

# COMMON TRAITS AND DIFFERENCES IN RUSSIAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS

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## Abstract

When we discuss Russian-American relations we often speak about mutual dissatisfaction with their dynamics. Such assessments to some extent could be explained by artificially high expectations and by ungrounded beliefs that an alliance or strategic partnership between two powers could be a realistic perspective. Only after two decades of painful practice, foreign policy elites of both countries have finally freed themselves from illusions of “democratic solidarity”. A comparative analysis of Russian and American interests clearly demonstrates that they diverge substantially on many crucial issues and even directly contradict each other in certain areas. The fundamental difference remains in the attitudes of the parties to the future international order. The U.S. still pursues the advancement of the Western-oriented global system under its leadership. Russia, on the contrary, ever more assertively supports more equal relations among major global powers. Meanwhile, a solid ground for more constructive interaction between Russia and the U.S. could be found in joint efforts against common threats, primarily in the domain of global security (including, for example, fight against terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). The opportunities for productive dialogue on regional issues are less visible. The growing competition in the Post-Soviet area inhibits prospects of meaningful cooperation on a regional level. However, today even the existing potential for partnership is not fully employed, partly due to the strength of ideological biases and stereotypes. This opens a major field for political leadership and government officials of both countries to deal with. In this regard it is useful to study certain constructive proposals forwarded by American experts, supporting limited dialogue between Russia and the U.S. They reflect a more general landscape of Russian-American relations, where competition and cooperation are intertwined and this complex combination is a norm rather than a deviation.

## Keywords:

Russia; United States; Russian-American relations; world politics; international security; global and regional threats; national interest.

In the early 1990s amid the euphoria over the removal of the Iron Curtain, one of the leading Russian Americanists G. Arbatov predicted with confidence that Russian-American relations would always be challenging, bumpy and imbued with serious disagreements, while periods of rapprochement (*détente*) would be followed by periods of strained (or even tense) dialogue. This conclusion, which at that time surprised many, was based on the results of a comprehensive study of the USA and his personal experience as a maker of the foreign policy of the USSR. It might be due to the

seeming simplicity of the idea that it was dismissed and forgotten (just as American studies as a field of research).

Quite to the contrary, the idea that has been insistently championed is the one that the relations between the two countries can and should develop productively. Yet, advocates of this thesis hardly ever take the trouble to explain what content and format these relations should have. Ideas about an alliance or strategic and equal partnership have been expressed but have rarely been followed by an explanation of what is meant by them (in fact, such an explanation

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has almost never been given). Protagonists of a Russian-American rapprochement seldom paid attention to the fact that the USA, one of the founders of NATO and its outright leader that rallied a large number of allies, had not expressed any wish to ally itself with Russia. Over the past two decades Moscow, in its turn, has sought to re-establish relations with numerous partners, to re-formulate its national interests and to consolidate gradually its status as a great power.

The format and the agenda of bilateral relations were actively discussed in Russia and the USA throughout the 1990–2000s. Only two decades later the discussion has become less animated in both countries. Americans have ceased to pretend that they disinterestedly “love” the new Russia and “believe in it and its new ‘bright future’”, while Russia no longer tries to come through the tightly closed door and has made it a priority to strengthen its cooperation with other countries without abandoning the idea of constructive dialogue with the USA [Kremenyuk 2009; Shakleina 2002; 2012].

No one in Russia doubts the significance of relations with the USA. We are constantly reminded of that by politicians and experts. These relations are less important to the USA. However, Washington has said it time and again that it is interested in Russia’s involvement in tackling certain problems of world politics. Such assurances reflect both shared interests and persistent dissatisfaction with the results of interaction over issues of various levels. For instance, Russia is not satisfied with the scale of economic cooperation with the USA and would like to broaden and diversify their cooperation in the fields of outer space and information, in the creation of a global missile defence system and in the exchange of technological innovations. The USA would prefer Russia to be more involved in tackling some issues (for example, greater engagement in counter-terrorism, Russian military involvement in the Afghan campaign) and less active in other areas, for example, the Arctic. It is also irritated by Russia’s persistence in its opposition to the deployment of the American missile defence system in Europe and NATO enlargement. It is not content with Russia’s

ongoing efforts to structure the post-Soviet area and attempts to force its rivals out of it.

