

Back to the Dear Old Cold War

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President Donald Trump and the neocon sofa samurais who surround him seem determined to pick a fight with China or Russia, or both at the same time.

Later this month, the US and China are due to try to end their long-running trade war which has damaged the economies of both nations. At the heart of the trade dispute are soya beans and pork, the two principal American exports to China, as well as China's efforts to grab US technology.

I find it amazing that, in 2019 high-tech America, the most important exports to China, aside from aircraft, are the humble soya bean and pigs. Of course, they come from farm country, the heartland of Trump's political support.

Not a thought has been given to the hellish mistreatment of the pigs themselves, intelligent animals who are turned into inanimate objects known as 'pork', or the foul conditions their industrial breeding creates.

China will likely be the first to blink in this test of national wills. It imports less from the US than it exports and is thus vulnerable to trade pressure.

But history amply shows that it's a bad idea to push China into a corner and make it lose face.

Suave diplomacy is the way to deal with the proud, prickly Chinese. They have refused to play by world trade rules, it is true, and need some serious arm-twisting. But not at a time when the Pentagon is ostentatiously planning a war against China in the western Pacific. The fuse has already been lit.

Meanwhile, the far right neocons, led by the unbalanced John Bolton, have convinced Trump to break the 1987 US-Soviet short and intermediate missile treaty signed by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev. This landmark agreement led to the removal of all US and Soviet land-based missiles from Europe. The pact was regarded as the first major step in reducing nuclear weapons.

The 1987 treaty was a godsend for Europe, which would have been ground zero in any nuclear exchange. It was also a huge relief for Moscow which rightly feared that the highly accurate US Pershing missiles based in Europe could deliver a devastating surprise strike, known as decapitation, on Soviet government leadership targets. Moscow's retaliation would have razed Paris, London, Frankfurt, Brussels, Amsterdam and other important targets.

Over recent months, Russian leader Vladimir Putin has been responding to growing US nuclear threats by vaunting new developments in his nation's missile technology. If accurate

and actually deployed, these new hypersonic and nuclear-powered missiles with immense range will make obsolete all of US anti-missile defenses, a topic much loved by Trump.

Now, Trump & Co. are preparing to junk this crucial piece of Cold War architecture and resume the arms race with Russia. Pentagon sources say the real reason is to counter China's missiles, which were not a factor in 1987, and have proliferated in recent years. Increasingly accurate, these Chinese tactical and strategic missiles are a major source of concern to the US Navy and US Asian bases.

But the US still has ample land, air and ocean-based nuclear forces to inflict immense damage on China. Violating the bedrock 1987 treaty with Moscow hardly seems worth adding some US nuclear-armed missiles in Guam, Japan or South Korea.

We must also suspect that the Trump White House has resurrected the old Cold War notion of bankrupting the Soviets/Russia by drawing them into a ruinous arms race. The US and its NATO satraps and Japan had a five times larger military capability than the old Soviet Union or today's threadbare Russia. 'We'll spend them into the ground,' went the old battle cry in Washington. This at least is preferable to a nuclear exchange.

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev just denounced the Trump administration's nuclear policies as a gigantic mistake and threat to mankind. NATO, showing its subservience to Washington, bleated its support for US plans to deploy new medium-ranged missiles in Europe. But, in truth, Europeans are aghast at the prospect of a nuclear war fought in their backyards.

When the history of our era is written, Trump's reincarnation of Cold War nuclear missile rattling will surely rank as a monumental historic folly. No amount of soya bean or pig sales can make up for that.

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