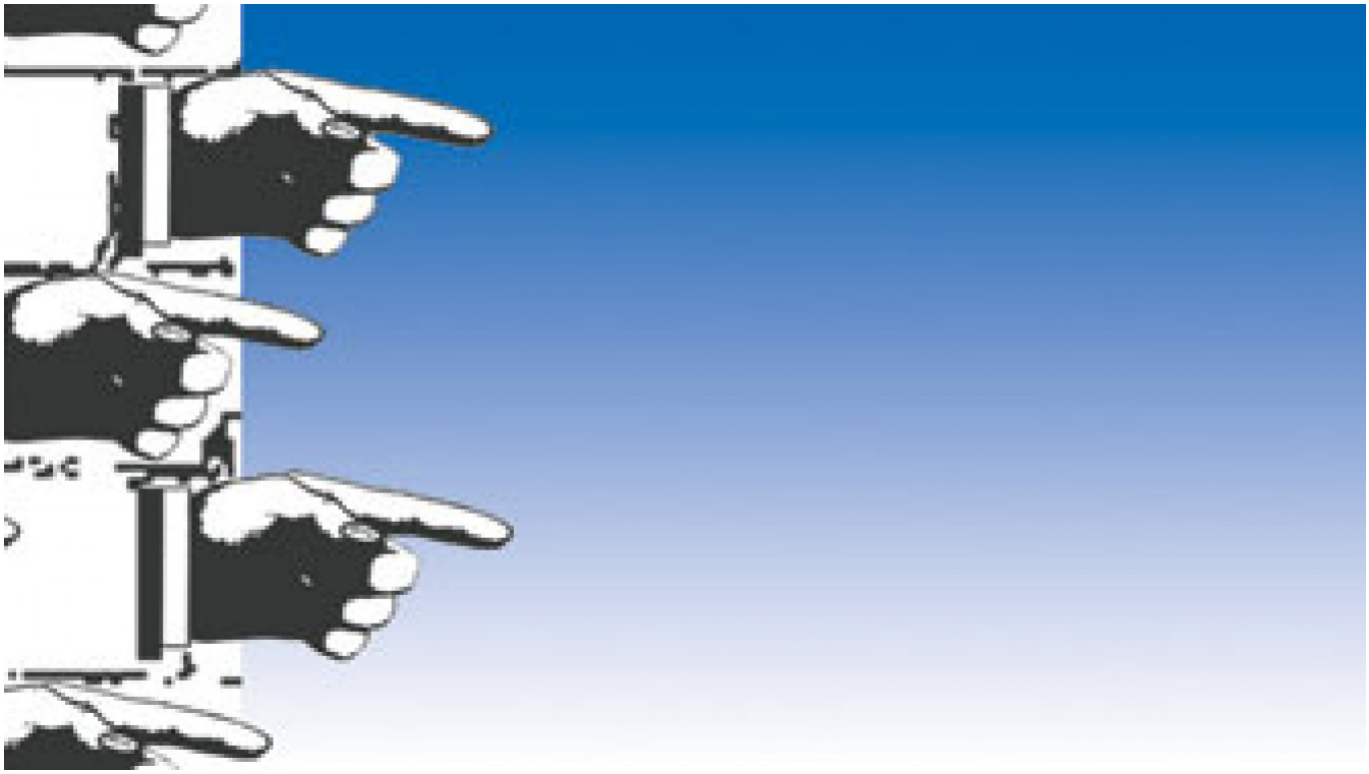
The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Must Stop U.S. Expansion in Ukraine

By Sergei Markov

March 19, 2014



Today, as a result of the Ukrainian crisis, U.S.-Russian relations have hit their lowest point since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 or of Czechoslovakia in 1969 — or perhaps even since they bottomed out during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The Crimean crisis, which began as a power struggle between the ruling authorities in Kiev and opposition forces, transformed in to an attempt to overthrow Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych by pro-Western and nationalist opposition forces with the support of the U.S. and European Union.

The crisis escalated into a conflict between the U.S. and Russia after the West supported a coup, then lied by violating the Feb. 21 agreement when it recognized the formation of a new and illegitimate government of extremists.

This conflict has the potential of sparking a new Cold War — something I never thought could happen in modern times since I believed it would have to be rooted in ideological differences. Instead, Moscow and Washington have billions of dollars of economic interests at stake, making this a geopolitical rather than an ideological Cold War.

