‘DO SVIDANYA’ TO ARMS: 
RUSSIAN COMMITMENTS TO LIMIT CONVENTIONAL ARMS SALES TO IRAN

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the United States’ ability to gain Russian commitments to limit or ban conventional arms sales to Iran. It tests the hypotheses that specific factors in the US-Russian bilateral relationship were present when Russia committed to limit conventional arms sales to Iran and absent when Russia sought to withdraw from or avoid such commitments. To test my hypotheses I examined two cases: the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement on arms sales and the September 2010 Russian ban on arms deliveries. My research supports the presence of four factors associated with gaining Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Focus

This thesis focuses on Russian commitments between 1992 and 2010 to limit conventional arms transfers to Iran. It uses two cases, each encompassing elements of commitment and evasion, to test hypotheses about which US policies are most strongly associated with Russian decisions to limit arms sales to Iran. To accomplish this, the thesis compares and contrasts US policies within and across the cases. In particular, this study addresses policy choices regarding US sanctions against Russian entities, US sensitivity toward Russian security interests, US-Russian bilateral cooperation, and US support for Russian integration into the international community.

Importance

Historically, the United States, Russia, and Iran have had a dynamic and competitive three-way relationship. Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the United States used Iran to check Soviet influence in the Middle East. During the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, the US and Soviet Union both supported Iraq, to the consternation of Iran. Following this Iran-Iraq War, Iran used Russia to protect itself from US and Western punitive measures.¹ Today, Russia straddles both sides, cooperating with the United States to prevent weapon sales to Iran, while working with Iran to produce civil nuclear power. The existing literature addresses many of these historical twists and turns.² US-Russian relations and US-Iranian relations are widely documented, analyzed, and debated. There is also a growing literature about Russian-Iranian relations, with a robust subset focusing on three issues: nuclear energy cooperation, ballistic missile proliferation, and arms

²For an introduction to these dynamics see Parker, Persian Dreams
sales. Within this subset of literature, one branch discusses Russian motivations to engage Iran or, in some cases, Russia’s inability to prevent these interactions, despite conflicting national interests. However, the role of the United States in shaping Russian policy is mentioned only briefly and accepted as fact without testing or measurement. This thesis contributes to existing literature and bridges this gap by testing and measuring one issue – arm sales – for associations between US policies and Russian behavior toward Iran.

The findings and recommendations contained in this thesis can affect US policy in a number of ways. First, and most immediately, this thesis recommends policies for the United States to continue and to avoid in order for the current Russian arms ban to remain in effect. Second, if Russia resumes arms sales to Iran in the future, these recommendations can help US policy makers solicit from Russia a commitment to limit such sales. Third, these recommendations may provide insight to policy makers wishing to reduce Russian arms sales to other countries, such as Syria or Venezuela. Finally, this thesis could provide insight about approaches to prevent future arms manufacturers, possibly China, from selling arms to countries of concern.

**Main Question**

This thesis seeks to answer the question:

What factors in the US-Russian bilateral relationship are associated with Russian commitments to limit conventional arms sales to Iran?

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Hypothesis

To answer this question I will test the following hypotheses:

Specific factors in the US-Russian bilateral relationship were present when Russia committed to limit conventional arms sales to Iran. These same factors were absent when Russia sought to withdraw from or avoid such commitments.

Summary of Findings

This study finds that four factors are associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran: low numbers of US sanctions against Russian entities, US sensitivity toward Russian interests, improvement in bilateral cooperation, and active US support for Russian integration into the international community. Conversely, high numbers of sanctions, insensitivity, decreasing levels of bilateral cooperation, and passivity toward Russian integration are associated with Russian attempts to avoid, loosen, or abrogate such arms commitments.

Methodology

Scope

Russia is a prominent arms supplier for many nations, including China, India, Syria, Venezuela, and others. Rather than study Russian arms sales across this spectrum of buyers, this thesis focuses on Russia’s arms relationship with only one country: Iran. This approach limits the number of variables to the geopolitical, economic, and social spectra along which Russian-Iranian relations fluctuate. Reducing these variables simplifies comparisons.

\[\text{The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) maintains an authoritative database of global, open source arms transfers. See } \text{http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/trade_register.php for more details on countries that have received arms from Russia or the Soviet Union.}\]
Even when limiting the scope to just one country, the issue of Russian arms sales is still vast. In the case of Iran, arms sales are often interwoven with topics such as Russian nuclear cooperation and the proliferation of Russian ballistic missile technology. This study does not deny these links, but to the extent possible, attempts to isolate arms sales to better understand the mechanisms by which the United States can influence Russian arms sales to Iran.

Time and space constraints limit the scope of this study to the US-Russian relationship. Russia’s relationship with other actors, such as Israel, the European Union, and Iran itself almost certainly contribute to Russia’s decision to limit arms sales. This thesis, however, leaves those questions, and their significance relative to the US-Russian relationship, to future research.

Case study selection

The sample size of this study is not large. In the history of the Russian Federation (December 1991 – present), the government has only given two known commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. However, these cases each include elements of commitment and abrogation or aversion to such commitments. Together, these two cases, and the variance within each case, provide enough data to illuminate an association between US policies and Russian decisions to limit arms sales to Iran.

