

Testimony of Ambassador Alexander R. Vershbow
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Department of Defense
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Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member McKeon, Members of this Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the U.S. relationship with Russia and implications for U.S. and transatlantic security. Russia has been a life-long interest for me, since I began studying the Russian language in high school. As a foreign service officer at what was then the Soviet desk, as the U.S. Ambassador to Russia in 2001-2005, and now most recently as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, I have learned that getting the U.S-Russian relationship right remains one of our highest priorities – and one of our biggest challenges.

That makes it especially meaningful to report that recent developments in U.S.-Russian relations present new opportunities for cooperation with Moscow to enhance U.S. and European security. It is certainly encouraging to see improvement in the tone of our dialogue, and we are building on this positive momentum to collaborate in areas where our national interests coincide, such as non-proliferation, arms control, and promoting security and stability in Afghanistan, among other issues.

Although we have pressed the “reset” button, this does not mean we will shy away from dealing with Russia on areas where we disagree, such as Georgia or NATO enlargement. The President and Vice President have made it clear that we support Georgia’s territorial integrity and its and other countries’ rights to enter into alliances of their choosing, and we refuse to recognize spheres of privileged interests. We also have frank discussions with the Russians on human rights and democracy. The challenge is to find a way to not only work cooperatively in those areas where our interests coincide, but also continue to

engage in those other, more contentious areas without artificial linkages. It is with this backdrop that we seek to establish a more solid basis for sustained engagement with Russia.

Let me begin by taking a few minutes to highlight some major areas of common interest where we believe Russia can work with us as a contributor to our mutual security, and then identify a couple of issues about which we remain concerned.

I.) RUSSIA AS SECURITY PARTNER: AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST

This month's summit in Moscow was far more productive than we had expected. I can report firsthand that the change in tone was striking. The mood was positive and discussions were substantive, opening the way to concrete items such as an agreement allowing for transit of troops and lethal equipment through Russia to Afghanistan, a Joint Understanding setting out a framework for negotiations on a new START Follow-on treaty, a framework agreement allowing for resumption of military-to-military ties, a Memorandum of Understanding on health cooperation, and creation of a bilateral Presidential Commission. We also issued several joint statements establishing a broad agenda for cooperation on a range of national security priorities: Afghanistan, nuclear security, and missile defense. I'll review a few of the areas of progress.

AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan is at the front and center of our security agenda. Russia is also aware that a stable, democratic Afghanistan is in its national security interests. Narcotics trafficking and the spread of violent extremism pose security risks for Russia that Moscow knows it cannot ignore.

President Medvedev has stated on numerous occasions that Afghanistan is our "common cause." Earlier this year, we began to take advantage of a NATO-Russia arrangement that allows for the transit of non-lethal equipment and supplies through Russia. At the

two presidents' April 1 meeting in London, President Medvedev offered to allow transit of lethal material through Russian territory. In Moscow, Bill Burns, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Foreign Minister Lavrov signed an agreement that will permit transit of troops and lethal materiel through Russian airspace. The agreement permits up to 4,500 military and unlimited commercial flights each year, and will yield significant savings. The Russians agreed to absorb the cost of air navigation fees for our military flights associated with the agreement as a contribution to the international effort to stabilize Afghanistan. The agreement will diversify the crucial supply routes to Afghanistan, reduce transit times and fuel usage, and complement agreements we have made with others in the region. We will continue to use all available routes to Afghanistan and not become overly dependent on any one of them. It should take no more than 60 days to implement the agreement.

President Medvedev has also offered more direct contributions to the stability and security of Afghanistan. To better coordinate our efforts, we will expand our cooperation within the U.S.-Russia Counter-Terrorism Working Group. In Moscow, the U.S. delegation had the opportunity to view a training center at Domodedovo, where Afghan counternarcotics police officers had been trained through the NATO-Russia Council Counter-Narcotics Project. The program has been successful, and we are thinking together about how to get more initiatives like this in place.

