

Ignoring 'Cold War II' Won't Make It Go Away

By [Pyotr Romanov](#)

December 21, 2014



Of course, we could split hairs and ask: Are we on the brink of a new Cold War? Has a second Cold War already started? Did the first Cold War ever end? In my opinion, that is not the main point.

The simple fact that we are even asking such questions is far more important because it means that, regardless of which answer you choose, the situation has gotten bad for absolutely everyone.

However, it seems that some people still don't realize the seriousness of the situation. A Russian friend who relocated to London a few years ago responded to a comment I made on Facebook concerning the start of the Cold War. With self-satisfied irony he wrote: "To be honest, the West does not really care much about Russia."

How strange! Of course, it is very possible that his British neighbors and friends are too preoccupied with their house, lawn, car, children, dentist, etc. to worry about a Cold War with

Russia.

But what will happen tomorrow when the average Westerner finally realizes that his whole life — his house, children, car and even his dentist — is under threat? What thoughts will run through his head when he comes to understand that the politicians he elected behaved in such an unfriendly way toward Russia that the Russian politicians elected by the people of this country made equally unfriendly moves in response? And that everything simply went downhill from there?

Things are not all black yet, but the world has clearly entered a sort of twilight state. In fact, some observers argue that a new Cold War could turn out to be more hazardous than the first. One such expert is Stephen F. Cohen, who wrote in *The Nation* that "This Cold War — its epicenter on Russia's borders; undertaken amid inflammatory American, Russian and Ukrainian media misinformation; and unfolding without the stabilizing practices that prevented disasters during the preceding Cold War — may be even more perilous."

Ordinary citizens remain calm because of the simple fact that they typically do not know the full picture — nor do they try to know it. It is easier to live that way. Just the same, it is time to wake up and recognize what is happening. This is no Hollywood blockbuster unfolding outside our windows, but a force majeure of international proportions. True, it is not the first that the world has experienced, but knowing what hardships previous conflicts have brought to mankind should motivate us to try to prevent any more from occurring.

In fact, the world began living under the real threat of nuclear war long before the Cuban Missile Crisis, although that confrontation was one of the most dangerous moments of the first Cold War. And fortunately for mankind, sensible politicians always emerged who could put a stop to the ambitions of the warmongers.

Former U.S. General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower knew firsthand the horrors of war — unlike the hawks in his administration. When he grew tired of their frequent calls to use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union, Eisenhower resorted to black humor, once quipping: "You can't have this kind of war. There just aren't enough bulldozers to scrape the bodies off the streets." Later, then-U.S. President John F. Kennedy had to fight his own battles against Washington hawks. Where is the guarantee that today's generation of nano-politicians will exhibit the same good sense?

Of course, both sides in the Cold War had their own share of reckless adventurers. Take, for example, Soviet Marshal Rodion Malinovsky, who, in the heat of the Cuban Missile Crisis, gave orders to Rear Admiral Leonid Rybalko — who commanded four Soviet submarines, each carrying nuclear-tipped torpedoes — that, in the event of a U.S. naval attack, the individual submarine commanders could launch the weapons at their own discretion.

The following true story provides evidence of the danger inherent in such situations. On Oct. 27, 1962, when the U.S.-Russian crisis was already quieting down, one of those four Soviet submarines carrying nuclear-tipped torpedoes — the B-059, commanded by Valentin Savitsky — slowly rose to the surface as the crew of the nearby U.S.S. *Cony*, a destroyer, looked on in interest.

Then more U.S. naval vessels cruised into range, one even greeting the Russians with a jazz

band. The U.S. soldiers asked if they could help the Russians in some way. Savitsky initially declined any assistance, but said the next day that he would be obliged to them for some cigarettes and fresh bread. As they grew closer still, the Russian and U.S. servicemen even began tying a cable bridge between their vessels.

For several hours the U.S. cruiser and Soviet submarine remained on friendly terms in close proximity. Everything was relaxed and peaceful until, sometime after nightfall, a U.S. plane appeared out of nowhere and dropped several incendiary devices without warning, apparently to provide light to better photograph the sub.

By the time the eyes of the U.S. officers aboard the destroyer readjusted to the darkness, they saw to their horror that the Soviet submarine was now pointing its nose and torpedo tubes directly at them. The commander of the Cony rushed to apologize to Savitsky for the idiotic airplane pilot.

Today's generation owes a debt of gratitude to Savitsky for not losing his nerve in such a tense situation. What if he had panicked and fired his torpedoes?

Now my friend tells me that Westerners do not care much about Russia. Well, it would make more sense if both Westerners and Russians woke up and faced the mounting threat. Otherwise, they risk waking up to a truly unimaginable disaster later.

Pyotr Romanov is a journalist and historian.

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

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/12/21/ignoring-cold-war-ii-wont-make-it-go-away-a42507>