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**CSIS PRESS BRIEFING: PRESIDENT OBAMA'S TRIP TO PRAGUE,
THE START TREATY AND THE NUCLEAR SECURITY SUMMIT**

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good morning and welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'm Andrew Schwartz. I'm vice president for external relations here at CSIS and I'm joined by my colleagues who I'll introduce to you in a minute. This briefing will be available later on Facebook today. CSIS has a Facebook page which I urge all of you to visit. It's also available – video and audio and transcript on CSIS.org. And with that, we'll get started. And also for you iTunes users, this will be on the Beyond Campus section of iTunes University.

My colleagues Andrew C. Kuchins, Sharon Squassoni and Janusz Bugajski are some of the top experts in the world with this region. And they've got a lot to say about various things that are associated with this visit. In addition, you'll find before you an example of our critical questions. And this is Sharon Squassoni's critical questions on the nuclear security summit. This will also be at CSIS.org. With that, I'd like to introduce my colleague, Dr. Andrew Kuchins, who directs our Russia program.

ANDREW KUCHINS: Thanks very much, Andrew. It's a great pleasure to be here. And thanks for joining us this morning for our briefing. And I promise I won't talk about my personal over/under on Tiger Woods' performance in the Masters coming up this week.

Now, the START I replacement treaty, which is going to be signed in Prague on Thursday – I want to beware of overselling the importance of this agreement, but it is really significant for the U.S.-Russia relationship, the so-called “reset” in the U.S.-Russia relationship and also President Obama's ambitious goals for nuclear security and further reductions in nuclear weapons.

I don't want to oversell it, but a long journey begins with a first step. And if he didn't have this first step, then pretty much both of those agendas would be severely hampered. And it was extremely important that this agreement be reached before the nuclear nonproliferation treaty in May, as well as, of course, the nuclear summit coming up here in Washington next week, which I'm sure my colleague Sharon will talk more about.

You know, about a month ago – the agreement is also important for President Obama's political capital, both domestically and more so, internationally. You know, when he was first elected, my sense was that this guy had a chance to be either one of the greatest presidents in American history because of the circumstances or an unsuccessful one-term president.

And about a month ago, it was looking more like the former than the latter (sic). And with the combination of the health-care bill passing and the START I replacement treaty, he's looking considerably more successful in this political capital – again, not only important here at home, but it's also extremely important for him abroad and how he's viewed by other international leaders.

Now for the U.S.-Russia relationship, which I'll talk about mostly in my few minutes. For the reset, there have been three key issues on security relations that have been driving the Obama administration's desire to improve relations with Moscow: The first and most important has been Iran and the urgency of their nuclear weapons program.

The second has been Afghanistan and the much larger bet that the Obama administration has placed – or higher priority the Obama administration has placed on winning the war in Afghanistan. And therefore, the role the Russians play in providing supply and transit of materials both lethal and non-lethal to our troops in theater. And the third is, of course, the nuclear security agenda, which without making progress with Russia is impossible to move forward on.

I think there's no question as we look at the 15 months or 14 months since the Obama administration has taken power that the U.S.-Russian relationship has improved considerably. Now, it's improved from a very low point. It's a very low bar. In fact, if the relationship had not improved, which it was basically frozen at the end of the Bush administration after the war in Georgia, there was the danger of – literally – of a new Cold War.

And amongst the achievements, one of them which is not talked about so much – and maybe I should knock on wood when I talk about this – is the fact that there has not been another war in Georgia in the last year-and-a-half since the war in August of 2008. And I know that my colleagues in the Defense Department, the National Security Council and the State Department – they spent a lot of time on this issue and ensuring that this does not happen.

And I think when they got a call in the middle of the night a week ago about the tragedy of the bombing of the Moscow metro, I think one of their first thoughts might have been whether another war had started in Georgia. So I underline that as a significant achievement, but one which is not often talked about.

The relationship has also been broadened considerably with the establishment of the commission between Secretary of State Clinton and Foreign Minister Lavrov and the 16 working groups. And that's important.

But there – most importantly probably, aside from no war in Georgia, is that there has been progress on the three key security drivers – Iran, Afghanistan and nuclear security – in the relationship. And as long as we have fairly modest expectations about what we can get out of the relationship with Russia, we're less likely to be disappointed. And that's been my line consistently for the last 15 months because particularly when you look at these three issues, our interests are not exactly fully aligned.

Now, I'm not going to talk about Iran and Afghanistan so much. Let's just look at the START I treaty. When we'd looked at the reset button 15 months ago, this was talked about as the low-lying fruit. This was going to be the so-called easy achievement. Well, the agreement was a little bit more complicated to reach than expected. And there was danger a month ago, I felt, that the low-lying fruit might actually become the poisoned fruit of the reset, but that's not been the case.

