

DYNAMICS OF US-RUSSIA RELATIONS1

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Literature Review

Introduction

The post-Soviet relations between Russia and the United States prove difficult to classify. The relations between the two states are neither truly good nor totally bad, important for both countries, but far less so than they have been in the past and more central to global equilibrium. Their relations are not without geopolitical stakes, they are particularly complex and find their "cruising rhythm".

The relations between Washington and Moscow become generally difficult over the last twenty years, and are often assessed in terms of their negative moments and the divergences that shape them¹. However, careful scrutiny shows that they are much less uniform than it appears. While there are many reasons for disagreement, areas of cooperation exist, and the negative representations inherited from the Cold War, as well as their competitive nature, should not mask the rather frequent moments of rapprochement that punctuate bilateral relations².

In order to explore the complexity of the relations between the former great enemies of the bipolar world, their geopolitical stakes and their oscillatory movements, this literature review distinguishes three main periods, corresponding approximately to the parallel presidencies of Bill

¹Mead, Walter Russell. "The return of geopolitics: The revenge of the revisionist powers." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 69.

²Legvold, Robert. "What Moscow and Washington Can Learn from the Last One." *Foreign Aff.* 93 (2014): 74.

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Clinton in Washington and Boris Yeltsin in Moscow, George Bush and Vladimir Putin and Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev. The first period, from the collapse of the USSR to the end of the 1990s, sees the two states coming together in a rather constructive atmosphere. The second period, from the late 1990s to the end of the GW Bush Presidency, was marked by a tightening of relations and a proliferation of disagreements. The third period, shorter than the previous ones, is characterized by the reset desired by President Obama and allows for a singular improvement in bilateral relations.

It is much more nuanced than these broad lines imply. On the one hand, the periods of tension do not prevent co-operations, sometimes pushed, and periods of general improvement do not prevent disagreements, sometimes serious ones. On the other hand, on the strictly chronological level, at least two sub-periods punctuate the three main periods and contradict the general tendencies of these. In the middle of the 1990s, first of all, while the dynamics were rather positive, US-Russian relations became tense, particularly as a result of disagreements and increased geopolitical competition in Eurasia³. Then, on the other hand, bilateral relations experienced a rather dramatic upturn following the attacks of 11 September 2001, which lasted only a short time. In fact, as summarized by the American political scientist Kubicek,⁴ since 1991, relations have oscillated between cooperation and confrontation, without really finding their breath and their identity.

³Baylis, John, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens. *The globalization of world politics: an introduction to international relations*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

⁴Kubicek, Paul. "Russian foreign policy and the West." *Political Science Quarterly* 114, no. 4 (1999): 547-568.

The first decade of post-Soviet Russian-American relations: craze and tensions

Post-Soviet Russian- American relations began, strictly speaking, at the very end of 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed and the G. H. Bush administration recognized the independence of the Russian Federation. Despite the surprise and hesitation about the collapse of the USSR in Washington, US leaders soon realize that relations with Russia remain central to their country. If the new Russia is not the USSR, it retains most of the armaments, including nuclear weapons, and inherits the permanent seat of the USSR in the UN Security Council, which makes it immediately unavoidable

The improvement following the collapse of the USSR

For President Bush and his successor Bill Clinton, the main objective is first of all to break with the logics of the Cold War and to move closer to the Kremlin by accompanying the new Russian state towards democracy and the market economy. The predominant logic is that "the Russian problem" was above all the consequence of the ideology and structure of the communist state⁵ and that a Russia integrating the democratic "free world" and adopting market economy could no longer be regarded as an enemy but as a partner. Even if some influential intellectuals like Henry Kissinger, Samuel Huntington or even Francis Fukuyama are very cautious, it is on this logic that the very symbolic Washington Charter was signed in 1992 between Presidents George H. Bush and Boris Yeltsin, stating that with the starting point of their new relations mutual trust and respect, the United States and Russia do not regard themselves as opponents but develop relations of partnership and friendship⁶.

