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U.S. - Russian Relations: From Bad to Worse? (Transcript)

By The Moscow Times

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In an interview before a JFK Jr. Forum at Harvard Kennedy School, Moscow-based analysts Sergei Rogov and Sergei Karaganov explain why U.S.- Russian relations have reached a dangerous low point.

Watch the video of the interview.

Rogov

Since America proclaimed itself a winner in the Cold War ... and if there is a winner there is a loser. Guess who is the loser?

How bad are relations between the U.S. and Russia today?

Karaganov

Yes, they're worse than they've been in my lifetime except for a very short period and that is in the early days of the Reagan administration. Actually, our relations now very much resemble those days. American policy resembles [it], Russian attitudes resemble [it] ... so we're back to the very worst [point in U.S.-Russian] relations.

Rogov

The present situation more looks like a cold peace. But we have not reached the bottom. And if the will continue to slide there could be a new Cold War type relationship.

What's driving the tension?

Karaganov

The number one [cause] was the expansion of the Western sphere of influence and control, especially of NATO on Russian sphere of security and on the Russian sphere of interest and which Russia believes are vital to its security.

Rogov

The U.S. and Russia failed to develop the strategy for the integration of Russia. There were many nice words, many declarations but there was really no policy to bring Russia in.

Can the relationship be improved?

Karaganov

I don't think that this relationship could be improved [in the] near term because the analysis of the drivers of policies on both sides shows that there is very little interest and no trust on both sides, absolutely.

Rogov

We have so many common interests — nonproliferation, terrorism, Islamic State, Iran, North Korea, climate change — really all those common interests have been pushed into the background.

What do Westerners get wrong about Putin?

Karaganov

His ratings in Europe are much higher than it is assumed, and his ratings all over the world are probably the highest of any politician. I mean if you take the majority, if we want to be quote, unquote, democratic, his ratings in China, as we know, are beyond those of the Chinese leader.

Rogov

Many people in Russia support Putin because they think that he's standing tall and "gives them hell."

Why has the U.S.- Russia relationship failed?

Karaganov

The reason why this relationship has failed was mostly due to the reason that, as we believe. and I believe firmly, that the West never understood that it could not pursue the policy towards Russia as if it was a defeated nation. Russians never believed they were defeated first and, second, it's a national character. We were one of the very few countries in the world, there are only two in Europe, which have never been defeated seriously.

Rogov

Instead of normal political debate, we have a propaganda match. And it's truly the Cold War type of propaganda with all the stereotypes of the Cold War being back again.

Can Putin and Obama repair their relationship?

Karaganov

There is lot of distrust on both sides. So most probably we'll have to wait.

However, if Obama decides to make a salto mortale, and he could because he's not running [for president,] it might be that we could make some kind of new rapprochement — but I wonder.

Rogov

When Obama declared that his goal is to isolate and to punish Russia, the result is, of course, well, that's not integrating Russia.

What outcome do you hope to see in Ukraine?

Karaganov

If I were an almighty [power], I would say [a] peaceful Ukraine, developing under the combined auspices of Europe and Russia because Ukraine could not develop on its own.

Rogov

The East and other Ukrainian regions are given the same autonomy as Scotland after the referendum. Well, what's wrong with that?

Why shouldn't Ukraine join NATO?

Karaganov

As for NATO, Russia said that it is intolerable because that would mean 2,000 kilometers of indefensible border. You know, that is absolutely intolerable for Russia.

Rogov

Russia is concerned that Ukraine may join NATO, and that would be like Canada or Mexico

joining a hostile, competitive military alliance.

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