Now, why the length of the negotiations? Well, you know, first of all, for the presidents to agree on this in April of 2009 and try to reach the deadline of December 5, 2009, at the expiration of the START I agreement – that's awfully ambitious in the first place.

Two, I think the Russians viewed that they had some leverage with the Obama administration. I think they view that for the Obama administration perhaps this agreement was more important for them than it was for Moscow and that led them to press hard in the tail end of the negotiations, which, for three or four months, it seemed like we were 97 percent there and never quite getting beyond 97 percent.

You know, three – and maybe this is the most important – this agreement, like any kind of agreement about security cooperation with – between Moscow and Washington – it brings into the debate the whole relationship itself. And I just want to remind you that for the Russians, they are still operating under a military doctrine which identifies the United States and the West – but principally the United States and NATO – as the number-one risk or threat to their security.

So our strategic outlooks are quite different. I mean, we – the United States – I think we really have moved on from the Cold War and we're looking at a different threat environment. And for the Russians, it's not quite in sync. And that's a problem. And I think if you talk to the Americans that were involved in the negotiations, it was clear that some political forces and military and security forces were exercising or obstructing the agreement in the tail-end. But we got it.

The other point I would make is that for the role of the nuclear weapons is there's an asymmetry for Washington and Moscow. For the Russians, because of the deterioration of the conventional weapons projection capability, nuclear weapons are more important in their overall military doctrine. For us, the reverse is true probably to some extent. And I think that gets to the question of how possible or how difficult future agreements are going to be getting to a next round of reductions with the Russians, which I think are going to be considerably tougher and we can talk about more.

Let me just say a word about the Prague trip because it's my understanding that in the meeting between Mr. Obama and Mr. Medvedev in Prague, the principal issue that's going to be discussed are going to be sanctions on Iran. And it will be important to work out something closer to an agreement with the Russians about the language in the areas on sanctions before negotiating with the Chinese, who will be – Hu Jintao will be in town here next week for the nuclear summit.

Broadly speaking, if I have about a minute left? Okay. The strategy of the Obama administration, I think, has been to try to convince the Russians that, you know, it probably is in your interest to have a better relationship with us, Washington, than one with Tehran if you think about your interests. And to think about your interests somewhat differently.

And if we aren't able to reach a meeting of the minds on sanctions, you know, then other things – for example, possible WTO accession, a civilian-nuclear 1-2-3 agreement, even the

ratification of START, START I – all those things are really going to be jeopardized on Capitol Hill, where there's not a whole lot of sympathy towards the Russians.

The Russian strategy consistently on the Iranian nuclear issue and sanctions has been to try to find a way to appear that they are cooperating with the United States and our allies on this while not having to make a hard decision about selling Tehran down the road. There was a big hullabaloo in the fall when Mr. Medvedev said that the Russians are not categorically opposed to sanctions on Iran. I thought that was completely overplayed because the Russians have already supported three rounds of sanctions against Iran in the U.N.

Lastly, I think the administration would like to – and from a strategic sense, particularly in the reset with the Russians – is try to regain some leverage in the U.S.-Russia-China relationship. And I think it is worth – I'll leave you with this thought in my opening remarks. While I think it's appropriate to have modest expectations about the reset with the Russians, when I look at the three key security issues driving the relationship – Iran, Afghanistan and nuclear security – I would conclude that probably Moscow's position on all three of those sets of issues are closer to us than are Beijing. And maybe that's something to think about. Thanks.

MR. SCHWARTZ: With that, I'd like to introduce my colleague, Sharon Squassoni. Sharon is the director and senior fellow for our proliferation program and she's just joined us from Carnegie. And we're very happy to have her. And this is her first briefing here at CSIS.

SHARON SQUASSONI: Thanks, Andrew. I guess I'm the functional specialist here. I'm going to talk a little bit about the nuclear security summit that will take place in Washington next Monday. Andrew mentioned the sort of three-pronged agenda that President Obama laid out last April in Prague. There's nuclear arms control and disarmament, nonproliferation and nuclear security.

This April summit next week takes place just a month before the review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that happens every five years. President Obama needs a big win. He needs something – (chuckles) – to gain more cooperation and collaboration from other members of the treaty. And so I think the nuclear security summit was designed with that in mind, to have something that would be splashy, that would have style but also have substance just one month before this important review conference.

So what's going to happen? We're going to have 44 total – 44 heads of state, we'll have Hu Jintao from China and Medvedev. Manmohan Singh from India. And the Prime Minister Gilani from Pakistan and Bebe Netanyahu from Israel. Iran and North Korea will not show up and that's probably for the best. (Chuckles.) There will be a state dinner or a heads of state dinner on the night of April 12th and then there will be two plenary sessions on the 13th that will focus on both national measures and on international cooperation to enhance nuclear security.

