The Russian "re-set button" that was grandly announced by President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton in 2009 was a unilateral gesture — and thus it's no surprise the Bear is still smiling. Now with President Putin's unprecedented third term as Russia's president underway and his decision to skip the G-8 Summit in Camp David on May 18-19, perhaps it's time to re-think the whole thing. First, though the idea might have sounded good to Americans who opposed President George W. Bush's tough foreign policy after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, the olive branch did not change Russia's generally antagonistic posture towards its neighbors or the West. While Obama "hoped" to "change" the relationship, America instead found itself on the losing end of the new START agreement on nuclear arms reduction. While the U.S. reduces its nuclear stockpile, Russia continues to modernize. And other nuclear powers like China, North Korea, Pakistan — not to mention Iran which is working at a feverish pace to develop nuclear weapons — aren't even covered by the treaty. Russia also continues to prop up anti-Western totalitarian leaders in Iran and Syria, diplomatically blocking meaningful international action to stop massacres of pro-democracy movements, while selling the regimes weapons like tanks, aircraft and small arms to crush dissent. So why have U.S. efforts to find common ground with Russia failed? For starters, the Obama administration simply does not appear to appreciate or understand Russia's national interests. This lapse begins with misreading the nature of perestroika and the Soviet Union's collapse. Though not often discussed in the West, in the midst of US-led pressure, there was also an evolving belief from Soviet leaders that it was in their own interests to abandon the Communist Party and Soviet economic system by 1991. They did so in large measure to openly obtain, create and display wealth. Being beneficiaries of the state was not enough for the "Inner Circle." They decided to own it. Many of these former Soviet figures now make up Putin's "Inner Circle" and rule Russia. These leaders are just as resentful of American power today as they were then. Simply because they're no longer communists, doesn't mean they're no longer rivals. And that's why they're always looking to take the US down a few pegs. Thus Team Obama's intent to reset U.S.-Russian relations was both naïve and counter-productive. President Putin has since declared: "We will strive to ensure a new world order." And earlier this month, Chief of General Staff Nikolai Makarov, Russia's top military officer, threatened to use "destructive force preemptively" on NATO missile-defense sites in Eastern Europe. Russia also projects a self-serving approach to the development of energy monopolies. It bullies neighbors, like Belarus and the Ukraine, by cutting off their natural gas when their governments drift too far from orbit. There is a host of other areas in which Russian and Western interests clash. Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia comes to mind. As does planting its flag on the Arctic sea floor, and flooding Hugo Chavez's Venezuela with AK-47s and shoulder-fired missiles. How then should pragmatic American policymakers deal h Putin's Russia? Russians have most respected the US when it leaders demonstrated strength and

clarity of purpose. To be respected, leaders must be tough. And it's doubtful that Mr. Obama's "hot mic" comments to then-President Dmitry Medvedev that he'll have "more flexibility" on US missile defense after the elections inspires much fear or respect in Moscow. Meanwhile, Russia's leaders have no problem showing resolve. For example, as president, Medvedev invited Europe to reform its system of collective security at a special summit of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). And his view? NATO had no right to expand by adopting new members; European countries did not have the right to deploy US missiles on their territory, and Russia still believes it has the right to do whatever it wants. Russia will not agree to help to stop Iran's nuclear program, either. Putin's interests are largely dictated by the price of oil, and simply put, all the recent tensions causing oil prices to skyrocket have made oil-rich Russia even richer. If Tehran-Washington relations improve, Washington would not need or expect help from the Kremlin. And oil prices would go down. Just like the former Soviet Union itself, it's apparent that it's high time for the so-called Russian "re-set button" to be thrown into the dustbin of history, as President Ronald Reagan would probably say. Maybe Barack Obama can deliver that message to Vladimir Putin next time he sees him? Although since Putin doesn't even think the trip to Camp David was worth his time this week, let's not hold our breath. Read the original article here on Fox News Opinion