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US–RUSSIAN RELATIONS

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Analysis

What Next After Warheads and Ideologies?

By Fyodor Lukyanov, Moscow

Abstract

Barack Obama's rise to power relaxed the atmosphere surrounding US–Russian relations, which by the fall of 2008 had reached their lowest point in the last 25 years. The beginning of negotiations on a new agreement to limit strategic offensive weapons, an understanding on Afghanistan, and Washington's decision not to locate missile defense sites in Central Europe, as well as the convergence on Iran, provide a basis for optimism. However, a new model of cooperation between Moscow and Washington, which would address the realities of the 21st century rather than simply echoing the Cold War, has not been established. The two themes that determined the parameters of Russian–US relations earlier – nuclear parity and ideological confrontation – have lost their previous importance. Today both states are interested in harmonizing their priorities regarding regional conflicts in Eurasia. Such agreements are possible, but there have yet to be any attempts to achieve them.

Changing Places

Let's start with two quotes.

First: "Democracy cannot be imposed on any nation from the outside. Each society must search for its own path, and no path is perfect. Each country will pursue a path rooted in the culture of its people and in its past traditions."

Second: "States ... should know each other as well as possible and have the right to evaluate critically not only each other's foreign, but also domestic policies and maybe even point out insufficiencies in these policies if they can lead to problems at the international level or ignore generally accepted ethical norms and the principles of humanism."

The first quote seems very familiar. During the middle of this decade, at a time when the Russian state implemented a policy of "sovereign democracy," Russian high level politicians constantly spoke about these things – the uniqueness of Russia's path toward democracy and the inadmissibility of intervening in a country's internal affairs. The second quote is practically a word-for-word expression of Washington's answer to Moscow.

Nothing new? Almost. The difference is that the first quote comes from US President Barack Obama. This is an excerpt from his speech to the UN General Assembly on September 23, 2009. The second quote is part of Dmitry Medvedev's speech at the Yaroslavl Political Forum on September 14. The leaders of the two countries have literally changed places.

Does this mean that the "reset" between Russia and the US has produced results and that there is mutual understanding between the countries? No, more likely this surprising transformation has a different meaning. In the relations between the two countries there is now much less of the ideology that constantly existed in the

1990s and particularly in the 2000s. After the departure of the Bush administration, the White House essentially does not make any evaluations of the state of democracy and human rights in Russia. Even the State Department's annual report on this topic had a routine character and drew little attention in Moscow.

During Barack Obama's July visit to Russia, he demonstrated a mastery of lexical and political tight-rope walking in order to say what he needed to say about rights and freedoms, while not injuring with such words the mutual understanding on principle questions that he was seeking. He succeeded in this, to the joy of the Russian leadership, which now has enough self-confidence to pose questions about openness and perfecting democracy. Of course, little will come from posing the question in this way.

This transition affects more countries than just Russia. Obama's cabinet has decisively rejected the idea of "promoting democracy," which was the main ideological pivot of the activity of his predecessor. The reason is clear – the results of the neo-conservative course were so miserable that Barack Obama now must undo the damage done by the Republicans. For this task, it is necessary to have more than the propaganda of ideals – America needs help in solving the vast majority of its foreign policy problems and needs to win support from those who are able to provide this help. It must find partners regardless of their socio-political structure.

Three "Easy" Problems

It makes sense that Russia is one of the top priorities in Obama's new course. It is not that Washington considers Moscow to be so important. Rather, the strategists of the current administration decided that among the numerous difficult problems Obama is facing, establishing

improved relations with Russia is achievable (progress is much more likely than say in the Middle East) and might provide a useful demonstration effect.

So far, Obama was not mistaken. In Russian–American relations there are several possibilities that could bring quick results without heavy costs on either side. Efforts in all these directions are under way.

First is the new agreement on reducing strategic offensive weapons to replace START I, which expires in December 2009. On this topic, the two parties can organize a loud and winning campaign showing how the two nuclear superpowers are again seeking to reduce their arsenals and call on other countries to follow their example. The actual parameters of the reduction always can produce numbers that do not require any serious concessions by either side. Ultimately, even the most extreme hawks do not believe in launching a nuclear war. But the symbolic factors and support for deterrence represent a great resource. As in the past, Russia and the US have many warheads and launchers and it is always easy to carry out cosmetic reductions. According to all indicators, such reductions will make up the content of the new agreement, which will be prepared by the end of the year.

Second is the question about the missile defense system designated for Central Europe. The project's technological weaknesses, strategic senselessness, high costs, and political provocations made it a prime target for elimination. This does not mean the rejection of missile defense as such, stop the development of the new technology, or prevent the appearance of a shield in the future, but it does give the administration the ability to make a beautiful gesture and expect something in return. Many in Russia assumed that Obama would overturn Bush's initiative, but nevertheless, Moscow appreciated the move and feels obligated to respond. Above all, the American president most likely won over the Kremlin by doing what he promised to do. During the previous administration, Russia no longer expected such an approach or that American leaders were at all interested in what other participants in international relations thought.

Naturally, if work on US national missile defense – an effort to defend America and its military-political allies – continues, we would quickly return to the stand-off that existed a year ago. A resolution can only come from creating the kind of joint missile defense system now discussed in Moscow, Washington, and Brussels. If these plans develop in a serious manner, there could be a fundamental transformation of relations. If these discussions are to be productive, China should be included in them from the very beginning. Otherwise, Beijing,

without doubt, will interpret the defenses as being directed against them. Most likely, Washington would not be against taking measures that reduce the level of cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, pulling Russia into a system which would elicit China's displeasure. But, objectively Russia simply cannot allow China to lose confidence in bilateral relations. Moreover, preserving stability in Eurasia is impossible without including China.

Third is the problem of Afghanistan. Here the interests of Russia and the US (and all players in global and regional politics including Iran) are similar, even if they do not coincide exactly. No one has an interest in the return of the Taliban to power in Kabul. Therefore, opening transit routes for the American air force, which presidents Medvedev and Obama agreed to in Moscow, does not contradict Russia's goals and provides a convenient opportunity to show good will.

Of course, one should not overestimate the degree to which Russia is interested in NATO's success in Afghanistan. In Moscow, most analysts believe that sooner or later NATO and the US will have to leave the country because they will not be able to achieve anything there. In practical terms, Russia is working to the best of its ability to support America and NATO in Afghanistan, but at the same time is preparing for what will happen in the region after they leave. In this connection, they are working to turn the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) into an effective military-political alliance and not just a "club of Russia's friends."

While these three topics are important, they do not define the entire agenda either for Moscow or Washington; however, beyond them, the field is undefined. One illustration of the objective difficulties that Russia and the US face in the search for cooperation is the situation with Iran.

The Iranian Conundrum

Russia's strengthening position on the Iranian question, which took place this autumn, definitely resulted from Obama's decision to reject placing missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. Moscow definitely felt it necessary to respond positively to this friendly gesture. However, it is one thing to announce support for sanctions and quite another to agree on their specific contents. If Washington expects a radical change in the Russian position, it will be disappointed. This is not a result of Moscow's desire to trip up its American partner or even particular sympathy for Iran. Simply, in formulating their policies, Russia and the US operate in completely different contexts regarding their re-

lations with Teheran. America looks at the situation with a global view, while Russia operates from a regional position.

For the US, problem number one, whose importance is an order of magnitude greater than the rest, is the possibility that Iran will acquire nuclear weapons. Such a development would qualitatively increase the threat to Israel; launch a domino effect throughout the entire Middle East with a likely massive race for nuclear status among Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and possibly others; and undermine American influence in this key region. The stakes are increased by the fact that the inadmissibility of Iran obtaining nuclear weapons sits at the center of American policy. Accordingly, if it happens, it will be a serious blow to the prestige of the superpower. And this would damage its global position.

Russia also considers a nuclear Iran to be a very unpleasant and undesirable development of events, but not as catastrophic as the Americans see it. For Moscow, Iran is a neighboring regional power whose influence is growing. Russia's experience of practical cooperation with Teheran in the post-Soviet period is generally positive: the joint effort to end the civil war in Tajikistan and also Iran's restrained position in regard to the Chechen wars.

Teheran's potential opportunities to create problems in the Russian sphere of interests are great: take, for example, the unresolved problem of the status of the Caspian Sea. Fighting with Iran means introducing additional instability along Russia's southern borders. Moreover, if now Moscow does not particularly believe that Russia could be a target for Iranian rockets, following a deterioration in relations, the probability of such a strike would increase. Already, Iran considers Russia to be an unreliable partner, one that makes decisions with a constant eye on the US and Europe and uses the Iranian question as a bargaining chip with the Western powers.

The negotiations in Geneva, which followed the most recent outbreak of concern around Iran, increased hope in the possibility of coordinated action, in which each of the sides is able to play a positive role. At the same time, Iranian diplomacy has rich experience in maneuvering and skillfully playing on contradictions, which constantly push problems into a new cycle.

Taking Interests into Account

Despite the objective differences between Russia and the US connected to the Iran problem, the very fact of dis-

cussing it marks a new base for relations. It is a potential area of agreement regarding regional interests.

The list of foreign policy priorities for the US and Russia are similar in structure and geography, but vary considerably in content. At the center of attention for both countries are regional conflicts, many of which have the potential to spill over to the global stage. But their lists are different. For Washington, it is above all Iran, Afghanistan, Middle East peace, and North Korea. For Moscow – Ukraine, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. American priorities are on the Russian list, but much lower in the hierarchy. And vice versa.

