

America's New Cold War against Russia and China

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Russia has just published its new foreign policy concept in which President Vladimir Putin indicates that the most important aspect of Moscow's foreign strategy is to strengthen its ties with China. The two countries hold the same principle on core issues in international politics and that can constitute a basic element in maintaining regional and global stability. Russia will engage in full spectrum foreign policy cooperation with China when dealing with new challenges or menaces, as well as in solving regional and global problems.

This may not exactly be what the Obama administration wants to hear. It has succeeded in stirring up conflict between China and Japan; but has been unable to sow any dissension between China and Russia. Its efforts to "reset" the relations with the Kremlin ended in slight disappointment.

Indeed, U.S.-Russia relations are now seemingly at their nadir. The publication of Moscow's new foreign policy concept was delayed as Putin wanted to emphasize the principle of non-intervention in Russia's internal affairs. He especially resents the humiliating Magnitsky Act, which was overwhelmingly passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Barack Obama. Moscow retaliated by banning the American adoption of Russian orphans.

Stephen F. Cohen, Russian expert and professor emeritus at NYU and Princeton, is even talking about a potential new Cold War. As one Chinese saying goes, "It takes more than one cold day for the river to freeze three-feet-deep." Cohen points to four components of U.S. policy resented by Moscow:

* NATO expansion to Russia's borders which now includes European missile-defense installations. This poses the most serious threat to Russian security. If NATO further expands to Georgia and Ukraine, crossing the Kremlin's "Red Line," hostility would be further

heightened. The missile-defense installations are supposedly aimed at Iran, but do pose a direct threat to Russia in the event of a nuclear first strike. Moscow has demanded participation in the European system, failing that, a written guarantee that it will never be directed against Russia. It was rebuffed on both counts.

* “Selective cooperation, ” or the obtaining of concessions from the Kremlin without any meaningful White House reciprocity. Putin has never forgotten his vital role in the 2001 U.S. war in Afghanistan and was later rewarded by George W. Bush’s further NATO expansion and tearing up of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

* “Democracy promotion” in Russia’s domestic politics, viewed by Russian leaders as an intolerable interference with their internal affairs. The National Endowment for Democracy openly funded Russian NGOs.

* Last but not least, high-level Moscow circles have repeatedly complained that “the Americans do not care about our national security.”

It is unlikely that Washington will make any meaningful concessions on these four issues. So the chill in relations will probably continue.

In fact, the clash of strategic interests has a long history. Former president Bill Clinton started his illegal air war over Kosovo ostensibly to save Kosovo Albanians from being massacred by the Serbs. The real purpose, however, has been rumored to be Moscow’s deprivation of its last European ally, Serbia.

Moscow has steadfastly opposed Western efforts to block Iran’s nuclear program as those efforts could be designed to support a regime change that would pave the way for Western penetration into Central Asia.

Russia has also blocked Western efforts to intervene in Syria, its ally in the Middle East, where it has a naval base at Tartus.

The Kremlin also pursues a hard line refusing to return the Northern Territories (four islands), which Moscow calls the Southern Kurils, to Japan. It is not just a conflict with Japan. It is also a response to the United States’ pivot towards Asia and the (Asia) Pacific region – Russia also considers itself a Pacific power. The latest incident occurred on February 12, the day President Obama delivered his State of the Union Address.

The U.S. military reported that two Russian “Bear” (TU-95) strategic bombers, capable of carrying nuclear cruise missiles, visited the U.S. strategic island Guam (Moscow denied this). U.S. Air Force F-15 jets were scrambled from Andersen Air Force Base to intercept the intruders. Nevertheless, both sides “stayed professional. ”

U.S. military officials hold that ever since Putin reclaimed the Russian presidency, the number of such flights in the vicinity of the Aleutian Islands and Alaska has increased, but encounters with U.S. aircrafts have generally remained “very professional. ”

Neither side is looking for a fight; but they’re not on the best of terms either.

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