Moving forward, I do see Afghanistan as an area where the Russians seem to be sincere in their offers to assist. Russia has become an important player in the international effort in Afghanistan, contributing toward improvement of infrastructure, supporting political processes, and offering support for the Afghan military and police. The stakes are high, as failure in Afghanistan could have a direct impact on the illegal narcotics flowing to Russia and stability in regions like the Northern Caucasus.

START FOLLOW-ON

One of the President's main goals for the Summit was to reach a framework agreement for a new START Follow-on treaty that laid out parameters and concrete numbers. This is precisely what we accomplished in the Joint Understanding signed by the two presidents in Moscow. The Joint Understanding establishes for both sides the objective of reducing and limiting their strategic offensive arms so that seven years after entry into force of the treaty and thereafter, the limits will be in the range of 500-1100 for strategic delivery vehicles, and in the range of 1500-1675 for their associated warheads. The treaty will also include effective verification measures drawn from the experience in implementing START. While specific ceilings remain to be negotiated, these ranges already represent reductions from the maximum levels allowed under the expiring START Treaty's 1600 delivery vehicles and Moscow Treaty's 2200 warheads. I'll defer to my colleague from State on the details of the START Follow-on treaty, but will briefly share a few key points here:

- It will combine the predictability of START and the flexibility of the Moscow Treaty, borrowing from the best elements of START on definitions, data exchanges, notifications, eliminations, inspections and verification procedures, as well as confidence-building and transparency measures.
- The Treaty will be in effect for ten years, unless it is superseded before that time by a subsequent treaty on reductions of strategic offensive arms.
- The Presidents also agreed to direct their negotiators to finish their work on the treaty soon so that they may sign and submit it for ratification in their respective countries.

In President Obama's speech at Moscow's New Economic School, he reiterated America's commitment "to stopping nuclear proliferation, and ultimately seeking a world without nuclear weapons." The steps initiated at this month's summit represent an

important demonstration of U.S. and Russian leadership in fulfilling their obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and will contribute to a more successful 2010 NPT Review Conference.

NUCLEAR SECURITY COOPERATION

Another high-priority issue for the President at the Summit was ensuring the security of nuclear materials and facilities, and strengthening our cooperation with the Russians to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. President Obama and President Medvedev had lengthy discussions on how to deal with the immediate challenges posed by Iran and North Korea. They agreed to broaden our bilateral cooperation to increase the level of security of nuclear facilities worldwide, and to take steps to strengthen the global non-proliferation regime. We also remain committed to implementing the Plutonium Disposition Agreement, through which we will dispose of 34 metric tons each of weapons-grade plutonium. We believe the Russians are open to more significant cooperation in this area to ensure that additional countries in the Middle East and Asia do not seek nuclear weapons.

MISSILE DEFENSE

Although missile defense remains a difficult issue, we were able to reach agreement with Russia on a joint statement on missile defense cooperation. In the statement, we agreed to conduct a Joint Ballistic Missile Threat Assessment, which will be primarily focused on Iran and North Korea. A U.S. team is traveling to Moscow this week to begin the process. We believe that the Threat Assessment will offer an effective mechanism for narrowing our differences on the immediacy of the threats, and thereby provide a foundation for expanding our cooperation in this area, both bilaterally and through the NATO-Russia Council.

In the Joint Statement, we also pledged to redouble our efforts to open the long-planned Joint Data Exchange Center in Moscow. This center, jointly commanded by U.S. and

Russian military, will allow us to share missile launch data with each other and reduce misunderstandings that might arise over a test launch, an unauthorized, accidental launch, or other benign missile launches. We believe that through this center we could also exchange data from third-country launches, information that would be of obvious benefit to both parties.