More importantly, this is a big opportunity. I guess not since 1949 has there been such a big gathering of heads of state. And so as Andrew mentioned, this will be an opportunity to discuss sanctions on Iran, other pressing bilateral issues and, of course, some of these nuclear nonproliferation issues one month before that conference.

On substance, this is a little trickier. And one of the questions that I often get is, what is nuclear security? (Chuckles.) What is this going to cover? Not everyone agrees on which material poses the biggest threat or how big the threat is. And so one of the functions of this conference will be to obtain greater agreement.

Let's start with a couple facts and then I'll leave a lot of time for your questions. Since 1993, there have been more than 1600 illicit nuclear trafficking incidents that have been reported to the IAEA. Not all of these have been serious. Not all of them have involved weapons-usable material. But what it demonstrates is that there's a market out there. (Chuckles.) There's interest in trafficking in this material.

This summit – when you look at the kinds of material, you can look at things in weapons stockpiles. You can look at weapons-usable material, which is not just stuff in weapons and stockpiles but also in the civilian nuclear energy sector in research reactors. The third category of material is radioactive materials that you find everywhere – in hospitals – these are sources that are used for cancer treatments, those kinds of things.

So some, particularly our European allies, believe we should focus on those radioactive materials because they're not well guarded, they're a target of opportunity for terrorists. You can't make a nuclear weapon with them, however. But you can make what we call a dirty bomb, a radioactive weapon. And many experts agree that that is what terrorists would probably seek.

Nonetheless, this security summit next week will focus on the weapons-usable material. There is enough material, depending on who you talk to, for between 120,000 weapons or 300,000 weapons. That range demonstrates right there that we need to do more. We need to exchange more information. There needs to be a lot more transparency. And this is a job that is for all countries – not just nuclear-weapon states, not just nuclear-weapon holders like India, Pakistan and Israel, but for all states.

And so going back to the agreement on what the threat is – one of the functions of this summit will be to get greater agreement on the fact that there is a threat, to get all countries to say, yes, we agree this is a problem. So the White House hopes for four things: that countries will be engaged, they will be more aware, they will pledge to do something about this, they will adopt best practices and they will provide assistance to other countries.

The nongovernmental organizations – that community hopes for a little bit more. Don't just focus on the existing regime, but do more. Actually consolidate, maybe eliminate these global stockpiles of material. I am going to leave your specific questions about what countries can do for the Q&A section.

But this will be – even if – I just want to close with – even if there is a communiqué that is full of flowery language about each country's – (chuckles) – commitments, even that will be helpful in this effort against nuclear terrorism, primarily because we all know what to do, but we're lacking the political will to do it and get it done in the shortest amount of time. Thanks.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Sharon. I'd like to introduce my colleague, Janusz Bugajski. Janusz is the Lavrentis Lavrentiadis Chair in Southeast Europe Studies. He's also the director of our new European democracies project. And he's a senior fellow in our Europe program. And Janusz is going to talk about this aspect of the trip. Thanks.

JANUSZ BUGAJSKI: Okay, thanks very much, Andrew. Good morning and welcome, everyone. I'm going to be exceptionally brief and I'm going to focus on President Obama's meeting with the Central European leaders, which he's planned in Prague, I believe, Thursday evening for a dinner.

And I would say this to begin with: Paradoxically, President Obama's planned meeting with 11 leaders from the new democracies, the new NATO allies, is attended to demonstrate that relations with Central Eastern Europe have not been reset or have not been downgraded, which is the way it's perceived in some parts of the region.

In other words, despite attempts to upgrade relations with Russia as Andy's been saying, primarily through the START treaty, the U.S. will not, according to the Obama administration – and let me make five points here – one, weaken its commitments to NATO's security guarantees; two, withdraw militarily from Europe; three, agree to any redivision of the continent into blocs or spheres of influence – the continent meaning Europe, the old continent – four, close the door to further NATO enlargement eastwards; and five, make any grand bargains with Moscow over the heads of former Soviet satellites in Central Eastern Europe.

However, I would say the very fact that such reassurances need to be emphasized indicates that several capitals in the region remain troubled – not just about Russia's aspirations in the neighborhood, but about U.S. and NATO policy towards Russia. For this reason, there are several landmark developments ahead that will prove significant for the new allies – and I think these are going to be discussed at the dinner – countries that are seeking not only reassurance, but an upgrade of NATO's security commitments.

