

## Russian-American Relations: How Can We Break the Deadlock?

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The state of Russian-American relations in recent years is such that some experts have been reminded of the Cold War or have predicted its revival. But are these predictions based on reality? If not, what are the reasons for problematic bilateral relations and how can we resolve these issues?

It appears that the main reason for the problem in Russian-American relations is that following the end of the Cold War, the United States did not abandon the containment policy applied to the Soviet Union, but transferred it toward Russia.

In the beginning of the 1990s, Russia opened its heart to rapprochement with the West, withdrew its forces from Eastern Europe, and together with NATO took on an active and effective role in peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Each Russian president, upon taking office, has given a perfectly clear signal about the readiness for rapprochement, including the possibility of Russia's membership in NATO. Russia, significantly earlier than NATO, actively and decisively supported the United States in carrying out counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan.

However, the euphoria of rapprochement with the West and the United States was quickly substituted with disappointment and warranted distrust. American policy toward Russia was akin to the behavior of a victor (in this case, the victor of the Cold War) over the defeated party. U.S. resistance to the natural processes of integration of states in the post-Soviet space was very obvious. There was a clear desire to limit Russia's influence and the march of NATO expansion continued from the Baltics to Ukraine and Georgia.

The list of factors negatively influencing Russian-American relations is long. All these factors are either the consequence of the prolongation of the containment policy toward Russia or are related to the absence of a consensus on solutions for various international security problems. It is significant that, during this period, anti-American attitudes were evolving among the younger generations of Russians.

It is clear that real improvement in Russian-American relations requires the abandonment of the containment policy toward Russia.

In addition, another reality has appeared that must be given proper consideration. Anti-Americanism has become a factor in Russian domestic politics. The growth in defense spending, now larger than that for education and health care, requires appropriate justification. Apparently, real growth in defense industry spending is connected not so much to the presence of military threats, as to an effort to narrow the technology gap by employing military research and development—a resurrected Soviet tactic. Attempts to motivate the private sector to invest in new technologies and modern production were unsuccessful. Therefore, the government attempts to resurrect the strength and scope of the defense industry and associated technical expertise. It is apparent that the downsizing of education and health care expenditures in favor of defense spending can be partially justified by U.S. policies toward Russia.

When discussing the goal of getting the United States to abandon its policy of containment toward Russia, an important nuance must be taken into account.

The policy of containing the Soviet Union was formulated in the United States almost immediately after the end of the Second World War. But with the advent of nuclear weapons, mutual nuclear deterrence became the principal component of containment. Practically all other components of containment became secondary. The shared understanding of the inanity of a nuclear arms race first brought about treaties on the limitation of strategic nuclear arms, followed up by treaties on their numerical reduction. The fulfillment of the START I treaty and the preparation and implementation of the [SORT](#) and New START treaties were now carried out between Russia and the United States—after the collapse of the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union, and after the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the preparation of new treaties vividly highlighted the fact that in their approaches to nuclear weapons, both states remain in the confines of Cold War thinking—the logic of strategic stability founded on the condition of mutually assured nuclear destruction.

That has led to a reality in which the policies of Russia and the United States ended up as prisoners of previously created nuclear weapons arsenals. Both states have land-based strategic missile systems, which

even in routine mode can only be in a state of preparedness to immediately launch missiles against each other.

In this way, the state of mutual nuclear deterrence between Russia and the United States, independent from the presence or absence of political necessity, is maintained and will be maintained for purely technical reasons, if both sides do not undertake coordinated efforts.

Is it possible to depart from the state of containment while still adhering to the conditions of maintaining mutual nuclear deterrence? It appears not. For that reason, significant improvement of Russian-American relations requires focusing efforts on two key areas:

- Renouncement of the policy of containing Russia:
- Gradual consistent exit from the state of mutual nuclear deterrence.

These areas represent separate issues. Each has been studied extensively, especially exiting from the state of mutual nuclear deterrence. Abandonment of the containment policy, first and foremost, should include the renouncement of attempts to halt the expansion of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space and the cessation of active policies intended to draw states from the post-Soviet space into NATO.

Moreover, it is necessary to finally recognize the Collective Security Treaty Organization and to not hinder its cooperation with NATO in the sphere of security.

By renouncing the policy of containing Russia, the United States will acquire a responsible partner in providing regional and global security under the complex circumstances of a more and more globalized world. Responsible partnership presupposes partners who are capable of having and defending independent views concerning the resolution of new problems, while concurring in defining the common, ultimate goal. Only this kind of partnership can provide for the sustained development of the world system.

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