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# The Future of U.S.–Russia Relations



Oleg Shakirov

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# The Future of U.S.–Russia Relations

## Introduction

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States and Russia have been exchanging humanitarian aid shipments, demonstrating the readiness of the two countries to temporarily put their political differences aside and come to the other's rescue. That being said, these episodes have had little effect on bilateral relations, which have been going through trying times in recent years. The crisis of confidence between the two countries is further aggravated by a number of problems that have built up over the past several years. This report attempts to present a picture of how bilateral relations between Russia and the United States may develop over the next ten years. The first section describes the context of these bilateral relations, specifically, how the general approaches of the two countries to foreign policy, as well as to certain domestic issues, will affect their interaction as a whole. The second section discusses specific areas of interaction, primarily those related to international security, in greater detail.

## The context of bilateral relations

In the first two subsections, we will examine two ideas that play a prominent role in the foreign policies of the United States and Russia, respectively. These are the “great power competition” in the United States and the “multipolar world” in Russia. While these ideas, which are heavily featured in the official discourse of the two countries, overlap somewhat, they are not entirely commensurate. Studying them will allow us to see how they could affect relations between the two countries in the future. The last subsection is devoted to the issue of external interference in domestic affairs in the context of U.S.–Russia relations.

### GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Great power competition has become a core idea of the Donald Trump administration. The

term was even formalized in the 2017 National Security Strategy: “[A]fter being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, great power competition returned [...] In short, they [Russia and China] are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor.”<sup>1</sup>

While the Obama administration's pivot to Asia can be considered a forerunner to this approach, it was not until Trump came into power that great power competition was turned into an official strategy. This was most clearly stated in the 2018 National Security Strategy: “Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism, is now the primary concern in U.S. national security.”<sup>2</sup>

Russia is at the centre of the United States' competition strategy: according to the official rhetoric, the United States coordinates its actions in response to those of Russia and China. Washington will seek to deter its rivals by relying on force. The increased military budget under Trump, as well as the reluctance of the current administration to be tied to any external restrictions, increases the risks for bilateral arms control between the United States and Russia. Washington is also preparing for competition in new areas of the confrontation, namely space (through the creation of the United States Space Command), the electromagnetic spectrum (through the development of a special strategy) and cyberspace. Speaking of cyberspace, the relevant strategic documents have already been adopted.<sup>3</sup> And Russia being singled out as a threat prompted local legislators to draw up a draft bill on the Russian Internet.<sup>4</sup>

At the global level, we are talking about the United States reconfiguring its military and political capabilities, but this is not a quick process. U.S. troops will not be pulled out of Afghanistan until the second quarter of 2021. At the same time, despite Trump's plans to exit the Middle East, the number of troops in the region has

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<sup>1</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America // The White House. 12.2017.

URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America // Department of Defense. 08.10.2018.

URL: <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Cyber Strategy of the United States of America // The White House. 09.2018.

URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/National-Cyber-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Kalyukov E. State Duma Adopts Law on Sovereign Internet // RBC. 16.04.2019.

URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/16/04/2019/5cb5926d9a79470c9428e7d1>

increased over the past year to counter another rival, namely, Iran.<sup>5</sup>

The longest running element of this strategy is likely to be the confrontation with Beijing. Trade and tech wars with China have marked Trump's presidency from the very outset. By the fourth year of his term in office, U.S. grievances towards China had expanded to include accusations regarding the coronavirus infection.

Harsh policies towards China have become the norm in Washington. Future presidents and other politicians will use it as a blueprint, rather than proceeding from an ideal vision of what U.S.–China cooperation could be. In the event that the competition between China and the United States intensifies, economic ties may weaken and attempts to enact a complete decoupling, which is mentioned with increasing regularity, may be made.

The question of how these developments will affect U.S.–Russia relations remains open: Will Russia still be seen in the same light as China ten years from now? Or will the United States adopt a more differentiated approach to the country?

## MULTIPOLAR WORLD

As far as Russia is concerned, the concept of a multipolar world encapsulates its perception of the international environment or, perhaps more accurately, what should be expected from it. This is by no means a new concept, having first entered the country's foreign policy lexicon back in the mid-1990s thanks to then Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeny Primakov. The concept is still used today to explain international issues.

Unlike the U.S. strategy of competition among great powers, the concept of multipolarity has not been written into the country's strategic documents, for example, the 2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation or the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (although it was included in the 2008 version of the document). This leaves room for

different interpretations of what multipolarity actually is.

