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THE US AND RUSSIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY: THE GREAT GAME OF INFLUENCE

For the US and Russia, the first decade of the 21st century was the time of re-evaluation and change of their relations. Both countries pursued policies the assumptions of which led to competing for areas of influence. The United States, which was initially pursuing a unilateral vision of foreign policy, aspired to the role of the "world sheriff" and the only superpower, which eventually led to gradual degradation of its place in the world and to internal problems. The situation, when Barack Obama took office, called for abandonment of unilateralism and concentration on conciliatory approach to problem solving. In result, the United States itself limited its role in the world. Moscow took advantage of that situation. After Vladimir Putin and his milieu came to power, Russia started to consistently implement a strategy aimed at winning back its global superpower status. In consequence, both countries started to compete for areas of influence. In this paper, the Great Game developments in most important areas are presented where the players' interests cross, i.e. the area of former Soviet influence covering countries of Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus, and the Middle East region, which is essential to the American strategy. A look at the world map is enough to see that those areas form a belt around Russia. Only Iran is an exception. It is a Russian "wedge" in a region of key importance for Americans, i.e. the Middle East which to a large extent restrains US moves.

RUSSIA'S PLACE IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

When George W. Bush was elected President of the United States, the approach of his administration to Russia was *anything but Clinton.*[1] The reason was that the former (Clinton) administration was judged to have pursued policies without a clear vision, lacking clear goals and priorities in relation to Russia. In particular it was judged on clumsy American activities which made Vladimir Putin follow his policy

[1] George W. Bush, *A Distinctly American Internationalism*, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, California, November 19, 1999, http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bush/wspeech.htm (accessed 15.07.2012).

freely. Neo-conservatives returned to the White House, and with them the concept of the US national interest redefinition promoted mostly by Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security Advisor. The American policy was to be based on the principles of internationalism, but its main assumption provided for the pursuit of American national interest.[2] Despite declarations on the discontinuation of Clinton's "personal" policy, Bush adopted virtually the same model of relationships with Moscow, declaring "a very good dialogue" and getting "a sense of his [Putin's] soul".[3] However the Bush administration was not quick to take into account Russian interests in its plans, as it was the case under the administration of Bill Clinton. According to the Bush administration, the reason why the place of Russia in American foreign policy was lower, was due to Russia's weaknesses and problems. Russia, itself, was responsible for its successes and failures and, in 2001, Russia was not the main threat to American interests. At the same time, Russia's approach did not facilitate any prospects for bilateral cooperation outside the US territory.[4] Improvement of American-Russian relations was supposed to be one of American priorities, however, before 9/11 the deteriorating relationship with Moscow did not give American policy-makers sleepless nights[5]. The greatest threat for the US were Russia's weaknesses, mainly its lack of full control over nuclear weapons and troubles with rebellious republics of the Russian Federation e.g. Chechen wars. Another problem was Russia-Iran relations including Russia's alleged arm trading to Iran[6]. The project of a missile defence shield was also not favourable for the situation as the United States withdrew from the ABM treaty. For neo-conservatives in the White House, the US national interest was more important than good relations with Russia. Bush's advisor Richard Perle argued that in the post-Cold War world, a treaty securing the US and Russia against pre-emptive attacks was not necessary[7].

An enormous change took place after 9/11 terrorist attacks. The fight against international terrorism became the main priority of Americans and the principle in the "Bush doctrine". Russia was the first country to declare to assist the US by supplying intelligence about terrorists in Afghanistan, deepening cooperation of special forces and making its air-space available for the through-flights of planes carrying humanitarian cargo and air corridors over Central Asian republics[8]. Joint anti-terrorist activities could reduce negative effects of the US policy toward Russia in the 1990s, and

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[2] C. Rice (2000), *Promoting the National Interest,* "Foreign Affairs" Jan./Feb., Vol. 79, No. 1.

[3] W. Schneider, *Putin's Power Grab,* AEI, September 24, 2004.

[4] C. W. Wallander (2001), *An Overview of Bush Administration Policy and Priorities on Russia,* Policy Memo 187, March, pp. 1-2.

[5] C. Rice (2000), *Promoting…*

[6] C. Rice, *US Security Policy: Russia*, White House Briefing, February 22, 2000.

[7] R. Perle, *Patience a Virtue with Europe, New Ideas Will Take Time to Sink in, Perle Tells Defense Central,* AEI, June 14, 2001.

[8] A. Bryc, *Polityka wobec Rosji i innych państw poradzieckich,* in: J. Zając (ed.) (2005), *Polityka zagraniczna USA po zimnej wojnie,* Toruń, p. 74; *Протокол заседания президиума Государственного совета № 12, № А4–14706 ГС, 24 сентября 2001 года,* docs/2001/09/30263.shtml (accessed 15.07.2012).

Russian experts noted that Russia no longer had to change its policy to be a pro-West one as it declared its wide involvement in anti-terrorist actions earlier[9]. The Russian aid was recognised by Americans in the National Security Strategy of 2002, in which the intention to build a strategic relationship was underlined. The Moscow Treaty on Strategic Reductions (SORT) was to be a sign of new relations to be build by the transatlantic community[10]. In the strategy, Americans declared further assistance to countries of the former Soviet Union in strengthening their independence and stabilisation. That was aimed at deepening Russia's integration with the West.[11] In the National Security Strategy document of 2006, references to Russia were only slightly more extensive and efforts to tighten relations with Russia were highlighted as significant for US strategic issues. It was pointed out that Russia had enormous influence in regions of "vital" US interest, i.e. the Middle East, South and Central Asia, and East Asia.[12]

However, throughout the entire first term of George W. Bush, US relations with Russia kept deteriorating and at the beginning of his second term there were no signs of improvement. To the contrary, both countries started to have increasingly less in common. The unilateral policy of the US annoyed Russia, which started to consistently rebuild its influence in neighbouring countries and launched its cooperation with new centres of power, especially in the Far East[13]. Many new disputable issues emerged e.g. Kosovo statehood, plans to locate elements of the NMD on the Russian border, and American presence in Central Asia. In 2007, the future American ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaule, stated that at the time American-Russian relations were the worst in last 20 years, and the White House had no idea how to deal with the situation.[14]

A new US President was to be a remedy for the failure. The task of Barack Obama was double difficult as he had to both avoid comparisons with Bill Clinton and his global strategy synonymous with responsibility avoidance, and distance himself from George W. Bush's unilateralism and neo-conservatives ideas which made Russia change its approach to the United States and Europe.[15] Obama wanted

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[9] Николай Бабич, *Президент Путин на Техасском ранчо (Россия- США),* «Миежународная жизнь» Но. 001, 01.01.2002, p. 16

[10] G.W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America,* The White House, September 17, 2002, in: Ł. Wordliczek (ed.) (2005), *Basic American Documents. U.S. Foreign Policy: Substance and Procedure*, Jagiellonian University Press, Cracow, pp. 36-39.

