



Prospects of the Russian – US Relations and their Impact on Global Security

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Amb. Sergey Kislyak

*Institute of Contemporary International Studies, Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Moscow
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Ambassador **Sergey Kislyak**, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Council of Federation, in 2008-2017 – Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the United States of America, one of the most knowledgeable experts on the Russian - US relations, strategic relations and foreign affairs. Before his posting to Washington, Amb. Kislyak served as a Deputy Foreign Minister from 2003 to 2008, and as a Russian Ambassador to Belgium and Permanent Representative to NATO in 1998-2003.

KISLYAK: First, I would like to thank you and the Trialogue Club International, for inviting me to speak to this distinguished group. I was asked to share my views on the current state of Russian-American relations, and maybe to answer questions that you might have on this issue. However, I am afraid that a lot of things that are happening, or not happening, in Russian-American relations are extensively covered by the press, a lot of pundits spending their lifetime discussing and putting the assessments to where we are.

Almost everything is known. Except maybe for the feeling of those who have been working in Russian-American relations and, get somewhat disappointed with the lack of progress, and I would say that it is worse. I have worked in Russian-American relations since 1978, and I would say that currently it is the worst state of Russian-American relations after the end of the Cold War. And it is disappointing because, after 25 years since the Cold War was over, we could have reached a much better understanding, and to reach an ability to work together on issues that will reunite us. I will try to list the problems we are facing in the international arena and to list the issues that are putting us apart.

The first list will be much longer and much more important both to Russia and to the United States. Being the two biggest nuclear powers, and being Permanent Members of the UN Security Council, we honestly have an additional responsibility in order to be able to work, in order to maintain strategic stability, something that is missing currently in our relations at larger. Having said that, I would not deny that there is some continued dialogue. There is some continued cooperation, and this is right. I will give you a couple of examples that are well known.

Let's start with the **Outer Space**. We are still managing the International Space Station is a testimony of our ability to continue working together, even in the worst political climate, and we have learned to work on these issues even in the Cold War, and that continues today. We have been able to work on the issue of the **chemical weapons in Syria**, which has been a very unique situation in very difficult and political war-time circumstances. And by being together, we were able to remove chemical weapon stocks from Syria, as well as to convince Syria first to adhere to the Chemical Weapons Convention. In my view, this is one of the most vivid examples of our ability to work together, when the issues are important, when both countries agree that these are important, and when we both can reinforce each other's ability to implement the tasks that are coming.

Unfortunately, there are very few examples to bring into the same line, because largely the dialogue is almost interrupted by a large spectrum of issues. Because of the current difficulties in Russian-American relations, the US government chose to discontinue the bilateral commission that we have established in the beginning of Obama's Administration. And at the peak time, we had **21 working groups** covering: Security, Economics, Space, and Energy, even people to people.

Almost everything under the moon was covered by the 21 working groups that were headed both sides by people from a cabinet or Sub-cabinet level. I would not say that during the time the commission existed, we have changed the world, but there were a lot of beginnings that were appearing and were promising. We thought that it would be something that could be changed in our relations, since the end of the Cold War. And, everything was discontinued by the United States. They were those who decided to do so. We have decided that we will not be chasing Americans in Washington with an extended hand and soliciting for cooperation. But at the same time, we will keep the doors open and if they are interested in working together on issues of mutual interests and important for both countries, we will be there. The way we will be working on the issues will be based on a mutual respectful basis, taking into account the interests of both countries. We will not close any avenues in the future. But currently, and I have to be honest, I am not too optimistic that kind of cooperation is going to return anytime soon. In fact, what will determine this situation, would be the current political situation in the United States.

What is happening now, and if you want me to dwell on history about how we arrived to this situation, I will certainly do that. But I'm trying to give you **our diagnosis as to where we are**. With the current situation of the Russian-American relations in the United States, there is a low opportunity for any administration, for Trump or for any other, to resume productive serious cooperation with us. Because in the US, maybe more than any other country, their foreign policy is an extension of internal political difficulties. This particular season when everybody is fighting with everybody. The Democrats are fighting with the Republicans because they still cannot accept the result of the elections. A part of the President's party does not accept his presidency. The liberal press is fighting with the White House. The special services are also contributing to the intensive fighting.

