

Russia and the West: Unsurmountable Structural Contradictions

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In our contemporary world, the relationship between Russia and the West has long been in the spotlight. The Ukraine crisis and the Syrian issue are both connected to the relationship of Russia and the West, particularly of Russia and the United States. Even when we refer to China-Russia relations, Russia's relationship with the West becomes an inevitable topic, and a widespread viewpoint is that China and Russia are getting closer to jointly respond to the US. The relationship between Russia and the West plays an almost pivotal role in Russian foreign policy.

Since the conclusion of the Cold War, Russia has also undergone a dramatic transformation along with the profound changes in the global context. Russia was not only instrumental in ending the Cold War system and the two opposing blocs, but also a builder and a major force in the evolution of the international situation after the Cold War. Moreover, Russia is also affected by a series of major changes and impacts brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the complicated global context in the post-Cold War era. All these issues have clearly demonstrated Russia's growing influence in the international arena, but due to the great diversity of perspectives, the projection of that influence is interpreted in widely different ways, sometimes in a contradictory and distorted manner. By going beyond the short-term diplomatic maneuvers and observing Russian policy from a relatively broad time span, we can get a roughly complete picture of the relationship

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between Russia and the outside world. This article attempts to examine the course of Russia's development and its relationship with the Western countries from a more macroscopic perspective and over a relatively complete time period.

Russia's Major Power Strategy Encounters Western Roadblocks

The strategy to resume Russia's major power status is in line with its national interests and reflects the basic aspirations of the Russian people. However, this strategy is apparently not in accordance with the interests of Western countries, especially that of the United States. What they wish to see is a weak and desperate Russia. Therefore, Western countries led by the US have enacted a variety of policies to impede the rise of Russia.

From the collapse of the Soviet Union to the late 1990s, Russia's ruling policies were not well-defined. Although the Boris Yeltsin government stressed that Russia should become a mainstream power of world civilization and a developed Western country, there were huge gaps between these goals and the methods, path and mode to achieve them. Leaving aside the fact that the goal itself was a cause of apprehension, the contradictions, disputes and conflicts ignited by domestic political forces had left the country in a state of social unrest and nationwide crisis. Russia's rapid decline reached an intolerable point and in turn exacerbated the overall social crisis; and the international situation became so complicated that Russia could no longer exert its traditional influence. The process of Western "reforms" pushed Russia further down the road to disintegration. "Russia's foreign policy in the first half of the 1990s in a deteriorating economic and social environment became very weak-kneed. Ironically, the goal of Russia's foreign policy at that time was to win a place in the 'civilized world.' To accomplish the objective, national interests were to take a back seat, and Russia embarked on a precarious trajectory and became a 'loyal follower' of the United States, a situation to which Washington had become long accustomed."¹

1 Yevgeny Primakov, *What Would the World Be like Without Russia?* Central Compilation and Translation Bureau Press, 2016, p.6.

Since the 21st century, Russia has undergone significant changes, moving rapidly from a country in serious deterioration to a newly emerging nation. All this could not be possible but for Vladimir Putin's policies. Noting the profound changes the post-industrial society has imposed on people's lives, Putin made it a strategic objective to create a "strong Russia." Unlike Boris Yeltsin's governing strategies, Putin abolished the policy of "ideology-based economic development"² and opposed Western model of development.³ Nevertheless, instead of cutting off Russia to the outside world, Putin emphasized the importance of the economic integration between Russia and the world. Three initiatives were launched to implement his policies. First, he supported the Russian commercial community doing business with the foreign market; Second, he opposed the discrimination imposed by the West in the international goods, services and investment markets; Third, he called for Russia's accession to the global economic system. Putin's pursuit to make Russia strong again is obviously intense, and prevented Russia from being reduced to the second or even third-tier country's status. He is determined to bring Russia back to a first-rank country. Making no secret of his support for Russia returning to great power status, Putin stresses that to realize the ideal of "Russia to become a unified, powerful and respected nation,"⁴ the only way is to create a powerful, strong and confident country, a country that is not opposed to the international community or any other major power, and wishes to coexist with the major powers.⁵ Putin's policy of reviving Russia as a major power is designed to reawaken the sense of being a great nation which has long been an intrinsic part of the psychology of the Russian people, but was eroded by the reality of decline in previous years.