⁵Garthoff, Raymond. *The great transition: American-Soviet relations and the end of the Cold*

War. Brookings Institution Press, 2000

⁶Goldgeier, James M., and Michael McFaul. *Power and purpose: US policy toward Russia after*

On the Russian side, the desire for democratization is particularly strong and the desire for rapprochement emanating from Washington is welcomed very favourably by the Muscovite leaders⁷. President Yeltsin is a symbol of this trend of rapprochement at all costs, even going so far as to suggest that his country could someday integrate NATO⁸. At the diplomatic level, Russia thus gives the impression, for a time, of accepting American leadership without reservations and systematically supports the United States and their decisions. At the same time, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was created at the initiative of Moscow in order to ensure economic, and then politico-military integration, in the former Soviet space, but it was the product of an improvisation "and" a low priority for those who rule Russia⁹.

Satisfied by this Kremlin's political line, the United States is thus fully committed to a policy of financial aid to Russia, accompanied by political support for President Yeltsin, appearing as a sincere reformer and an interlocutor reliable¹⁰. This policy of rapprochement and support for democratic and economic transition¹¹ is all the more sustained since Russia is experiencing, in particular in 1992-1993, great economic difficulties, potentially disastrous for

the Cold War. Brookings Institution Press, 2003

⁷Mankoff, Jeffrey. *Russian foreign policy: the return of great power politics*. Vol. 295, no. 10.

Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

⁸Ibid

⁹Kubicek, Paul. "The Commonwealth of Independent States: an example of failed regionalism?." *Review of International Studies* 35, no. S1 (2009): 237-256.

¹⁰Graham, Thomas E. *US-Russia relations: Facing reality pragmatically*. CSIS, 2008.

¹¹Brock, Gregory. "Regional Growth in Russia During the 1990s—What Role Did FDI Play?" *Post-communist economies* 17, no. 3 (2005): 319-329.

all of Eurasia. Financial aid to Russia thus becomes a major challenge of US foreign policy and between 1992 and 2009 the US allocated nearly \$ 18 billion to the Russian state¹².

However, the bulk of aid (about \$ 11 billion) is not for democratization, economic reform or humanitarian aid, but for activities grouped under the heading "Peace and Security" and Mainly related to the dismantling of Russian arsenals¹³. They are permitted by the Cooperative Threat Reduction Program (CTR), which is framed by the emblematic Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) agreements¹⁴: aimed at reducing the nuclear arsenals of the two superpowers¹⁵. Signed between 1991 and 1993, demonstrate the willingness of the American and Russian leaders to work together and their ability to do so - although ratification of START takes three years on the US side and seven on the Russian side¹⁶.

This significant rapprochement of the two extensities of the early 1990s is also symbolized by the rapprochement between Russia and NATO. NATO-Russia relations began formally as early as 1991¹⁷, culminating in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), a period of

¹²Fleck, Robert K., and Christopher Kilby. "Changing aid regimes? US foreign aid from the Cold War to the War on Terror." *Journal of Development Economics* 91, no. 2 (2010): 185-197

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴Goldman, Stuart D. "Russian political, economic, and security issues and US interests." *Russia, China and Eurasia* 27, no. 4/5 (2011): 757

¹⁵Woolf, Amy F. *Nonproliferation and Threat Reduction Assistance: US Programs in the Former Soviet Union*. DIANE Publishing, 2010.