There are so many issues about Russia which are injected to the internal debate that have converted Russia into kind of "permanent evil" that is present in almost all

political debates in the States. And it is not a coincidence. It is something that is deliberately injected into the political life. We see it, we know it, and sometimes we are not even surprised because if you listen to the kind of arguments that are put together against the President of the United States that he might have colluded with Russia, he might have had a willingness to build good relations with Russia. But in order to press the President you need first to create an image of Russia as a kind of eternal evil and if that is the case, that means that those who want to cooperate with Russia, either do not understand what they are dealing with, or they are almost on the verge of being traitors. That kind of exaggerated but maybe rather precise picture of what the line of arguments against the President and the White House, in general, was developing a number of investigations at the Congress, in both the Senate and the House of Representatives, the FBI is investigating everything that is now called the “Russian Investigation”. This makes the whole atmosphere against the Russian-American relations even less promising for the American ability to work with Russia. I honestly hope sometimes that our American colleagues will come to the final conclusion that it is an empty fight against Russia in which they are involved. Maybe at some point in the future, they will decide to apologize for everything that has been done against Russia; against the Russian-American relations. However, I doubt that any American politician can do that. Remembering the discussion about whether Americans have ever apologized for anything they have been doing in the past or not. During one of their campaigns, I think it was Mr. Romney, who insisted that he would never apologize for anything that the US had done in the past.

The current situation is a wave of hatred against Russia that has deliberately been injected into the minds of people in the United States. It is poisoning the atmosphere. It has also resulted in a number of decisions that will be difficult to reverse for the United States, like several legislations that have long-term consequences. One of them is the recent legislation on sanctions against Russia. I will put aside the sanctions issue, we will survive that, but what is the most important, in the long-term, is that for the first time and it has not even happened during Cold War time, Russia is defined by law as an adversary of the United States.

Secondly, there are several components of this new law that suggest, any substantive change of Russia policy in the United States will have to be approved by the Congress. And there are a number of procedures that are required to be followed, if any President in the future decides to change the policy towards Russia. And the policy is certainly **defined by the *chapeau*: Russia is an adversary.**

The number of **sanctions** that are amazingly arrogant is certainly another issue that causes problems in Russian-American relations. It is important and it is poisoning our relations, but in my view, trying to assess where we can move in the future is secondary to the notion that Russia is an adversary. And any change in the policy based on this definition, it has to be approved by the Congress. Now, when you even try to think about what can or cannot be approved by the Congress, I immediately remind myself of the times of President Obama, after the START Treaty was ratified by the Senate, and ratified in a way that kind of precluded a number of additional arrangements in this strategic field, especially in the ballistic missile defense area.

It was probably the last time when the United States was able to ratify anything. The US has become unable to reach any agreements of substance with Russia; irrespective of the importance of the agreements, and it is not because of us, but because of the internal politics in the US that brought the country to such levels of division and polarization that whatever the Democratic President at the time would have been sent to the Congress for approval, it would have been almost automatically rejected by the legislature.

At that time, and when we were discussing a number of issues of importance in the security area with our American colleagues in the Democratic Administration, and when I challenged them with the question of whether any agreement with Russia can be ratified in the American Senate, those honest professionals who spoke openly to me said: no. Even the issue, I would bring you one particular example, the issue of extension of the New START Treaty, it expires in 2021, I think. This issue was raised by the American Administration and we were considering if it was still valid or not. We learned immediately that the US would not be able to ratify an extension. They did not even contemplate the idea of getting full legal instruments signed, to be sent for their ratification to the Senate. So, we were told that we can do it by an Executive Order by the President of the US, and be as good as any agreement that would be ratified by the Senate. We knew it and we were told that in American reality, it is so unreliable.

Currently, after the changes made in the White House, we see how initiatives and Executive Orders made by previous administrations can be easily repealed; revoked or reconsidered. That certainly makes us think twice about what is feasible in the security area with our American colleagues and there are more questions about it, rather than answers.

Moreover, I will give you another example of things that concern to us. Even in the cold war times, we had been working on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and there were instances when we were working almost as one team. A couple of days ago, we celebrated 25 years since the Review Conference and Extension of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to make it indefinite. I did participate in this Conference together with a number of American colleagues who we met with General Buzhinsky last week, and we remembered how we worked together in order to make sure the Treaty became indefinite. It was one team and we succeeded in doing that.

Currently, after all the decisions that the American Administration has made to discontinue the normal dialogue in Russian-American relations, the Department of Energy, that has been our partner in technical aspects on nonproliferation of nuclear weapons, is not allowed to work with Russian counterparts. There is a law now in the US that impedes cooperation among our military, the only exception that I know of is in the case of Syria in some zones and is very limited. So at larger context, where we have been working together on a multiagency level, it has become an area with lacks of professional quality of cooperation that it requires.