In both Moscow and Washington, there is no understanding that the entire regional spectrum should be viewed in a unified context. Doing so means that in each individual case there is more room for maneuver. It is not simply a matter of linkages and exchanges. The answer is much more sophisticated. If one adds up the existing concrete challenges, only a comprehensive solution is capable of providing stability in Eurasia, where the disappearance of the USSR and the end of Cold War ideological confrontation removed the system-forming pivot.

In general, global political tendencies, which were visible at the beginning of the twenty-first century and were accelerated by the crisis, are forcing Washington to intensively search for new approaches. Relations with Russia are part of this broader effort.

Despite the presence of numerous weaknesses threatening the future development of the state, Russia is one of the few remaining countries in the world capable of strategic thinking and the potential to use force. Europe lost these qualities and China is focused on self-development, at least for now. The absence of alternatives makes Moscow both a potential opponent of Washington, and a potentially important partner.

For such a partnership, both sides should go beyond the limits of the ideological conceptions passed down from a previous era. Zero sum game logic dominates relations, while there is minimal attention paid to mutual interests. But it is possible to agree on interests: since many of them do not match in terms of priorities, each side can give up the ones it considers secondary in order to address the most important ones. However, this outcome is only possible if the inertia of the Cold War gives way to an understanding that the twenty-first century will be completely different for both the US and Russia.

About the Author

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Analysis

The “Post-START” Treaty: Goals and Implications

By Marcin Kaczmarek, Warsaw

Abstract

With the new administration of Barack Obama coming to power, Russia managed to re-engage the U.S. in arms control negotiations. The “post-START” treaty is expected to bring Moscow status as a global great power, strategic stability and parity with the U.S., as well as security and economic gains. Despite existing differences between the two sides, the new treaty offers a win-win situation, which makes agreement probable. Nevertheless, the “post-START” treaty is unlikely to cause spill-over effects that change the overall dynamics of Russian-American relations. Similarly, it cannot be taken for granted that the treaty paves the way for further disarmament. Rather, it may stand out as the main – and only – achievement of the “reset” policy.

Moscow Waits a Long Time to Re-engage the U.S. in Arms Control

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia’s only tangible claim to great power status was its nuclear parity with the U.S. Despite all its weaknesses, the Russian Federation remained the only state capable of inflicting ruinous damage on the United States. Moscow perceived its nuclear weapons as a cornerstone of its security policy and the ultimate guarantee of its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the turbulent 1990s. During the presidencies of George Bush senior and Bill Clinton, Washington demonstrated a deep understanding of Russian over-sensitivity in the sphere of strategic stability, conducting endless negotiations with regard to strategic arms reductions (amendments to START II and preparations for START III). The U.S. found it useful to reduce the Russian nuclear arsenal and gain a considerable degree of control over it. Moscow, for its part, attempted to bargain using the issue of START II ratification.

After George W. Bush took office, he overturned the status quo inherited from the Cold War. His opposition to arms control stood out as one of the key features of the US’s growing unilateralism. Two major blows to Russian–U.S. nuclear parity (and indirectly strategic stability) came from the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty (announced in December 2001, effective in June 2002) and, paradoxically, the SORT treaty (referred to also as the Moscow treaty). The parameters of SORT made it merely symbolic – the level of reduction remained imprecise (between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads), the structure of the nuclear triad was not defined, and the treaty lacked verification measures. In practice, the U.S. began unilateral arms control, adjusting the posture of its nuclear forces to the needs of global primacy, promoting, for example, the concept of a global strike capability. Plans to deploy a missile defence

shield followed, with elements positioned in Poland and the Czech Republic, provoking angry reactions from the Russian elite. American analysts went so far as to proclaim the dawn of American nuclear primacy, arguing that the poor conditions of the aging Russian nuclear arsenal combined with an effective missile defence system would render Russia’s second strike capability useless. However exaggerated, such opinions indicated the growing asymmetry in Russian–American strategic relations.

Since then, Russia has strived to reverse both tendencies – to gain influence over American missile defence plans and strategic forces. The need to return to strategic arms control was one of the key issues of then-President Putin’s speech at the 2007 Munich security conference. These efforts to re-engage the U.S. in arms control talks succeeded when Barack Obama won the presidency. The arms control lobby in the American policy-making community gained the upper hand. Resuming arms reductions talks with Russia fits perfectly with Obama’s conception of a nuclear-free world order. Negotiations on the treaty replacing START I, which expires in December 2009, dominated the “reset” agenda. Several rounds of talks followed, starting in May 2009, and during the July summit in Moscow, both presidents agreed upon the basic parameters of the new “post-START” treaty.

The Goals Behind the “Post-START” Negotiations: Status, Security and Economic Gains

The “post-START” treaty goes beyond the zero-sum logic that has dominated Russian–American relations for the last several years. The new agreement may create a win-win situation. Nevertheless, it is still Russia that has more to gain from the new treaty, if it manages to push through its proposals. At stake from Moscow’s

point of view are status, strategic stability and nuclear parity with the U.S., as well as security and economic gains.

Securing great power status remains one of the key driving forces behind Russian foreign policy. Concluding a treaty that confirms Moscow's nuclear parity with the U.S. and strengthens strategic stability would be a powerful symbol of Russia's return as a global great power, second only to the U.S. and in particular spheres, to no one. At the same time, it would confirm the wisdom of Russia's policy resisting President Bush's unilateralism.

Strategic stability vis-à-vis the U.S. is another element of Russia's self-image and the cornerstone of its security policy in the global dimension. Although Moscow cannot afford to maintain numerical parity with the U.S. (and the new treaty envisions differentials in the levels of warheads and carriers), it is still obsessed with qualitative equilibrium. Pressing for the U.S. to re-engage in arms control, maintain strategic stability and limit missile defence plans, Russia has raised the issue of its national security, which has remained ambiguous. It has always been doubtful whether a modest American mid-phase missile defence system would be able to upset strategic stability between Russia and the U.S., given the former's vast nuclear arsenal. However, Moscow has been wary of the possibilities of expanding the system, which, in turn, would give the U.S. a kind of primacy (although it is questionable whether even an expanded system could deprive Moscow of its second-strike capability).

Expected economic gains are another motive behind Russia's desire to secure the "post-START" treaty. The objective is to reduce the costs of maintaining and modernizing the Russian nuclear arsenal. Moscow cannot afford to replace all its warheads and missiles with new models, and it faces difficulties in developing such weapons.

Although it gives more benefits to Russia, the U.S. is also interested in concluding the new treaty for several reasons. An agreement that reduces the Russian arsenal combined with verification measures will give the U.S. a degree of influence over the Russian nuclear arsenal and current information. Washington also expects concessions in other spheres.

American support for the treaty goes beyond immediate advantages. The new administration perceives it as the first step in realizing the *idée fixe* of President Obama – establishing a non-nuclear world. The strength of the arms control lobby and the partial failure of the missile defense idea are also responsible for U.S. engage-

ment in the "post-START" negotiations. Finally, the administration is seeking desperately for a clear-cut success in its foreign policy.

Negotiations – Perspectives for Narrowing the Differences

All of the factors presented above have not made the negotiating process easier. Both sides face a time limit (START expires on 5 December), but important differences still persist. It is obvious that Russia and the U.S. will not manage to ratify a new treaty by 5 December, but signing a treaty would be enough (and the two sides might find a way to have it enter into force before it is ratified).

The key differences separating Russia and the U.S. can be summed up as follows: rules for counting warheads and carriers; linking offensive and defensive weapons; conventional use of strategic weapons and "downloading" possibilities. Russia would prefer to maintain the basic structure of START, which implies an irreversible reduction in the number of nuclear warheads to a certain ceiling (the Russian Federation opposes storing warheads in depots). Russia aims to keep in place the quantitative limits on delivery vehicles (strategic bombers, intercontinental missiles, submarines carrying ballistic missiles). The United States prefers to impose limits only on those warheads which are actually installed on delivery vehicles, while being able to keep the remaining warheads in storage. This would allow it to equip some delivery vehicles with conventional weapons, while at the same time retaining the ability to flexibly expand the nuclear arsenal, a possibility that causes Russia serious concern.

Agreement on the basic parameters of the "post-START" treaty, signed during July's presidential summit, has not done much to solve these basic problems. The parties agreed to reduce the number of warheads to 1,500–1,675 over a period of seven years. The agreement also provides for a reduction in the number of weapon delivery vehicles to 500–1,100. The agreement states that the new treaty should include provisions concerning the relationship between the offensive and defensive strategic potentials, without specifying what form such provisions should take.

The (Limited?) Impact of the "Post-START" Treaty on Russian-American Relations

Although the differences have not been resolved yet, the U.S. seems to have significantly facilitated negotiations by dropping plans to deploy a missile defense system in Central Europe. This policy shift opens the way for

both sides to adopt a common position on the issue of linking offensive and defensive potentials. Nevertheless, it still has not determined Russia's stance – whether it pushes for new concessions or steps back and agrees to some of America's proposals. Nevertheless, even given the persisting differences, the probability of concluding the “post-START” treaty remains high. But two further questions remain open: ratification by the U.S. Senate and the overall impact of the expected agreement on Russian–American relations.

