United States in cases where it is good for Russian interest - e.g.: participating in the global war on terror, allowing NATO transit to Afghanistan through Russian territory, engaging in western international institutions in order to gain influence, etc.

Since Russian economic position became stronger together with the rise of oil prices (Russian government revenues are massively dependant on oil prices and it can therefore be concluded that Russian ability to project soft power is directly proportional to price of exported commodities), Russia became more assertive towards the west and did not hesitate to demonstrate its readiness to use force in Georgia and implicitly, anywhere in the post-soviet territory. The energy sector has a strong influence on Russian politics, including foreign relations with the US. Russia is keen to prevent the US from cutting it off from natural resources in Central Asian region. Caspian sea is seen as a region of special strategic importance and all American steps in this area are perceived by Russian Federation through geopolitical lenses. On the other hand, the US does not have a good alternative to developing energy cooperation with Russian Federation. Russian Federation is world's chief hydrocarbon producer and the US are the biggest consumer. It is therefore in the interest of the US to develop cooperation in the energy sector and make sure that American companies are allowed to develop oil and gas fields in Russia. However, in order to achieve this, political obstacles must be overcome, especially American criticism of frequent Russian use of its energy infrastructure to apply political pressure on regimes in countries dependent on Russian energy imports such as Ukraine or Belorussia.

In conclusion, Putin's willingness to engage in international cooperation with the US was limited to issues of mutual interest and due to western criticism of Russian authoritarianism and lack of appreciation for Russian geopolitical interests, it can be argued that this willingness decreased steadily during the whole presidency of G. Bush. Additionally, political initiatives to improve bi-lateral relations had another large

obstacle to overcome - renewed Russian vigour in its quest for the establishment of multipolar world, where Russian-led Eurasian power-block would successfully balance out the homogeneity of the west, particularly the United States.

### **3.2 Geopolitics of bi-lateral relations with Russian Federation from American perspective**

This subchapter analyses the relations between Russian Federation and the US from the American perspective. It will focus on two primary topics where the first one is about the impact of policies of the Bush doctrine on relations between the US and Russian Federation, and the second topic deals with the way in which the US approach changed under the Obama doctrine. Therefore, there are two research questions which deal with these topics respectively. The first research question is: What was the effect of the Bush Doctrine on international relations with the Russian Federation? The second research question is: How did the Obama doctrine change American approach to foreign relations with the Russian federation? The overall purpose of this subchapter is to describe the evolution of the geopolitical interaction between the two nations and then to describe the way in which the change in leadership in the US changed it. The findings of this subchapter together with those of the previous subchapter will then provide a geopolitical perspective on the way in which these two nations approach international relations with each other.

The so-called Bush Doctrine (named after president G. W. Bush Jr.) represents a set of policies by the Administration of President Bush, that centred around the American response to modern threat of terrorism and which have led to the US invasion of Afghanistan. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that took place in New York in 2001, there was a strong need to describe the new enemy of the country and to outline the framework of this new global conflict. *'Bush's national security strategy as applied to the war on terror advocates the use of 'pre-emptive strikes,' regime change, and the use of force against regimes or states determined to be harbouring, sponsoring, aiding, or abetting terrorists.'*<sup>58</sup> The move towards unilateralism has, however, been present in Bush's policies even before the 9/11 attacks and was signified by e.g.: the US

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<sup>58</sup> Watson, Robert P., Charles Gleek and Michael Grillo. *Presidential doctrines: national security from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush*. Penacook: NH Publications 2003, p. 21

withdrawal or cease of support to various international alliances, treaties and organizations. Specific examples of this include the Kyoto Treaty, Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, or the Middle East Peace Process as well as ceasing of funding of many UN-led initiatives or ceasing to use International Justice Tribunals.

The Bush Doctrine has caused major controversies and polarization of the political spectrum. One of the strongest arguments of its critics has been the issue of legality of some of its concepts such as the regime change or unilateral use of force. *'While the evaluation of the Bush Doctrine under international law is a contentious issue, ultimately there is a basic agreement on its illegality among scholars of international law. In contrast, its political evaluation is a more diversified and far more controversial issue.'*<sup>59</sup> According to many scholars the Bush Doctrine represented one of the most radical shifts in the US foreign policy since presidents F. D. Roosevelt and H. S. Truman. It has dismantled security pillars on which the transatlantic region has been dependant for its security since the WWII in favour of more direct pursuit of international security through unilateral actions including the use of military forces. This approach clearly enforces the world's multipolar initiatives to resist the US unilateralism such as present day Russian government's political approach of neo-Eurasianism. The Bush Doctrine represented a unique approach to a unique problem and is therefore manifestly different to all previous doctrines. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the Bush Doctrine merely emphasised and exported the tradition of US conservative belief in liberty as the 'God's Gift' and was clearly based upon the ideology of the US exceptionalism and divine right to pursue spread of its liberal values.

Relations between the United States and Russian Federation are relatively strained because these two nations collide on various matters. After the 9/11 attacks in New York, there was a brief period of reconciliation when Russian Federation immediately offered its support in the war against terrorism, however, as the US started to take more unilateral policy in pursuit of its goals, Russians started to criticize what they saw as potentially hostile encroachment on their traditional sphere of influence. Russian Federation condemned the eastwards expansion of NATO, US withdrawal from ABM treaty and plans to place missiles in Poland, and American attempts to gain access to

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<sup>59</sup> Meiertöns, Heiko. *The doctrine of the US security policy: an evaluation under international law.* Cambridge: CUP 2010, p.235

natural resources in Central Asia as steps that threaten their interests. On the other hand, the United States often criticizes Russian inclination to authoritarianism and direct support to outright authoritarian regimes such as Belorussia. Furthermore, the US opposes Russian military cooperation with Venezuela and support of Syrian regime. Russian Federation has often used its right of veto in the UN Security Council to block US-led initiatives, especially various sanctions against so-called rogue states such as Iran or North Korea. It can therefore be concluded, that Russia opposes US unilateralism and US attempts to become Hobbesian leviathan in world politics. On the other hand, the US clearly seeks to prevent Russian reassertion of a compact sphere of influence and creation of its own power bloc that could rival the American power.

Counter-terrorism efforts are another significant part of Russian-American relations. *"Russia supports the United States to the extent that it find legitimacy for its actions, but tries to counteract it when it perceives its interests might be threatened."*<sup>60</sup> Russia has separatism and fundamentalist terrorism problems within its own borders and it is clearly in Russian interest to help Americans stabilize Afghanistan and Iraq. It is also in the interests of both nations to enforce non-proliferation and prevent international terrorism from obtaining nuclear weapons. However, the US has criticized Russian approach towards Chechnya and Russians have condemned America's increasingly unilateral actions such as targeted killings of foreign nationals abroad by US secret services. There is also the issue with Russian participation on the Iranian nuclear programme. Therefore, just like in the case of energy cooperation, even in the case of counter-terrorist efforts, political obstacles must be overcome to encourage effective cooperation.

As far as international relations are concerned, it can be argued, that *"Washington continues to operate with an attitude of superiority that is evident in a broad range of its policies and attitudes, from a persistent attitude that "we won the Cold War" to expanding NATO, blocking development of Russia's energy infrastructure, and pushing the Kremlin to adopt Western-style democratization. These policies betray a fundamental misunderstanding of international and former Soviet realities."*<sup>61</sup> In other words, Washington's refusal to admit Russia a special status leads to enforcement of

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<sup>60</sup> Kolodziej, Edward A. and Roger E. Kanet. *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 2008, p.173

<sup>61</sup> Aggerwal, Vinod K.. *Responding to Resurgent Russia. Russian policy and Responses from the European Union and the United States*. New York: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2012, p.48

insecurity amongst Russian policymakers and often leads to unnecessary deterioration in relations. On the other hand, should the US admit Russia its sphere of influence and privileged position in Eurasia, it would have to completely abandon its dream of establishing world hegemony and universality of its liberal values, i.e.: abandon the ideology of American exceptionalism.

The Bush Doctrine can be perceived as the basis for what could be called the Obama Doctrine in such way that the foreign policy of President Obama is seemingly meant to be the exact opposite of the foreign policy pursued by the Bush Administration. President Obama's administration seems to have adopted an approach that balances between accommodating Russian demand for being treated as an equal partner, and American need to contain Russian ambitions in Eurasia. Obama has withdrawn from previous administration's plans to place missiles in Poland and invited Russia to "reset" relations and establish cooperation in matters where their interests converge. On the other hand both countries still disagree on multiple matters and refrain from employing systematic solutions to contentious issues.

