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# The United States, Russia, and Europe: Trilateral Security Dialogue in the Absence of Strategic Partnership



Isabelle François

# The United States, Russia, and Europe: Trilateral Security Dialogue in the Absence of Strategic Partnership

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1030 15th Street NW, 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005

ISBN: 978-1-61977-036-2

**September 2013**



## Atlantic Council

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## Foreword

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This report is the result of a series of trilateral dialogue sessions between American, European, and Russian experts with some involvement of current and former officials from governments and international organizations, as well as participants from the Atlantic Council's Young Atlanticist Program, and colleagues from the private sector. The project was funded by a grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The Atlantic Council is grateful for the contributions of Ellen Tauscher, Rose Gottemoeller, Celeste Wallander, Claudio Bisogniero, Hans Binnendijk, Elaine Bunn, Robert Hunter, Paul Fritch, Jules Silberberg, Michael Kofman, Andrew Kuchins, Dean Wilkening, Matt Rojansky, Jack Segal, Jordan Becker, Joshua Faust, Simon Saradzhyan, Deana Arsenian, Oksana Antonenko, Danila Bokarev, Andrey Frolov, Andrei Zagorsky, Ivan Soltanovsky, Yuri Gorlach, Igor Ivanov, Andrey Kortunov, Ivan Timofeev, Tatyana Parkhalina, Ekaterina Kuznetsova, Andrey, Sushensov, Petr Topychkanov, Dmitri Trenin, Mikhail Trotsky, Sergey Utkin, Dmitri Suslov, Fabrice Pothier, Stian Janssen, Daniel Keohane, Paul Schulte, Olga Shumylo-Tapiola, Pirkka Tapiola, Andrei Tarnea, Jan Techau, Michael Williams, Jean Fournet, Jaroslav Kurfurst, Timothy Stafford, Clara O'Donnell, Lisa Aronsson, Edgar Buckley, Thomas Gomart, Suat Kiniklioglu, Andrew Monaghan, and many staff members from the Atlantic Council who joined this effort. Each and every participant in this one-year project took part in workshops and conferences, helped assess the relationship between the United States, Russia, and Europe,

and contributed ideas to move forward in addressing current security challenges.

This report is the first of a series of papers devoted to how the United States and its allies need to consider their relationship with Russia in the midst of new global currents with new powers rising, new challenges emerging, and the need for renewed American leadership and partnerships. Any strategy calling for "staying the course" is no longer viable. The key question in this report is whether the United States, NATO allies, and Russia will approach the future together or separately.

The trilateral dialogue was launched in April 2012. It was developed against the backdrop of significant presidential elections in Washington and Moscow and a number of challenges. First, in January 2012, the United States unveiled a new security strategy and force posture review in Europe that significantly impacted both NATO and European security and rebalanced US priorities toward Asia. Second, Russia continued to pursue military modernization plans and voice its objections to the European-based US missile defense system. Third, allied defense establishments continued to face severe fiscal constraints and budgetary cuts.

In engaging experts and decision-makers from Europe, Russia, and the United States, this project considers the prospects for an inclusive European security community laid out in President George H.W. Bush's grand strategy for a Europe whole, free, and at peace. This report offers a diagnosis, a prognosis, and a prescription for the United States, Russia, and Europe to move beyond the status quo.

In acknowledging that a “strategic partnership” with Russia never materialized, the report provides an honest diagnosis in an effort to assess the way forward. The report also makes a prognosis on the prospects for cooperative security. Alternatives to Euro-Atlantic cooperative security arrangements remain unclear, however, and the prescription for how to proceed is transactional rather than transformational or normative. Nonetheless, this report offers a viable strategy in an attempt to remain engaged without prejudging of the outcome.

We hope that this report will help to clarify the debate about how to best engage with Russia and avoid the pitfalls of regular resets by offering specific proposals for US-Russia-Europe cooperation while acknowledging the significant challenges in the relationship.

## Executive Summary

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The past twenty years have been marked by a series of setbacks and disappointments in the US-European-Russian dialogue, despite regular attempts to develop a strategic partnership. In this cyclical relationship, 2012 was a low point in Western relations with Russia, from the calculated absence of President Vladimir Putin at the NATO summit in Chicago to the Russian ban on American adoptions of Russian orphans, and the US reaction to the Sergei Magnitsky case. The year 2013 could have been the beginning of an upswing in the trilateral dialogue. In April, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met on the margins of the G8 foreign ministers' gathering in London. At the same time, US National Security Advisor Tom Donilon called on Putin in Moscow, where he hand-delivered a letter from President Barack Obama detailing potential areas of cooperation. A series of meetings between Russian and American officials throughout the summer saw a new diplomatic push to reframe the US–Russia relationship in the run-up to the Group of Eight meeting in June and the G20 meeting in September 2013. However, the Edward Snowden affair and Obama's subsequent decision to cancel the planned September meeting with Putin in light of insufficient progress on bilateral issues point to a pause in the relationship.

What might work in the future that did not work in the past?

For the relationship between the United States, Europe, and Russia to develop in the long run, there must be a conscious political choice by the top

leadership to engage and a readiness to address disagreements within national constituencies. The political expectations of the 1990s, when Russia and the West sought to influence each other's decision-making processes—whether Russia's attempts to have a say within NATO or US attempts to influence Russian domestic politics—will have to be abandoned. Instead, the parties can work on the more modest short-term goal of establishing a transactional partnership on areas of common interests and resist regular attempts to close the values gap.

In this turbulent relationship, a strategy should provide a guide that helps manage expectations, hedges against unhelpful decisions, and mitigates the risks of disengagement. A strategy could also help identify compromises between the requirements of expedient solutions, typical in transactional relationships, without losing sight of the ultimate search for a normative framework. A strategy could define short-term goals and long-term objectives, and thus allow for pragmatic decisions based on interests, while retaining a values-based, long-term perspective.