I would say that, recently, we have restarted the **dialogue on strategic stability**. There were two meetings of this kind at the level of Deputy Foreign Ministers. Is good that this meeting happened. It is good that people at least can sit on the same table and try to discuss these issues, but it is certainly not with the quality of cooperation that brought

significant agreements and partnerships in the past. And at the same time, the difficulties in the strategic realm are piling up. For instance, the Ballistic Missile Defense System developed by the United States has certainly challenged Russian security. We see the global strike concept getting more military. We also are witnessing increasing joint military activities of NATO and the United States nearby to our borders. Increased intelligence, overflights, maximized borders, and the number of flights is phenomenal. All of these issues certainly do not contribute to increasing the sense of security in Russia, and they are certainly prompting and we will prompt measures to ensure that whatever happens around our borders, we will be able to protect the Russian national security. And we will do that.

But the question is, will our western colleagues and neighbors, as well as the United States, as a long-range neighbor be benefited from that kind of situation or not?

We do not know. Certainly, it is not going to end the strategic stability, let alone the issue of compliance of political commitments that were given to us when we agreed with the so-called “Founding Act on Mutual Relations”, when our NATO partners committed not to deploy substantive forces beyond the borders of the NATO countries at that time.

There are a lot of issues that are popping up almost each and every day. There is a huge number of issues on which we could have worked together, and we missed the opportunity. And I would say that we honestly believe that it is not because of us. And to say that all of this is going to change anytime soon, would be less than a true statement because of the political realities in the United States.

On top of that, I would add a couple of considerations that are not part of the strategic discussions. Overall, Russian-American relations have proven to be very immature 25 years after the end of cold war. When it comes to **mutual perceptions**, the US, or rather American people have always called the Soviet Union “Russia”. After the end of the Soviet Union, we are still called “Russia”. Many do not understand the differences in policies of former Russia and new Russia. And that certainly carries with a lot of stereotypes of the past and we also see that with a lot of stereotypes of the west.

We also see that when Russia is assessed, described, or analyzed, especially from the military, and political side, people do not understand what new Russia is, and what New Russia is not, which is equally important. And that is largely missing in American debates. Because the analysis of Russian perceptions, of Russian class, of Russian aspirations, I usually assume that Russia will like to do it, and will have the capabilities to do that, about the same the United States would have done being in our shoes.

When it comes to our military colleagues, when they try to analyze options, they base their analysis on the worst-case scenario. And that is largely a way of thinking about Russia especially when it comes to military damage in Europe and elsewhere. With a lack of dialogue that is prevailing now, the misperceptions of prevailing largely in the United States and NATO.

On top of that, the **lack of interaction between American and Russian societies** also add to these absences of full understanding of our respective countries. It is not widely

known, but the economic ties between Russia and the United States are minuscule. The best time was in 2012. The trade between our two countries has increased to 40 billion USD both ways, to put this number in perspective, 40 billion USD is less than 1% of American foreign trade. 40 billion USD does not put the United States on the list of priority of economic partners for Russia. But the numbers are important in their own right.

But the issues that are more important than the absence of serious economic interaction; is the lack of interaction between both societies. Otherwise, we would have been able to better understand each other, to better communicate, to better influence our respective governments on the necessity to maintain and normalized our bilateral relations. I would say that in the United States, and by the same topic in Russia, the portion of society that is materially interested in seeing that the Russian-US relations prosper is minuscule.

On the backdrop on the current development of the Russian-American relations, we see the trade falling twofold. Last year, the bilateral trade it was about, I think, 20 billion USD both ways. However, we spoke that we will see more or less 14 billion increasing, including bilateral investment, which is surprising for me, but also good to have some pleasant surprises from time to time.

When it comes to culture and exchange, they are also minuscule. People to people contacts are undermined by our American friends largely. I ask myself, what is going to happen in the United States in order to allow that, to return not too good quality relations with us, but to normalize relations with us or to normalize and appreciation?

I am afraid that it will take quite a while, at first. And secondly, even if there is a change in political thinking about Russia, there is now **legislation that put Russia in a category of adversary position**, which means that the US policy towards Russia cannot be easily changed by future presidents. And if history could be of any guidance, it could also be somewhat disappointing. We have the history of the so-called “*Jackson-Vanik*” amendment that was introduced in the United States 25 or 26 years ago in order to punish the Soviet Union for the lack of ability of Jewish population of the Soviet Union to migrate to Israel.

Since the time of the “*Jackson-Vanik*” amendment was adopted, the Soviet Union ceased to exist. We have established friendly relations with Israel. All the Jews that wanted to leave, they have left. Other have come back. Some of them have even returned to capitals, with ideas, and established businesses in Russia. Today, Russian citizens can go to Israel even without a visa, and the same migration policy applies to Israeli citizens coming to Russia. We have a party in the Knesset that is one million strong, which is called “*Our House Israel*”, that speaks Russian and which is very friendly to Russia and who send a number of Knesset into the government to become Ministry of Defense.