Let me mention three: first of all, the framing of NATO's new Strategic Concept which is in the works, which is being worked out as we speak and how Russia is interpreted and depicted in the document. Secondly, NATO's summit in Lisbon in November and what commitments are made to enlargement, mutual defense and NATO's role over the coming decade. There's a huge debate over what role NATO is playing. Is it a global NATO? Is it NATO back-to-basics? Or how can the two be combined? And there's different views on how this should be structured.

And three, the contours of the new missile defense system. Remember President Obama cancelled the Bush version, but he's now talked about his own version, his own alternative version to which several countries in Central Eastern Europe have already quickly signed up, including Romania, possibly Bulgaria, certainly the Poles and the Czechs are interested. The question there is exactly how this will be an integrated NATO system, how will Russia and if Russia will be included in the planned system as the NATO secretary general has been offering over the past few weeks.

It is worth remembering in this context that one of the reasons Warsaw and Prague initially signed onto the Bush version of the missile defense was not so much defense against Iran but to try and establish a closer bilateral link with the United States, bilateral military link with the United States – at a time when doubts over NATO's solidarity were growing, as several West European countries had reset their relations with Russia to quite warm, if not very warm, which troubled some countries in the region.

So to summarize or to conclude, let me say this, that the Central European states bordering Russia are concerned about Russia's ambitions in countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Andrew mentioned the possibility of another war in Georgia. It's not to be discounted. And the pressure that Moscow can exert even on their own security, particularly with the most – more vulnerable three Baltic states.

As proof of NATO's Article 5 defense guarantees, they have pushed the alliance to prepare for contingency plans for their defense, which is now evidently taking place for the three Baltic states, to stage more regular exercises – not just air exercises – in the eastern part of NATO. Russia has staged quite, I would say, provocative exercises last year next to the Polish and Baltic borders and NATO did not respond.

And even to position some NATO infrastructure on their territories. This is why this month actually the deployment of a battery of Patriot missiles with a small American contingent in Poland – northern Poland – is considered extremely important because in some way, it ties NATO closer to the defense of these countries.

They also – last point – they also want greater clarity as to how NATO countries interpret Article 5, which is subject to some debate. And proof that the alliance is an effective deterrence policy. Let me stop there and if you have any questions, happy to answer.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Great. We'll open it up to questions now. Questions. Julianna.

Q: Thank you. Julianna Goldman with Bloomberg News. I was wondering if you could elaborate a bit. You talked about the political capital that the president has now. And just the capital he has with European leaders because of the START treaty and how that will play out with other issues, other nuclear issues this year and looking forward.

MR. KUCHINS: It's a great question. It's hard to quantify. You know, I just think that given the success that the administration has experienced in the last month, you know, international leaders, whether they're in Europe or elsewhere, I think they have to regard the administration, which is –

I mean, there was a broad tendency, I think, and kind of an increasing tendency – understandably, given the difficulty of the first year of the Obama administration – to sort of, you know, well, he's weak, it's discounted and this is not – you know, we may not be dealing with this guy in 2012 and beyond. I think that calculation has to look different now than just a month ago.

How it's going to play out on the – well, the most imminent question is how it's going to play out on the sanctions on Iran. And I think that behind the scenes the administration has been getting closer to a meeting of the minds, not only with the Russians but also to some extent with the Chinese.

And I would point to the fact that Hu Jintao decided to come to the nuclear summit next week as – you know – (chuckles) – this may not be, sort of, direct – you can't directly tie a correlation necessarily between a victory in health care and the START I treaty and that. But the fact that he's coming here sort of bolsters that image that this is a president which is looking more successful.

How successful they're going to be with the sanctions on Iran – and I don't think anybody in the Obama administration has any illusions that whatever sanctions are leveled on the Iranians that this is going to solve the problem. But we'll just have to wait and see. Maybe some of my colleagues have some other comments on that.

Q: I'm Christi Parsons from the Chicago Tribune. Could you follow up just a bit – what are we likely to see? Will there be developments this week, in the coming week on sanctions on Iran? And how would they become evident? What are you expecting?

MS. SQUASSONI: In a lot of ways, we're in the same place we've always been on sanctions on Iran. Over the past few years, we've tried to target sanctions, so that they didn't affect the Iranian people as a whole – all the while knowing that the kinds of things which would really get the Iranians attention are the kinds of things that hurt. So restrictions on refined petroleum products into Iran – they not only hurt the Iranian people, but they hurt Iran's trading partners.

You know, it's easy for the U.S. to talk about sanctions. We don't have a big trading relationship with Iran. It's a lot harder with Russia and China – particularly China. So the effort right now since Iran has really refused to comply with U.N. Security Council resolutions and even the kind of olive branch offering in the fall to get back to the negotiating table.