The strategy presented in this report rests on three pillars: transatlantic security, regional and trans-regional issues, and global challenges. In the short term, its seven operational goals focus the trilateral dialogue from the conceptual to the practical, spanning security issues such as the need to define common understanding on “Mutual Assured Stability” and regional focus from Afghanistan to Asia-Pacific. Finally, among the key

enablers, the report highlights the need to broaden human contacts beyond the United States, Russia, and Europe, and beyond the usual group of security experts that have dominated the trilateral dialogue for decades. It calls for more informal ties and processes, and for nurturing and integrating a new generation ready to engage, unburdened by the weight of history.

Ultimately, the challenge for delivering such a strategy will not be the absence of an inspiring vision, past failures to develop a strategic partnership, or lack of common interests. Rather, the biggest challenge will rest on the lack of mutual intentions, mutual respect, and political will on the part of the respective leaderships to work with their own internal opposition and move toward genuine cooperation.

# I. Unequivocal Diagnosis: A Strategic Partnership Gone Missing

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In the summer of 2013, despite a series of setbacks and disappointments during President Barack Obama's first term and with mixed results from the so-called "reset" policy, a renewed sense of engagement dominated the US–Russian political dialogue for a couple of months with a series of high-level meetings. These efforts did not yield the expected results and the pathologies of the US–Russia relationship proved stronger. Twenty years after the end of the Cold War, Washington and Moscow have yet to overcome the outdated Cold War paradigm of "mutual assured destruction." The bilateral relationship is still dominated by a security agenda and a zero-sum approach, rooted in the fierce ideological and political competition between two superpowers, which no longer fits today's globalized and multipolar world.

Similarly, the NATO–Russia relationship, formally launched in 1997 when both sides seemed ready to trade an adversarial relationship for dialogue and cooperation, has resulted in disappointment and frustration. In reality, despite the political statements and summits, just beneath the surface of cooperative security lies a very uneasy partnership between NATO and Russia. Events in the last five years have often diverged from the cooperative agenda of the 1997 Founding Act and the 2002 Rome Declaration, highlighting a more competitive and at times even confrontational relationship. In spite of the creation of various institutional frameworks such as the NATO–Russia Council (NRC) and examples of concrete practical cooperation, the so-called "strategic partnership"

has had limited impact in addressing today's strategic issues in Europe and beyond.

The polarization of positions and the inability to reach strategic partnership, the lack of political will to find compromises for joint solutions to common security challenges and to develop joint actions reflect three dilemmas in the US–Russia–Europe relationship.

## **Shaky premises**

The NATO–Russia relationship was developed on a fundamental misunderstanding about each other's expectations. In the 1990s, Russia embarked on a path of integrating Western values fundamental to the post-Cold War alliance transformation. Russia was thereby reconciled with NATO's "open door" policy in the eyes of Western observers. For its part, Russia expected that it would be given a voice at the table in Euro-Atlantic security affairs, where it could influence alliance thinking from within. The creation of the NRC and the 2002 Rome Declaration were thus developed under the dubious assumption that both NATO and Russia would be in a position to influence each other's decision-making processes. Already the 1999 Kosovo air campaign and more starkly, the 2008 Russian–Georgian war called into question the core assumption binding the NATO and Russia partnership, namely that Russia would become more integrated into the Western community of states.

The US–Russia relationship has also developed under misplaced assumptions. Washington and

Moscow seemed intent on adapting strategic stability to the 21st century through significant arms control efforts, when in reality the bilateral partnership has evolved toward a fundamentally asymmetrical relationship. Neither side grasped the challenge of transformation that occurred in the past two decades and affected the conditions in which strategic stability needs to be sustained. Washington and Moscow have talked past each other. Russian preoccupations have focused on American technologies.<sup>1</sup> Moscow lacks the confidence that strategic stability can be maintained given US technological advantages and seems to wrongly assume Washington's hostile intent. The United States' own focus is elsewhere, and it has failed to understand or recognize the Russian threat perceptions. The United States has been adjusting to the changed political security conditions of the 21st century where Russia is not a focal point. The Russians have failed to understand the American preoccupation with Iran and North Korea, which have been much more significant nuclear threats than Russia—hence the dilemma over missile defense.<sup>2</sup>

### **Diverging threat perceptions**

In "Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," published in early 2012, the Department of Defense refocused on threats emanating primarily from Asia and the Middle East, rebalancing its efforts beyond Europe.<sup>3</sup> The US government also clearly decided to address these threats working with allies and partners. In this context, the Department of Defense emphasized US engagement with Russia and committed to continue efforts to build a closer relationship in areas of mutual interest. By contrast, official Russian policies have tended to emphasize that US policies such as NATO expansion pose a security threat to the Russian Federation.<sup>4</sup> In part, this

reflects that given the US military, economic, and political preeminence, US actions can be more consequential for Russia than Russian actions for the United States.<sup>5</sup>

These former enemies are no longer enemies, but may not have become friends. Some partners are actually competitors, and partnership arrangements may be ill suited for the reality of the relationship. Official statements thus often reflect the uneasy compromise between the requirements of partnership in areas of mutual interest, such as terrorism, and the reality of nuclear and other capabilities that needs to be addressed in terms of potential threats by defense planners.

NATO documents have been particularly ambiguous about the fact that Russia is both a partner with whom to engage in cooperative security programs and a potential nuclear threat against which the alliance continues to plan, train, and exercise in terms of its Article 5 requirements. In its Deterrence and Defense Posture Review agreed upon at the Chicago Summit in 2012, allies reiterated that the alliance does not consider any country to be its adversary and preserved its "to-whom-it-may-concern" deterrence policy maintaining a mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities for the full range of Alliance missions, from collective defense to crisis management and partnerships. At the same time, NATO reaffirmed its commitment to arms control, disarmament, and nonproliferation. Recognizing the Russian nuclear stockpiles stationed in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO committed to "developing detailed proposals on and increasing mutual understanding of NATO's and Russia's nonstrategic nuclear force postures in Europe," as well as seeking "reciprocal steps by Russia in terms of further reducing its requirement for nonstrategic nuclear weapons assigned to the alliance."<sup>6</sup>

This ambiguity seems to adequately reflect the complexities of the post-Cold War era with diverging positions and interests. Differences

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1 Paul J. Saunders, "New Realities in US-Russia Arms Control," Center for the National Interest, p. 24, April 2012.