A natural question arising out of this state of affairs is *whether it is possible to reconcile Russian and American interests and, if so, how it can be achieved*. To answer it, the subject should be analysed along the following lines:

- where do American and Russian interests (global, regional, national) lie, which of them coincide and which ones differ;

- how are “our” and “their” interests interpreted by American and Russian experts and politicians;

- why do the stances of the two powers diverge in those cases when the commonality of interests is obvious.

### 1

When analysing the structure of the interests of the two countries, it is important to take into account a considerable *difference in the statuses* of Russia and the USA in modern world politics. The USA remains the global superpower, while Russia is just one of the leading world powers and its policies become globally significant only in regard to some issues (in contrast to the policies of the USSR). Russia maintains an active and quite often offensive stance towards many global problems but does not always obtain results that drastically change the situation.

When the potential for establishing order is not equal, it does not necessarily lead to a conflict of interests and irreconcilable disagreements. States with differing statuses can have common or converging interests, but apparently such a disparity cannot be ignored.

*At the global level*, the USA aims to establish a West-oriented global order (transformation of political, economic, ideological and juridical institutions of world adjustment) while retaining its leadership/hegemony. It strives for the democratisation of the world in general, of certain regions and countries (proceeding from the normative principle according to which democracies do not fight with each other). It is also interested in controlling the global security environment, in particular this is the aim of the gradual creation of the global missile defence system. All in all, the USA aspires to

retain its dominant role in responding to all global challenges, which implies not only being involved in the activities of the international community and initiating common decisions, but also preventing the decisions it disagrees with from being made and implemented.

*At the macro-regional level*, the USA advances plans to build transcontinental subsystems (Trans-Pacific, Trans-Atlantic, Pan-American) where it could assume the leadership. It intends to create new integration structures and join the existing regional associations taking leading positions in them. It is interested in developing a network of military bases abroad that would ensure access to key regions of the world and form a global system of military presence [Baykov 2011].

The national welfare, economic prosperity and security of the USA directly depend on whether global goals have been attained. Members of the American foreign policy elite state that only America's success in transforming the world according to the Western democracy model can guarantee that the high living standards and the high level of security achieved by the USA by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are preserved.

Unlike the USA, Russia's focus at the global level is on creating a global order where there would be no hegemony of one state or group of states and the majority of players (apart from criminal structures) would have freedom of manoeuvre for promoting their interests within the limits that should be set by the international law. It advocates collective actions aimed at strengthening global security without granting privileges or exclusive rights (regulatory, punitive and other rights) to any one country or organisation. Russia believes that the UN should continue to play its role in strengthening the international order; it seeks to be instrumental in resolving global problems (along with the security issues mentioned above), to take an active part in global economic associations and organisations, and to remain competitive and independent in some sectors of world economy (primarily in regard to the development of the world's energy industry and in a broader sense – natural resources development).

*At the macro-regional level*, Russia strives to consolidate the "Little Eurasia" subsystem uniting some of the post-Soviet states and pursues a policy aimed at neutralising rivalry from other players in the region. It is interested in building a regional security system engaging the leading countries of Central and East Asia (China, India, Iran). At the same time it counteracts the efforts made by the USA and NATO to establish key military bases and deploy elements of the missile defence system in Eurasia, primarily in CIS member states. Moscow remains orientated towards interaction within the framework of regional integration associations (EU, APEC, ASEAN) and consolidation of its positions in the Arctic and the Asia-Pacific region.

Russia's foreign policy focuses on strengthening its statehood and maintaining its status as a great power. It is designed to help to solve pressing domestic problems, first of all to implement successfully programmes of economic modernisation and to achieve higher positions in world economy. In the meantime, Russia has to ensure its own security amid growing instability and proneness to conflict in countries and regions near its borders (in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia).

Even the brief outline of Russian and American interests shows that they differ considerably in terms of their scope and content. The differences become more pronounced when the parties try to suggest their own interpretation of each other's interests. Almost all the goals on which Moscow bases its policy are more often than not perceived by American political scientists and politicians as attempts to stand in the way of the USA, to revive its sphere of influence (or even the "Soviet Empire") and as an endeavour to overpower its partners and blackmail them with resources and to usurp influence in certain regions (for example, in the Arctic where Russia has traditionally had considerable presence).

