

The New Cold War

Although largely unremarked upon and little recognized by the vast majority of Americans, Russia has been engaged in a new Cold War with the United States for almost seven years. Indeed, we have not until recently acknowledged its existence or risen to the challenge of responding. But the time has come to understand what is happening, to understand why (to the best of our knowledge) this has occurred, and to understand what we should be doing about it. If you leave here this evening better armed on each of these three points than you were when you arrived then I will consider my task accomplished.

Beginning in the middle of the last decade then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin began a series of policy initiatives to solidify his control at home and to enhance Russia's power and prestige at the expense of his neighbors. Upon beginning his second term as President of the Russian Federation in 2012, he accelerated this process dramatically. In doing so, he has fanned a combination of virulent anti-Americanism and messianic Russian nationalism, all the while fostering a cult of personality. He has brutally crushed political dissent at home and has cynically violated both solemn treaty commitments and other countries' sovereignty. And most of this has been unremarked upon here at home. So, let's review briefly what has been occurring.

Within Russia, Mr. Putin has virtually eliminated domestic political opposition by outlawing opposition parties, exiling or arresting political opponents, destroying the free press and establishing a state-controlled media system reminiscent of Soviet days. He has appropriated the firms, property, and money of political rivals and either jailed or deported them. He has forced many Western non-governmental organizations to close their Russian offices, accusing them of

spying and sedition, and has placed the remainder under heavy surveillance. His secret services murdered the crusading journalist Anna Politkovskaya (2006), the muck-raking auditor Sergei Magnitsky (2009), and in February of this year the leading opposition politician Boris Nemtsov was shot to death within sight of the Kremlin. Just last week one of Nemtsov's associates, Vladimir Kara-Murza, was rushed to hospital, the victim of what is believed to be an exotic poison. Nor has Putin allowed the niceties of international law to stay his hand, sending agents to murder former KGB officer Alexander Litvienko in London in 2006 – and, last year, awarding a medal to the chief murderer. Russian tycoon Boris Berezhovskiy, once a Putin crony who then fell out with him, died in the UK under extremely suspicious circumstances in 2012. Just last week, British police announced that new test results had established that Alexander Perepilichnyy, an investment banker and whistleblower, who died in the UK in 2012, was in fact killed by an exotic poison. And, as early as 2004, Russian agents poisoned the Ukrainian politician Viktor Yuschenko, at the time the leader in a close race for the Ukrainian presidency; Yuschenko survived due to prompt medical intervention, so the Russian regime worked with allies in Ukraine to blatantly steal the election – a result which was overturned four months later in the so-called “Orange Revolution”, thereby setting the stage for the current crisis in Ukraine.

Turning to the international stage, in the fall of 2008, following a series of skirmishes between Russian troops and Georgian forces, the Russian army invaded portions of Georgia. While Putin's forces performed poorly, they nevertheless overwhelmed the Georgians. Since then, Russian forces have occupied the Georgian provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and have supported local pro-Russian governments which have announced their independence from Tblisi. Russian troops also still occupy the Moldovan province of Transdnistria, as they have since the breakup of the USSR. The Russian military's lack of competence

in the Georgian campaign prompted Putin to begin a massive rearmament campaign, the fruits of which were clearly visible last year in the lightning invasion of Crimea.

Incidentally, you will hear it said occasionally that NATO is militarily superior to Russia. That may be true theoretically, if you were to add up all of the military manpower and equipment possessed by all 28 NATO nations. In reality, however, at every point along the common border that NATO nations share with Russia -- with the possible exception of the Russo-Turkish border -- it is Moscow which holds a significant conventional military advantage.

And then, of course, there is that 2014 seizure of Crimea and Russia's invasion of Ukraine's eastern provinces. To this day, Russia has continued to pour military units into the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, creating the concern that before long those forces will again roll into action, driving west to capture the city of Mariupol and establishing a corridor which reaches all the way to the Crimean peninsula. Putin and his government continue to maintain, in a twenty-first century version of Hitler's "the Big Lie", that no Russian forces are in eastern Ukraine. Tellingly, however, the Putin administration decreed last week that reporting or discussing the deaths of Russian military personnel would henceforth be a crime, and there are numerous press reports, confirmed by the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Mac Thornberry, that Moscow has deployed mobile crematoria to the Russian-Ukraine border. It is also important to note that Russia is taking steps to militarize the Arctic....