The Department is taking a comprehensive look at our plans for European ballistic missile defense as a part of the ongoing Ballistic Missile Defense Review. President Obama committed to completing the review before the end of the summer and we will look to the outcome of that process to guide our next steps. We made clear to our Russian counterparts that our decision on missile defense sites in Europe will be determined by the threat from Iran, the technical feasibility of different missile defense options, and the cost. As we move forward with our review, the steps initiated at the Moscow Summit will provide an excellent opportunity to engage Russia on cooperation on a missile defense system that could protect U.S., European, and Russian populations from nuclear and ballistic missile threats from Iran and elsewhere.

NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS

After almost a year-long break in relations in the wake of events in Georgia last August, the NATO-Russia Council resumed its activity with a ministerial-level meeting on June 27 in Corfu, Greece. The meeting did not lead to a formal agreement on a way ahead, but we were able to identify some concrete areas of cooperation.

Specifically, NATO-Russia Council Members agreed on the need to resume military-to-military contacts and broader cooperation, specifically in the stabilization of Afghanistan, counter-terrorism efforts, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, maritime cooperation on counter-piracy and search-and-rescue at sea, and responding to civil emergencies. The discussion was frank and constructive, and members agreed that due to the important role the NATO-Russia Council plays in Euro-Atlantic security, its activities should continue even during times of disagreement. NATO Secretary General Jaap de

Hoop Scheffer has highlighted NATO-Russia relations as a key issue to address in NATO's new Strategic Concept. The Alliance looks forward to continuing to engage Russia as we develop the new Strategic Concept.

II. AREAS OF CONCERN

Even though Russian conventional forces are far smaller than what constituted the Soviet armed forces, they maintain a comparative advantage over other armed forces in Europe and have embarked on the most serious defense reforms since the end of the Cold War. We will need to manage our disagreements in areas such as energy security, NATO enlargement, missile defense, the sovereignty of countries in the post-Soviet space, and Russia's backsliding on democracy and human rights issues.

REGIONAL SECURITY

We reject anachronistic 19th century thinking about spheres of influence or privileged interests. We will continue to support the sovereignty, with all the rights and responsibilities that word implies, of all states regardless of geographic location. We continue to believe that stable democracies on Russia's borders contribute not only to Europe's security, but to Russia's as well. In that vein, we stand by our commitment to continue to strongly support programs aimed at building partner capacity and promoting security cooperation with our partners in the region. These will not suffer due to the "reset" in relations with Russia. Good relations with Russia and its neighbors are not mutually exclusive, as President Obama made clear during his meetings with President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin, and that the U.S. supports Georgian and Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity.

During his visits to both countries last week, Vice President Biden reaffirmed this support. In Tbilisi, he stated that he had returned to Georgia "to send an unequivocal, clear, simple message to all who will listen, that America stands with you at this moment and will continue to stand with you." To this end, the U.S. is implementing the U.S.-

Georgia Charter on Strategic Partnership, and will engage with Georgia to assist it in completing the democratic, economic, and security reforms necessary for Euro-Atlantic integration. Together with our European Allies, we will continue to press Russia to honor its commitments under the September 8, 2008 Medvedev-Sarkozy Ceasefire Agreement, and will urge both Georgia and Russia to refrain from destabilizing actions.

The Vice President's visit also underscores the U.S. commitment to Ukraine, an important partner whose integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions would advance our vision of a wider and more stable Europe. As a distinctive partner of NATO through the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and as an active NATO Partnership for Peace nation participating in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, Kosovo and Iraq, Ukraine has demonstrated its commitment to regional and global security; but, it also has substantial work ahead of it to complete the political, economic, and security reforms necessary for Euro-Atlantic integration. The Department will continue to support Ukraine's efforts to transform and restructure its military into a modern, professional and NATO-interoperable force.

In addition to supporting Ukraine and Georgia in their objective of integration in Western institutions, the United States remains committed to the safety and security of those states already in NATO. We understand there is growing anxiety among some members of the NATO Alliance – particularly those in Central and Eastern Europe – but U.S. commitments to Europe's security remain firm. Article 5 continues to serve as the cornerstone of the Alliance, which is a theme that will no doubt be highlighted in NATO's new Strategic Concept.