The first commitment took place in 1995, in the context of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. Russia foreswore new arms sales to Iran and promised to stop executing current arms contracts after 1999. The second commitment, articulated in September, 2010, took the form of a
presidential ban on delivering the S-300 air defense system and other military hardware to Iran. Russia claims this ban is a response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1929.6

In November 2000, Russia abrogated the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement, after enforcing it for only five years. Between the years 2000 and 2010, Russia resumed sales and avoided commitments to limit arms deliveries to Iran.

Identification of Factors

Drawing from my desire to make this thesis and its recommendation valuable to US policy makers, I sought to identify factors over which the US Executive Branch has substantial input or control. As such, I excluded from this study trade, business contacts, and private or non-governmental connections between US and Russian entities.

In addition to the US-Russian bilateral relationship, I considered a variety of potential influences on Russian decisions to limit arms sales to Iran. These include Russian-Iranian relations, Russian-Israeli relations, US-Iranian relations, and fluctuations in global oil and gas prices. I also explored domestic and individual level7 explanations for these decisions within Russia. Of all these potential influences, only US-Russian relations had sufficient explanatory power and consistency within and across both cases.

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7 For an authoritative treatment of system, domestic, and individual levels of analysis, see Kenneth Waltz, Man, the State, and War: A Theoretical Analysis, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
Roadmap

Chapter 2 discusses US actions associated with changes in Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran, namely sanctions on Russian entities, flexibility toward Russian security interests, US-Russian cooperation in the field of science and technology, and US support for greater Russian integration into the international community. Chapter 3 summarizes the results of this study, addresses alternative explanations, notes implications, and makes policy recommendations.
Chapter 2: Four Factors Associated with Russian Commitments to Limit Arms Sales

This thesis examines four factors associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. The following discussion highlights how US sanctions against Russian entities, flexibility over Russian interests, bilateral cooperation, and US support for Russian international integration contribute to a context in which Russia makes or breaks political commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. The results are summarized in the graph below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement</th>
<th>Gore-Chernomyrdin Abrogation</th>
<th>S-300 Ambiguity</th>
<th>2010 Arms Ban</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bilateral Cooperation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Integration</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>(Not applicable)</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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**Factor 1: Sanctions Strongly Associated with Russian Arms Limits**

Low levels of US sanctions against Russian entities are strongly associated with Russian commitments to halt conventional arms sales to Iran.

**Low Number of Sanctions Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement**

In June 1995, in the context of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission meetings, the United States and Russia signed a memorandum in which Russia foreswore new arms deals with Iran and agreed to stop implementing existing arms contracts after 1999. At this time only two US sanctions were imposed against Russian entities. The first was imposed in 1992 against Parker, *Persian Dreams*, p. 117; (citing Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Jan 27, 1999 [FBIS])
Glavkosmos for missile proliferation to India.\textsuperscript{9} The second, imposed in 1995, was against an individual.\textsuperscript{10}

**Low Number of Sanctions Associated with 2010 Arms Ban**

Russia similarly committed to stop transferring arms to Iran in 2010. On September 22, 2010, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev banned the delivery to Iran of the S-300 air defense system\textsuperscript{11} and other military hardware.\textsuperscript{12} According to this research only one sanction was in place at the time of Medvedev’s announcement.\textsuperscript{13}

Furthermore, the timing of the S-300 ban strongly suggests a link to the removal of US sanctions. President Medvedev’s ban cites United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1929 as the catalyst for Russia’s arms ban. On June 9, 2010, the UN Security Council, including Russia, approved Resolution 1929, which, in part, prohibits the supply of military hardware to Iran.\textsuperscript{14} As a permanent member on the Council, Russia may veto any resolution that conflicts with its national priorities and interests. Therefore, Moscow evidently made a political decision to halt arms sales to Iran prior to the June 9 UNSC vote. On May 21, 2010, less than a month before the


\textsuperscript{12} In addition, he banned the export, transfer, or transit through Russia or by Russian vessels of tanks, armored vehicles, high-caliber artillery, as well as military planes, helicopters, ships, and missile systems to Iran.

\textsuperscript{13} See the entry for “Khazra Trading” in Appendix 1.

UN vote, the United States lifted long-standing sanctions against four Russian entities.\(^\text{15}\) Earlier, in February and March 2010, the Obama administration lifted similar sanctions against two other Russian entities. The US Department of State rejected the idea that the lifting of US sanctions was an exchange for Russia’s vote on the UN Security Council resolution.\(^\text{16}\)