¹⁶Pouliot, Vincent. "The materials of practice: Nuclear warheads, rhetorical commonplaces and committee meetings in Russian–Atlantic relations." *Cooperation and Conflict* 45, no. 3 (2010): 294-311

¹⁷Braun, Aurel, ed. *Nato-Russia relations in the twenty-first century*. Vol. 7. Routledge, 2008

intense cooperation¹⁸. In the wake of this, the Kremlin expresses its interest to further deepen its contacts with the Atlantic Alliance, within the framework of the PFP, but also beyond¹⁹. Thus, in spite of the reservations of certain members of the Alliance, in 1995 Russia obtained a special status (known as "16 + 1") in the North Atlantic Council and the Political Committee. Then, in 1997, the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation", leading to the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, was signed²⁰. On this positive dynamic and as a sign of goodwill, Boris Yeltsin gives his official approval to the first wave of enlargement of NATO to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

The first complications

This period of improved relations between Russia and the West, especially Russia and the United States, did not go without some difficulty. While relations with the "foreigner", that is to say with the former Soviet republics, were not at the top of the agenda in the early post-independence years, these questions became central again in Moscow from 1995-1996²¹. According to Henry Kissinger, they are gradually asserting themselves to be the most sensitive, psychologically sensitive aspect of the relations between the United States and Russia²². Beyond

¹⁸Smith, Martin. *Russia and NATO since 1991: from Cold War through cold peace to partnership?* Routledge, 2006

¹⁹Peter, Baker and Susan, Glasser. *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*. Scribner, New York, 2005

²⁰Forsberg, Tuomas, and Graeme Herd. "Russia and NATO: From Windows of Opportunities to Closed Doors." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015): 41-57

²¹Aron, Leon. "The United States and Russia: Ideologies, Policies, and Relations." *Russian Outlook* (2006): 3.

²²Schwartz, Thomas A. "Legacies of détente: a three-way discussion Thomas Alan Schwartz is a

the foreigner, strictly speaking, it is on matters relating to influence in Eurasia that things are stumbling between Russia and the United States.

The Yugoslav file²³ thus becomes a major bone of contention between the two countries. Although early disagreements emerged in 1995 between Russia, which is close to Orthodox Christian Serbia, and NATO led by the United States, which is very critical of Belgrade, Moscow is still an important partner by participating on the ground in operations alongside the NATO troops²⁴. It is actually in the second phase of the tensions between the Atlantic Alliance and the Serbian Yugoslavian Slobodan Milosevic that things get complicated: NATO, on the American impulse, finding that the diplomatic channel is struggling to achieve results²⁵. To stop the bloody excesses of the Milosevic regime by force, while Russia is trying to avoid this option at all costs and threatens to veto the demand that the United States is preparing to do so in the Security Council, The United Nations²⁶. Without a United Nations mandate, NATO nevertheless

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²³Cohen, Ariel, and Yevgeny Volk. *Recent Changes in Russia and Their Impact on US-Russian Relations*. Heritage Foundation, 2004

²⁴Blank, Stephen J. "The NATO-Russia Partnership: A Marriage of Convenience or a Troubled Relationship?" *Russia, China and Eurasia* 27, no. 4/5 (2011): 595

²⁵Ibid

²⁶Holbrooke, Richard. *To End a War: The Conflict in Yugoslavia--America's Inside Story—Negotiating with Milosevic*. Modern Library, 2011.

begins air strikes against Yugoslavia. The tension between Russia and the West is rising dramatically, and strikes are also a very bad press for NATO among the Russian population²⁷.

In addition to NATO as a sign of tensions, it is in particular the foreign policies of the two states towards the Russian foreigner that are incompatible and highly competitive. While Russia is gradually reconsidering these regions - especially the Black Sea, South Caucasus and Central Asia - as strategically important for its security, President Clinton, motivated by various motives (to link Eurasia to the West²⁸. To stem the conflicts of the region, to get hold of the Caspian hydrocarbons and their way to the west, etc.), differentiates itself from its republican predecessor and pays great attention to the former Soviet republics²⁹. As early as 1993, according to the Clinton Doctrine, the United States became diplomatically, politically and economically involved in the affairs of the countries of the former USSR and exerted an increasingly strong and multifaceted influence³⁰. The coming to power of Vladimir Putin in Russia would only confirm this competition between Russia and the United States in Eurasia.