An important starting point for the multipolar world is to pit it against the unipolar model led by the United States and, by extension, the West. Sergey Lavrov summed up the idea rather laconically at the Paris Peace Forum in 2019: “[R] egardless of the terminology you use, be it a polycentric world, a multipolar world or a multi-lateral world, the essence is the same. No one, no single country, no group of countries, like what we call the ‘historical West,’ can rule the world in this situation alone.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the European Union can be seen as a separate pole.<sup>7</sup>

Russian diplomats emphasize that a multipolar world is not a reality of today, but rather a model that is gradually unfolding, an objective process that will take time.<sup>8</sup> In addition, multipolarity is understood not so much in the traditional terms of the balance of powers as it is in the nature of relations between countries. In an article on the international relations system of the future, Lavrov noted: “It is our common interest to ensure that multipolarity is not based on a stark balance of power like it was at the earlier stages of human history (for example, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), but rather bears a just, democratic and unifying nature, takes into account the approaches and concerns of all those taking part in the international relations without an exception, and ensures a stable and secure future.”<sup>9</sup>

At the level of rhetoric, this idealized view of the desired world order is placed in stark contrast to the negative aspects of politics in the United States and the West. For example, this forms the basis of the criticisms that Russian diplomats level at the idea of “rule-based order,” which is seen as an arbitrary construct created by a narrow group of countries (the West) to serve their own interests. This order runs counter to international law, which is, on the contrary, developed by the entire global community.

<sup>5</sup> Baldor L. U.S. General Says Troop Surge in Middle East May Not End Soon // AP. 23.01.2020.  
URL: <https://apnews.com/2208d8645ac0437024ac71c06fcb8e1>

<sup>6</sup> Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Remarks and Answers to Questions at the Masterclass Working Session Held as Part of the 2019 Paris Peace Forum, Paris, November 12, 2019 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 12.11.2019.  
URL: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3896584](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/3896584)

<sup>7</sup> Lavrov S. V. Our Neighbours in Europe // Rossiyskaya gazeta. 18.12.2019.  
URL: <https://rg.ru/2019/12/18/sergej-lavrov-ob-itogah-30-letnih-otnoshenij-mezhdu-rossiej-i-evrosoiuzom.html>

<sup>8</sup> Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's Answers to Questions at Bolshaya Igra (Great Game) Talk Show on Channel One, Moscow, April 25, 2020 // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 25.04.2020.  
URL: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya\\_s\\_uchastiem\\_ministra/-/asset\\_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4105593](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/meropriyatiya_s_uchastiem_ministra/-/asset_publisher/xK1BhB2bUjd3/content/id/4105593)

<sup>9</sup> Lavrov S. V. World at a Crossroads and a System of International Relations for the Future // Russia in Global Affairs. 20.09.2019.  
URL: <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/world-at-a-crossroads-and-a-system-of-international-relations-for-the-future/>

On a practical level, the most obvious example of how ideas of multipolarity can turn into reality is the cooperation within the BRICS organization, including the creation of the relevant infrastructure – the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, the single payment system, etc.

Another example is the creation of a new mechanism for discussing international information security (IIS) issues at the United Nations. Russia was the architect behind the establishment of an Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on the issue, which differed from its predecessor (the Group of Governmental Experts) in that all UN Member States are invited to participate. In its report on the creation of the OEWG, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs pointed out the advantages of such a format in language that is normally reserved for descriptions of a multipolar world: “We are convinced that the era of ‘club’ arrangements is over and that all countries, regardless of their level of technological development, have a right to take a direct part in talks on IIS at the UN and to influence the decision-making process. Every vote counts and must be taken into consideration. Only in this way can we create the basis for a fair and equal world order in the digital sphere.”<sup>10</sup>

Russia will surely continue to use the concept of the multipolar world at both the rhetorical and practical levels over the next decade. The concept has its obvious limitations in that its general nature means that it cannot always be put into practice. In the context of U.S.–Russia relations, the topic of multipolarity will remain an important component of Russia’s criticism of the West’s approaches to a variety of issues.

## MUTUALLY GUARANTEED INTERVENTION

Russia and the United States are both critical of the other’s actions on the international stage. This is reflected, as we have shown, in the foreign policy approaches and concepts of the two countries. The hostile attitudes of both sides are manifested at the domestic political level in heightened suspicions and an increased sense of vulnerability to external interference.