**High Number of Sanctions Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Abrogation**

The converse association further strengthens this argument. High numbers of US sanctions against Russian entities are associated with Russia’s unwillingness to limit conventional arms sales to Iran. As US sanctions against Russian firms increased in the late 1990s, Russia sought to loosen the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin restrictions on conventional arms sales to Iran. US sanctions began to accumulate in 1998, when the United States sanctioned seven Russian military firms for providing missile technology to Iran.\(^\text{17}\) According to Parker, these sanctions, in part, coincide with a “marked cooling” in US-Russian relations.\(^\text{18}\) Over the course of 1999, the United States sanctioned an additional six Russian defense industry entities.\(^\text{19}\) In March 2000, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Sergei Ivanov announced that Russia was seeking to revise the terms of the 1995 Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement.\(^\text{20}\) He said that Russia would continue to fulfill existing contracts, but would not conclude new agreements.\(^\text{21}\) By November, however, Russia had informed the United State of its decision to abrogate the Gore-

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\(^\text{15}\) “Lifting of Nonproliferation Measures Against Two Russian Entities (Department of State; Public Notice).” (75 FR 7022; 5/21/10). Text from: Federal Register; “Termination of Measures Against a Russian Entity (Department of State; Public Notice).” (75 FR 7021; 5/21/10). Text from: Federal Register.


\(^\text{17}\) See Appendix 1; Parker, *Persian Dreams*, p. 129

\(^\text{18}\) Parker, *Persian Dreams*, p. 143 (citing a January 1999 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article by Igor Korotchenko)

\(^\text{19}\) See Appendix 1


\(^\text{21}\) Parker, *Persian Dreams*, p. 143.
Chernomyrdin agreement, giving Russia complete freedom of action over future arms sales to Iran.\(^{22}\) At the time, the United States was sanctioning 13 Russian defense-related entities.

High Number of Sanctions Associated with S-300 Ambiguity

A similar dynamic is evident in the years prior to Russia banning delivery of the S-300 air defense system. As long as the number of US sanctions remained high, Russia continued to sell weapons systems to Iran.\(^{23}\) At most, Russia intentionally delayed a particular delivery, the S-300 air defense system. It did not, however, commit to any long-term limits on its arms relationship with Iran. As discussed above, Russia did not commit to banning the S-300 and other weapon systems to Iran until after the United States dropped most of its sanctions against Russian entities.

Factor 2: Demonstrated US Sensitivity over Russian Strategic Interests

Demonstrated US sensitivity toward Russian strategic interests is strongly associated with commitments to limit conventional arms sales to Iran. Russian strategic interests intersect, and potentially collide, with US foreign policy in the areas of NATO expansion, European missile defense, and pro-Western activity in Russia’s traditional sphere of influence.

US Sensitivity toward Russian Interests Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement

At the time of the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, one of Russia’s interests was the solvency of the military-industrial complex.\(^{24}\) Accustomed to priority funding and status during the Soviet years, the military-industrial complex now competed for influence in the government and scarce

\(^{22}\) Parker, *Persian Dreams*, p. 129.


national resources. The industry’s financial problems were a strong motivator for arms sales to Iran. The Russian press estimates, in a figure that Parker notes is “grossly rounded off,” that Iranian arms deals were worth $4 billion to the Russian military-industrial complex. As noted earlier, the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement allowed Russia to continue implementing existing contracts until the end of 1999. By that date, the Soviet-Iranian cooperation agreement (inherited by Russia), under which current arms deliveries took place, would expire. Naturally, Russia had planned to complete all sales by this time. By allowing Russia to complete all current contracts, and not forego this badly-needed revenue, the United States demonstrated its flexibility over critical Russian concerns of the time.

US Sensitivity toward Russian Strategic Interests Associated with 2010 Arms Ban

At the time of the 2010 arms ban, the United States had softened its policies, demonstrating its sensitivity, on three areas related to Russia’s strategic interests. The United States no longer advocated NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. The United States accepted the reorientation toward Moscow of formerly pro-Western regimes in Russia’s “near abroad,” and the Obama administration modified US missile defense plans for Europe.

By 2010 the United States no longer pursued NATO Membership Action Plans (MAPs), a fast track to NATO membership, for Ukraine and Georgia. In 2008 the Bush administration had strongly advocated MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia, to which Russia strongly objected because

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27 Parker, Persian Dreams, p.143.
28 Parker, Persian Dreams, p.142.
29 Parker, Persian Dreams, p.142.
the two countries border Russian territory. The election of President Obama in November, 2008, represented a shift in this policy, according to US, Georgian, and Ukrainian commentators. In December, 2008, one month before the Obama administration entered office, the NATO foreign ministers decided against offering MAPs to either Georgia or Ukraine at that time, while leaving open the possibility to membership at some future date. The NATO-Russia situation essentially returned to the status quo prior to the Bush administration’s campaign for MAPs.

At the time of the 2010 arms ban, the United States had accepted a reorientation toward Moscow of formerly pro-Western regimes in Russia’s near abroad. In Kyrgyzstan, a 2010 political uprising ousted then-President Bakiyev from power and replaced him with a government warmer to Moscow. In 2005, Mr. Bakiyev had come to power on the tide of the Tulip Revolution, one of three US-supported revolutions in the post-Soviet space during the mid-2000s. The US

Department of State supported the provisional government and provided humanitarian assistance to stabilize the political and economic situations in the country.  

