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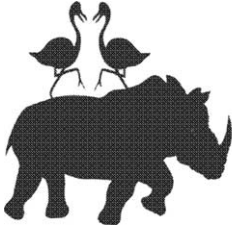
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SERGEY KISLYAK: “RESETTING U.S.–RUSSIAN RELATIONS ALSO MEANS KILLING OLD VIRUSES THAT HAVE BEEN POISONING OUR DIALOGUE”

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the United States of America Sergey Kislyak is a good friend of the PIR Center and one of the contributors to our journal. Normally we have had conversations with him in Russia, including the time when he was Deputy Foreign Minister. However, this time Editor-in-Chief of the Security Index journal Vladimir Orlov and Sergey Kislyak met in California, in Monterey. The Russian Ambassador visited this nonproliferation capital of the United States to speak to the students and professors of the Monterey Institute of International Studies and the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. The discussion was held by William Potter, CNS Director and PIR Center’s Executive Board member, in July 2009. Before the discussion Sergey Kislyak mentioned to Vladimir Orlov and William Potter the willingness to strengthen cooperation between the PIR Center and the U.S. academic institutions, above all the CNS.

With the permission of William Potter, we publish below the transcripts of the debate in Monterey.

POTTER: Washington and Moscow speak about the policy of reset. But what were the major current obstacles in U.S.–Russian relations?

KISLYAK: Let us first go back in time and look at the situation in bilateral Russian–U.S. relations of just 12 months ago. August 2008. It was, if you remember, a time when we had a very difficult relationship because of the South Ossetia and Georgian invasion there. We had to step in and to enforce peace there. And I would say that in my humble opinion this was the lowest point in our relations after the Cold War, since the United States was following its own perception of what Russia was doing there rather than the real facts on the ground.

The United States was advancing the idea of isolating Russia. A number of fora where we and the United States had worked together were frozen. G-8 delayed a number of meetings; the NATO–Russia Council was frozen because of the decision of Washington to do so. This is a sad fact for me personally, as the very first reality check proved that the U.S.A. wasn’t interested and able to talk to us. We turned to the Security Council, to other institutions, but they were simply paralyzed.

And it was a very telling moment for us—it proved that the current institutions and relations should be modernized, in order to address serious issues of security, including security in Europe.

What we need is the place where people can sit together and discuss the issues, and not necessarily automatically adopt the Russian position. We should discuss the roots of the problems and this would help us to go forward. At such meetings we could provide more real information to our partners.

POTTER: And what was the nature of reset?

KISLYAK: When President Obama was elected, he brought a new tone to our relations. Then there was a famous speech by Vice-President Biden in Munich. So we feel that the main message that the current administration wants to send to us [is] willingness to engage constructively. We



took this approach with respect and the meeting of the two presidents in London in April [2009] was very good and substantial. And it was followed by the summit in Moscow [in July 2009].

I would add to this that the term “reset” came from, as I understand, the computer world. And all of us who are faithful computer users know that when you want to reset your computer you would want to take away the old viruses otherwise you would end up with the same problems. And I think that the Moscow meeting was exactly the time to take away those viruses and to start building some new relations. We try to build cooperation in the areas where our leaders coincide.

POTTER: President Obama has indicated that he seeks a strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia. On the other hand, in late July 2009, Vice-President Biden appeared to communicate a somewhat different message in his interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, in which he seemed to imply that Russia’s withering economy—his phrase—would lead Moscow to accommodate the West on a variety of national security issues. How do most Russians interpret these mixed signals?

KISLYAK: I think, first and foremost, we have a policy that has been taken by President Obama. He currently speaks to Moscow in a very benign fashion on how he sees Russian–American relations and what he wants to develop. We take him seriously and we take it as a reflection of U.S. policy. We certainly hear many nuances in assessment of Russia and the prospects of Russian relations. I understand that. The good news doesn’t sell more, so you’re focusing on the bad news. Certainly the world is such that that we can always find news that would be unpleasant to deal with anyway.

We can understand that the change of attitudes toward Russia in the United States isn’t going to occur overnight. The same is true the other way around, the attitude of the Russians toward the United States. So it’s not going to be an easy process. But we need to work on issues that unite us, to work as partners, and working on these things is the best way to have a normal relationship.

