Madam Chairman and members of the committee,

thank you for inviting me to join in today’s discussion. The

20th anniversary of the Soviet Union’s collapse is a good moment

to reflect on Russian-American relations. I too wish we could hear

what Tom Lantos had to say about it.

I will focus my remarks today on three issues: First, how Russia

and the U.S. restored broadly cooperative ties after 2008; second,

why their relations are still marked by frustration and friction;

and, third, how to address areas of disagreement going forward.

Three years ago many experts thought Russian-American relations

were in for a prolonged chill. Their expectations proved almost

entirely wrong. Russia and the U.S. ratified a new treaty on

strategic arms reductions. They have cooperated in support of military

operations in Afghanistan. They joined in passing a new round

of U.N. sanctions against Iran. They collaborate against the proliferation

of missile materials and international drug trafficking.

Even popular attitudes are beginning to change. Last year the

percentage of Russians who had a favorable view of the United

States reached its highest level, 60 percent, in a decade and a half.

The reset has, of course, focused on issues where the practical benefits

for both sides are clear-cut: Predictability in strategic arms reductions,

nuclear non-proliferation, counterterrorism and so on.

But the fact that the benefits of cooperation are obvious does not

make them less important to our national interests. And there are

tentative signs that Russia may be rethinking—in our direction—

what is in its interest.

In light of these benefits, why does the reset evoke so many

mixed feelings? There is clear hesitation in both countries about

the next steps that seem to be on the agenda. Madam Chairman,

both you and Mr. Berman have rightly mentioned many of these

problems, from aggression against Georgia to human rights abuses.

In the U.S. there is ambivalence about graduating Russia from the

coverage of the Jackson-Vanik amendment. In Russia there is ambivalence

about cooperating with NATO on missile defense.

The legacy of the Cold War plays a part in these attitudes, but

something deeper is at work. The next steps of the reset require

a level of mutual respect and trust that Russia and the U.S. have

not yet developed. Russia’s domestic evolution since the Soviet collapse

has been deeply disappointing. Its own President complains

of corruption and lack of political competition. He is right; Russia

lags behind other post-Communist nations in its embrace of democratic

norms. In this light, it is hardly surprising that Members of

Congress hesitate to abandon legislation that embodies our human

rights concerns.

Russia’s reluctance to work with NATO and missile defense may

originate in Cold War thinking, but that is not the only factor.

Even close allies have great difficulty sharing information and

plans that affect their ultimate security, and Russia and NATO are

not close allies.

Given these obstacles to cooperation, does the reset need a

pause? I know that is in the title of today’s hearing, Madam Chairman,

but it is the wrong approach. It does not serve our interest

to undo cooperation developed over 20 years by Presidents of both

parties. Our troops in Afghanistan don’t want to pause, nor do our

New START Treaty inspectors. But we do need to carry forward

the reset without pretending that Russia and the United States

have obtained a greater degree of mutual trust and respect than

they have.

To keep this policy on the realistic footing it requires, we need

to develop relations step by step. Let me say a word about how to

do so on two important issues. Congress is, for good reason, uncomfortable

about graduating Russia from Jackson-Vanik unless we

have a clearly articulated policy toward human rights and democracy

in Russia. Legislation to take the place of Jackson-Vanik can

play a part. Members of both houses have proposed to focus on the

worst abuses by individual Russian officials. Such measures, carefully

designed, may strengthen American policy, but they are not

the end of the story. Congress needs to look at other ways of modernizing

our human rights policy in the spirit of Jackson-Vanik by

increasing support for civil society groups, for electoral monitoring

and so forth.

As for missile defense, if Russia resists full-blown cooperation

with NATO, other approaches are available to it. This should hardly

be a crisis in Russian-American relations. Administration officials

have publicly suggested that the best way for Russia to explore

the pluses and minuses of greater cooperation is to get inside

the tent. This is good advice.

The agreement to create a joint data exchange center, signed

back in 2000, is one place to start. It would be a clearinghouse for

trading early warning information on missile launches; 11 years

later it is still waiting to be implemented.

Madam Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these

and the other issues with you and your colleagues and with the

other witnesses here today.