The scandal surrounding the 2016 U.S. presidential elections set the country’s agenda for years to

come. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the American people appear to be genuinely concerned about the possibility of external forces having an influence on their country. Foreign intervention, and not only on the part of Russia, has been a constantly present theme in the United States since 2016. Investigative journalism, congressional hearings and measures to increase the transparency of social networks have attracted the attention of the general public to the problem of information dissemination on the Internet. And these fears are only being exacerbated by the political polarization of American society.

In the run-up to the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, officials warned of possible outside interference, and they are saying the same now about this year’s presidential elections. Not only do such warnings about information threats increase alertness, but they also fuel interest in conspiracy theories.

In Russia, accusing foreign governments of attempting to influence the political situation inside the country is nothing new. Just like in the United States, information about such activity tends to spike in the months leading up to elections. It happened before the 2007 parliamentary elections and again during the 2011–2012 election season; it even happened during the Moscow City Duma elections in the summer of 2019.

Such accusations are not good for bilateral relations. As a result, trust wanes and suspicions grow. Worse still, attempts are made to discredit diplomats and obstruct their work. When the new U.S. Ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul arrived in Moscow in 2012 amid a wave of civil discontent, the Russian media attempted to paint him as a revolutionary.<sup>11</sup> The Ambassador of Russia to the United States Sergey Kislyak found himself in a similar situation. In early March 2017, CNN published a story claiming that Kislyak was a foreign spy, citing an unnamed source in the U.S. intelligence services.<sup>12</sup> This prompted a discussion in the American media about whether or not this was actually the case, which made little difference as the damage to the Ambassador’s reputation in Washington had already been done.

<sup>10</sup> Press Release on the Adoption of a Russian Resolution on International Information Security at the UN General Assembly // Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. 07.12.2018. URL: [https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/mezhdunarodnaa-informacionnaa-bezopasnost/-/asset\\_publisher/UsCUTi-w2pO53/content/id/3437775](https://www.mid.ru/web/guest/mezhdunarodnaa-informacionnaa-bezopasnost/-/asset_publisher/UsCUTi-w2pO53/content/id/3437775)

<sup>11</sup> Specialist on Democracy // Lenta.ru. 18.01.2012. URL: <https://lenta.ru/articles/2012/01/18/mcfaul/>

<sup>12</sup> Lister T. Who is Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the United States? // CNN. 02.03.2017. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/02/world/sergey-kislyak-russian-ambassador-us-profile/>

Both the United States and Russia will remain extremely sensitive to issues of external interference in their domestic affairs in the coming years, and probably throughout the next decade. Real or false accusations may serve as a convenient excuse for curtailing cooperation.

## Areas of interaction and Russia's goals

In this section, we will take a look at particular areas and regions where cooperation exists between Russia and the United States. This is by no means an exhaustive review, but it does illustrate the diversity of areas in which the interests of the two countries intersect. When considering the prospects for the next ten years, we will focus on the interests of the Russian side. In a number of areas, particularly arms control, all the signs point to a deterioration of the current situation.

### STRATEGIC STABILITY AND ARMS CONTROL

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the first signs of movement towards the collapse of the arms control system that had been established during the Cold War. And this trend has only picked up speed since the arrival of Trump in the White House: the United States pulled out of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and the Treaty on Open Skies and has shown absolutely no interest in extending the New START. In the same period, the U.S. and Russian leaders have not met once to negotiate strategic stability and arms control. For the first time in years, the two countries risk being left without legally binding instruments to limit their strategic forces.<sup>13</sup> And the probability of this being case will only rise if Donald Trump wins re-election.

The United States explains its position, among other things, by saying that China needs to be included in the arms control system. And this is understandable in the context of the country's strategic rivalry with Beijing. The problem is that Washington is keeping its cards close to its chest when it comes to saying exactly what the desired outcome of such a system would be. Connecting the U.S.–China and U.S.–Russia tracks is problematic because the sides are not equal in terms of their nuclear capabilities. Experts have devoted

much time to the idea of a trilateral treaty on strategic arms control, but at the official level, it has not found traction in China or Russia.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, Russia's position has for many years been informed by the notion that, in the long term, the United Kingdom and France should also be involved in nuclear arms control agreements.

