

ISSUE BRIEF

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Hagel, Kerry, and Brennan Senate Confirmation Hearings: Russia and Eurasia

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President Barack Obama's new foreign policy team is facing Senate approval: Senator John Kerry (D-MA) for Secretary of State, former Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) for Secretary of Defense, and White House chief counterterrorism advisor John Brennan for director of the CIA.

All three will confront a truculent Russia. However, their past statements and support of the Administration's failed "reset" approach to Moscow suggest that their perceptions of the Kremlin's policies are unrealistic.

The Senate needs to ascertain whether the attitudes of these candidates toward Russia make them fit to serve and lay down baselines by which it can judge the future performance of their departments and agencies.

Russia's Anti-American Foreign Policy. Since Vladimir

Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, Moscow has been escalating its anti-American rhetoric and actions. It is sliding toward a confrontation with Washington abroad and a crack-down at home.¹

The Kremlin has failed to come to understandings about Syria, effectively flying diplomatic "cover" for the Bashar al-Assad regime. Russia wants to keep its naval bases and arms sales to Syria and fears that radical Sunni Islamists may replace Assad.

Moscow also opposes further U.N., U.S., and EU sanctions against the Iranian military nuclear program, instead using Iran to threaten U.S. allies in the Middle East, increasing regional instability.²

The Kremlin is working hard to create a sphere of influence along its periphery and wants to become a "pole" in a multi-polar world that confronts Washington. Meanwhile, the Obama Administration has kept a low profile vis-à-vis the former Soviet Union, effectively acquiescing to Russian moves to re-establish a sphere of influence there.

The Kremlin is modernizing its military to the tune of over \$700 billion over the next 10 years. It is upgrading its nuclear arsenal—including intercontinental ballistic

missiles (ICBMs) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles—launching a new series of nuclear submarines, and reviving rail-based ICBM deployment, a direct throwback to its Cold War posture.

Russia is turning the U.S. ballistic missile defense program into a bone of contention, demanding effective limitations on missile defense features and U.S. technology sharing aimed at neutralizing the U.S. program.

Moscow has expelled the United States Agency for International Development, fearing its support of the Russian domestic opposition. It terminated the historic Nunn-Lugar agreement on arms control, making strategic weapons, nuclear materials storage, and nuclear technology transfers less transparent.

The Kremlin's crackdown on domestic opposition is on a scale not seen since the 1970s. Russia banned American financing of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), forbidding them to even employ Americans any longer. Foreign-funded "political" NGOs now need to register as "foreign agents." The state has expanded the legal definition of treason, launched criminal investigations against opposition leaders, arrested demonstrators, and

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subjected the Internet to more government controls—not to mention the tragic plight of the Russian children who can no longer be adopted by Americans.

The Russian law enforcement and the court system are corrupt—and collapsing, which makes doing business in Russia doubly problematic, despite its having joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). The courts are not truly independent. The Kremlin has expanded “telephone justice” (a Soviet practice) by which judges receive verbal instructions from the top on how to decide cases involving prominent opponents of the government, such as Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the jailed founder of the Yukos oil company, who has been recognized by Amnesty International as a political prisoner. Moscow attempts to tie the Russian domestic opposition to the “external enemy”—i.e., the U.S.

Putin publicly has stated that “‘reset’ was not our term,” effectively disavowing the Obama policy. Assistant Secretary of State Phil Gordon also recently rejected “reset” as a descriptive term at a press conference in the Netherlands.³

Track Records of the Candidates. An examination of the track record of each candidate raises questions about their ability to develop and implement adequate policies toward a resurgent Russia.

Senator Hagel, in a 2008 article published by the *Harvard International Review*, claimed, “The US government should [also] seek to work in concert with Russian officials and propose a new initiative to help resolve the standoff over Iran’s nuclear program.”⁴

Together with former Senator Gary Hart (D-CO), Hagel co-chaired the Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Russia at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, which in 2009 produced a report, “The Right Direction for U.S. Policy Toward Russia.”⁵

Many recommendations of the Hagel-Hart commission—such as lifting the Jackson-Vanick amendment, bringing Russia into the WTO, boosting cooperation with Russia on supplying the NATO contingent in Afghanistan, terminating the Poland/Czech Republic missile defense deployment, and signing the New START arms control treaty—have been implemented by the Obama Administration, but the overall relationship is abysmal and getting worse.