We're engaged in an effort to get another round of U.N. Security Council resolutions. And the issue is will China at best support if – or a not-so-bad outcome would be if they just abstained. And how much will Russia support a new round of sanctions. There are lot of things that can be done outside of the U.N. Security Council. And a lot of those measures that deal with transactions at banks, et cetera, have been helpful. But Iran shows no sign of either returning to the negotiating table or halting its enrichment program.

And so I think we're in a slightly better position. The Chinese have shown a little bit more flexibility. Up until now, they have been sort of – taken a principled stand against sanctions. But we'll have to see. This security summit next week really does offer an opportunity to talk on the margins. This is what happens at major summits. And so I think the hope is – there as well as this meeting in Prague – is that we can bring, you know, first Russia and then China along.

MR. KUCHINS: I don't think we're going to see sanctions on the energy sector – oil and gas sector. And I am skeptical we're going to see sanctions also on arms exports to Iran. I think both the Russians and the Chinese are not going to sign on that for different reasons. It looks like there is a decent likelihood of more restrictions in the banking sector and try to restrict the access that some of the political leadership and political economic elite has to capital.

Now, one of the positive things that I took note of about two weeks ago was the report that actually the Russians and the Chinese have made a demarche to the Iranians about their failures to be more forthcoming with the IAEA on their nuclear weapons program. That was a little bit lost because it was the same week in which it was announced that the START I treaty was basically agreed to. But in a debriefing at the National Security Council, that was – they pointed to that as quite a positive sign.

Now, it's kind of interesting – they weren't able to say to what – whether this – they expected that it was a Russian initiative to the Chinese, but nobody was quite sure about that, which again kind of raises the interesting aspect of the, kind of, how the Russian and Chinese relationship – to what extent are they together and to what extent are we breaking them off somewhat. I think it's clear that on Iran that the Russians are closer to us than the Chinese are.

MR. BUGAJSKI: If I could just add very briefly in terms of Russian policy towards Iran, it's very ambiguous, I would say. On the one hand, they don't want Iran to develop a nuclear capability. On the other hand, they don't want a U.S.-Iranian rapprochement because in terms of their zero-sum calculations, greater U.S. influence in the region means lesser Russian influence in the region.

So in a way it suits them to have for us a little bit of a problem in the region with Iran – not one that gets out of hand and descends into some sort of strike against Iranian nuclear facilities or what we suspect are nuclear facilities or for them to develop a nuclear device that could be deployable, that could be used.

So it's this ambiguous position and we see the same, I think, in Afghanistan. In other words, they want to help us. They don't want us to lose. But they don't want us to win either. So it's a sort of tying down American resources, restricting American influence and using themselves as a potential mediator and problem solver. That's part of the strategy.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Margaret.

Q: Thanks. Margaret Talev with McClatchy. It sounds like you're all saying we should look at the Prague trip as – in the sort of larger context of all these things that are going to be happening over the course of the next month. So in that vein, two questions: We're looking at the release of the NPR tomorrow, the White House says. And I want to ask you how that all fits in with this.

And then also – India, Pakistan, they'll both be participating in the summit. And I'm curious what sort of interplay between those countries you'll be watching over the next month.

And also how President Karzai's recent comments in Afghanistan, you think, will factor into the meetings in Prague and all the discussions in terms of what to expect.

MS. SQUASSONI: I'll start on the NPR. (Chuckles.) The Nuclear Posture Review – not National Public Radio. (Laughter.) The long-awaited Nuclear Posture Review. What this had done in the past – it's a congressionally mandated document – it sets out the role of nuclear weapons in U.S. national security strategy. And it's no coincidence that the Bush administration's Nuclear Posture Review basically said, well, we can down to, I guess it was 2,000 warheads. And that's what you saw in the SORT treaty – the Moscow treaty.

And so the Nuclear Posture Review this time around should – you know, it will talk about, what are the primary uses of nuclear weapons? What are levels that we can live with? I don't think there's going to be a whole lot that will be very surprising, but it should support what the Obama administration is doing with both new START and follow-on negotiations there.

On India and Pakistan, you know, Pakistan is probably – even though the nuclear security summit is not designed, and hopes to avoid actually, pointing fingers at any single country – but obviously the issue of nuclear security is a big one in Pakistan – both the security of nuclear material and the security of their nuclear weapons. I don't think we'll – I can't imagine we're going to see too much – (chuckles) – too much progress between India and Pakistan at this summit, but I think it's a good thing that both are at least attending.

Andy, do you want to –

MR. KUCHINS: Well, one comment about the administration's going-to-zero agenda, which as Secretary of Defense Gates said last week is not anything that's going to happen soon. But I mean, one of the fundamental problems about that agenda is that – is enlisting the support of other countries with it, beginning with the Russians and then the Chinese, then the Indians and the Pakistanis and so on, so on down the line.