What drives Russia to be a powerful and influential country? In Putin's view, Russia is facing a variety of challenges including some very

2 Путин В. В. Россия на рубеже тысячелетий. // Независимая газета. 30 Декабря 1999.

3 *Ibid.*

4 Vladimir Putin, *The Collected Works of Putin*, China Social Sciences Press, 2002, p.76.

5 *Ibid.*



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the visiting US Secretary of State John Kerry seeking breakthroughs on Ukraine and Syrian issues in December 2015.

dangerous ones. “If our country is not powerful enough, then we cannot respond to these risks nor can we address any nationwide tasks.”⁶ Putin is very much alert toward the changes in the global environment: “The international transition process is producing many hidden changes, often involving incalculable risks. Thus, we can under no circumstance abandon our strategic deterrent capability, rather we are going to increase it.”⁷ Putin has repeatedly said that Russia must have a strategic foresight, a long-term prediction mechanism, and a response system that can react to both current and future risks, and that it is imperative to see things with a forward-looking perspective in order to predict what kind of risks Russia will encounter in 30 to 50 years. For him, this is a significant mission which requires the

6 *The Collected Works of Putin*, p.81.

7 *Путин В. В. Быть сильными: гарантии национальной безопасности для России*. 20 Февраля 2012, <https://rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>.

mobilization of all civil and military science capabilities to develop a long-term reliable prediction mechanism.⁸ Despite the fact that Russia is now facing multiple challenges, Putin is confident in dealing with them: “Russia is by no means a country that will be intimidated by challenges. By concentrating our focus and accumulating our strengths, we can cope with any challenges with ease. We have proven victorious each time we face them.”⁹

Although the revival of a powerful Russia is in line with Russia’s national interests and people’s aspirations, how is this to be achieved? What kind of international environment is required to achieve this goal? What kind of relationship does Russia need to establish with the world and with the West in particular? Now that Russia is ready to become a world power, is the West willing to accept Russia as a major global power? This is the big question.

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States always deemed Russia as a weak country, not expecting Russia’s revival within such a short period of time. As Russia’s comprehensive national strength gained momentum, the US, driven by its own national interests, began to intensify its containment of Russia. Russia’s re-integration of Eurasia has aroused concerns of the US. Especially in regard to security, the US-led NATO centrality does not allow any vigorous Russian participation in their Eurasian programs. Any programs aimed at promoting economic integration in the CIS region are seen by the US as an attempt to reconstruct the Soviet Union. The US is intent on not allowing Russia to achieve economic integration with the newly independent countries, making it difficult for Russia to contend with the US. In other words, as long as a substantial alliance with Ukraine, Belarus and other countries is not realized, Russia will not be a world-class power that can rival the US. The crisis in Ukraine is actually a result of the strategic tit for tat between Russia and the US. The strategic purposes of Russian interference in Ukraine was to prevent Ukraine from

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Путин В. В.* Россия сосредотачивается - вызовы, на которые мы должны ответить. // Известий. 16 Января 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/511884>.

entering NATO, or more specifically, to prevent the stationing of US troops in Ukraine. For Russia, the greatest threat to its military security is the NATO. The closer the NATO's military facilities are to Russia, the greater is the threat felt by Russia. Furthermore, due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's strategic depth to the west had been wiped out.

The rivalry between the US and Russia on ballistic missile defense system is worth attention. The US is preparing to deploy anti-missile systems in Europe and the Korean Peninsula. In Europe, the US is to deploy the anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system in the newly recruited member states of the EU and NATO, for instance Romania, which poses a considerable geopolitical and psychological challenge upon Russia. On the Korean Peninsula, the US has decided to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea, which is seemingly to combat North Korea but actually targets China and Russia. Therefore, Russia is facing America's threat from both the west in Europe and the east on the Peninsula. Russia aims to achieve a fundamental balance of global forces but is prevented by the US missile defense system program. The basic solution for Russia to combat the US is not to establish an anti-missile system but rather to develop the ability to defeat any ABM system as soon as possible, which means Russia has to develop a huge counterattack capability. Thus, the reaction to America's ABM system is guided by an "asymmetrical" but "effective" principle that can keep pace with the US by developing a counterforce with sharper "spears" in response to hardened "shields."