The opposition to the “post-START” treaty seems to be relatively stronger in the U.S. Particular constituencies oppose specific provisions, which are perceived as concessions going too far, even if they do not reject the treaty itself. President Obama will face a difficult task in convincing the Senate to ratify the treaty, especially if Moscow pursues its assertive policy. In Russia, most observers view the treaty as necessary, while the Kremlin maintains complete control over the Duma.

The implications of the “post-START” treaty for bilateral relations between Moscow and Washington are far more speculative. The arms control issue is the easiest to address among all the problems overshadowing the Russian–American relationship. The question of whether the new treaty will change the overall dynamics of post-Cold War Russian–American relations remains open. The U.S. seems to expect the “post-START” treaty to act as a catalyst and to spill-over into other spheres. Nevertheless, equally probable is that the treaty remains the only achievement of the “reset” policy proclaimed by the Obama administration. The relative convergence of both parties' interests observable in the arms control area does not exist in other fields. Most telling is the wide divergence in the two parties' approach toward the post-Soviet space.

Implications for Global Arms Control

The implications of the “post-START” treaty go beyond the Russian–American bilateral relationship. Judging

from the point of view of arms control and disarmament, the return of Russia and the U.S. to a legal framework is more important than the reductions themselves. The levels of warheads will probably remain above 1,500 (SORT treaty envisioned the level of warheads between 1,700 and 2,200), which means that there still is over-kill capacity on both sides.

Nevertheless, contrary to the expectations of the Obama administration and Obama himself, the new treaty may not open a new era of arms control and disarmament, and may not move the global process of arms control forward. On the margins of post-START negotiations, Russian representatives including President Dmitry Medvedev, outlined their evolving approach to arms control. Moscow wants to broaden the scope of existing strategic talks, proposing to adjust the nuclear arsenals of lesser powers (China, France and the UK) in line with Russian–American cuts in order to maintain the distance in case of further cuts (as in the Washington 1922 treaty on sea power). Another proposal is the multilateralization of the INF Treaty. Such a stance suggests that Russia aims to freeze the current situation in the sphere of strategic weapons rather than pursue a “nuclear zero” option.

Conclusions

The main paradox is that whereas it is Russia that has more to gain from the “post-START” treaty, it is the U.S. that is behaving as if it needs the treaty more urgently. The Obama administration needs a spectacular success that it can deliver to the American public as proof that its post-Bush foreign policy is on the right track. The Kremlin may try to take advantage of such a situation by toughening its negotiating stance. On the other hand, Russia must realize that a treaty perceived as weakening American national security will undoubtedly fail in the U.S. Senate, which obviously is not in Russia's interest.

About the Author

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Further reading

www.armscontrol.org – the web-page and on-line edition of Arms Control Today

www.carnegie.ru – the web page of the Carnegie Foundation in Moscow, with the best expertise on Russia's nuclear policy

Analysis

START Follow-on Negotiations: Problems and Progress

By Pavel Podvig, Stanford, California

Abstract

The 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) has remained in force much longer than anyone expected as attempts to iron out a successor treaty failed. Now the presidents of the US and Russia are committed to reducing their forces to the level of 500–1,100 strategic launchers and 1,500–1,650 warheads. Success depends on whether the two sides can agree on counting rules. Observers also fear a gap in verification measures after the START treaty expires in December and before the new one is ratified.

A Hard Act to Follow

It is highly unlikely that anyone present at the signing of the Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (START) in Moscow in 1991 expected it to stay in force for the full 15-year term specified in the treaty. The term was made long enough to give the United States and the Soviet Union a chance to negotiate a new agreement, which was supposed to supersede START and commit the two nuclear superpowers to deeper reductions of their nuclear forces. The process of negotiating these reductions, however, turned out to be quite difficult, since it raised a host of questions about the nature of the relationship between the two countries, the role of nuclear weapons in that relationship and in national security in general, as well as about the importance of missile defense and the balance of conventional forces. All of these issues have been at the center of the debate about international security and U.S.–Russian relationships in the past twenty years and all of them are in some form present in the current round of arms control talks.

In the first decade after the breakup of the Soviet Union, arms control was hardly the most urgent task of the new Russian leadership, which had to deal with the economic and social cost of the transition to a market economy. The United States also did not assign arms control a high priority, concentrating instead on what appeared to be a rising threat from third countries. Attempts to ratify the START II Treaty, which was signed by the United States and Russia in 1993, were unsuccessful, mostly because of Russia's concerns about its growing disparity with the United States. U.S. pursuit of national missile defense and Russia's economic problems only exacerbated the situation. The ratification attempts were finally abandoned in 2002, when the Bush administration withdrew from the ABM Treaty and adopted a policy that emphasized unilateral reductions in nuclear forces and generally rejected the value of arms control treaties.

To replace START II, in May 2002 the United States and Russia signed the Strategic Offensive Reduction

Treaty (SORT or Moscow treaty), which ostensibly committed them to further reductions, but in reality was never meant to go beyond what the two sides were planning to do unilaterally. In addition, the Moscow treaty provided no legal framework of its own, relying instead on the one created by START. As a result, the START Treaty is still the only substantive strategic arms control that exists today and when it expires in December 2009, the United States and Russia will have no bilateral arms control and disarmament obligations that would cover their strategic nuclear arsenals.

Getting Serious about Replacing START

The first attempts to negotiate an agreement that would replace START were undertaken during the last years of the Bush administration. However, it is only after the change of administration in Washington that the U.S. and Russian presidents made, at their first meeting in April 2009, a strong commitment to resuming the process of “verifiable reductions in strategic offensive arsenals”, which would begin with negotiating a new arms control treaty, normally known as START follow-on. It is worth noting that at this point the scope of the arms control process is defined fairly narrowly – it is supposed to cover only strategic forces, leaving tactical nuclear weapons outside of the talks, and it will not formally include issues of missile defense.

A more detailed outline of the future treaty was provided at the U.S.–Russian summit held in Moscow in July 2009. The treaty is expected to commit the two countries to reducing their forces to the level of 500–1,100 strategic launchers and 1,500–1,650 warheads. These ranges reflect the current disagreements and are expected to narrow substantially in the final text. The treaty will not have separate ceilings on components of the strategic triad, so each side would be free to make its own decisions about the structure of its nuclear force.

The projected reductions seem to represent substantial progress when compared to the START agreement, which limited the number of strategic launchers and

warheads by 1,600 and 6,000 respectively. It also appears to go further than the Moscow treaty, which set a limit of 1,700–2,200 strategic warheads (the treaty did not have a separate limit on launchers). In reality, however, the reductions will be much more modest, especially on the U.S. side, since the difference in numbers reflects a change of definitions rather than actual reductions.

A Numbers Game

In the START treaty, strategic launchers and warheads are counted by a set of rules designed to ensure that neither side has the capability of quickly reconstituting its strategic potential. These rules reflected the degree of distrust that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time, but they did assure that the numbers in the treaty closely corresponded to the maximum number of warheads that a country could deploy. On the other hand, these rules make deep reductions difficult, for they, in most cases, require physical elimination of delivery systems. After achieving the START limits, the United States and Russia continued reducing their arsenals – the process that was codified in the Moscow treaty – but they handled it differently, creating a disparity in what is known as “upload potential,” the ability to reconstitute the force that the START Treaty sought to limit.

If the new treaty is to limit the strategic forces at the level of 1,500–1,675 warheads agreed upon in July 2009, it will have to relax the strict START counting rules and rely instead on some version of the U.S. definition of “operationally deployed nuclear warheads” that was used in the context of the Moscow treaty (Russia has not formally accepted that definition yet). According to the January 2009 START data exchange, the United States had 5,576 strategic nuclear warheads associated with 1,198 delivery vehicles. The actual number of warheads that were operationally deployed was substantially lower – it was estimated to be around 2,200 in the beginning of 2009. For Russia, the difference is smaller, but it exists nevertheless – it reported having 3,909 warheads associated with 814 launchers, although the number of operationally deployed warheads is believed to be about 2,800. More importantly, in the United States, most of the difference between the START count and the operationally deployed warhead count is due to easily reversible measures, such as removal of some warheads from ballistic missiles. For example, most Minuteman III ICBMs, which are capable of carrying three warheads, are currently deployed with only one; Trident II SLBMs are deployed with four warheads, although they are ca-

pable of carrying eight. Moreover, the United States as a matter of policy keeps reserve warheads specifically to have that reconstitution option. In Russia, the difference was created primarily by the slow pace of eliminating old delivery systems, so it has no reconstitution capability to speak of.

While it is unclear if the U.S. “upload potential” has any practical significance, Russia has been raising this issue at negotiations for many years, insisting that any new treaty should include measures that would limit the U.S. reconstitution capability. One way of dealing with it would be to preserve the START treaty counting rules and requirements. However, as noted above, since the treaty is expected to set a limit of about 1,500 warheads, it will definitely limit only operationally deployed warheads, meaning that the START counting rules would have to be abandoned. As a way of satisfying Russia’s demand for provisions that would limit upload potential, the new treaty will include a separate limit on the number of strategic launchers.

Although the concept of a limit on launchers is now accepted by both sides, in order for this limit to be meaningful, it would have to be set relatively low. This is the reason why the disagreement about the number of launchers, as reflected in the July presidential statement, is especially strong. Russia insisted on setting that limit at the lower end of the range – at about 500 launchers, while the United States would like to keep that number at about 1,100. Each side understandably tried to have a limit that would correspond to its existing plans – Russia has about 600 operational launchers and its modernization program envisages a force of about 400–450 delivery vehicles in a decade or so. The U.S. force currently includes almost exactly 1,100 deployed launchers, which the United States would certainly try to preserve, if only to have an option to convert them for non-nuclear missions (some of them have been converted already).

