

**Senate Committee on Foreign Relations**  
**Senator John F. Kerry**  
**Opening Statement for Hearing on Prospects for Engagement with Russia**  
**March 19, 2009**

In recent years, America's relationship with Russia has reached arguably its lowest and least productive phase in two decades. President Obama has spoken of the need to "re-set" US-Russian relations. I agree wholeheartedly. While it is not yet clear what this new chapter in our relations can bring, it is clear that our common interests demand that we try to work together more constructively.

Our differences are real, but so too is our potential to cooperate and even lead together on global challenges. From Iran's nuclear program to human rights in Burma to our presence in Afghanistan, there is scarcely an issue of global importance which would not benefit from greater cooperation with Russia. Our challenge will be to ensure that, to the extent possible, we enlist Russia to act not just as a great power but also as a global partner.

This hearing will explore what we can hope to accomplish through engagement; what motivates Russia's behavior; how we can best respond to our continued disagreements and how we can achieve greater cooperation on the issues where our interests converge.

Nowhere is our shared challenge greater—or shared leadership more vital—than in confronting the threat posed by nuclear weapons and nuclear terrorism. The statesman sitting next to me, Senator Lugar, along with Sam Nunn, sounded the alarm early on that Russia's unsecured nuclear materials posed a major threat. Nunn-Lugar was the start of a visionary initiative to dismantle excess weapons and secure dangerous materials. It sparked long-term cooperation with Russia that has paid major dividends for national and international security alike. We need more of that kind of vision now to re-build relations with Russia.

We ushered in the nuclear age together—and together America and Russia now bear a special responsibility to dramatically reduce our arsenals. We must make a serious joint effort to move the world in the direction of zero nuclear weapons—with the recognition that, while the ultimate goal remains distant, every prudent step we take in that direction will make us safer.

In fact, America and Russia can accomplish a great deal together on arms control right now. We need to reach agreement on a legally-binding successor to the START treaty, and President Obama has committed to pursuing these negotiations with the intensity they deserve. With START set to expire in December, we must make it a priority to strike a deal—or at least construct a bridge—before we lose the verification regime that has been vital to maintaining each country's understanding of the other's nuclear force posture. I am convinced we can go well below the levels established by the Moscow Treaty. We should set a near-term goal of no more than 1,000 operationally deployed warheads—and this can be done in a way that increases our national security, rather than diminishing it. Obviously we must pursue such a goal in close consultation with our allies and our military, but that level, in my view, is more than enough to deter aggression.

Vital to our efforts toward a nuclear free world will be a greater effort from Russia to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. The president is right to open the door to direct engagement with Iran. But it is imperative that we back a strategy of engagement with a commitment to more effective multilateral sanctions if negotiations don't bring progress. To do this effectively, we need Russia on board.

We must also think carefully about missile defense. I have serious reservations regarding the rapid deployment of a largely untested missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic—and I intend to examine this closely. Many Russian leaders see these missile defense sites as somehow directed at them. In fact, they are not. But Russia can minimize our need for missile defense in Europe by helping to convince Iran to change its nuclear and missile policies; and both Russia and the United States can put more effort into jointly developing an effective defense against medium- and intermediate-range missiles.

Our former colleagues in the Senate, Gary Hart and Chuck Hagel, are the co-authors of an insightful new report from the Commission on U.S. Policy toward Russia that explores in depth many of these same avenues for greater cooperation. This report warrants serious consideration as we look for the way forward with Russia.

Of course, we will continue to have our differences. Russia's neighbors have a right to choose their own destinies, and America and the world community will continue to support their sovereignty and self-determination. Georgia has a right to its territorial integrity. I visited Georgia last December, and I shared the concern of many over the failure to fully implement the cease fire agreement, as well as the continued lack of access for international monitors in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russia was wrong to manipulate the flow of energy to Ukraine for political purposes, and we should support Ukraine's democratically-elected government. We also have genuine concerns about Russia's troubling backsliding on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

As we consider the prospects for a new era in relations, we must understand the dynamics at work in Russia. This includes Russia's politics and its economy, particularly the impact of the steep drop in the price of oil, the decline in Russia's foreign exchange reserves, and the 67% decline in Russia's stock market. I'm eager to hear witnesses' thoughts on how that will affect both Russian foreign policy and our prospects for better engagement.

Constructive relations and greater mutual confidence with Russia undoubtedly be a challenge, but the mutual benefits are clear and compelling. In the twentieth century, America and the Soviet Union expended incalculable resources on their rivalry. The days when Moscow stood on the opposite side of our every global crisis have passed. Now we must enlist Moscow to be on our side whenever possible in meeting the challenges of a new century.

We have three distinguished panelists today. Stephen Sestanovich negotiated directly with the Kremlin as Ambassador-at-large and Advisor to the Secretary at State during the Clinton Administration. Andrew Kuchins, Director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at CSIS, is the author of an interesting and timely report entitled "Pressing the Reset Button on U.S. – Russian Relations." Ariel Cohen is a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation. I look forward to their testimony.

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