2 Celeste Wallander, "Mutual Assured Stability: Establishing US-Russia Security Relations for a New Century," Atlantic Council, 29 July 2013.

3 See [http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf).

4 See [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia\\_military\\_doc-trine.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doc-trine.pdf).

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5 Paul J. Saunders, "New Realities in US-Russia Arms Control," Center for the National Interest, p. 15, April 2012.

6 NATO, "Deterrence and Defense Posture Review," May 12, 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_87597.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_87597.htm).

among allies' positions vis-à-vis Russia are well known. Diverging interpretations of Russian actions against Georgia in the summer of 2008 reinforced differences within the alliance on how to best engage with Russia. The suspension of political dialogue and military cooperation between NATO and Russia resulted in polarized positions within the Alliance that have continued to hamper the proper functioning of the NRC, which has essentially become a forum where the parties "agree to disagree." The resumption of NRC meetings in the spring of 2009 proceeded on the same basis of partnership and cooperation developed in 1997 and 2002. In reality, this papered over the fact that the various NATO allies came out of the 2008-09 period with different outlooks on the potential for the NATO-Russia relationship. Yet, in 2010 at the NATO summit in Lisbon, allies stated once more the importance they attached to "developing a true strategic and modernized partnership based on the principles of reciprocal confidence, transparency, and predictability, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a common space of peace, security, and stability." The reality of NATO-Russia cooperation pales in comparison with optimistic official documents reaffirming strategic partnership intentions.

### **Different approaches to change**

This gap between rhetoric and reality may have been the result of fundamental misunderstandings among Americans, Europeans, and Russians about one another's expectations regarding the post-Cold War era as much as the result of their diverging threat perceptions. The world and this uneasy partnership seem to be at a crossroads fast approaching an inflection point.<sup>7</sup> The US, European and Russian abilities to position themselves in this new era will be largely determined by their past responses to the post-Cold War period and the significant changes it brought along. How did the United States, Russia and Europe respond to the challenges and manage the call for change when caught between the legacy of the past and

the aspirations to a different future? The real dilemma for security lies with what seems to have been an inability after twenty years of attempted cooperation to get beyond the old paradigm of mutual assured destruction, which no longer corresponds to reality.

The relationship between the United States and Russia remains anchored in a narrowly defined security agenda, dominated by nuclear weapons and arms control negotiations, which distorted the broader and richer ties these two countries could have developed. While some European countries like Germany or France have engaged with Russia bilaterally on a much broader agenda, the security partnership through NATO has also been dominated by the old paradigm, undermining allies' and Russia's ability to advance their wider interests.

Arms control still has as much a role to play in European security as in US-Russia bilateral relations, but it is a much different role which cannot be played in the same way with the same concepts and rules of the games as in the past. It has to be first about reassurance rather than reductions of nuclear and conventional arsenals. The continued relevance of arms control lies in the fact that it offers a familiar setting managing change step-by-step in a controlled fashion. This is reassuring to Russia in particular at a time when the relationship between Moscow and the West is in a state of flux, best characterized as "unfinished business." Arms control actually corresponds to the Russian approach to change.

It is fundamental to appreciate how Americans, Europeans, and Russians have dealt with change differently in the post-Cold War period. In the 1990s, the United States had been first to develop a new vision reaching out to former enemies. Europeans have been generally amenable to change, albeit less swiftly and less broadly, while Russia has been reluctant to embrace change. The default mode in Russia when faced with change seems to be status quo until Moscow has had a chance to fully review and assess new proposals. New ideas are met with suspicion and the process of transformation is very slow.

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<sup>7</sup> Atlantic Council, "Envisioning 2030: U.S. Strategy for a Post-Western World," December 2012, [http://www.acus.org/files/publication\\_pdfs/403/Envisioning2030\\_web.pdf.pdf](http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/403/Envisioning2030_web.pdf.pdf).

Russia appears genuinely perturbed about the ultimate intentions behind the endless inventiveness of American military power. It is also mindful of the political debates within the United States, especially the anti-Russian sentiments regularly emanating from Congress and the significant changes on key issues such as missile defense from one administration to the next. The need for reassurance and clarity is crucial and can be addressed through arms control mechanisms.

However, arms control is a means to an end—it is a tool, but the end game and the strategy are still unclear to all. Arms control was developed as a tool for managing risk in an adversarial security relationship. The revival of arms control debates today, and the return of arms control in the European security agenda twenty years after the end of the Cold War, might be cause for concern. Has the security environment deteriorated to the point of warning against a new arms race with Russia?

The fact is that the old paradigm of mutual assured destruction has yet to be replaced, while the goal of an inclusive European security community seems far-fetched. A cooperative European security framework, dominated by trust and transparency, where adversarial approaches to manage security challenges have disappeared and rendered nuclear deterrence redundant, may be unrealistic in the near to medium term. In the long run, cooperative security among the United States, Europe, and Russia may still represent the ultimate goal, but in the interim a paradigm shift toward “mutual assured stability” may be more realistic. Mutual assured stability could be defined as “a condition in which neither party has the intention or capability to exercise unilateral advantage for political or military exploitation through preemptive coercion or military strike in such a way that precludes response, negotiation, or compromise.”<sup>8</sup> At this stage, however, the shift has yet to occur. The United States-Russia-Europe security partnership is facing an uncertain future.

In the face of a new period and given the differences in views among the United States,

Europe, and Russia, the past twenty years have taught us one lesson if nothing else: if engagement between the West and Russia goes toward one side prevailing over the other, it will go toward disengagement. This type of partnership with Russia is unsustainable.