It is most likely that the number in the treaty will be a compromise that would set the limit lower than 1,100, but would allow the United States to exclude some of the launchers from the treaty count by demonstrating that they have been converted and no longer have nuclear missions. This might allow the United States to exclude 56 B-1 bombers that are still counted as deployed in START, about 50 B-52 bombers, 96 SLBM launchers on Trident submarines, and maybe some other systems as well. It is possible that the final treaty will set a limit of 800–900 launchers on each side. While this would probably not fully address all concerns about

the “upload potential”, this limit is likely to be accepted by Russia.

Another issue that has been discussed during this round of negotiations is closely linked to the possible conversion of strategic launchers from nuclear to conventional missions. Russia has expressed two separate sets of concerns related to this. One is that the use of strategic launchers with conventional payloads, e.g. as planned in the U.S. Conventional Trident Missile program, could lead to a misunderstanding and an accident that could prompt a nuclear strike. Another, more long-term concern often expressed by the Russian military is that the U.S. high-precision conventional strike capability could at some point pose a threat to Russia’s strategic forces. Accordingly, Russia would want to place some limits on the U.S. ability to convert the existing strategic delivery systems for conventional missions. It is highly unlikely that these issues could be adequately addressed in the strategic arms control negotiations, but the treaty will probably include provisions that would allow some additional transparency measures to apply to former strategic delivery systems.

Verification

Although Russia and the United States are seeking to relax the START treaty counting rules, in general they seem to be committed to preserving most of its transparency and verification provisions. This may well be the most important element of the future agreement, for it would maintain the legal and institutional framework established by the START treaty. These arrangements allowed the two countries to preserve an important communication channel during the last two decades and greatly reduced the chances for misunderstandings similar to those that happened in the areas which did

not have a similar supporting infrastructure – tactical nuclear weapons and nuclear testing among them.

Given the political support that the negotiations have received from the presidents and the progress that has been made so far, there is little doubt that the new treaty will be signed before the START Treaty expires on December 5, 2009. However, it almost certainly will not enter into force by then, so the United States and Russia would have to find a way of dealing with the resulting gap in the arms control and disarmament regime. One possible option that is being considered by the negotiators is a joint commitment that would be made by the presidents not to take actions that would undermine the goal of the treaty. Since both countries have enough flexibility in their nuclear planning, they will have no difficulty fulfilling their obligations regarding reductions to their arsenals. It is not clear, however, if an executive agreement would be sufficient to ensure continuity in transparency and verification regimes – data exchanges and inspections may prove impossible without a formal treaty. This may not be a problem if the new treaty quickly enters into force, but the ratification process may take a significant amount of time – as long as one year.

A better alternative to the executive agreement would be an extension of the START treaty for five years, which is allowed by Article XVII of the treaty. This extension would be relatively simple to make since it would not require ratification by the legislature of either country. At the same time, the new treaty would automatically supersede START as soon as its ratification is complete. This course of action would provide the best way of avoiding the gap between two arms control agreements and preserving the structure of transparency and accountability established by START.

About the Author

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Table

International Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (as of March 2008)

	USA	Russia	UK	France	China	Israel	India	Pakistan	North Korea	Total
All weapons systems	Stockpile	14,000	-185	348+	-240	-80	-50	-60	<10	-20,373
	Operational	5,192	<160	348	-193	?	?	?	?	-9,968
Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM)	Number	430	-	-	26	-	-	-	?	-944
	Warheads	1,605	-	-	26	-	-	-	?	
Short- and Medium-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBM, IRBM, MRBM)	Number	-	-	-	-100	50	<58	<150	-	<350
	Warheads	-	-	-	-100	-50	-10	-35	?	-195
Sea Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM)	Number	288	48	48	(12)	-	-	-	-	-572
	Warheads	1,728	<144	288	(12)	-	-	-	-	-2,796
	Submarines (SSBN)	14	4	4	(3)	-	-	-	-	
Strategic Bombers	Number	115	-	-	-100	-	-	-	-	-294
	Warheads/Bombs	1,083	-	-	Bombs -20; DH-10 LACM -15	-	-	-	-	-2,002
Theater Weapons	Number	325								
	Warheads/Bombs	500		ASMP 60	Bombs -20	-30	Bombs -40	-25	?	-2,754

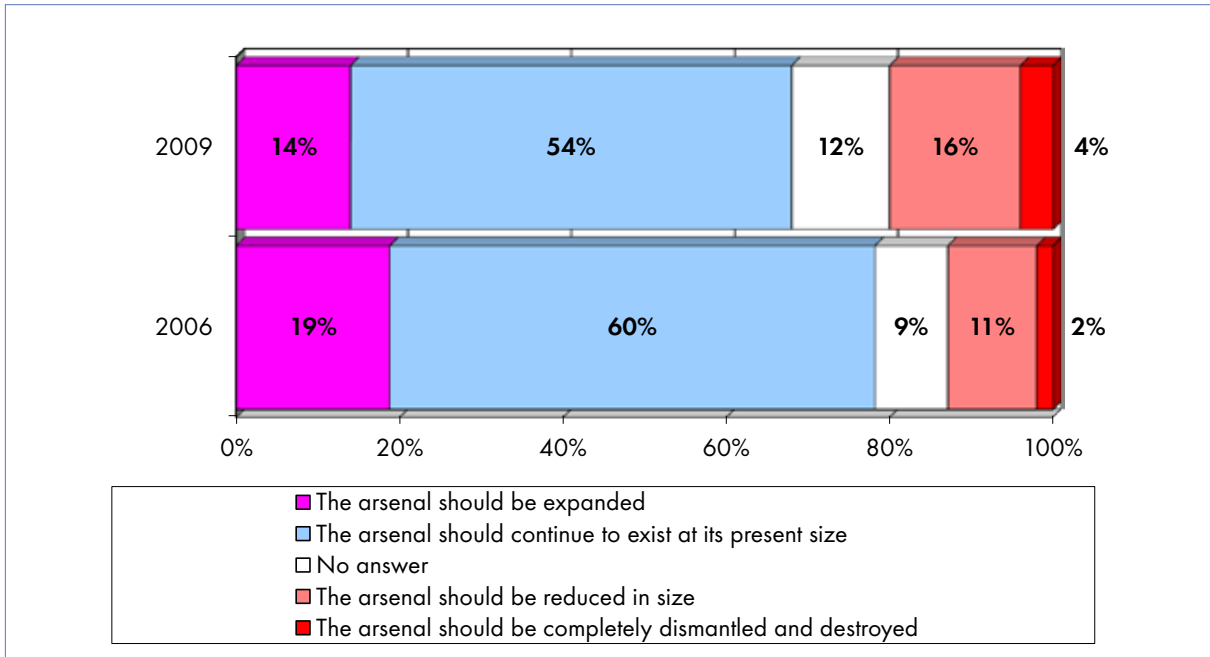
ASMP = Air-Sol Moyenne Portée, ICBM = Intercontinental Ballistic Missile, IRBM = Intermediate-Range Ballistic Missile, LACM = Land-Attack Cruise Missile, MRBM = Medium Range Ballistic Missile, SLBM Sea-Launched Ballistic Missile, SRBM = Short Range Ballistic Missile, SSBN = Nuclear Powered Ballistic Missile Submarine

Source: <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/summary.htm>, 4.10.2009

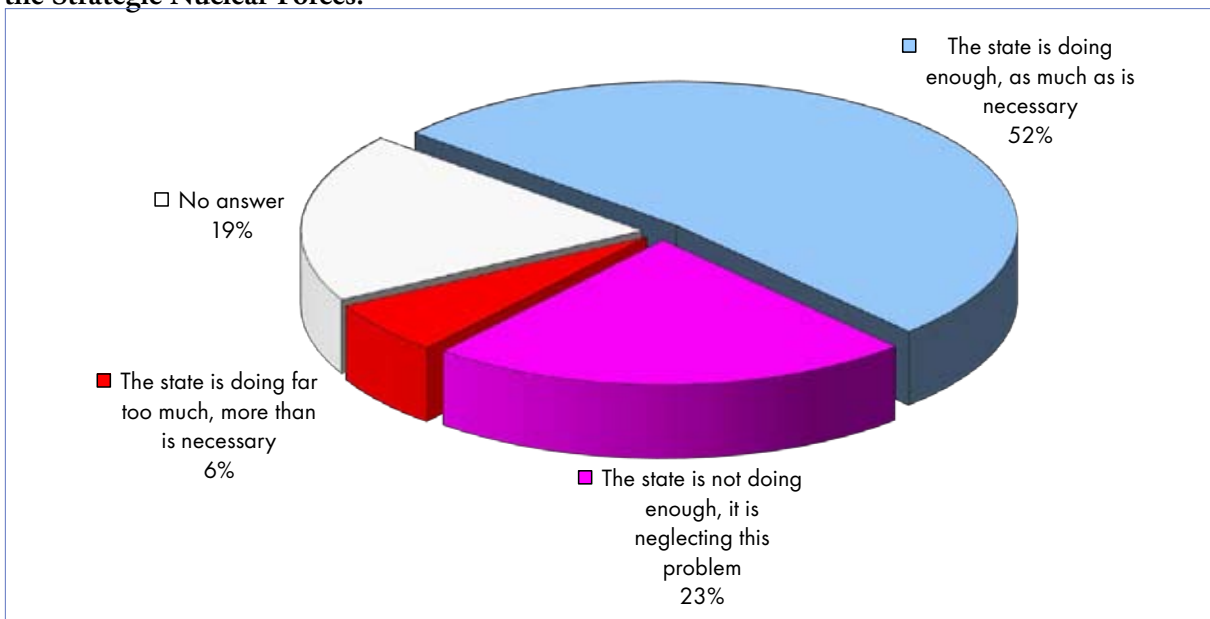
Opinion Poll

**The Opinion of the Russian Public on Russia's Nuclear Arsenal
(August 2009)**

How Should Russia Deal With Its Nuclear Arsenal in the Next Three to Five Years?



