

Russia and the Security of Poland: Our Reset Button

Center for American Progress

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure to be invited here to the Center for American Progress.

The more so after the Center was described by *Time* magazine as “the most influential organisation” in Washington D.C.

While I was not surprised to hear this, I always thought that the U.S. government had that fine distinction!

According to your website:

Progressives are idealistic enough to believe change is possible, and practical enough to make it happen

Well, I too *believe that change is possible*. And I hope that I am *practical enough to make it happen*.

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So where do you find the bitterest rivalries, the saddest conflicts, the sharpest tensions, the deepest divisions?

Usually, between people who are close. Between neighbors. Within families.

Harvard wants to beat UCLA. But it really wants to beat Yale!

Any Polish soccer team enjoys defeating a team from Italy. But beating a team from Germany? Now you're talking!

So it is with Poland and Russia. So near, and yet so often so far apart.

We might as well pause for thought, and think about how to change things for the better in our part of the world.

Is there a good way forward which is likely to work – and have lasting benefits? Which gets the right balance between fair principles and firm practice? Which is generous, but not naïve?

The answer is a definite ‘maybe’. But one thing's for sure. It can't be quick or easy.

God forbid that I of all people sound like a Marxist or Hegelian!

Yet there is something *dialectical* – thesis, antithesis and then synthesis - when it comes to either Polish or American dealings with Russia.

Periods of frosty relations sooner or later give rise to new attempts to do better. Which seem to lead to new contradictions, and more cold weather. And so it goes round.

Isn't it time for us to break this cycle? And to prove that lasting change is possible.

Most recently in 2009 the Obama Administration made its own move. Hillary Clinton made a contribution to the imagery and symbolism of diplomacy by passing the now famous reset button to Foreign Minister Lavrov.

A little while earlier, Poland had pressed its button. After the elections in 2007, our new Prime Minister Donald Tusk launched a new dialogue with Moscow after several difficult years when things were stuck.

He paid an official visit to Moscow, the first Polish head of government to do so in seven years. That was a fresh start.

Back in the 1990s, a genial President Yeltsin famously agreed with President Lech Walesa that Poland could join NATO if it liked.

That, unfortunately, did not last long. Moscow started to view our accession to NATO as a threat to Russia.

Fortunately the Clinton administration would not be moved. And in 1999 Poland did join NATO.

Poland's NATO membership has made Poland more secure. It broke once and for all, the various geopolitical games being played in our part of the world.

Poland's NATO membership has also made Europe more secure. It has given Poland a new responsibility in managing cooperative security in Europe. Strangely enough, it also helped Polish-Russian relations. The new situation encouraged Russia to treat Poland as part of the West.

Regrettably, the traditional geo-political thinking, based on the old fashioned concept of spheres of influence and buffer zones continues to resonate among some of the Russian elite.

Recent examples of this outdated approach can be found in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, latest Russian military doctrine which named NATO and its expansion a threat, and large joint Russian and Belarusian military exercise "*Zapad 2009*."

Poland has moved to a quite different way of looking at the world - a *liberal peace concept, where accepting limits and rules is not a form of weakness but a foundation for a stable international order.*

It's boring. Laborious. Painstaking. But also respectful. Reasonable and Fair-minded.

So what is Poland's policy towards Russia today? It turns on a simple idea.

The past is important. But so is the future. Let's work on both simultaneously.

Poland has moved to institutionalise bilateral cooperation with Moscow. To get better results, while making the relationship more resistant to changing political climate. Through **structured purposeful dialogue. We unblocked Russian negotiations with the OECD. They dropped a politically motivated embargo of Polish goods. We made a positive move. We responded to the move the other side made.**

We have set up a high-level *Committee for Polish-Russian Cooperation Strategy*. New bilateral groups for *Regions* and *Civil Society Dialogue* and people-to-people links.

Above all, we have decided that filling in the "blank spots" of history together helps mutual reconciliation and helps the cause of de-Stalinisation of memory in Russia.

This is why we have set up an appropriately named *Joint Polish-Russian Group on Difficult Issues*. That is doing good work in defusing painful chapters from our history.

Russia is Poland's number two trading partner. We are working to increase trade and investment. Poland is urging other EU members to extend local cross-border traffic to the entire Kaliningrad region, and to make life easier for Russians wanting to travel to Europe. Together with my Russian colleague, Sergei Lavrov, we are jointly lobbying Brussels on this matter.

There are still controversies over Smolensk catastrophe. But on the whole, I have to say that **Russia has accepted Poland's extended hand.**

The Russian peoples immediate emotional reaction after the Smolensk tragedy, touched Polish hearts.

Andrzej Wajda's unbearably moving film *Katyn* was shown on Russian state television. An important breakthrough in explaining to millions of Russians why this issue matters so much to Poles. It enabled them to feel our pain.

Good news. As far as it goes. But there are bigger issues to tackle. Notably three key security areas where 'existential' instincts about security and power collide:

- **conventional forces in Europe**

- **tactical nuclear weapons**
- **energy security**

The **CFE Treaty** is a cornerstone of European stability.

Since Russia suspended compliance with the Treaty four years ago, Europe has been less secure, as there is less transparency and confidence in political and military relations.