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<sup>8</sup> Wallander, “Mutual Assured Stability.”

## II. Uninspiring Prognosis: Common Interests, Cooperative Programs, and Cyclical Relations

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The inherent limits of the United States/NATO-Russia partnership should not overshadow the successes and genuine efforts at cooperation. Over the past two decades, cooperation on various security projects has led to concrete results and significant agreements.

On the NATO-Russia agenda, two significant cooperative successes should guard against undue pessimism. In the area of counterterrorism, the NRC presided over the development of Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI). In the aftermath of 9/11, this NATO-Russia initiative was launched to prevent terrorist attacks using civilian aircraft by sharing information on movements in NATO and Russian airspace by coordinating interceptions of renegade aircraft. Significant cooperative work led to the creation of an airspace security system, which today provides a shared NATO-Russia radar picture of air traffic and allows for early warning of suspicious air activities. Similarly, cooperation with Russia on Afghanistan has yielded three significant projects. The first allowed for cooperation in countering narcotics trafficking. The second enabled the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to make use of the Northern Sea Route to and from Afghanistan for cargo shipments. The third has provided funding for helicopter maintenance building the capacity of the Afghan army. However, these projects have been punctual and limited to specific areas of cooperation, often on a commercial basis, and clearly fell short of developing into a strategic partnership.

Similarly, on the US-Russia security agenda, the signature and ratification of the New START Treaty in 2011 was considered a milestone and anchored the “reset” policy between Washington and Moscow. President Obama committed in the Senate to follow-on negotiations and to address reductions in nonstrategic and nondeployed strategic nuclear warheads. However, the lack of enthusiasm in Moscow for follow-on negotiations, and the expected resistance in the US Congress to ratify further arms control agreements with Russia have hampered progress in security cooperation.

Despite the lack of progress, the proponents of cooperative security have pursued their efforts and remained vocal, convinced that there is no alternative in the long run to Western partnership for Russia. While Europeans may seem more likely to persist in their search for a strategic partnership with their Russian neighbor, when it comes to security affairs, the US-Russia bilateral relationship is determinant for a genuine partnership to develop. Hence, NATO may not be the organization of choice to foster engagement with Moscow and get past the post-Cold War inertia. The NATO-Russia relationship, while significant to NATO’s transformation agenda, is not vital to alliance core interests and missions. For its part, Moscow will not walk back on its commitment to the NRC, but NATO is becoming less central to its foreign policy interests.

Today, Russians and Americans do not fear a nuclear attack on each other. Instead, extremism, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction, and environmental catastrophes are the greatest risks to the citizens of both countries. Moreover, they are trading and investing with each other, facilitating greater scientific cooperation among themselves, and creating opportunities for cultural and people-to-people exchanges through simplified visa programs. Although Russian and American leaders have acknowledged this new reality, they have failed to take concrete steps to usher in a new strategic relationship that reflects the prospects of a new era and the opportunities sought by their own people, despite encouragement from prominent political figures from both sides.<sup>9</sup>

### **The trappings of a cyclical partnership**

The US-Russia relationship, just like the NATO-Russia partnership, has had to reinvent itself on a regular basis. The last US-Russia “reset” between President Obama and President Dmitry Medvedev echoed prior cooperative attempts and positive moments in the bilateral relationship—be it the Bush-Putin rapprochement following the Iraq war or the Clinton-Yeltsin honeymoon in the mid-1990s. Invariably these “highs” quickly subsided, and significant efforts were required to mitigate the “lows” and keep cooperation on the agenda.<sup>10</sup>

On the NATO-Russia agenda, the major breakthrough of 1997—the Founding Act—quickly unraveled with the Kosovo air campaign. A new attempt in 2002 by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson and President Vladimir Putin lasted a few years but ultimately deteriorated in 2007 with Putin’s Munich speech and came to a halt in 2008 with the Russian-Georgian war. The next attempt by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and President Medvedev in the run-up to the 2010 Lisbon Summit focused on missile defense cooperation, but it gained little traction. Since then, NATO-Russia cooperation has for the most part remained below the radar.

Looking back at the past twenty years, the

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<sup>9</sup> See Ellen Tauscher and Igor Ivanov, “MAD About You,” *Foreign Policy.com*, June 14, 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/14/mad\\_mutual\\_missile\\_defense\\_us\\_russia](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/14/mad_mutual_missile_defense_us_russia).

<sup>10</sup> Frances Burwell and Svante Cornell, “Rethinking the Russia Reset,” *Atlantic Council*, 2012, <http://www.acus.org/publication/rethinking-russia-reset>.

relationship between Russia and the West is best described as cyclical. It currently seems to be in a downward spiral. Unfortunately, no one seems to learn from one cycle to the next. Instead, the players accumulate negative baggage, making it more difficult each time to get back to a meaningful, cooperative agenda.

These cycles feed off diverging positions between optimists and pessimists regarding cooperation between Russia and the West. For the pessimists, a possible reset in the short term is met with considerable skepticism and some resistance due to a perceived growing polarization of positions within the security community. In the West, the lack of progress on missile defense cooperation with Russia and the dismissal of aggressive political statements from Moscow mirror the skepticism in Moscow regarding Western readiness to accommodate Russian interests and address Moscow security concerns about the current European security architecture. Pessimism has been in the driver seat for some time. NATO seems increasingly dismissive of a strategic partnership with Russia, while Washington is focused on threats and challenges beyond Russia, and its attention span and efforts to reach out to Russia will necessarily be limited. Moscow is also looking beyond its Euro-Atlantic relations and pivoting toward Asia.

This pessimism is often informed by popular judgment and channeled by the media. The general perception from Western media is that Russia is in a downward spiral prompted by internal politics. Similarly, the Russian perception is that the West is in decline in the aftermath of a significant economic and fiscal crisis, followed by destabilizing social uprisings. Pessimists on all sides seem to have concluded that the other side is on the wrong side of history.