You know there are the subjects we all face. Terrorism is one of them, economic instability, poverty, climate change, and many others. It’s a long list. And then there are things that divide us and require solution. Expansion of NATO, ballistic missile defense deployment near our borders But war on terror and other complicated issues are much more important for the long-term interests of the United States and Russia. And that gives us a good chance to work on these issues. In fact, our joint willingness to work on these cases will help define what is possible in our relationships and what is not.

I think that a pretty unique area where we have been working together with the United States and Europe, during even the most difficult times of the Cold War, is nonproliferation. The ups and downs in our political relations did not affect our work in this area. I think that is living proof that there are important security issues where the long-term core interests of the United States and Russia coincide. We had to learn to cooperate—it doesn’t mean that we didn’t have differences on how to best achieve the goals that we shared. But, at the same time, we have never interrupted the channels of communication on this issue. Even during the crises that we have lived through. It’s something that needs to be built upon in the future.

POTTER: Let us now move to the issues of nuclear arms control, namely the START I replacement talks. The START I Treaty is set to expire on December 5, 2009. I would be very interested in your assessment, first about the prospects for reaching an agreement by December 5.

KISLYAK: It is a formidable task because START deals with the core of security issues between the United States and Russia. When the current agreement expires, it means that on December 6 we will have no limits, no rules in the field of strategic arms. And all strategic arms, not only strategic defensive arms. Because the United States chose to withdraw from the ABM Treaty—one of these two previous agreements that laid the foundation of predictability was withdrawn from unilaterally by the United States in the early years of the President Bush administration. Now the only thing that is left is START. It has proved to be workable and is largely considered to be a success by both sides. If we lose that kind of strength on December 6, each side will be able to do whatever they want in the development of area of strategic capabilities.

So we feel that START has been a very important instrument of stability and predictability in this area. It’s not easy to negotiate. Each and every small issue for the negotiators is a big issue for the General Staff of the Russian Federation or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So part of the issue is to discuss what is sensible and important, and this is the additional task of the negotiators.

At the same time it is not a treaty that will be started from scratch. All of the things that were developed in terms of procedures to destroy, in terms of inspections for the purposes of START, have been tested already. And in some respect we have developed a culture of working together to implement START.

You [United States] have a significant infrastructure that has been working on the implementation of this agreement with Russia, we have the same in Russia. And they work much better than I expected 10 years ago. That's also an important touch point for the negotiators. Because some things that maybe they couldn't do then, now they can do easier. Sometimes it shouldn't be reinvented. They can borrow experiences or borrow negotiations from the old treaty and bring them forward in the new one. However, the biggest challenge is to decide our role and where we need to go. And here we are not yet clear on that and that may be a challenge for us. Besides, we need to establish the limits on the warheads and the limits on the delivery systems.

Your goal strategically is quite a lot different than ours. We have different asymmetries, but both sides want to achieve an equal sense of security. I'm not saying parity, I'm saying equal sense of security.

POTTER: Now let's turn to the topic of tactical, or non-strategic, nuclear weapons (TNW). The Obama administration appears to be far more receptive to the argument that tactical nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from Europe. And tactical nuclear weapons should be the focus of future U.S.–Russia negotiated arms control. Do you believe such initiatives hold much promise, and if not, why not? And also, under what circumstances Russia might consider reducing and eventually eliminating the entire arsenal of its TNW?

KISLYAK: First of all, as to where the American administration moves, I think, you would be better served by asking my colleagues in the State Department. So far the nuclear component of U.S. forces is still in Europe. And we have proposed relocating all the nuclear weapons to the national territories, i.e. to the states that do possess them. Russia doesn't have any nuclear weapons outside of the territory of Russia.

As to negotiations on tactical [nuclear] weapons, it's too precise a question to be able to respond to right now as to what we specifically wish to negotiate. First of all, I would say in generic terms, our presidents have raised the idea of nuclear arms reductions.

They understand that to achieve that kind of goal it will require all other things to be also implemented. We need to be sure that while the big nuclear powers reduce these weapons, the other countries join in. You need to be sure that while you are eliminating nuclear weapons, the other countries today aren't going to introduce nuclear weapons in new parts of the world. And it is initially important to show that we are all compliant with this process. Then we can go and work on these issues. So tactical weapons will be somewhere in this process by definition.