[11] G.W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy*…

[12] *National Security Strategy of the United States 2006,* The White House, Washington D.C., September 2006, p. 39.

[13] More in: S. D. Goldman, *Russia,* Congressional Research Service, "Report for Congress" May 8, 2006.

[14] P. Baker, P. Finn, *Bush Reaches to Putin as Relations Continue to Slide,* "Washington Post" May 31, 2007.

[15] More in: B. Obama (2007), *Renewing American Leadership,* "Foreign Affairs" July/Aug., Vol. 86, Issue 4; S. R. Graubard (2009), *A Broader Agenda: Beyond Bush-Era Foreign Policy,* "Foreign Affairs" Jan./Feb., Vol. 88, Issue 1.

to avoid a stiff framework for his foreign policy and favoured a soft power approach and flexibility in responding to specific situations. In short, it was to be a return to multilateralism. Barack Obama appeared to be not infected with Cold War rhetoric and as a pragmatist not interested in ideology. His premise was that Russia - despite its political instability and authoritarian tendencies – was not the Soviet Union and should be approached differently. He assumed that mutual relations would improve once the Russian Federation was drawn into western security structures as Russia's involvement should make it impossible for Russia to intimidate other countries and expand its areas of influence. In January 2009, Obama and President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev announced a project to develop a roadmap for bilateral relations which would halt the earlier "drifting apart" of the US and Russia.[16] It resulted in the famous "reset" of American-Russian relations, announced during the meeting of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with Sergey Lavrov who was Foreign Minister of Russia. In the National Security Strategy of 2010, Russia - together with China and India - was referred to as a country with which partnership relations should be strengthened and common interests identified. However, authors of the strategy did not mention anything revolutionary. What was underlined were troublesome disarmament negotiations and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and further development of economic and trade cooperation. Other declarations concerned the development of Russia as a strong country that respects international law.[17]

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: RETURN OF THE EMPIRE

The assumption of the office of President of the Russian Federation by Vladimir Putin meant a total change in Russian foreign policy and relations with the United States. In one of his first speeches, Vladimir Putin emphasised that the only choice for Russia was to act as a strong country, in unison with international community, and not against it.[18] That new foreign policy, positively received both by experts as well as other groups on the Russian political stage, was referred to as a "dynamic equilibrium" strategy. It allowed Russia to undertake a very wide scope of activities. In relation to international entities representing particular centres of power, it was necessary to keep equal distance, which facilitated undertaking multi-vector actions in the changing international environment.[19] The main assumption was not to enter any strategic alliance with centres of power like the US, the EU, or China, and the

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[16] G. Austin, *President-elect Obama and the Russian Challenge,* East West Institute, 7.11.2009.

[17] *National Security Strategy May 2010,* p.11, 23 and 44, rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf (accessed 25.08.2012)

[18] *Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации 8 июля 2000 года* http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2000/07/08/0000_type63372type63374type82634_28782.shtml (accessed 20.08.2012).

[19] B. Lo (2003), *Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy,* London, p.16 and 69-71.

equilibrium of actions was seen to be the key to success.[20] The main element of the new policy was to emphasise Russian national interest in the light of global competition, and to retain the status of a nuclear superpower in order to prevent conflicts. Russia was to be actively involved in shaping a stable international order and security, but with its national identity retained.[21] In practice, the dynamic equilibrium concept allowed Russia to enter various power constellations. For example, Russia made use of the negative position of France and Germany on the war in Iraq to divide the US and Europe. At the same time, Russia made its air space, military bases in Central Asia and intelligence data available to the US, which silenced criticism of Russia's activities in Chechnya. As a country supporting multi-polarity, Russia strengthened its place and role in the United Nations Security Council.[22]

During his second term, Vladimir Putin continued to restore the imperial status of Russia, mainly with the use of Russian economy. A useful tool were Russian mineral resources. Natural gas and crude oil were treated by Russian politicians as an instrument of strategic control strengthening Russia's role on the international arena.[23] Putin's doctrine along with the concept of flexible alliances made it possible for Russia to start political intrigues in the Middle East and Latin America, aimed at limiting American and European influence. Apart from that, Russia wanted to upkeep its non-military control over former post-Soviet territories, i.e. its traditional zone of influence.[24] At the same time, Putin criticised the US for creating a unipolar world and the US desire to divide Russia by supporting opposition and concentrating military forces on the Russian border.[25]

Putin's successor, Dmitri Medvedev, was initially perceived as a possible architect of a new order and a person able to warm Russia's relations with the West. Such hopes turned out to be unrealistic especially in the context of the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. Medvedev implemented five principles of Russian foreign policy, among which a special place was given to Russia's right to undertake activities aimed at protecting Russian citizens outside the country and to paying particular attention to regions where Russia had its "privileged" interests.[26] It meant that the new foreign policy

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[20] K. Łastawski, *Koncepcje polityki zagranicznej i bezpieczeństwa Federacji Rosyjskiej*, in: A. Czarocki, I. Topolski (2006), *Federacja Rosyjska w stosunkach międzynarodowych,* Lublin, p. 66.

[21] И. Иванов, *Политика, Новый внешнеполитический год для мира и России,* "Международная жизнь" No. 009, 2003-10-31, pp. 10-11.

[22] A. Kassianova, *Russian Diplomacy in the 21th Century. Multilateralism Put to Work,* PONARS Policy Memo No. 262, pp. 2-3; R. Allison (2004), *Strategic reassertion in Russia's Central Asia Policy,* "International Affairs" No. 2, pp. 277-283.

[23] P. Gardocki (2006), *Ropa naftowa i gaz ziemny jako środki strategii politycznej Rosji, "*Polityka Wschodnia" No. 1-2, pp. 50-51.

[24] В. Третьяков, *Гипотез о большом треугольнике* , "Политический класс" No. 10, Октябр 2005, p. 64

[25] President Vladimir Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly* , May 10, 2006, Marble Hall, the Kremlin, Moscow.

[26] L. Shevstova, *Russia's Choice: Change or Degradation?*, in: S. J. Blank (ed.) (2012), *Can Russia Reform Economic, Political, and Military Perspectives?,* Strategic Studies Institute, June,

was in fact identical with the one pursued in times of Vladimir Putin. In relation to the United States, Medvedev proposed to create a "new *entente*" meaning a political and defence alliance with the US.[27] However, in Russia's Security Strategy to 2020, it was assumed that Russia would became one of main players on the international arena heading toward a multi-polar one. Among threats, NATO was listed in the first place as a structure not apt to face modern challenges. A unilateral use of force and US eagerness to achieve military advantage, even in the outer space, were deemed to be major threats. Also "resource wars" (a loaded phrase describing the loss of influence in resource-rich regions of Central Asia) were mentioned as a treat. What was clearly visible in the Strategy, was Russia's conviction that it would restore its status of a global superpower and the objective to retain its areas of influence.[28] Although the presidency of Medvedev was supposed to be more liberal and less aggressive, the "reset" of relations with the US did not affect Russian strategic goals. Moscow was not able to come to terms with US aspirations to maintain its global leadership, even in Obama's soft way. It is an open question how, in a long run, Russia's policy towards the US will be shaped during the third and most probably forth term of Vladimir Putin. On the one hand, it is possible that due to the Kremlin's political "dualism" no significant changes will take place, but, on the other hand, Putin has always been "positioned" as the part of the tandem that was sceptical toward the West.