### **Cooperation and trust**

However, the voice of optimism is not far below the surface. Optimists recognize disturbing realities and political differences but resist value judgment, do not demonize differences, and avoid emotional reactions—be it epidemic anti-Americanism in Russia or hysteria about Russian authoritarianism

in the West. Optimists underline that cultural and political differences have existed among Western partners in the past without preventing former enemies from developing normalizing relations over time. Essentially, we are reminded that socio-political differences among former enemies are not a sufficient cause for lack of progress in developing genuine cooperation.

The lack of progress in cooperation has generally been the result of polemical rhetoric by political elites. More often than not, Western-Russian relations are used in domestic political debates, in particular at times of elections, as an effective way to galvanize support by resorting to old prejudices in the absence of new ideas and leadership skills. Left to their own devices, the Western and Russian publics have long left Cold War political reflexes behind. In Russia, a predominantly Western-oriented citizenry favors westward migration. Young Russians are drawn to Western culture and to Western education. Westerners have also become more open toward Russia, especially in the private sector, and have helped foster a new corporate culture in Russia.

Six sets of issues bind the United States, Europe, and Russia together and provide the basis for what a substantive program of cooperation should entail.

- Current practical programs of cooperation on Afghanistan, counterpiracy, counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and even Iran could be reinforced.
- The arms control agenda would need further action, whether as a follow-on to the new START treaty, conventional forces in Europe, or missile defense.
- A new agenda dealing with new threats and challenges, such as cyber-security, energy security, and the Arctic would require new thinking.<sup>11</sup>
- An economically-driven agenda with cooperation in smart defense, possible cooperation among armament industries, and

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<sup>11</sup> Energy security refers to efforts to protect energy infrastructure and maintain adequate energy supplies through securing trade routes.

collaboration to help Russia uphold its World Trade Organization (WTO) obligations as a new member would help address today's European security challenges.

- Strategic consultations on issues such as the Arab spring, Asia-Pacific, and China, as well as global governance would reenergize a polarized political dialogue through formal and informal channels.
- Finally, good neighborly relations would help address unresolved tensions that resulted from the end of the Cold War.

While American, European, and Russian experts might quickly come together in listing the key issues to advance a cooperative agenda, they would find it much more difficult to agree on how to prioritize these issues. The United States would be more ready to embrace a new agenda focused on cyber and energy security issues in the hopes of getting early results and making visible progress on issues with less "historical baggage," while Russians would insist on addressing the old "unfinished business" of arms control. Ultimately, a meaningful cooperative agenda likely to offer "win-win" opportunities to Americans, Russians, and Europeans alike would have to address both sets of issues with a dual-track approach.

Trust is the linchpin of continued efforts toward European security with its hardcore defense agenda and the new security agenda well beyond Europe. Whether the focus on trust should come first as Russians would likely insist upon or whether cooperation should strengthen in order to build trust is a mute point. The United States, NATO, and Russia all acknowledge their mutual lack of trust resulting from the past twenty years and their collective inability to address each other's security concerns. The United States, Europe, and Russia must take their mutual lack of trust seriously and deal with it urgently before they can effectively enhance cooperation beyond European security.

In order to advance cooperative security, the United States, Europe, and Russia will have to devote significant efforts toward confidence-building measures and reassurance through a wide-ranging

program with mutually reinforcing bilateral and multilateral activities.<sup>12</sup> Such a confidence-building program could build on well-established practices in the field, notably through transparency on contingency planning and military exercises. Both sides initiated increasingly robust exercise programs, which in themselves may be useful to keep the rhetoric and the planning in check given unhelpful political statements, but which could benefit from increased transparency and reciprocal efforts. Similarly, this trilateral initiative should enhance dialogue on deterrence and transparency, notably to address safety measures and the way ahead on nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Finally, operational cooperation is always a successful approach to build confidence and trust among partner countries, and one can only regret the limited cooperative deployments involving Russian contingents in NATO-led operations.

The United States, Russia, and Europe could also develop new ideas based on recent developments in the context of smart defense and missile defense. Modernization efforts in Russia and allies' multinational cooperation with smart defense in the face of economic recession and fiscal austerity might provide new opportunities. In the sphere of missile defense, the parties could, for example, create joint installations to build upon the CAI in the context of missile defense, notably through the establishment of fusion centers to exchange data and assist in joint planning, concept of operations, and rules of engagement. This would allow US, European, and Russian planners to work side-by-side and develop trust.

### **Common interests and common values**

The lack of common values is often cited as one of the major impediments to further cooperation between Russia and its Western partners. This values gap has been exacerbated since the return of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency. The Russian government's record on human rights, freedom of speech and assembly, fair elections,

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12 Isabelle Francois, "The United States, Russia, Europe and Security: How to Address the 'Unfinished Business' of the Post-Cold War Era," *Transatlantic Perspectives* no.2, CTSS, National Defense University, pp. 35-39, April 2012, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/trans-perspectives/CTSS-TransPers-2.pdf>.

and rule of law have all been causes for concern to those in the West calling for a tougher stance on Russia. Assessing Putin's policies as repressive as a rollback on the mildly liberal changes of the Medvedev era certainly points to different standards than those prevailing in the United States and Europe. But this does not make Russia an enemy. In the end, it is unclear whether President Putin will be able to control Russian elites and respond to the interests of a more vocal Russian middle class and relatively nascent civil society. Ultimately, Russia's political trajectory is for the Russian electorate to decide.

The lack of common values is not deterministic of future relations among the United States, Europe, and Russia. Common interests will drive the relationship. Security policy is not developed on the basis of judgment of others' domestic practices but to provide for common defense. The complex relationship between allies and Russia cannot be reduced to single-issue advocacy.<sup>13</sup> Defending the highest moral standards will not be served by jeopardizing practical cooperation with Russia and security interests more broadly.