In Ukraine, the pro-Moscow politician Viktor Yanukovich won a February 2010 election against the pro-Western candidate and then-Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. Six years earlier, in 2004, the Orange Revolution swept pro-Western Viktor Yanukovich and Ms. Tymoshenko into power. The Orange Revolution, like other “colored revolutions,” is widely believed to have been supported by the United States. Although the US Department of State officially criticized the 2010 vote, saying the election did not meet standard for openness and fairness, it concluded that President Yanukovich “recognized the need to bring electoral legislation into line with international standards” and pledged to help Ukraine do so.

In addition, the Obama administration softened its stance on US ballistic missile defense in Europe. As a presidential candidate, then-Senator Obama called for a reexamination of European missile defense, an effort he quickly undertook once in office. In February 2009, less than a month after President Obama took the oath of office, an anonymous “senior US administration official” linked Russian cooperation on Iran to the administration’s offer to slow development of missile defense in Europe.

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39. [http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1983785,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1983785,00.html)
40. [http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/prsrl/2010/150351.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/prsrl/2010/150351.htm)
The Obama administration announced the results of the European missile defense review in September 2009.\textsuperscript{43} As foreshadowed by the “senior official,” the White House chose to deploy European missile defense more slowly and with less permanent infrastructure in the early stages of deployment. In contrast to his predecessor, Mr. George W. Bush, President Obama would set up the missile shield over four phases, the last to begin around 2020. Only in the final phase would the United States deploy missiles intended to defend against intercontinental ballistic missiles, the main concern of Moscow. In perhaps the most obvious signal of flexibility to Russia, the administration concluded that it no longer needed to base a radar and interceptors in the Czech Republic and Poland. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in October.\textsuperscript{44} Describing that meeting to the press, she reiterated the administration’s countries had agreed on the way forward in dealing with Iran.\textsuperscript{45} Clinton did not explicitly link the issues of missile defense to restraint in arms deliveries, but she and Medvedev clearly discussed both topics in the same conversation.\textsuperscript{46} A review of US global missile defense plans was published in February 2010, five months before Russia voted in the UN Security Council to ban arms deliveries to Iran.\textsuperscript{47}

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\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{44}“Clinton Says Agrees With Russia On Iran Steps,” Reuters, October 19, 2009, \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/Clinton_Says_Agrees_With_Russia_On_Iran_Steps/1855140.html}, accessed March 8, 2011, [RFE/RL].
\textsuperscript{45}“Clinton Says Agrees With Russia On Iran Steps,” Reuters, October 19, 2009, \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/Clinton_Says_Agrees_With_Russia_On_Iran_Steps/1855140.html}, accessed March 8, 2011, [RFE/RL].
\textsuperscript{46}“Clinton Says Agrees With Russia On Iran Steps,” Reuters, October 19, 2009, \url{http://www.rferl.org/content/Clinton_Says_Agrees_With_Russia_On_Iran_Steps/1855140.html}, accessed March 8, 2011, [RFE/RL].
\end{flushleft}
US Insensitivity toward Russian Strategic Interests Associated with S-300 Ambiguity

Conversely, Russia’s reluctance to acknowledge, cancel, or ban the S-300 air defense system contract to Iran in 2007 or 2008 follows a period of US support for pro-Western uprisings in the post-Soviet space, assertiveness in US missile defense plans for Europe, NATO membership for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and US advocacy for NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine.

Between 2003 and 2005 the United States undertook a so-called “Freedom Agenda,” under which it supported (fomented, according to Russia)48) “colored revolutions,” bringing pro-Western governments to three countries of the former Soviet Union: Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan.49 These countries are located in Russia’s “near abroad,” essentially the former Soviet republics, which has comprised a strategic buffer zone for Russia since the loss of its superpower status in the 1990s.

In 2007, the George W. Bush administration asked Poland and the Czech Republic to base missile defense elements on their soil.50 Russia repeatedly asserted that from these locations US missile defenses could intercept Russian strategic nuclear weapons in addition to missiles from the Middle East. The Bush administration undertook a series of high-level meetings to convince Russian leaders that missile defense was not intended to counter its missiles.51 However, beyond

meeting and sharing information, the Bush administration made no concrete changes or gestures to signal sensitivity toward Russian concerns.

In 2004, NATO received seven new Eastern European members, three of which – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – directly border Russian territory.\(^52\) NATO came into being as a counterweight to the military alliance of the Warsaw Pact countries, lead by Moscow, during the Cold War. The fact that four NATO members (the three Baltic states and Poland) now border Russian territory struck a blow to Russia’s sense of security. Four years later, in 2008, the Bush administration advocated a fast track to membership for two more Russian neighbors, Ukraine and Georgia.

**US Insensitivity Associated with Abrogation of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement**

US insensitivities toward Russia’s strategic interests are associated with Russia’s abrogation of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement. In the years prior to Russia’s abrogation, NATO expanded into the former Warsaw Pact region, while the United States conducted a bombing campaign of Serbia, a close Russian ally.

In 1999, NATO welcomed Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, all former members of the Warsaw Pact, Russia’s Cold War military alliance. Poland, in particular, borders Russia’s Kaliningrad region, a small territory in Eastern Europe separated from the contiguous Russian regions.