It is true that sometimes the USA acknowledges Russia's engagement in tackling some problems, for instance, the fight against international terrorism. However, even in this case the comment that it could do more is not infrequent. Russia's role in the fight against the

spread of nuclear weapons is not denied, but even in this regard some dissatisfaction with its efforts can be seen in American experts' papers and official representatives' statements. Russia receives rebukes for its unwillingness to back the US proposal on Global Zero, for showing too much indulgence to Iran's nuclear programme and adopting a tough stance towards further agreed reduction in nuclear arsenals. However, the authors of such comments do not explain the essence of the concept of Global Zero and whether it is feasible when other nuclear powers are reluctant to join the initiative. The issues of bilateral reductions in strategic offensive weapons are also taken out of the general context of relations among the leading nuclear powers.

Russia is critical of America's actions. It is concerned about the pressure exerted on many countries to influence their stance towards the development of the international political and economic order. It disagrees with the appropriation by the USA and NATO of the role of global leader responsible for the fate of the whole world and some peoples, hence having the right to force, to invade and to punish. Russia is not pleased with America's policy in respect of the former Soviet Republics, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. It does not accept the US-centric world order, forcible transformation of the world, interference in domestic affairs of some countries and attempts to push them along the path chosen by Washington.

We could further elaborate on the list of reciprocal rebukes<sup>1</sup>, but the examples given suffice to conclude that a deep divergence of interests of the two countries is evident in respect of almost the whole range of global and regional challenges.

It is not a tragedy. Relations can be forged even when interests differ. The problem is that the interests of the two countries do not only diverge, but they overlap and collide, which results in a greater rivalry and even opposition in their bilateral relations.

Russia's general strategy and its policy towards the USA should be planned with account for these divergences. This situation should not be regarded as a crisis or anomaly. Its comprehension is reflected in G. Arbatov's words: we have *relations* but they are complex, and we should have no illusions as to their "miraculous regeneration" in the foreseeable future, especially if Russia becomes stronger and acts with more confidence, initiative and vigour at the global and regional levels.

In making a realistic assessment of Russian-American relations, one more point should be considered in order to understand them better. It was voiced by T. Graham, a well-known American Sovietologist, in 2008. Although he acknowledged that Russia and the USA had no *common interests*, he admitted that cooperation was possible in view of *common threats* [Graham 2008]. In order to assess the validity of the statement, it is necessary to define more clearly the challenges that could bring the relations between the two countries to a new level.

## 2

Through comparison of the lists of threats declared by Russia and the USA we distinctly see a lot of common challenges *at the global level*. First of all, the two countries persist with their efforts to prevent a global conflict, especially one involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Such commonality of concerns also characterised the relations between the USSR and the USA. It has been the most dangerous threat for many decades already and can be avoided only through dialogue, concessions, reciprocal limitations, concerted actions and extremely careful policy on the part of either party. It is this really frightening threat that maintains stability, though negative one, in the bilateral relations.

However, Russia and the USA have different approaches to eliminating it. By abandoning the confrontation model of the cold war, suggesting the idea of renouncing the use of military force, calling for an end to the arms race,

<sup>1</sup>It would suffice to look at the reports by American think tanks for the period between 2006 and 2009 and some Russian papers in order to see how politicians and experts in international relations interpret the interests of either party.

for the elimination of nuclear weapons (this idea was advanced by President of the Soviet Union Gorbachev) and for the demilitarisation of international relations, the USSR (and later Russia) hoped that the USA would support its initiatives (in the late 1980s these expectations seemed valid [Breakthrough 1988]). But the ideas are still just ideas, and the 2000s and especially the 2010s witnessed the renewal of the arms race which was stimulated by the USA with NATO and which Russia had to join.

When the mightiest military power strives to secure its dominance and to be beyond the reach of other powers in terms of its military and technological development, increases its military budget and still holds to the idea of transforming the world with military means (a vivid example is the situation in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and Central Asia), other countries follow its lead. Consequently, mutual concerns grow in number. As C. Layne, a reputable American political scientist, writes, today we have only an illusion of peace but it does not exist in reality. The prospects of real peace are questionable, and one of the reasons for this is US policy [Layne 2006]<sup>2</sup>.

It is vital for Russia to maintain peace. Over the past century, it experienced two terrible wars and wants to make the world safer for itself. The statements that appear in American expert literature and say that Russia has willingly begun a new stage of military build-up are inaccurate. Its actions are to a large extent reactive and stem from developments along its borders and in the world in general.