There are indeed common interests in addressing some strategic challenges and seizing opportunities between Washington and Moscow in a number of key regions in the world.<sup>14</sup> The scope of common interests between NATO and Russia is necessarily far more limited. In South Asia, the United States, Europe, and Russia will have to continue working together in Afghanistan, in particular after the ISAF drawdown, in the interest of regional stability. In the Middle East, working toward developing a common position on Syria and continuing to engage in negotiations with Iran will be critical. Both the United States and Russia have pivoted and rebalanced their priorities toward the Asia-Pacific while essentially ignoring each other's presence in the region. Russia will have to be part of the equation as any new security architecture emerges

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13 Matthew Rojansky, "Magnitsky List's Limited Impact," *National Interest*.org, April 16, 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/magnitsky-lists-limited-impact-8352>.

14 John Parker and Michael Kofman, "Russia Still Matters: Strategic Challenges and Opportunities for the Obama Administration," *Strategic Forum*, INSS, National Defense University, March 2013.

around China's rise in the region. In the Arctic, Russia is facing the consequences of climate change firsthand, and will look at transforming challenges into opportunities for East-West commerce. Finally, irrespective of the problems regularly plaguing the US-Europe-Russia relationship, business opportunities to expand trade and investment will not be ignored.

It has never been beneficial to isolate or marginalize Russia. Russia's permanent membership and veto power in the United Nations Security Council and its nuclear potential mean that it will remain a country that the United States and its allies cannot afford to ignore for long. Similarly, Russia will not escape the importance of Euro-Atlantic relations for its own long-term modernization plans. One may conclude that mutual interests and concerns destine the United States, Europe, and Russia to pragmatism. These uneasy partners may just have to settle for a transactional partnership on areas of common interests and resist regular attempts to close the value gap by staying away from a normative partnership. Transformational leadership at this stage may just be a bridge too far.

### III. Prescription Without Political Vision

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In 2012, analyzing global trends with a 2030 horizon, the US National Intelligence Council offered potential scenarios pointing to an unparalleled transformation coming with unprecedented breadth, speed, and complexity, and indicated that none of them is pre-ordained.<sup>15</sup> The Atlantic Council went a step further in defining what that meant for the United States and how the Obama administration should position itself to meet the global challenges ahead.<sup>16</sup> This proactive approach reflects American affinity toward embracing change. It calls for more collaborative forms of leadership at home and abroad, and reaffirms the importance of the United States' transatlantic ties, despite the challenges of European and NATO's political will and capacities in a time of sustained defense austerity. It also concludes that the US strategy should be to create an environment conducive for Russia to move in a direction of modernization and greater integration into the European Union and NATO.

One would be hard-pressed to find a comparable study reflecting European positioning vis-à-vis global trends given the lack of consensus on a strategic vision in Europe, despite a perfunctory Common Security and Defense Policy. This has little to do with lack of capabilities and institutions and more to do with the lack of consensus on European

needs and ambitions in the emerging world order. Lacking in shared interests, Europeans are hard-pressed to define a foreign policy. Interests and ambitions continue to be defended from national positions rather than as Europeans.<sup>17</sup> However, developments on Europe's doorstep in North Africa to the Middle East may force a change of European strategy by necessity.

While there does not seem to be much of a European strategy toward Russia, Moscow for its part appears to have decoupled itself from Europe, despite the fact that Europe remains Russia's main trading partner. Following the euro crisis, Russia has come to the conclusion that Europe will not emerge as a strategic partner beyond economic issues.<sup>18</sup> This stands in sharp contrast to just a few years ago when Europe was regarded as a mentor. Today, contacts are much more transactional, and President Putin seems to enjoy his interaction with chief executive officers of European and American companies more than the company of European and American political leaders.

#### **Lack of vision: beyond Euro-Atlanticism**

In retrospect, the post-Cold War dynamic among the United States, Europe, and Russia has evolved markedly every ten years. It started with a Euro-Atlantic choice in the 1990s followed by

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15 "Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds," National Intelligence Council, December 2012, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/global-trends-2030>.

16 "Envisioning 2030: US Strategy for a Post-Western World," Atlantic Council, December 2012, [http://www.acus.org/files/publication\\_pdfs/403/Envisioning2030\\_web.pdf](http://www.acus.org/files/publication_pdfs/403/Envisioning2030_web.pdf).

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17 Jan Techau, "Will Europeans Ask the Right Question in Munich," Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe, January 31, 2013, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=50802>.

18 Dmitri Trenin, "How Russia Sees Europe After the Euro Crisis," Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe, Carnegie Europe, February 15, 2013, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=50955>.

disenchantment with a resurgent Russia best characterized by president Putin's Munich speech in the mid-2000s, a period still marked by continued Euro-Atlantic efforts toward defense reforms. The last few years, however, seem to mark a new period in which Russia is significantly distancing itself from Euro-Atlanticism. In the aftermath of the euro crisis and significant political challenges on the home front, American, European, and Russian leaders have moved toward consolidating power at home. The United States and Russia have also been rebalancing their foreign policies beyond Europe.

The conceptual framework for Russia and the West to interact in the security field seems to have disintegrated. The idea of an inclusive Euro-Atlantic security community no longer inspires. Euro-Atlanticism has ceased to offer a common vision from Vancouver to Vladivostok that could bind North Americans, Europeans and Russians together. This vision still resonates in Europe and North America but no longer in Russia. Atlanticism in today's Russia is a symbol of Western democratization and modernization imposed from outside at the expense of national security and sovereignty. Of late, Russia has pushed forward its own set of values anchored in traditional family, religious faith, and national sovereignty.

Russia's foreign policy has focused on Eurasia and Eurasian economic integration. President Putin has also pivoted to Asia-Pacific not only in attempt to foster a geopolitical rebalancing between East and West, but also as an acknowledgment of China's importance in the regional power play.

