

RUSSIA IS DIFFICULT, BUT FAR FROM AN ENEMY

Matthew Rojansky, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars

Russia is among a handful of influential global actors on almost every issue of vital national interest to the United States, from strategic nuclear stability and nonproliferation, to countering terrorism, responding to pandemic threats, and sustaining global economic growth based on free trade and energy security. Russia may seem to be a difficult partner at times, yet it is far from America's adversary or enemy today. Tough talk and tit-for-tat posturing of the kind both sides have demonstrated in recent months are nothing compared to the potentially catastrophic results of real confrontation, which veterans of the Cold War worked tirelessly to avoid.

On the contrary, a broad range of mutual interests shared by Moscow and Washington has underpinned decades of successful joint initiatives in space, scientific research, cultural exchange, and conflict resolution, while the potential for U.S.-Russia cooperation in the future should be even greater.

Recognize Russia's distinct national interests

Managing U.S.-Russia ties will never be easy or intuitive for either side. Although many vital interests are shared, there are important areas of divergence, and the current imbalance of political, diplomatic, and economic power, favoring the United States, inclines Russians toward particular sensitivity over any perception of bullying, undue meddling, or disrespect from Washington.

Successful engagement with Russia demands recognition of Russia's distinct and legitimate national interests, even when they do not appear compatible with those of the United States. While Americans may hope for accelerated progress toward liberal democracy and the rule of law in Russia, only the Russian people can decide the priorities and pace of their domestic development. Respect for Russia's independent interests and developmental course, with sustained attention and patience for official engagement, plus investment in the building blocks of the relationship such as trade promotion, ease of travel, and cultural exchange, offer the best chance to produce big bilateral accomplishments over time.

Matthew Rojansky is Director of the Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

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