The concerns widely held by American experts and ordinary Americans are those regarding the prospects of a large-scale regional or global conflict; they would like their government to be more circumspect in its policy [Fulbright 1966; Kegley et al. 1990; Mandelbaum 2010; Bacevich 2010]. However, for the moment Russia and the USA have a different view of this problem: they keep dialogue open and maintain limited interaction

while simultaneously modernising their armed forces.

Nuclear weapons reduction is also among the topical issues. The trend, which has been steadily developing, towards a stronger mutual interest in gradual WMD reduction has reached a stage when all the nuclear powers should get involved in the process. That has not been achieved yet, and the idea of Global Zero put forward by the USSR in the late 1980s and by the USA at present time is hardly likely to get support from China, India or Pakistan. It seems strange that many American politicians and experts claim that it is Russia in the first place that is reluctant to back the initiative. Even in this case where the two countries share both an interest and a threat, we are not together but apart. The failure of an American initiative is once again blamed on Russia.

A. Kuchins, a reputable American expert, directly says in one of his latest papers that Russia is of no help to the USA when it comes to the implementation of the Global Zero concept (it would be interesting to know who will be the helper). He notes that Russia is no longer needed either for dealing with the Iranian and Afghan issues as the USA manages without it. Consequently, in his opinion Putin can give nothing to Obama, and the incumbent US President is a pragmatic person and will not cooperate with Russia unless it is beneficial for his country. Kuchins does not deny, though, that Russia can be of use to the USA in addressing such global challenges as the rise of political Islam, global energy security, WTO activities and interaction within this organisation. It can also contribute to solving regional problems: to ensure security in East Asia and to contain China's growing influence<sup>3</sup>. The situation with the interests and threats shared by the USA and Russia seems to be very ambivalent.

The continued tendency to unprecedented American military build-up and the expansion of US politico-military and geopolitical presence in various regions of the world is condu-

<sup>2</sup>Although Layne wrote his book in 2006, at the very height of the US offensive policy, his ideas are still relevant.

<sup>3</sup>Critical Questions for 2013: Regional Issues. URL: [www.csis.org/publications/critical-questions-2013-regional-issues](http://www.csis.org/publications/critical-questions-2013-regional-issues).

cive to the spread of Russian-American controversies to new areas of world politics (the Arctic, outer space, the World Ocean, information space). In these areas the policy of penetration and of remaking spheres of influence poses new challenges to Russia and in the longer term threats to its national interests [Megatrends 2013].

The USA and Russia differently understand global threats in specific cases and consequently their responses would not be the same. Yet, the penetration of military technologies into outer space endangers the whole world; the militarization and uncontrolled use of maritime space also bring global problems<sup>4</sup>.

Russia has to take counter measures to protect its information space. It tries to persuade the USA to back international agreements setting rules for the information sphere but no considerable results have been reached yet [Smirnov 2012: 52-67].

Russia and the USA are both interested in resolving global problems beyond traditional security aspects, such as the degradation of ecosystems and global warming, illegal migration, criminal networks, including international terrorism, epidemics, catastrophes etc. But these problems cannot be solved even through a joint effort made by such powerful countries as the USA and Russia. These threats require collective actions of the most developed countries. However, not all the powers are active in dealing with them. For instance, China does not consider terrorism to be a threat that is worth pooling efforts with the USA and Russia. It also avoids being involved in the solution of a number of ecological problems as it does not intend to stop building up its industrial might. China is not very concerned about migration as it is mostly a source of migration, while the inflow of migrants is well controlled (China actively invites young high-

ly-qualified specialists from Russia as well). This also holds true for India and other countries where these global issues of concern are subordinated to domestic socioeconomic, ethnic and other problems. In this context Russia and the USA do not refuse to discuss even cooperation demonstrating how players of a really global level should act<sup>5</sup>.

### 3

While at the global level the potential for cooperation is significant, *at the regional and national levels* the interests of the two countries are poles apart: the USA hardly faces any direct territorial threats while they are numerous in case of Russia.

*At the macro-regional level*, the USA does not expect any direct danger from the actions of Latin American countries or still less from Canada, an American ally and NATO member. The typical problems for the region are the spread of drugs, illegal and legal migration, and deviations in the policy of some countries, including the anti-American bias (the “left turn” still governs the stance of a number of Latin American states).

