
THE IDEA OF A US-RUSSIAN 'RESET' IN THE RHETORIC OF POLITICAL LEADERS

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Abstract

This article aims to elucidate the conceptualisation of a 'reset' in US-Russian relations through the analysis of the public rhetoric of political leaders. The analysis is based on the theory of social constructivism, which accentuates the significance of rhetorical analysis in ascertaining the ideas constituting the basis of foreign policy making. A comparison of perceptions is implemented by applying the methods of thematic content analysis and discourse analysis. Four categorical dimensions that focus on the attitudes of political leaders towards the reasons, interests, challenges and expectations of the 'reset' are identified. The conclusions of this research reveal categories and subjects where the main divergences and similarities of perceptions emerge.

Introduction

In recent years, relations between the USA and Russia have been multifaceted. Post-Cold War political dialogue had been quite courteous, but during the tenure of Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush relations between Washington and Moscow plunged to their lowest point since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first gust of the winds of change blew when newly elected US President Barack Obama in 2009 introduced the idea of *reset*, which was enthusiastically greeted in both states. However, previous experience with failed *detente* fostered dubious opinions and thus academic discussions questioning the intent of such project.

According to political analysts, the announcement of *reset* was just another form of zero-sum game: neither the USA nor Russia desire a partnership based on the principles of equality (Stephen F. Cohen, 2011; Dmitri K. Simes, 2009, T. Graham, 2011, S. LeVine, 2010). American idealism also received harsh criticism:

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the implementation of *reset* cannot be based on sentimental illusions of an altered approach in Russia, but only on cold-blooded calculations of American interests (A. Wood, 2009; S. Blank, 2009; S. Charat, 2011). An unduly vague perception of the idea was identified as a stumbling block as well: instead of setting the main principles of co-operation, Obama merely sketched an indefinite image with strategic armament questions in the epicentre (M. Lagon, 2010; J.E. Keating, 2010; V. Belaeff, 2009).

Hence, the scenarios of US-Russian *reset* have mostly been designed around realistic foreign policy-making motives, whereas political rhetoric analysis focusing on the background of foreign policy formation has been omitted in academic works. The relevance of political rhetoric in international relations is reflected by the theory of social constructivism. According to constructivists, reality is not defined by nature but constructed through social interactions, where language plays a substantial role in generating new meanings.¹ On-going, regular dialogue contributes to the building of a common worldview, which allows each side to more accurately understand the intentions, interpretations and expectations of the other.² In international politics, rhetoric may therefore have causal impact: the ideas it conveys become part of the common understanding of the issue such that policy actors cannot act without addressing its concerns, even if they do not agree with the policy.³

Thus, the exchange of meanings constructs a common view of specific issues, enabling foreign policy goals to be achieved more effectively. In the case of the USA and Russia however, since the *reset* button was initially pushed, it has not been clear how the essence of renewed relations is conceived by each state. Therefore, *the aim* of this research is to compare how the idea of *reset* is conceptualised in the rhetoric of both US and Russian political leaders. Two main *objectives* are formulated to accomplish this goal: 1) to examine in what way political leaders define the reasons, interests, obstacles and expectations of the *reset*; 2) to compare their conceptions, thereby identifying in which categories (reasons, interests, obstacles, expectations) the views coincide the most and in which they diverge the most.

¹ Berger P., T. Luckmann, *Socialinis tikrovės konstravimas: žinojimo sociologijos traktatas [The Social Construction of Reality: a Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge]* Vilnius: Pradai, 1999, 39.

² Muller H., 'International Relations as Communicative Action', // Karin M. Fierke and Knud Erik Jorgensen (eds) *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation*, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001, pp. 160–78.

³ Schmidt Vivien A & Claudio M Radaelli 'Policy Change and Discourse in Europe: Conceptual and Methodological Issues' // *West European Politics*, 27:2 2004, 183–210.

These objectives are implemented by applying the methods of content and discourse analysis. Thematic perspective of content analysis, which is considered the most appropriate when the target is to ascertain the ideas and views of the speaker, was chosen at the first stage of research for a quantitative comparison of beliefs. Four categories that are analogous to the objectives (*reasons, interests, obstacles, expectations*) were deductively set before carrying out the research. The marking units or themes (e.g. nuclear disarmament, increase in bilateral trade, spread of democracy, etc.) were inductively assigned to the given categories. The calculation of marking units used simple binary coding to identify whether the marking unit exists in the text or not. Discourse analysis was employed at the second stage of analysis for a deeper examination of beliefs: to investigate linguistic instruments prevailing in the rhetoric and political circumstances influencing the speaking manner of political actors.

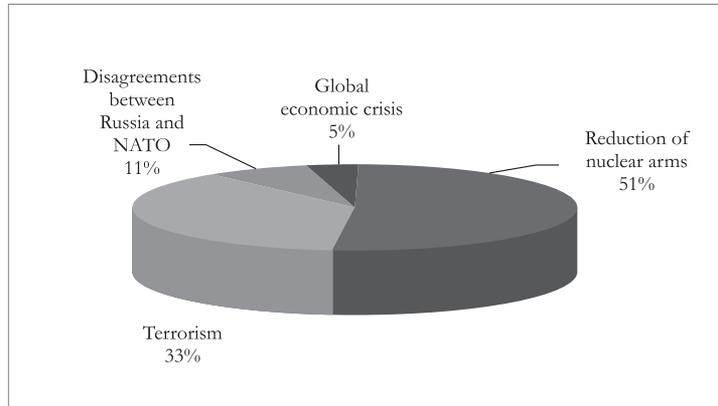
Criteria for text selection: 1) the period: February 2009 – February 2012; 2) the sources: official websites of Russian and US political institutions; 3) the authors of statements: US President *Barack Obama*, Vice President *Joe Biden*, and Secretary of State *Hillary Clinton* and Russian President *Dmitry Medvedev*, Prime Minister *Vladimir Putin*, and Foreign Affairs Minister *Sergey Lavrov*; 4) format of texts: statements at bilateral meetings, press conferences, international conferences, and interviews; 5) texts in English (official translations of Russian texts); 6) the keyword used in the search—*reset*;

Fifty-one texts were selected. Official websites of US institutions contained 32 statements related to *reset*, while the remarks of Russian authorities were included in 19 texts. The majority of statements were made at press conferences and bilateral meetings, with Clinton and Medvedev acting as the most common speakers.