Also in 1999, the United States, under the NATO banner, conducted a bombing campaign of Serbia in response to the Milosevic government’s treatment of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo.

Serbia has been a friend and ally of Russia since before World War I and shares with it

linguistic, cultural, and ethnic roots. In a sign of protest to the bombing, Russian Prime Minister Primakov, at the time en route to Washington, DC to take part in the upcoming Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission meeting, ordered his plane to turn around and return him to Russian territory.\footnote{Matthew Rojansky, Indispensable Institutions: The Obama-Medvedev Commission and Five Decades of U.S.-Russia Dialogue, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010).}

The author notes that during this period then-President Clinton made a series of decisions on ballistic missile defense that were congruent with Russian security interests. In 1996, President Clinton reoriented the missile defense program, deferring some components until 2000.\footnote{Information in this paragraph is taken from Peter Baker, “White House Scraps Bush’s Approach to Missile Shield,” The New York Times, September 17, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/18/world/europe/18shield.html, accessed April 8, 2011.} In 2000, President Clinton took the decision to delay the planned deployment of missile defense elements. In light of the previously discussed insensitivities, however, these actions did not temper Russia’s decision to abrogate the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement with the United States.

Factor 3: Improvement in US-Russian Bilateral Cooperation

Improvement in US-Russian bilateral cooperation are associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. Both the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement and Russia’s 2010 arms ban support this association.

Increasing Cooperation Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement

The original task of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, initiated by Presidents Clinton and Yeltsin in April 1993, was to develop joint projects in energy, space, science, and technology that would benefit both countries.\footnote{“Fact Sheet: Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission,” BNET: The CBS Interactive Business Network, accessed March 12, 2011, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_nSUPP-6_v5/ai_15894171/} Over time, the purview of this group expanded to encompass
nearly all aspects of the US-Russian bilateral relationship. By the mid-1990s the Commission’s focus had expanded to encompass eight committees chaired at the cabinet level. These committees dealt with space, business development, energy policy, defense conversion, science and technology, the environment, health, and agribusiness. In addition, several informal working groups complemented the efforts of the eight official committees.

Some of this cooperation was inevitably unidirectional, flowing from the United States to Russia, although some efforts produced substantive collaboration. By 1996 the Committee on Space Cooperation had signed numerous cooperation agreements, which resulted in the link-up of the US space shuttle program to the Mir Space Station, joint flight tests, and US access to Russian launch capabilities for commercial applications. Similarly, the Science and Technology Committee, in coordination with the Civilian Research and Development Foundation, helped to direct Russian defense scientists toward useful civilian applications, like the joint Alpha-Magnetic Spectrometer experiment to detect anti-matter and dark matter in space, a joint seismological research program, and a joint space biomedical research center.

The Committee on Health adopted mutually beneficial food safety standards, agreements on pharmaceutical developments, and information exchanges about advanced medical devices. Meanwhile, the Committee on Environmental Issues demonstrated an “impressive level of

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engagement” on global and multilateral challenges: implementing the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on ozone-depleting substances, and sharing best practices to sequester radioactive waste, sustain forests, and prevent pollution in the Arctic. In the midst of this cooperative activity, Russia committed itself to limit arms sales to Iran.

Increasing Bilateral Cooperation Associated with 2010 Arms Ban

Upon entering the White House, the Obama administration resuscitated the concept of a US-Russia Presidential Commission. The “Obama-Medvedev Commission,” as it has been called, sets out to collaborate on a broader range of issues than its predecessors, involving 17 committees, up from the eight of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. Among its early achievements the US Department of State points to a new arms treaty (New START), an agreement to dispose of 70 tons of weapons-grade plutonium, investments in the Skolkovo innovation center outside Moscow, and a tender from Russia to the Boeing Company for 50 aircraft worth $4 billion.63

Also, the Obama administration submitted to Congress a US-Russian civilian nuclear cooperation deal on May 10, 2010, one month before Russia’s critical UN vote. The agreement, known as a 123 Agreement after Section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954,64 allows for greater civilian nuclear cooperation between Russia and the United States, including extensive commercial nuclear trade, technology transfers and joint research.65 This deal would be a

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potential boon for both Russia and the United States.\textsuperscript{66} Russia is the largest exporter of nuclear fuel, while the United States produces only 20\% or so of its own nuclear fuel needs. The deal would allow the United States to ship spent fuel to be permanently stored in Russia. It would also allow fuel from US-built reactors in South Korea and Japan to be permanently stored in Russia. The deal required a review period of 90 days in continuous session of Congress for lawmakers to reject the proposal. That period ended in December 2010 and the United States and Russia brought the agreement into force in January 2011.\textsuperscript{67}

Matthew Rojansky, deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment, suggests that it is still too early to pass judgment on the Presidential Commission, and that cooperation seems lopsided toward hard security issues.\textsuperscript{68} However, this analysis suggests that the accomplishments attained thus far, in conjunction with the upward potential of future cooperation, provided a necessary context for Russia to ban heavy arms sales to Iran.