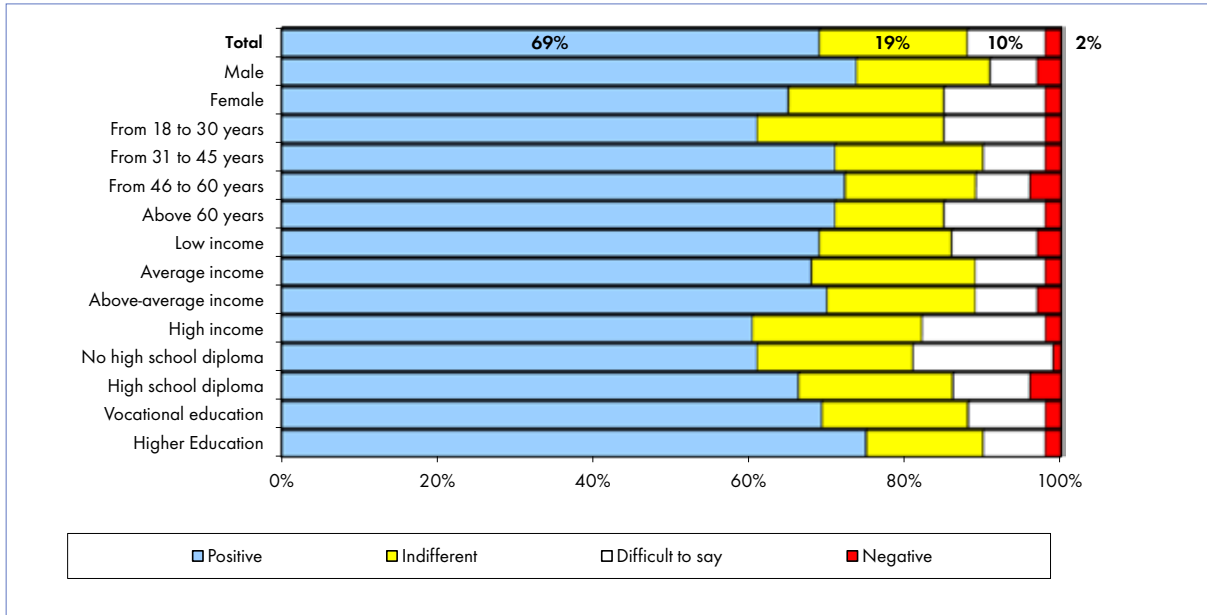
In Your Opinion, Is Our State Currently Doing Enough To Preserve the Combat Readiness of the Strategic Nuclear Forces?



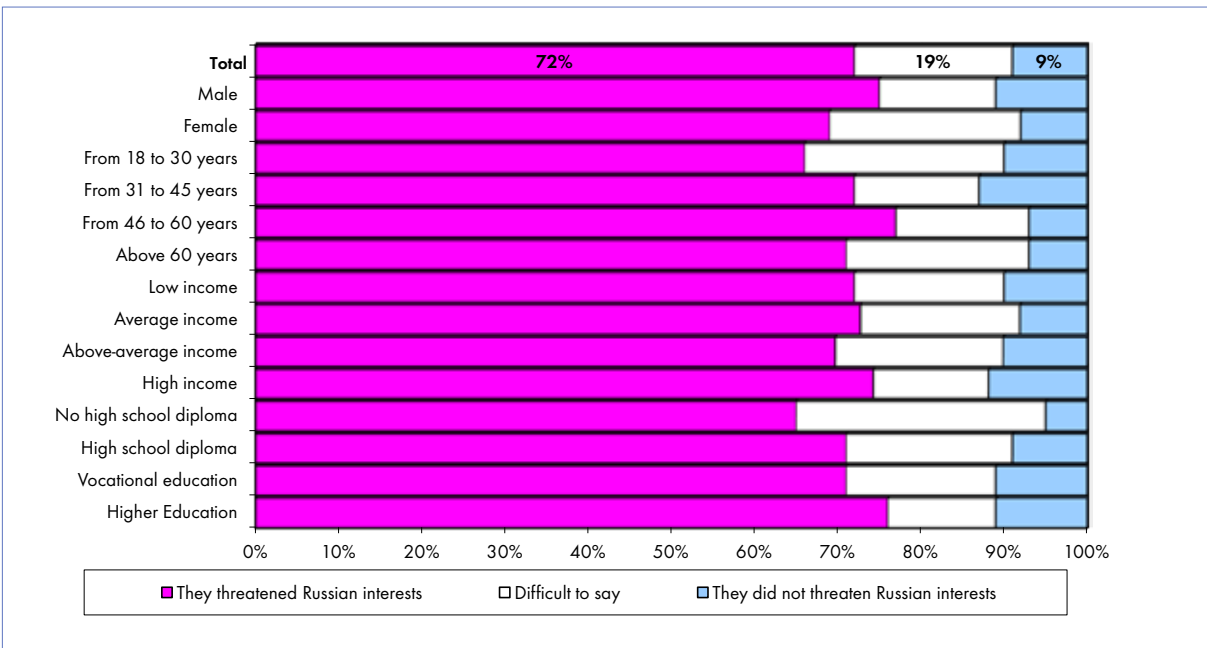
Source: opinion poll conducted by VTsIOM on 22–30 August 2009 <http://wciom.ru/novosti/press-vypuski/press-vypusk/single/12459.html>

The Cancelling of the Missile Defense Plans for Eastern Europe and Russian–American Relations in the Eyes of the Russian Public

What is Your Attitude toward the Cancelling of the US Missile Defense Plans for Eastern Europe?

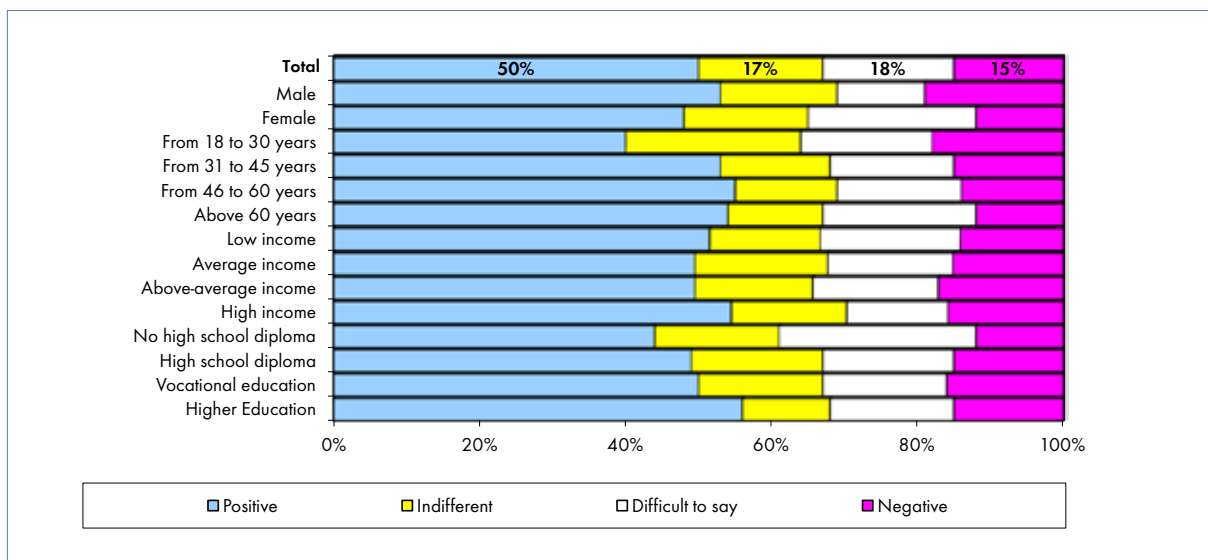


Did the US Plans to Station Missile Defense Systems in Eastern Europe Threaten Russian Interests?