President Obama frequently calls for more multilateral approach and stresses the need to reach consensus. This was apparent in his attempt to "reset" relations with Russian Federation, which was underlined by the US abandonment of the anti-ballistic missile projects in Czech Republic and Poland. His policies have often been criticized as too naive and even compared to those of appeasement as Obama has often referred in his speeches to Roosevelt's Good Neighbour Policy which emphasizes diplomacy. His supporters usually outline his approach as *'a form of realism unafraid to deploy American power but mindful that its use must be tempered by practical limits and a dose of self-awareness'*<sup>62</sup>

The impact of Obama Doctrine is still difficult to assess as his first term of presidency is not yet over, but it can be argued that it reflects certain dose of hopeful search for peaceful future in which the US will not have to be responsible for the security and stability of the world but will rather share that responsibility with other regional powers for mutual benefit and eventual peaceful coexistence. As of today there has been little practical impact however. The US relations with Russia are still relatively reserved and

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<sup>62</sup>Dionne, E. "The Obama Doctrine" *The Washington Post*, April 16th, 2009, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/15/AR2009041502902.html>, downloaded on 13.04.12

pragmatic on both sides while the ABM programme has been renewed (although in a revised form that seems more respectful towards Russian interests). Countries like Iran or China are becoming more assertive in pursuit of their interests and Obama's handling of the so-called Arab Spring has been described as incompetent by academic scholars. E.g.: according to Niall Fergusson, British historian and Harvard University professor, *'all the president and his NSC team seem to have done is to draft touchy-feely speeches.'*<sup>63</sup> Therefore, any present analysis of the Obama Doctrine in general would fall short on general lack of conclusive results.

President Obama's multilateralism can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be described as a constructive liberal internationalist agenda that seeks to institutionalize the world peace and reach this objective on the basis of consensus. On the other hand, it can be just as well described as a directive multilateralism which merely provides an opportunity to other countries to join on US policies and initiatives for the benefit of becoming US ally (like the Coalition forces in Iraq). In this case, president Obama's policies would not share Russian objective of establishing a genuinely multipolar world. In both cases, Obama's policies are very different to those of his predecessor. While president Bush sought to unilaterally establish the US homogeneity, president Obama is attempting to achieve the same objective through consensus that is encouraged by providing incentives and benefits to America's allies as well as opponents. This change in strategy is a result of political reasons as well as practical considerations. R. Kanet identified four structural constraints on the American homogeneity: *"(1) the lack of a coherent and workable military strategy, notably in coping with insurgencies; (2) the rising costs of the Iraq war, material but especially human, and subsequent eroding public support for continued occupation of a country in the midst of civil war provoked by the U.S. invasion; (3) the limited human and material resources of the United States to mount wars, occupy foreign territories, and rule resistant populations whatever the level of public support; and (4) the rising costs of maintaining and enlarging the nation's social welfare safety nets - the opportunity costs of foreign interventions that impact negatively on these entitlement obligations."*<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fergusson, Niall. *Wanted: A Grand Strategy for America*. February 2011, available at <http://www.niallferguson.com/site/FERG/Templates/GeneralArticle.aspx?pageid=276&cc=GB>, accessed on 14.04.12

<sup>64</sup> Kolodziej, Edward A. and Roger E. Kanet. *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power*. Athens: University of Georgia Press 2008, p.21

These and other reasons force Obama's administration to seek more efficient ways of securing American influence in the world. Furthermore, it is necessary to secure cooperation or at least containment of aspiring regional power such as the Russian Federation.

In conclusion, there are numerous areas in which geopolitical objectives of the US and Russian Federation are incompatible with one another. This results from the differing geopolitical strategies employed by the two nations where the US under the Bush Administration sought to unilaterally pursue American interests and behave like a hegemon, while Russian Federation under president Putin sought to establish itself as an equal partner to the US with legitimate interests in its region. The lack of appreciation of Russian interests by the Bush Administration led to estrangement of the two nations and deterioration in relations which reached its low during the war in Georgia. The Obama Administration sought to reverse this trend and improve relations by showing a better appreciation of Russian geopolitical interests. The next chapter will analyze the efficiency of such approach and whether it was possible to overcome the differences in geopolitical objectives and strategies of the two nations.



#### **4. Politics of "reset" and their impact on relations between the US and Russian Federation**

This chapter will deal with political initiatives associated with the so-called "reset" in relations which took place during the time of presidencies of Obama and Medvedev. The idea of hitting the reset button in relations between the Russian Federation and the US has been first suggested by the US vice-president Joe Biden at the Munich Security Conference in 2009, when he first used the term in relation to improving the relations between the two nations. For purposes of this work, politics of "reset" will include political initiatives named in the White House statement document U.S.-Russia relations: *"Reset" Fact Sheet*.<sup>65</sup> The research goals of this chapter are to describe the geopolitical interaction between the two nations during the time period of Obama and Medvedev presidencies, find out whether the policies of Obama and Medvedev managed to overcome obstacles posed to international cooperation by the differences in American and Russian geopolitical objectives, and finally, to predict possible future developments in bi-lateral relations.

To achieve these goals, this chapter will begin with a subchapter providing a brief overview of both Russian and American motivations and expectations from the "reset" in relations as well as its relation to their geopolitical objectives. This subchapter will include a series of smaller subchapters, each dealing with individual policies associated with the "reset", where the purpose of each subchapter will be introduced by a specific research question linking each policy to the overall topic of geopolitical interaction and international cooperation between the two nations. Finally, there will be a second subchapter evaluating the results of the politics of the so-called "reset" followed by the last subchapter which will build upon the findings of this chapter to provide predictions of possible future developments in bi-lateral relations.

In the final analysis, findings of this and the previous chapter will be compared to evaluate both the feasibility of international cooperation between the US and Russian

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<sup>65</sup> *U.S.-Russia relations: "Reset" Fact Sheet*, accessible at White House official pages, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>, accessed on 13.04.12

Federation and the influence that leadership of these nations can have on the potential to cooperate despite often diverging geopolitical interests.

#### **4.1 Russian and American motivations and expectations from the so-called "reset" in relations**

The purpose of this subchapter is to outline the major motives and expectations of the two nations in relation to the proposed improvement in bi-lateral relations. These are illustrative of their respective geopolitical interests and will play a major role in determining the success or failure of the "reset" in relations and thus be useful in an analysis of the potential for international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation.

As far as Russian expectations in connection to the politics of reset are concerned, the major motive seems to be its acknowledgement by the US as an equal partner with legitimate security interests in its own sphere of influence and on the geopolitical stage. *"For Washington, Russia has fallen far down on the list of priorities. The Russian political and security establishment, by contrast, continues to be obsessed with the United States".*<sup>66</sup> As stated above, Russian government political philosophy seems to be based around pragmatic neo-Eurasianist geopolitical strategy following an objective of the reassertion of Russian international status as a Great Power as well as engaging in soft-balancing to contain American ambitions for world leadership. Therefore, it can be expected from the Russian Federation to perceive the pronounced reset in relations as a symbol of Russian status and importance to the US, i.e.: an acknowledgment of the fact that Russian Federation is a country of special significance that needs to be engaged through bi-lateral talks. In other words, Russian geopolitical objective is to promote multipolarity and contain US power. It will therefore be in Russian interest to promote all elements of the politics of reset that are based on bi-lateral agreements of two equal partners as opposed to policies which could put Russia into a position of a junior partner to the US.

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<sup>66</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. *U.S.-Russian reset in recess*, published on 29.11.11, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/11/29/u.s.-russian-reset-in-recess/8kkn>, accessed on 20.04.12

Russian feeling of encroachment by US and its allies will only be alleviated, if the US refrain from any major military, economic or political involvement within the old USSR territory and especially from any meddling in the internal affairs of Russian Federation itself. This was bound to play a crucial role in any reformation of relations between the two nations. Furthermore, the politics of "reset" represented an opportunity for Russians to influence the policy of the US in such a way that would prevent the US from tipping the balance of power too much in their favour at Russian expense. The Anti-Ballistic Missile defence is one such critical game changer and Russians are particularly sensitive to any such projects that could potentially weaken their own nuclear deterrent. This is because "*Russian strategists are attached to the concept of 'mutually-assured destruction' and worry that American missile defence would necessitate a rethinking of that Cold War principle.*"<sup>67</sup> The politics of "reset" represent a channel through which Russians can pressure the US to refrain from pursuing such projects.