1. The rhetoric of US political leaders

1.1. Reasons

US political leaders exclude security factors as those that most influence the initiation of *reset*. According to Graph 1, the reduction of nuclear arms (51%) and terrorism (33%) are the most prevailing topics, while the effects of the global economic crisis are considered to least affect the renewal of relations.

Graph 1. Reasons

Alongside these factors, US President Obama indicates the improvement of bilateral relations as the prerequisite for altering the perception of a great power: 'In 2009, a great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries. The days when empires could treat sovereign states as pieces on a chessboard are over.... The pursuit of power is no longer a zero-sum game—progress must be shared'.⁴

Obama contradicts the most common approaches towards US-Russian relations. Although the USA and Russia are still identified in his statement as great powers or even empires, he alludes that the use of instruments of 'hard power', most often belonging to the notion of 'great power', is obsolete. Major powers do not behave with fragile states as they would with chess pieces. They are entrusted with a much greater mission: to allot prosperity they generate to others. The manner of Obama's discourse is not novel: since the beginning of his tenure, Obama has been composing an image of America as a returning international leader. In his inaugural address, he stated, 'America is a friend of each nation, and every man, woman and child who seeks a future of peace and dignity'.⁵ The theme 'we are ready to lead once more'⁶ is eminent in resetting relations with Russia as well.

⁴ Obama B. 'Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation' <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/REMARKS-BY-THE-PRESIDENT-AT-THE-NEW-ECONOMIC-SCHOOL-GRADUATION/> 12 08 2012

⁵ Obama B. 'President Barack Obama's Inaugural Address' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address>> 12 08 2012.

⁶ *Ibid.*

The notion that the great powers are the generators of global sustainability remains when negotiating specific bilateral questions: 'We can and should cooperate to secure loose nuclear weapons and materials to prevent their spread, to renew the verification procedures in the START Treaty ... The United States and Russia have a special obligation to lead the international effort to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world'.⁷

US Vice President Biden implies that the reduction of nuclear weaponry is not limited to a bilateral dimension, but is a question of global concern: Russia and the U.S. not only *can*, but indeed *must* cooperate when tackling this issue. Thus, calling the reduction of nuclear weapons 'a special obligation' of the USA and Russia, Biden returns to the concept of two superpowers setting the prevailing *modus operandi* in the international arena.

Obama also calls the renewal of American and Russian relations vital for a safer planet:

A reporter who was there at that time, all those years ago, said, 'If there is a fine, splendid world in the future, it will largely be because the United States and Russia get on well together. If it is in trouble, it will be because they don't get on well. It's as simple as that.' ... But 65 years later, it's still as simple as that. Our countries are more secure and the world is safer when the United States and Russia get on well together.⁸

Obama reveals that nothing has changed since the Cold War; nowadays the prosperity of nations still leans upon the relations between the USA and Russia. It can be noticed that Obama does not refrain from using the term 'world', thereby strengthening the notion of interstate relations as a question of global interest. The USA and Russia are envisaged as the *micro* world, inevitably affecting the *macro* level.

Therefore, the discourse of the US speakers demonstrates that the reasons for the US–Russian *reset* are seen in a context that is wider than merely negotiations on bilateral questions: harmonious partnership is assumed to be an indispensable prerequisite for a more secure global presence. The renewal of bilateral dialogue is also apprehended as the renaissance of great powers in a new epoch and in a modern form.

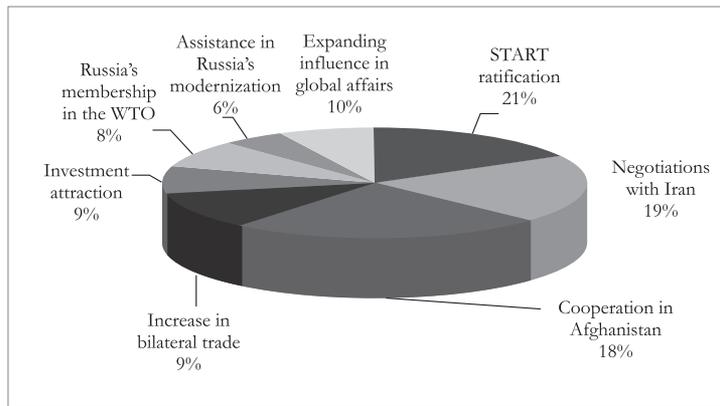
⁷ Biden J. 'Remarks by Vice President Biden at 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy' <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/RemarksbyVicePresidentBidenat45thMunichConferenceonSecurityPolicy/> 12 08 2012.

⁸ Obama B. 'Remarks by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia at Joint Press Conference' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-medvedev-russia-joint-press-conference>> 12 08 2012.

1.2. Interests

In the discourse of US political leaders, security interests greatly preponderate over others. START ratification (21%) and issues regarding Iran (19%) and Afghanistan (18%) are the topics that prevail most often, whilst Russia's modernisation is not a predominant American interest in resetting bilateral relations.

Graph 2. Interests



The distribution of data in Graph 2 also shows that one of the most common interests of the USA is the expansion of influence in global affairs. The political leaders of the USA frequently assert the aspiration to return America and Russia to the role of great powers: 'Russia and the United States have not only the largest arsenals in the world, but we have been the stewards of nuclear weapons. Other countries may have them, but people look to us to set the tone and to provide the leadership'.⁹ It is often stressed that the renewal of bilateral co-operation is essential for the development of all countries; foreign policy trends in the USA and Russia directly affect the course of policy in other states.

The US Secretary of State Clinton's allusions to the Cold War once again indicate that the major players in today's world are the same countries: 'There are many people not only in Russia and the United States, but, literally, throughout the world who depend upon the ability of the U.S. and Russia to work together.