The Russian leadership will see the unwillingness of the United States to preserve bilateral arms control not in terms of hypothetical future models, but rather from the point of view of security. Not only will the United States' refusal to extend New START, along with its actions in other areas (for example, equipping ballistic missile submarines with low-yield nuclear warheads), be interpreted as deliberately destabilizing and provocative, but they will also increase global uncertainty and push Moscow to plan for the worst-case scenario.

Fears that Washington will gain an advantage in strategic weapons once the sanctions are lifted could lead to a new arms race between Russia and the United States. It will be important for Russia to maintain parity with the United States both in terms of the traditional understanding of strategic stability (as a state of relations where there are no incentives for launching a first strike), and for the sake of its global status, as it will show that the two sides are equal in this respect. What is more, parity has always been the go-to approach when it comes to bilateral strategic arms control.

In the unlikely event that New START is extended, it will only remain in force until February 2026 at the latest. However, this time can be used to prepare for fresh negotiations, in which case the two sides will have to decide on a wide range of issues, including the principles on which the new restrictions will be based, whether or not third countries will be party to such an agreement (the American side is likely to insist on China's involvement no matter who is in the White House), what provisions should be made regarding strategic defence forces, space, etc.

### CYBERSECURITY

Russia and the United States first started discussing information and cybersecurity issues back

<sup>13</sup> Baklitsky A. Arms Control: What Will Happen if the Existing System Collapses // Carnegie Moscow Center. 07.03.2019. URL: <https://carnegie.ru/2019/03/07/ru-pub-78524>

<sup>14</sup> Trilateral Arms Control? Perspectives from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing // Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg. 03.2020. URL: <https://ifsh.de/en/publications/research-report/research-report-002>

in the mid-1990s.<sup>15</sup> At the initiative of the Russian side, these topics were included in the agendas of the UN General Assembly starting in 1998. And since the mid-2000s, the United Nations has held international negotiations on the measures that countries are taking to improve security in cyberspace. Russia and the United States were actively involved in this work, which resulted in the publication of three comprehensive reports by Groups of Governmental Experts, including a 2015 report that put forward recommendations for the responsible behaviour of states in cyberspace.<sup>16</sup>

However, the negotiations are not keeping pace with what is actually happening in international relations. The 2010s opened with the uncovering of the Stuxnet cyberattack against the Iranian nuclear programme. And throughout the rest of the decade, states would use their cyber capabilities against each other with increasing frequency, while effective international tools to counter such practices did not appear.

At the political level, this has led to increased finger-pointing (primarily the United States and some of its partners accusing other countries of carrying out cyberattacks), the formation of quasi-coalitions that each have different views on international cyberspace governance,<sup>17</sup> and the tendency to reformat the cyber agenda in accordance with two approaches.<sup>18</sup>

In the coming decade, political differences are likely to hamper progress in the negotiations on international cybersecurity, despite the fact that the influence of information and communications technologies on global politics will continue to grow.

Russia will be interested in pushing negotiations forward and preventing them from breaking down, and will also insist on maintaining its leading role in such talks. At the same time, the multilateral track is inextricably linked

with the bilateral U.S.–Russian dialogue on information security. Russia has expressed its desire in recent years to launch talks on the prevention of cyber incidents, primarily between the armed forces.<sup>19</sup> Other promising areas for bilateral cooperation include fighting cybercrime and developing a dialogue on specific issues of the security of critical infrastructure, for example, in healthcare.

Negotiations on cybersecurity are complicated by distrust, primarily on the American side: the last meeting between the two sides on the issue was supposed to take place in Geneva in 2018, but the Americans pulled out at the last minute.<sup>20</sup> This distrust has also affected private companies in Russia, for example Kaspersky Lab, whose products have been pulled from the offices of U.S. government agencies.

## COUNTERTERRORISM

Cooperation in counterterrorism holds a special place in U.S.–Russia relations. In 2001, Vladimir Putin was the first world leader to call George Bush following the September 11 terrorist attacks. In a 2015 speech at the United Nations, the President of the Russian Federation called on all countries, including the West, to “create a genuinely broad international coalition against terrorism,” which he likened to the anti-Hitler coalition.<sup>21</sup> Despite this, Russia and the United States never managed to develop a full-fledged partnership on the basis of counterterrorism, even though the two countries had ample opportunity to do so during the United States’ war on terrorism in the 2000s and later during the struggle against ISIS in the second half of the 2010s.