At the same time, two or three years ago, when we were discussing the possibility of Russia joining WTO, the “*Jackson-Vanik*” amendment was an impediment from the United States to allow the Russian participation in the WTO. Even at the time, when the President of the US decided to repel finally after years and years of promises to us

to repeal the amendment, he could not do that. I remember at that time, I went to the Senate and spoke to one person who was very much active in these discussions on The Hill, and I asked her, why do you want to keep the “Jackson-Vanik” Amendment when is no longer relevant in Russian-American, Russian-Israeli Relations? She told me very directly, “We need to have a leverage.” What happened? Until the moment they developed a legislation, the so-called “Magnitsky Law”, another anti-Russian law, they did not odd out the Jackson-Vanik to be erected. So, I am telling you all of this to you to help you understand how disappointingly important the sanction law can be for the future of Russian-American relations. Once again, I am not talking about the sanctions properly, I am talking about political content that it creates.

So, that is where we are. It’s kind of a gloomy assessment, but I tried to be honest. If you ask me, have we lost the hope for normalization of bilateral relations? And I repeated this word several times, normality, rather than partnership because before we can start thinking and talking about partnership, **one has to restore normality and honesty in our relations that is largely missing.**

We are still, as I have said, in the very beginning of this discussion, we are open for more cooperation. We are not going to chase for it and beg for cooperation from the American side, but somebody has to be the adult of the block. We are trying to be honest and if the understanding of the importance of normality in the United States and Russia, that can be done, but that will require a lot, a lot of political influence in the United States.

But I think at some point, normality will return. And even if that is not going to happen tomorrow, what it is also important that between today and the day when normality is back, in the meantime, we do not have to smash too many pieces of chinaware because it’s very difficult to fix them afterwards.

So thank you so much, and I will be open for Q&A.

QUESTION: My question is about the meeting of **the Special Control Commission on the INF Treaty** that starts today. Do you see any room for compromise on this difficult problem? What are the perspectives of this meeting from your mind? How can you assess the experts’ opinion that this is one of the last chances to save this very important Treaty?

KISLYAK: Well, I have been in arms control almost all my professional life, and I would say that I do not agree that “last chance meetings” is something that exists in arms control. The issues of science warn are particularly ready to continue, but with INF we face a difficult situation because American friends chose to link things that we haven’t linked and not them. I think we understand that the reason behind this is the INF is because Americans have been less than faithful in implementing the agreement all along. They were using the missile targets for ballistic missile defense tests that definitely fall in the category of INF. Some of the tests are done even without inter-science by anti-ballistic missiles that certainly doesn’t agree well to be in compliance with the Treaty by the United States.

Secondly, and I think most importantly, the timing that it must probably coincide with the appearance of allegations that Russia has violated the Treaty. And that is the issue of “Aegis Ashore” launching systems that have already been deployed in Romania, and soon to be deployed in Poland in the future down the road. And the technical problem is that the kind of launchers put on Ashore they are explicitly prohibited by the INF because they can use universal launching systems -MK41, I think it is- that is deployed on ships and now they are on the ground that can be used to launch standard missiles for ballistic missile defense or cruise missiles. I think the Tomahawk, as well. So, being deployed on the ground is a violation of the Treaty. So, when Americans start deploying it occurred simultaneously when the wave of allegations against Russia about such violations. We haven’t violated it. We haven’t done anything that Americans can tell us that they were right; to be honest, they are not too forthcoming and explaining the allegations. And that’s another problem with our American colleagues. All along, in this particular area and others as well. So we’ll see; we’ll see how things are going to develop.

We are interested in the INF Treaty to continue. We are going to be compliant with the obligations of the Treaty, but we also want Americans to do the same.

QUESTION: The lack of **trade relationship between Russia and the United States** makes it difficult to progress in other areas. So, how could you brand the reasons for this lack of trade? Are US companies too cautious to collaborate with Russia? Is it the attitude of the States that makes companies understand that their governments would be suspicious of this kind of cooperation? Or probably is just that the US and Russian state machineries that have to support trade activities are not exhaustive as they should be. What kind of reasons would you name for that?