⁹ Clinton H. 'Secretary Clinton's Interview With Ekho Moskvoy Radio' <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/10/130546.htm>> 16 08 2012.

... And many of the challenges facing the world today can only be addressed through greater cooperation between Russia and the United States'.¹⁰

The secretary's frequent use of the third person ('people look to us', 'there are many people not only in Russia and the United States ... who depend upon') consolidates this position: the status of a leader is not *self-constructed*, but acclaimed by *others*. Such acknowledgement gives the USA and Russia additional impetus to take on the mission of 'saving the world' and the mandate of contending with modern challenges.

Economic interests, the increase in the volume of trade and investments (Graph 2), are also noted by state authorities. The full-fledged membership of Russia in the World Trade Organization is jointly declared as one US concern: 'On the WTO, first of all, I emphasized to President Medvedev, I emphasized to his entire delegation, and I now want to emphasize to the Russian people, we think it is not only in the interests of the Russian Federation, but in the interests of the United States and in the interest of the world that Russia joins the WTO'.¹¹

Obama highlights that the USA is positive about the benefits not only at a unilateral or bilateral level but also at a multilateral level. The unflinching intonation of Obama ('I emphasized', 'now I want to emphasize') reinforces an impression that the USA is tenacious about Russia's membership, also hinting that reset should accelerate Russia's admittance to the WTO.

Unlike Obama, Vice President Biden, talking about other economic matters, is quite stern:

I'm not here to tell Russia what to do. But I know from my experience, almost every country I visit, particularly smaller ones, not great countries like Russia, the first thing they'll tell me is, can you encourage, Mr. Vice President, American businesses to invest here. And there's the same answer: Get your system right. Don't make it a gamble. Have certainty.¹²

Biden makes it perfectly clear that Russia should not expect implicit assistance in emboldening American business to invest to the Russian market. The vice president claims he is not there to preach to Russia about appropriate behaviour, even though his phrases are instructive: 'from my experience', 'there's the same

¹⁰ Clinton H. 'Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov' <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/03/138531.htm>> 16 08 2012.

¹¹ Obama B. 'Remarks by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia at Joint Press Conference' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-president-medvedev-russia-joint-press-conference>> 16 08 2012.

¹² Biden J. 'Vice President Biden's Remarks at Moscow State University' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/10/vice-president-bidens-remarks-moscow-state-university>> 16 08 2012.

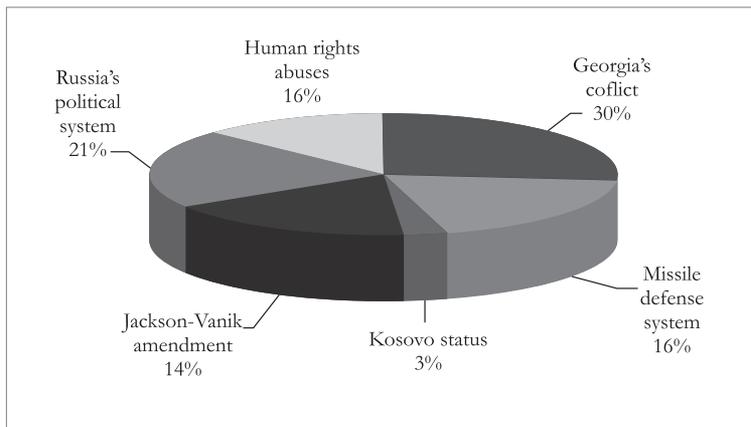
answer'. The same impression is created by the use of the imperative mood and choppy sentences: 'Get your system right. Don't make it a gamble. Have certainty'. A clear message is sent: no changes can be expected until Russia overcomes internal hardships. At the same time, Russians are not distinguished from others; even less powerful actors are being given the same message. Thus, it is implied that despite Russia's new status of 'partner', the USA does not plan to provide special privileges. On the contrary, Russia is encouraged to undertake some internal transformations.

The discourse of US authorities therefore reveals that the assurance of international security is the most significant interest binding the USA and Russia in their new stage of co-operation. The apprehensions concerning common economic interests are unequivocal, but enthusiastic support for Russia's membership in the WTO is tempered by rigid declarations that economic prosperity should be built independently.

1.3. Obstacles

The US speakers consider Russia's position towards Georgia's conflict (30%) and the prevailing political system in Russia (21%) to be the main obstacles for promising *reset* outcomes. As Graph 3 shows, the validity of the Jackson-Vanik amendment and the disagreements on the status of Kosovo are regarded as at least impeding political collaboration between the USA and Russia.

Graph 3. Obstacles



Data distribution demonstrates that prevailing authoritarian features in Russia's political system are perceived as a serious impediment. According to Clinton, the unhealthy political climate and the lack of democratic credentials are one of the major obstacles hindering the development of more constructive bilateral dialogue: 'We are still very opposed to their actions in Georgia. We are very concerned about the imprisonment and even the killing of journalists and human rights activists'.¹³

Although diverging views on missile defence in Europe are also apprehended as a stumbling block (Graph 3), Obama assures that the USA is willing to search for a compromise:

I know Russia opposes the planned configuration for missile defense in Europe. And my administration is reviewing these plans to enhance the security of America, Europe and the world. And I've made it clear that this system is directed at preventing a potential attack from Iran. It has nothing to do with Russia. In fact, I want to work together with Russia on a missile defense architecture that makes us all safer.¹⁴

Still, in light of the fact that the missile defence system in Europe is one of the questions on which the US and Russian opinions diverge the most, such rhetoric seems ostentatious, merely seeking to convince Russia that it is acknowledged as a new ally whose preferences will be taken seriously.

Meanwhile, the words of Vice President Biden are not very favourable. He states that some boundaries where consensus cannot be achieved exist: 'At the same time we set this reset button, we made it clear that there are certain red lines. We do not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. And it will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and to choose their own alliances'.¹⁵

Biden, referring to a 'sphere of influence', likely includes Ukraine and Georgia. Although they have declared their willingness to belong to the NATO alliance, these countries are traditionally seen as being in the area of Russia's influence. It should be noted that the 'exceptional interest' of Russia in resetting relations with the USA is the silent demand not to interfere in its sphere of influence in

¹³ Clinton H. 'Remarks, Town Hall at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute', <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/07/143941.htm>> 19 08 2012.