Madam Chairman, it would be hard to think

of a better way for Putin’s government to look like Leonid Brezhnev’s

government than by what they did with Boris Nemtsov. And

it is the kind of opportunity for senior officials in the legislative

and executive branches to convey to their Russian counterparts

that if the reset is to advance, actions of this kind are a threat to it.

I agree with my colleagues; the right response in the first instance

is attention, attention, attention. Dr. Cohen is exactly right.

The Magnitsky bill has gotten a lot of attention in Moscow.

I would add two other points. Our friends in Europe and

throughout Europe, and particularly in European Parliament and

the Council of Europe have taken the lead in talking about a lot

of these issues. We want to speak with one voice with them.

Secondly, it seems to me important that American efforts to support

Russian civil society, election monitoring, and other activities

of this kind be fully funded.

Thank you, Mr. Berman. I would dispute the

idea that the principal theme of the reset has been pleasing Russia.

I would say it has been to find areas where cooperation between

Russia and the United States can serve American interests. And I

think the record has been good there. And I don’t think that the

Russian Government has been particularly pleased by the way in

which American officials have kept the issue of Russia’s domestic

evolution prominent in their public discussion.

Dr. Cohen and others have talked about Russian aims in a way

that I find perfectly accurate. There is, to my mind, no doubt that

Russia would like to divide NATO. Madam Chairman, you said

that yourself. I don’t think there is any doubt that Russia would

like to strengthen a sphere of influence on its borders. I think it

wants the international respect that enables it to ignore criticism.

But my question would be, to quote a well-known American politician,

‘‘How’s it working out?’’ I don’t think all that well. Just this

week the Ambassadors of NATO and the Secretary General went

to Russia to say Russia’s objections to NATO’s missile defense

plans are a nonstarter. You know, let’s keep talking, but we are not

interested in the kind of proposal you have in mind. They are getting

nowhere there.

On a sphere of influence, the Russians began the Obama administration

trying to bribe the Kyrgyz Government to oust the United

States from its base in Kyrgyzstan. Today that base is still there

and the Russians have had to back off.

International respect. I say in my testimony that Russia enjoys

less respect internationally than other post-Communist nations.

And this hearing and the comments of all the witnesses and of all

the members indicate that Russia’s internal evolution remains a

hot topic in the West.

Uh——

I think the answer is certainly yes, Congressman.

It would have to be described as his hope. I don’t know

whether it was his strong expectation.

Yeah.

Gee, it would only be common sense to think

it was.

No.

In politics, Congressman, I think you have to

ask what the purpose of any action is, and I guess I would be a

little disturbed by thinking about what the purpose of such an action

on the Russian part would be.

Can I say a word first about Central Asia and

not moving fast enough? Some are and some aren’t. You have a

very broad spectrum of developments there with Kyrgystan on the

verge of being a real democracy and others deep in dictatorship. I

think there is undoubted Russian disappointment about the level

of assistance that it got from the West in the 1990s. That doesn’t

mean there wasn’t a lot of assistance and in fact—if you take together

all assistance programs, it comes to a rather substantial

level.

But I think most—a lot of Russians would tell you it all went

into the pockets of criminal businessmen or corrupt bureaucrats.

There is a sense that they didn’t get much out of the assistance

that you are talking about——

Jackson-Vanik doesn’t do us much good anymore,

and Russia should be graduated from Jackson-Vanik when

it joins the WTO. But Congress can play an important role in finding

and helping to articulate a new policy for human rights and democracy

in Russia.

The Russians can’t figure out what to do with

Belarus, because you are right, they sustain it with subsidies, with

cheap energy, with a measure of investment. But they put recurrent

pressure on the regime. They have been cutting off electricity.

They cut off gas. If there is any one government in the world that

has done more to put the Lukashenko regime under threat than

the Russian Government, I don’t know which one it is. So there is

a kind of incoherence there.

We have to continue to work with Belarus’

democratic neighbors, with other European countries that are very

concerned and have kept their attention on this issue. Lukashenko

has been a stubborn and rather resilient force. But he is totally isolated

in Europe, and that can’t last.