KISLYAK: I would say all of the above. Because there is not a black and white picture. There are so many reasons for that kind of situation. First, there are people who tell us that the trade is much more important between Russia and the United States than the numbers show because a lot of American companies trade with Russia from Europe. So when it comes to direct investment, the numbers are staggered. The accumulated direct investment into Russian economy, from the United States, is 2.8 billion dollars. At the same time, at some point, I think it was also in 2012, accumulated Russian private direct investment in the United States was about 13.8 billion dollars and there is something wrong with this for sure. And everybody understood that.

So some specialists say that a lot of American companies invest directly in Russia from Europe, rather than from the United States, so they fall into different categories of statistics. But even taking into account that kind of factor, it sounds very small. By the way, currently, Russians are withdrawing from the American market. In 2016, I think our direct investment fell to 7.5 plus-minus billions, so Russian companies are withdrawing. Political uncertainty, among the most important reasons.

Secondly, and looking at the current situation, this factor of sanctions and the gray zones at the State Department and the Department of Finance deliberately create around Russian economic relations also as of confidence of nationality for business. But I spoke to each and every American company that has entered to Russia. All of them are very comfortable. All of them say that they are going to stay. But for new American players

in the Russian market, the current uncertainty is certainly would play a significant role. We see that Europeans are much more actively exploring Russian market from the very beginning, most probably because they understand us better.

The colleagues and leaders from the East like Japan and South Korea are much more audacious than American business and most probably have fewer things to look back on when they take these decisions. But the fact is that economic relations between Russia and the United States are absolutely immature. And it is not an only economic task because there are a lot of other things that are connected to this. I will tell you, I was in Alaska. I spoke to the government of Alaska and asked them. What was the trade between Alaska and neighboring Russia? And there is only 4 km between us. Russia is the closest neighbor of the United States after Mexico and Canada. Not many people understand that. And the trade between Alaska and the Russian Far East is about 11 million dollars, is small. It's almost non-existent. Moreover, if you want to fly from Anchorage to Vladivostok, you first need to fly to Tokyo or Seoul and then fly back to the North East. There are no direct connections, not sea line connecting us. The only exception is chart planes that climb during the hunting season because our bears are so much better than the ones there are in the United States.

QUESTION: Thank you Mr. Ambassador for your in-depth analysis. My question actually is the important amount of structural problems, **legislative problems** created within these bilateral relations. How would you factor in the importance of national interest and if there would be a continued failure in bilateral relations, what would be the alternatives for that situation?

KISLYAK: First of all, for a drastic change in US-American relations probably you need to find consensus on a common understanding of national interest in the United States, which is largely missing. Secondly, I will be honest with you. I've spent 17 years working in the United States. I have never seen Americans so polarized and divided. I've never seen an America so focused on these fights, that they are losing track of things that are really important national interest otherwise. In the current situation, the influence with the President at the White House, the Russian-American relations have become, at least, of fight. And if trust to be so easy for the United States to dispense with Russian-American relations for the sake of fight political combat, so if you listen on a daily basis to the discussions of political factors depriving American issue, which I did many years, even in bad times, Americans are much more focused on their internal themes, the immediate issues, the immediate quality of life changes, rather than thinking about the rest of the world. They have lived behind oceans kind of protected from the calamities of the world, for ages, and only in the line of, I think it has started changes in the mentality of the Americans on all these issues. But at the same time, they are still focused mostly on the internal fights and all international issues that have not directly impact on their physical security in the United States are unsolved. And that is a problem because national interest will define in the United States as well.

QUESTION: The improvement of the relationship between the US and Russia runs through **Ukraine**. Regarding the issue of Crimea, would you comment on where you believe the dialogue between the US and Russia, perhaps, with some bigger Westerns nations that are also saying the same thing that they want to go over the next wild and

whether a new belief that is one of the biggest ways to watch the way forward to US-Russia relations.

KISLYAK: Well, I think that there are a number of road books. Ukraine is one of the bigger ones. In Ukraine there are a number of problems that are blocking progress in our relations with the US, with Canada and Europeans; and sometimes the mixed picture on where we are, if we judge by reading the official statements of the United States, Canada, Russia or Western countries about the future of Ukraine. Everybody supports Minsk Agreements. Almost everybody repeats the same, but the problem comes when we try to define what is to be done in order to see the Minsk agreement implemented. And the position of Western countries on such is, that the Minsk agreement needs to be implemented by Russia. However, Minsk agreement needs to be implemented by the Ukrainians. They have committed to do a number of things that would help people in Lugansk and Donetsk to understand what kind of Ukraine they are invited to rejoin. So there have to be several laws adopted. Honestly, for the people in the two regions, because otherwise if as absolute that means that any arrangement that could be arrived at would lead to them being prosecuted by Kiev and Kiev hasn't implemented the commitment of the Minsk agreement, which is among the first to be done.