¹⁴ Obama B. 'Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation', <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/REMARKS-BY-THE-PRESIDENT-AT-THE-NEW-ECONOMIC-SCHOOL-GRADUATION/> 19 08 2012.

¹⁵ Biden J. 'Remarks by the Vice President at the Atlantic Council's 50th Anniversary Dinner' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/04/remarks-vice-president-atlantic-councils-50th-anniversary-dinner>> 19 08 2012.

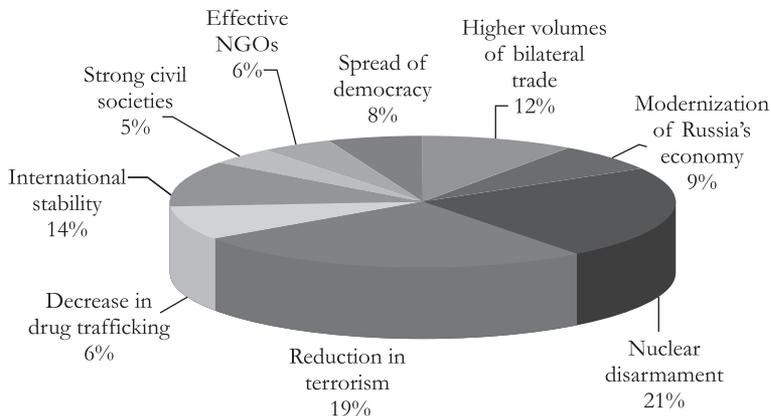
post-Soviet space. Yet, Biden strongly contradicts ‘Medvedev’s doctrine’, which designates the existence of ‘privileged zones of influence’ and identifies this concept as one of the *red lines* where compromises are infeasible.

Therefore, it can be seen that the representatives of the USA are ambiguous about the bilateral disagreements. Clinton and Biden state their position about the situation in Georgia, human rights violations, and the existence of ‘privileged zones’ more acutely, whereas Obama is not inclined to draw strict boundaries on diverging questions with Russia. Nevertheless, the US authorities aim to convey the impression that all disagreements are going to be removed by avoiding assertive actions and seeking a solution that satisfies both sides.

1.4. Expectations

The US leaders mostly associate the future of reset with improvements in the field of security: nuclear disarmament (21%), the reduction in terrorism (19%), and international stability (14%) are the most prevailing subjects in their discourses. Graph 4 indicates that the increase in the volume of trade and progress in modernising the Russian economy are also anticipated.

Graph 4. Expectations



Distribution of data reveals that more efficacious expansion of democratic traditions in Russia is also recognised as a future prospect. The presence of active

civil society as the foundation for closer co-operation is underlined in Clinton's discourse:

We reject the idea that some countries are not ready for democracy. We believe that human rights are universal and that all people, regardless of where they live, thrive in an open society where ideas are exchanged freely. This competition of ideas leads to more accountable governance and a more innovative, prosperous economy, which form a solid foundation for the kind of relationship that we are looking for with Russia and Russians.¹⁶

Clinton implies that the quality of bilateral relations is akin to the level of democracy in Russia. It is emphasised that no borders exist for the spread of democracy; all countries should be guided by democratic ideals. The secretary of state insinuates that only freedom of speech and the dissemination of ideas can produce prosperity at the individual, national and international level. Clinton acutely demonstrates that Russia must modernise not only its economy, but also its political system, lessening governmental interference in civic initiatives, thereby preparing the ground for a diversified and innovative economic structure to develop.

The US leaders in most instances underline their belief in results, based not on the traditional rules of the zero-sum game, but on the principles of equal co-operation producing mutual benefits:

A fundamental change has taken place between my first visit in the seventies and today as we no longer and you no longer view our mutual success as a zero-sum game. We both benefit when the other succeeds.... So it may be, sometimes, we do expect too much progress too quickly. But the expectation is born out of admiration and respect, not out of disrespect.¹⁷

The reference to the seventies highlights that reset will attempt to correct the failures of *détente*. Biden points out that Russia is no longer regarded as a rival, but as equal partner whose words and deeds are respected and require commendation. However, the allusion is also made that expectations must be realistic; the systems are too different to expect immediate results.

Therefore, the discourse of the US representatives demonstrates that the prospects of reset are perceived positively but nonetheless with a sense of realism. It is realised that one should not expect immediate results. The implications of

¹⁶ Clinton H. 'Interview with Yevgenia Albats, The New Times' <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/03/138354.htm>> 19 08 2012.

¹⁷ Biden J. 'Meeting with Vice President of the United States of America Joseph Biden' <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/1873>> 22 08 2012.

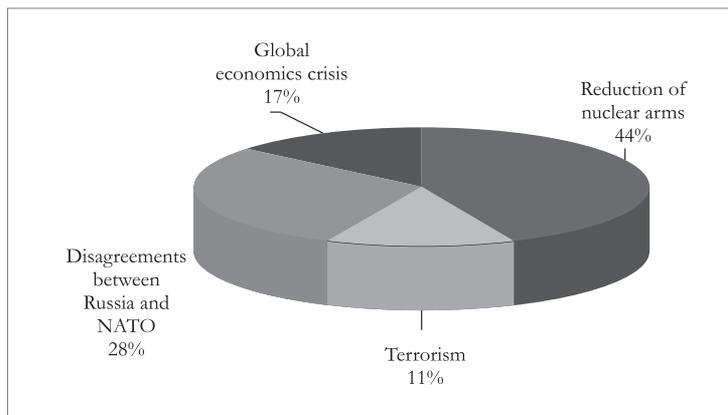
reset in Russia's democratisation are also stressed: the role model of the USA is anticipated to boost domestic reforms, potentially bringing economic profit and upgrading Russia's image in the eyes of international community.