STRUGGLE FOR INFLUENCE IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

The region of Central Asia and the Caucasus is very important in foreign policies of both the US and Russia. It is import because of natural resources that are crucial to energy security of the US, Russia and Western Europe. The region has also been a strategically important place for American forces involved in military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and there a base camp for a possible military intervention in Iran can be located. Countries of the region are also an investment target of large American businesses operating in the primary industry sector. Besides, the United States supports, with various results, democratisation processes in former Soviet republics where authoritarian governments are still in power.

After 11/9, the rapprochement of Russia and the United States bore some fruit. The US has intensively cooperated militarily with countries of Central Asia - a traditional area of Russian influence - while intervening in Afghanistan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan made their military bases available to the US whereas Uzbeki-

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p.15*, Интервью Дмитрия Медведева российским телеканалам,* 31 августа 2008 года, transcripts/1276 (accessed 20.07.2012)

[27] С. Дубинин, Е. Савостьянов, И. Юргенс, *Новая Антанта,* http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2009/11/16_a_3287423.shtml (accessed 20.07.2012).

[28] More in: Указ президента российской федераци о Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года, http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html (accessed 25.07.2012).

stan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan additionally allowed for an unlimited use of their air space and Uzbekistan of its air base in Karshi Kahanabada.[29] The Taliban in Afghanistan has been a threat to Russia's security for years and thus American actions there were convenient for the Kremlin. In addition, Islamic fundamentalism limited Russia's influence also in the "soft belly" of Russia and in Central Asia. Given the atmosphere of the war on terrorism, Russia's objection made no sense and would not contribute to Russia's good image on the international area, especially in face of Russia's attempts to rebuild it after the disastrous rule of Boris Yeltsin. It turned out that Americans did not want to quickly withdraw their forces from Central Asia, which was unacceptable to Russian leaders who expected US forces to be withdrawn right after the completion of the US intervention in Afghanistan.[30] Russian interests in Afghanistan were not large. Issues that mattered were to prevent the Taliban's victory and stop drug trafficking. In the end, however, once Afghanistan has been pacified and become neutral, the most important issue was to restore Afghanistan's role of a buffer country between Central Asia and the Middle East. The Kremlin was also interested in extraction of oil and gas deposits located in the north of Afghanistan. In fact, to Russian businesses a more attractive place for investments was Central Asia, richer in resources, safer and more friendly to Russians. The American influence, but also the growing power of China as an economic competitor in Afghanistan, seemed to be an obstacle.[31] Nevertheless, it was the US which continued to be perceived as the main rival and Russia counteracted by transforming regional organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation into international forums associating not only China and countries of Central Asia, but also India, Pakistan, and Iran.

The US called for democratisation and financially supported democratisation processes in post-Soviet countries where "colour revolutions" took place. In that way it started widening its influence zone to cover the post-Soviet area. In Georgia and Ukraine, power was seized by political elites sympathising with the West. In Kyrgyzstan, the Tulip Revolution (2005) failed and democratic transformations did not take place but for the US, its access to Ganci military base, located near Bishkek, was more important than the composition of the ruling crew. Additionally, the very geographical location of Kyrgyzstan bordering with China and post-Soviet republics was important as well as its mineral resources. Colour revolutions weakened some old bonds within the Commonwealth of Independent States but the *derzhavnichestvo* (great-powerness) mentality was strongly rooted in the post-Soviet zone.[32] At the be-

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[29] More in: R. Giragosian (2004), *U.S. Military Engagement in Central Asia: Great Game or Great Gain,* "Central Asia and the Caucasus" No. 1 (25), p.53-57; B. R. Posen (2001), *The Struggle Against Terrorism: Grand strategy, Strategy and Tactics,* "International Security" Vol. 26, No.3, Winter, p. 39-51.

[30] T. Shanker, *Russian Official Caution U.S. on Use of Central Asian Bases,* "The New York Times" October 9, 2003, p. A9.

[31] D. Trenin, A. Malashenko (2010), *Afghanistan. A View From Moscow*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 14.

[32] I. Kobrinskaya (2006), *Russia – NIS Relations Beyond the Color Revolutions. Are the Shift Durable?,*PONARS Policy Memo No. 375, December, p. 51.

ginning of the 21st century when countries of Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, emerged as new centres of energy resources, Russia applied a "sovereign democracy" formula to that region. The US, in turn, adopted a strategy of developing new liberal democracies and implementing human rights, of which good example is the document titled *Silk Road Strategy Act* adopted by the US Senate in 1999 as an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961. It aimed at supporting political and economical independence of countries of the southern Caucasus and Central Asia.[33] The Silk Road Strategy project was derived from the ancient Silk Road leading through territories of modern Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Stabilisation of those countries, and thus stabilisation of the region, was to contribute to opening their markets and increasing foreign investment there. The potential oil and gas production in Central Asia and the Caucasus would make it possible for the US to reduce its dependence on energy supplies from the not fully reliable Persian Gulf countries. The Obama administration continued that policy and introduced a new *Silk Road Strategy* of 2011, aimed, in addition to the promotion of democracy and human rights, at increasing and diversifying regional energy sources there and supply routes.[34] The United States supported the construction of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline, in operation since 2006, and other energy routes from the east to the west. The new "road" was aimed at fostering higher integration of countries like Azerbaijan or Georgia with western structures, strengthening their cooperation within organisations such as GU(U)AM, which was a response to Russia's endeavours for greater integration of the CIS territory. Despite the declaration on the progressing Russian-American energy dialogue after 11/9 endorsed by Bush and Putin, Russia was uneasy and worried that by intervening in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the US would be able to define the run of gas and oil pipelines, and that the same might happen in the South Caucasus, where a potential new "Silk Road" could bypass Russia.[35] The construction of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline, linking countries of Central Asia and the South Caucasus was an example. Therefore, the US doubled its efforts aimed at normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia, and Azerbaijan and Armenia. In August 2007, Russia tried to regain its influence on energy supplies at the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, where - together with Kazakhstan - it called for the creation of an "Asian energy club" to develop a common energy market for its members.[36] A Russian-Chinese partnership could

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[33] *H.R. 1152 (106th): Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999*, http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/hr1152 (accessed 24.08.2012).