Russia is unlikely to become the center of US or European focus in the years ahead, and Moscow seems no longer interested in getting the attention. According to Russian experts, Moscow "sees itself as an independent player and now interprets the notion of a great power both as a freedom from foreign influence at home and a freedom to act according to its own wishes on the international scene."<sup>19</sup> In fact, the real challenge for the Kremlin seems to come from within, which has prompted policies toward consolidating power at home. President Putin, challenged by Moscow protesters

in the run-up to his reelection in 2012, focused his attention on Russian civil society organizations that have received funding from Western sources in his effort to regain control over society and safeguard sovereignty.

American international affairs experts have also argued for US leadership to emphasize what has been called "nation building at home" as the first foreign policy priority. President Obama in his reelection campaign focused on the need to revitalize US economic strength as the most effective way to ensure US global influence. The Obama administration has focused on reversing rising deficits and debt, and addressing the political factors that have led to this conundrum.

The preeminence of internal challenges in the United States, Russia, and Europe, and the need to refocus on "nation-building at home," was not intended to neglect the global context. However, it forced some rebalancing and realignment, which has prompted some core questions about the future of the US-Europe-Russia relations. While Euro-Atlanticism has receded, Western and Russian leaders have not yet developed a new path, short of cautioning against a return to the past. This is hardly a position of leadership and it needs some attention and creative thinking.

### **Mutual respect**

In the absence of a clear vision, the best approach for the United States, Europe, and Russia to define how to interact in a complex environment without prejudice to the future will be to start by asking the fundamental question of whether the allies and Russia could develop relations on the basis of mutual respect without an expectation on either side to win over the other on the merit of its own position.

Russian experts at Carnegie Moscow Center have described changes occurring in Russia in the past couple of years, including calls for a more accountable government and growing opposition to Putin's rule, as "the Russian awakening."<sup>20</sup> The

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20 Dmitri Trenin, et al., "The Russian Awakening," Carnegie Moscow Center, November 2012, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/russian\\_awakening.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/russian_awakening.pdf).

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19 Ibid.

authors encouraged Western policymakers to help Russia's transformation and modernization process by diversifying strategic and economic relations and enhancing people-to-people contacts, while trusting the internal political process and acknowledging that Russia is for the Russians to fix. The Russian awakening is presented as rooted in Russian society's relative success in surviving the Soviet system without plunging into civil war and achieving a measure of freedom and prosperity never enjoyed before in Russian history. This movement encompasses the whole political spectrum from liberals to nationalists and was met by the Russian government with targeted repression as a threat to its rule.

Dealing with Russia in the coming years will mean dealing with President Putin, who for many symbolizes authoritarianism and is seen as standing against the values espoused by the United States and Europe. At the same time, Russia is by no means the only authoritarian regime with which the West engages on the international scene. While Western values are rightly informing Western interests, they are hindering necessary engagement with Russia. At the same time, Western societies are inherently value-based societies—it is part of their DNA. It is therefore difficult to transcend a value-based approach without giving up a fundamental part of Western identity. The values versus interests debate is not only an issue in engaging with Russia but also in the West's dealings with other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup> Russia will have to do its part in accepting that this recurrent debate is part and parcel of what it takes to engage with the West, and move on. Moreover, Moscow will have to continue repeating that Russia is not, and is not going to become, a new USSR. Similarly, allies facing constant recrimination from Russia about the threat of missile defense will have to continue repeating that European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) is not aimed at Russia and is not undermining strategic stability, as Russians' fear of encirclement and unalterable faith in American technological ingenuity is part of the Russian psychological make-up.

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<sup>21</sup> Jan Techau, "Values vs. Interests: The Big European Soul Search," Judy Dempsey's Strategic Europe, October 9, 2012, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=49622>.

## A roadmap to nowhere

In the absence of vision, to reconcile the idealists and their values with the pragmatists and their interests, the optimists with their action-oriented approach, and the pessimists with their uneasiness with change, the only way forward lies with defining a strategy. The best of strategies may not stand the test of time, especially in the face of a fast-evolving reality. A strategy remains nonetheless a guidepost in managing a turbulent relationship hedging against political improvisation and unhelpful decisions, such as publicized expulsions of spies (real and otherwise). A strategy also mitigates the risks of disengagement. As a crisis management tool, developing a strategy should help identify compromises between the requirements of expedient solutions typical in transactional relationships without losing sight of the ultimate search for a normative framework. A strategy provides decision-makers with tools facilitating these types of compromises through time management, offering short-term goals and long-term objectives, and thus allowing pragmatic decisions based on interests, while retaining a value-based, long-term perspective.

Recognizing the absence of vision binding the United States, Europe, and Russia together, all will nonetheless have to first consciously choose engagement. For the West, standing up to Russia or simply ignoring it has not worked in the past and will not work in future. It goes against global trends--demographic patterns, the food, water and energy nexus, the diffusion of state-centric power, and emergence of individual empowerment--and is therefore short-sighted.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, for Russia to ramp up anti-Americanism or choose to see the relative decline of the West as a welcome sign of global power rebalancing will not serve its interests on the long run, as most of its modernization goals can only be met in cooperation with the world's most advanced economies.

This report sees the strategy for US-Europe-Russia engagement as follows.

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<sup>22</sup> "Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds," National Intelligence Council, December 2012, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/about/organization/global-trends-2030>.

### **Strategic objectives:**

- *Transatlantic security issues:* Ensure peace and stability in Europe. This will only be achieved once the United States, Europe, and Russia have come to terms with the fact that no one should prevail at the expense of another, calling for mutual respect as well as consideration for each other's threat perceptions.
- *Regional and trans-regional issues:* Explore common challenges and interests beyond Europe, the United States, and Russia, and consider joint actions in other regions of the world.
- *Global issues:* Expand and deepen trade with each other, avoid overdependence and overreliance, exploit investment opportunities strengthening the rule of law, address regulatory measures against corruption, and harmonize norms and principles.