A grave problem is posed by the growing self-sufficiency of Brazil and other states of the region, their projects to deepen mutual integration and their attempts to pursue an independent policy and to diversify their trade and economic relations. Brazil holds a special place in the South American subsystem. It is rising to the position of regional leader and is becoming one of the leading world powers that would eventually increase its contribution to world politics.

Latin American countries still have serious disagreements; therefore, it is difficult to forecast with certainty that Brazil will manage to rally an influential subsystem. However, its actions and the actions of its supporters in terms

<sup>4</sup>The latest exposures of US actions in the information sphere have shown that many countries face a real threat to their national security at all levels, from personal to military. China is also known to follow an aggressive policy of breaking information barriers of other countries.

<sup>5</sup>In previous papers the author ranked China and India among great powers; the events of 2012–2013 showed, however, that such high hopes may be unjustified. It is entirely possible that the magnitude of socioeconomic challenges in such populous countries can hold them back from reaching a truly global level and will not allow them to hold really key positions when it comes to settling issues about the global order and resolving large-scale world problems.

of regional integration have not yet allowed the USA to implement successfully its plans to build a Pan-American subsystem.

Nevertheless, even a failure in this respect is unlikely to pose a threat to the USA because America's economic might and its position in world politics are quite solid. The USA and Canada have almost no differences. The growing competition in the Arctic is unlikely to make them fierce opponents.

*At the macro-regional level*, the USA and Russia have hardly any areas of common interest. Russia's presence and influence in Latin America are visible but are no menace to the US positions. Moreover, it is far less involved in regional processes as compared to China and the EU. As to Canada, it shows solidarity with its neighbour's policy and becomes a serious opponent of Russia in competitive battles in the Arctic.

The international situation around Russia is significantly more complicated. At the macro-regional level, it faces considerable risks in Asia<sup>6</sup>. They are mostly of regional origins but are partly related to the influence exerted by external players and trends (for instance, the global trend, with the USA at the helm, towards democratisation and transformation of countries). Russian and American interests, therefore, quite often collide.

While for the USA Asia is a remote territory, for Russia it is part of the continent that houses more than half of its territory, vital strategic facilities and natural resources. Any shift in Asia is intensely felt in Russia. In this respect risks of macro-regional nature here coincide with threats to its national security.

Russia is concerned about the unstable political and economic situation in many countries of Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. Although the threat is quite remote yet, in the longer term immediate threats are really possible. In this unstable environment Russia has to assume responsibility for a lot of security problems because most parties to conflicts are either unable or unwilling to settle them.

The main flow of drugs, criminality, terrorists and illegal migrants from Central Asia is directed towards Russia and represents an immediate menace to it. This set of problems worries it more than the other leading players, though the existing threats are rooted in global trends. It has to bear itself the main burden of the fight against drug trafficking, criminality, terrorism and migration. Over the past years, there has been a dramatic increase in diseases caused by viruses and in epidemics in Russia, and this is a threat to the nation's health. One of the reasons is the inflow of illegal migrants, and it can grow due to the destabilisation of countries of North Africa and the Middle East.

If we take the post-Soviet area, dangers and threats are also quite significant here. The countries of this region, most of which are CIS members, mean a lot to Russia. We define this regional entity – “Little Eurasia” – as an individual subsystem [Megatrends 2013: 283-298]. Its centre is still Russia having the highest organisational potential and showing a great degree of creativity in building integration structures and putting forward integration projects. It is not the only field of action for Russia. It is trying to establish a wide range of interactions with the EU (not quite successfully yet), with cooperative associations in the Asia-Pacific region (ASEAN, APEC) and works within the framework of the BRICS.

In addition, Little Eurasia is a special region. It comprises countries that have historical ties to Russia and still share with it transport networks, grids, the labour market, the language of communication and also common borders that are transparent to a large extent. Russia continues to provide economic support to post-Soviet states and assists them in ensuring security. Although each of the CIS countries pursues an independent multi-vector policy and interacts with various partners, including the USA, Russia remains a priority for them. It seeks to use this situation for the sake of its interests, and that prompts criticism from the USA.

At the regional level, there is a danger for Russia that the integration associations initi-

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that in Russian literature and documents two notions are used: danger and threat, while Americans reduce everything to threats and accordingly interpret Russian doctrines and assessments.

ated by it may decline in importance, its positions may become weaker and it may be outplayed by other stronger players. The American politico-academic community is still dominated by critical views of post-Soviet integration. Its members are open about their willingness to take this regional leadership away from Russia and to fracture the existing associations. However, hardly anybody wonders what would happen in this case to the separated post-Soviet countries of Central Asia. And the future of the Transcaucasian states and post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe, which under the American elite's plans should eventually join the EU and NATO, does not seem clear-cut and serene because these countries would bring with them an overwhelming burden of socioeconomic and geopolitical problems.