However, in practice, the counterterrorism agencies in the two countries have continued their cooperation despite their differences and despite the general worsening of relations between Russia and the United States.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that

<sup>15</sup> Markoff J., Kramer A. E. U.S. and Russia Differ on a Treaty for Cyberspace // The New York Times. 27.06.2009. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/world/28cyber.html>

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security // United Nations General Assembly. 22.07.2015. URL: <https://undocs.org/A/70/174>

<sup>17</sup> Stadnik I. Discussing State Behaviour in Cyberspace: What Should We Expect? // DiploFoundation. 20.03.2019. URL: <https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/discussing-state-behaviour-cyberspace-what-should-we-expect>

<sup>18</sup> Tolstukhina A. Two Cyber Resolutions Are Better Than None // Russian International Affairs Council. 13.02.2019. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/luchshe-dve-kiberrezolyutsii-chem-ni-odnoy/>; Demidov O. Multilateral Regulation in Cyberspace // PIR Center. November 14, 2018. URL: <https://www.pircenter.org/blog/view/id/355>

<sup>19</sup> Chernenko E., Krutskikh A. “You’ll Have to Answer for Your Rude Behaviour” // Kommersant. 05.04.2018. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3593972>

<sup>20</sup> Chernenko E. Some Things Will Never Change // Kommersant. 03.03.2018. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3565613>

<sup>21</sup> 70th Session of the UN General Assembly // President of Russia. 28.09.2015. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50385>

<sup>22</sup> Beebe G. Cooperate to Deescalate: Working with Russia Against Terrorism Will Make America Safer // Russia Matters. 08.02.2018. URL: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/cooperate-deescalate-working-russia-against-terrorism-will-make-america-safer>

counterterrorism has been one of the few areas in which the two sides have been able to step up cooperation since Trump came to power: the bilateral dialogue on the issue has been resumed, and information exchanges have helped prevent terrorist attacks from taking place, something the presidents of the two countries have talked about publicly.<sup>23</sup>

Russia has always spoken in favour of developing cooperation in counterterrorism, and we can expect such cooperation to continue in the next decade. However, experience tells us that counterterrorism will not become a unifying idea that will help the sides overcome differences in other areas. What it will do, though, is ensure a basic level of trust between the governments of the two countries, and this cannot be underestimated.

## EUROPEAN SECURITY

The security situation in Europe right now is in an unfortunate state, thanks to the conflict in Ukraine. The confrontation between Russia and NATO took on a very real dimension when military activity was stepped up on the European continent, specifically in areas of contact between the two sides. The rivalry in the region is often a zero-sum game, especially with respect to countries that have not joined either of the sides. Russia and NATO have different interpretations of how the crisis came to be, which is hardly conducive to finding a way out of the current situation.

At the same time, regional tensions are nothing like they were during the Cold War. The absence of meaningful dialogue on security issues is balanced by the fact that neither Russia nor NATO are likely to aggravate the situation. This creates certain predictability that does not suit either side entirely. As a result, things will remain very much the same as they are now in Europe until 2030, albeit with minor changes.

## REGIONAL PROBLEMS

Unlike the situation in Europe, where Russia and the United States do not see any room for compromise, the two sides may be more flexible when it comes to cooperation in other regions. Russia and the United States have a long history

of cooperation in resolving regional security problems. The negotiations on the situation surrounding Iran, where the six-party talks involving both the United States and Russia eventually led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015, could be used as a blueprint here. The future of the JCPOA is now in doubt after the withdrawal of the United States under Trump.

Russian mediation is needed because, first of all, the country has long-term ties with a number of regional players (for example, North Korea, Iran and the Palestinian National Authority) and, secondly, because the attempts of the United States to resolve various conflicts over the years have shown themselves to be ineffective or one-sided. The fact that President of the State of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas asked Putin if Russia could organize a conference on the conflict in the Middle East, and that Kim Jong-un paid an official visit to Russia both demonstrate that the leaders of these countries are eager for Russia to be involved in settlement processes.<sup>24</sup> However, this has not prompted the Trump administration to try and develop more intensive interaction with Russia on these issues, preferring to act alone instead. That said, negotiations on Afghanistan have been stepped up since 2018 in connection with U.S. preparations to withdraw its troops from the country.<sup>25</sup>

The examples of negotiations on Iran and Afghanistan in the 2010s demonstrate that such interaction between Moscow and Washington is possible, even when relations between the sides are less than rosy. The prospects for cooperation on other issues will depend on the degree to which the interests of the sides overlap, as well as on the flexibility of the U.S. policy. It is highly unlikely that the Trump administration will change its position on North Korea and Palestine.