### **Operational goals:**

- Develop common understanding of “*mutual assured stability*” as a potential substitute for “mutual assured destruction” over time.
- Address Russian concerns regarding missile defense through transparency and *technical cooperation*, assuming Russia is prepared to be reassured.
- Develop a modus operandi for regional cooperation in *Afghanistan* post-2014 given long-term mutual security interests.
- Turn challenges into opportunities in the *Arctic*. As a result of the melting of the ice cap, Arctic sea lanes are increasingly available for commercial and military use. As competition from liquid natural gas and shale oil lessens dependence on Russian energy, the use of Arctic sea lanes offers options for transfer of hydrocarbons and other raw materials from East to West. This presents opportunities for North America, its allies, and Russia, among others, and for public-private partnerships.

- Explore the potential for common interests and joint actions in *Asia-Pacific*, taking into account that Europeans have yet to define their own interests in Asia. Multilateral efforts in Asia-Pacific might offer a different approach to relations among North America, Russia, and Europe.
- Pursue consultations and dialogue on the *Middle East and North Africa*. Europeans will have no choice but to be engaged in a region stretching to their doorstep, but the challenge is beyond European capacity to address alone and will require cooperation from the United States and Russia.
- Strengthen *trade and investment*. The need for Western technical know-how and significant investment capital to modernize and grow the Russian economy should be further exploited, as Western business leaders welcomed the permanent normal trade relations with Russia following its accession to the WTO last year. Build on the business community interests and its resilience to political stand-offs, recognizing that in the long run continuing trade and investments will also require rule of law to settle disputes.

### **Enablers of the trilateral dialogue:**

- Broaden *human contacts* and exchanges in all fields to avoid isolationist policies and strengthen mutual understanding. This will require visa-free regimes among the United States, Europe, and Russia extending to ordinary citizens. Expanding engagement through tourism, cultural exchange programs, and other people-to-people contacts would contribute to the strengthening of civil society in Russia.
- The US-Europe-Russia security relationship is no longer solely about United States-Russia-Europe and has to include other players as security challenges keep evolving and shifting.
- Given the complexity of issues and their global reach, it will be important to reach out across geographical boundaries and across fields

of expertise, from arms control to economic issues, thereby avoiding single-issue advocates, and get passed locked debates on particular projects such as missile defense.

- Institutional ties among the United States, Europe, and Russia have not delivered a strategic partnership. *Informal ties and processes* will be necessary to get beyond the security community and bring different experts to develop integrated solutions.
- *A new generation* interested in strengthening relations among the United States, Europe, and Russia in order to meet global security challenges can help to develop a different approach, unburdened by the weight of history and the failures of the past.<sup>23</sup>

The US-Russia-Europe dialogue continues to be relevant well beyond European security. The main focus in the short run should be reassuring through confidence-building measures in these times of change and defining concrete rules of the game to facilitate transition and transactions. It is also important to develop the habit of addressing security issues beyond their regional dimension, and to integrate transnational and global perspectives. The challenge seems to be more in the way security is approached and the ability to learn from and work with each other than in the actual security issues.

Coping with global security issues will require the US, European, and Russian political and military leaders to reexamine some of their long-held assumptions, notably about nuclear weapons and strategic stability. In order to accomplish this difficult task, informal dialogue will be necessary. Sustained commitment to reach out through informal contacts and personal commitments at the highest levels will be necessary. Track two diplomacy can also serve as a bridge across different areas of expertise and help to develop public-private partnerships. It will be vital for all parties to open up to new thinking.

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<sup>23</sup> See [http://www.acus.org/new\\_atlanticist/do-russia-and-america-have-future-together](http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/do-russia-and-america-have-future-together).

## Conclusion

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The past twenty years have been marked by a series of setbacks and disappointments in the dialogue among the United States, Europe, and Russia. For the US, Russian, and European relations to develop in the long run there has to be a genuine move by the top leadership toward engagement and readiness to address disagreements within national constituencies—optimists and pessimists—speaking up for engagement. At this stage, the trilateral dialogue appears to be a rather sick patient and the future seems uncertain at best.

The diagnosis is clear. The United States, Europe, and Russia inherited shaky premises from the 1990s, which prevented a healthy relationship from developing. The political deal by which Russia and the West expected to influence each other's decision-making by weighing in on internal forces has proven detrimental. Similarly, threat perceptions are diverging, although official documents—especially NATO documents—are ambiguous, preferring to focus on common threats and challenges while papering over the real differences. Transformation has dominated the security landscape over the past twenty years without developing new rules of the game. This triggered suspicions and increasing distrust, especially on the Russian side, with a renewed interest in arms control rather than cooperation. In the end, the so-called strategic partnership has gone missing.

The prognosis is not particularly inspiring. The US-Russia relationship, just like the NATO-Russia partnership, has been essentially cyclical, but all parties have been unable to learn from one cycle

to the next. There are clearly a number of areas of common interest where the United States, Europe, and Russia can cooperate and have engaged with some genuine success over the past two decades. This is, however, leading at best to a transactional partnership without much trust and with little hope of closing the value gap.

This leaves us with an uneasy prescription for the sick patient. The idea of an inclusive Euro-Atlantic security community no longer inspires. In the absence of a clear vision that binds us together, the United States, Europe, and Russia will have to rely on developing a relationship based on mutual respect without an expectation on either side to prevail over the other. In the absence of a vision, engagement has to rest on a strategy to mitigate the risk of disengagement. In the short term, this strategy may entail a transactional partnership at a time when the United States is focused on global challenges beyond Russia, while Russia remains focused on how the United States is positioning itself. Developing a normative partnership through transformational leadership may have to wait. Today's challenge lies with providing a roadmap without clear destination.

In sum, engaging Russia is no longer just about Russia and no longer best achieved through existing institutions and frameworks. The biggest challenge for this trilateral dialogue in the absence of vision and strategic partnership is above all an issue of mutual intentions, mutual respect, and political will on the part of the respective leaderships to work with their respective internal oppositions towards genuine cooperation.

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