Source: opinion polls conducted by the “Public Opinion Fund” (FOM) in September 2009
<http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/dominant/dom0939/d093913>

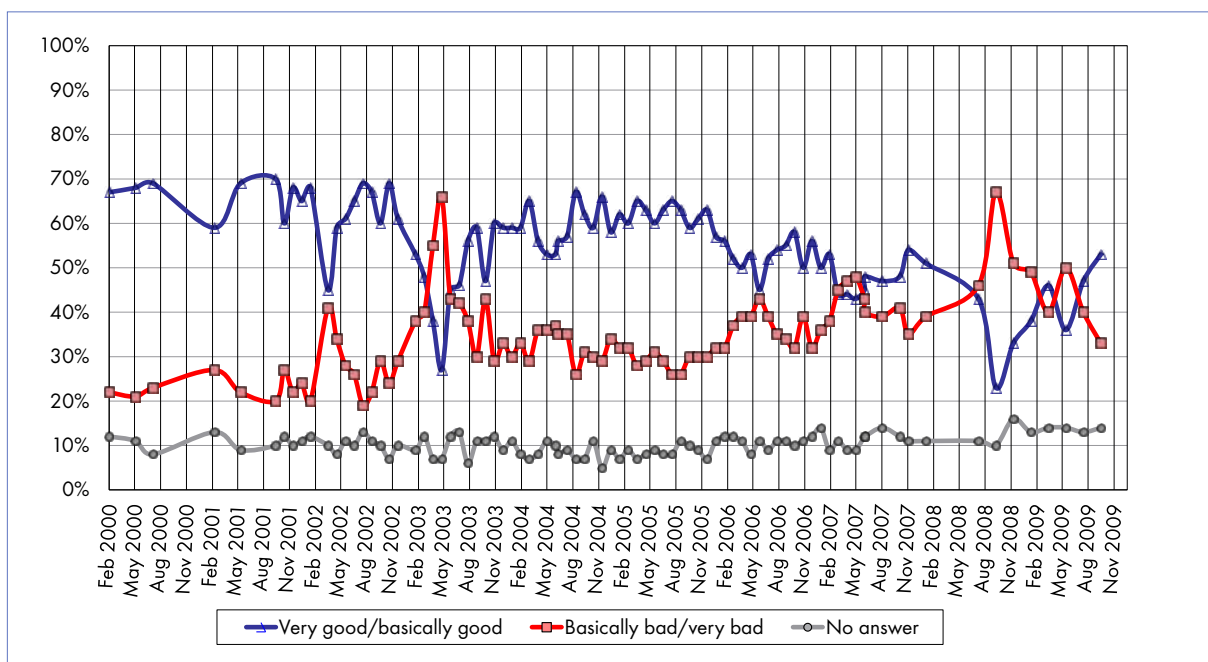
What is Your Attitude Towards the Cancellation of Russian Plans to Station Iskander Missiles in the Kaliningrad Area?



Source: opinion polls conducted by the "Public Opinion Fund" (FOM) in September 2009
<http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/projects/dominant/dom0939/d093913>

Attitudes Towards the USA

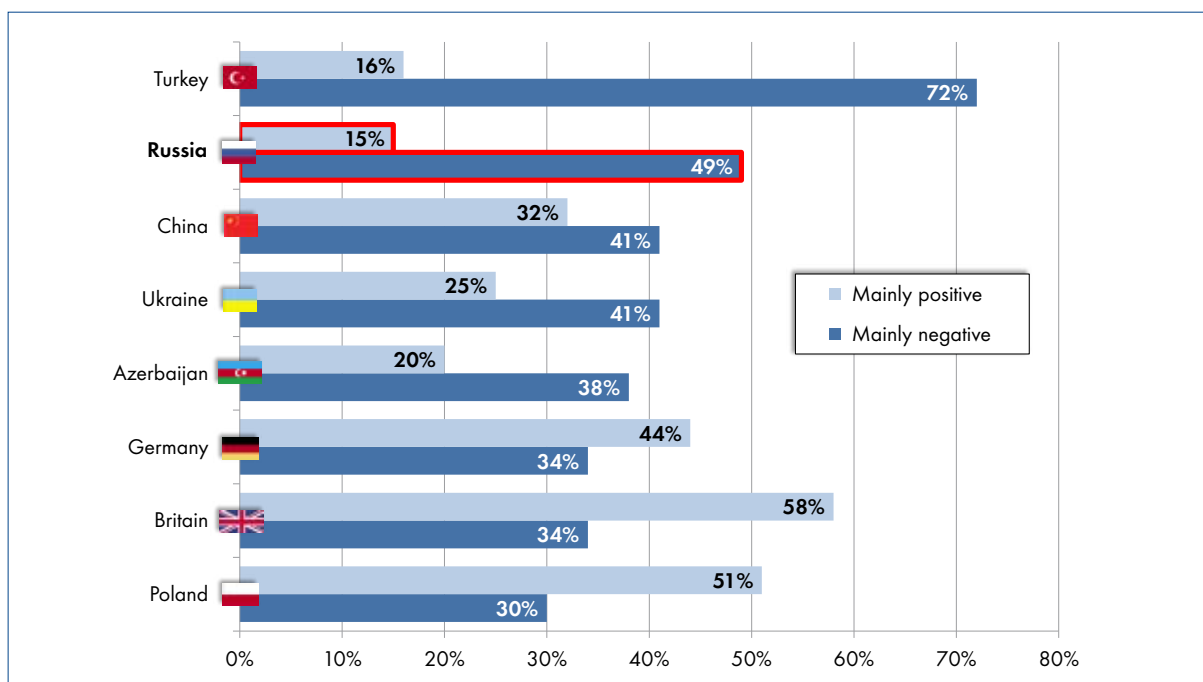
What is Your Attitude Towards the USA? (Russian Population)



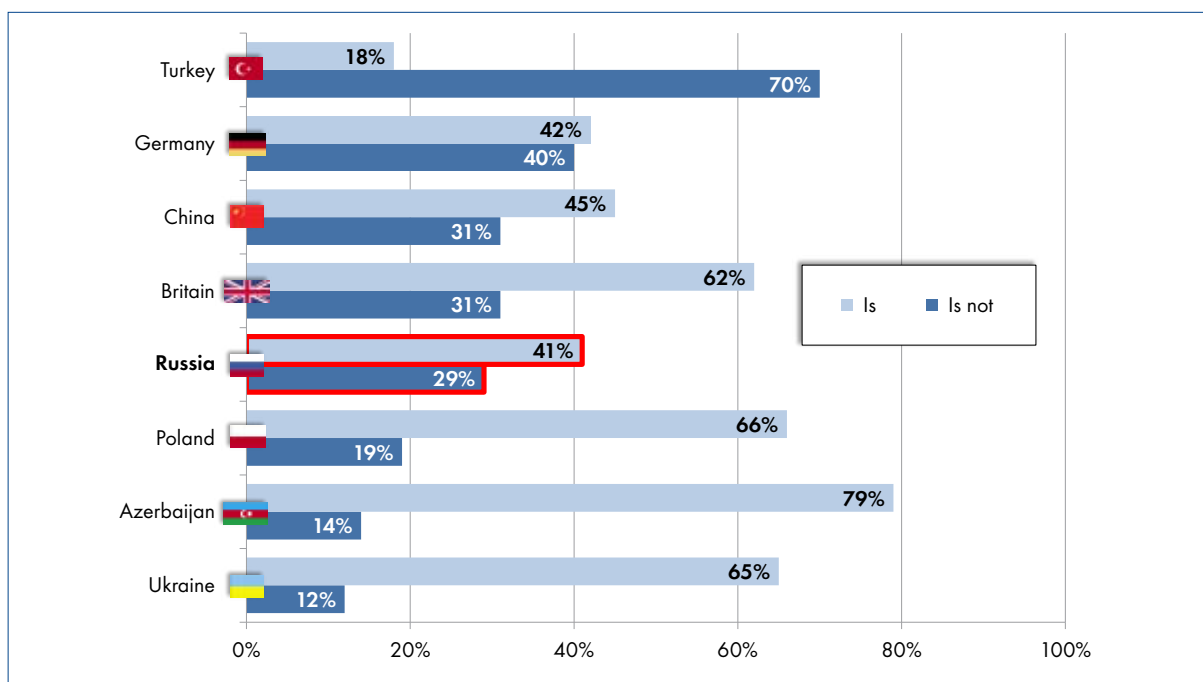
Source: opinion polls conducted by the Levada Center, February 2000–September 2009
<http://www.levada.ru./press/2009013001.htm>;
<http://www.levada.ru./press/2009081102.html>; <http://www.levada.ru./press/2009100100.html>

International Public Opinion on the USA

Do You Think the USA Is Playing a Mainly Positive or a Mainly Negative Role in the World?