I mean, nobody else in the world – no other nation-state in the world which is an officially recognized or unofficially recognized nuclear-weapon state is particularly enthusiastic about it because the United States enjoys – particularly for the Russians.

I mean, here's the rub. For the Russians, their concern is that the combination of their eroding – the tremendous erosion of their conventional weapons forces plus the deteriorating numbers on offensive forces, plus the U.S. conventional weapons development in which they have weapons which are close to near-nuclear capabilities, plus the development of missile defenses – all of that, from the Russian standpoint and the Russians are not alone in this – see this as potentially making the world safe for American military intervention whenever we want. And that's a core tension and challenge for the agenda.

It's pretty easy to understand when we are spending 55 percent of world expenditures on global arms and telling the rest of the world that we should be moving very, very aggressively down in their nuclear weapons, which for them is sort of the asymmetric balancer. That's a

pretty tough nut to crack. It's going to become more telling as we get beyond the START I replacement treaty.

On the Karzai comments, wow. Sometimes, with friends like that, who needs enemies? But sorry, we are on TV. I mean, this is the crux of the problem in Afghanistan and if, indeed – is it true that Mr. Karzai is going to be at the nuclear summit in Washington next week? Sorry? That was a reference to the May 12 separate meeting, which is still on as of today. Well, obviously, one of the core problems we face in Afghanistan is the competitive instincts of Pakistan and India. And so I would have to think that, with both of their leaders here next week, that may be a point of discussion, hopefully.

With the upcoming planned offensive in Kandahar, you know, Ambassador Eikenberry was here recently and his comment was, you know: This is one part political. Excuse me, one part military and five parts political. The one part military the Afghan leadership is likely to support. The five parts political: big, big question mark.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Welcome to the bipartisan, non-ideologically driven Center for Strategic International Studies. Right over here, Francine.

Q: Francine Kiefer from the Christian Science Monitor. I'd like to go back to the reset with Russia subject. Could you talk a little bit about the political aspect of it? And whether you see any relationship developing between Obama and Medvedev, whether that could cause a split between Medvedev and Putin in terms of direction of the country. Just where do you see the politics going and Obama, perhaps, finding a better friend in Medvedev than he may find in Putin?

MR. KUCHINS: Well, I think there's no question that President Obama finds it easier and more pleasant to interact with Mr. Medvedev than he does with Mr. Putin. It's a tricky point. On foreign policy and security issues, my view has been, and my discussions with administration officials confirm this, that there really isn't any space between them on foreign policy and security issues that they see that is significant.

What is significant is – and, you know, I've observed this myself, simply from meeting with the two of them separately – they really do have different outlooks on the development of Russia. They talk about it very, very differently. You know, the fact that Medvedev is a lot younger, that he does have experience in the private sector; he does have what we would call a more liberal outlook on things than does Mr. Putin. It's impossible to miss that.

Now, what's going to happen politically in Russia – (chuckles) – is impossible to predict. I mean, I would be very, very wary of making any bets against Vladimir Putin. And I would be very, very wary about being viewed overtly as trying to support Mr. Medvedev domestically at the expense of Mr. Putin. We may have more potential to endanger Mr. Medvedev than we have, actually, to help. We and most other countries don't have a particularly good track record in trying to intervene in other countries' domestic politics. And I think particularly in the case of Russia, where it is so – the issue of sovereignty is so sensitive – that has to be handled with the utmost care.

Q: Emily Cadei with CQ-Roll Call, and I was just wondering if you could talk about the role of Congress. And particularly on the START treaty ratification, but also, just in general, how much they can be an obstacle to what the White House is trying to do when it comes to Iran sanctions and some of these other issues high on the agenda.

MS. SQUASSONI: That's a great question, thank you. Congress can obviously be a big obstacle when it comes to nuclear arms control. And that is because on the START treaty, the Senate has to consent to ratification. On the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is something else that this administration supports, they can also be an obstacle there. I think that we haven't yet – I mean, we've seen some things from the Hill, from particular senators expressing, well, expressing their views on certain issues related to this: on verification, on missile defenses, on several of those things.

I think the Obama administration has tried to head them off at the pass, one, with a few speeches by Vice President Biden and a lot of money for the nuclear weapons complex, which many thought would be kind of a prerequisite for Senate approval in some of these nuclear arms control areas. But we'll see what happens with the debate on START. I don't think that there're – and correct me if I'm wrong – there are too many – this new START treaty is, on the face of it, incremental. There is nothing in there on missile defense. It doesn't seem, from a rational, technical perspective, that there are too many leaps here.