The Putin-Bush tandem and bilateral relations

Vladimir Putin was elected President of the Russian Federation in March 2000 after a few months as Prime Minister and President by interim³¹. He inherited a difficult situation, as had to

²⁷Ibid

²⁸Cohen and Yevgeny, 2004

²⁹Huntington, Samuel P. "The lonely superpower." *Foreign affairs* (1999): 35-49.

³⁰Mastanduno, Michael. "Preserving the unipolar moment: realist theories and US grand strategy after the Cold War." *International security* 21, no. 4 (1997): 49-88

³¹Lo, Bobo. *Vladimir Putin and the evolution of Russian foreign policy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

deal with internal problems, Socio-economic issues, as well as foreign policy and international influence.

Reaffirmation of Russia and embellishment of US-Russia following September 11

Putin is elected first and foremost to recover the economy, in a catastrophic state, by putting an end to the reign of the oligarchs who have built fortunes by buying at large prices whole sections of the Soviet economy³²; He was also elected to find a favourable outcome for the war in Chechnya, which flared up again in autumn 1999. However, the question of the size of Russia and its international influence, especially in the Near East, occupies a place of priority in the priorities of the new President³³. On his arrival in power, he sought to restore Russian influence in the ex-Soviet territories, giving the impression that he did not hesitate to stand up against the West if necessary, especially against the United States³⁴. In the spring of 2001, the Russian authorities created the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)³⁵, which, around Russia, includes Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, is a forum for Eurasian military and security cooperation. In addition to the CSTO, which symbolizes the return of Russian influence in the military and security spheres in the former Soviet Union, Moscow also further develops its relations with the CIS states on a bilateral basis, taking account

³² Ibid

³³ Jonson, Lena. *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: the shaping of Russian foreign policy*. Vol. 1. IB Tauris, 2004

³⁴ Roxburgh, Angus. *The strongman: Vladimir Putin and the struggle for Russia*. IB Tauris, 2013.

³⁵ Frost, Alexander. "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia." In *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 83-102. 2009.

of the specificities of the different countries, which enables it to strengthen its positions. Russia also has economic levers, particularly in the area of energy policy³⁶.

This clear reaffirmation of Russia in the former Soviet space is "cringing" in Washington, on the side of the Clinton administration, but even more among its republican opponents. Clinton is also considered by the latter to be too passive and complacent towards Russia, especially during the first Chechen war (1994-1996), when some of the actions of the Russian army shocked American opinion and somewhat tarnished the Good relations then³⁷. In 1999, George W. Bush, pronouncing his first campaign speech for the presidential elections that he won a year later, presents Clinton's policy towards Russia as a failure³⁸. Condoleezza Rice, future adviser to the President, then Secretary of State, describes the American-Russian relations under Clinton as "happy talk", a major cause of hopes disappointed between the two countries. Everything seems to come together in 2001, after the election of George W. Bush, so that the American-Russian relations enter a new phase, made of disagreement and tension³⁹.

However, the attacks of September 11 will bring about a significant rapprochement between the two states, especially between the American and Russian executives, which everything seemed to oppose⁴⁰. This lull, moreover, finds, against all expectations, its roots from the early days of the presidency G.W. Bush. Indeed, if during his presidential campaign George

³⁶Roxburgh, 2013

³⁷LaFeber, Walter. *America, Russia and the Cold War 1945-2006*. McGraw-Hill

Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages, 2008.

³⁸Soros, George. *Bubble of American supremacy*. PublicAffairs, 2003.

³⁹Ibid

⁴⁰O'loughlin, John, Gearo' id O' Tuathail, and Vladimir Kolossov. "A 'Risky Westward Turn'? Putin's 9-11 Script and Ordinary Russians." *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 1 (2004): 3-34.