Secondly, they need to adopt a law on the status of these Republics, because they need one fixed political solution, they need to understand what their place in the future is going to be, otherwise that anything would be undefined because undefined means continue of the same. And that's the biggest problem. And if you fool the line step by step sequencing of things that need to be done on the Minsk Agreement. You will see that these are among the first and that would lead to come to elections, all the Ukrainian laws that need to be adapted on the situations of these Republics, and in the end of it, Ukrainian government would take control over the whole region including the border with Russia. That is the sequence that was negotiated with the President of Ukraine and that is something that the President of Ukraine never agrees to implement. That is a problem. So, if there are prospects for perishing solutions, I think they lie through the concerted effort by our Western colleagues to convince Ukrainians to implement what Poroshenko signed up to.

QUESTION: Japan is now seeking to strength ties with Russia and from that point of view, we are hoping for an improvement in the relationship between Russia and the United States. The joint effort of both countries is needed to tackle very difficult questions. **Syria** is a good example. What prospective of cooperation between Russia and the United States on this issue?

KISLYAK: I think that Syria is one of the topics on which we can work together in the short term. Secondly, there are some elements of the agreement that have already been issued. We welcomed the joint statement by the two Presidents in Da Nang. I would say that it was kind of breakthrough in joint thinking about Syria. Nevertheless, cementing that level of agreement can help us to work together. But on the ground, there are some smaller and more technical issues that sometimes can undermine the ability of countries to work.

First of all, I will return to what I have already said, by law American military prohibit cooperating with Russians. Even in Syrian deconflicting. On this backdrop, we are yet to see what is going to be the availability of American military to work on the ground, in order to make sure that this is not establishment containment. Certainly very significant disagreements on the future, but it is not the first time. What is important is that we at least agreed to work on de-escalation zones and that was very important because de-escalation zones have become kind of nucleus to the process of re-establishing peace in Syria. We hope that is going to continue in our relations. We are going to have another Astana meeting and Americans coming there usually as observers. From day one, even before President Trump inaugurated as President, we kept Americans fully informed of our plans in Astana. We didn't want any surprises. We want them to fully understand what we are trying to accomplish. We were inviting them. Since then, there have been observers there. I hope this will continue for them to better understand what we are doing and what we are not doing. We certainly need to start working seriously on the future of Syria.

There are some positive signals coming from the American side. For example, Mr. Tillerson suggested that they do not long insist on Assad going before the negotiating process starts, which is a small but necessary departure from the previous position that was blocking serious discussions. So, all these small elements for the cooperation to continue and engagement are still there. And we will see how things could develop. As I said, we are going to keep the doors open. However, we need to overcome a number of difficulties some American matches in the air when we were bombing ISIL, have created questions among our military: what they are trying to accomplish? Then Americans declared they are going to stay in the region. But they do not have any mandate from the UN Security Council or invitation from the government, I said. Syrians are still divided and we certainly would like to see Americans more involved in bringing Syrians together, as a country, rather than using the divisive to impose one-sided agenda that won't be coming from the Syrians themselves.

QUESTION: I would like to know your assessment and the prospects of US-Russian relation on the **Balkans**.

KISLYAK: I am not sure I know of anything in particular about Russian-American relations on the Balkans, except for American campaign in order to undermine the friendship between us and the Serbs in the region. That is something that unfortunately is not new. Most probably it requires some additional energy, and there is an increased pressure on Serbs to make a choice whether they want to be with the West or with Russia. Is it a wrong choice to be close to a country like Serbia? If you asked me out this question, the answer is no. Are we going to continue our friendship? Yes, but we are not going to do anything that would undermine the stability of the Balkans. It is not in our strategic interest.

QUESTION: I would like to know if you think that traditional perception of Russia by the US leadership would change in the future when the **post-cold war generation** of both countries reach the higher decision-making positions.

KISLYAK: First of all, I didn't say that Russia is seen the same way around the world, as it is seen by American leaders. I will not equate American leaders with the rest of

the world. We enjoy phenomenal friendship with many countries outside of the United States and outside Western Europe. So, we have a lot of friends. You should not be deceived by the intensity of anti-Russian campaign in the American press and the Western press. We have friends in BRICS and it's 40% of the population in the world. We have so many friends in our neighborhood. Yesterday, our President went to three countries: Syria, Egypt, and Turkey; each and every country has certain different specific angles of interest in Russia, but we are developing very trustworthy relations with all. We are not limited to the list of these countries. We are actively pursuing friendly relations with all countries, including the United States.