## NON-INTERFERENCE

The alleged Russian government interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election prompted Moscow to suggest signing an agreement with Washington on non-interference in each other's domestic affairs.<sup>26</sup> The response in Washington

<sup>23</sup> Lavrov Talks About the Difficulties of Working with the U.S. // RIA Novosti. 02.02.2020. URL: <https://ria.ru/20200210/1564468377.html>

<sup>24</sup> Abbas Asks Putin to Organize a Conference on Israel and Palestine in Moscow // Kommersant. 20.05.2020. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4349743>

<sup>25</sup> Bocharova S., Nikolsky A. Russia and the U.S. Agree on Afghanistan's Future // Vedomosti. 24.02.2019. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2019/02/24/794959-afganistana>

<sup>26</sup> Ryabkov: Russia Proposes Signing Document with U.S. on Non-interference in Each Other's Affairs // TASS. 16.05.2019. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/6438348>; Patrushev and Bolton Fail to Come to Terms on Joint Statement Following Talks // Vedomosti. 23.08.2018. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2018/08/23/778874-pomoschnik-trampa>



was cool. As we mentioned in the previous section, the issue of external intervention remains relevant in both countries. Instead, the response to real or imagined attempts by foreigners to influence domestic politics has been to clamp down on the work of journalists, non-profit organizations and diplomats.

In the future, Moscow and Washington could attempt to approach the topic not from the point of view of a legally binding document, but rather as a political and diplomatic process. This is by no means a trivial task, but the U.S.–Soviet information negotiations in the late 1980s show that it can be done.<sup>27</sup> At the very least, such consultations could involve identifying a number of problems of an informational nature and highlighting those that have potential in terms of coming to a common understanding. A more ambitious task would be to draw up a set of political obligations, for example, refusing to publish sensitive information or certain types of political advertising.<sup>28</sup> These talks will not be easy, but they may be necessary to overcome certain stereotypes or to clarify the “rules of the game.”

## ECONOMICS

According to Vadim Grishin, consultant to the chief economist, International Finance Corporation, “the scale and scope of U.S.–Russia economic interaction and business activity is much greater than officially appreciated but not significant enough to be taken into consideration by policymakers.”<sup>29</sup> Bilateral economic relations have been on the rise since 2017 following the lull in 2014–2015. In 2019, for example, trade between Russia and the United States amounted to approximately \$26 billion, up 4.9 per cent from the previous year.<sup>30</sup>

According to a study published by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPF), trade volumes between Russia and the United States will either remain at the same level over the next three to five years or even gradually

decrease, with a much larger drop-off expected within the next seven years.<sup>31</sup> The United States is currently Russia’s fifth or sixth largest foreign trade partner and will continue to play an important role moving forward.

The U.S. sanctions against Russia significantly affect bilateral economic relations between the two countries. While certain restrictions may be lifted, it is unlikely that the United States will ease the sanctions pressure on Russia any time soon. The Russian leadership, primarily the president and high-ranking diplomats, has repeatedly emphasized the fact that Russia has neither asked for the sanctions to be lifted, nor has it attempted to discuss the issue with the United States. At the same time, the Russian authorities have called on the U.S. business community to support developing cooperation between Russia and the United States.<sup>32</sup> The American side has also talked about its desire to increase the trade flow between the two countries, but has yet to take any noticeable steps in this direction.<sup>33</sup>

The main task in bilateral economic relations over the next decade may very well be to preserve mutually beneficial areas of cooperation, as well as to ensure the predictability of economic activity under the sanctions. For example, the RSPF recommends depoliticizing existing economic ties (not positioning the economy as a method of establishing political ties) and building an infrastructure that helps Russian and American companies comply with the U.S. sanctions regime. According to one group of Russian and American experts, the United States needs to effectively communicate the political conditions for sanctions relief.<sup>34</sup>

## SPACE

Historically, cooperation in space has played an important role in U.S.–Russia relations ever since the joint Apollo-Soyuz mission. A number of factors have the potential to affect this interaction in the coming decade negatively. We are talking

