

Can the World Avert a New Cold War?

The West is charging off into a new Cold War with Russia under banners of hypocrisy, from charges of “expansionism” to complaints about disrespect for individual rights. This lack of balance could have grave consequences for the world, says former British intelligence officer Annie Machon.

By Annie Machon

Last weekend, I was invited onto RT to do an interview about the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, particularly focusing on the speech delivered by the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, during his visit to Berlin.

I would like to expand on some of the topics I mentioned, how to encapsulate an alternative geopolitical perspective different from the Western orthodoxy in under four minutes? A task even Monty Python would find challenging!

The first issue was Gorbachev’s recent comments about the dangers of a new Cold War arising around the crisis in Ukraine. Though there are a variety of geopolitical factors involved in these new East-West tensions, the front line of this new Cold War remains the Internet, which emerged in the 1990s after the original Cold War ended – as an outlet for political diversity circumventing the traditional gatekeepers for information.

In the 1990s, the United States had a golden opportunity, in fact a perfect storm of opportunities to assert its global hegemony. It was the last superpower left standing in a newly unipolar world, history had supposedly ended and capitalism had triumphed. The Soviet Union had disintegrated and the newly shorn Russia was tottering, its vast national wealth being assiduously asset-stripped by the globalized neocon Ålite and its economic “shock therapy.”

Simultaneously, the new World Wide Web was exponentially growing and the key pioneers were predominantly American companies. After a panicked phase of playing catch-up to the Internet’s exhilarating burst of democratization, Western spy agencies saw the potential for total mastery of the Internet, creating a surveillance panopticon, a single location from which a watchman can observe all inmates of an institution without them knowing they are being watched. In this case, the institution was the entire planet and the inmates were the world’s people. It was an opportunity that the KGB or the Stasi could only have fantasized about. Thanks to Edward Snowden, we are now beginning to get glimpses of the full horror of the surveillance under which we all now live.

Building on the old Echelon model, which was so nearly overthrown in Europe back in July 2001, the National Security Agency suborned, bought and prostituted other intelligence agencies across Europe to do its bidding. Germany, at the nexus of east and west Europe, remains a front line in this battle, with the BND possibly working unconstitutionally to do the NSA's bidding, even apparently to the detriment of its own national interest. Some politicians and many hacktivists are fighting back.

Reneging on a Deal

But it is the geographical boundaries that have shifted most significantly since the fall of the Wall. Here I need to credit Ray McGovern, a former senior CIA officer and now a peace activist, for all the useful information he provided during his various talks and interviews across Europe a couple of months ago.

McGovern, a fluent Russian speaker, worked as a Soviet expert for much of his career in the CIA. As such he was privy to the behind-the-scenes negotiating that occurred after the fall of the Wall when the United States pushed for German reunification but was worried about the 260,000 Soviet troops stationed in the former East Germany. So, a deal was cut with Gorbachev, stating that NATO would not move "one inch" further than Germany after reunification. The Soviets accepted this arrangement and withdrew their troops.

Well, we all know what has happened since. Though its principal *raison d'être* to counter the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991, NATO expanded east at an amazing rate, now encompassing a further 12 eastern European countries including the Baltic States and Poland, which the U.S. has used as a base for an increasing number of "defensive" missile systems. In 2008, NATO also issued a declaration that Georgia and Ukraine would be welcome to join, taking the front line up to the borders of Russia. Coincidentally, both these countries in recent years have been portrayed as the victims of "Russian expansionism."

In 2008, Georgia invaded the disputed ethnic Russian region of South Ossetia. Russia moved to protect the people and gave the Georgian military a bloody nose. Anyone remember that? At the time it was portrayed across the Western media as Russian aggression, but the facts have emerged since to disprove this version of events.

Similarly, this year we have seen a violent coup overthrow democratically-elected President Viktor Yanukovich of Ukraine when he was inclined to stay within the Russian sphere of influence rather than ally the country more closely to the European Union under the asset-stripping austerity measures demanded by the International Monetary Fund.

Victoria Nuland, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State responsible for Europe, explained in one speech late last year that the United States had spent \$5 billion in support of Ukraine's "European aspirations" and then before the Feb. 22 coup she was overheard in a phone conversation with the U.S. ambassador in Kiev picking who should serve in the new government, saying "Fuck the EU" and declaring that Arseniy Yatsenyuk "Yats is the guy" should take over. After the coup, Yatsenyuk emerged as the new prime minister and then pushed through the IMF plan.