Putin has repeatedly stressed that foreign policy ought to deliver a favorable international environment for the rise of Russia. In the era of economic globalization where the connection between countries is becoming closer, Russia cannot succeed in its revival in isolation. A favorable international environment is a prerequisite. However, the international

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climate is not on the side of Russia's upward trajectory. There are tensions and frictions between Russia and the West now and again leading to confrontations. In that case, economic power constitutes an indispensable material basis to underpin Russia's military strength. In 2002, the Russian Chief of the General Staff suggested that Putin cancel the inspection on the submarine base in Kamchatka since it couldn't afford to maintain daily operations. Instead of adopting this proposal, Putin turned to Russian Surgutneftegas (SNG) and TNK-BP Holdings to finance the operation of the base and save the submarine fleet at last. This is just one indication of the dilemma haunting Russia between economic development and defense construction. If Russia were to become a "great power," it must boast the corresponding hard power. However, building the hard power is indeed an expensive endeavor. Excessive input into military construction will slow down the pace of economic development in Russia. In this regard, Putin's thinking is very clear. He has already made it known that Russia's internal interests are more crucial than external ones.

Relations between Russia and the West did not function smoothly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with constant ups and downs. The eastward expansion of NATO and the EU pressing on Russia's traditional strategic space has engendered a sense of containment and obstruction by the West. Despite the end of the Cold War, the Cold War mentality of the Western bloc, especially of the United States, is far from ending. Western countries have adopted several typical ways to suppress Russia's ascent, such as fomenting "color revolution" in the CIS, even in Russia, and using human rights and democracy issues to stifle Russia. Since Western "transformation" has led nowhere, they decide to exert pressure on Russia, which Putin has not figured out an effective way to deal with so far. The picture of Russia in the West is distorted. Some Western politicians and academics have demonized Putin because they believe that Putin is in his heart of hearts opposed to democracy and the West. This just doesn't correspond to reality. Putin is not always anti-West. What he is doing is just performing his duty to safeguard Russia's national interests. Even Yeltsin, who had a lot of illusions about the

West, warned the West on the eve of his resignation that Russia was equipped with nuclear weapons and the plot to suppress Russia would not end well. Western countries have generally shown distrust toward Russia, but in reality, Russia is willing to be on good terms with the United States and is not “subconsciously” preparing for confrontation with it. Putin made this clear in 2012, “We are willing to foster a long-term relationship with the United States to score a substantive breakthrough on the condition that the United States abide by the principle of mutual equality and mutual respect.”¹⁰ However, Russia’s pursuit of equal major power status is not echoed by the United States.

The Arrogance of the Cold War Victor

In the opinion of Western countries, Russia lost the Cold War and thus had to pay the price. The drastic reduction of Russia’s sphere of influence since the end of the Cold War is basically a process of the Western bloc headed by the United States to share the “fruits of victory.”

The two world wars that broke out in the 20th century were a great calamity for mankind. The Cold War did not become a world war, but bore all the ominous earmarks of a real war. What stopped this global cold war from escalating into a hot war was the emergence of nuclear weapons. The confrontation between these two blocs led by the Soviet Union and the United States was, somewhat ironically, established on the basis of nuclear terror. Ultimately, the Cold War ended with a dramatic upheaval and the Soviet collapse.

The end of the Cold War had a number of important characteristics. First, one of the opposing sides resoundingly collapsed with drastic changes in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union as the most prominent symbols; Second, the world saw a change from the confrontation of two camps into a situation in which the United States emerged totally

10 Путин В. В. Россия и меняющийся мир. // Московские новости. 27 Февраля 2012, <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>.

intact while the Soviet Union disintegrated. The Comecon and the Warsaw Pact came to an end while the European Community survived and expanded into the EU; NATO also saw an expansion and further development; Third, the Soviet Union, one of the two superpowers in the bipolar world, fell apart, leaving the US as the only superpower in the world; Fourth, the

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world consequently shifted from a dual-hegemon system into one with a single exceedingly strong superpower; Fifth, the Cold War mentality did not disappear with the end of the Cold War. "The 'Cold War', like any other wars, left us with live ammunition, figuratively speaking." Putin said, "I am referring to ideological stereotypes, double standards

and other typical aspects of Cold War bloc thinking."

