

World Politics

# Relations f

## By Russian and American ambassadors

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**T**HIS year marks an important anniversary. In 1807, the Russian Empire and the young American Republic agreed to establish diplomatic relations. Soon after, Russia's first envoy, Alexander Dashkov, arrived in Washington, and John Quincy Adams traveled to St Petersburg.

Since this modest beginning, our relations, at their best and worst, have borne out de Tocqueville's prophecy that America and Russia are "marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe".

Today, with the Cold War and immediate post-Soviet transition behind us, we face a new world in which an effective US-Russian relationship is central to addressing many global challenges.

As American ambassadors to Moscow or Russian ambassadors to Washington, we are all direct descendants of those envoys who pioneered the bilateral conversation.

We are diplomats - not politicians - who represent a half-century of

experience of "doing US-Russian relations". We have come together on this diplomatic bicentennial at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington to reflect on the prospects for US-Russian relations.

Our careers have seen our countries face critical, at times existential, challenges. We have known the success of close cooperation when we defeated

for positive change. But change also brings with it new threats.

The threats posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and organised crime, unprecedented stresses on our environment and energy security, and a host of unresolved and frozen regional conflicts are among the pressing issues that require joint attention. In these and many other areas, our two

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common foes and developed a safer world, but also the consequences of estrangement and rivalry.

Today, unprecedented globalisation of communications, economic dynamism and the movement of people, goods and ideas have broken down traditional barriers and opened our nations to new and powerful influences

countries have the experience and responsibility to provide leadership.

Faced with so many important tasks, we cannot afford to let miscommunication or mistrust derail our relations. When we have pursued active dialog and creative diplomacy based on agreed principles, we have brought about positive change. How do

# for a new century

we regain that relationship? What lessons have we learned?

First, America and Russia are large, complex nations with different histories, geography and cultures. It is normal and inevitable that we each see the world through the lens of our own national interests, compete in global economic and political affairs and have legitimate disagreements.

The task is to identify and advance shared interests even as we manage our differences and disagreements. As Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, who was instrumental in negotiating the Cuban missile crisis, wrote, "We should always be able to find a way to disagree without damaging a profoundly important strategic partnership."

Second, both countries have experienced profound change in the past quarter century. The Cold War's end and the dissolution of the Soviet Union into independent states brought a sea change across Europe and Eurasia, the consequences of which continue to reverberate. Russia has entered a difficult period of economic, social and political transformation as well as of reshaping its global and regional strategies. The United States has undergone the national shock of 9-11. The emergence of violent anti-US extremism poses an imminent threat

to Americans everywhere, challenging traditional US policies, perceptions and priorities.

Third, US-Russian relations work best when we avoid demonising one another and hone in on common interests to develop shared solutions. For example, we have markedly improved our work together in combating terrorism. We must concentrate on

future security structures for Europe and how best to proceed in Kosovo have brought new tensions between us. Our diplomacy must find a way forward.

Fourth, as we begin our third diplomatic century, it is important to continue to rely on the power of diplomacy. Keeping our channels always open and busy spared us from nuclear annihilation in the 20th century and can

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opening new areas of cooperation in nuclear matters, including prevention of WMD proliferation.

Much remains to be done. There is growing concern that our successful arms control regime may disappear, with unacceptable consequences for the world. Present disagreements about missile defence in Europe, the shape of

help us surmount the threats that lie ahead. Today, in addition to regular diplomatic channels and contacts between leaders, we should explore further institutionalization of our dialog at the cabinet and sub-cabinet levels.

Finally, we need a wider conversation between our societies to strengthen the foundation of shared values. Encouraging



the broadest possible open contacts among scientific, social, and religious organisations is equally important. To this end, our visa systems should facilitate exchange rather than hinder it.

Expanding our economic ties can also promote a more stable and predictable relationship. We must move beyond the WTO issue and remove politically motivated barriers that have held up US-Russian commercial exchange so that Russia takes its place as a full member of the global trading community.

Our two countries have already proven themselves able to bridge wide political and cultural gaps. We can now work together in the broad context of democratic values and market economics. Today the US and Russia need to build a well-defined new strategic framework for productive diplomacy to resolve old problems and meet new challenges. Our future work should be worthy of a third diplomatic century. COURTESY INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

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