The expectations of the US in relation to the politics of reset are centred around persuading the Russian Federation to stop opposing the US interests in Europe and Middle East. As the world is becoming increasingly multipolar and the relative power of the West and of the US is decreasing while the country itself has been severely hit by the financial crisis, it is in the interest of the US to persuade Russian Federation to cooperate with it or to at least refrain from causing trouble. In exchange for recognition of Russian interests and reversal of some aspects of the Bush doctrine such as support for Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO or unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty, the US will expect Russian Federation to decrease its hostility, cooperate on non-proliferation and help the US fight its war in Afghanistan. Another important topic is Russian support to Iran and Syria. This support makes sense if Russian Federation sees the US as its geopolitical adversary. The Sunni part of Middle East including major US allies such as the Saudi Arabia stands opposed to the Shiite part which is centred around Iran. In order to prevent the US to completely dominate the region, Russian Federation logically supports Iran. Syria on the other hand, is Russia's major ally and destination of significant Russian arms exports, furthermore, Syria provides Russian Federation with a strategic port in the Mediterranean. In order to persuade Russian

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<sup>67</sup> Grant, Charles. *The US-Russia Reset is Over*, published on 02.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/us-russia-reset-is-over.html>, accessed on 22.04.12

Federation to withhold its protection over Syria in the UNSEC and its cooperation with the Iranian regime on economic and even nuclear matters, the US needs to reverse the Russian feeling of hostility towards the US and promote the benefits of cooperation. In order to achieve this, however, the US needs to understand the origins of this hostility.

The main sources of Russian anti-Americanism that reached its peak by the end of Putin's presidency (discussed in the previous chapter) are mostly centred around American insensitivity to Russian geopolitical interests and their blatant disregard during the American pursuit of the global war on terror under president Bush. In order to overcome this burden from the past, confidence building measures are needed such as the Working Groups of the Presidential Committee mentioned above or the 123 Agreement, which unlike the new START treaty is forward looking and independent on politics. It is also necessary to understand different approach to geopolitics by both sides which are in different positions and whose power in relation to each other is constantly changing. The overall objective for the Obama Administration, however, is to make sure that his "reset" initiative will not fail like similar initiatives undertaken by two previous administrations, which failed, because they could not survive crises such as Kosovo or Georgia.

The following subchapters will deal with individual policies and initiatives of the "reset" politics that are tied to Russian ambitions of reasserting itself as a major geopolitical player with a role equal to that of the US, as well as American expectations of Russian assistance on issues of global significance. Their purpose is to explain how these policies are perceived by each of the two nations in context of their respective geopolitical objectives. Each of these smaller subchapters will be introduced by a relevant research question.

#### **4.1.1 Geopolitical perspective on the resumption of nuclear arms control on bilateral basis**

The signing of the new START treaty on April 2010 was the symbolic start of the reset in relations between the Russian Federation and the US. This treaty<sup>68</sup> includes

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<sup>68</sup> *Treaty between the United States of American and the Russian Federation on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms*, accessible at the US government official pages, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>, accessed on 02.05.12

provisions about reductions in numbers of strategic nuclear weapons including aggregate limits on both deployed and non-deployed ICBMs (Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles) and SLBMs (Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles). While the practical impact of the treaty lies in the provision of mutual checks on each nation's nuclear arsenal, its political impact can be matter of some debate. The research questions for this part is whether either party to the new START treaty had to make any significant compromise regarding its geopolitical interests.

Given the differing orientations of Russian and American foreign policies, both parties may perceive this treaty and its significance through entirely different geopolitical lenses. For president Obama and his administration, the new START treaty may symbolize cooperation and final setting aside of Cold War confrontational style. Furthermore, it conveniently complements his wider policy of reducing the threat of nuclear weapons on world's security and enforcing the nuclear taboo. According to R. Kagan, Obama's administration operates on "*the fundamental assumption that the great powers today share common interests.*"<sup>69</sup> Therefore, for the American side - in its belief that international politics is not a zero-sum game - the new START treaty can be a symbol of the "bringing of Russia into the fold."

On the other hand, Russian side may interpret it as a symbol of the restoration of Russian status in the geopolitical arena and rather than reconciliation it may be interpreted as a return to Cold War practices of bi-lateral arms control with the purpose of balancing out each other's strengths. Such interpretation would complement Russian geopolitical strategy reflected in Putin's neo-Eurasianist policies. Furthermore, Russian Federation would find it difficult to fully modernize the whole of its nuclear arsenal and will therefore receive a convenient excuse to reduce its rocket forces into a more compact and cost-efficient shape.

It is also important to recognize, that the new START treaty symbolizes a reversal of president Bush's foreign policy, which was more unilaterally active and included the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty and thus general weakening of bi-lateral arms control. Reinstatement of such mechanisms of mutual control not only reinforces the Russian vision of multipolar world and generates international prestige

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<sup>69</sup> Kagan, Robert. *The Perils of Wishful Thinking*, published on January-February, 2010, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2009/12/16/perils-of-wishful-thinking/2tce>, accessed on 20.04.12

from being recognized by the US as an important partner requiring special mechanisms based on bi-lateral relations, but also enables the Administration of president Obama to differentiate itself from policies of its unpopular predecessor and present the treaty as a success in field of international relations. It can be argued that the issues of nuclear arms is much more important for the American side, while “*many view arms control and nuclear proliferation as U.S. concerns with little political salience within Russia. As Sergei Markov, a Duma member and Kremlin mouthpiece, has argued, the reset is ‘not just about an agreement on START, but about the status of the Russian Federation and whether Russia is a great power or not’*”<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, it can be concluded, that the new START treaty’s main value is political in nature rather than practical and both sides may perceive it as a success. The one practical effect this treaty could have had on the global balance of power would have been a clause restricting the US development of missile shield technology, but the American side did not accept such clause as will be further explained in the next subchapter. According to R. Kagan, a reduction of nuclear stockpiles is one of the few areas where interests of both the US and Russian Federation converge, and it can be argued that “*both parties were happy to sign the New Start agreement,*”<sup>71</sup> therefore the new START treaty should not be viewed as a strong evidence of any actual improvement in relations. Both parties gained politically without the necessity to make any sacrifices in regards to their geopolitical objectives.

Additionally, despite fitting well with Russian geopolitical ambitions, the new START treaty can be evaluated as a political success for president Obama who has gained an achievement in foreign relations that resonated in domestic politics. Russian side on the other hand did not gain any longstanding concessions and the issue of anti-ballistic missile defence was carefully circumvented.

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<sup>70</sup> Shevtsova, Lilia Fedorovna. *It takes two to reset*, published on 06.16.10, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/06/16/it-takes-two-to-reset/26dx>, accessed on 20.04.12

<sup>71</sup> Grant, Charles. *The US-Russia Reset is Over*, published on 02.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/us-russia-reset-is-over.html>, accessed on 22.04.12

#### **4.1.2 Anti-ballistic missile defence as the decisive obstacle to US-Russian international cooperation**

This part will deal with the topic of the Anti-ballistic missile defence. As the heading suggests, this issue is considered a crucial obstacle to an international cooperation between Russian Federation and the US. Therefore, the research question for this part is: did US and Russian Federation manage to sort out their disagreements about the ABM defence?

Unlike the new START treaty that did not require either party to make any painful compromises about its geopolitical interests, the ABM projects undertaken by the US have proved to be a crucial issue with a potential to far outweigh all achievements of the new START treaty. The US plans to place components of the ABM system in Central and Eastern Europe, notably a radar installation in the Czech Republic and missiles in Poland led to extremely harsh responses from the Russian side. Such responses may be interpreted in context of the effect that an operational and effective ABM system could have on the global balance of power. *"The U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 sparked concerns among Russian leaders and military top brass about the ultimate strategic goals of the United States. Many senior officials continue to believe that the United States has a hidden agenda: to destroy Russia."*<sup>72</sup> Although the official purpose of the European projects was to provide a defensive shield against potential missile attacks from rogue states in the Middle East, Russian geopolitical perspective is bound to interpret it as a game changer that will ultimately allow Americans to tip the balance of power overwhelmingly in their favour.

Russian geopolitical thinking is centred on the idea of establishing a truly multipolar world where Russian Federation could play a role of an equal partner to the US. Given Russian policymaker's traditional resort to Cold War thinking, it is logical that nuclear deterrent will be a significant part of their perception of what constitutes a great power status. President Bush's unilateral withdrawal from the ABM treaty sent a clear signal that the US seek to develop anti-missile technologies that would enable them to circumvent the material inhibitor on their potential use of nuclear weapons, i.e.:

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<sup>72</sup> Trenin, Dmitri. *Missile Defence Silver Bullet*, published on 01.07.09, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2009/07/01/missile-defense-silver-bullet/3sz2>, accessed on 15.04.12

the Mutually Assured Destruction. According to Nina Tannenwald, this would not necessarily mean that the US would be more likely to use them because of moral and political inhibitors that would remain in place. On the other hand, and precisely as the Wolfowitz doctrine suggested, the US would successfully neutralize threat posed by nuclear arsenals of other countries and solidify their military hegemony around the globe. Russian geopolitical strategists see this as a major threat to Russia's capacity to achieve geopolitical parity with the US.