For the purposes of START, we do not discuss it because that doesn't help. In the future we will not exclude that, but we need to be very cognizant of the real problems of Russia. We have a situation here that is still not very predictable to us. Recent events in Kosovo or in South Ossetia just proved that wars in Europe are still possible.

We see that there is an alliance that is by its nature is a military bloc, which operates beyond its original location. And they proved that they can employ military force. Certainly we are talking about imbalances in Europe. The sense of security for all of us in Europe needs to be established. Unless it is achieved, some nuclear weapons are still considered to be a significant deterrent as of now.

POTTER: Do you mean that the issue of TNW should correspond with the progress on the CFE Treaty?

KISLYAK: We need to be also working on regional imbalances. But so far we have not been able to get the Adapted CFE treaty enforced. It's very important to us because currently—and probably not everybody knows this—we live in the Cold War type of regional environment and the old treaty still regulates the policy in conventional weapons between two major alliances.

But the Warsaw Pact exists no longer. So we have started insisting on negotiating things that would take care of the new situation in the absence of alliances. A new situation would give more assurance about security not only to the members of the alliance, but to all countries in the region.



So we have negotiated the treaty, and we don't have it in force; because it was ratified only by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Not a single remaining country has ratified it. The problem is that currently we do not have an active treaty. We don't have a predictable and reliable framework to control the conventional sphere in the long term in Europe. And it leaves a lot of question marks as to what is going to happen if relations change.

What I'm suggesting is that the CFE treaty is important in its own right. But, by creating a predictable environment in conventional weapons security, we make it easier to think about our next steps.

POTTER: Now as we turn to regional issues what is your assessment of the current status of Iran's nuclear program?

KISLYAK: The program itself is very interesting. They started this program after years and years of American government trying to convince the previous regime in Iran that they need to have at least 20 GW installed for power in Iran. And that the United States would help Iran to develop that kind of nuclear program that would include also an enrichment facility, provided that the facility would be built by outsiders.

Then the regime changed as well as the attitude of the United States—from that moment on the position was that Iran had enough oil and gas to ensure all its needs in energy consumption, and they didn't have any need for nuclear power.

The Iranians, however, still had the intention to continue the program—after all they had the basic infrastructure created by the Germans. And they turned to us. We thought that the country complied with the nonproliferation treaty and had a legitimate power generation nuclear energy program.

At the same time, during the years of war with Iraq, they started a program that was seeking enriched uranium. They did in a way that wasn't transparent to the international community, that wasn't transparent to the IAEA. So politically it wasn't the best way to develop that type of sensitive program. Then, at some point in time, there was a subtle change in the program for enrichment. And from that moment on we had very difficult negotiations, discussions, and resolutions in the IAEA, the Security Council, on this issue.

POTTER: How would you comment on such change?

KISLYAK: The problem is that Iran is developing [a] nuclear enrichment capability that by tradition is useful for peaceful purposes and, if they decide to do so, for military purposes as well.

Today they have a capability that gives them an opportunity to enrich much more, which they do. And the enrichment is the 2–4 percent that is required for nuclear reactors. As we understand it, and I think it's shared by everybody, each and every gram of this enriched uranium has been accounted for by the IAEA. And this program so far hasn't led to nuclear weapons. And I would assume that as long as the agency is there in Iran it will not be used for nuclear weapons-grade material.

Where the problem can arise is that if there is a diversion, which currently nobody, neither you nor I, has any proof of. Thus it is a matter of the lack of certainty about the nature of this program, and its perception and the lack of understanding that all they have put on the table is all they have.

And sometimes people are questioning the intentions of the Iranian government about the use of these enrichment capabilities. Currently it's done legally and within the limits of the nonproliferation treaty (NPT). And there are a number of NPT non-nuclear-weapon members who run the same kind of programs—Japan or Brazil, some European and Asian nations.