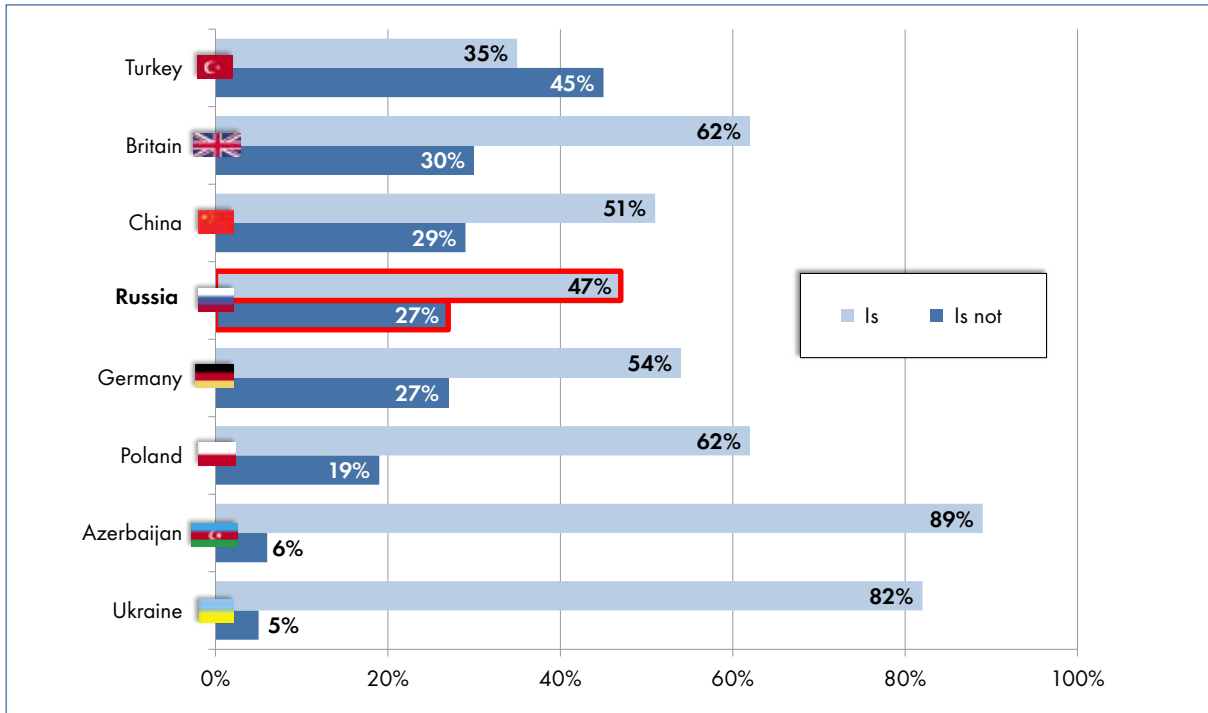


Do You Think the USA Is Generally Respectful of Human Rights or Not?

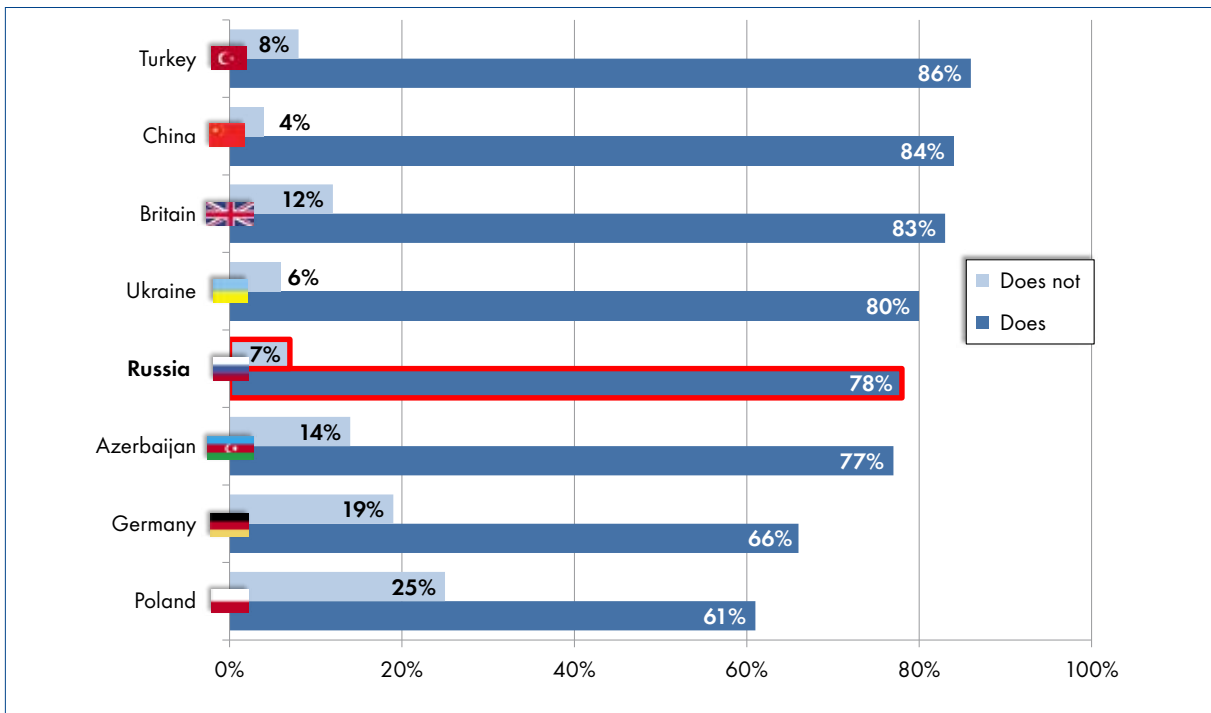


Source: opinion poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org on 7 July 2009,
http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/623.php?nid=&id=&pnt=623

Do You Think the USA Is or Is Not Generally Cooperative With Other Countries?

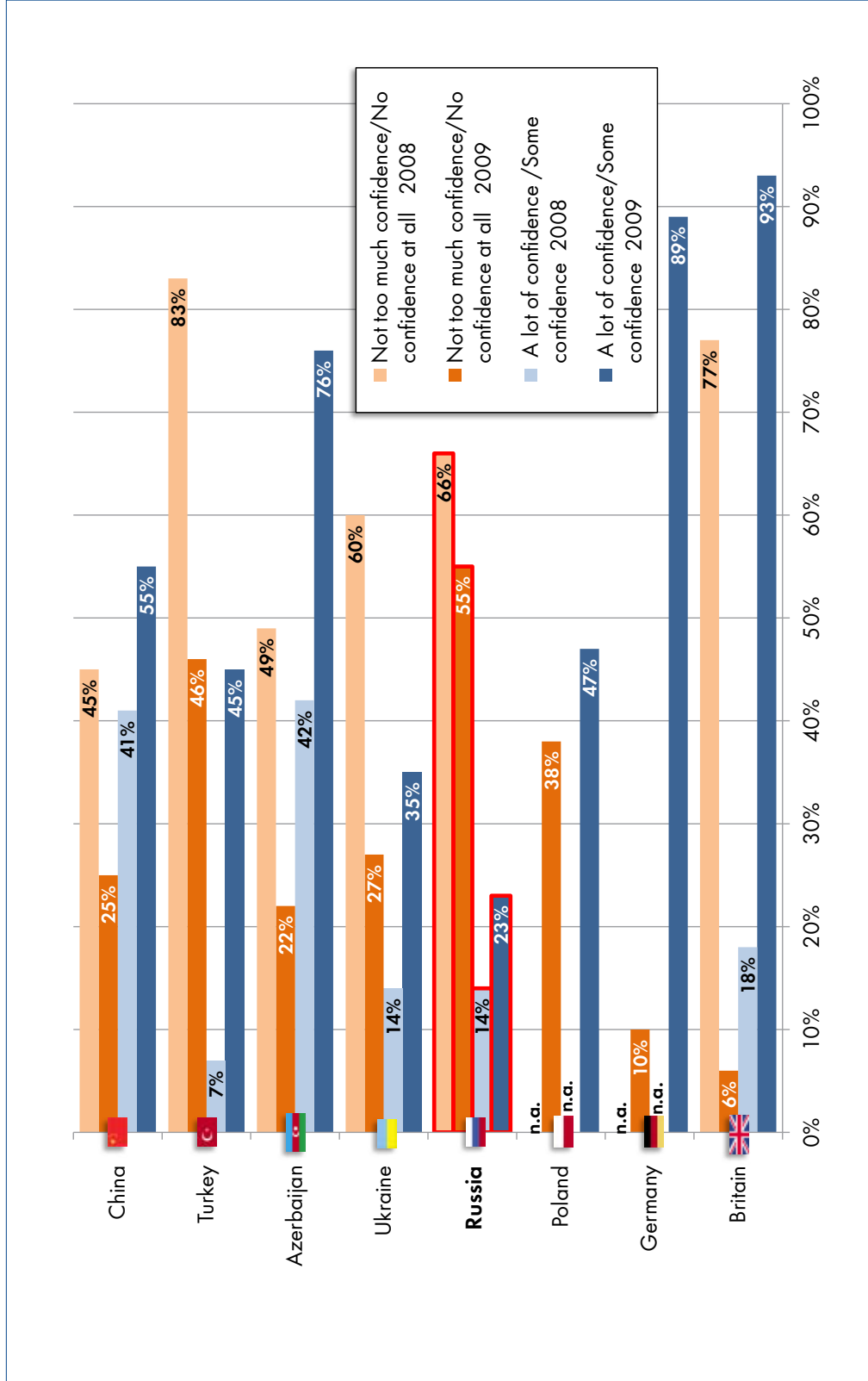


Do You Think the USA Does or Does Not Use the Threat of Military Force to Gain Advantages?



