



# After the “Reset”: Policy Recommendations for the July Moscow Summit and Beyond

## Nine Policy Recommendations for the Obama Administration

By Samuel Charap July 2009

The Obama administration’s approach to Russia has thus far been encapsulated in a catch phrase: the “reset button.” The reset—an attempt to improve the toxic atmosphere in U.S.-Russia relations that characterized the final months of the Bush presidency—has been a relative success. It spurred a sober examination of many important issues, allowing policymakers on both sides to determine where they can cooperate and where they have to agree to disagree.

The administration has the opportunity to consolidate the improvements that resulted from the reset at the summit between President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev in Moscow on July 6-8. It should consider the following nine recommendations as it prepares for the summit and in the months thereafter.

- **Reviving negotiations on the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.** CFE was a cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security until the Russians pulled out in 2007. The administration should try to revive negotiations; start up the confidence building measures built into the treaty; and use the CFE negotiations as a platform to begin discussions on a new Euro-Atlantic security architecture.
- **Cooperating with Russia on climate change and energy efficiency.** The United States should pursue a proactive stance on these issues, since Russia is the third largest emitter and one of the most energy-intensive economies in the world. The Obama administration should more actively engage Russia on the successor to the Kyoto climate agreement; offer capacity building expertise for establishing an emissions trading market in Russia; work with Russian scientists and the Russian government on energy efficiency in industrial sectors; and provide technical advice for establishing an Energy Star-like program for conservation on the end-user level.
- **Demonstrating commitment to Ukraine and Georgia.** The Obama administration should complement the “reset button” with a “recommit button” in U.S. relations with Russia’s neighbors, particularly Ukraine and Georgia. The administration should demonstrate, with specific, concrete steps, that a better relationship with Moscow does not entail abandoning our partners in the region. These steps should include working with our allies on Euro-Atlantic integration; assisting internal reforms; and encouraging Russia to adhere to its commitments, such as the ceasefire agreement ending the August 2008 war with Georgia.

- **Facilitating Russia's accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.** The administration should facilitate Russia's membership in the OECD. Membership in this organization could serve as a strong stimulus for economic reform and the development of the rule of law. Specifically, the U.S. government should provide expert assistance during the accession process; work with OECD member-states on demonstrating some flexibility on the most stringent conditions for membership; and reconsider the precondition that Russia be a WTO member if it were to fulfill all other requirements.
- **Forging a new democracy and human rights agenda.** The democracy and human rights agenda in U.S. Russia policy has reached a dead-end. Yet we should not give up on promoting our fundamental values. The administration should work with the Russian government on issues where our positions converge, such as President Medvedev's recent anticorruption and rule-of-law initiatives; promote linkages between civil society groups in our two countries; and find the appropriate balance between public and private diplomacy on democracy and human rights.
- **Finding ways to cooperate with Russia in the former-Soviet region.** The Obama administration should seek to work with Russia in the region and demonstrate to policymakers in Moscow that U.S.-Russia interaction there need not be a zero-sum game. The administration can help mitigate this perceived competition dynamic and further its goal of bolstering security in Afghanistan by applying for "dialogue partner" status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—a regional grouping that includes Russia, several Central Asian states, and China. We should engage with the SCO counterterrorism structures and consider joining its counternarcotics efforts in the future.
- **Developing solutions to Arctic-related challenges.** The Arctic is emerging as a key locus of both potential competition and cooperation between Russia and the United States. The administration should ensure that the United States can compete effectively in the region by pushing for ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea and recapitalizing the U.S. icebreaker fleet, and create avenues for bilateral cooperation on scientific exploration and environmental issues, including building a jointly managed international park in the Bering Strait.
- **Engaging directly with Russian society.** The United States should make an effort to counter anti-Americanism and misperceptions about U.S. intentions. President Obama can begin this process by conducting a town hall-style meeting during his July visit to Moscow along the lines of his appearance in Strasbourg, France in April. Obama's personal diplomacy has a major effect on popular attitudes toward the United States, as the Strasbourg event and his speech in Cairo have demonstrated.
- **Building a legislative compromise to repeal the Jackson-Vanik amendment.** This legislation was originally intended to support freedom of emigration from the Soviet Union and was an important policy tool when it passed in 1975. But now it serves little purpose in bilateral relations. Its repeal would allow the United States and Russia to focus on critical issues such as arms control, nonproliferation, and Iran instead of rehashing Cold War-era disputes. The administration can build a legislative compromise to repeal the amendment by addressing Congress's concerns. Specifically, it should propose provisions to protect U.S. businesses against violations of bilateral trade agreements; create a new government body exclusively devoted to human rights and rule-of-law issues in Russia and a task force to push for restitution of archival materials important to a U.S. religious group; and add additional reporting requirements on these issues.

See the full report, "[After the 'Reset': A Strategy and New Agenda for U.S. Russia Policy](#)," for more details.