Nor have Putin's efforts at military rearmament and intimidation been confined to conventional forces. As I made clear when I spoke here a few years ago, Russia is engaged in a massive modernization of its nuclear forces. As we meet here tonight, Russia is building and deploying:

- Two new types of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs)
- Two new types of submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs)
- A new class of SSBNs, two of which are in commission and the third of which will commission this year
- A new long-range air launched cruise missile, along with upgrades to its TU-95 and Blackjack strategic bombers
- Additionally, at least two new types of ICBMs are in development, including a heavy-ICBM follow-on to the highly destabilizing SS-18, as is reportedly a new strategic bomber
- And then, of course, there is the new treaty-shattering ground launched cruise missile. In 2014, the US Government accused the Kremlin of violating the 1987 Intermediate Nuclear Forces treaty, one of the land-mark treaties of the Reagan-Gorbachev era, by covertly developing and testing a new ground launched cruise missile. This system will only add to the grotesquely large Russian arsenal of so-called theater nuclear weapons, which number between 2000-4000, dwarfing by a factor of at least 10 NATO's theater-based deterrent arsenal.

Sadly, Putin's decision to violate the INF treaty is just the latest in his government's actions demonstrating contempt of international agreements.

Today Moscow stands in violation of:

- The Helsinki Final Act (Russia is in violation of at least Articles 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6)
- The Istanbul Commitments of 1999 (Russia is in violation of its commitment to remove its military forces from occupied parts of Moldova and Georgia)

- The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-92 (Russia is violation by continuing to deploy nuclear SRBMs and by continuing to deploy nuclear-tipped naval cruise missiles on general purpose submarines)
- The Budapest Memorandum (Russia has violated its commitments to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity) and also
- The CWC (Russia is in violation of the intent of the treaty by inventing and deploying "Fourth Generation" chemical agents which evade the Treaty's specific restrictions but which are nevertheless chemical agents).

But it is important to recognize that Putin's nuclear adventurism is not confined to building new systems and violating treaties. The Putin Administration is guilty of nuclear saber-rattling in a manner that has not been seen since the days of Nikita Khrushchev. This saber-rattling has taken three forms:

- first, the Russian military has engaged in a series of nuclear forces exercises which deliberately simulate nuclear strikes on Poland and the Baltic states
- second, Russian nuclear bombers have been engaged in increasingly dangerous forays into airspace adjacent to Alaska, California, the UK, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Japan. These flights, taking the form of attack formations, are now occurring on many occasions with the bombers' safety of flight transponders turned off, thereby endangering civil aviation and causing near collisions on multiple occasions. For the record, Russian military aircraft have in the last year also taken to buzzing US and Canadian warships at very low altitudes, and conducting dangerous maneuvers close aboard US reconnaissance aircraft.
- Finally, listen to some of the outrageous statements the Russian leadership has been making:

- “In a situation critical for national security, we don’t exclude a preventive nuclear strike at the aggressor.” (Gen Nikolai Patryushev, head of Russia’s Security Council, June 2010)
- “Let me remind you that Russia is one of the world’s leading nuclear powers. ..It’s best not to mess with us” (Putin, August 2014)
- “Our nukes are always ready for action”. (Putin 2015)
- “If Denmark joins the American-led missile defense shield...then Danish warships will be targets for Russian nuclear missiles.” (Mikhail Vanin, Russian Ambassador to Denmark, March 2015)
- In a retrospective this year on the invasion of Crimea, Putin stated “We were ready to do this [put our nuclear forces on alert]”... It’s worth noting that Putin did put Russian nuclear forces on alert during the Georgian crisis of 2008.

The intent of these actions is clear: they are designed to intimidate and cow Russia’s neighbors. There should be no place or tolerance for this kind of rhetoric and activity in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, western governments have not reacted publicly or privately to this nuclear saber rattling until quite recently.

At this point in the evening you should be asking “why is all of this happening?” and “What has caused this downturn in Russia’s relations with the West?”