[34] *Discussing the 'New Silk Road' Strategy in Central Asia,* (2012), "Central Asia Policy Forum" No. 2, June, George Washington University, http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy_Forum_2,_June_2012.pdf (accessed 25.08.2012).

[35] А. Мигранян, *Политика. Конец России?,* "*Свободная мысль*-XXI" No. 007, 2002-07-01, pp. 8-9.

[36] P. Fedynsky, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization Seeks to Expand Energy and Security Influence,* Voice of America, August 16, 2007, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2007/08/mil-070816-voa03.htm (accessed 22.07.2012).

harm the US' involvement in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan, for example, raised fees for the use of its air base in Manas by Americans from USD 2.7 million to USD 200 million while Russia used "their" bases for free.[37] Access to resources in the Caspian Sea area was problematic due to the unsettled status of the very sea as well as bonds between Russia and countries of the region dating back to times when it was part of the Soviet Union. Because of those bonds, the US had hardly any chance to succeed in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Russia had exclusive rights to the Turkmen gas and similar rights to deposits in Uzbekistan thanks to an agreement signed by Gazprom and the Uzbek government in 2006. Only Kazakhstan's policy was more open which allowed the US to widen its economic cooperation, however Russia's influence there was still strong. As part of the energy competition, the United States, together with the EU, supported the construction of the Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku – Tbilisi – Supsa (BTS) oil pipelines, and the Baku – Tbilisi – Erzerum (BTE) gas pipeline, which were to create an energy "corridor" separating Europe from Russia.[38] The opening of the BTC pipeline was of key importance to both western powers and Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey which counted on the support of the former.[39]

The crowning achievement of the US' efforts is to be the Nabucco-West project, officially financed by the European Union and strongly supported by the US. Its purpose is to ensure independence of Europe from Russian gas supplies. After it is connected with the BTC gas pipeline, more gas can be supplied from deposits in Azerbaijan and Iran. Furthermore, should Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan be successfully connected by the gas pipeline laid on the bottom of the Caspian Sea, also the Turkmen, Uzbek, and Kazakh deposits could be exploited. The Nabucco project was threatened by the Russia-Georgia War (2008) and Russia's destabilisation of the South Caucasus areas, including blocking the accession of Georgia and Azerbaijan to NATO. Apart from that, Russia strongly promoted the South Stream pipeline as an alternative energy supply route in the Caspian region, crossing the same countries as the Nabucco pipeline.[40]

An enormous role has been played by Georgia whose relations with Russia were strained since the beginning of the 1990s in result of the Nagorno-Karabakh War (armed conflict between the majority ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijan). Georgia had been a safe route for crude oil and gas supplies from Azerbaijan, important to Russia. The American-Russian competition was escalated with new closer US

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[37] A. Cohen, *The Dragon Looks West: China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,* "Heritage Lectures" No. 961, September 7, 2006, p. 3

[38] J. Mankoff, *Eurasian Energy Security,* Council Special Report No. 43, February 2009, Council on Foreign Relations, p. 19.

[39] J. Mankoff (2012), *The Big Caucasus: Between Fragmentation and Integration,* CSIS March, p. 21.

[40] A. Shleifer, D. Treisman (2011), *Why Moscow Says No,* "Foreign Affairs" Jan./Feb., Vol. 90, Issue 1, pp. 123-126.

relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia after 1999. It should be added that until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian armed forces stationed in four military bases in Georgia: Sukhumi in Abkhazia, Batumi in Adjara, Akhalkalaki in Javakhk and Vaziani near Tbilisi. Therefore, it is no surprise that Georgia, in order to curb the Russian influence, began to solicit good relations with the West at its own initiative. For the Kremlin it was unacceptable, so it exploited the existing problems in pro-Russian separatist regions of Georgia, i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After 11/9, good relations with Georgia were important for the US if only for two reasons: to isolate Iran and to use the Georgian air space for flights of American forces from Afghanistan. In 2001, a panel of American advisors was sent to Tbilisi to train Georgia's army as part of a military training programme named Georgia Train and Equip Program.[141] To save its political face, Russia started to call Georgia a gate to Islam because Tbilisi tolerated activities of Chechen groups in the Pankisi Gorge.[42] Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 and the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as President only increased Russia's concerns about US influences in the Caucasus, especially given the fact that the financial contribution of the US in support of the Georgian revolution was quite a delicate issue. Russia claimed that the *Khmara*, a student organisation and the driver of revolution, had been subsidised by George Soros's Foundation, and resistance methods had been "implemented" by the Serbian *Otpor* organisation which also funded Saakashvili's trips to Serbia.[43] Georgia was a geopolitical key to the South Caucasus as it had good relations with pro-Russian Armenia and Azerbaijan and an access to resources in the Caspian Sea region. Thus, conflicts in Georgia were not advantageous to the US for strategic reasons. Georgia, along with Azerbaijan, was a terrain where American forces could withdraw from Central Asia. The pro-West Georgia was unacceptable to Russia used to a sovietised Georgian administration. Georgia which successfully negotiated the withdrawal of Russian forces from its military bases, wished to join NATO and asked to "internationalise" peace missions in Abkhazia and Ossetia was even more unacceptable to Russia. The Kremlin started to exert direct pressure on Georgia by banning imports of Georgian products, blocking communication, and strongly objecting to Georgia's deeper integration with Western structures on international forums. Submissiveness of Western countries in respect to Russia's position on Georgia's accession to NATO and energy policy issues encouraged Russia to pursue its imperial policy in a more aggressive manner. In 2008, acting in line with Medvedev's doctrine, Russia invaded Georgia to protect Russian citizens in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, where Georgia had commenced military operations. Georgia's aspirations to join the EU and NATO were immediately discredited and Russia demonstrated that it may successfully pretend to

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[41] V. Avioutskii (2006), *Les Révolutions de velours,* Paris (Polish translation: *Aksamitne rewolucje,* Warszawa 2007, p. 57).

[42] A. Bryc, *Rosja w XXI wieku. Gracz światowy czy koniec gry?* Warszawa 2008, p. 85.

