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Don't Fear a Eurasian Union

By Edward Lozansky

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Speaking recently to the media, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer blasted Russia for allowing Edward Snowden to land in Moscow. "The bottom line is very simple," he said bitterly. "Allies are supposed to treat each other in decent ways, and Putin always seems almost eager to put a finger in the eye of the United States."

Since when have the U.S. and Russia become allies? There was indeed a short window of opportunity for this to happen after the collapse of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union 22 years ago, but the U.S. and Europe did not seize this historic chance. Instead of making a serious effort to make Russia a true, powerful ally by integrating it into major Western political, economic and security structures, Washington did the opposite by unceremoniously rebuffing Moscow's attempts to achieve this goal.

When the U.S. withdraws its troops from Afghanistan in 2014, shouldn't the U.S. work with the Eurasian Union to help defend

the region?

The most tragic mistake, in the words of the late U.S. diplomat George Kennan, was the NATO expansion, which actually started in the late 1990s when Boris Yeltsin was president.

''I think it is the beginning of a new Cold War," Kennan told The New York Times in 1998. "The Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way."

Other U.S. mistakes included its unilateral withdrawal in 2001 from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, direct support of color revolutions in several former Soviet republics, calling Russia the aggressor in the 2008 war when it was Georgia who initiated it and adopting the senseless, provocative and harmful Magnitsky Act last year.

U.S. President Barack Obama through his policy of "resetting" relations with Russia tried to correct some of the past mistakes, but Hillary Clinton in her last days as secretary of state effectively disavowed all the achievements of Obama's first term by bluntly describing President Vladimir Putin's Eurasian Union project as an attempt to resurrect the Soviet Union. What's more, Clinton added that the U.S. would "figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it."

It doesn't sound like she was talking to an ally. Therefore, those who have been trying to promote a U.S.-Russia alliance gave a big sigh of relief when John Kerry was appointed secretary of state.

Regrettably, there are still plenty analysts and decision-makers in Washington who, like Clinton, are worried about the Kremlin's Eurasian Union project, whose members are currently Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, while several other former Soviet republics may join in the future. At a recent seminar at the Heritage Foundation on June 17 titled "Russia's Eurasian Union Could Endanger the Neighborhood and U.S. Interests," it was obvious that the emerging Union is not viewed positively by policymakers or pundits.

Sergei Markedonov from the Institute for Political and Military Analysis in Moscow, a visiting fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, was the lonely voice who tried to emphasize economics as the main driving force for the Eurasian Union, but all others were talking about dangerous Russia's geopolitical and security ambitions that dominate this initiative.

When the U.S. and NATO end their disastrous military campaign in Afghanistan in 2014, it will be Russia and Central Asian countries who will feel most of the heat from the Taliban, al-Qaida and its allied extremist groups that will emerge in Afghanistan to fill the vacuum. Shouldn't the U.S. and NATO welcome the Eurasian Union and work closely with it to help defend the region?

For those who still believe in the necessity of a U.S.-Russian alliance to meet the threat

of Islamic extremism and other global challenges, the Eurasian Union is not a security threat but an opportunity to increase security in a highly volatile and unstable region.

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