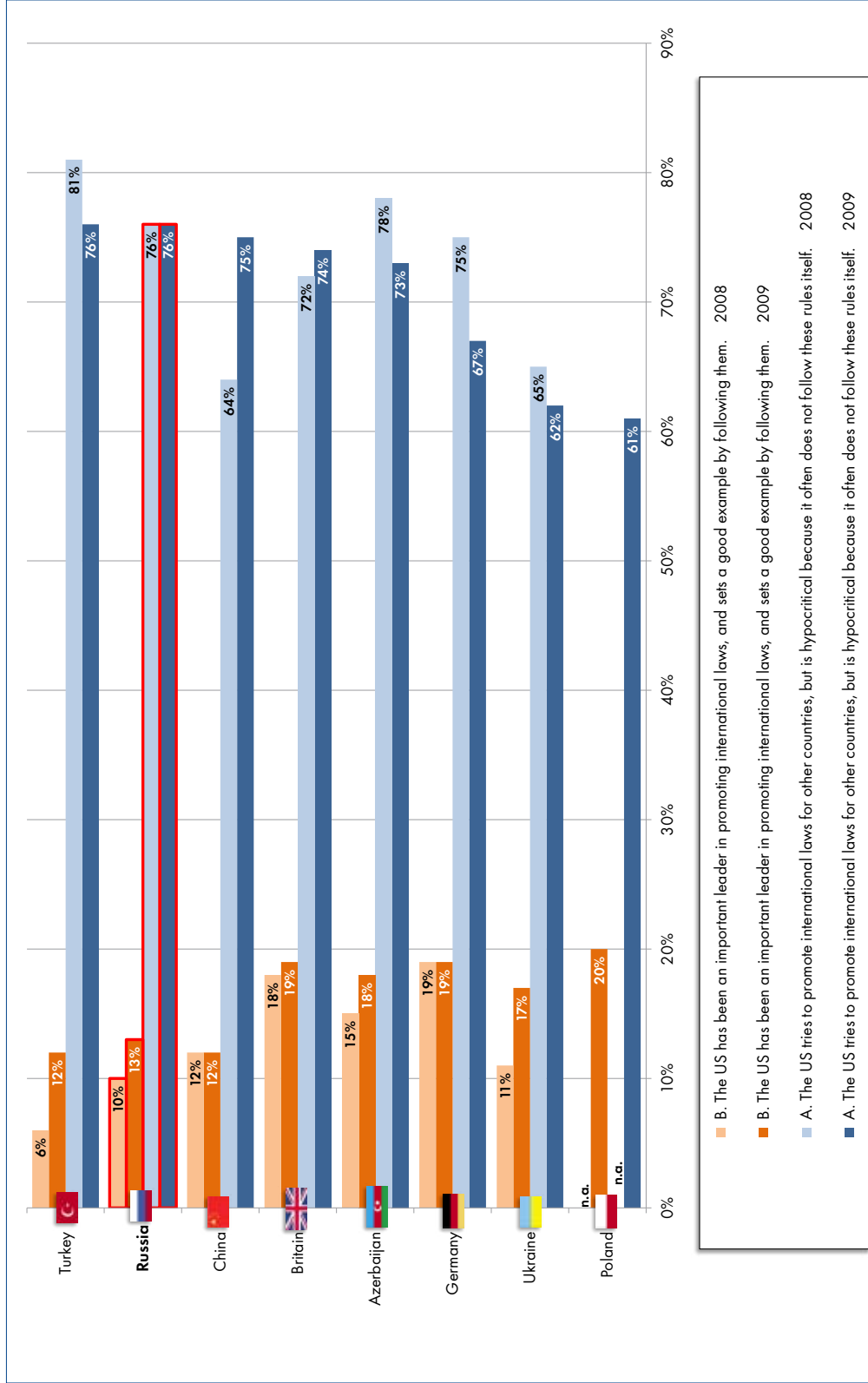
Source: opinion poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org on 7 July 2009,
http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/623.php?nid=&id=&pnt=623

How Much Confidence Do You Have in the US President (Barack Obama in 2009, George W. Bush in 2008) To Do the Right Thing Regarding World Affairs?



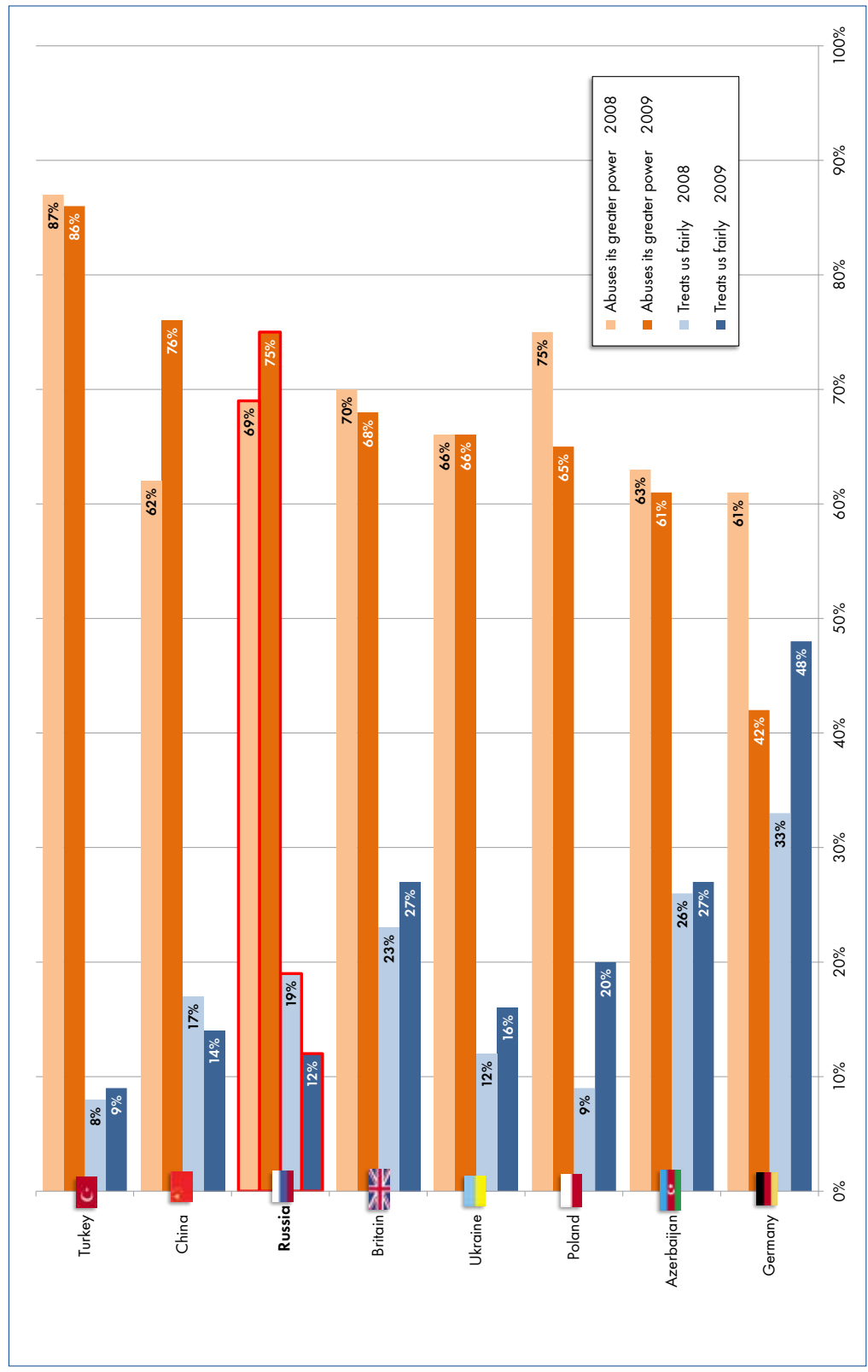
Source: opinion poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org on 7 July 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/623.php?nid=&id=&pnt=623

Which of These Two Views Is Closer To Yours?



Source: opinion poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org on 7 July 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/623.php?nid=&id=&pnt=623

In Our Government's Relations With the USA, Do You Think the USA More Often Treats Us Fairly, or Abuses Its Greater Power To Make Us Do What the USA Wants?



Source: opinion poll conducted by WorldPublicOpinion.org on 7 July 2009, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/623.php?nid=&id=&pnt=623

About the Russian Analytical Digest

Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder

The Russian Analytical Digest is a bi-weekly internet publication jointly produced by the Research Centre for East European Studies [Forschungsstelle Osteuropa] at the University of Bremen (www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich). It is supported by the German Association for East European Studies (DGO). The Digest draws on contributions to the German-language *Russlandanalysen* (www.laender-analysen.de/russland), the CSS analytical network on Russia and Eurasia (www.res.ethz.ch), and the Russian Regional Report. The Russian Analytical Digest covers political, economic, and social developments in Russia and its regions, and looks at Russia's role in international relations.

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Founded in 1982, the Research Centre for East European Studies (Forschungsstelle Osteuropa) at the University of Bremen is dedicated to socialist and post-socialist cultural and societal developments in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Research Centre possesses a unique collection of alternative culture and independent writings from the former socialist countries in its archive. In addition to extensive individual research on dissidence and society in socialist countries, since January 2007 a group of international research institutes is participating in a collaborative project on the theme "The other Eastern Europe – the 1960s to the 1980s, dissidence in politics and society, alternatives in culture. Contributions to comparative contemporary history", which is funded by the Volkswagen Foundation.

In the area of post-socialist societies, extensive research projects have been conducted in recent years with emphasis on political decision-making processes, economic culture and the integration of post-socialist countries into EU governance. One of the core missions of the institute is the dissemination of academic knowledge to the interested public. This includes regular email services with nearly 20,000 subscribers in politics, economics and the media.

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The CSS runs the International Relations and Security Network (ISN), and in cooperation with partner institutes manages the Crisis and Risk Network (CRN), the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security (PHP), the Swiss Foreign and Security Policy Network (SSN), and the Russian and Eurasian Security (RES) Network.

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Editors: Stephen Aris, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines, Hans-Henning Schröder

Layout: Cengiz Kibaroglu, Matthias Neumann

ISSN 1863-0421 © 2009 by Forschungsstelle Osteuropa, Bremen and Center for Security Studies, Zürich

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