W. Bush is very severe with regard to Moscow, the tone changes when he comes to power⁴¹. The new administration has little to say about those who are angry, like Chechnya, and seems to believe in the good intentions of the Kremlin, which it does not want to alienate. This beginning of warming is also illustrated by the good personal relationship between G.W. Bush and V. Putin, whose first official meeting in June 2001 in Slovenia is very warm⁴². American president proposes to his Russian counterpart to "make History together"⁴³. With the attacks of 11 September, things became clearer and the rapprochement took on a strategic dimension.

In the autumn of 2001, it became clear that the United States needed Russia's support to carry out anti-terrorist operations against Al Qaeda in Central Asia and to contain Islamist movements in the region⁴⁴. For Russia, this is an opportunity to be seized. Allying with the United States is both an opportunity to emerge as a credible international player and to reap the benefits, particularly from an economic standpoint, of normalizing relations with the West. It is also an opportunity to show that it is still indispensable to any large-scale geopolitical operation in Eurasia and to keep a watchful eye and even active control over American activities in the region⁴⁵. Moreover, supporting the United States in the fight against terrorism also allows Russian leaders to skilfully amalgamate Chechen activists with Islamist terrorism and to try to take advantage of the counter-terrorist dynamic that is being set up to eradicate Chechen resistance, especially as Russia and its allies in Asia are not immune to terrorist actions by the Al

⁴¹LaFeber, 2008

⁴²Ibid

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴Stent, Angela, and Lilia Shevtsova. "America, Russia and Europe: a realignment?" *Survival* 44, no. 4 (2002): 121-134

⁴⁵Ibid

Qaeda movement and the Russian population, which is very sensitive to these issues, is clearly favourable to any support to the United States in this struggle⁴⁶.

Thus, Russia, whose President was the first foreign head of state to call his American counterpart on September 11, 2001, decided to cooperate fully in the early days of the "Global War On Terror, GWOT, as labelled by the Bush administration) of the United States⁴⁷. On September 4, President Putin announced [a] five-point plan to support the United States in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. It undertakes to: (1) share information with US counterparts; (2) open Russian airspace to provide humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan; (3) cooperate with Central Asian States to ensure similar air access for Americans; (4) participating in search and rescue operations; and (5) increase humanitarian and military assistance to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan⁴⁸.

This major strategic rapprochement between the two countries is again symbolized by the personal relations between Presidents Bush and Putin, which reached highs at the end of October 2001, during an official visit of the Russian President to the United States. President Bush receives his Russian counterpart on his ranch in Crawford, Texas, and publicly declares his friendship for V. Putin⁴⁹. A few months later, the two presidents met again in Moscow and

⁴⁶Russell, John. "Terrorists, bandits, spooks and thieves: Russian demonisation of the Chechens before and since 9/11." *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2005): 101-116.

⁴⁷O'loughlin et al., 2004

⁴⁸Roberts, Kari. "Empire Envy: Russia-US Relations Post 9/11." *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 6, no. 4 (2004).

⁴⁹Goldgeier, James, and Michael McFaul. "George W Bush and Russia." *Current History* 101, no. 657 (2002): 313.

signed an agreement to revitalize the START process for the reduction of nuclear arsenals: the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) Moscow, which plans to increase the number of nuclear warheads in each of the two countries from 6,000 to 2,200 by the end of 2012⁵⁰. The good US-Russian understanding then probably reached one of its highest levels since the collapse of the USSR and the potential for cooperation between the two powers seems considerable.

Back to "tensions box"

However, this approximation will be fairly short-lived and, as of 2002, several serious disputes once again darken bilateral relations. A few weeks after the signing of the agreement on the reduction of nuclear arsenals, the United States decided to withdraw from the Strategic Arms Control (ABM) Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 with a view to deploying a new defense system Missiles⁵¹. If President Putin formally seeks to relativize, this raises the greatest misunderstandings on the Russian side.