In June, Greece hosted a ministerial meeting in Corfu of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to discuss ways to strengthen European security. We remain ready to continue our dialogue with Russia in the OSCE about its ideas for a new European security architecture, although we remain committed to working through existing structures and mechanisms for joint cooperation on European security rather than

creating new ones. We will need to continue to engage because, as last August's events show, we need to make existing mechanisms more effective in preventing conflicts.

CONVENTIONAL ARMED FORCES IN EUROPE (CFE)

The Administration is concerned that, since December 12 2007, Russia has continued unilateral "suspension" of its legal obligations under the CFE Treaty. The U.S. is committed to cooperative security and fulfillment of international agreements, as well as the importance of the confidence that results from military transparency and predictability. Because of this, the U.S. continues to fully implement the CFE Treaty. The U.S. continues to urge Russia to work cooperatively with the U.S. and other concerned CFE States Parties to reach agreement on the basis of the parallel actions package so that together we can bring the Adapted CFE Treaty forward for ratification and preserve the benefits of this landmark regime.

III. WAY FORWARD

The signals from Moscow since the summit have thus far been largely positive. We expect that in developing a more formal institutional underpinning for the relationship, a more stable and substantive partnership will mature.

BILATERAL COMMISSION

I think one of the problems of the recent years in our management of U.S.-Russian relations was that we treated Russia largely as a function of our policy on other issues – Afghanistan, the Middle East, counter-terrorism or energy – rather than focusing on the relationship as a whole. To provide more strategic direction, the Presidents decided to establish a bilateral commission which will govern all aspects of the relationship. President Obama and President Medvedev will co-chair the Commission with Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov serving as coordinators. More structured relationships may help us to maintain momentum, and avoid misunderstandings.

MILITARY-TO-MILITARY COOPERATION

Good relations between militaries form a sound building block for good relations between countries and we are working with the Russian MOD and General Staff to improve on the military-to-military programs we had before they were suspended as a result of the war in Georgia. During the summit, Admiral Mullen and General Makarov signed a new Framework on Military-to-Military Cooperation. This Framework, based on principles of pragmatism, parity, reciprocity, balance and synchronization with NATO, will change the nature of the relationship. It will set conditions that raise military cooperation to a new level and deepen mutual understanding between our respective armed forces.

We also agreed on a work plan which will include nearly 20 exchanges and operational events before the end of the year, including a strategic discussion between the U.S. Joint Staff and the Russian General Staff, orientation for Russian military cadets at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, planning for a joint exercise to respond to a hijacked aircraft in national and international airspace, visit of the faculty of the Russian Combined Arms Academy to the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Ft. Leavenworth, and a naval war game conducted by the Kuznetsov Naval Academy and the U.S. Naval War College. In addition, the U.S. European Command and the Russian Ministry of Defense agreed to meet and develop a robust and more ambitious work plan for 2010.

CONCLUSION

The Presidents' April meeting in London and their July summit mark what I believe can be a significant turning point in U.S.-Russia relations. The Corfu Ministerial Council in June offers a similar example of the restart in NATO-Russia relations. The Administration is under no illusion that this will be easy. Nor do we believe that any kind of strategic partnership will develop overnight. We do believe that improved relations between the U.S. and Russia, which had started on a downward trend long before hitting a nadir due to the August 2008 conflict in Georgia, can help us meet the range of 21st

century challenges we face today. This policy acknowledges that Russia is still important as a potential partner that is on the front lines of most of the main security problems we have to deal with.

We set a very ambitious agenda for the Moscow Summit and made significant progress on a number of important issues. We are optimistic that the agreements that arose from the Summit will assist our efforts broadly, from reducing strategic weapons stockpiles to supporting the war in Afghanistan. Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts here today, and I look forward to your questions.