Things will change in the United States. I would say first we need to identify: is it 20 years that's biological changing generation or is it a generation of politicians? What is happening there has created a significant layer of politicians who made their career trying to make themselves known as anti-Trump or anti-Russian agents. I don't expect these particular people to change their mind anytime soon. So how long would it take for them to continue, I don't know. Maybe two election cycles have to occur in the United States in order to bring in new thinking among people, especially taking into account the majority in those in Congress they do not care or know too much about Russia, but because of the current situation, it has become so easy to speak up to Russia. The overall course is defined by a group of politicians to lead the issue. My guess be two elections or cycles at least because there have to be new faces that are interested, at least, to understand what they are talking about.

QUESTION: What is the intake on the occupation of **Crimea**? Because this is one of the essential points that is also leading to a decreasing the situation between the United States, Europe, and Russia because there is a lack of trust. What is really the action of Russia? Is it imperial or not?

KISLYAK: First and foremost, I would like to take an issue with your notion that we occupied Ukraine. And it is not just the topic, most probably not many people in the West understand what happened or want to be honest in assessing what happened in Ukraine. First of all, what happened, was the overthrown of a government, the overthrown of the President, who was elected mainly by the votes of the East part of Ukraine (Donetsk-Lugansk and Crimea). Those are the regions of Ukraine among the strongest supporters of everything that was designed to help to build relations with Russia. When the President that was elected with the votes was taken away by force and nationalist government came to power promising "Ukrainization of all Ukraine" even the regions that are predominantly Russian, not only Russian speakers, everybody in Ukraine is Russian speaker, they are Russian thinkers, many of them are ethnic Russians. They lost the country in which they lived. They lost it because somebody stole it from them, and they didn't agree. That's why they decided to rejoin Russia, that they have been part of since ages. It was their decision, we embraced them in Russia. Is it imperial? No, we simply respected the choice of the people who decided to return to Russia because of the circumstances that were created in Ukraine by people who stole from their country that, more or less was, accommodating all the nationalities. It was their choice, we have adopted that, and we embraced that. They are part of Russia. This issue is closed no matter what our friends in Austria or elsewhere are thinking about it, agreeing with us or disagreeing with us. The issue is closed because these people have to depart from a country that betrayed them. So whether we are

imperialistic or not, I think I answered to you: we are not, but I would certainly not advise our friends to encourage additional overthrows and color revolutions in the world.

BUZHINSKIY: May I have some words about Crimea. You mentioned occupation, well, you will be surprised at the number of special Russian forces and marines, which took part in that operation. Just a few comments, out of 25, 000 Ukrainian troops ,70% afterward decided to continue their service in the Russian armed forces, they didn't hold fire because they refused, not because Kiev forbade to hold fire because they refused to fire. Most of them were locals. So, please, this word of occupation there was no military occupation. That's for sure.

QUESTION: I would like to come back to the United States where you spend so many years. What are your expectations for the future? Do you put your hopes on President Trump for improvement in US-Russia bilateral relations? Is the reconciliation of the two sides in US domestic politics possible?

KISLYAK: First of all, what it is important to understand that **we never invested any particular hopes in candidate Trump versus candidate Clinton.** I was working there and they were preparing the whole set of fires for either option. In the future, we don't invest our hopes in any particular candidate or any particular party. Moreover, if you look at what is happening now in the United States is mind-blowing. Because, the Democrats are blaming the White House for being friendly with Russians and the Republicans now they are trying to initiate an investigation of Ms. Clinton and her camp for colluding with Russia. So whoever you look at everybody is making Russia a scapegoat for the problems that they have. So, there is little chance for us to investing to, but seriously speaking my hopes are maybe more relying on the wisdom of Americans, because they need to overcome this phenomenal polarization of the country. Not for us, not for Russian-American relations, because the country and the political class is polarize, people are getting tired and Russia has nothing to do with that. They are getting tangled in the long war with Republicans and Democrats. And I think in both countries there are people who started doing this together. At some point, they will have to come with some more bipartisanship especially, among other things in foreign policy. They need to define their national interest. The problem is that Americans need to be a little bit more united as to define what the national interest is, when it comes to Russia. And that will take time. It is not connected with anything mindset on might or might not to invest in any political forces in the United States. It is a painful process, I have my own theory about why is happening, but it is very long. They have difficulties in understanding the political changes in the world and that is a big problem and most probably a long-term problem for the United States, because they have grown, not only accustomed, but absolutely convinced that they are exceptional nation. That they are not only asked by the elders to lead the rest of the world, but they think they have the burden of leading the rest of the world and when the world is changing and is becoming less and less, I don't like to use monopolar versus multipolar systems, it's not exactly what I'm trying to say, but when the world is getting less and less controlled from a single capital, and for Americans it's only Washington that can have this role, they have certainly different views on what kind of leadership excerpt in the rest of the world, what kind of pressure against those countries that don't appreciate their leadership and

that's a difficult period for Americans themselves to solve things out and I would take that.