I would suggest to you while there is no single causal factor in international affairs, much of the onus for what has occurred rests with Vladimir Putin himself. I believe we can draw tremendous insight from the comment he has made on several occasions to the effect that “the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geo-political catastrophe of the [twentieth] century.” Pretty strong words when you consider all that happened in the last century. So if you take that as a

starting point, you then need to understand that the political and economic situation in Russia in the 1990s, following the demise of the USSR, was somewhat chaotic. The attempt by western-oriented Russian politicians to create a western-style democratic political system, foundered -- producing coups and confusion. President Yeltsin's often clownish behavior was an embarrassment. In addition, the introduction of market economics was a disaster, due in large part because the transformation of a government directed system to a free market system was undercut by the fact that State run factories were producing sub-standard goods few Russians wanted, and the loss of the Union destroyed much of the market and supply system which kept the old system afloat. Add to this the fact that during the Yeltsin years, unscrupulous politicians and their cronies (including Yeltsin's family and friends) methodically manipulated the sale of State assets to the private sector, impoverishing millions while enriching a themselves. All of this produced a resentment of the West because, in a classic case of Russian paranoia, rumors were spread that Western governments (rather than home-grown avarice and incompetence) were to blame for the ills which had befallen Russia. Enter Vladimir Putin, who emerged from obscurity to a position of dominance in two short years.

And Putin was among those who believed the West was responsible for Russia's decline. If you have not done so, I urge you to read his speech of March 18, 2014 to the Russian Parliament on the occasion of the vote on the annexation of Crimea. It is an enormously revealing document. Let me read you a few quotes:

- Speaking about the breakup of the Soviet Union and Crimea's subsequent inclusion in the newly emerged country of Ukraine, Putin had this to say: "...when Crimea ended up as part of a different country...Russia realized that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered". "Millions of people went

to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest, ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders.” I would pause for a moment here to point out to you that the “former Union republics” he refers to include Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, now members of NATO and therefore whose independence and territorial integrity the United States is treaty-bound to defend.

- Putin continued: “Russia...was going through such hard times then that realistically it was incapable of protecting its interest. However the people could not reconcile themselves to this outrageous historical injustice.”
- Putin then launched into an attack on the United States and its allies on a wide variety of issues, noting that the US and its allies “are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are....:
- And then come the warnings: “But there is a limit to everything.If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard. You must always remember this. ...Today it is imperative to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.”

All of this brings to mind Churchill’s remarks about another dictator: “This wicked man, the repository and embodiment of many forms of soul-destroying hatred, this monstrous product of former wrongs and shame....”

So, we have now discussed, however briefly, the “what” and the “why”. Now we come to the hard question: “what can and should we do about this?”

The first step is to recognize, publicly and within government circles, that this problem exists and to alert the American people about it. Those of you who heard me a few years ago know that I began sounding the warning even then. More recently, over the past six months, US Air Force General Phillip Breedlove, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander, has been highly vocal on the subject. And last week, in a speech at the Brookings Institution, Vice President Biden weighed in. Let me repeat two of the points he made:

- “Russia is taking actions to weaken and undermine its European neighbors and reassert its hegemonic ambitions.”
- “President Putin is also trying to scare our allies and partners with the threat of a new and aggressive Russia. Terms we haven't heard in a long time, terms relating to nuclear arms.”

And the message is beginning to be broadcast elsewhere. Last Friday, the New York Times, not known for taking a strong position against the Kremlin, responding to the story about the poisoning of Nemtsov's young aide, spoke of “Russia's murderous regime” in an editorial which also included the following :

- [We find] “staggering the complacency Western governments exhibit toward the crude attacks on peaceful opponents in a country that wishes to be, and often is, treated as a global power. Apart from North Korea, it's hard to think of a nation where political murder is as much of a hazard as it is now in Russia. Yet Western leaders have said little about the slayings and go on treating Mr. Putin as if he were a civilized statesman and potential partner...”.

And just two days ago the Times followed up with another editorial condemning Putin's new decree criminalizing discussion of combat deaths, and

yesterday, in another editorial, it condemned Russia's nuclear saber rattling and INF Treaty violation.

Just today, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, released an important new study on Russia. The authors observe:

- “Moscow and the West have competing, conflicting and entirely incompatible agendas.”
- “Putin is a fundamentally anti-Western leader whose serial disregard for the truth has destroyed his credibility as a negotiating partner.”