Decreased Cooperation Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Abrogation

The inverse statement, that low levels of bilateral cooperation correlate to Russia’s unwillingness to limit arms sales to Iran, is also supported by this research. By 1998, cooperation through the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission had faded as domestic politics distracted both parties. The American delegation was sidetracked by then-President Clinton’s impeachment proceedings, and then-Vice President Gore’s 2000 presidential bid.\textsuperscript{69} Similarly, the Russian side experienced a


“cataclysmic” economic crisis by a sudden drop in oil and commodity prices. In the process to holding onto power, Russian President Yeltsin repeatedly shuffled his cabinet, introducing a high degree of volatility to the cooperation proceedings.

By 1999 the cooperation under the banner of the Gore-Chernomyrdin/Primakov/Stepashin Commissions (successive Prime Ministers) continued to “limp along,” but without much public record of its meetings or accomplishments, suggesting that bilateral collaboration had essentially stalled. Matthew Rojansky, deputy director of the Russia and Eurasia Program at the Carnegie Endowment, argues that the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission had failed to form a lasting foundation for bilateral cooperation. Little more than a year later, Russia had abrogated its commitment to limit arms sales to Iran.

Decreasing Cooperation Associated with Increased Arms Sales and S-300 Ambiguity

Initially, Presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin tried to invigorate the lagging US-Russian cooperation. The effort was “ambitious, but short-lived” and eventually ended in failure. The leaders aimed for small group, unpublicized meetings to encourage frank and open discussion. However, this arrangement led subordinates to ignore deadlines and assume a more
“ad hoc” approach to implementing the Presidents’ directives.\textsuperscript{74} Furthermore, on the US side, the White House failed to impose consequences for such lax behavior.\textsuperscript{75}

After 2003, US-Russian cooperation dropped sharply. In October 2003, Russian authorities arrested Mikhail Khodorkovsky, CEO of Yukos - Russia’s largest energy company at the time – signaling greater state control in business, politics, economics, and civil society. Russian cooperation weakened and US rhetoric, inspired by the “Freedom Agenda,” left little room for negotiations with an increasingly resurgent Russian government. Cooperation declined through 2004 and by 2005 a bilateral summit produced only an “anemic joint statement” and “recycled past commitments and platitudes.”\textsuperscript{76} US-Russian cooperation was adrift.

Having made only two arms sales to Iran since abrogating the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, Russia began to sell in earnest. In 2005, Russia concluded five agreements with Iran for aircraft, aircraft upgrades, submarine upgrades, short-range missile defense systems, and accompanying surface-to-air missiles. In 2006, Russia sold and delivered air-to-air missiles, and in 2007 concluded a deal for military aircraft engines. Russia and Iran allegedly concluded the S-300 air defense system contract sometime during this period.

The Bush administration attempted to jump-start bilateral cooperation with nuclear cooperation talks (the precursor to the 123 Agreement) in mid-2006. Two years later Russia and the United States reached a deal and in May 2008 Bush submitted the 123 Agreement to Congress for


review. However, the Bush administration withdrew this agreement from Congress after the Russian-Georgian armed conflict in August 2008 and the deal never took effect.

The initiation and progression of these talks coincided with Russian delays of the S-300, and rumors in the media suggested that the Iran leadership was losing patience with its Russian suppliers.77 Yet, just as the United States never fully realized the 123 Agreement, Russia never signaled a willingness to do more than delay the S-300 delivery to Iran.

Factor 4: US Support for Greater International Integration

US support for greater Russian integration into the international community is associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. The United States rewarded Russia with such support shortly after the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement and the 2010 arms ban.

US Support for International Integration Associated with Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement

The Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission reached agreement over Russia’s weapons sales to Iran on June 30, 1995.78 The United States supported Russia’s entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) less than six weeks later. The MTCR admits new members by consensus only,79 therefore US support was necessary for Russia’s admittance. Later that year, in December, Russia became a charter member of the Wassenaar Arrangement, which seeks to curb destabilizing transfers of arms and technologies.80

78 Parker, Persian Dreams, p. 143.
80 Parker, Persian Dreams, p. 117
US Support for WTO Membership Associated with 2010 Arms Ban

Likewise, Russia’s ban of the S-300 air defense system and other arms deliveries is associated with US support for entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). Russia banned the delivery of these systems to Iran on September 22, 2010. Nine days later, on October 1, 2010, the United States dropped its objections to Russia’s entry into the WTO, entry into which Russia had been seeking for 17 years.\(^1\)

Opposite association not applicable to this factor

The opposite statement, that withdrawing support for international integration is associated with Russia avoiding commitment, is not supported by this research. Admittance into international organizations often requires consensus by its members, but states must choose to leave international organizations voluntarily and can rarely be banned or forced to leave by other member states. Thus, the United States can support Russian membership as an incentive to limit arms sales to Iran, just as it did with the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement and the S-300 ban. However, once Russia has joined, the United States cannot remove it from these organizations as punishment for resuming arms sales to Iran.

