



## Panel Discussion

In assessing the “Reset,” David Kramer argued that the Obama administration’s attempts to engage Russia have not been reciprocated. Kramer observed that the Russian attitude toward the “Reset” is not one of cooperation but an expectation that the U.S. should revise its policy, and Russia need not change at all. Indeed, Russia has not moderated its confrontational policies, as evidenced by the recent reduction of natural gas flows to Belarus.

However, the change in U.S. policy has come at the expense of our allies in Central and Eastern Europe. America’s refusal to participate in the EU’s monitoring of Georgia and unwillingness to criticize the pro-Russian president of Ukraine do not constitute a “balancing act” but a clear shift in favor of Russia.

Meanwhile, the human rights situation in Russia is bad and getting worse. Government crackdowns on dissidents and the intimidation of journalists have become routine, and Medvedev recently endorsed plans to expand the FSB. While Medvedev’s visit will highlight areas of economic cooperation, the Obama administration should work toward political modernization in Russia before economic modernization.

Stephen Rademaker argued that the administration’s approach to the new START treaty made negotiations more problematic. The administration should have sought to simply extend existing verification provisions, but Obama decided to seek additional nuclear armaments reductions as well—in part out of an ideological commitment to a “global zero” and as a gesture to generate goodwill among the Russians by reducing America’s nuclear forces to parity with Russian levels. Although the benefits of such an approach would clearly accrue to the Russians, the Russians instead sought to exploit Obama’s political need to reach an agreement by demanding—and getting—further concessions on launch vehicles and other deployments.

Rather than improve relations, Obama’s attempt at “Reset” only recreated the old Cold War dynamic while rewarding Russia’s hardnosed negotiating tactics. Furthermore, although Russia’s vote for the recent U.N. sanctions resolution against Iran is sometimes considered a positive effect of arms control compromises, Rademaker argued that this cooperation was driven more by Russia’s desire for a “1-2-3” treaty on civilian nuclear technology.

Charles Kupchan presented an opposing view. First, he argued that engagement can produce meaningful results, such as Nixon’s opening of China, and there are reasons to believe engagement can produce success in Russia. Of the regimes Obama has attempted to engage, Kupchan argued, Russia is the least ideologically extreme and most likely to respond. Engagement can also build a level of trust, improving the prospects of resolving more difficult issues like the situation in Georgia. Moreover, countries without democratic domestic institutions can still be partners in peace, such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Our ultimate goal should be to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic order and to make Russia a stakeholder in that order. This transformation would benefit everyone, especially Central and Eastern Europe.

Although the Russian response to U.S. engagement appears to be minimal, engagement takes time. Positive signs so far include Russia’s allowance of more overflights to Afghanistan, and Russian public opinion of the U.S. has significantly improved. Kupchan noted that Russian elite

opinion is divided on how to proceed, and, therefore, the U.S. needs to offer a "green light" to encourage a further shift toward the West.

Rademaker, however, argued that Kupchan had erected a "straw man" and that the question is not whether the U.S. engages Russia but how this engagement is conducted. Critics of the "Reset" are not opposed to opening Russia to the West but are concerned that the administration's policies only embolden the Russians to be more confrontational. Kramer added that the deterioration in U.S.-Russia relations toward the end of the Bush administration was a result of Russia's invasion of Georgia and not Bush's refusal to engage.