QUESTION: Do you see any potential for cooperation with the United States around **Afghanistan** and the challenges there? Is that an area where one could see coming together or common issues to approach for stability and addressing relevant issues in Afghanistan and the region?

KISLYAK: I would be less than honest if I say that I know how to do that. Because, I fully agree with you, Afghanistan is a region that is important to Americans because they got involved for many years. They have problems to respect themselves in the region without the use of force and I don't see opportunity for them anytime soon to restate their goals. So there has to be more efforts in order to help Afghanistan to come to a more stable, and reliable peace that would be inclusive for Afghans. For us, it is certainly an important region, because is much closer to us than it is to the United States. And the appearance of ISIS in the north of Afghanistan is a greater challenge is in change for our central Asian neighbors and friends; and by virtue of absence of protecting borders between us, it's a challenge to us as well. So there has to be some more multilateral involved, not only on the ground, we are not going to send troops there, but in seeking political solutions and we need to understand when the Americans will be able to do that, because they usually prefer to decide everything themselves, including on the issue of internal dialogue between the Afghans –the Afghans now don't appreciate too much- and I would say that I hope that we didn't longer years specially Syrian issues stabilize, there will be more availability of the Americans and other western partners to work in a more international form in order to bring this in Afghanistan so far seriously. Thank you.

BUZHINSKIY: If there are no more questions, let's thank Ambassador Kislyak for his presentation. I would like to say only a few words about the small group of experts which is working with our General Staff in **Syrian operations**. I would like to say a few words about yesterday decision by the President Putin to withdraw, I would say, part of our group of forces, the major part of our group of forces from Syria.

So, a lot related that Syria would become the second Afghanistan for Russia, for national forces. First of all, the decision to withdraw the major part of our forces from Syria, does not mean that the operation is over. The acting military face of the operation since the estimation is that 80% of the Syrian territory is liberated from the terrorists and now it is under control of the Syrian government, including as it called "the useful Syria", I mean all major cities. Only some part of northern Syria is not under control of the Syrian government. Russia, two years of the operation of course, there would be a lot of studies afterwards about lessons learned, but what our military forces actually did in Syria, we consider to be a **military success**.

From the military point of view, we managed to, first of all, to give our pilots the practice of real war combat conditions, practically all the pilots of our fighter bomber aviation, of long-range aviation, of our interceptors can experience combat experience and managed to pass their abilities in Syria. We managed to work out the coordination under combat conditions between the various branches of forces, mainly between navy and air force, between air force and ground forces, and we manage to give some

experience to Special Forces working under real combat conditions. We managed to combat more than a hundred samples or types of modern combat armaments. Well, our aviation made more than three thousand combat sorties and destroyed tens of thousands of combat targets belonging to ISIS and its allies.

There are a lot of questions about what is left in Syria? Of course when President Putin and the Minister of Defense said that we are withdrawing the major part of our forces that doesn't mean that it will be nothing there. First of all, our "Khmeimim Air Base", we never had an air base in Syria before. Now, we have an agreement without time limit, so we have a real base. When I say real base, of course sometimes people, especially not military, just misunderstand the difference between military base and military facility. We have, I mean, the Russian Federation has very few military bases, just a number of them. Syrian interior will have air force military base, it is already there, but the construction of the air base will continue. The squadron of S 200 for coverage anti-aircraft/anti-missile defense will be left there. The military police will be withdrawn. Most of our Special Forces will be withdrawn. The mining things will be left of course, because there is a lot of work still to be done in Syria, afterwards, and I think our military advisers, which are working now practically with each and every battalion of the Syrian armed forces will also stay there. As for the naval facility in Tartus, it's a naval facility, it is not a base, it does not mean for permanent basing of any warship or even auxiliary ship. It's just the facility mean for resupplying ships, the rest of the cruise of our warships operating in the Mediterranean. I remember the year 2005, when I accompanied the Chief of the General Staff, General Baluyevsky, and we visited Tartus. Of course there was nothing, there was a supply facility, but in practice it was just non-existent. Now, my former colleagues told me that works are on the way. Construction is continuous and it will be the modern supply facility for our navy. So, that's all I wanted to add about Syria and the decision of the President about the withdrawal of forces.