Results

This research found that four factors are associated with Russian commitments to halt Iranian arms sales. First, low levels of US sanctions against Russian entities are strongly associated with Russian commitments to halt conventional arms sales to Iran. Second, demonstrated US flexibility over Russian core interests is associated with Russian commitments to limit conventional arms sales to Iran. Third, deals to increase US-Russian bilateral cooperation are

associated with Russian commitments to stop arms sales to Iran. Fourth, US support for greater Russian integration into the international community is associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran.
Chapter 3: Alternative Explanations, Implications, and Recommendations

Alternative Explanations

In my research I considered a variety of potential influences on Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran, including Russian-Iranian relations, Russian-Israeli relations, US-Iranian relations, and fluctuations in global oil and gas prices. I also explored domestic and individual level explanations for these decisions within Russia. Of all these potential influences, only US-Russian relations – and in particular the four factors analyzed above – had sufficient explanatory power and association across both cases.

For example, I first considered Russian-Iranian relations and searched for associations between this dynamic and Russia’s commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. To compete with the explanation in Chapter 2, this alternative had to show that Russian-Iranian relations were poor leading up to 1995, when Russia signed the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement, and remained tepid for at least four years. Around the year 2000, when Russia abrogated this agreement, I would expect Russian-Iranian relations to improve markedly, but then cool again in the late 2000s when Russia delayed delivery of the S-300 air defense system. In 2009 or 2010, I would expect relations to relations to decline significantly as Russia banned the S-300 delivery and other large military sales to Iran.

By some measures, the Russian-Iranian relationship supports this alternative explanation. Leading up to the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement at least one ideological group in Russia viewed Iran as a potential threat and kept the Islamic Republic at arms distance.\(^\text{82}\) This began to change, arguably, by the late 1990s. Russia undertook a second war in Chechnya in December

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\(^\text{82}\) Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara, 2010), p.110
1998, and, rather than supporting Chechnya’s Muslim insurgents, Iran sided with Moscow, asserting that the military campaign was an internal Russian security matter. According to Hunter, some Russia officials began to see Iran as a strategic partner in 1999, and in 2000, Russia enshrined in its Foreign Policy Concept that “it is important to develop further relations with Iran.”83 In March 2001, Iranian President Khatami traveled to Moscow, which was, according to Russian Prime Minster Primakov, the biggest event in the history of Russian-Iranian relations.84

In some ways these good relations continued. In 2005, Russia sold to Iran a short-range air defense system known as the Tor-M1. The system is not as sophisticated as the S-300, but could eventually be used in conjunction with the S-300 for a multilayered air defense network. In October 2007, Russian President Putin visited Iran for summit of the heads of states of the Caspian region.

And, as predicted, Russian-Iranian relations deteriorated in 2009 and 2010. Hunter notes that some Iranian publications referred to this period as the “Cold Winter” of bilateral relations. Iran had become exasperated at the delays of the S-300 air defense system and the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Russia, meanwhile, was nursing a diplomatic embarrassment after Iran rejected Moscow’s offer to broker a nuclear deal between Iran and the West. As a sign of sinking relations, in March 2010, Iran gave Russian pilots working with Iran’s civilian transport

83 Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara, 2010), pp.111-112
84 Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara, 2010), p.112
industry two months to leave the country. In these ways, Russian-Iranian relations did predict Russian limits on arms sales.

Other elements of the bilateral relationship, however, call into question any perceived association between Russian-Iranian relations and Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran. By some counts, Russia and Iran maintained a healthy relationship even after Russia committed to the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement. As early as 1995, Hunter notes, some officials were speaking of a strategic partnership between the two countries. In 1996, Russia agreed to build the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran and received Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati in Moscow. In the following years, Hunter notes that Iran’s “good behavior” in Central Asia and Chechnya contributed to a rapprochement with Russia. Iran had helped to end the Tajik civil war, and remained non-judgmental toward Russia’s military campaign in Chechnya. Furthermore, Russia and Iran shared interests in supporting the Tajik-dominated Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. Finally, Russia was still executing previous arms commitments to Iran during this period, as allowed under the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement. The agreement prohibited only new contracts for arms sales between the countries.

Furthermore, in the years before and after Russia’s abrogation of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement, Russian-Iranian relations were not universally positive. Russia had originally promised to finish construction on the Bushehr reactor by 1999, but by the turn of the century had delayed this event until 2004. Bilateral cooperation over the Caspian Sea had broken down after Russia changed its position on delimiting the littoral state’s access to energy resources. Moreover, Russian military exercises in the Caspian Sea proved to be a strong irritant in Tehran.

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85 Shireen Hunter, *Iran’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, (Santa Barbara, 2010), p.115
Despite the historic nature of President Khatami’s visit to Russia, his meetings produced only meager results. Most relevant to this study, Russia had not rushed to conclude any new arms agreements with Iran, despite its freedom from the Gore-Chernomyrdin restrictions.

In the mid-2000s, when Russia was resisted US pressure to limit arms sales, one would expect relations with Iran to climb. In fact, they were sagging. Iranian officials complained of Russian “foot dragging” over construction at Bushehr. Russia’s self-imposed 2004 deadline was first pushed back to 2005, then to 2007, then to 2010. Likewise, Russia grew increasingly concerned over Iran’s resumption of nuclear activities and Tehran’s unresponsiveness to Russian proposals to resolve the nuclear impasse. While Putin’s visit to Iran was an important moment in the bilateral relationship, the trip was almost canceled at the last minute due to rumors of an assassination plot against the Russian President. As it was Putin stayed in country only 24 hours.

