

Chairman Robert Wexler
Subcommittee on Europe

Opening Statement

“The Reset Button Has Been Pushed: Kicking Off a New Era in U.S.-Russian
Relations”

July 28, 2009

The Subcommittee on Europe will come to order.

I want to welcome our two witnesses, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Philip Gordon and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia policy Celeste Wallander.

The President’s recent Moscow Summit and the Administration’s effort to “reset” relations between the United States and Russia comes at a critical juncture as we grapple with several major foreign policy challenges, of which one of the most difficult, complex and consistently frustrating is America’s relations with Russia.

I agree with President Obama that there is an opportunity for increased dialogue, cooperation, and progress between the U.S. and Russia if we reject and put to rest “old assumptions, old ways of thinking” that the United States and Russia are destined to be “antagonists,” or that we are in a power struggle where a “zero sum game” is played and one side is the loser.

Although there remain serious disagreements between Washington and Moscow on many issues, at the Summit, the Obama Administration and Russian officials began the process of “resetting relations,” and agreed to a new strategic framework for U.S.-Russian military to military cooperation, reaffirmed a common commitment to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons and nuclear terrorism, and signed an agreement allowing U.S. military personnel and equipment to transit across Russia to Afghanistan.

Presidents Obama and Medvedev also signed a joint Understanding on the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty that will guide negotiations and commits both the U.S. and Russia to reduce strategic warheads and strategic delivery vehicles. Finally, a bilateral Presidential Commission, coordinated by Secretary Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov, with thirteen high-level working groups, will meet for the first time this fall to focus on a range of issues, including civil society, fighting terrorism, common threat assessment, economic relations, nuclear energy and nuclear cooperation, and space cooperation.

As the Administration pursues a more robust relationship with Russia, it must carefully navigate and make sense of the internal political dynamics and power struggles in the Kremlin and Russia, a weakened Russian economy, and a growing values gap between the U.S. and Russia in terms of human rights, democracy, rule of law, anti-corruption, economic transparency, and freedom of the press.

It is hard to be optimistic about US-Russian relations, as we approach the one year anniversary of the Russian-Georgian War, Russia’s military and political presence in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is hardening, President Medvedev renews threats to place short range missiles on

Russia's border with Poland and another prominent Chechen human rights activist is brutally murdered without judicial recourse.

There is no more pressing issue on the U.S.-Russian "reset" agenda than Iran's development of nuclear weapons. To date, Russia's actions suggest anything but a real partner in deterring Iran's nuclear program. In fact, Russia has failed to implement Security Council resolutions and their accompanying sanctions, continues to build the Bushehr nuclear power plant, and provides the Iranian government with lethal weapons – even signing an agreement to sell the S-300 anti-Missile defense system to Tehran.

Twenty years after the revolutions of 1989 and the fall of the Iron Curtain, many central and eastern European nations feel increasingly threatened by a resurgent Russia. The U.S. must take these concerns seriously; continue to unequivocally reject a Russian sphere of influence, assist Europe in its quest for energy security, expand the Visa Waiver Program to include allies, and consult closely with European governments, including Poland and the Czech Republic, on missile defense. We must also strengthen NATO, follow through on efforts to provide credible defense plans for alliance members, and state unequivocally America's unwavering obligation to our Article 5 commitments.

I would now like to invite the ranking member, Mr. Gallegly from California, to give his opening remarks.