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**Prospects for US-Russia Relations in
the Context of the Biden-Putin Summit**

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Introduction

Today, the main vector of Russia's foreign policy continues to go through a confrontation with the West in the international arena, especially with the United States. This fact is important for international politics and, even more so, for the context of Georgia's national security.

As a whole, so far, the Biden administration's policy toward Russia is not different from that of its predecessors - the Trump administration and the Obama administration. Its main characteristics are poor bilateral relations and sanctions imposed on Russia, since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and launched a military intervention in eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, the US expert community is inclined to say that balancing China's growing influence is a top foreign policy priority of the Biden administration and the realization of this policy could alter US foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia.

The Biden-Putin summit held in Geneva on June 16 this year should be understood as a starting point of the US administration's relations with Moscow. Most probably, the parties have "tested the ground" on many different topics, including those where their positions differ the most. Although, this summit did not bring a drastic change between the two countries, which indeed was less expected, but it has relatively increased the dynamics of the relations between the two countries.

US-Russia Dialogue on Strategic Stability

The Biden-Putin summit of June 16 was indeed outstanding with a busy agenda during which the parties discussed numerous issues. However, according to the official information, an agreement was reached on only one of them; namely, reopening the US-Russia dialogue on strategic stability.

[In a joint statement](#) on the subject, the parties reaffirmed their high responsibility for nuclear weapons control which was reflected in the extension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Agreement to 2026 in early February 2021. According to the same statement, the US and Russia want to lay the foundation for arms control in the future and establish risk mitigation mechanisms by resuming the dialogue on strategic stability.

The resumption of the dialogue on strategic stability is, naturally, important for both sides. This dialogue, which began in the Soviet era, has always emphasized the special role of the United States and Russia in the world as the states with greater nuclear capabilities than others.

Shortly after the end of the summit on July 28, the first meeting on strategic stability was held within the framework of the US-Russia dialogue led by US Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman, and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov. The State Department [covered](#) the meeting positively, calling it professional and meaningful while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation made only [brief information](#) about this meeting public.

The second meeting of this format took place on September 30 shortly after the first meeting. The parties issued a joint [statement](#) following thereafter where they declared that the US and the Russian delegations had agreed to establish two working groups, namely:

- Working Group on Principles and Objectives for Future Arms Control
- Working Group on Capabilities and Actions with Strategic Effects.

At the same time, the US and the Russian delegations agreed that the meetings of these two working groups will be held first and the third meeting will take place only afterwards - within the framework of the strategic dialogue - which is already planned for January 2022.

When [assessing](#) the meeting, Sergei Ryabkov, the head of the Russian delegation, first noted the progress made in setting up the working groups but added that the US and Russia have only a minor agreement of positions in terms of strategic stability. Nevertheless, both sides are willing to continue working in this direction according to Ryabkov.

Ryabkov also commented on the small progress made in the field of cyber security during the talks. It should be noted that cyber security differs in essence from the list of issues which this format of dialogue is supposed to include. However, given its urgency for both sides, this seems to be one of the main topics of discussion at this point.

It is difficult to foresee how the US-Russia dialogue on strategic stability will unfold. In any case, it is quite a long and time-consuming process. At this stage, both sides are interested in maintaining a high dynamic of dialogue and making at least some progress. As for the differences between the positions of the parties, this will become clearer after the abovementioned working groups are set up.

In general, it is [already known that](#) the US will seek a new agreement to include intercontinental nuclear weapons delivery systems and non-strategic nuclear weapons.

As for the Russian side, [it believes](#) that the dialogue should cover everything related to strategic stability, including nuclear and non-nuclear, defensive and offensive weapons. Moscow also considers part of the agenda missile defense systems, conventional long-range and strategic weapons, and the deployment of arms in space.

The Central Asian Issue in US-Russian Relations

The developments since the Biden-Putin summit indicate that a significant chunk of the discussion was devoted to the possible deployment of US military bases in Central Asian countries. On September 22, in the Finnish capital of Helsinki, a meeting was held between the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US Armed Forces, General Mark Milley, and the Chief of the General Staff of Russia, Valery Gerasimov. [According to official information](#), this meeting was a continuation of the dialogue between the US and Russia at the level of senior military officials with the purpose of reducing the risks and avoiding the threats of conflict between each other while conducting military operations in the same geographical area.

However, according to [unofficial information](#), the meeting discussed the issue of the US utilizing Russian military bases in Central Asian countries; in particular, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which was allegedly proposed by the Russian President to US President Joseph Biden during the June 16 summit in Geneva. The [Information](#) about such an offer was disseminated in the Russian media roughly a month after the end of the Biden-Putin summit. However, it does not explicitly state what Vladimir Putin's offer implied.

It can be said with certainty that the deployment of US military bases in Central Asia was indeed one of the main topics of discussion at the Biden-Putin summit as both Russian and American news sources were discussing it rigorously. During a meeting with President Biden, Vladimir Putin [was against](#) the deployment of US military bases in Central Asian countries according to high-ranking US and Russian officials.

