

Moscow is Elbowing Into its Place in the Sun *But it should remain the West's goal to anchor Russia in Europe - By Theo Sommer*

Relations between Moscow and the West are worsening. How should we be dealing with a resurgent Russia? First of a series.

Is it, to borrow a phrase from Yogi Berra, the legendary American baseball coach, "d  j   vu all over again?"

In 1980, a few months after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, most Western nations boycotted the Olympic Games in Moscow. It was the height of the Cold War. Will there be a repeat performance in 2014 - this time a boycott of the Olympic Winter Games, which Vladimir Putin secured for the Black Sea resort Sochi just a few weeks ago?

Reading the comments penned by some neocons, Cold War nostalgics or nervous nellys in both West and East, one might easily be trapped into believing that the hectoring preceding another historic confrontation has already started, that swords are drawn and nuclear missiles will soon be put on the alert. Newsweek, for instance, with an addiction to alliteration that clearly suffocates cool-headed analysis, recently splashed "Putin's Dark Descent into Dictatorship" across its title-page, denouncing "The Tyrant's Turn" and his global ambitions. Other Western commentators lament "Russia's new belligerence" and deplore its "stealth imperialism."

In Moscow, the hardliners, yearning for the good old days of unconstrained confrontation, spread an even grimmer message. Thus, Major General Alexander Vladimirov conjures up the ineluctability of war between Russia and the United States within 10 to 15 years. Leonid Ivashov, the former chief of Russia's General Staff, is convinced that the Americans are already readying their military potential for war with Russia in order to make their centuries-old dream come true, "eliminating Russia as the main obstacle to the achievement of complete control over Eurasia."

As we say in German: "Nun macht's mal halb lang," or in the words of Andrew Jackson: "Elevate them guns a little lower."

Russia is not a flawless democracy. At best, it can be described as a mix between quasi-democracy and protodemocracy - a democratically camouflaged authoritarian system or hopefully, a system on its evolutionary way to unrestricted political freedom. At this juncture, the most fitting label is probably "guided democracy." Russian society has broken with its Soviet past and has, formally at least, adopted democratic values but it does not live in accordance with these values. It has got everything it takes: a parliament and political parties, elections, votes, majority decisions. What is lacking, however, is the democratic spirit. Political competition is hampered. The media is put on a short leash, especially television. The economy is shaped and directed not by the forces of the market but by the fiat of the Kremlin; state capitalism has replaced state socialism.

As Dmitri Trenin, senior associate at the Carnegie Moscow Center, recently formulated in the Washington Quarterly: "Russia is not a democracy - not even a failed one - but it is a rough, capitalist reality powered by private interest, which sometimes poses as the state interest." Human rights do not enjoy top priority and the authorities have been suspiciously lax in their efforts to clear up political murders like those of Anna Politkovskaja.

For a thousand years, until 1992, Russia was governed by autocratic rulers. The burden of

history weighs heavily on the country. It won't turn quickly into a Westminster democracy. As Trenin predicts: "It may or may not become a democracy but this outcome will not be known until the mid-twentieth century." The possibilities for outsiders to influence the evolution of Russia's democracy are severely limited. At the end of the day, the Russians themselves will determine their future course.

Europe can only point out what kind of Russia it would wish for: a Russia not only rich but responsible; a Russia on the way to a government for the people and by the people; a Russia, finally, that seeks relations with the West which are competitive but not antagonistic. And Europe should make crystal-clear that a Russia bent anew on confrontation could never hope for the kind of modernization partnership with the EU which it so badly needs.

So how about Moscow's global ambitions? Its purported "new belligerence?" Its "stealth imperialism?"

Certainly, there are several disconcerting factors. The interruption of gas supplies to Ukraine; the pressure on Belarus for partial ownership of gas pipelines; the economic blockade imposed on Georgia have given rise to serious concern. So have the cyber-attacks on Estonia after the relocation of the Soviet war memorial in Tallinn; the blackmailing of Shell and BP to give up their majority in the Sakhalin II project; the embargo on Polish meat deliveries; the preposterous threats against Poland and the Czech Republic because of the U.S. missile shield to be installed in these two countries; the refusal to hand over the main suspect in the Litvinenko murder case; the suspension of the treaty governing the reduction of conventional forces in Europe; the production of a new generation of intercontinental missiles; the stubborn rejection of the Ahtisaari plan for granting Kosovo independence from Serbia, and the sly maneuvers blocking Europe's plans for gas and oil pipelines from Central Asia which would bypass Russian territory. The list is long and depressing. It signifies a new Russian assertiveness - but belligerence, no.