Russian response to the ABM projects can be surprising given the fact that there are no plans for fielding enough interceptors to even remotely endanger Russian nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, under new plans presented by president Obama, the sea-based AEGIS system that will be accompanied by ground elements in Poland and Romania will not be completed until 2018. This system will also not be able to intercept ICBMs but only short to medium range missiles which was considered enough given that Iran should not be able to develop ICBMs in the foreseeable future. Yet Russian policymakers chose to oppose the system which suggests that Russian opposition stems from general feeling of insecurity and lack of assertiveness towards the United States. The ABM system is symbolic of the US elevation into the position of an invulnerable superpower, a position that it lost with the first successful detonation of Soviet atomic bomb. Therefore, it is understandable that Russian Federation would be inclined to condition the nuclear arms reduction by US withdrawal from further ABM development.

The ABM issues represented a significant obstacle in negotiating the new START treaty. President Obama's cancellation of the ABM projects in Europe has been a significant step to provide an incentive to Russians to sign the new START treaty, but Americans refused to include a provision into the treaty that would prohibit ABM projects altogether. The result was the so-called "extraordinary events clause" which was inserted into the new START treaty and says that "*Each Party shall, in exercising its national sovereignty, have the right to withdraw from this Treaty if it decides that extraordinary events related to the subject matter of this Treaty have jeopardized its supreme interests.*"<sup>73</sup> This clause clearly demonstrates that Russian Federation

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<sup>73</sup> *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on measures for the further reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms*, Article XIV, paragraph 3, accessible at the US



considers the missile defence a crucial factor in nuclear balance and is also illustrative of how the US and Russian Federation carefully avoided the issue that could compromise the whole arms reduction initiative.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the ABM defence remains an issue which was not solved by the politics of reset. It represents a significant effort on the side of the US to enforce its global hegemony by preserving its technological edge and is therefore rejected by Russian Federation on the matter of principle. Obama's partial withdrawal from the ABM projects in Europe can be interpreted as a partial compromise on his side and a gesture of a good will towards Russians, however as the projects now continue in a renewed form which includes sea-based elements as well as planned ground elements that are to be placed in Poland and Romania by 2020<sup>74</sup>. This has raised significant concerns on the Russian side which sees the US missile shield as a factor with a potential to reduce the efficiency of their own nuclear deterrent which is going to be further reduced according to the new START treaty. It is possible that this will have an effect that will completely undermine the achievements of the new START treaty. The ABM factor is therefore illustrative of how the politics of "reset" in relations fall short of solving issues that arise from competing geopolitical strategies of the two nations.

#### **4.1.3 American recognition of Russian interests as a way of improving relations**

The research question for this part is whether the "reset" in relations brought about increased recognition by the US of Russian geopolitical interests. This is an important topic because American disregard for Russian interest in the past has led to deterioration in relations between the two nations, thus harming the possibility of successful international cooperation.

The acknowledgement of legitimacy of Russian security interests, especially in the territory of former USSR, has been an important motivation for the Russian Federation to participate in the politics of reset. Russian government since Putin's coming to

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government official pages, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>, accessed on 02.05.12

<sup>74</sup> The year 2020 is the final timeframe for the final phase of the so-called *Phased, Adaptive Approach for Missile Defense in Europe*, which outlines gradual buildup and testing of the missile shield in Europe. Factsheet on this topic is accessible on the White House pages, [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/FACT-SHEET-US-Missile-Defense-Policy-A-Phased-Adaptive-Approach-for-Missile-Defense-in-Europe](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/FACT-SHEET-US-Missile-Defense-Policy-A-Phased-Adaptive-Approach-for-Missile-Defense-in-Europe), accessed on 02.02.12

power has been much more nationalist and quasi-imperialist than its predecessor. Hence Russian sensitivity to another power's encroachment into its former territories such as, e.g. the American support to coloured revolutions in the Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, US criticism of Russian domestic social and political reforms or the ABM projects that included placing US military installations in the Czech Republic and Poland. If Russian Federation is to accomplish its geostrategic objective of becoming a recognized geopolitical player of the highest order on par with the US, it needs to either force the US to recognize Russia as such, or persuade it to do the same through diplomatic means. Any form of institutionalization of such recognition would prove most valuable to the Russian Federation. The US has been institutionalizing its own hegemony since the end of WWII by setting up extensive framework of international institutions where the US called the shots and it is therefore difficult for Russia to counterbalance it solely through the establishment of its own institutions where the US would not be involved and Russia would play the dominant role. The politics of "reset" provided Russian Federation with an opportunity to persuade the US to be more considerate of Russian interest in its region. In other words, in exchange for Russian support in some global issues such as the war in Afghanistan, sale of sophisticated Russian anti-air missiles to Iran or support for US led UNSEC initiatives (most importantly, sanctions against regimes in Iran, North Korea and recently in Syria), Russian Federation would demand, amongst other things, an *"implicit understanding that the US would not directly challenge Russia's key interests in its own backyard (for example, in Ukraine)."*<sup>75</sup>

Such a deal was never made officially, but some of the US actions such as the cancellation of plans to place US bases in Central and Eastern Europe or decrease of the US involvement in Georgia and the Ukraine could suggest that such unofficial trade-off happened. This would represent an important gain for Russian side given its self-perception as an Eurasian country with bounds to previous USSR. On the other hand, it can be argued that Obama's Administration did not formalize any such a deal, keeps insisting that there should not be any spheres of influence in Eastern Europe and refused to completely withdraw from either Georgia or Kyrgyzstan. It can therefore be concluded, that Russian Federation did not receive any formal guarantees that its

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<sup>75</sup> Grant, Charles. *The US-Russia Reset is over*, published on 02.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/us-russia-reset-is-over.html>, accessed on 22.04.12

interests would be respected and while this US approach has a potential to add to confidence-building and general warming up in relations, it is unlikely that it would have any durable effect that would be able to survive any major crisis in the region that would accentuate the conflict of interests between Russia and the US. This would include Russian quasi-imperialistic claim to sphere of influence in the region and perceived need to enhance its security by acquiring buffer zones in order to compensate for its feeling of insecurity. Spreading of US influence in “Russia’s backyard” would not only put it in a weak defensive position, but would also be reminiscent of the containment policy employed against the USSR as part of the Reagan Doctrine. On the other hand there is a whole host of reasons why the US would not allow Russian Federation to truly dominate the whole ex-USSR territory. Firstly, there is the US determination to protect its local economic interests (especially in Central Asia and around Caspian Sea). Secondly, it would go against the Wolfowitz doctrine or any other doctrine based on establishing and preserving a global hegemony to allow Russians to effectively harness Eurasian resources that would make Russian Federation a true geopolitical competitor. Finally, there is the idea of US determination to promote democracy and liberalism in order to fulfil its divine mission upon which the ideology of American exceptionalism is based.

In conclusion, while tacit recognition by the US of Russian interests in the former territory of the US generally weakens any notion of US hegemony and therefore goes against US aspirations to global leadership, on the other hand, Russian Federation was left without any guarantees and its national security did not objectively improve. On the contrary, as a part of the support that Russian Federation provided to the US in relation to transport of troops and material into Afghanistan, Putin’s government allowed for increased US military presence in Central Asia, a region that is crucial to the Russian Federation. Therefore, because of lack of formalization, it cannot be argued that Russian Federation obtained any objective improvement in the legitimacy of its claim to a sphere of influence in its “near abroad.”

#### **4.1.4 Russia-US Presidential Commission: making Russia an equal partner**

Policies associated with the "reset" in relations have mostly been associated with issues of security such as non-proliferation and war against global terrorism. However, the improvement in relations under the Obama-Medvedev presidential duo has also brought about a significant improvement in bi-lateral cooperation on other matters as well. Therefore, in order to assess the feasibility of international cooperation between Russian Federation and the US, it is also necessary to analyze the successes in non-security related field. The research questions for this part is whether the work of the Russia-US Presidential Commission brought about any significant and durable improvement to relations between the US and Russian Federation.

The establishment of U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission has been a significant step in bringing the two nations closer together. The Commission includes various working groups intended to streamline cooperation between analogous agencies in the US and Russian Federation. These groups focus on various aspects of possible cooperation including military, security, economy, counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism, intelligence, nuclear energy and science. However, they also include working groups dealing with civil society and rule of law. Therefore, the presidential commission represents a significant initiative in indentifying possible cooperation opportunities and facilitating their implementation by bringing Russian and American agencies together: e.g.: the Energy Working Group is co-chaired by U.S. Secretary of Energy and Russian Minister of Energy and promotes energy cooperation by bringing together agencies like the U.S. Department of Energy, State and Commerce, or U.S. Agency for International Development with their Russian counterparts such as the Russian ministry of Energy, or the Russian Energy Agency. These working groups usually come up with so called Joint Action Plans which identify cooperation opportunities and suggests ways in which these opportunities can be exploited to mutual benefit.