After the September 2010 Russian ban on arms deliveries to Iran, one would expect Russian-Iranian relations to be at a low point. In fact, after initial criticism from Iran, the two countries made sustained, high-profile efforts to promote cooperation on “mutual interests,” including narcotic trafficking.86

On the whole, the Russian-Iranian bilateral relationship provides equal evidence for and against an alleged correlation with Russian decisions to limit arms sales. Lacking a more definitive association, I have excluded Russian-Iranian relations as a possible explanatory factor.

Implications of the first factor

These results hold several implications for US policy makers. First, reducing the number of US sanctions against Russian entities contributes to a context in which Russia is more likely to limit arms sales to Iran. Second, if Russia is currently fulfilling commitments to limit on its arms relationship with Iran, new sanctions contribute to a context in which Russia is likely to withdraw its commitments.

Implications of the second factor

This factor presents lessons for policy makers. First, US flexibility on Russian interests need not translate into concessions or weakened goals. In both the cases examined here, US policy makers kept their ultimate goals intact – reducing or halting the flow of arms from Russia to Iran. In both cases the concession came in the form of time rather than substance. In the case or Gore-Chernomyrdin, time allowed Russia to minimize its financial losses. In the case of missile defense, time may allow Russia to further develop its own advanced missile defense systems, known as the S-400 and S-500, and thus maintain strategic parity with the United States.

One important question remains: how much flexibility is enough? This study suggests that high-level meetings, while well-received, were not enough to allay Russian concerns over missile defense. Altering the US timeline, however, was ultimately associated with changes in Russian arms policy. Alternatively, high-level talks may have been sufficient, if accompanied by progress on other factors studied here. Unfortunately the historical record is not diverse enough to study each factor in isolation.
Implications of the third factor

Improved prospects for bilateral cooperation, especially in the scientific and technological fields, contributes to a context in which Russia commits to limiting arms sales to Iran. The potential for future cooperation is only limited by the creativity of policy makers and scientists.

Implications of the fourth factor

US support for Russia’s membership in international organizations contributes to a context in which Russia is inclined to commit to limit arms sales to Iran. However, the United States cannot easily reverse its position or withdraw its support. Therefore, the United States should offer this support judiciously, when it meets US interest in a wide range of policy areas, not just arms sales to Iran. This factor has been associated with both of the cases examined here. It may, however, have limited utility in the future, since there are few international organizations left to which Russia desires membership.

Study-wide Implications

There are several implications that apply to all of these factors. First, these factors tend to take place in a relatively short time period, and usually in the context of a larger US-Russian rapprochement. The second broad implication of these factors is that Russia needs “deliverables” – concrete offers or actions - which it can use to defend its own flexibility and concessions to the United States, such as limiting arms sales to Iran.

Thirdly, the United States has been able to leverage more from these actions than arms sales commitments. Take, for example, the S-300 ban. In addition to the arms commitment, the United States also benefits from increased commerce and trade as a result of the 123 Agreement and Russia’s membership in the WTO. Furthermore, the United States gained a strategic arms treaty
(New START), reduced tensions over military present in Central Asia, Russian counternarcotics assistance,\(^{87}\) and permission to send supplies to Afghanistan through Russian airspace and Russian railways.

Finally, as with all political and economic decisions, these steps require trade-offs. Policy makers must weigh the costs and benefits of removing sanction, showing flexibility, improving bilateral cooperation, and supporting Russian integration. A discussion of all of these trade-offs is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this study shows that the costs of these steps, whatever they may be, are strongly associated with the benefit of Russian commitments to limit or ban conventional arms sales to Iran. This association should be a starting point for making such calculations.

**Policy Recommendations**

This study leads to several policy recommendations for US government officials:

1) If US policy goals include limiting or halting Russian arms sales to Iran, policy makers should first explore opportunities to decrease the number of US sanctions against Russian entities, demonstrate US sensitivity toward Russia’s interests, increase US-Russian bilateral cooperation, and show support for Russian integration into the international community. These factors are associated with Russian commitments to limit arms sales to Iran.

2) Although associated, these factors may not be the only actions to which Russia would respond with commitments to limit or ban arms sales to Iran. This study shows that these factors have taken place in the broader context of a US-Russian rapprochement. If any of

these particular four factors are impractical at the time of engagement, other steps toward rapprochement might illicit a similar effect.

3) Finally, these factors, in combination, have historically gained more for the United States than arms commitments alone. US policy makers would be prudent to request further actions, commitments, or gestures from Russia in return for US action along these factors.
## Appendix A: US Sanctions Imposed Against Russia, 1992-2010

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(Compiled by author. Source: Federal Register)
Key:


EAA = Export Administration Act of 1979 as amended (as carried out under Executive Order 13222 of August 17, 2001) http://law.justia.com/cfr/title48/48-4.0.4.34.40.2.1.10.html


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