But, you know, politics is politics and there can be any number of different bargains that can be asked for. I would say that, you know, I particularly was hoping that Obama would be able to do a series of unilateral moves that wouldn't depend so much on congressional approval. And we'll see in the coming days, particularly in the next two weeks, I think we'll see some more views emerging from Congress, not just on START, but on the Nuclear Posture Review, whether there's dissatisfaction there.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Questions?

Q: A couple things. Do you anticipate that when President Obama meets with President Medvedev, that will be a meeting to, sort of, get the Russians to sign off on Iran sanctions? Similarly when President Hu comes here in the subsequent week. Should we look at both of those meetings as a potentially face-to-face signoff on Iran sanctions? Do you think we're on that kind of timetable? I know it's hard to know for sure, but for those of us covering it and around it, should we consider that one of the dead-central items of that agenda?

Secondly, whatever happens at the Security Council, do you think it would be likely and advisable for the EU or some organization to do another component of sanctions? Do you think Europe would be open to that? Do you think that's something we should anticipate after whatever the Security Council does or does not come up with? Lastly, almost every treaty that's been of this nature, there's been a tremendous conversation on the numbers. We haven't talked numbers at all. Is that because the numbers aren't impressive, or it's about something else? And I've thrown a lot out, so I'll stop there.

MR. KUCHINS: On the Iran question, I'm operating under the assumption that the meeting in Prague is very important to get signoff with Mr. Medvedev, or get that much closer to it, and that the following week the meeting with Hu Jintao – there'll be a meeting with Hu Jintao and the Chinese. Now, that may be overly ambitious, but that looks to be the sequencing from my standpoint. The Russians are closer to us on this. The hope has always been that you get the Russians and that'll help to bring the Chinese along.

I've always kind of been intrigued by the idea of, let's see if – because the Chinese, traditionally, have been quite happy to kind of hide behind Russian opposition to sanctions and Russian vocal opposition on a lot of issues, be it missile defense or NATO expansion or others that the Chinese are not particularly enthusiastic about either. And on the Iran sanctions, what's been kind of interesting – this round, with the Obama administration, they've been pretty explicit in talking about this on the reset. Getting the Russians to come on board, that's the litmus test.

Now, if you ask him whether that's the litmus test with the U.S.-China relationship, no, it's not, which reflects, A, the much greater leverage that the Chinese have in the bilateral relationship with the United States than the Russians in particular. And that's a pretty interesting and telling, I think, change of affairs from even just a few years ago, where the Russian support was viewed as, you get that, then you've got the Chinese. I think that whole paradigm is –

Q: If it ever existed.

MR. KUCHINS: Exactly. If it ever existed, I think it's broken. And the Chinese have shown themselves, on a number of different issues over the past year, to be willing to be more in front in opposition to U.S. interests. I'm sorry, the question on the nuclear treaty?

Q: The numbers.

MR. KUCHINS: The numbers? Well, Sharon, do you want to talk about the numbers?

MS. SQUASSONI: Sure, but I was going to refer to – I think that there's less of an obsession with numbers because of the reason that Andy gave earlier, which is that the U.S. does not – or, there are many in the U.S. that do not – fear Russia as the major strategic competitor. Maybe Andy can talk about the discussion in Russia over numbers, but there's another thing. First, the numbers are not so low compared to what they were previously. And it also depends on what you're comparing it to. Are you comparing it to the original?

Q: And how you're counting.

MS. SQUASSONI: And how you're counting. So, you know, is it the original START agreement that we're comparing to? Is it the Moscow SORT treaty? The White House has come out and said: Well, this is, you know, 30 percent lower than the SORT levels. But in the end, do you really care? When the warheads start to get – now we're at 1550, right? One thousand, five hundred and fifty.

When they start to get to the thousand level, or below, then you're really going to start to care about numbers because then you're talking about – do we continue to have a strategic triad? You know, are we going to still continue to have missiles and bombers and submarines? And who else do you need to bring into the negotiations? It then becomes a multilateral arms control negotiation. And, you know, previous administrations were always focused on the bilateral U.S.-Russian or U.S.-Soviet. The Obama administration has said, yeah, we're going to pursue multilateral arms control, so the big question will be: At what point can you bring in those other players?

MR. KUCHINS: To follow up on that, I think for the administration the most important things were, one, that we get the treaty done. With the expiration of the START I treaty in December, it meant you were going to lose the entire verification and monitoring regime that went along with that. So I think for the Obama folks, being able to replace the treaty and maintain a significant degree of that verification and monitoring regime is probably the most important achievement, from the standpoint of U.S. national security, with the treaty.

For the Russians, the numbers are – for the Russians, talk over the last decade or so in nuclear circles with Russians and you often – they can talk about getting down to 1,000 weapons. And I think that seems to be a relatively reasonable proposition for them. It's kind of interesting how that is – over this negotiation, I mean, getting to where we are with this treaty was harder than some expected.