2. The rhetoric of Russia's political leaders

2.1. Reasons

Russian leaders exclude security factors as those that most influence the initiation of *reset*. The reduction of nuclear arms (44%) and an urgency to solve the contradictions between Russia and NATO (28%) are considered to be the most significant motives. According to Graph 5, the effects of the economic crisis and the spread of terrorism are not regarded as a sufficient basis for improvements in bilateral relations.

Graph 5. Reasons



'Russia and the United States, as the two largest nuclear powers, stand ready to head up this work, to set an example and engage other countries in collective collaboration. We ought to normalize these relations, to free them from the negative legacy of the past and to elevate them to a new level'.¹⁸ Lavrov indicates

¹⁸ Lavrov S. 'Transcript of Remarks and Response to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference Following Talks with US Secretary of State Hilary

that the status of the largest nuclear powers obliges the USA and Russia to initiate the mission of ensuring nuclear security. However, to indicate the right path and encourage other states to engage in this process, the normalisation of relations and disposal of the unpleasant past legacy is crucial. Reset here is perceived as a purifying diplomatic tool, eliminating both the material (nuclear weapons) and non-material (rivalry for dominance) legacy of the past and transferring co-operation to a new level.

President Medvedev also underlines the extraordinary role of the USA and Russia: 'Even in the past, the situation and the world depended on us. It is all the more important now since there are no longer the old ideological barriers, and now we try to friendly and constructively resolve issues we face together'.¹⁹ The parallels between the Second World War and the present endue America and Russia with the role of 'saviours of the world' again. The significance of co-operation is enhanced as ideological discrepancies vanish: contradictions between communism and Western liberal democracy have been eliminated, and the USA and Russia are anticipated to cope with international challenges more efficiently.

Meanwhile, Lavrov mentions the ancient myth of Sisyphus as an allegorical context for reset:

Today, our agenda is a full one, but do not compare us with the stone that Sisyphus was trying to get up the hill. And anyway, we will always manage to get that stone up the hill. Together with Hillary, we did press that button, as you've seen. It is a very, very large red button, and I do hope that both Russia and the United States and all other countries would never, ever push any other buttons associated with the initiation of destructive facilities. We will keep pushing the reset button of constructive interaction.²⁰

According to the myth, the gods condemned Sisyphus to roll a huge stone up a steep hill. Every time he approached the top, the massive boulder would roll back down, forcing him to begin again. However, Lavrov strictly rejects considering reset as one more futile attempt to roll the stone of Sisyphus up a hill ('do not compare us with the stone'). He makes it clear that even if the reset idea had not been realised on the first attempt, an effort to improve relations would be still

Clinton', <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/dce6078711b9d628c32575b0004f6580!OpenDocument> 22 08 2012.

¹⁹ Medvedev D. 'Statements By President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia After Bilateral Meeting' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/statements-president-obama-and-president-medvedev-russia-after-bilateral-meeting>> 22 08 2012.

²⁰ Lavrov S. 'Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov', <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/03/120124.htm>> 22 08 2012.

worthwhile and prominent ('and anyway, we will always manage to get that stone up the hill'). The importance of maintaining steady relations is highlighted by mentioning other 'buttons' that would if pressed foreshadow not a symbolic act of beginning, but total destruction. The juxtaposition stresses that unlike the case of Sisyphus, resetting relations is not senseless; on the contrary, it is essential in asserting that other countries will never take the opportunity to hit the buttons activating nuclear facilities.

Meanwhile, Putin, contrary to his counterparts, calls reset a process put forward only by the whim of the new US administration: 'We do not talk about "resetting" our relations. It is the US Administration that has proposed to "reset" them. We agree with that and, of course, we would like to give a new positive impetus to Russian-US relations'.²¹

It is evident that Putin's approach to "reset" lacks enthusiasm. He asserts that Russia merely accepted Obama's proposal without giving undue prominence to it. Such an utterance is not surprising, retaining the anti-American tendencies of Putin's rhetoric and previous foreign policy vectors. Still, in this excerpt Putin's use of the plural pronoun 'we' is of particular interest. Though this pronoun is also employed by other Russian officials, 'we' in their discourse is most often applied while talking about the USA and Russia as allies and looking at reset as a bilateral action, whereas Putin, when he uses 'we', appears to be speaking in the name of Russia. When it is considered that Putin, even after the temporary pass of the presidential baton to Medvedev, has remained the main architect of foreign policy in Russia, this statement could reflect Russia's actual approach towards bilateral relations: 'we are in as long as our interests are fulfilled'.

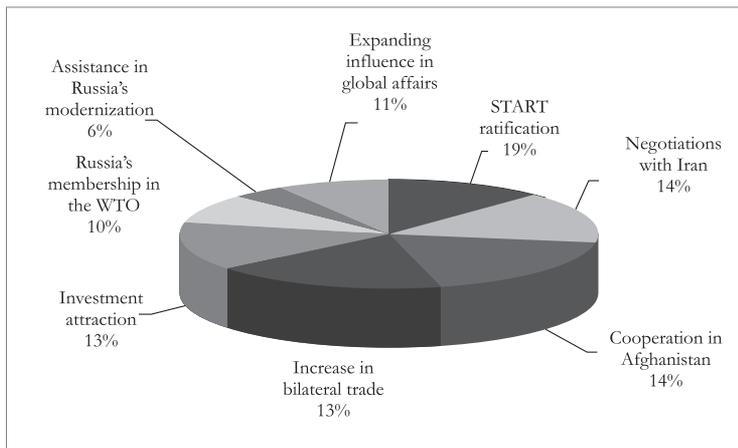
It could therefore be noticed that reset in the discourse of Russia's leaders is mostly perceived as a prerequisite for the assurance of global nuclear security. Even though both Medvedev and Lavrov describe reset as a process driven by mutual effort, Putin reveals a contrasting official approach, defining *reset* as merely a unilateral move of the US administration, wherein Russia agrees to engage as long as it is advantageous to national interests.