And yet still Russia is blamed for aggression. I am not an apologist for Russia, but the facts speak for themselves even if they are not widely reported in the Western mainstream media.

Why the Meddling?

But why on earth would the U.S. be meddling in Ukraine? Would an expansion of NATO be sufficient excuse in America's self-interested eyes? Probably not.

Which leads me on to a very interesting article by Eric Zuesse. The argument of his well-researched report is that it all comes down to energy supplies once again. When does it not?

The United States has some unsavory allies in the Middle East, including theocratic dictatorships such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Their vast energy reserves are not only essential to the United States, but also the trading of these reserves in the petrodollar monopoly is vital to propping up the fragile U.S. economy.

Russia, at the moment, is the primary energy supplier to the EU, the world's largest market. Iran, which has strengthened its ties to Russia, wanted to build a pipeline via Syria with President Bashar al-Assad's approval, to exploit this vast market. However, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United States apparently have other plans involving a pipeline from Qatar via Syria to Europe.

Hence the urgent need to overthrow Assad and put a Sunni puppet government in place, more susceptible to those pulling the strings. Qatar's preferred candidate of choice would be more moderate, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, would have no compunction about installing a hardline fundamentalist régime in place, up to and including ISIS or al-Qaeda's affiliate, the Nusra Front. Thus the murder, mayhem and human suffering erupting across the region now.

Though the mainstream media presents the Syrian civil war to the U.S. and EU people as a noble struggle of "moderates" to oust evil dictator Assad, it is really an appalling real-life example of the horrors inherent in Zbigniew

Brzezinski's psychopathic "grand chessboard."

King Dollar

It is a widely accepted understanding today, over a decade after the "war on terror" began, that all the wars in the Middle East were launched to protect America's oil and energy interests. Less well known is the country's desperate scramble to protect the petro-dollar monopoly, the denomination of oil sales in U.S. dollars. If that ends if some alternative currency or basket of currencies supplants the U.S. dollar the dollar will no longer remain the world's reserve currency and the United States will be financially screwed.

If you look at all the recent wars, invasions and "humanitarian interventions" that have resulted in collapsed countries and anarchy across whole regions, it is clear that beyond oil and gas the key issue is money.

Pre-2003 Iraq tried to trade what oil it could in euros not dollars and Saddam Hussein was deposed and killed; Libya was welcomed briefly back into the international fold, but once Colonel Muammar Gaddafi began to talk about establishing an African gold dinar currency, backed by Libya's oil wealth to challenge the petro-dollar, he too was toppled and killed; Assad wanted to facilitate energy pipelines to Europe for Russia and Iran, and he was attacked; even Iran tried to trade its energy reserves in euros, and lo and behold it was almost bombed in 2008; and finally Russia itself trades some of its energy in rubles and faces NATO expansion onto its borders, economic sanctions and the prospects of a new Cold War.

As people say, always follow the money.

So, in my view, this is the current geopolitical situation: Russia is now strong enough – with its domination of Europe's energy supply, its backing by some Middle Eastern countries that want to break away from the U.S. sphere of influence, and its trade deals and establishment of an independent global investment development bank with other BRICS countries – that it can challenge the U.S. hegemony.

However, threaten the petro-dollar monopoly and thereby the financial solvency of the United States of America and you are suddenly Public Enemy No 1.

As I said, I am by no means an apologist for Russia. I tell it like I see it. To Western sensibilities, Russia has some serious domestic issues to address: human rights abuses during the brutal Chechen war; its suspected involvement in the death by polonium-210 poisoning of KGB defector Alexander Litvinenko in London in 2006; its overly punitive drug laws; and human rights abuses against dissidents, the LGBT community and journalists. Yet the West has merely mouthed

platitudinous objections to all these issues and clearly does not have clean hands on similar troubling issues of its own.

So why now is Russia being internationally excoriated and penalized for its reaction to what was clearly an unconstitutional coup in Ukraine followed by a punitive campaign of repression by the new Kiev regime against ethnic Russians in Ukraine's south and east? Over the last few years, Russia has looked statesmanlike compared to the U.S. and its vassal states: it was not involved with the Libya fiasco; it has given safe haven to NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden; and it halted the rush to yet another disastrous western war in Syria.

