

# Behind The Lines!

Late Summer 2013

## A SHORT RUSSIAN LESSON

*Peregruzka* (перегрузка) versus *perezagruzka* (перезагрузка). What's the difference? *Peregruzka* was the term former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used to introduce the so-called "re-set" in U.S.-Russian relations. Much to her chagrin Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov unabashedly corrected her on the spot stating that the correct word for "re-set" in Russian should be *perezagruzka* and not *peregruzka*. The absence of that troublesome little infix "za" changed and spoiled the whole mood of the new American initiative to re-boot U.S.-Russian relations. This linguistic misstep was an ill omen for U.S.-Russian relations.

As to the current U.S.-Russia relationship, there is no relationship to speak of. When the U.S. pushed the so-called "re-set" button, there was silence on the Russian end. Putin continues to rule like the tsar that he is. The recent and ongoing Snowden affair provides *prima facie* evidence of an omnipotent Putin firmly in control and set on restoring vestiges of the old Soviet empire. The weak, prolonged and tardy American response to Snowden's decision to seek asylum in Russia played directly into Putin's agenda to portray the U.S. once again as a weak player in the international arena. Had the U.S. recalled its ambassador to Russia immediately when the aircraft carrying Snowden from China to Russia touched down at Sheremetevo Airport in Moscow, Putin would have understood the esoteric diplomatic message and *quid pro quo* response of a major power. This is the way the game was once played in international politics, and particularly as it related to the traditional U.S.-Russian calculus.

Putin has succeeded in changing the Russian constitution so that he can continue to serve as president; squelching, incarcerating and intimidating his political challengers (i.e., Khodorovsky, Navalny); controlling the media as necessary; and appointing the national governors who previously held elected positions. Moreover, he employs propaganda themes that are reminiscent of Stalinist tactics to warn the Russian populace of perceived threats from foreign entities (read the U.S.) while citing extreme nationalist elements lurking as a constant domestic danger.

The schizophrenic nature of the Russian psyche is nowhere more explicit than in Putin's "friendly" gesture allowing the U.S. transit of Russia to provide logistical support for the war in Afghanistan while simultaneously probing near-U.S. airspace with long-range Tu-95 bombers and dispatching a naval squadron led by the large antisubmarine ship "Vice-Admiral Kulakov" and support vessels on a long-range voyage from its Northern Fleet home port in Severomorsk to Havana, Cuba reminiscent of the Cold War. So much for *perezagruzka*.