²¹ Putin V. 'Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's interview to Japan's Kyodo Tsushin News Agency, the NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation, and the Nihon Keizai Shimbun newspaper (The Nikkei)' <<http://premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/4094/>> 25 08 2012.

2.2. Interests

Russian political leaders in their discourse primarily emphasise security interests. According to Graph 6, the ratification of the START Treaty (19%), negotiations with Iran (14%), and co-operation in Afghanistan (14%) are the most dominant subjects. The distribution of data also exposes that economic interests (increase in trade volumes and investments, membership in the WTO, modernisation) together make up almost half of all the interests mentioned in the statements.

Graph 6. Interests



Russian leaders constantly stress deeper economic collaboration as a prerequisite for fruitful partnership: 'But at the same time, we have bilateral issues that are also very important for our states ... I think that our economic relations lag significantly behind our political relations. In this sense, of course, the issue is also hampered by Russia's lack of membership in the World Trade Organization'.²² While asserting that the political dialogue is going more smoothly than the economic one, Medvedev alludes that there exist specific circumstances that may influence the outcomes of reset. As was mentioned earlier, Putin defined *reset* as a process that was put forward unilaterally by the USA and in which Russia had agreed to participate without particular eagerness. Hence, it is once again suggested that if the

²² Medvedev D. 'Meeting with Vice President of the United States of America Joseph Biden' <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/1873>> 25 08 2012.

USA aims to implement the 'reset project' and desires Russia's active engagement, the USA should consider specific demands such as providing assistance to Russia in its arduous accession to the WTO. The argument of global benefits is not avoided in this matter. A strong conviction exists: what is beneficial for Russia and the USA is beneficial for other countries: 'As has been recognized just now, Russia's accession is good not only for Russia itself or for the USA or other countries, but for the entire system of trade relations in the world'.²³

Lavrov regards more constructive dialogue on economic questions as the basis for complete co-operation of the USA and Russia: 'In our bilateral relations we need more successful investment projects, joint research ... This would strengthen the material foundation of our partnership and make it much less vulnerable to the temptations to play the old geopolitical zero-sum games which nowadays have nothing to do with the fundamental national interests of our two great nations'.²⁴ The development of common economic projects is perceived as the premise of healthy and equal bilateral co-operation. Robust economic partnership is identified as a measure preventing the return to 'old geopolitical zero-sum games'. The latter are characterised as 'old temptations', thereby indicating that the probability of deterioration in US-Russia relations is not eliminated. Lavrov hints that the threat of revived confrontation will abate only if the USA demonstrates benevolence towards Russian economic interests and if the advantages brought out by partnership turn out to be noteworthy.

The idea of national interest as the premise of reset emerges in Medvedev's discourse: 'Everything we do (I mean the Russian Federation) is dictated by our understanding of our national interest, exactly as everything that the government of the United States does is dictated by the national interest of the USA'.²⁵ This passage distinctly reveals how Medvedev perceives the essence of renewed relations: it is directly asserted that national interests take priority over all other incentives.

Therefore, the discourse of the Russian speakers shows that the USA is perceived to be the main partner for ensuring security at both the national and international level. It is acutely demonstrated that it is also associated with particular economic benefits: Russian leaders make it clear that Russia's membership in the WTO is

²³ Medvedev D. 'Remarks by President Obama and President Medvedev of Russia After Bilateral Meeting' <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/11/12/president-obamas-bilateral-meeting-president-medvedev-russia#transcript>> 25 08 2012.

²⁴ Lavrov S. 'Opening Remarks by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in the Carnegie Foundation' <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/999eb3d43b813435c32575b200460875!OpenDocument> 28 08 2012.

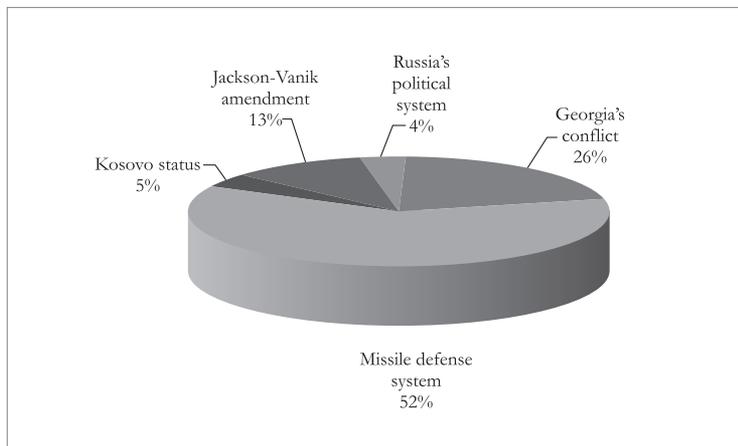
²⁵ Medvedev D., 'Interview with CNN' <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/1622>> 28 08 2012.

not only unilaterally or bilaterally useful but also in the global interest. Economic co-operation is in general acknowledged to be fundamental in pursuing a more constructive partnership. Nevertheless, the USA is admonished to concede that the national interests of Russia will always stand above collective interests.

2.3. Obstacles

As Graph 7 shows, the main obstacles for resetting relations are seen in the field of security: more than a half of the disagreements emerge due to the US plans for a missile defence system in Europe. The clashes over Georgia's conflict (26%) and the validity of the Jackson-Vanik amendment (13%) are also perceived as impediments, while the issues of human rights violations are altogether ignored.

Graph 7. Obstacles



Lavrov briefly indicates that though the positions of the USA and Russia towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia are totally incompatible, Russia is not going to alter its view: 'As to the situation in the Caucasus, especially in the South Caucasus, which we discussed today, we do have some obvious differences of opinion and we do not try to conceal them'.²⁶

²⁶ Lavrov S. 'Transcript of Remarks and Response to Media Questions by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov at Joint Press Conference Following Talks with US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton', <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/dce6078711b9d628c32575b0004f6580!OpenDocument> 28 08 2012.