Although the Cold War was quite different from the two world wars, it still saw a winner and a loser. Russia believed that there was no loser in the Cold War because the two sides had mutually agreed to end it. The Russian political elites lacked a clear understanding of the strategic impacts of the Cold War's conclusion and the sober realization that Russia was viewed by the West as the loser. They even indulged in the fantasy that they would co-rule the world with the US as a winner of the Cold War. However, the reality was cruel. The US and Europe considered themselves to be the victors of the Cold War and were ready to seize the defeated Russia's sphere of influence. As former Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov pointed out, the US policy had all the Cold War "victor's syndromes." It tried to squeeze Russia out of the former Soviet Union region, and claimed the region of "vital interest," which has become a new irritant in Russia-US relations.¹¹ Shortly after the Cold War ended, the US-led Western bloc launched the eastward expansion of the EU and NATO, gradually grabbing the Cold War's "fruits of victory," and

¹¹ Yevgeny Primakov, *The New Diplomacy of Russia*, Contemporary World Press, 2002, p.98.

thus greatly reducing Russia's traditional influence.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Western Europe and the former Soviet Union region have seen two very opposite geopolitical trends. Western Europe, through integration, organizational aggregation, and deep fusion, moved toward a unity. Its integration process greatly attracted the Eastern European countries after the drastic changes, because they, out of their long-term fear of the Soviet Union, were eager to establish an alliance with Western Europe. Therefore, the eastward expansion of the EU coincided with Eastern Europe's desire to befriend Western Europe, helping to accelerate the process of European integration. In contrast, the former Soviet camp has seen a trend of disintegration, separation and fragmentation. Eastern European countries made obvious attempts to "break away from the Soviet Union" and "break away from the Russia," while the other newly independent CIS countries have also expressed wishes, more or less, to alienate Russia. The republics of Chechnya and Tatarstan also showed a tendency to demand independence. Therefore, after the end of the Cold War, Russia was caught in an unprecedented geopolitical dilemma.

The Western countries, as the "victors" of the Cold War, have adopted a three-step strategy toward the region of former Soviet Union and East Europe.

The first step is to transform Eastern European countries. Based on the EU eastward expansion, Western countries conducted an institutional transformation in political, economic, cultural and value systems of these countries, "formatting" them to a European system and gradually absorbing the Eastern European countries and the Baltic States; And the eastward expansion of NATO provided Eastern Europe and the three Baltic States with security guarantees, formatting these countries militarily as well. The US and Europe, through the enlargement of the EU and NATO, has completed the transformation, integration and incorporation of the sphere of influence of the former Soviet Union, integrating and co-opting the East European countries, peeling them away from their traditional relationship

with Russia and preventing any further Russian influence on them. Western countries' recognition of the Kosovo independence signaled that Russia had completely lost its original political influence in Eastern Europe and the Baltic States region.

The second step is to encroach on the former Soviet republics. The process of Western countries' annexation of the Eastern European countries bore witness to the strategic confrontation with Russia, but the manner in which Russia showed its forbearance and resistance to the process clearly revealed its disadvantageous and helpless position. In the 1990s, Russia was thrown into crisis and turmoil, having no power to stop the expansion of the EU and NATO. Despite that Russia had drawn a red line at the border of Eastern European and the Baltic States, the EU and NATO expansion crossed that red line, even bringing the Baltic States into their embrace. However, Russia could do nothing to confront the West. Perhaps trying to get off the hook, Russia justified its response on the historical particularity of the Baltic States' accession to the Soviet Union, and emphasized, at the same time, that other parts of the former Soviet region belong to the vital interests of Russia with which the West should not interfere. In the 21st century, the West obviously increased its strategic involvement in the CIS region, with Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan successively experiencing real or suspected "color revolutions." In addition, many CIS members signed the "Partnership for Peace" agreements with NATO while the EU sought to establish close contact with CIS member through EU "Association Agreements."

The third step is to foment "color revolutions" in Russia itself, thus endangering the Putin administration and Russia's social foundation.