Nor, to my West European sensibilities, are America and its acolytes pristine either, with their mass surveillance, presidentially approved kill lists, illegal wars, kidnapping, torture and drone bombings. Not to mention the U.S. domestic addiction to gun ownership, vast prison populations, draconian drug sentences and the death penalty, but that's another story.

Yet the U.S. media-enabled propaganda machines justify all of the above and demonize Russia for reacting to geopolitical provocations on its own border thus creating yet another fresh bogeyman to justify yet more "defense" spending.

A Patient Bear

The Russian bear is being baited, increasingly surrounded by yapping curs. I thought this sport had been made illegal hundreds of years ago, at least in Europe, but obviously not in the dirty realm of international politics. It is a marvel that the bear has not lashed out more in the face of such provocation.

There was a chance for peace when the Berlin Wall came down 25 years ago. If the United States had upheld its side of the gentlemen's agreement about not expanding NATO, if the neocon "shock therapy" predators had not pounced on a weakened post-Soviet Russia, and if closer integration could have been achieved with Europe, the future could have been rosy.

Unfortunately, I have to agree with Gorbachev, we are indeed facing a new Cold War, and this time it is clearly of America's making. But Europe will bear the brunt, through trade sanctions, energy shortages and even, potentially, war. It is time we Europeans broke away from our American vassalage and looked to our own future.

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GOP Climate-Deniers Lose a Point

The Republican mid-term victories were viewed as a big win for global-warming deniers and their oil-and-coal industry backers, but China's surprising acceptance of greenhouse gas limits removes one of the chief arguments against the U.S. doing something about the climate crisis, writes ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

This week's announcement of a U.S.-Chinese agreement on curbing greenhouse gases is very important, including in some ways that Michael Levi's expert analysis effectively captures. As Levi notes, this agreement was a marked departure for China not only in terms of the numerical goals set but also in the manner of setting them, in the form of an agreement negotiated with the United States.

This goes against the prior Chinese habit of treating climate change, like Beijing treats many things, as a subject on which China must firmly assert its independence.

The agreement surprised many from the standpoint not only of Chinese policy-making habits but also of American politics. The dominant story line as President Obama left on his current trip was that, with his party having just gotten whopped in the mid-term election, he would struggle to assert U.S. power and influence. But instead his visit to China has been productive.

Getting Beijing's signature on the environmental accord has been the biggest achievement, but other deliverables have included a substantial trade agreement and progress toward averting U.S.-Chinese incidents at sea. As Sarah Palin might remark if her political allegiances were different, "How's that weak-president-shuffling-off-to-Beijing thing workin' out for ya?"

Much more important than political story lines are the substance, symbolism and momentum contained in the emissions accord itself. The sheer fact of the two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases jointly arriving at such an objective is itself significant. Any direct benefit involved will have a multiplier effect to the degree that it imparts momentum to efforts to negotiate broader multilateral commitments and action.

The effects also will be beneficial insofar as they affect debates in the United States, where pre-Enlightenment opposition to doing something about climate change is still all too deeply entrenched. The accord with China will at least

help to refute the argument that it wouldn't make sense for the United States to get out in front on this issue when other emitters, and China is the biggest emitter of all, are not doing their part.

Failed Hewlett-Packard executive and unsuccessful senatorial candidate Carly Fiorina made exactly this argument the other day in a [pro-pollution op-ed](#) in which she blithely observed that "no form of energy is perfect" and that "action by a single state or nation will make little difference."

The domestic political task of getting the United States to live up to negotiated goals and to doing its necessary share will still be formidable. The election result earlier this month made it even more formidable. Probably the person who personifies this unfortunate fact the most is Sen. James Inhofe, R-Oklahoma, who has declared that "manmade global warming is the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people." In a fox-overseeing-the-henhouse situation, Inhofe will take over as chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Maybe, just maybe, the accord announced in Beijing will nudge the deniers and other opponents of action at least slightly away from their Dark Ages attitude toward science, from their narrow focus on denying not just scientifically derived knowledge but also anything that smells like an accomplishment for Barack Obama, and from a short-sighted focus on quarterly results of the coal industry in Kentucky or the oil industry in Oklahoma, and lead them to give some thought to doing the responsible thing to preserve a habitable environment.

Another of the standard knocks on President Obama is that he plays only small ball and hits only singles, and that he doesn't think strategically enough and go for home runs. There is nothing more strategic and big-picture than saving the planet. The agreement announced in Beijing cannot count for a home run because it is only the setting, and not yet the achieving, of a goal. But it is an important step toward getting around the bases.

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