[43] More in: V. Avioutskii (2006), *op. cit.* pp. 50-51; T. Warner, *Russia accuses US over Georgia,* "The Financial Times" December 8, 2003.

the role of a global superpower capable of carrying immediate and successful military operations. It is disputable whether, at that time, Russia took advantage of the weakness and hesitancy of the West in respect to its refusal to allow Georgia to enter the Alliance Membership Action Plan (MAP). The significance of the recognition of Kosovo's independence by the US and EU countries against opinions of Russia and pro-Russian Serbia is disputable. A report commissioned by the UE and published in 2009 reads that the war in South Ossetia started with Georgia's attack which violated international law. However, the attack was preceded by a provocation and thus both Georgia on one side, and Russia and the separatist South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the other, violated international law.[44] It turned out that Russia could violate international law and "protect" its "traditional" territory even at the price of deteriorating its relations with the US. On the other hand, the US was an indirect culprit of the situation with its exaggerated promises about US-Georgia relations. During Obama's presidency, in June 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Tbilisi and assured Saakashvili that the United States was against the Russian occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and that the US supported Georgia's independence and territorial integrity. During the NATO summit in Lisbon, the willingness to admit Georgia to NATO was clearly confirmed, and Russia was called to withdraw its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.[45] Obama expressed his support for Georgia many times and in result Georgia demonstrated its pro-West orientation by increasing the Georgian contingent operating as part of the ISAF in Afghanistan.[46] However, Georgia should not overestimate American declarations as Barack Obama, especially on the eve of US presidential elections, was primarily focused on issues related to domestic economic crisis and on Iran and Syria in US international affairs.[47]

UKRAINE AND THE NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENCE: THE STRUGLE FOR INFLUENCE ON THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT

Ukraine may serve as another good example of Americans entering the geopolitical courtyard of Russia. Since the beginning of the 1990s, Ukraine's importance to Russia and its imperial aspirations has been huge. Touchy and critical issues in their relations have included ownership of nuclear weapons, division of the Black Sea

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[44] *Georgia 'started unjustified war'*, BBC News, 30 September 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8281990.stm (accessed 25 .07.2012).

[45] P. J. Saunders (ed.) (2011), *Enduring Rivalry? American and Russian Perspectives on the Former Soviet Space,* Center for the National Interest, June, p. 46.

[46] W. Wojtasiewicz, *Krok naprzód,* 12.01.2012, „Nowa Europa Wschodnia" website, www.new.org.pl/2012-01-12,krok_naprzod.html (accessed 15.08. 2012)

[47] W. Wojtasiewicz, *Szczere wyznanie Putina,* 16.08.2012, „Nowa Europa Wschodnia" website, http://www.new.org.pl/2012-08-16,szczere_wyznania_putina.html (accessed 18.08.2012).

Fleet and the Crimea region.[48] Till the beginning of the 21st century, Ukraine seemed to be a Russian stronghold in Europe. The situation changed with Ukrainian presidential elections in 2004 and pro-Western candidate Viktor Yushchenko. In that situation, the United States could undertake activities aimed at increasing its influence in Ukraine.[49] Naturally, in the said elections Russia supported counter-candidate Viktor Yanukovych. Washington asked Russia to refrain from actions that would impede Ukrainians' free choice. The Orange Revolution was thought to bring Ukraine closer to western integration and security structures.[50] Democratisation of Ukraine was to facilitate the same processes in other post-Soviet countries and provide a stimulus for revival of democracy in Russia.[51] After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine started to demonstrate its pro-Western ambitions. Its accession to NATO and the European Union could create a geopolitical situation for which Russia was not fully prepared to face. The pro-Western orientation of Ukraine could be a threat to the western part of the former Soviet Union for, in a long run, Moldova and Belarus might join the same structures. The strength of Russian influence was an issue. Counteracting the US influence not only next to the Russian border but also in Europe, Russia intensified its relations with Germany, especially in the area of energy policy. Gerhard Schröder prioritised economic cooperation with the Kremlin. In result, the controversial Nord Stream AG consortium was born. The consortium planned to construct and operate a natural gas pipeline connecting Germany and Russia directly through the Baltic Sea and by-passing Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Belarus. Energy resources were a strong argument used by Russia in its talks with the European Union as some EU member states have been strongly dependent on gas and crude oil imports. Russia tried to make Europe dependent on its supplies by imposing limits on volumes imported and consolidating crude oil and natural gas deliveries thanks to long-term contracts signed with producers in Central Asia, and by taking control over strategic infrastructure.[52] At the same time, Russia needed to have an ally from among countries of the so-called "old" Europe, and Germany was to be the main recipient and a distribution centre of the Russian gas.[53] Fortunately, the European Union reached its internal agreement and called upon Russia to sign

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[48] More in: K. Malak, *Rosyjsko-ukraiński spór o Krym, Sewastopol i Flotę Czarnomorską*, in: J. Kukułka, Ł. Łukaszuk (eds) (1997), *Od konfiktów do partnerskiej współpracy*, AON, Warszawa, pp. 107-137.

[49] More about Polish-Ukrainian relations in: A. Dergachev (2000), *Ukrainian-Russian Relations – European and Eurasian Context,* "Russian Politics and Law" Vol. 39, No. 6, Nov.-Dec., pp. 55-73.

[50] J. Tefft, *Ukraine and the United States: The Challenges Ahead, Remarks to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations,* Chicago, Illinois, February 7, 2005, MANPADS/Ukraine14feb05.htm (accessed 20.07.2012).

[51] Z. Brzezinski, *Imperial Russia, Vassal Ukraine,* "The Wall Street Journal", December 1, 2004, http://www.aei.org/article/21647 (accessed 20.07.2012).

[52] A. Cohen, *Europe's Strategic Dependence on Russian Energy,* "Backgrounder" No. 2083, November 5, 2007, p. 3.

[53] В. Чижов, *Политика. Россия - ЕС, Стратегия партнерства,* „Международная жизнь" No. 009, 2004-09-30, pp. 23-34.

the Energy Charter and the Transit Protocol that guaranteed security of gas deliveries to EU member states. A thorn in Russia's side were also Yushchenko's actions aimed at assigning the highest priority to Ukraine's integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. In 2005, Ukraine adopted the EU-Ukraine Action Plan which was an element of the EU Neighbourhood Policy and Ukraine's economy was recognised to be market economy, which was an important step toward joining the WTO, an organisation which also Russia long wanted to join.[54] In addition, there were plans to develop NATO's Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine and, in a longer run, its possible accession to NATO. Russia perceived those developments as one great conspiracy against Russia. American experts recommended that the US increased its pressure on the EU to facilitate Ukraine's accession to the EU, intensified NATO membership MAP talks with Ukraine, supported operations of the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development members, and graduated Ukraine from the Jackson Vanik Amendment, for which also Russia has long been striving.[55] Unfortunately, the situation in Ukraine was far from being politically stable by Western democracy standards. Russia's influence on Ukrainian policy-makers was very strong, and the actual Ukraine's divide into its undoubtedly pro-Western part (in the west), and the eastern part visibly dependent on Russia, was not necessarily helpful either. The situation under Yushchenko was not stable, and paradoxically, strategic decisions adopted were based on opinion polls. In autumn 2006, Ukraine suspended its endeavours to join NATO.[56] That was a fault of the Alliance and the US as NATO did not develop its new operation formula and it was unclear what new tasks of NATO should be.[57]

At its summit in Bucharest in April 2008, NATO suspended the process of Ukraine and Georgia's accession for two reasons. Firstly, it was the time of the presidential campaign in the US in which Democrats were expected to win, and the worsening economic crisis did not encourage taking strategic decisions on foreign policy. Secondly, there was lack of agreement among Alliance member states. The American administration reached a conclusion that the success of NATO's activities would be ensured by a smooth cooperation of France, Germany, and the UK. Germany, however, pursued its policy of good relations with Russia and strongly opposed further NATO enlargement to the east. Russia, in turn, insisted that military "presence" of NATO next to its border was a direct threat to Russia.[58] In addition, it turned out

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[54] A. Moshes (2007), *Ukraine: Domestic Change and Foreign Policy Reconfiguration,* "Political Trends in the New Eastern Europe: Ukraine and Belarus", Strategic Studies Institute, June, pp.28-29.