It should be noted that such a position on the part of Putin could not have come as a surprise to the US side, at the very least because it was repeatedly, publicly and quite harshly stated by the Russian officials both before and after the summit. Clearly, Russia sees Central Asia as its sphere of influence and its negative stance on the deployment of US military bases there stems primarily from this. At the same time, Moscow is also aware that its ally China is against the deployment of US bases in Central Asia as well. Cooperation with China is one of the main priorities of Moscow's foreign policy, especially when it comes to a joint effort against the United States.

As for the specific reasons, official Moscow speaks about them quite harshly as well. One of the clearest manifestations of this is the position of Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, as [expressed in writing](#) for *The Wall Street Journal*. According to Ryabkov's assessment, which was made in August before the end of the withdrawal process of US troops from Afghanistan: "We do not see how any form of U.S. military presence in Central Asia might enhance the security of the countries involved and/or of their neighbors. It would definitely not be in the interests of Russia. This position has not changed against the backdrop of what is transpiring in Afghanistan these days."

According to US officials, since the US began withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan in May 2021, the ability to obtain intelligence through drones has been [reduced by 90%](#). However, when President Biden announced the beginning of the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, he noted that the United States would maintain intelligence capabilities as well as the capacity to strike preventively against the groups whose bolstering would pose a threat to the United States. [According to](#) a former US military official, reconnaissance layers and strikes in Afghanistan could be carried out from the US military base in Qatar but its effectiveness will be quite low owing to the distance.

The deployment of a US military base in Central Asia from the outset was considered one of the most optimal options for reconnaissance flights and pre-emptive strikes. During the summer, the US had engaged several high-level representatives of Central Asian countries on this matter. In particular, a high-level US delegation led by the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security, Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, [visited Uzbekistan](#) on July 15-16. The delegation included representatives of the US National Security Council, the Department of Defense and the Department of State. The US delegation participated in the C5 + 1 (5 Central Asian countries and the USA) international conference entitled Central and South Asia: Regional Connections. Challenges and Opportunities.

When it comes to the possible deployment of US military bases in Central Asian countries, special emphasis is often placed on Uzbekistan. It is considered that Uzbekistan, which is not a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, has more leeway to decide on such issues independently than other Central Asian countries. Along with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan is also often mentioned as a potential location for US military bases in Central Asia.

Although, the aforementioned and other similar efforts by the US have not yet yielded any significant results; however, it should be noted that this issue has not been removed from the agenda to date. This is illustrated by the fact that high-ranking Russian officials continue to publicly express a negative attitude towards the deployment of US military bases in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. [One such](#) recent statement was made by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, on October 27 while attending a ministerial meeting of the neighboring countries of Afghanistan. In particular, he once again called on these countries not to allow US and NATO military presence on their territory which they plan to do after leaving Afghanistan.

Conclusion

At this point, it is unequivocal that the dynamics of relations between the US and the Russian Federation are gradually increasing. This is illustrated by the two recent high-level working visits to the Russian Federation. In particular, the US Under Secretary of State, Victoria Nuland, was in Moscow on October 11. [According to](#) the official representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, this visit was initiated by the United States. In order for the meeting to be realized, Nuland was removed by the Russian side from the so-called black list as persons from the list are prohibited to enter Russia. [According to](#) the same Zakharova, during Nuland's visit, some foundation for progress between Moscow and Washington was laid. At the same time in Moscow, according to the Russian side, Nuland was provided with a list of issues that need to be resolved in the near future.

It is also noteworthy that the issue of Ukraine was named as one of the main topics of Nuland's visit. [According to](#) Fyodor Lukyanov, a well-known Russian expert on international relations close to the Russian government, Nuland's visit to Moscow is probably linked to the Biden administration's intention to determine how realistic the prospect of a possible escalation of Russian-Ukrainian relations will be.

Ukraine was also named as [one of the main topics](#) of the visit of the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, William Burns, which took place in early November. In particular, the main purpose of Burns' visit was to inform Moscow that the United States was closely monitoring Russia's military mobilization near the Ukrainian border and understand Russia's motivation for these actions.

The fact that Ukraine, along with Georgia and the Black Sea region as a whole, remains a priority for the United States is validated by the visit of US Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, to Georgia, Ukraine and Romania in the second half of October after which he participated in the NATO Defense Ministerial. Indeed, the main political message of this visit was that despite various difficulties, the United States remains a supporter of its allies and continues to see their security as an important task.

Overall, it can be said that the US, despite the increased dynamics of the relations with Russia, is not considering any compromise at the expense of the security of its allies. These relations primarily aim to outline common interests in international security issues, enabling US-Russian cooperation on specific issues. It is also unlikely that Moscow, which sees itself as a major geopolitical adversary of the US, will substantially reconsider its policy towards Washington. Consequently, we should expect a continuation of mainly difficult and problematic relations between the two countries.