Analyzing the structure and procedures of the Commission reveals that there is a significant stress on preserving an atmosphere of equality between the US and Russian in their bi-lateral relations where neither partner aspires to playing a dominant role. Therefore, it can be argued that the Commission fulfils the political objective of both president Obama and president Medvedev. It promotes and institutionalizes bi-lateral

relations between the US and Russian Federation which politically makes the latter an equal partner deserving special treatment and accentuates the need to approach Russian interests outside the framework of other international institutions, where the US might be seen as a leading nation. On the other hand, it gives Obama's administration an opportunity to draw Russian Federation into constructive confidence-building dialogue which can be used as a means to promote liberalism, e.g.: through the Civil Society Working Group or secure Russian cooperation on the non-proliferation agenda, which was achieved by e.g.: drawing up the Plutonium Management and Disposition Agreement. The so-far achievements of the presidential Commission have produced mutual benefits to both countries, which is important as a trust and confidence-building measure. However, like most of the policies associated with the reset in relations, even many successes of the Commission outlined in the Commission's Spring 2012 Joint Report can be usually described as superficial and reversible, while avoiding the complicated issues. According to the 2010 Spring Joint Report: *"Despite tangible progress in many areas, the Commission's work is far from finished. There is more to be done that will benefit both of our nations. Our ongoing strategic stability talks seek to make progress to build cooperation and enhance mutual confidence, and we are working to increase our capacity to meet non-traditional challenge in areas such as cyber security. On the economic and commercial front, the potential for mutually beneficial cooperation has barely been tapped."*<sup>76</sup> This can be illustrated by the Civil Society working group. While one of the official purposes of this group has been to foster cooperation between US and Russian activist groups and even improve dialogue between Russian government agencies and Russian NGOs, it can be expected that the Russian side will be reluctant to allow this to strengthen position of Russian anti-government civil groups as well as foreign activists and NGOs within Russia. The issue of US criticism of Russian authoritarianism and activities of both foreign and domestic civil groups that are often accused by Russian government from being funded by the US with the purpose of undermining Russian national stability has therefore been avoided. The Civil Society group limits its activities on Prison Reform, Child Protection and Anti-Corruption measures but does little to address the increasing Russian political activism.

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<sup>76</sup> U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission: Spring 2012 Joint Report, accessible at the U.S. Department of State official pages, at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ci/rs/usrussiabilat/186831.htm#12>, accessed on 04.05.12

Furthermore, the Commission as a whole is often criticized for being a personal initiative of presidents Obama and Medvedev whose warm personal relations is the main reason for the Commission's existence. *"The Obama and Medvedev administrations have taken steps to formalize the basis for the relationship, notably via the Bilateral Presidential Commission, which links U.S. departments and Russian ministries in work groups ranging from clean energy cooperation to counterterrorism. But it is essential to turn this commission from an Obama-Medvedev initiative that may die once one or both of its principals leaves office into a permanent intergovernmental body that can continue its work as presidents come and go."*<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the real durability and general value of the Commission will be tested after premier Putin returns to the presidential post in the Russian Federation. Putin's harsh criticism of the US combined with his keeping of distance from the politics of "reset" suggest that his approach is more pragmatic than constructive and therefore, after returning to position of president, the Commission could easily become a mere discussion platform with limited potential to implement any of its measures.

#### **4.1.5 Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement: economic aspect of the "reset" politics**

The research goal of this part is to assess the significance of the Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and its possible impact on the potential of international cooperation between the US and Russian Federation. The Civilian Nuclear Cooperation Agreement can be described as one of the larger practical economic achievements of the politics of reset. This agreement, also dubbed the US-Russia 123 agreement after the section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954 that deals with nuclear cooperation with other countries, will allow the two nations to cooperate on civilian nuclear technology development. It will unite the world's largest producer of uranium and the world's largest producer of nuclear energy. Furthermore, it will enable Russian nuclear energy companies to cooperate with US companies on research, nuclear powerplant projects, fuel storage and nuclear infrastructure development. According to the factsheet provided by the US government, the Agreement will *"advance key*

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<sup>77</sup> Rojansky, Matthew and Nikolas Gvosdev. *Keep the "reset" moving*, published on 15.12.11, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2011/12/15/keep-reset-moving/8kft>, accessed on 10.04.12

*nonproliferation and commercial goals*<sup>78</sup> including Nuclear nonproliferation cooperation, Civil Nuclear Energy cooperation, bring commercial opportunities etc.

It can be argued, that the 123 Agreement, while bringing on major economic benefits, also helps to secure Russian cooperation on major US geopolitical goals such as the nonproliferation enforcement. "*This deal will greatly improve the ability of both nuclear powers to prevent proliferation—helping to stop sensitive nuclear materials or technology from falling into the wrong hands and being used to build bombs.*"<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, critics of the treaty warned that giving the Russian Federation access to US technologies may backfire in case that Russian Federation passes these technologies to third parties such as Iran. Academic commentators usually agree, however, that if the two countries are to really improve their relations in a meaningful and durable way, it is important that they also cooperate on matters outside security. Furthermore, tying Russian Federation economically to the US can have the effect of reducing tension and providing mutual benefits, i.e.: The US will help Russian Federation to modernize its infrastructure and it will receive Russian cooperation on nonproliferation and generally gain more influence on the country.

It is for a similar reason that the US determined to assist Russian Federation in its accession to the WTO. This idea was greatly supported by today's US ambassador to Russian Federation M. McFaul, who often argues that including Russia in global economic institutions will positively influence Russian social and economic reforms aiming to liberalize the country. On one hand, it is questionable to what extent Russian political elites will allow increased economic cooperation to influence political perception of the US as a geopolitical adversary, an outlook that is represented by Putin much more than by the more economically and liberally minded president Medvedev. In each case, however, the 123 Agreement illustrates that there are cooperation opportunities for the two nations that are relatively independent of their geopolitical struggle. The 123 Agreement was not politicized like the new START treaty, but perhaps brought even more practical benefits to the two nations. Its durability, however, may be greatly influenced by politics.

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<sup>78</sup> *U.S.-Russia 123 Agreement*, accessible at the US government official pages, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2011/01/154318.htm>, accessed on 05.05.12

<sup>79</sup> Rojansky, Matthew. *As the New START debate rages: quiet nuclear progress with Russia*, published on 09.12.10, accessible at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace pages, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/12/09/as-new-start-debate-rages-quiet-nuclear-progress-with-russia/2ynr>, accessed on 10.04.12

The Agreement is valid for 30 years but its applicability and usefulness may be dependent on politics more than it seems. This can be illustrated by the fact, that the idea is not new - the same agreement was already submitted to Congress by the Bush Administration but it was later withdrawn in August 2008 as a reaction to the Russian-Georgian war. It is therefore highly questionable whether cooperation on civilian nuclear development can survive a major political crisis.

#### **4.1.6 Russian support for US efforts in Iran and Afghanistan as an example of successful cooperation**

As part of the effort to improve relations in the wake of the "reset", the US asked Russian Federation to support its efforts in the Middle East. This covered, amongst other initiatives such as counter-narcotic and trafficking, Russian support of American operations in Afghanistan and of American efforts to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. The research goal of this part is to describe Russian-American cooperation in the Middle East region and determine whether this cooperation can be described as a genuine international cooperation on common geopolitical objectives.

The Middle East is a crucial region for both the US and Russian Federation. For the US, it is the principal theatre for the global war against terror and for Russian Federation it is a potential source of instability close to its borders, furthermore, it is a source of world's largest deposits of oil. The Middle East is also a host to a conflict between two competing branches of Islam, Shiite and Sunni, which are informally led by Iran and Saudi Arabian regimes respectively. The Saudi Arabia is a major regional ally of the US and it can therefore be argued, that Russian diplomatic and economic support of Iran is part of its broader geopolitical balancing effort to check US power. It is therefore against Russian interests to allow Iran to fall under US influence and lose regional competition for power to Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, it is not entirely in the interest of Russian Federation to allow Iranian regime to obtain nuclear weapons, which could lead to instability in the Middle Eastern region. Therefore, it will be in the interest of the Russian Federation to balance its policies in such a way, so as to keep Iran in the game, prevent it from becoming armed with nuclear bomb and at the same time both contain the US power in the region and appear to cooperate. The close relation between Iran and Russian federation mean that the US realizes the value of



Russian cooperation. Furthermore, "*Russia's seat on the UNSC means that the US needs its help in tackling Iran and other problems in the Middle East. And Russia knows that stormy relations with the West could damage its efforts to modernise its economy.*"<sup>80</sup>

This cooperation has materialized in number of ways. First of all, Russian Federation, in line with its multipolar-oriented foreign policy strategy supported multilateral sanctions in the UN (sanctions that were ironically vehemently opposed by NATO member Turkey), but opposed and criticized unilateral sanctions brought about by the US and later the EU. Russian Federation also increased its criticism of Iranian regime and cancelled its delivery of S-300 anti-aircraft system which would make it complicated to make safe aerial strikes against Iranian nuclear facilities. On the other hand, Russian Federation did not withhold its economic cooperation with Iran, which includes the Bushehr nuclear power plant, development of civilian nuclear projects (medical and research) as well as energy-related projects.

