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Paranoid Russia Now Sees Enemies Everywhere

By Vladimir Ryzhkov

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When senior Soviet officials wanted to set down the ideological or conceptual framework by which citizens should understand current events, they issued statements that were called "attitudinal papers" to guide national policy and that came replete with ready-made definitions and formulas.

A good example is Soviet leader Josef Stalin's famous "Year of Great Change" article in 1929, which explained the reasons for the abandonment of Lenin's New Economic Policy and the acceleration of the policies of collectivization and industrialization to Soviet citizens.

Contemporary Russian officials and spin doctors know and understand this type of document well. They immediately adopt the new terms and ideas it contains and begin applying and reiterating them endlessly. These documents automatically set in motion another new political campaign to reconfigure all government agencies according to the new paradigm.

The text of the new attitudinal paper eclipses all previous decisions made by those

government agencies and political parties and even carries more weight than the law and the constitution.

Three such attitudinal papers were released last week. They deserve serious attention not only because of the standing of their authors, but because all three were released in concert and with virtually identical content.

Security Council secretary Nikolai Patrushev gave a major interview to state-controlled newspaper Rossiiskaya Gazeta that carried the typical title "A Second Cold War."

The same day, presidential administration head Sergei Ivanov gave his own major interview titled "We Are Not Tightening Any Screws" to the Komsomolskaya Pravda newspaper. Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin gave an interview to the Serbian newspaper Politika on the eve of his visit to Belgrade and his participation in the Asia-Europe Meeting in Milan.

All three attitudinal papers defend Kremlin policy in Ukraine as the only correct course, give a consistent explanation of the roots of the crisis and blame the West — and primarily the U.S. — for it. All three make the claim that Russia is ready for a confrontation with the West and for a new rendition of the Cold War — although they place 100 percent of the blame on the other side.

Putin resorted to thinly veiled threats in his statements. He referred to U.S. President Barack Obama's policies as "hostile," urged him to realize the "folly of trying to blackmail Russia" and in a clear allusion to the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 said Obama should remember how "discord between major nuclear powers can influence strategic stability."

Patrushev, in his interview, painted a comprehensive picture of a U.S. conspiracy against first the Soviet Union and now Russia that has the ultimate goal of destroying this country. He said that the West continues its previous "containment" policy against Russia and that Ukraine is simply a handy pretext for the escalation of such measures.

The Ukrainian crisis, he argued, is the result of deliberate and systematic efforts by the West to break Ukraine away from Russia and pursue its wider goal of completely reconfiguring the former Soviet republics.

Patrushev went on to place the lion's share of the blame for the collapse of the Soviet Union on the U.S., rather than on internal causes. He said that the West's main Russophobe, former U.S. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski — whom, Patrushev emphasized, was of Polish descent — in the 1970s formulated and substantiated the strategy of achieving the Soviet collapse by attacking its most "vulnerable" area: the economy.

According to this theory, the West delivered its crippling blow by bringing down oil prices in the 1980s and enlisting the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as co-conspirators to help organize the bankruptcy and collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a kind of "economic Cold War" that proved remarkably effective, he said.

And then, Patrushev claimed without explaining why, the U.S. deliberately destroyed Yugoslavia and provoked a bloody civil war there.

He went on to argue that the U.S. wanted to seize control of the raw materials of the Black Sea,

the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, but that only a nuclear-equipped Russia could thwart its plans. That was why U.S. strategists decided to achieve the collapse of the government and the "subsequent dismemberment of our country," Patrushev said.

He claimed that the West was also behind the Chechen conflict and that Georgia's attack against South Ossetia in 2008 was nothing short of an anti-Russia venture by Washington. Now, he says, following Crimea and Donetsk, U.S. policy toward Russia once again resembles that of the Cold War.

He said that the West's economic sanctions are an attempt by the West to repeat the successful "economic Cold War" scenario that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The goal is the same this time — namely, to destroy Russia and seize its natural resources and territory.

According to this theory, the West tries to interfere in Russia's internal affairs in order to destabilize the government while the political opposition and nongovernmental organizations work to achieve the country's collapse.

For example, Sergei Ivanov said the September Peace March in Moscow "was carried out with obvious external support and was intended to split society." That statement coincided with yet another attempt by the Justice Ministry to shut down the Memorial human rights organization.

That is the picture of the world in the minds of Russia's ruling siloviki, and after 15 years of daily brainwashing, they have managed to instill this paranoid view into the minds of Russia's citizens. According to the Levada Center pollster, only 13 percent of respondents in 1990 believed that Russia was surrounded by enemies. Today that number stands at 78 percent. Civilian politicians look at the world and see friends or potential allies, but siloviki politicians see only enemies or potential enemies everywhere.

Russian leaders have decisively made national security and defense their top priorities, pushing the previous goals of development and modernization into the background. They are rapidly increasing spending on the military and police while cutting budgets for health care and education.

If the country's leaders believe that Russia is a besieged fortress, they will behave as if they are surrounded by enemies. Their objective: to fend off the external enemy and identify and eliminate all enemies within Russia's borders. They will cut and economize wherever necessary in order to maintain that posture as long as possible. And obviously, any talk of development is now completely out of the question.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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