<sup>27</sup> Shakirov O. “Russian Propaganda”: On Social Networks, in Eastern Europe, and Soon Everywhere // Russian International Affairs Council. 24.07.2018. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/-rossiyskaya-propaganda-v-sotssetyakh-v-vostochnoy-evrope-dalee-vezde/>

<sup>28</sup> Charap S., I. Timofeev. Can Washington and Moscow Agree to Limit Political Interference? // War on the Rocks. 13.06.2019. URL: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/06/can-washington-and-moscow-agree-to-limit-political-interference/>

<sup>29</sup> Grishin V. U.S.–Russia Economic Relations // Center for Strategic and International Studies. 10.2017. URL: [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/171020\\_Grishin\\_USRussiaEconRelations\\_Web.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/171020_Grishin_USRussiaEconRelations_Web.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> U.S.–Russia Trade Grew 4.9% in 2019 // REGNUM News Agency. 11.02.2020. URL: <https://regnum.ru/news/2855583.html>

<sup>31</sup> Karaganov S. A., Suslov D. V. U.S.–Russia Economic Cooperation at a Time of Uncertainty // Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs. 03.2019. URL: [https://roscongress.org/upload/medialibrary/64c/\\_preview.pdf](https://roscongress.org/upload/medialibrary/64c/_preview.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Putin Calls on U.S. Businessmen to Help Trump Open a Constructive Dialogue with Russia // TASS. 02.06.2017. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/4306797>

<sup>33</sup> Visloguzov V., Chernenko E. Trump’s Terms are Short // Kommersant. 12.12.2019. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4189698>

<sup>34</sup> Mankoff J., Kortunov A. Addressing Unresolved Challenges in U.S.–Russia Relations // Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). 03.2020. URL: [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200313\\_Mankoff\\_TrackII\\_WEB%20FINAL.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200313_Mankoff_TrackII_WEB%20FINAL.pdf)

about the development of private space, which will reduce the United States' dependence on Russia; the ongoing militarization of space, most notably the United States Space Command; and the expected decommissioning of the International Space Station.<sup>35</sup> Other factors include the diversification of cooperation, for example, Russia developing cooperation with China or India,<sup>36</sup> as well as politically motivated restrictions on cooperation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, both Russia and the United States are interested in developing new joint space exploration projects.<sup>38</sup> The militarization of space, as well as the new American initiatives to develop space resources, may prompt Russia to step up diplomatic efforts to develop an international legal framework in this area.

## Conclusion

The forecast presented here is largely inertial, meaning that there are no significant impulses that might revive cooperation in the near future. This is due to the experience of recent years, when both Russia and the United States have

had concrete ideas about how to move forward but for various reasons have been unable to put them into action. Such ideas include the agreements reached between President Trump and President Putin in Helsinki on the creation of a group of experts,<sup>39</sup> as well as the launch of a dialogue between “captains” of business (which, reports indicated, may have been scheduled for the St. Petersburg International Economic Conference,<sup>40</sup> but those plans were canceled due to the coronavirus). Obviously, a political decision made after the elections in one of the countries, for example, could serve as an impulse to breathe new life into bilateral relations. An external crisis such as a pandemic may also provide a window of opportunity, although cooperation between Russia and the United States to fight the coronavirus infection has been extremely limited thus far. That said, the assessments presented in this report can be used to form the basis for discussions on the kind of relations we should realistically be striving for and the steps that need to be taken to make this happen.

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<sup>35</sup> Space for Cooperation? // Center for Strategic and International Studies. 21.08.2018.  
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<sup>36</sup> Kramer A. E. Russia Wants to Extend U.S. Space Partnership. Or It Could Turn to China. // The New York Times. 11.12.2018.  
URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/11/world/europe/russia-space-us.html>

<sup>37</sup> Gatinsky A., Sidorkova I. Pentagon to Limit Use of Russian Services for Space Launches // RBC. 30.05.2019.  
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<sup>38</sup> Russia, U.S. to Discuss Cooperation in Deep Space Exploration // Interfax. February 10, 2020. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/694815>

<sup>39</sup> Pudovkin E., Galimova N., Khimshashvili P. Russia and the U.S. Name Heads of “New Philosophy” Group // RBC. 07.08.2018.  
URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/07/08/2018/5b6853789a79476c69c7c90c>

<sup>40</sup> “Captains” of Russian and American Business Could Meet at SPIEF // RIA Novosti. 14.11.2019. URL: <https://ria.ru/20191114/1560911732.html>



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