Meanwhile, the stance on the missile defence system is more deliberate: 'Well, now the construction has not yet started. We have today stated that the Obama Administration's strategic review is continuing and encompasses MD problems. Our US partners have confirmed that the proposals by Russia had also been considered within this review.'²⁷

Lavrov insinuates that though the disagreements on the missile defence system still exist, they, unlike the case of Georgia, are not unresolved. Nevertheless, concessions are expected only from the USA. It is not a secret that in Russia's rhetoric the US prospects of missile defence have always been perceived as a threat to national security. Proclamations such as 'the construction has not yet started' and 'strategic review is continuing' therefore imply that even in the status of resetting Russia is not apt to alter its approach and anticipates a decision advantageous to its interests. Reset is again perceived as a process driven by unilateral effort, where Russia takes the role of recipient, rejecting the idea of giving something in return.

President Medvedev sustains the position that unanimous agreement on all questions is inconceivable: 'It does not mean that we now have identical views on all the topics. It's impossible, and I believe that it's not even worth trying. Each and every country is sure to always have its own national priorities and interests, but a lot depends on our relations too'.²⁸

Negations such as 'it does not mean', 'it's impossible', and 'it's not even worth trying' consolidate the position that divergence of views is inevitable. Medvedev once again stresses that the protection of national interests is more essential than ideal consensus on all matters; bilateral relations should develop so as not to undermine the national priorities of each state:

I can say the same of foreign policy. Each president pursues his own foreign policy. Our foreign policy today differs somewhat from earlier policy, but this does not mean that we have changed our priorities.... It is very important when your dialogue partner, even if he heads as big an economy and powerful a country as the United States, listens to your arguments and reflects on them. I think this is extremely important.²⁹

Medvedev highlights that every country, Russia included, has a unique conception of foreign policy. It differs from the times of the Cold War, though it is

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Medvedev D. 'Meeting with President of the United States Barack Obama' <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/2279>> 28 08 2012.

²⁹ Medvedev D. 'Transcript of meeting with participants of Munich Conference on Security Policy' <<http://eng.kremlin.ru/transcripts/1175>> 28 08 2012.

explicitly indicated that the new era in US–Russian relations will not alter Russia’s foreign policy prerogatives.

In addition to that, Medvedev underlines the necessity of equal co-operation based on attentiveness and respect for each other’s interests. The importance of leaders pursuing relations is also mentioned (‘It is very important when your dialogue partner ... listens to your arguments and reflects on them’). It should be noted that unlike G. W. Bush and Putin, who frankly criticised each other’s policies, Medvedev and Obama since the beginning of their tenures have demonstrated personal sympathies, thus publicly declaring that the course of bilateral relations is also directly related with leading personalities and their mutual relationship.

Lavrov also considers bilateral disagreements as an inevitable part in interstate relations:

No one is talking in terms of removing in a single stroke the differences and contradictions which are inevitable in the development of relations between any two major powers. This would be just the very idealism we want to get rid of. But one must know how to respect a partner, recognize his legitimate interests and not to take actions which are consciously aimed at undermining these interests.³⁰

The emergence of antagonisms is explained by the status of cooperating states. It is reiterated that the subject matter is not any state but ‘great powers’: in other words, greater power presupposes a greater extent of disagreements. Moreover, the absence of conflicts is understood as blatant idealism, which is generally seen as a hurdle to be removed, thereby retaining the notion of partnership based on purely realistic grounds. An example of non-idealised co-operation is also adduced: the foundation of dialogue, according to Lavrov, should be absolute respect for interests, which should not be infringed upon. Such a reference may be a warning for the USA about its intentions to develop a missile defence system in Europe, hinting that Russia is not going to give up her zone of privileged interests in post-Soviet territory. It is insinuated that the partnership will be fruitful only if America recognises the sanctity of these interests. In other words, reset will continue as long as the USA respects Russia’s privileged aims in foreign policy.

Disagreements in Russia’s discourse are acutely perceived as a natural and inevitable part of bilateral relations. They are explained by the status of ‘great powers’, which carries the obligation of avoiding idealism and instead focusing on the protection of national interests. Such attributes as mutual respect, silent

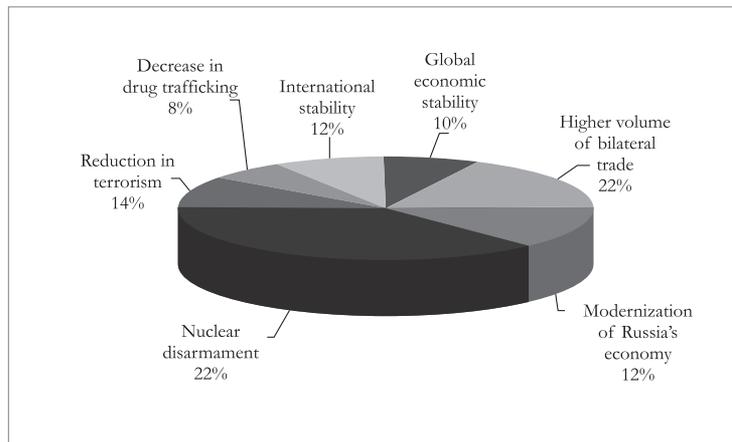
³⁰ Lavrov S. ‘Opening Remarks by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in the Carnegie Foundation’, <http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/999eb3d43b813435c32575b200460875!OpenDocument> 28 08 2012.

agreement on zones of influence, and one-sided concessions from the USA are conceived as mandatory while climbing the ladder of success in bilateral co-operation.

2.3. Expectations

Russian leaders mostly stress expectations related with improvements in security and the economy. According to Graph 8, nuclear disarmament (22%) and vibrant bilateral trade (22%) are the most prevailing topics, whereas the prospects of civil society, the spread of democracy, and effectively operating non-governmental organisations are absolutely ignored.

