

## **Pressing That Re-set Button: Shared Interests, Competing Values, and U.S.-Russian Relations**

*Highlights transcript*  
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SUSAN EISENHOWER: Every morning when you pick up the paper and you see the hundreds of thousands of people in the streets of Tehran – it does take one back twenty years ago when the very same size crowds were in the streets of Moscow.

JACK MATLOCK: The end of the Cold War meant a decrease in American power because what gave us much of the authority we had during the Cold War was the contrast between the Soviet Union, its lack of human rights, its manifest lack of real democracy, its failing economy, and the system that we represented and supported.

SARAH MENDELSON: We are not in a position to fix Russia; it's not a problem to be fixed.

THOMAS GRAHAM: I think we always need to start with U.S. national interests, how we understand what our goals should be in what is a very difficult international environment now.

ANDREI SITOV: How restricted is the ability of the American side to meet the expectations of the Russians?

GRAHAM: I think it's clear that on many levels there is some strategic overlap.

MATLOCK: What I've seen of the Obama administration so far is precisely the direction we should be taking.

GRAHAM: If you look at the catch-phrases in Russia right now – President Medvedev, Prime Minister Putin—it's "innovation." Russia needs to become an innovation society.

ANDREI PIONTOVSKIY: Putin's regime abandoned the program of this modernization and took the model of a kleptocratic authoritarian regime, and this type of regime needs the image of the United States as an enemy.

GRAHAM: A lot of Putin's initial effort was trying to, as he said, rebuild the state, rebuild governance across Russia. Now some of us might argue that he over-fulfilled the plan.

JEFFREY LAURENTI: ...and whether there is any real difference between Medvedev, who comes out of a, supposedly, human rights law background and a Putin, whose KGB background is much more unvarnished?

MENDELSON: There have been some important symbolic steps. The president met with and gave an interview to Nova Gazyeta. It was his first interview with the newspaper press, Nova Gazyeta being the newspaper that's had four journalists killed.

MATLOCK: The background of a lot of this was a profound misunderstanding and misrepresentation of how the cold war ended. 'We won the cold war, we can do what we wish.'

GRAHAM: I've always traced the -- sort of the breakdown in the relationship to the fall of 2004, which is framed by two events: Beslan in August and September and then the Orange Revolution in November and December.

MENDELSON: There were all sorts of ways in which civil society in Russia was experiencing a closing of political space prior to Beslan.

MATLOCK: I am one who feels that the only missile defense that really makes sense both politically and technically will be a joint defense, that you work with Russia.

MENDELSON: I think that the Russian opinion on the United States, on Presidential policy, on people -- Americans -- is complex, and I think that you see in the surveys there's a lot of anti-Bush sentiment.

MATLOCK: Instead of building a new security structure, you use a principal cold war instrument -- expanding NATO in Eastern Europe -- now what's going to be the reaction? The reaction is going to be an increase in nationalism.

MICHAEL HATZEL: NATO enlargement didn't begin in Washington; it began in Warsaw and in Prague with Lech Wałęsa and Václav Havel.

MATLOCK: I think the biggest problems in both Ukraine and Georgia are internal, and that all of the parties -- east and west, Russia, the United States, and Europe, as well as the local people, are making a mistake by making these so-called East-West issues.

GRAHAM: From the United States' perspective, I think it's clear that we have a continuing interest in the independence and territorial integrity of these states.

LAURENTI: Sarah's report suggests that one of the problems is that the Russian population at large is essentially, or has become, indifferent -- at least to democracy, maybe not to rule of law.

MENDELSON: They're very concerned about torture and arbitrary arrest; they're very concerned about abuse.

MATLOCK: Do we have an interest in civil society, democracy, and particularly in human rights? Absolutely. But we need to find ways to bring long-term results.

MENDELSON: But if we approach the relationship with a slightly different modus operandi, I think we're going to see very different results.