So it is not very unique that they have an enrichment capability. The difference being that, economy-wise, it's not very easy to justify the possession of that kind of program in the absence of a well-developed nuclear electricity generating program. So far, they do not run a single power station. Only because Bushehr is going to be the first one in operation and, for Bushehr, Russia has supplied fuel for the first phase and will be supplying it until the last phase. So there is uranium.

So all the discussion about the nuclear weaponization of Iran is based on the capability that physically they are creating and on the implication of the intentions in the future, which have

developed into almost a stereotype that either they have built nuclear weapons or are building nuclear weapons. It's not reality.

But there are a lot of uncertainties about the nature of the program that haven't been declared by the IAEA. The agency has been entrusted by all of us to do the verification job with the Iranians. Their compliance with these requirements, by the way, was less than 100%, and there are still elements that need to be addressed before the IAEA or the Security Council can say that all the concerns are met. And it's going to be difficult.

POTTER: What would you like to see Iran and the international community do to resolve the ongoing crisis?

KISLYAK: I think the first solution can be political. That means you need to engage diplomacy and negotiations. We have a mechanism about engaging with the Iranians on this issue—that is, the Group of Six. Moreover, we see some changes in the American position under the new administration and the willingness to negotiate.

The proposal of The Six is a good basis, because it provides for a wide spectrum of arrangements with Iran. Not only in that it provides for a legitimate and moral preparation for developing nuclear energy programs in Iran as a part of cooperation, but it also includes a number of other items, like access to peaceful technologies for other industries.

So we are convinced that if Iran chooses to seek negotiations by picking up the proposal and developing into an agreement with all of us, they tend to benefit much more from this than from any nuclear enrichment program which they might choose to develop during the years ahead.

POTTER: Another issue which is topical for the United States today is Afghanistan. Based on the Soviet Union's difficult experience in Afghanistan in the 1970s and 1980s, what lessons did Moscow learn that may be applicable to the United States today?

KISLYAK: It wasn't easy for us. It was really difficult, and will be for the United States. Lesson number one. Lesson number two, you need to work at building your own fence against the terrorists. It should be made of those who make the first elements of the normal economy. The normal economy has been almost absent in our time. It is a kind of breeding ground for the recruitment of terrorism. The reliance on the poppy crop is a result of the absence of an alternative for the peasants to grow. They don't have even the irrigation systems to help them with normal crops. And it is a huge problem for us and other countries adjacent to the region.

The fight against terrorism should be accompanied by helping to build up the civil society and the normal government in this country. And it's going to be a long process.

As far as we are concerned, we try to be helpful. Not only in sharing our experience, which is a simple thing to do, but also in supporting the efforts to help the common people of Afghanistan to run the country. We also decided to help the U.S. military forces by allowing the transit of material and forces through Russian territory.

It was controversial, but we thought it was something that we, Russians, can do to contribute to the overall mission of the United States in this region. So we are going to be helpful and you will see more cooperation from us, short of sending Russian soldiers to this country. That is taking into account the experience we have had so far, it is not ill-conceived.

POTTER: The final question is more general. Americans know very little about Russian history, or even contemporary Russia. How do you propose to promote and provide a better education for Americans about Russians?

KISLYAK: I think that the differences we have, they are not as great as one might think. The problem is the lack of knowledge and the problem is PR. It is wrong to perceive Russia as an extension of the Soviet Union. As if whatever Russia does, rightly or wrongly, is a resurrection of the Cold War competition with the United States. We are certainly competing with you, in many respects, but we are not going to create anything, at least in our own relations, that would remind us of the confrontations of the Cold War. We have changed much more than the Americans have understood. But we have had trouble in explaining it in the United States.

And I would say that one of the basic elements that is less known here is that currently there is no basis whatsoever for the resumption of the Cold War. For one thing, Russia is as much a market economy as the United States, the difference being that we are only 18 years old and America is



200 years plus. Being young, it means that we are going through the same mistakes and the same problems that the United States had as a country 100 years ago. But at the same time, we are growing reliably and, I would say, much faster than anybody else.

So psychologically and ideologically, there are no big divides. Russians and Americans are very similar. Ideologically, I think the United States government is much more ideologically charged than we have been. So we are building an economy for the Russian people, we need a stable and predictable environment around our countries. Stable, predictable, and reassuring that we cannot have bad relations with other countries.