Russia's latest initiative to create a Eurasian Economic Union has received criticism from the USA. Members of the American expert community say that it is Russia's new move aimed at re-establishing its "imperial control" over the post-Soviet area. It is postulated that this step jeopardises regional stability, undermines the economic and political freedom of the countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and hinders the development of their relations with other countries. The US leadership is recommended to take serious steps in order to intensify its policy at "the heart of Eurasia" after its withdrawal from Afghanistan, not to leave this territory to Russia or China and not to allow the Eurasian Union to block trade with other countries.

The integration initiative launched by Moscow in the region is regarded as a projection of Russia's soft power that will be backed by the military component of the CSTO (an organisation in which Russia is the strongest power). In general, the Eurasian Union is seen as a project that should be fought against, as a menace to the implementation of the policy of the EU and the USA. It is certain that with this

attitude the two powers will have no common interests in this field [Cohen 2013]<sup>7</sup>.

It is difficult to expect that Russia's rivals playing in the post-Soviet field will appreciate Russia's moves aimed at protecting its national interests near its borders. But in the modern world almost all the countries strive to integrate and, whenever possible, to obtain the most favourable conditions for themselves, while preserving maximum room for manoeuvre. It is an ambition of the USA, China, Brazil, the EU countries, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. It is a natural process of competition-based interaction at the global and regional levels. Yet, nor is the USA pleased with China's actions in the Asia-Pacific region, Central Asia, Latin America, Africa and towards Iran; and it does not conceal that it is going to look for ways of neutralising and counteracting it, through interaction as well.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation also constantly comes under attack from experts. Its activity is really controversial and does not yet fully correspond to the interests and plans of its founders. Nevertheless, it fulfils certain tasks: it brings together some post-Soviet countries and China, which makes it possible to retain a platform for dialogue, though on a limited range of issues. Whether its status will improve depends not least on an increase in its membership; however, the outcome of SCO enlargement could be unfavourable to Russia and China which actively opposes accession of other countries to the organisation<sup>8</sup>. So far, Mongolia, India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan have received the status of observers and Turkey has been granted the dialogue partner status. A. Fenenko, a Russian political scientist, believes that the USA can get access to SCO documents with the help of its members Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, as well as the observers Turkey and India that are orientated towards the USA. As a result, the USA, which does not have an official status, is able to

<sup>7</sup>The point of view of A. Cohen, an expert from the Heritage Foundation, is quite typical of many political scientists and politicians.

<sup>8</sup>At different times the issue of granting the SCO dialogue partner or observer status to the USA was raised. There were few supporters of this move in the USA, and the main opponent was China.



weaken the leading role of Russia and China in the SCO [Fenenko 2013: 420-421].

America's rhetoric and actions in general run counter to Russia's interests and hamper the functioning of integration structures in Eurasia. However, Russia should continue to act and move forward because not only Russia experiences difficulties but the USA as well. Moreover, 20 years of America's unprecedentedly active policy have produced results that are not altogether encouraging. What is evident is that the USA has made grave miscalculations in its attempts to regulate world politics and that it is unwilling and unable to deal with the negative socioeconomic and political consequences of its efforts to transform countries and regions.

#### 4

Late in 2012 leading experts of the Carnegie Endowment prepared a report for the Obama administration entitled "Global Ten: Challenges and Opportunities for the President in 2013" [Mathews 2013]. It contains an analysis of the main challenges to be met by the USA within the next four years. They include domestic financial and social challenges; Afghanistan (and the need to avoid repercussions of the catastrophic failure of America's policy in this country); the Iranian nuclear threat; a new great-power relationship with China; consequences of the "Arab awakening"; the situation in the energy sector; the creation of a cooperative missile defence system; new relations with India; re-energising democracy promotion and US-China security cooperation.