Russia has unfortunately not met the Istanbul summit obligation of pulling its so-called peacekeepers out of Transdnistria and Georgia. Instead, it has increased its military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Meanwhile, Poland supports putting **tactical nuclear weapons** on the table in the next round of arms reduction talks with Russia.

Thank you very much for mentioning our support for the ratification of the START Treaty.

President Obama's statement that he will start negotiations on tactical nuclear weapons within the year after the New START Treaty enters into force is encouraging. This would be the next rational step towards a nuclear free world. After all we are all striving for this.

Until then, we strongly support Secretary Clinton's position: no withdrawal of US nuclear weapons without an agreement on Russian arsenals in Europe as acting unilaterally would be unhelpful.

Most of Russia's operational sub-strategic nuclear weapons are believed to be deployed close to Poland's borders – right at NATO's doorstep. Within the striking distance of Warsaw.

They are the nuclear weapons least regulated by arms control regimes.

Experts suspect the Russians have up to 4,000 such weapons: eight times more than the US currently has deployed in Europe.

Russian officials say that it is "too early" to submit tactical weapons to arms control. I would suggest most people might think that 20 years after the Cold War ended is a good time to sort this one out.

Finally, **energy security**.

Poland depends on Russian gas and oil for 67 and 97 percent respectively of its domestic consumption.

Any investor would recommend diversifying your investment portfolio. Especially in this case, given Russia's occasional toying with energy as a political lever.

Poland is working hard on diversification. US companies are exploring shale gas reserves on Polish territory—something we believe will make a difference. However, we are also looking at building nuclear energy plants and importing liquefied natural gas.

In three months, Poland will take over the Presidency of the European Union—as one of our priorities, we intend to make energy security a focal point. This means building up the current energy infrastructure, expanding on the diversification of the energy resources, building physical interconnectors between EU Members States, and strengthening European energy solidarity during crisis situations. The United States and its business community are a welcomed partner and we encourage you to join in this endeavour. Finally, we all need to cut down on energy waste.

Energy security matters, I believe equally to Poles and Russians. Reliable buyers need reliable sellers, and vice versa.

Energy interdependence is a good basis for an improving political relationship and we recently signed a new energy agreement with the Russian side. Part of the key here is an open and reasonable set of market-based rules: no monopolisation of transmission networks or other activities.

With 65 percent of its export income coming from selling hydrocarbons, Russia is awash with petrodollars but faces problems common to resource-rich countries: endemic corruption; a reluctance to diversify; and complacency about the future.

Russia's non-ratification of the Energy Charter Treaty I believe harms the relationship with the EU and harms Russia. During Poland's EU Presidency, we intend to persuade our Russian counterparts to ratify the ECT.

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So much for Russia and Europe, as seen from Warsaw. What about the wider world?

Asia's main powers, China and India, now outspend both Britain and France, Europe's biggest military powers.

Iran schemes to get nuclear weapons, thus posing a strategic threat to Europe, including Russia.

Russia and much of the West face similar challenges. Not least worrying demographics.

Russia and the West both face the prospect of a dramatic, perhaps unmanageable increase in inward migration.

That is why events in Libya and across the Middle East are so important.

It is going to be a huge long-term job to help bring some sort of pluralism, normal economic activity and decent human rights – above all rights for women - to these frustrated Arab countries.

We would welcome Russia to join the reform team.

We hope that a positive scenario may unfold. Confronted with growing uncertainty elsewhere, what Russia and NATO/EU leaderships need to do is to decide once and for all to build on what they have in common. A move towards a groundbreaking 21st century strategic military and economic understanding.

NATO and Russia can reach consensus on missile defence, perhaps with interlinked but separate projects.

New arms control architecture can be built: a revived CFE Treaty and a treaty on tactical nuclear weapons could be agreed upon.

The Transdnistria dispute is resolved with Moscow's help. Belarus and Ukraine and Russia itself get increasingly integrated in modern pan-European processes.

Russia works as a strong partner with Europe and the USA to stabilise Afghanistan and North Africa.

All important points, and perhaps sounding like a dream today, but such a scenario will not prevail without Russian cooperation.

There is a lot of positive thinking in this scenario. But, this we know for sure—the alternative is much messier and unstable.

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I tell you without qualification: Poland wants to develop the current positive atmosphere in our bilateral relations to help to achieve a wider redefinition of European and global security.

We believe that it is right to offer the integration prospects to all Europeans including Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Moldavians, Georgians and other friends. We also support EU's greater engagement with Russia, paralleling the continued development of the Eastern Partnership and its mission in the region. We don't perceive the cooperation with Russia and the EU's European neighbours as a zero-sum game.

We believe these countries have the right to freely choose their destiny.

Wishful thinking? Hopefully not. I entered politics twenty years ago because I too believed in the power of hope, and the reality of change. That's why John Podesta set up this fine Policy Center.

In our lifetimes, Poland has shaken off the chains of tyranny. Just as Libyans and Egyptians and others across that region are finally starting to do so.

And as Cuba and North Korea and Burma in their turn will do so as well.

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That's a fine motto for Poland and Russia to live up to in the years ahead. *Thank you very much and I look forward to answering your questions.*