[55] C. A. Wallander (2005), *Challenge and Opportunity: A U.S. Strategy on Ukraine,* June, CSIS, pp. 1-4.

[56] A. Górska, *Ukraina zawiesza starania o członkostwo w NATO,* "Komentarze OSW" 21 September 2006, OSW.

[57] More in: S. Kober, *Crack in the Foundation. NATO s New Troubles,* "Policy Analysis" No. 608, January 15, 2008, The Cato Institute.

[58] A. Gruszczak, *Szczyt NATO w Bukareszcie. Pogłębienie transatlantyckich podziałów,* in: P. Bajor, O. Plaze (eds) (2009), "Biuletyn Międzynarodowy" Kraków, p. 60.

that despite four years of pro-Western Ukrainian administration, the old bonds and dependence on Russia were deeply rooted in Ukraine. Viktor Yushchenko's eastern foreign policy often turned against him. He was judged to be Russophobic and it was one of the reasons for his defeat in presidential elections in 2010. The elections were won by Viktor Yanukovych, a candidate supported by Russia, who has consistently pursued a pro-Russian policy and who distanced himself from his predecessor's ideas of Ukraine's integration with the West.

Another factor that largely influenced relations in Europe was the planned construction of the National Missile Defence (NMD) sites. The original NMD project, put forward by the George W. Bush administration, escalated tensions in US-Russia relations and exposed frictions between "old" and "new" Europe. The plan advocated by the US included installation of the NMD system elements, i.e. Ground Based Interceptors in Poland and a radar and tracking system in the Czech Republic. It caused great indignation in Russia. In the opinion of Russian policy-makers, deployment of missiles proposed by Americans meant an attack on Russia and thus relevant changes in Russian strategic forces began to be prepared.[59] Already in 2002, the US withdrew from the ABM treaty judging it redundant if the NMD was developed further. The ABM treaty was considered by Russians to be a huge compromise on the reduction of its military capabilities. The withdrawal of the US heated the tensions. In the conflict situation, the US made some concessions to Russia. In April 2007, in Moscow, the visiting American delegation presented a proposal for Russia, as a country also threatened with nuclear attacks, to join the system and to share the technology with Russia.[60] But Russia worried not only about military issues. Political issues also mattered. The military potential of Russia was much greater that 10 anti-ballistic missiles to be deployed in Poland, but Russia could not consent to the "presence" of American bases nearly its border. The latter was crucial for Russia's prestige on the international arena and of high relevance to its domestic policy. It should be also highlighted that the location of an American base in Poland would violate an informal agreement reached when the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security (1997) was signed and in 1999 when NATO enlarged. The Act contained NATO's qualified pledge not to deploy nuclear weapons or station troops in new member states and refined the basic "scope and parameters" for an adapted Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. In the new situation, Poland, stronger militarily and politically, and also other countries of Central and Eastern Europe would not be so sensitive to threats and pressure from the Kremlin and possibilities of impacting Russia's traditional area of influence would be significantly limited. In addition, in the end of George W. Bush's second term, the level of anti-American feelings in the world was very high and the US as the "lonely sheriff", acting unilaterally, did not have a good record among the international community. The quick signing of the agreement on the anti-missile

[59] A. Pisalnik, *Minister Iwanow: będzie kara dla Polski za tarczę,* „Rzeczpospolita" 10.11.2006.
[60] C. Rice, R. Gates*, Wir wollen kein neues Wettrüsten,* "Süddeutsche Zeitung" 26.04.2007.

"shield" construction during the Russia-Georgia War in 2008 seemed to be the last move of Bush to highlight his efficiency in foreign policy. At the time, Russia was involved militarily on the Georgian territory and had no grounds to protest. After Barack Obama was elected, it was clear that his policy would be different, especially given his high scepticism toward the actual necessity of the project implementation. A reset of US-Russia relations was promised and Russia's expectation was that the "shield" project would not be implemented.[61] Apart from that, there were hints that Russia would not agree to sign the *opus magnum* of Obama's presidency, i.e. the new START treaty, if American missiles were deployed near the Russian border. At the time, the US military budget was cut by approx. USD 1.4 billion due to the crisis. Russia proposed to construct a common anti-missile defence system with radars in Armavir (Krasnodar Krai in Russia) and Gabala (Azerbaijan). The United States suspended the "shield" project in Poland and the Czech Republic. The decision to construct the "shield" was on paper (NMD within NATO), but given the lack of ideas about future operation of the Alliance itself, it is probable that the project will never be implemented.

THE IRANIAN ISSUE IN US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Russia's relations with Iran were established already during the Cold War. At that time, the Soviet Union and Iran signed bilateral agreements on trade, military, scientific and technological cooperation, the latest mainly in the field of nuclear power engineering. Russia perceived relations with Iran in terms of two categories: as a possibility to retain its influence in the Middle East, strategically an extremely important region, and also as an opportunity to salvage its national budget thanks to proceeds from trade in arms industry products.[62]Already in the first half of the 1990s, Russia supplied Iran with a several hundred tanks and armoured vehicles, fighters, submarines, and surface-to-air missiles, and undertook to build two atomic reactors in Iran. The Iranian Bushehr facility was developed, where Russia built another reactor, supplied nuclear fuel and trained Iranian personnel.[63] The Russian-Iranian military and nuclear cooperation was of a serious concern as the US pursued the policy of international isolation of Iran. The concern turned out to be even more justified when, in August 2002, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) revealed the existence of two nuclear facilities in Iran which had not been known earlier. As IAEA inspections in Iran brought no results, there were proposals to solve the situ-

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[61] *Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации,* 5 ноября 2008 года, Москва, Большой Кремлёвский дворец, http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/1968 (accessed 22.08.2012).

[62] Mores on Russia trading arms to Iran: A. Kassianova (2006), *Russian Weapons Sales to Iran. Why They Unlikely to Stop,* PONARS Policy Memo No. 427, December, pp. 1-5.