And I think getting to that next step is going to be harder, unless we are willing to really kind of address the strategic stability relationship and talk about the role of missile defenses and include – and you can't be finessed in the next round, I don't think. I'm fairly certain of that from the Russian standpoint. And also the role of long-range precision-guided conventional munitions, that's what really, again, is sort of the concern of the Russian military and strategic planners in where this is going.

Q: On sanctions or anything else, likely to (revise it)?

MS. SQUASSONI: Well, I think we're going to have to consider if – well, if there's no discernible progress on a U.N. Security Council resolution, we will, of course, consider other options. And the question is: Which of the European allies will be most helpful there? The French are espousing their help, but probably it'll be the –

Q: They're talking big.

MS. SQUASSONI: Yeah, they are talking big. But the Germans will probably, in the end, be a little more helpful. You know, I think we continue on the same path we've been going down, which is to look at this at every single level, not just the top-level, highly political, highly visible ones.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Janusz, did you want to add to that?

MR. BUGAJSKI: Not particularly, no.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Okay, great. Questions?

Q: I'm Carol Lee with Politico. Going back to the reset, can you guys elaborate a little bit on what the recent suicide bombings mean to that effort?

MR. KUCHINS: For me, the suicide bombings, especially the bombings that took place in Moscow last Monday, on the metro, is a reminder that, you know, Russia is probably – if you look at the United States, Europe and Russia – Russia is probably the most vulnerable of those three countries, three regions, to terrorist attack and to the possibility of catastrophic terrorist attack.

And whoever carried out these bombings, it was a very, very powerful statement to, you know, undertake them underneath – or very close to being underneath – to the former KGB building, the institution which has primary responsibility for the protection of the Russian people. It is a little bit, sort of, analogous to the symbolic import of taking out the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and with the aspiration of taking out the Capitol as well.

You know, how it's going to play out is hard to predict. On the domestic political front in the past, over the past decade, there's no question that terrorist attacks have played to the favor of Mr. Putin and as a justification for the further centralization of political power, et cetera. We have seen, in response to this attack, I think, a considerable difference between Mr. Putin and Mr. Medvedev.

You know, Mr. Putin has resorted to his usual playbook of “we're going to pull them all out of the sewer,” like taking them out of the outhouse and that kind of very, very tough talk. And we've seen some of that tough talk from Medvedev as well. What we've also seen from Medvedev is that this is a reminder that, really, the core problem is the terrible socioeconomic conditions in the North Caucasus, which are the driver for these groups to attack, which is not something we hear from Mr. Putin.

Q: Francine Kiefer again, from the Monitor. So how could the U.S. administration assist Russia at all in the antiterrorism fight? Obama said we stand ready to help, last week. How could he do that and would Russia even be open to that?

MR. BUGAJSKI: Can I jump in? That's a very good question because the way I see the conflict in Russia is between nonstate terrorism, which is some of these suicide bombers, and state terrorism. In other words, Russian policy in the Caucasus hasn't exactly been the same as our policy in Afghanistan. In other words, for Russia, antiterrorism means dealing with a wider swath of population that you can – with no cameras present, no media present – and you can do with them what you wish.

And some of the brave Russian human rights activists have reported on some of the atrocities by Russian servicemen, by security forces in the region. It's not surprising this is stirring even more – it's like a hornet's nest – it's stirring even more cause for revenge. And it looks as though the two people that blew themselves up in the Moscow metro were so-called

black widows, in other words, women whose husbands, or brothers, or some kinsmen, were actually killed by Russian forces.

So how can we help? Your question is, how can we help Russian antiterrorism? Maybe through the example of Guantanamo, legal process and so on and so forth, to show that antiterrorism does not mean the destruction of all human rights, the violation of all human rights in the North Caucasus. So I don't know directly that Russia would want us to necessarily help.

What I do fear is that there's a foreign policy aspect of this. Whether it strengthens Putin or not, domestically or not, on the foreign policy side there are worries, I think, in some of the neighboring countries that Russia – that Moscow could use this to point fingers at countries such as Georgia, which they've already been doing. Hinting that Georgia supports terrorism against Russia, that it supports some of the separatist movements in the North Caucasus – in other words, it could potentially be whipped up as an anti-foreigner, anti-neighbor device in places where Russia wants to exert greater influence and particularly where it's failing domestically to handle terrorism. So that's something I fear on the foreign policy side.

MR. SCHWARTZ: With that, I'd like to thank everybody for coming to CSIS today. Again, this briefing will be found later on our Web site at csis.org. Thanks again for coming. And if you have follow-up questions, please feel free to contact us. Thank you.

(END)