These represent a good start. More is needed.

The second step – really the most important step – is to realize that the United States must continue to be the leader of the world's democracies. We are the indispensable nation. No other government can fill our role. Despite our many flaws and foibles, and despite the snide criticisms we sometimes hear from our allies, at the end of the day they understand that only the United States can provide the glue which holds the NATO Alliance together. For our part, we must remind ourselves that keeping NATO, the most successful military alliance in history, strong and secure is vital to our national interest.

Third, we, the United States, must continue to rebuild our deterrent strength in Europe. Please remember that weakness is provocative. Weakness and indecision can cause Moscow to calculate that we really do not mean to stand by our commitments. Compounding this, both the George W. Bush Administration and the current one have overseen a precipitous withdrawal of US forces from Europe; unfortunately these actions, coupled with the current Administration's “Pivot to the Pacific” initiative, has inadvertently created an impression both in Moscow and in

some allied capitals that we are no longer as committed to the defense of NATO Europe as we once were ... and that is very dangerous. Our red lines must be real and must be perceived by the Kremlin to be real.

Fortunately, in the past six-to-nine months the Administration has begun returning forces, particularly infantry and armored units, to Europe – placing rotational forces in the Baltic states and forward deploying some fighter units, also on a rotational basis, to Poland. These deployments should continue as long as they are necessary, and be augmented if need be, ... and obviously we need to halt further withdrawals of US forces. We also need to continue to press our allies to meet their pledged contributions, financially as well as in terms of increased levels of readiness and capability. Our goal must be twofold: to ensure Putin and his cronies understand that NATO will defend itself successfully against any aggression, thereby deterring that aggression in the first place, and to reassure nervous allies that we are there for them. Please remember: NATO's "Article V" commitment, our pledge to defend our allies if they are attacked, is only as strong a deterrent as Putin believes it is.

Fourth, we need to work with those same NATO allies to ensure that -- if Russia continues to fail to carry out fully the provisions of the Minsk accords setting forth the conditions for the cessation of hostilities in eastern Ukraine – the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union remain in force. If the situation worsens, that is if Russian forces break out of the Donbass region and move on Mariupol and towards the Crimean peninsula, the US and the EU need to impose additional, harsher, sanctions to make clear that it is unacceptable to use military force to change existing international borders. This task will not be easy. As Vice President Biden observed last week: "the Kremlin is working hard to buy off and co-opt European political forces, funding both right wing and left wing ... parties throughout Europe".

Fifth, the United States must move forward to implement its plans to modernize our strategic forces. We must do so because:

- First and most obviously, our strategic submarines are aging, our Minuteman ICBMs are becoming superannuated, and the air-launched cruise missiles carried by our B52s are increasingly unreliable.
- Second, Putin and his cronies place great stock in nuclear weapons. And, therefore, our deterrent must be credible in his eyes to prevent him from miscalculating .

The bottom line is that the Administration and the Congress must work together to ensure that all three legs are renewed.

Sixth, we need to put an end to the silly idea, still active in some parts of the Department of State and in the non-governmental arms control community, that we need to begin negotiations with Moscow on a new round of strategic arms reductions. We cannot afford to enter into any new agreements which we would respect and Russia would violate. And, that, put simply, is why there should be no future arms control with Russia until Moscow decides to respect the agreements it has signed previously and return to compliance with them. And we must continue to press Moscow to return to compliance in those instances where it is now in violation. And, it should be obvious, that offering to enter new negotiations while the Russians are violating existing agreements sends the signal that we are not really serious about having them carry out their obligations and is perceived in Moscow as a sign of American weakness and lack of resolve.

Seventh, we need to continue to press the Putin Administration to halt its nuclear saber-rattling. The overblown rhetoric employed by Mr. Putin and his

cronies have no place in the twenty-first century, and the dangerous activities undertaken by Russian bombers carry within them the seeds of crisis and tragedy.

I wish that I could close my remarks on a more uplifting note. There are some tough times ahead. But history demonstrates that it costs far less in treasure and in blood to deter an aggressor than to defeat him on the battlefield. And that is particularly true in the nuclear age. This is a task we accomplished successfully for almost five decades a short while ago. There is every reason to believe we can do it again.

I thank you for coming this evening and look forward to your questions.

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