

# Russian threats over ISS lost in space

By Kostis Geropoulos

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BRATISLAVA – Russia’s threats not to extend co-operation on the International Space Station (ISS) and limit exports of its rocket engines to the US are just “blustery language” and do not mean that Moscow plans to cut off these specific areas of co-operation, former US officials have said in Bratislava.

Russia’s deputy Prime Ministry Dmitry Rogozin said on 13 May that Russia would not accept a NASA proposal to extend the life of the ISS beyond 2020 and would like to divert these funds used for ISS to more promising space projects.

But Kurt Volker, the executive director of the McCain Institute for International Leadership, part of Arizona State University, and former US ambassador to NATO, dismissed Rogozin’s comments. “He is well known for strong, blustery language,” he told New Europe.

Speaking on the sidelines of the GLOBSEC 2014 Security conference in Bratislava on 15 May, Volker said that he does not believe there are any Russian plans to cut off these specific areas of co-operation.

“What he’s doing is reminding people that Russia could cut off those areas if it wished -- and thus try to influence western policy. Make people think the costs of additional sanctions -- or other policies -- would be too high,” Volker said.

The ambassador stressed, however that “the prospect of new US-Russia co-operation going forward while Russia is actively dismembering Ukraine is off the table”.

Asked by New Europe if other aspects of US-Russian co-operation will be frozen, Michael Chertoff, former US Secretary of Homeland Security, told a press conference in Bratislava on 15 May that this deterioration in relations is the direct result of what Russian President Vladimir Putin has done with respect to the Ukraine.

“Having started to pursue what I would consider to be an aggressive approach to the Ukraine, it should not be surprising to the Russians that there’s going to be a response,” Chertoff said, adding that in additions to sanctions, measures may involve non-participation in different types of programmes.

“Now if the Russians want to push back on the theory that that’s somehow going to deter the West from continuing to stand up for the independence of the Ukraine and the Ukrainian borders,

I think the Russians are going to learn a difficult lesson,” the former US Secretary of Homeland Security quipped.

“This is about ultimately a test of wills and my experience over the years has been that the way to maintain peace and security is to demonstrate the will to do what’s necessary to enforce the rules – in this case the rules of international law and the sanctity of borders,” Chertoff said.

“I believe the West has to show we have the willpower. And if that means the Russians seize to co-operate in certain ways, that’s fine - it’s also going to wind-up hurting them as well. What I don’t think we can do is get bluffed into stepping back and shrugging our shoulders and turning our backs on what’s going on in the Ukraine. History shows that that kind of appeasement does not work,” he said.

Meanwhile, Andrei Illarionov, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a former economic adviser to Putin from 2000 to 2005, told New Europe in Bratislava on 15 May that he doesn’t expect a disruption of co-operation between the European Union and Russia. He said that unlike the US, which Russia blames for the Maidan events in Ukraine, so far “there is no particular interest and I haven’t seen any single example that Russian side would voluntarily, unilaterally stop any co-operation with continental Europe – even if there’s a discussion about the sanctions”.