Moscow does not see the revolution in Ukraine as an attempt to create a more democratic or law-based society. Instead, it sees the events in Kiev as an attempt to make Ukraine as anti-Russian as possible. The new government represents a minority of the Ukrainian population. It wants to suppress the Russian-speaking majority and violate their right to representation by holding unfair elections on May 25.

Moreover, U.S. President Barack Obama and German Chancellor Angela Merkel deceived President Vladimir Putin when they pursuaded him to convince Yanukovych to refrain from using force to quell the Maidan, and then to sign the Feb. 21 agreement — which they refused to uphold. Instead, they told Russia to accept the new reality in Ukraine. But why should Moscow accept that reality when it is directed against Russia, democracy and human rights?

What did Russia do to become the focus of so much animosity? Is it because it prevented the West from bombing Syria? Because it persuaded Yanukovych not to sign the Association Agreement — a treaty of little real importance to the EU? Those are trivial reasons for starting a new Cold War.

It seems that the West simply does not like Putin. He is a huge obstacle who prevents them from achieving global hegemony. For this reason alone he must be broken. Nobody in Moscow has any doubt that what happened in Ukraine will be repeated in Moscow in two or three years. Without Putin, there will be few world leaders left who have the power or courage to stand up to Washington. When this happens, the entire world will have to quickly accept the new reality.

Russia is not in Crimea to expand its territory but to oppose the immense power of West and its financial institutions in New York and London. Washington wants to characterize this as a conflict between Moscow and Kiev, thereby forcing Russia to negotiate with an illegitimate regime determined to destroy everything Russian in Ukraine.

However, everyone understands that this is a conflict between Moscow and Washington and that these countries should negotiate a solution. The question here is not Crimea but which reality the two sides are prepared to accept.

Should Moscow allow Washington to force it into humiliating submission and accept the possibility of a violent overthrow of the Putin regime? Or should Washington acknowledge that it can no longer impose its will on others? Both sides are unwilling to admit their weakness, thus making a geopolitical Cold War likely.

The West will hit Russia with economic sanctions to pressure Russian oligarchs into forming a fifth column, just as it did in Ukraine. To avoid this, Moscow will have to force oligarchs to bring their overseas assets back to Russia.

If Washington wins this geopolitical Cold War, it will install a pro-Western government in Moscow which could lead to the breakup of Russia. Siberia, the Caucasus and the Far East will demand autonomy, and the country's oil and gas resources will be transferred from the government to multinational corporations.

However, it is possible that Russia can resist, thereby fulfilling its historical mission of foiling

the designs of those who long for world domination. Just as Russia stopped Hitler in the 20th century, Napoleon in the 19th century and Frederick the Great in the 18th century, it will stop Washington in the 21st century. This is nothing personal, just business. Russia has its historical mission to fulfill.

If a geopolitical Cold War erupts, it very well may morph into an ideological one since a Western attack would force Putin to rely heavily on conservative forces in the country's so-called "moral majority" in order to bolster his support. Additionally, Moscow will attempt to relieve pressure and find support abroad by stepping up its information campaign among the hundreds of millions of EU residents who sympathize not only with Putin's stance against Washington, but also his support of the traditional values that have been rejected by the EU elite.

Recent polls show that 80 percent of Germany's population sympathizes with Russian policy in Ukraine and only 8 percent favor sanctions. The online social networks in the West constitute an intellectual revolt against the bias of the mainstream media — all of which demonize Putin without any objectivity. Social network users clearly sympathize with Putin and their support will only grow.

Washington once transformed Cesar Chavez from a minor U.S. activist into a major political figure. Now Washington will transform Putin from his role as the man that lifted Russia off its knees into a global leader in the struggle against the global domination of Washington and the new values of postmodernism.

However, I would like to believe that the current crisis will not develop into a full-fledged geopolitical Cold War. After all, Obama thinks in 21st century terms, not 19th century. For his part, Putin holds many Western convictions. What's more, a geopolitical Cold War would hit Europe the hardest, robbing it of the balanced economic growth it needs and preventing it from consolidating its resources for something more useful. It is now the time for every responsible European leader to speak out against a new Cold War since they have the most to lose.

The way to end this standoff is clear: Ukraine must become a neutral state with a democratic government. It must grant full equality to both its Ukrainian and Russian-speaking citizens, adopt the policy of federalism and make both Ukrainian and Russian official state languages.

Sergei Markov is director of the Institute of Political Studies.

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