This double-sided approach can be explained by the fact that Russian Federation wants to keep the Iranian issue alive, because it increases the value of Russian cooperation for the US. Therefore, it can be argued that because of Russian power-centred realism and Russian tendency to assess its own power by comparing it as relative to the US power, the cooperation offered to the US will never be absolute and it will be subject to condition of reciprocity. This can be observed in the Syrian issue as well, where Russian Federation refuses to allow for a UNSEC resolution that could authorize any kind of humanitarian or military intervention. Syria provides Russian Federation with its only strategic port in the Mediterranean sea and is also the only ally of Iran in the region.

Additionally, fall of regimes in Iran or Syria could lead to establishment of fundamentalist regimes which could in turn prove to be a source of instability in the Muslim part of Caucasus. It can therefore be concluded, that unless the "reset" in relations leads to a severe rethinking of Russian geopolitical strategy and objectives, it is highly unlikely that Russian Federation will provide any meaningful and durable cooperation on the issues of Iran and Syria.

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<sup>80</sup> Grant, Charles. *The US-Russia Reset is Over*, published on 02.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://centreforeuropeanreform.blogspot.co.uk/2012/04/us-russia-reset-is-over.html>, accessed on 22.04.12

Russian cooperation with the US on Afghanistan follows a similar pattern. Russian Federation allowed NATO transit of its forces and materiel through Russian territory which greatly reduced logistical strain on NATO forces in Afghanistan and made NATO less dependent on routes through unstable and exposed Pakistan. Putin's tolerance of increased US military presence in Central Asia has been part of older strategy of cooperating with the US on matter of fighting Islamic fundamentalists. After the 9/11 attacks Putin decided to work with the US. This was not compatible with the neo-Eurasian approach to geopolitics, which would be opposed to any increasing of US military outreach, but it was pragmatic: Russian Federation needed to suppress sources of Islamic fundamentalism near its own territory.

Furthermore, there was an implied agreement that the US will refrain from pursuing policies viewed by Russian Federation as hostile in Eastern Europe. However, it did not work out because of increased assertivity and unilateralism of Bush's Administration which promoted further eastwards NATO expansion and supported coloured revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia - Russia's own backyard. Therefore, Russian cooperation can be seen as very limited and pragmatic in nature. Furthermore, in the view of Russian political realists, it can be beneficial to let the US and NATO forces bleed out in the unpopular war and later use disputes between the US and Karzai's government to their own advantage. President Karzai has close relations with Iran and strained relations with the West, which could provide an opportunity for Russian Federation to increase its own influence in the region at the American expense.

In conclusion, it is unlikely that Russian cooperation in the Middle East with the US will ever lead to any geopolitically relevant and durable changes. Russian Federation will avoid contributing to US victory which could result in strengthening of US international clout and would lead to freeing of American forces in Afghanistan, which would strengthen the US both militarily and economically. It is also definitely against Russian interests to help Americans free their forces that are now tied down in Afghanistan for other possible military adventures in the region. *"Many Russians believe that geopolitics will drive the U.S. to use force against not only Iran but also Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. They believe that only ill will come of the Arab Spring and predict that many countries will end up with extreme Islamist regimes*

*backed by Saudi Arabia.*<sup>81</sup> It is therefore more likely that Russian assistance will be limited to cases where it will be exchanged for increased influence or another benefits. In other words, it can be seen as a pragmatic continuation of Russian policy of balancing out the US power, rather than genuine effort in international cooperation.

#### **4.1.7 Improvement in relations between the US and Russian Federation and its effect on Russian anti-Americanism**

The research goal of this part is to assess whether the improvement in relations between the US and Russian Federation is a result of any fundamental change in their respective geopolitical thinking. Therefore, this part will focus on Russian Anti-Americanism, its origins and the way in which it was dealt with during the period of "reset" in relations. Finally, it will be determined whether the improvement in the general atmosphere in relations reflects a fundamental change in their geopolitical thinking and therefore can lead to a genuine cooperation, or whether it is merely superficial improvement without any permanent and durable effect.

It can be argued, that contemporary Russian anti-Americanism originates in the period of Yeltsin's government. After the fall of USSR, political elites of newly established Russian Federation held high hopes that the West will welcome the new country within its structures and help it with modernization and transition towards western socio-economic model based upon liberal values. This did not happen and after the chaos of the 90s finally subsided, Russians felt that the West abandoned them and prayed upon Russian weakness. Many liberal reformists were disillusioned with the West and flocked to Russian nationalists. Russian policy-makers kept the old Cold War realist thinking based upon power-balancing and assessing policy results using zero-sum scenarios, i.e.: Russian policies were competitive and not constructive.

When the price of oil went up after the 9/11 attacks, Russian Federation became more assertive. Putin's government sought to improve relations with the West in a hope, that in exchange Russian Federation will receive help that is needed in order to modernize its economy, but this did not happen as the US under the Bush Administration

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<sup>81</sup> Grant, Charles. *Will Putin delete the reset?* published on 04.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://www.cer.org.uk/in-the-press/will-putin-delete-reset>, accessed on 16.04.12

continued with policies, that went against Russian interests (as described in the above subchapter). This led to feeling of betrayal and perception of the West as a hostile entity. The US once again became the geopolitical arch-enemy whose power must be checked and balanced if Russian Federation is to renew its status of Great Power. Therefore, Russian Federation engages in fostering anti-Americanism around the globe by keeping good relations with anti-American countries such as Syria, Iran or Venezuela. Russian Federation also strives to build international framework of institutions that would not include the US such as the BRIC or the SCO, as well as institutions dominated by Russian Federation itself such as the CIS or the Eurasian Economic Community.

Now that Russian Federation's relative power in the world is increasing and the relative power of the US is decreasing (mostly due to economic crisis and relative growth of other powers such as the BRIC countries), the Administration of president Obama will seek to improve relations. This would allow the US to secure Russian cooperation on geopolitical issues and also enable the Obama Administration to differentiate itself from its predecessor which was much more assertive and unilateral. To reverse the trend of anti-Americanism in Russian Federation and ameliorate the strong Russian feeling of mistrusts towards the US that was greatly summarized by Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference where he spoke against the US hegemony, president Obama offered Russians what they wanted the most - respect and recognition.

As a result of various political initiatives mentioned above and frequent confidence building measures such as the Presidential Committee and so on, Russian diplomatic hostility indeed subsided. "*There are signs that Russia is becoming less antagonistic towards the West and more inclined to work co-operatively with it.*"<sup>82</sup> However, Russians did not refrain from pursuing a multipolar vision of the world which they think contrasts with the unilateral nature of the US hegemony (or hegemony of the Western civilization in general - than it would be a question of how much Russian Federation would see itself as its member rather than a sui generis case). Furthermore,

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<sup>82</sup>Barysch, Katinka and Tomas Valasek. *Russia and the West: is the reset working?* published on 01.06.10, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages <http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/bulletin-article/2010/russia-and-west-reset-working>, accessed on 20.04.12

the anti-Americanism may have subsided, but did not disappear altogether from Russian state-controlled media.

The overall success of the American initiative to reduce Russian anti-Americanism seems to be determined by the future relations with Russian government after Putin's return to the presidential position in May 2012. The whole initiative of "resetting" relations is associated with the presidential duo Obama-Medvedev and it can be argued, the premier Putin kept his distance and never expressed much optimism. E.g.: when Russian Federation did not object to the UNSEC resolution that allowed for Western military intervention in Libya, this decision was widely criticized by Putin and it seems unlikely that Russian Federation would repeat this approach in the Syrian case.

It can therefore be argued that president Putin will play the pivotal role in the future consolidation of any successes brought about by the reset politics. *"Putin, who has remained the preeminent political figure in the Kremlin during the Medvedev presidency, allowed the reset to happen, though he never used the word. He is less of a natural diplomat than Medvedev, and has a less benign view of the United States. During the recent presidential election campaign in Russia, Putin resorted to tough anti-American rhetoric, accusing opposition demonstrators of being paid by the United States. Putin's recent newspaper articles also suggest that he sees U.S. hegemony as a bigger problem than the rise of Chinese power."*<sup>83</sup>

It can therefore be concluded that the politics of "reset" brought about some superficial improvements in relations and general atmosphere between the two nations. However, it is yet to be seen if any such improvements will survive the upcoming change in presidential positions in Russian Federation and possibly in the US as well, or if they will survive any major crisis such as e.g.: armed intervention in Syria or an attack on Iran which would undoubtedly provoke a hostile reaction and shatter any so-far achievements.