And, frankly, in several instances the West acted unwisely enough to provoke Moscow's new boisterousness. Washington badly mishandled its plans for the missile shield in Eastern Europe. Britain's insistence on the rendition of Andrei Lugovoi flew in the face of international law and was contrary to London's own practice. The scheme to push NATO's eastern border ever closer to Russia's frontier naturally rouses hackles behind the Kremlin walls. The suspension of the CFE Treaty can be seen as a response to the fact that, in contrast to Moscow, the West has not yet ratified the treaty (with rather threadbare arguments about Russian bases in Georgia and Moldova). The new Russian ICBM program was preceded by a similar decision in Washington. And the rejection of the Ahtisaari plan could be seen as Moscow's belated revenge for the mortifying fact that NATO went to war against Serbia in 1999 despite Russia's passionate objections.

But this kind of tit-for-tat reckoning is besides the point. The crucial fact is that Russia is back, fighting for its place in the sun. It was always unrealistic to assume that after the breakup of the Soviet empire and the demise of the Soviet Union it would forever renounce its role as a great power, a rank it had rightly claimed since Peter the Great.

Russia has overcome the humiliating shock of its imperial decline and the implosion of the Soviet Union. It has also left the chaos of the Yeltsin years behind. Its leaders stand tall again. No longer does Moscow beg for IMF loans - it has paid off its debts. Exploding energy prices have boosted the economy by 40 percent since 2002. Russia is a world power again thanks to the windfall profits due to skyrocketing oil and gas prices. The country's carbon-based fuel reserves are now

the earnest of Moscow's might; they have taken the place once occupied by its nuclear arsenal. Today, petroleum rather than uranium is the Kremlin's power base.

But, to quote Trenin once more: "Russia does not crave world domination, and its leaders do not dream of restoring the Soviet Union. They plan to rebuild Russia as a great power with global reach, organized as a super-corporation." The new energy power will behave like any other great power in the world of states: defending its interests, staking out its sphere of influence, warding off encroachments by outsiders, making life difficult for adversaries as well as competitors (what Georgia's Saakashvili is to the U.S., Venezuela's Chávez is to the Kremlin).

The aim, as defined in the Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2000, is "to the greatest extent promote the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power and one of the most influential centers in the modern world." This is not another belligerent challenge to the West; it reflects Moscow's determination to prove that it still matters on the world scene.

Such an assertive Russia, while not an aggressive international actor, is likely to be an uncomfortable customer. It can be expected to play its nuisance value to the hilt. Relations with Europe will not be smooth and easy; at times they will get rocky. The EU will have to stand its ground but it should not get panicky. We are not in a new Cold War merely because Russia is back again. Yet we should not be simpletons either. Resurgent Russia must be shown that it cannot get away with anything.

Taking the longer view, it should remain the West's goal to anchor Russia in Europe and align it with Western standards and to keep relations competitive, not antagonistic. Those relations, however, must be based on genuine parity. The West - and Europe in particular - has to assert and defend its own interests. It has to draw some red lines in the sand and tell Kremlin leaders that it will not suffer their transgressions. Concretely, this means three things:

First, the European Union must not allow the Kremlin to bilateralize its relations with EU countries. While it should not let its policy vis-à-vis Moscow be dictated by the trauma of Eastern Europe's traditional Russia skeptics, it should vigorously protect their essential interests. No bullying the Baltic states, no further harassment of Poland must be the message. The new Russia-EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the still unaccomplished energy pact should finally be enacted.

Second, we must insist on a balance of rights and responsibilities. Reciprocity is the key principle. This goes for the political and military relationship but also for economic relations, in particular for the rules governing mutual investment. If Russia bans or limits foreign ownership of vital industries, it should not be surprised if Western countries do likewise. It must also recognize that investment by private companies is a different can of worms than investment by state-owned conglomerates.

Third, and most urgently, the West should no longer heed Moscow's opposition to the Ahtisaari Plan for the EU-supervised independence of Kosovo. Further procrastination is bound to create trouble. Already, tensions are rising in the - formally still Serbian - province, which has been administered by the United Nations since 1999. Kosovo-Albanian ex-guerrillas are getting restless, and a unilateral declaration of independence cannot forever be excluded. Even Kosovar moderates will never accept a return to Serbian rule.

For all practical purposes, Ahtisaari's proposal, if enacted, would turn Kosovo into a protectorate

of the European Union, the second such entity after Bosnia-Herzegovina. The EU would protect the ethnic Serbs and the other minorities who live there. By offering Belgrade the prospect of eventual membership, it could even, over time, break down Serbia's recalcitrance. Russia's "nyet" should not prevent the West from going ahead with the implementation of the Ahtisaari Plan. The Kremlin leaders will have to accept that the Balkans are the EU's near abroad, not Russia's.

It will take true statesmanship on both sides to prevent East and West slithering into another Cold War, or even a Cold Peace. They do not necessarily share common values or visions, but they have enough congruent interests to prevent the "déjà vu all over again" of another tragic confrontation.

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