Graph 8. Expectations



We all have become wiser. Look — both us in the period of the Soviet Union and you in the United States over the past twenty or thirty years — have conducted experiments with social and economic development according to the models taken in their pure and extreme form: socialism and liberal capitalism. Having been, in terms of their ideological purity, reduced to absurdity, both of them, each in its time, proved their insolvency. It is clear now that what we need is something in between, something well balanced, something not so categorical and uncompromising.³¹

³¹ Lavrov S. 'Opening Remarks by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in the Carnegie Foundation' <http://www.mid.ru/bdomb/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/999eb3d43b813435c32575b200460875!OpenDocument> 29 08 2012.

In this excerpt, the models of liberal capitalism and socialism are labelled 'extreme', 'absurd' and 'insolvent', and thus the damage made by both ideologies is equated. Lavrov states that such failed ideological projects should be replaced by 'something in between, something well balanced, something not so categorical and uncompromising'. Hence, the US and Russian reset is supposed to operate as a political vehicle leading to the implementation of more balanced and flexible policy.

According to Graph 8, Russian leaders also formulate the aspiration of international stability. The achievement of this goal requires adjustments in international leadership, however:

In brief, the terms of debate on the ways of the future world development have changed. This creates brilliant conditions for those who want to demonstrate intellectual and other kinds of leadership in international affairs in order to help the world community to work out a common vision of the contemporary historic era. It would be a pity to miss such an opportunity and thus to fail to draw an absolutely final line under the period of the 'Cold War' and those misunderstandings which followed in the relations between the USA and Russia.³²

The minister of foreign affairs hints at the distinctive role of the USA and Russia in the international system. It is noted that the current time is more favourable than ever for new leaders to step up. Lavrov asserts that the USA and Russia are exactly those leaders that are capable of turning over a new page in world history and generating a new vision. A stable relationship ('to draw an absolutely final line under the period of the "Cold War"') and the window of opportunity ('it would be a pity to miss such an opportunity') create circumstances to adopt the position of international leaders.

Therefore, Russian representatives perceive reset in a wider perspective than only the assurance of security or economic benefits. The reunion of both great powers is assumed to have the potential to fill the gap in international leadership, mending mistakes made by out-dated ideologies and striking out in new directions in international politics.

³² Lavrov S. 'Opening Remarks by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in the Carnegie Foundation' <http://www.mid.ru/bdcomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/999eb3d43b813435c32575b200460875!OpenDocument> 29 08 2012.

Conclusions

Comparison of the rhetoric of US and Russian political leaders leads to the following conclusions.

- The US and Russia's views concerning the reasons for reset coincide only partially. Authorities in both states consider reset to have been induced by the exigency to ensure nuclear security; indeed the importance of good relations between the two major nuclear powers is claimed to be vital for global security. Reset is also inspired by the necessity to find a new mode for the great powers to operate in the international arena: the reunion of the major international players is no longer related to the achievement of unilateral or bilateral benefits but to prosperity at the global level.

Nevertheless, US leaders name terrorism as another significant incentive to reset relations, while Russia perceives the abolishment of disagreements with NATO to be a more crucial factor. Such preferences affirm the notion that both states are 'reloading' bilateral relations on national security grounds: in the United States, terrorism has so far remained the biggest threat to national security, while Russia's aspiration to suppress the US plans for a missile defence system in Europe directly interrelates with Russia's priorities in the realm of national security.

- The main interests of the USA and Russia do not diverge. Both states share mutual security interests such as the ratification of the START Treaty, collaboration in Afghanistan, and greater co-operation on sanctions against Iran. However, the eagerness for economic benefits are much more conspicuous in the rhetoric of Russia's political leaders; reset is associated with a higher volume of bilateral trade, attraction of investments, the and US assistance in economic modernisation. Such priorities conform with Russian foreign policy-making approach that was established during Putin's tenure and that associates dominance in the international system with economic capacity. Thus, reset operates as a pragmatic step to lay the groundwork for the new role of Russia as a great power.

Contrary to Russian officials, the US representatives talk about common economic ventures more cautiously. Although Russia is encouraged to modernise and supported in its desire for membership in the WTO, it is stressed that state authorities should first overcome internal hindrances and strive for economic prosperity independently.

- Positions are more distinguished in the category of expectations. The leaders of both states perceive reset as a stepping-stone on the way to the assurance of nuclear security. The US representatives however associate *reset* with a reduction in the spread of terrorism and maintenance of international stability, whereas in Russia the promotion of bilateral trade and modernisation are considered to have higher importance. Such differences once again affirm that in the USA reset is more related to protection of national and international security, whereas Russia expects specific economic benefits. Dynamic economic cooperation is in general perceived as a prerequisite for successful political partnership: the Russian leaders make it clear that the achievements of reset are directly related to the advantages produced by economic collaboration.

Reset in the US rhetoric is also expected to bring positive results in the process of Russia's democratisation. It is anticipated that Russia's government, encouraged by its partnership with America, will undertake domestic reforms: Russia's future is associated with flourishing civil societies, the knowledge-based economy, effectively operating non-governmental organisations, and general alterations in the West's apprehension of Russia. Meanwhile, in Russia's discourse such forecasts are ignored and partnership is more expected to set a new direction for leadership in world politics, with Russia as a great power shining in the global spotlight.

- Fundamental incongruities can be noticed in the category of obstacles. American and Russian political leaders distinctively perceive challenges to reset: in the USA, Russia's position on Georgia's conflict is regarded as the main impediment, whereas Russian authorities consider the US plans for a missile defence system in Europe to be the main barrier to a constructive partnership. The lack of democratic credentials in Russia is also deemed a hardship, whilst Russia itself does not consider this a stumbling block in bilateral relations. Unlike the USA, Russian authorities ignore the issue of human rights abuses. The discrepancies in economic interests and the still valid Jackson-Vanik amendment, which limits bilateral trade, are conceded to be greater obstacles.

In general, contrary to the US authorities, the Russian leaders do not overestimate these differences. Incompatible positions are identified as an inherent and inevitable part of bilateral relations and justified by the extraordinary status of 'great powers'. Unlike the USA, Russia is

not prone to reach a consensus by mutual effort: it is clearly stated that national interests will always stand above mutual concerns and that the USA must make concessions without expecting a similar response from its counterpart.