

US-Russia Relations: Cold War Politics Heats Up

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Previous articles discussed how Washington reinvented the “evil empire.” On March 8, 1983, Ronald Reagan coined the term. He addressed the National Association of Evangelicals.

He called communism “the focus of evil in the modern world.” He said don’t “ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire....and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.”

That was then. This is now. Cold War politics returned. Vladimir Putin is prime target. Boris Yeltsin was Russia’s first president. He played Washington’s game. He instituted neoliberal shock therapy.

He ignored essential human needs. He let corruption and other criminality flourish. He surrounded himself with likeminded apparachiks. He institutionalized pro-Western free market rapaciousness.

He let Russia’s oligarch class accumulate enormous wealth at the expense of suffering millions. Decades may be needed to recoup the enormous damage he caused.

Putin and former President Dmitry Medvedev haven’t done much to change things. Modernizing Russia’s economy inflicts horrendous harm. Creating a favorable investment climate makes ordinary people suffer.

At the same time, Putin asserts state sovereignty. He’s less compromising toward Washington than Medvedev. Russia under him is back. It’s proud and reassertive. He’s not about to roll over for America.

He wants greater Moscow influence. He wants rule of law principles respected. He wants Western meddling in the internal affairs of Russia, Syria, and other nations stopped.

He stresses Moscow’s “independent foreign policy.” He affirms the “inalienable right to security for all states, the inadmissibility of excessive force, and unconditional observance of international law.”

He and Obama disagree on fundamental geopolitical issues. Key is national sovereignty. So are war and peace. America claims a divine right to fight. Putin prioritizes conflict resolution.

Disagreements between both countries play out in dueling agendas. Russia’s gone all-out to prevent full-scale war on Syria. It’s valued regional interests are too important to sacrifice.

Washington notoriously plays hard ball. It retaliates different ways. For decades, Jackson-Vanik legislation remained a Cold War relic.

Section 401, Title IV of the 1974 Trade Act affected commercial relations with communist and former communist countries. It targeted nations. It influenced US/Russian relations until mid-December.

Repealing it came with strings. On December 6, House and Senate legislators passed the Magnitsky Act. On December 14, Obama enacted it. Congress and US media scoundrels hailed it as “an important step in the cause of human rights and democracy.”

Russia’s [Foreign Ministry](#) angrily responded. It called linking human rights to trade “cynical.”

“We regret that a US administration declaring its commitment to the development of stable and constructive bilateral relations was unable to defend its stated position against those who look to the past and see our country not as a partner, but rather an opponent – fully in line with the canons of the Cold War,” it stated.

[Putin](#) called the Magnitsky measure a “purely political, unfriendly act.”

“I don’t understand why Russian-US relations should be sacrificed for some domestic political gain,” he added.

“The government’s stance is to ignore crimes against Russian orphans adopted by US parents and not to punish the criminals. Russian observers are not even allowed to attend such trials and I find this unacceptable.”

“The US should better not humiliate Russia,” he stressed.

Russian Federation Council speaker [Valentina Matvienko](#) said:

“That law, the so-called Magnitsky law is aimed against Russian citizens whose guilt has not been proved by the court yet but who were a priori found guilty in the US.”

“This is a very unfriendly gesture to Russia. I am sure that some political forces are interested in the presence of constant political pressure on Russia.”

“If the US Congress adopted a universal law banning entry to the US for citizens of any country who violate human rights that could be understood.”

“But why is Washington doing such an unfriendly gesture amid the current reset of the US-Russia relations on which the global stability depends? Why did they chose Russia for it?”

Moscow promised “analogous restrictions” on US officials in response.

Key is anti-Russian sentiment. Sergei Magnitsky was a Russian attorney. In 2009, he died in police custody. His death drew international media attention.

He specialized in civil law. He did anti-corruption work. He uncovered evidence of tax fraud. He implicated police, judiciary figures, tax officials, bankers, and Russia’s mafia.

He accused them of stealing around \$230 million dollars in 2007 through fraudulent tax refunds.

On issues relating to courts, taxes, fines, and civil law, he was called the “go to guy” in

Moscow.

In November 2008, he was arrested, imprisoned, and treated abusively. For 11 months he was denied family visits. Serious health problems developed. Inadequate treatment followed.

On November 16, 2009, he died for reasons attributed officially to a “rupture to the abdominal membrane” and subsequent heart attack. If trial proceedings didn’t begin, he was due to be released eight days later.

His death sparked public outrage. Improving prison healthcare was demanded. Reducing the number of inmates awaiting trial was stressed.

In December 2009, an independent Moscow Public Oversight Commission said he was subjected to “psychological and physical pressure....”

Initially his death was blamed on medical neglect. Later claims suggested murder. Official investigations began. In July 2011, death by medical neglect was ruled.

The 2012 Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act normalized US/Russian trade relations. Doing so came with strings. Moscow raised legitimate objections.

The legislation imposes visa bans, asset freezes, and other sanctions on Russian nationals accused of committing human rights abuses.

It mandates publishing and updating information on individuals the Secretary of State believes were responsible for detaining, abusing, and/or causing Magnitsky’s death.

Others accused of concealing what happened are targeted. So is anyone believed to have benefitted financially, as well as those involved in an alleged criminal conspiracy regarding his treatment and death.

Targeted offenses include extrajudicial killing, torture, and/or other human rights violations committed against individuals seeking to expose illegal Russian activity, or against persons promoting human rights and freedoms.

On December 21, Russia’s State Duma lower house retaliated. It passed the Dima Yakovlev bill.

On December 26, Russia’s upper house Federation Council followed suit. It passed the measure unanimously. It imposes visa bans and asset freezes on US officials accused of violating the rights of Russian citizens abroad.

It prohibits US-sponsored NGOs from operating in Russia disruptively. It also targets US citizens associated with them. Another provision bans US citizens from adopting Russian orphans.

At issue is neglect causing harm or death. Dima Yakovlev was a Russian boy. His adoptive father abused him. It led to his death. He was acquitted on manslaughter charges.

Reprehensible negligence caused Dima’s death. Lax US adoption laws and follow-through prevent knowing how other Russian orphans are treated.

America never signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Failure shows dismissiveness and contempt for children's rights. It's clear from how adopted Russian and other orphans are treated. Moscow reacted.

On December 28, Putin enacted Dima Yakovlev legislation. It's effective January 1. Addressing a Thursday State Council session, he vowed "to adopt the decree granting support to orphans, children without parental care, and especially those kids who have health problems."

US-Russia 2009 reset policies promised a "fresh start." Rhetoric was more promise than fulfillment. Washington's intentions prevent normalized relations. Obama is more belligerent than Bush. Conflict is prioritized over diplomacy.

NATO includes 10 former Soviet Republics and Warsaw Pact countries. Georgia, Ukraine and potentially others may join them.

Washington's been systematically encircling Russia and China with bases. North Africa, the Middle East, and Eurasia are increasingly militarized.

Moscow isn't happy about aggressive encroachment on its borders. America's early warning radar and offensive missile defense systems target Russia belligerently.

Magnitsky legislation adds fuel to the fire. Russia knows America perhaps is more threat than ally. It's back to the future.

US/Russian relations are strained. Global war risks are too high to tolerate. Instead of cooling tensions, US policies heighten them. Anything ahead is possible.

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