Well, the reset policy has included an awareness

of the kinds of difficulties that Dr. Cohen mentioned, and has

tried to keep them in perspective while seeking cooperation that

will serve our interests. And that seems like an approach that is

worth continuing, although I would note that to go forward in the

next step of the reset that the administration cares about most,

which is WTO, Jackson-Vanik graduation, I think it will need to

think harder and the Congress will need to think harder about how

to come up with a modernized approach to democracy and human

rights in Russia.

If they meet the usual commercial terms.

I am sure there will be competition over resources,

but I am not an expert on this issue.

There is no doubt that Putin picked Medvedev

because he thought he was the most controllable President he could

imagine, and there is no doubt that since Medvedev became President,

Putin has remained the dominant political figure in Russia.

But I think it is wrong to say that beneath this—to use your

words—beneath the surface, nothing changes. The area is more political

ferment, more political debate, more questioning of precisely

the institutional arrangements that you have talked about in Russia

3 years ago, 6 years ago, 9 years ago. And while we shouldn’t

be naive about where that can go, it is to me significant that as

many Russian political figures that speak on this subject have

talked about the need for more political competition. Polls show

that the Russian people want more political competition. So something

is happening, even below the surface and on the surface, and

we need to watch it carefully.

It is hard to be hopeful that there will be a

compromise on the issue, because for all the parties there are rather

fundamental issues involved, and for Georgia in particular. It is

hard to put pressure on the Georgians to yield on an issue that involves

its sovereignty, where there is a military occupation of two

of its provinces. Both the Russians and the Georgians seem pretty

dug in here, and the United States has said that they do not want

to mediate the discussion—that it has to be resolved between Moscow

and Tbilisi.

There are formulas that are being addressed that do involve compromise,

but I can’t say that from what I have heard they are particularly

promising ones. The discussions, however, continue. I

don’t think either Russia or Georgia or the United States is prepared

to let this issue derail, a goal that all of them in some way

share. So, I can’t help you.

Well, there needs to be a Russian withdrawal

from Georgian territory. But that is a broader and long-term problem.

The question is, is there a small fix, a small step forward that

will make WTO accession easier? And I don’t know the answer to

that.

Russia, as you know, is a member of the quartet.

They tend to be one of the less active members of the quartet

and to shape their agenda in relation to the others—the lead taken

by others. There have been some exceptions to that. Periodically,

Russia tries to make itself a mediator between Hamas and other

governments, but not a great deal has come of those efforts.

Yes. The encouragement of Hamas and the

opening of the channel to Hamas has definitely carried that implication.

What the exact communications with Hamas have been, I

don’t know.

If you can’t pay for weapons or nuclear power

plants or other Russian exports, you are not really interesting to

the Russians. There is a tiny bit of residual tail-pulling value for

Cuba in Russian policy, but it is pretty minor. The Russians are

more interested in Brazil as a member of the BRICs, or of Venezuela

because it is an energy exporter and generally irresponsible

player in the hemisphere. Those countries offer more fun and profit

for Russia. Castro seems very much yesterday’s man by comparison.

The Russians have backed themselves into a

corner here. I predict they will be able to get out of it. But they

have taken a rather absolutist position that the administration—

that no U.S. administration is going to support. It is an absolute

red line in American policy that you are not going to yield on missile

defense just to please the Russians. The Russians, I believe,

are getting that message. They have got it loud and clear from

NATO this week.

My question on this is always, how is it working

out? No one agrees with the Russian position.

Congressman, I have to comment on your

point about consistent anti-Russian policy on the issue of territorial

integrity. The issue of territorial integrity that has mattered most

to Russia in the past 20 years has been Chechnya. And the United

States has never in any way questioned that territorial integrity.

We have objected to the way in which Russia repressed the

Chechen people and brutally——

But on that issue there has been——

Yes. I think that Russia has a desire to have

its great power status respected, its status as a nuclear superpower

respected, its growing position as an energy power advanced

through cooperation, and sometimes not cooperation, with other

consuming countries.

I think that every administration since the

end of the Cold War has tried to find a way of according Russia

respect without giving Russia veto over issues where we want to

pursue our interests. And as with territorial integrity and self-determination,

that is sometimes a hard balance to strike. I would

say most of the administrations have gotten it pretty much right.

But on the receiving end for the Russians, the feeling is always we

don’t get enough deference.