Senator Kerry has been one of the greatest supporters of President Obama’s “reset” policy with Russia. He led the way on the New START ratification, supported Russian WTO membership, and even tried to delay the vote on the Sergey Magnitsky Act in the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee. Kerry is also a vocal critic of missile defense.

Establishing Policy Baselines. The Senate should use the confirmation process as an opportunity to evaluate each nominee on U.S.–Russian policy and draw conclusions accordingly.

The Senate should seek clear guarantees from Senator Kerry that he will:

- Continue working with U.S. European and Middle Eastern allies to convince Russia to support an end game in Syria that would prevent the Sunni Islamists from taking over while removing the Assad family from power.
- Convince Moscow to support additional sanctions on Iran to stop its nuclear program.
- Support Euro-Atlantic integration, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement; a U.S.–Georgia free trade agreement, and eventually NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia (which is the declared NATO policy) so long as the majority of the populations and elites in these countries support this path.
- Ensure that Georgia does not revert to the Russian orbit under

1. See Ariel Cohen, “How the U.S. Should Deal with Putin’s Russia,” Heritage Foundation *Issue Brief* No. 3530, March 7, 2012, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/03/how-the-us-should-deal-with-putins-russia>.

2. See Ariel Cohen, “Russia’s Iran Policy: A Curveball for Obama,” Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 2359, January 15, 2010, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/01/russias-iran-policy-a-curveball-for-obama>.

3. IIP Digital, “State’s Gordon at Media Round Table in the Netherlands,” January 10, 2013, <http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/01/20130110140807.html#axzz2l4DI9YL2> (accessed January 15, 2013).

4. Chuck Hagel, “At a Dangerous Crossroads: A Global Approach to Iranian Nuclear Ambitions,” *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 30, No.1 (Spring 2008), <http://www.freepatentsonline.com/article/Harvard-International-Review/179742209.html> (accessed January 15, 2013).

5. News release, “Report from the Commission on U.S. Policy Toward Russia—The Right Direction for U.S. Policy Toward Russia,” Harvard University, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, March 16, 2009, http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/18909/report_from_the_commission_on_us_policy_toward_russia_the_right_direction_for_us_policy_toward_russia.html (accessed January 15, 2013).

the Georgian Dream government and that human rights and the rule of law are fully observed, including toward political opponents.

- Develop further ties with the strategically located, oil-rich and pro-Western republic of Azerbaijan. Support annulment of Section 907 of United States Freedom Support Act, as 20 percent of the Azerbaijani territory remains occupied by Armenia.
- Develop a system of sustainable support for the Russian democratic opposition and oppose Russia's violations of human rights by holding Moscow up to its commitments to the Helsinki Accords' third basket covering human rights. Expand the Magnitsky Act list to include gross and systematic rights violators beyond the Magnitsky case itself.

The Senate should seek clear guarantees from Senator Hagel that he will:

- Recognize that Moscow still views the U.S. as a strategic adversary, including in the nuclear arms sphere, and that it has no right to impose its diktat over vital aspects of American defenses, including missile defenses; and
 - Assure that military and dual-use technologies sold to Russia and the former Soviet countries will not end up in the hands of Tehran.
- The Senate should seek clear guarantees from John Brennan that he will:
- Keep Russia and Eurasia a priority for CIA collection and operations, especially as U.S./NATO troops leave Afghanistan;
 - Provide resources to secure speakers of Russian and other regional languages for CIA employment; and
 - Monitor Russian weapons, military, and dual-use technology

supplies to Iran, North Korea, and other proliferators.

No Illusions or Wishful

Thinking. The new Obama team will define American foreign policy for the next four years. This is an era of unprecedented challenges, as the international arena is wrought with dangers, and the U.S. military and State Department budgets are likely to be cut. The candidates should see Russia for what it is—without illusions and wishful thinking. The Senate should vote wisely on these nominations, as the security and prosperity of America are at stake.

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