Then the American war in Iraq really sounds the end of the post-September 11th embellishment and becomes the most visible and symbolic element of the new American-Russian discord⁵². Russia, which has long been a close friend of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, where it has significant economic interests, decides not to follow the coalition led by the United States. Opposed at the beginning of the military intervention against Baghdad, the presidency Putin joined the camp of the opponents of the war, led by France and Germany, and maintains this

⁵⁰Ibid

⁵¹Boese, Wade. "US withdraws from ABM treaty; Global response muted." *Arms Control*

Today (2002): 14-15.

⁵²Graham, 2008

course during the armed conflict. It was even accused, on several occasions, of conveying confidential information concerning the plans of attacks of the American coalition, gathered by her spies, to the then dying regime of Saddam Hussein⁵³. As a result of these difficulties, other parts of the bilateral relationship are also deteriorating. Graham⁵⁴ stresses, in particular, the structures of bilateral dialogue and action: Frequency, the intensity and content of these relationships decreased sharply from 2001-2002, while hopes of strategic partnership were at the zenith. Other means of communication have suffered even more deleteriously. The line between the White House and the Kremlin during the first mandate to discuss strategic issues gradually dissolved in the second.

Barack Obama and Russia: under the sign of the "restart"

This project, strongly supported by the Bush administration, is abandoned by the Obama administration at the beginning of its mandate, in the spring of 2009 - although the announcement is only formalized in September. The new US President, differing from his predecessor, thus sends a positive signal to Moscow

Reset of American-Russian relations

This decision of the Obama administration, not only motivated by the desire to spare Russia - it also avoids considerable expenses, while its immediate utility, even by Washington, is far from proven - , Is one of the first steps in the policy of appeasement and then revitalization of the bilateral relations wanted by the American president and labelled "reset"⁵⁵. This is one of the

⁵³Ibid

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵Cohen, Stephen F. "Obama's Russia 'reset': another lost opportunity?" *The Nation* (2011): 11-

first major foreign policy initiatives of the new administration. Barely elected and not yet in office, in December 2008, Barack Obama actually places the cursor on relations with Russia and uses immediately the term reset in an interview explaining: it will be important for US to restart the American-Russian relations⁵⁶. The word reset is then widely used by American officials and the President himself, as well as by observers, to describe the US-Russian rapprochement policy initiated by the American side, but has since been carried out jointly by the two States. The objective of this restart is to re-establish a climate of trust between the two governments and to implement their active co-operation on as many files as possible, with a given "give and take" and "win-win" approach.

While the US side also emphasizes civil society and Russian enterprises as partners, it is indeed inter-state relations that are at the heart of the process, and it is these relations that record progress more significant. The signature of a new START treaty, signed in April 2010 and entered into force in February 2011, is one of the central elements. It aims to reduce the nuclear warheads of each country to 1,550, as well as the number of authorized launchers from 1,600 to 800⁵⁷.

In terms of diplomatic co-operation, important progress is also made and Russia is more active in supporting the United States on the Iranian and North Korean nuclear issues. Moscow, clearly distinguished from its traditional position, decides in particular to support, in May 2010, a round of United Nations sanctions wanted by the United States against Iran. Similarly, at the last minute, in September 2010, Russia cancelled the delivery of S-300 missile batteries to the

⁵⁶Ibid

⁵⁷Whisenhunt, William Benton, and Norman E. Saul, eds. *New Perspectives on Russian-American Relations*. Vol. 39. Routledge, 2015

Islamic Republic, to which it had committed itself⁵⁸. For its part, the US administration is giving more or less direct support to Russia in its efforts to integrate the World Trade Organization, which it finally incorporates in November 2011⁵⁹.

The reset also allows for increased joint work on many other subjects, ranging from the global financial crisis to military cooperation, civil nuclear, nuclear non-proliferation, new technologies, environment, Health, space programs, cultural exchanges, etc., in particular within the framework of the Presidential Bilateral Commission⁶⁰. Established in Moscow in July 2009, during the first official visit of Barack Obama to Russia, this committee, which consists of 18 working groups, allows the organization of more than 150 meetings between the summers of 2009 and 2011⁶¹.