[63] A. Cohen, *U.S. Should warn Russia Over Its "Soviet" Middle East Policy,* "WebMemo" No. 1007, March 6, 2006, The Heritage Foundation, p. 3.

ation using armed forces. Russia, taking care of its own interests and global multipolarity, opted for diplomatic measures.[64] The Russian proposal focused on uranium enrichment in Russia and fuel supply to Iran. At the same time, arguments were raised that the Iranian nuclear programme did not serve military purposes, which strangely collided with Iranian threats to launch its missiles.[65] When new sanctions were imposed on Iran, Russia would vote for resolutions of the UN Security Council but then took all efforts to mitigate their application. The Iranian nuclear project was developed further. In December 2007, a Russian company, *Atomstroiexport*, which undertook to build a power plant in Bushehr, announced that it reached an agreement with Tehran about the investment deadline but it also declared that the construction would not be finished by 2008. In result, the first Iranian atomic plant was launched in September 2011.[66]

The US strongly criticised Russia for being the supplier of arms to Iran, mostly for its provision of the TOR-M1 and a more a advanced S-300 version of its mobile anti-aircraft defence systems. Both Iran and Russia took steps to shape the world market of natural gas. Vladimir Putin's visit to Tehran in 2007 indicated a new dimension of relations between the two countries. The Caspian Sea countries – Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan – clearly headed toward strengthening regional cooperation. Governments of those five countries made the first step toward the creation of a regional security system, undertaking not to avail their territories to third countries intending to invade them.[67] In Teheran, on 21 October 2008, head of Russian Gazprom Alexey Miller and ministers of oil industry of Iran and Qatar announced the intent to establish an alliance coordinating natural gas export policies. On 23 December 2008, in Moscow, a Gas Exporting Countries Forum meeting was held. Participants were Russia, Iran and 10 other countries. At the meeting, the statute of the Forum as an intergovernmental organisation with its headquarters in Doha, Qatar, was approved.

The US was highly concerned about Iran's aggressive rhetoric coupled with Iran's development of its own programme of mid- and long-range ballistic missiles. Nuclear weapons and missiles in the hands of Iran constituted a substantial threat not only to the Middle East but to the whole world. In the US, there was a nationwide consensus on the need to stop the Iranian nuclear programme. A common opinion was that Russia could have a major influence on the course of the dialogue between Iran and the West thanks to its connections from the Soviet Union time.[68]

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[64] J. Elliott, I. Khrestin (2007), *Russia and the Middle East,* "Middle East Quarterly" (Winter), AEI, January 19, 2007.

[65] Е. Примаков, *Политика. Это Ближний Восток, это своя специфика*, *"*Международная жизнь" 30.04.2006, No.004, pp. 30-31.

[66] *Iran launches Bushehr nuclear power plant*, Ria Novosti 12.09.2011, http://en.rian.ru/world/20110912/166785925.html (accessed 27.08.2012).

[67] *Caspian states adopt declaration on repelling aggressors -2,* RIA Novosti, 16.10.2007, en.rian.ru/world/20071016/84185487.html (accessed 27.08.2012).

[68] C. D. Ferguson, V. Mizin, *Russia can help resolve Iran crisis,* Council on Foreign Relations, May 22, 2006.

It was the time when the main divide on the policy toward Iran became visible. Western countries, the United States in particular, wanted to undertake resolute steps, while Russia and China, both permanent members of the UN Security Council, opted for slowing down Iranian endeavours. Some Russian experts were of the opinion that each country had the right to develop its own nuclear programme. They explained that nuclear ambitions of Iran stemmed from three factors: 1. geopolitical, as Iran played the main role in a strategically extremely important region of western Asia, 2. military-political, as Iran was surrounded by unfriendly countries and possible adversaries, and its main enemy – the United States – kept concentrating its forces on three sides of Iran: in the west (Iraq), the east (Afghanistan), and in the south (the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman), 3. psychological, as Iran was the heir of one of the greatest ancient civilisations, i.e. the Persian Empire, and for six hundred years it was the world centre of Shia Islam.[69]

The Russia-Georgia War and deterioration of Russia's relations with the West turned out to be the catalyst of changes. It brought about destabilisation of energy markets and boosted oil and gas prices, and Iranian oil and gas deposits became virtually unavailable to Europe, which results in even greater dependence of Europe on the Russian energy industry. At that very time, Iran started to strengthen its economic ties with Asian countries and thus its "proximity" to Russia and China increased. The case of the Russia-Georgia War could have been used by Tehran as a "subtle" message to its enemies.[70] Even negotiations offering Iran a freeze-for-freeze, i.e. a freeze of sanctions for six weeks in return for freezing the Iranian nuclear programme, which were carried by France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, China, and the United States, did not help.[71] The International Atomic Energy Agency's Report of 15 September 2008 confirmed that there was no substantive progress on clarification of all ambiguities accrued around the Iranian nuclear programme. It was highlighted that the process of uranium enrichment in Iranian nuclear plants was continued.[72]

The issue of Iranian nuclear weapons was the subject of controversial negotiations between Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev. During their meeting in London in 2009, a need to persuade Iran to implement UN resolutions and cooperate with IAEA was recognised. Russia, however, did not see any sense whatsoever in imposing any sanctions on Iran.[73] In Prague, the US maintained that the AMD proj-

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[69] V. Sazhin *Iran's Nuclear Programme. A Russian Perspective,* in: "Iran. The Moment of Truth" (2005), Working Paper No. 20 of the European Security Forum - A Join Initiative of CEPS and IISS, June, p. 15.

[70] R. Takeyh, N. Gvosdev, *Russia's Role in Iran Crisis,* Council on Foreign Relations, "The Boston Globe", September 6, 2008.

[71] F. Berrigan, *Avoiding Brinksmanship with Iran,* New American Foundation, "Foreign Policy in Focus" July 23, 2008.

[72] *Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and relevant provisions of Security Council resolutions 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007) and 1803 (2008) in the Islamic Republic of Iran, GOV/2008/38,* IAEA, www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2008/gov2008-38.pdf (accessed 25.08.2012).

[73] L. Aron (2009), *The Button and the Bear,* "Russian Outlook" Summer, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, p. 5.

ect could not be abandoned particularly because of Iran. However, at the Moscow summit, Obama suggested abandonment of the AMD implementation, if Iran gave up its nuclear programme under Russia's pressure. It brought about some results, as at the 64th UN summit Russia acknowledged the need to impose sanctions even though they have hardly ever gave to positive results.[74] For Russia, the liquidation of the Iranian nuclear programme was not desirable. Its point was that aggravation of sanctions against Iran (the forth exporter of crude oil in the world) would lead to increase of prices, which would allow Russian oil industry to enhance its profits. Russia did not see Iran as a threat. Iran was its partner and temporary ally in preventing American expansion around the Persian Gulf which was part the multi-polarity strategy. Iran was perceived by Russia as an emerging "regional superpower" in the Middle East and thus the Kremlin could not officially act against it.[75] Iran itself also sought for partners able to counterbalance the influence of the US. It signed favourable economic and military agreements with China and Russia and promoted anti-Americanism as part of the goals of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. Tehran also started to establish ties with US opponents in Latin America: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela.[76]