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<sup>83</sup>Grant, Charles. *Will Putin delete the reset?* published on 04.04.12, accessible at the Centre for European Reform pages, <http://www.cer.org.uk/in-the-press/will-putin-delete-reset>, accessed on 16.04.12

## **4.2 Evaluation of the impact of the "reset" politics on the geopolitical confrontation between the US and Russian Federation**

This subchapter will summarize the overall achievements of the politics of "reset". Their durability and significance will be evaluated and analyzed from the perspective of Russian and American geopolitical interests. The research question is whether the policies of Obama and Medvedev managed to overcome obstacles posed to international cooperation by the differences in American and Russian geopolitical objectives.

The primary impact of the "reset" in relations on the strategic balance between US and Russian Federation lies in the development of bi-lateral arms control and discussion on the topic of ABM defence. As specified above, the United States met Russia on its demands about the ABM only half way through and refused to provide any legally binding guarantees, that the placement of ABM components in the European region will not weaken Russian nuclear deterrent. This has a potential to undermine Russian willingness to cooperate on the nuclear arms reduction which is a significant part of Obama's Administration foreign policy objectives. Russian elites resort to Cold War era thinking centred about realist balance of power assessment while Putin's government contains strong elements of nationalism and neo-Eurasianism, which deem it necessary to balance out US influence in the Eurasian region, especially the former USSR territory. Therefore, Russian Federation cannot accept any feature of the reset politics that would lead to increased US military dominance. On the other hand, Obama's Administration seeking of improvement in relations can provide Russian Federation with valuable bargaining chips that can be used to persuade the US to accept Russian influence in its "near abroad" and recognize the legitimacy of its regional security interests.

In such a way, Russian Federation persuaded the US to decrease its involvement in countries like Georgia, Ukraine and region of Central Asia. The US also decreased its criticism of Russian authoritarianism and cancelled its plans to put interceptor missiles in Poland. However, this plan was merely replaced with a new plan called the European Phased Adaptive Approach, which seeks to achieve a very similar objective until 2020. This could have potentially detrimental effects on the improvement in relations that was achieved during the past years.

It can be argued that general relations between Russian Federation and the US improved and their general atmosphere warmed up. This was mostly achieved through initiatives such as the Presidential Commission and its working groups or the 123 Agreement which brought about significant economic benefits for both countries. These initiatives are relatively independent of political considerations, but it is possible that it will be political reasons which will jeopardize all recent achievements. With Putin's planned return to presidency, it is highly questionable what course relations between US and Russian Federation are about to take. On the other hand, Putin's pragmatic political strategy never refused the idea of cooperation with the US on matters of common interest such as non-proliferation or combating global terrorism. Furthermore, Russian Federation could use US assistance in modernizing its economy, which is now still heavily dependent on petrodollars and can benefit greatly from Russian membership in the WTO which is now extensively supported by the US.

The politics of "reset" in relations managed to provide for confidence building and general improvement in the atmosphere of relations between the two nations, but generally failed to provide solutions to contentious issues such as the missile defence which is a game changer to the old Cold War paradigm of mutual deterrence. This is largely caused by the fact that geopolitical objectives of the two nations are in conflict on fundamental matters. These include the role of the US in the world. While the US seeks to preserve its geopolitical dominance, it is in Russian interest to promote multipolar world in which the US would be constrained in its actions and would be discouraged from acting unilaterally. It has been explained above how Russian Federation seeks to achieve its objective by promoting multilateralism in various institutions and set up its own institutions to oppose the US initiatives to institutionalize the primacy of their own values centred around liberalism and market economy.

Furthermore, it is in Russian interest to alienate the US from Europe and to promote anti-Americanism around the globe by cooperating with government that are hostile to the US such as in Venezuela or Iran. Caspian Sea and generally the region of Central Asia is also important and while Putin's government pragmatically allowed for increase US military presence there, the US bases such as the one in Kyrgyzstan has been a much contested issue. Finally, there is the topic of pre-election rhetoric in both Russian Federation and the US. While in Russian Federation, Putin's presidential campaign has seen some sharp rise of anti-American rhetoric, the situation is similar in the US where

republican candidates criticize Obama for being too soft on Russia. This could also potentially have a detrimental effect on the durability of the reset achievements.

The key to any permanent improvement in relations that could survive changes in leadership perhaps lies in the US learning to understand Russia's grievances. There is still a deep resentment in Russian Federation over US criticism of its domestic policies, US involvement in its former territory, US endorsement of eastwards NATO expansion as well its increasingly unilateral agenda which may not directly threaten Russian interests, but is rather uncomfortably suggestive of the loss of international prestige and importance, resulting in the US treating Russian Federation as a lesser power. The relative global power of the US is decreasing due to both domestic and external factors and the US need Russian Federation's cooperation on number of issues, especially those in the Middle East. Apart from practical geopolitical considerations and cooperation on mutually beneficial matters while avoiding matters of fundamental disagreement, however, much more confidence and trust building may be required in order to bring a truly lasting improvement in mutual relations between the US and Russian Federation.

Therefore, the politics of reset can be said to have succeeded in restarting the dialogue between the two nations and facilitating cooperation on matters where their respective national interests converge, but they failed to resolve fundamental disagreements which stem from their differing geopolitical objectives and strategies.

### **4.3 Possible future developments in mutual relations**

This chapter was only dealing with the efforts to improve relations between the US and Russian Federation that took place during the presidencies of Obama and Medvedev. However, to conclude the chapter, this last subchapter outlines possible future developments in bi-lateral relations after Putin's return to presidency in May 2012. The research goal of this chapter is to predict possible future developments in bi-lateral relations, and these prediction will be based upon findings presented above.

It is difficult to predict the future development of relations between the US and Russian Federation. The differences in their respective geopolitical objectives and strategies place these two nations on a collision course in numerous ways. Since the US



now enjoys the position of a relative superiority, it is the US foreign policy that is likely to be the major determinant of Russian choices. The reactivity of Russian policymakers towards the US policies is given by Russian feeling of insecurity and encroachment as well as its geopolitical inheritance after the USSR, which measured its success by means of being able to balance out US power.

Furthermore, Russian Federation is likely to be highly distrustful of any US attempts to improve relations, which is a consequence of the pattern in US-Russian relations since the end of the Cold War. There seems to be a cycle of improvements in relations which occur in situations when the US needs Russian cooperation on some issues such as was the case of post 9/11 attacks global war against terrorism, followed by rapid deterioration in reaction to the US infringement of Russian security interests. NATO enlargement, Georgia, Ukraine, the ABM projects, all of these are illustrative of US unilateralism which aggravated Russian political elites. Therefore, Russia is likely to have a tendency to engage with the US in a manner based upon short-term goals and bartering for influence and economic benefits.

There is nothing to suggest that Russian Federation would change its strategy of soft-balancing and pragmatic ad-hoc bartering with the US as well as leveraging its influence over some hostile regimes such as the one in Iran, Syria or Venezuela. Russian cooperation and assistance to regime in Iran is opportunistic and can be seen as a part of larger geopolitical strategy to contain US power in the crucial Middle Eastern region. Furthermore, Iranian nuclear question is likely to continue to be linked to the question of the US ABM projects. According to recent report on U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition document: "*The US has a strong interest in continuing to draw Russia away from Iran and toward its Western coalition. Without Russian support Iran loses not only a diplomatic sponsor, but also access to arms and technical support for its existing nuclear infrastructure. The Russo-Iranian relationship is built upon mutual opportunism. The US should continue to stress the material and diplomatic benefits of partnership with the West, while at the same time working to enhance the costs of partnership with Iran.*"<sup>84</sup> On one side, Russian can leverage its influence over Iranian

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<sup>84</sup> Fite, Brandon. *U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Impact of China and Russia*, p. 37, published in March 2010, accessible at the CSIS Burke Chair pages, [http://csis.org/files/publication/REPORT\\_Iran\\_Chapter\\_X\\_China\\_and\\_Russia\\_Final\\_Revision2212.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/REPORT_Iran_Chapter_X_China_and_Russia_Final_Revision2212.pdf), accessed on 05.05.12

projects but on the other hand, Iranian nuclear weapon would only strengthen the argument for American ABM defence initiatives. These Russian alliances to anti-US regimes promote rivalry and can prove to be a catalyst for future crises.

Such crisis can be brought about by e.g.: Israeli attack on Iran, or generally by an increased US interventionism in the Middle East. Syria is another issue that can continue to put US and Russian differences at the centre stage, jeopardizing recent improvements in the diplomatic atmosphere between the two nations. While Middle East is likely to be the crucial region determining the dynamics of future relationships, other possible friction zones include competition for resources in the Arctic region or US support to Georgia.

Additionally, the personal chemistry between leaders can play a significant role. During the period of Bush and Putin, relations between the US and Russian Federation improved after the 9/11 attacks and then rapidly deteriorated in 2008 after the war between Russian Federation and Georgia. With the change on the presidential posts which brought about the duo Obama-Medvedev, relationships became more constructive. While Medvedev was more liberal-oriented than Putin, president Obama sought to change US approach to foreign policy and engage in constructive dialogue and cooperation on matters of mutual interest. Meanwhile, premier Putin kept his distance from the reset and continued in his anti-American rhetoric which culminated during his re-election campaign in 2012.