The limits of the reset

Welcomed and regarded as a success by many observers, in Russia, the United States and internationally, the reset nevertheless encounters difficulties⁶². Already, it does not resolve all the disagreements between the two countries and this is not its objective. President Obama explains that if he considers that there is a need for co-operation with the Russians, they must act in such a way as not to intimidate their neighbours⁶³. The reference is made here in particular to Georgia, in bad terms with Russia and Washington ally. The Georgian question remains a bone of

⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹Ibid

⁶⁰Ziegler, Charles E. "Russian–American relations: From Tsarism to Putin." *International Politics* 51, no. 6 (2014): 671-692.

⁶¹Ibid

⁶²Ziegler, 2014

⁶³Ibid

contention between the two countries, which the reset fails to attenuate⁶⁴. Similarly, on the very high profile of the Iranian nuclear issue, the positions of the two states, despite the 2010 rapprochement mentioned above, are far from identical. The Russian side does not seem convinced that Iran's objective is to acquire the bomb and, unlike the Americans, is generally opposed to the increase in economic sanctions against Tehran⁶⁵. Similarly, on other sensitive issues, such as NATO enlargement or even the anti-missile shield project, which is rather modified than completely buried by President Obama⁶⁶, the problems are not resolved. Finally, Russian hesitations regarding the support for the anti-Gaddafi rebellion in Libya and the good understanding between Hugo Chávez and Venezuela and the controversial and violent regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria pose serious problems for the Obama administration⁶⁷.

When Hillary Clinton proposes the resumption of bilateral relations with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in March 2009 at a meeting in Geneva, a translation error complicates the official announcement of this important and promising initiative⁶⁸. Secretary of State Clinton, who has planned a little sketch in which she offers Minister Lavrov a miniature red switch of relationship reset, finds himself in an uncomfortable situation for a few moments: while

⁶⁴Nichol, Jim. "Georgia [Republic]: Recent developments and US interests." *Current Politics and Economics of Russia, Eastern and Central Europe* 29, no. 5 (2014): 635

⁶⁵Monaghan, Andrew. "The limits of partnership: US-Russian relations in the twenty-first century. By Angela Stent." *International Affairs* 91, no. 1 (2015): 196-197.

⁶⁶Ibid

⁶⁷Ibid

⁶⁸Kanet, Roger E. "Presidential Elections and "Resets" in US-Russian Relations: Do Leaders Make a Difference?" *Shifting Priorities in Russia's Foreign and Security Policy* (2016): 95.

accepting, with a smile, to support on the red button with her, her Russian counterpart remarked to Hillary Clinton, that the Russian translation of the word reset inscribed on the small switch is not exact - the word inscribed, "peregruzka", explains Lavrov, in a very Good English and before a crowd of journalists, does not mean, in the language of Pushkin, "restart", but "overload"⁶⁹.

This anecdote perfectly illustrates the rough path of bilateral relations and shows that even when the two parties show a real desire for rapprochement, things are never simple.

Conclusion

Faced with a difficult common history, as well as geopolitical interests and sensitivities that are often different, the American and Russian leaders have not been able to do better in the past two decades than to maintain irregular bilateral relations. Each period of improvement is followed by a period of tension and co-operation and disagreements are intertwined in a rather random and chaotic manner.

It is a bit problematic for both States, for the regions of the world and the diplomatic files impacted by the US-Russian relations, because it is easier to evolve in a climate of serenity than to constantly navigate . Nevertheless, it is clear that the two former enemies of the Cold War cooperated on many issues and managed to never reach a point of no return on those where their views diverge. The examination of the last two decades of bilateral relations seems even to show that the two States know how to accommodate their differences and sometimes accept to "make the back" and let the other take the hand ... while putting everything in Work to get back on top as quickly as possible.

⁶⁹Ibid

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