The situation grew more tense once the next IAEA report got published in the end of 2011. It read explicitly that Iran's activities aimed at producing a nuclear explosive device. To stop that, intensified measures were applied. In January 2012, the EU banned imports of Iranian crude oil. Further negotiations were carried though. In the beginning of 2012, rumours about a possible US attack on Iran started spreading, albeit were it to happen, it is difficult to envisage its legal endorsement. The following question must be asked: what will Russia's response to the actual US armed military operation in Iran be? A US unitary operation may meet with strong opposition on international forums and this applies to a possible Israeli involvement too. Quite recently, however, Russia has warned Iran about its lack of support for the Iranian nuclear programme, should the suit of Teheran against the *Rosoboroneksport* company not be withdrawn. Russia also demanded that Iran pays it USD 4 billion in compensation for breaking the contract for delivery of S-300 missile systems in the aftermath of a fourth round of United Nations sanctions against Iran in 2010.[77] This means that Iran may lose an important ally and that Russia's influence in the Middle East will decrease.

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[74] H. Sicherman (2009), *Obama's Foreign Policy at Ten Months: the Limits of Consensus*, November, Foreign Policy Research Institute, http://www.fpri.org/enotes/200911.sicherman.obamaforeignpolicy.html (accessed 25.08.2012).

[75] A. Cohen, *Russia's Iran Policy: A Curveball for Obama,* "Backgrounder" No. 2359, January 15, 2010, The Heritage Foundation, p. 2.

[76] More in: M. Mohsen (2009), *Teheran's Take,* "Foreign Affairs" July/Aug., Vol. 88, Issue 4, pp. 46-62.

[77] И. Сафронов, Е. Черненко, А. Горшкова, А. Габуев, *Иск за С-300 развора-чивают против Ирана. Россия готова лишить Тегеран поддержки,* "Коммерсантъ" No. 147 (4932), 10.08.2012, http://kommersant.ru/doc/1998722 (website accessed 27.08.2012).

SUMMARY

The last decade was a breakthrough period in US-Russia relations. The asymmetry in their relations caused by the collapse of the bi-polar international order in 1989 was levelled. At the same time, Russia's role as a global player decreased. The above largely refers to the US-Russia competition in the discussed areas of overlapping interests. It should be stressed that the clashing areas were like a magnifying lens highlighting tensions and conflicts between the two countries. Thanks to the consistent implementation of its strategy, Russia has gradually restored its lost role. Russian authorities managed to translate Russia's traditional imperialistic pursuits into modern international relations. The tools used for that purpose included:

– support given to pro-Russian political milieus to seize or retain power in some countries, for example in Ukraine and countries in Central Asia,
– winning the opposition against the US domination and the creation of discord groups e.g. opposing the intervention in Iraq or pursuing specific activities by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,
– skilful resort to the military dimension like its threat to deploy ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad, warning against a new arms race in the NMD context, not to mention the Russia-Georgia War,
– stiff stance on its trade relations with Iran, not negotiable in relations with Western countries,
– protection of Russia's huge exports of raw materials to Europe by having a decisive impact on possible diversification of natural gas and crude oil supplies thanks to Russia's strong role in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

The US entered the 21st century as the only superpower and it perceived itself as such. This perception was strengthened by the Republican neoconservative administration forcing a unilateral vision of US foreign policy. In result of this policy implementation, a global opposition against the US domination emerged, which made Russia's undertakings much easier. Republicans' policy of entering Russia's areas of influence was a failure. American activities appeared to be insufficiently resolute and incoherent. The lack of real support for groups leading the so-called colour revolutions after their victories is a telling example. In consequence, the US gradually lost its influence on and in former Soviet republics in Central Asia, failed totally in Ukraine, contributed to the weakening of Georgia's place in the international arena and to the continuation of the Iranian nuclear programme. After Democrats took over, the situation did not improve. The administration of Barack Obama have strived for a radical change in US foreign policy including a change of the US' role in the world. A symbol of the latter was the abandonment of the NMD project in Europe. In has turned out that US authorities in the White House must take into account Russia's opinion on European security, especially in Central Europe which is a sensitive region to Russia. After failing to include Ukraine in western integration structures, mainly NATO, the US limited its activity to empty rhetoric of support for a possible enlargement of NATO. That was due to objections of European countries

and the reaction of Moscow to a possible integration of some CIS countries. With regard to Iran, Moscow played a double game. It seemed to support activities of the US administration and, at the same time, supported Iran's political and economic objectives reducing the weight of sanctions imposed.

Democrats have tried to force a conciliatory approach steering toward multilateralism and cooperation at any cost. That, however, has not altered the attitude of Russia consistently following its policy of restoring its global superpower role. Russia has relentlessly continued to protect and win back its areas of influence and weaken the US, judged to be its main rival. In this context, Russia appears to be more successful if an achievement of political goals is the criterion. For Putin, the key issue has been to build the domestic power of the state using, however, instruments typical of the authoritarian rule. Economic development has been translated into cultivation of Russia's security reflected in Russia's foreign policy. Russia's role in neighbouring regions, arms industry and Russian army have been strengthened. Russia shifted the focus of its foreign policy to Central Asia, commencing integration processes of post-Soviet republics. There the energy resources are to which, indirectly, also Americans have aspired. Russia has continued to compete against the US. For Putin, it was part of the "dynamic equilibrium" concept. His activities have strengthened the place of Russia in the CIS. Russia's image as a country acting multilaterally and respecting international law was simply part of Russian PR aimed at European countries irritated with the unilateral policy of the US, especially in the face of the failure of the Iraqi mission and lack of successes in Afghanistan. The Kremlin expressly renounced Russia's intent to restore its global empire status but its withdrawal from global politics has only been apparent. Natural resources and Putin's energy policy turned out to be highly effective means used to create a network of new contacts and relations and as a tool to punish those defying Russia's policy.

ABSTRACT

In the article, selected issues in US-Russia relations in the first decade of the 21st century are discussed. That time was marked by revaluation and changes in the place and role of both the US and Russia in the international arena. Policy objectives of both states engaged them in a tactic game for spheres of influence. American unilateralism led to a gradual degradation of the US role in the world. Circumstances accompanying the assumption of presidency by Barack Obama included the need to abandon unilateralism and focus on a conciliatory approach to problems, which in turn resulted in the US self-imposed limitation of its role in the world. On the other hand, following the rise of Vladimir Putin to power, Russia launched a consistent strategy of resuming the status of a global power. Therefore, in the period under discussion the two countries started competing for spheres of influence. The latter phenomenon is analysed with reference to major areas of overlapping interests, i.e. to the territory of the former sphere of influence of the USSR and to the region of the Near East, especially Iran, which is one of the vital regions in US strategy.