How the USA will address all these issues will influence, among other things, US-Russian relations. It is vitally important to Russia what results America's actions in Afghanistan will have and what the situation will be like after the withdrawal of its troops; Russia is one of the main players in the energy sector and is not indifferent to the US policy of increasing oil and shale gas production. Russia

is developing special relations with China and India and calls them its strategic partners, but they are in the spotlight of US policy, which cannot but be a matter of concern to Russia. Ongoing democracy promotion, of which one of the report co-authors T. Carothers writes, cannot be left unattended either since the political scientist once again mentions Russia as a nondemocratic power and the US leadership's stance on this issue is unlikely to change<sup>9</sup>. Finally, the Russian factor is still significant for the discussion of missile defence issues.

No other tasks are set because Russia itself is not considered to be a priority, and therefore the relations with it are not regarded as worthy of great strategic elaboration. But if American politicians deem it possible to act in accordance with the scheme devised as far back as the 1990s and mostly counteract with various intensity, Russia has to continue to be very attentive to all the steps taken by the USA in world and regional politics.

Proponents of limited interaction who are against linking major issues of the bilateral relations agenda (strategic nuclear weapons cuts and missile defence, Syria) to issues like the Snowden affair believe that the USA should continue its dialogue with Russia. It is essential both to international and American security. Adherents of this approach note that the American leadership understands that America's capabilities of influencing the Russian leadership are not limitless and that no persuasion, threat or deal can guarantee Russia's agreement.

The political scientist C. Welt, for example, recommends assessing Russia's moves in accordance with the bilateral relations context. For instance, in the Snowden affair one should not forget the conduct of Hong Kong and China, and later Amnesty International, many countries of the world (including European ones) and a great part of American society that did not side with the USA leadership. C. Welt believes that it is important to take into account the viewpoint of Congress that does not

<sup>9</sup>The evidence of that is not only the fact that the Magnitsky Act was passed but also various statements made by members of American Congress about the boycott of the Sochi Olympics over the Snowden affair. The issue of democracy on the agenda of Russian-American relations will remain unchanged.

endorse the administration's initiative for strategic nuclear weapons cuts, especially unilaterally (if no agreement is reached with Russia) and takes a harshly critical stance towards many issues of interaction with Russia. In other words, all the blame for difficulties in reaching agreements should not be shifted onto Russia alone [Welt 2013].

According to a group of political scientists, including C. Welt, A. Kuchins, J. Collins, A. Stent and other reputable experts that are close to the ruling administration, despite all the mutual discontent and disagreements Russia remains an important world player and a partner that the USA needs for addressing a number of security issues. It is suggested that attention should be focused on positive facts: the continuation of the dialogue between the Russian and US Presidents, for example, within G8 and G20, the work of the bilateral committee headed by the Prime Minister and the Vice President, the continuation of the talks on missile defence, counter-terrorism and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Proponents of constructive bilateral relations believe that this positive agenda should be treated irrespective of Russia's stance on the Snowden affair.

Indeed, at the global level the USA and Russia have very much in common and could work together in a fruitful way countering threats of international terrorism, reducing armaments, fighting against WMD proliferation, exerting influence on such countries as North Korea and Pakistan, countering piracy and reducing risks of major conflicts and escalation of civil wars. It would not be right to say that no success has been achieved. There is no threat of a global conflict or military clash of another type between the two countries. They continue to reduce strategic offensive weapons and do not abandon the talks despite their

disagreements over missile defence and NATO enlargement. They work together to settle the situation in Afghanistan, fight against terrorism, piracy and drug business and address other issues; they pursue cooperation in space research and in the work of the ISS. All that is a stock of matters for positive Russian-American interaction in the future.

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In November 2013 diplomatic relations between Russia (the USSR at the moment of their establishment) and the USA turn 80. Twenty years have already passed since the end of the cold war. What results have the two countries achieved over these decades?

The two countries continue to have a high level of interaction due to the fact that Russia preserves the status of a leading world power, as well as surpassing in some respects China and India. But in their essence the relations are two-tier: *competition* over many global, macro-regional and regional challenges is coupled with *competitive and cooperative interaction* in regard to a limited range of problems, primarily security. The general atmosphere of the relations is subject to the logic that has already become traditional: the phase of competition/opposition gives place to limited dialogue and engagement which are again followed by competition/opposition.

Such dynamics are a norm for Russian-American relations and are not worth fighting over. The historical paradigm of the relations will exist as long as the two powers – the United States of America and the Russian state – exist. Both Washington and Moscow understand this state of affairs. It has a positive impact on the development of the relations. It is a guarantee that there will be fewer illusions and more realism and pragmatism in bilateral interaction.

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