It can be argued, that while the geopolitical objectives of both nations remained principally the same, relationships could nonetheless improve because of slight change in the approach of the US (change from unilateralism towards constructive policies based upon mutual benefit) on one side, and slightly more cooperative Russian president on the other side. However, as Putin will soon resume his presidency, it is possible that this will have a detrimental effect on the relations as he may be likely to pursue Russian geopolitical strategy in a more assertive manner. On the other hand, there is some scholarly consensus that Russian-American relations are more dependent on the level of appreciation that the US administration is willing to grant to Russian interests. According to A. Kuchins, Director and Senior Fellow at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, *"U.S. policies will be a far more important factor in*

*effecting Russian leader and elite views of the United States than who the next Russian president is.*"<sup>85</sup>

It can be argued, that Russia would have to revise its geopolitical strategy and objectives in order to seriously consider integration into Western international structures and a diplomatic alliance with the US. The politics of "reset" in relations achieved some symbolic and not very durable compromises on nuclear arms control but avoided contentious issues such as the missile defence, which is likely to put further strain on bi-lateral relations in the future. Politics of "reset" focused on cooperation in the security sphere which outshined relatively promising achievements in other fields. These include the above mentioned Presidential Commission whose Working Groups outline areas of possible cooperation and suggest measures of realizing common projects. Additionally, there was the 123 Agreement with significant potential to improve economic and scientific cooperation on nuclear matters. The impact of economic cooperation, despite being constantly outshined by security issues, should not be underestimated. After all, *"The lack of trade and business relationships means that each country has no vested interest in the success of the other."*<sup>86</sup> Therefore, it is possible that increase in economic cooperation would tie the countries together just like it happened between the US and China, which are increasingly interdependent economically.

The politics of "reset" so far and by themselves did not achieve much, because of the focus on the backward-looking nuclear cooperation, but there is a potential for future cooperation where institutions such as the Presidential Commission could serve as a forum where projects might be proposed and realized. The success of such strategy would depend on the level of interdependence between security dimension of the reset politics and other initiatives that would be economic in nature. Should both countries be able to separate common political, security and economic initiatives, there would be a good chance that economic cooperation would bring about new incentives for cooperation on political and security matters. The Russian WTO accession is an

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<sup>85</sup> Kuchins, Andrew C. *Reset Expectations: Russian assessments of U.S. power*, p. 123, available at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies pages, [http://csis.org/files/publication/110613\\_kuchins\\_CapacityResolve\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/110613_kuchins_CapacityResolve_Web.pdf), accessed on 02.05.12

<sup>86</sup> Jacobs, Eli. *The Future of U.S. Russia Relations Recap*, published on 16.11.11, available at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies pages, <http://csis.org/blog/future-us-russia-relations-recap>, accessed on 02.05.12

illustration of such cooperation which can lead to deeper integration of Russian economy within globalized structures and thus in turn lessen the willingness of Russian elites to seek conflicts with the US.

## **Conclusion**

The overall goal of this work was to analyze the potential of the US and Russian Federation to engage in international cooperation and their ability to achieve consensus on issues where their geopolitical objectives and strategies diverge.

The first chapter which dealt with Russian foreign policy had the goal of analyzing the basic factors influencing Russian geopolitical thinking as well as providing a theoretical understanding of competing foreign policy approaches of contemporary Russian political system. The first part of this chapter analyzed four factors that historically played a major role in Russian foreign politics. The resulting conclusion was that Russian insecurity can lead to a sensitivity of Russian foreign policy makers towards foreign involvement in countries of ex-USSR territory, Russian authoritarianism can lead to friction with the West which has a tendency to criticize it, Russian search for identity can lead to misunderstandings with the West which may not understand Russian socio-economic realities and finally, Russian alienation from European civilization can have a detrimental effect on efforts to integrate Russian Federation within Western international structures.

The second part of the first chapter had a research goal to provide an understanding of competing Russian approaches to foreign policy. Conclusions of this subchapter can be summarized as follows: The overall influence of Westernism in contemporary Russian Federation is minimal and some elements of quasi-Westernist approach in Russian foreign policy should not be confused with Westernism, but can be rather a result of pragmatic approach of Putin's government. Similarly, while Russian government often plays the Slavophile card, such policies can be seen as a part of pragmatic Eurasian approach which is now a prevalent stream in contemporary Russian government.

The second chapter dealt with the key factors influencing American geopolitical thinking and its main research goal was to identify the main objectives of American geopolitical strategy. The conclusion was that Liberalism plays a vital role in the US foreign policy and the ideology of American exceptionalism which supports its export can often put the US on a collision course with Russian interests. Similarly, US aspirations to global leadership as well as attempts at universalization of its values are both incompatible with Russian geopolitical objectives and can therefore represent an

obstacle to any significant improvement in relations. Finally, the issue of nuclear weapons and non-proliferation is a common security interest that the US shares with the Russian Federation, however, American ABM projects which are often pursued unilaterally represent a significant obstacle to any permanent and durable international cooperation.

The third chapter deals with the development of relations between the US and Russian Federation during the presidencies of G. Bush and V. Putin. The research goal was to analyze the this development in this given time period from a geopolitical perspective and determine how these nations dealt with the differences in their geopolitical objectives and strategies. Again, for sake of clarity, this chapter was divided into two subchapters, where each dealt with a perspective of individual country.

The first subchapter dealt with Russian perspective and the research question was what was the Russian geopolitical strategy towards the US during the first Putin's presidency. Its conclusion was that Putin's willingness to engage in international cooperation with the US was limited to issues of mutual interest and due to western criticism of Russian authoritarianism and lack of appreciation for Russian geopolitical interests, it can be argued that this willingness decreased steadily during the whole presidency of G. Bush.

The second subchapter dealt with the US perspective on relations with Russian Federation during the same time period. Its research question was what was the effect of the Bush Doctrine on bi-lateral relations. It was concluded the Bush Administration sought to unilaterally pursue American interests and behave like a global hegemon, while Russian Federation under president Putin sought to establish itself as an equal partner to the US with legitimate interests in its region. Furthermore, this lack of appreciation of Russian interests by the Bush Administration then led to estrangement of the two nations and deterioration in relations which reached its low during the war in Georgia.

The last chapter dealt with the political initiatives associated with the so-called "reset" in relations which took place during the time of presidencies of Obama and Medvedev. Its research goal was to describe the geopolitical interaction between the two nations during this time period, and analyze how did these policies deal with the differences between Russian and American geopolitical objectives and whether they managed to

overcome these obstacles and establish a meaningful and durable form of international cooperation. The general conclusion of this chapter was that while the politics of "reset" succeeded in restarting the dialogue between the two nations and facilitating cooperation on matters where their respective national interests converge, they nonetheless failed to resolve fundamental disagreements which stem from their differing geopolitical objectives and strategies. These include the American ABM defence or Russian support to Iran and Syria in order to contain the US power.

It can therefore be concluded, that a more favourable constellation of leaders during the Obama-Medvedev presidencies made it possible for the general atmosphere in relations between the US and Russian Federation to improve. The two nations engaged in constructive dialogue and institutionalized bi-lateral relations. On the other hand, the success of the "reset" in relations was achieved at a price of avoiding issues where Russian and American geopolitical interests differ, such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile defence. This and other issues have caused relations to deteriorate during the Bush-Putin presidencies and it is easily possible that same deterioration will occur again in case of any international crisis such as e.g.: an attack on Iran. Therefore, the hypothesis that US and Russia will not be able to achieve any significant and durable improvement in bi-lateral relations due to their differing geopolitical interests has been confirmed.

On the other hand, this work has some weaknesses which weaken the validity of the above conclusion. First of all, most of the literature used was relatively old and first published still during the 90s. This problem was partially solved by referring to some more recent publications as well as authors of articles which were recently published by various think-tanks. Additionally, not many primary sources were referred to and none of them was a document published by a Russian government agency. However, these sources were usually used to cite primary documents such as an international treaty between the US and Russian Federation and not to present an opinion of a single party. In case of further research, however, it would be prudent to include more balanced portfolio of primary sources. Additionally, as mentioned above in the introduction, this work avoided the question of actual influence of president Medvedev on Russian foreign policy due to the obscure nature of the Russian "tandemocracy" of Medvedev and Putin, who is widely believed to hold most of the power. Finally, in case of further research on the given topic, the author of this work would like to take into account a possible intervening variable, which is the rise of the influence of China, which could

create a geopolitical triangle between the US, Russian Federation, and the People's Republic and a whole new geopolitical reality of power balancing.



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