Faced with the increasing aggression of the West, Russia did not wait to die, but decided to fight back. To counter the strong involvement of the US and the EU in the CIS region, Russia has adopted a series of strategic responses and countermeasures: in regional economic cooperation, it formed the Eurasian Economic Community, a customs union and subsequently the Eurasian Economic Union, all part of the regional integration process pushed and led by Russia; in the regional security realm, Russia set up and led the

Collective Security Treaty Organization for CIS members. For the “color revolutions” in the CIS countries, Russia had to take some unconventional measures to prevent CIS members from leaving. The Russia-Georgia war in 2008 and the Ukraine crisis in 2014 well demonstrated that the strategic game and confrontation in the CIS region has entered a white-hot stage. To fight against the Western conspiracy of launching more “color revolutions,” the Russian authorities had to adopt a series of extraordinary measures in order to rein in the activities of NGOs from the West, nip their political infiltration into Russia in the bud and safeguard Russia’s sovereignty and national unity.

In short, even many years after the Cold War ended, the problems and contradictions that kept emerging during the post-Cold War period are not fewer than during the Cold War itself. The United States, as the victor of the Cold War, has never tried to build a new foundation for balancing powers and maintaining international order and stability. Instead, it takes measures that led to further imbalances. Although Russia sometimes enjoys some gains in its wrangling with the West, it never recovers from that state of passivity and decline engendered by the demise of the Cold War, and has had to swallow some of its bitter consequences.

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Multipolar World vs. Hegemonism

Given the fundamentally different understanding of the Cold War, there is a huge gap in the world views of Russia and the United States. How is today’s world, unipolar or multipolar? Russia and the Western countries led by the US have essentially different answers.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the world’s power structure has undergone fundamental changes. The US takes it for granted that it is the

unparalleled superpower and has assumed that the world from here on has entered an era of unipolar dominance. “As soon as the Cold War ended, there emerged a tendency toward building a unipolar structure,” with the United States “attempting to impose a unipolar world order.” “Unipolarization not only counters the bipolarization that can threaten the end of human life, it also works to prevent the surge in any attempt to build a multipolar world.”¹²

Facing the repression of the Western countries and the hegemonic manifestation of the US in international affairs, Russian leaders, from Yeltsin to Putin, all emphasized the idea of multipolar world and opposed US’ pursuit of global hegemony. Russia’s view of the contemporary world during the Putin Administration can be summarized by the following aspects:

First, the world is in a transitional period, and the global transformation has not yet completed. In fact, this period is an unstable one. Putin said: “Strictly speaking, the world is experiencing a profound systematic crisis, and the global transformation is under way. This represents an obvious characteristic of the world’s transition to an era with a new culture, a new economy, new technology and new geopolitics. Our world is entering into a turbulent period. Moreover, it is doomed to be a long and painful period about which we should have no illusions.”¹³ Putin’s emphasis on the unstable state of today’s world indicates that Russia is clearly concerned about the crisis-filled nature of the present international situation.

Second, the United States, as the only superpower, has been unable to dominate the world, thus there is great “unpredictability” in the global process. In Putin’s view, the US has caused much trouble. “The world’s major economic center” failed to become the driving force for world development, but rather caused a lot of problems and trouble. Putin regarded the US as “a country that is accustomed to ‘exporting democracy’ by means of military force,” and is an “accomplice” to the international “destructive forces.”¹⁴

Third, Russia is firmly opposed to the “unipolar world” pursued by the

12 Yevgeny Primakov, *What Would the World Be like Without Russia?* p.2.

13 Путин В. В. Россия сосредотачивается - вызовы, на которые мы должны ответить.

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US. Putin's opposition to a unipolar world and his wish to build a multipolar one can be seen in many of his speeches and reports, the most famous is his speech at the Munich Security Conference on February 10, 2007. In this speech titled "Break the Fantasy of a Unipolar World and Build a New Structure for International Security," he defined the unipolar world as "a center of power, a center of forces and a center of decision-making," "a world in which there is one master, one sovereign." He believes that a unipolar world runs counter to the democratization process. Today's world can never accept the "unipolar pattern" because this pattern would not function in today's world and because "at its basis there would be no moral foundations for modern civilization." Therefore, it's time to think about the global security structure, and the world today has seen a "multi-polarization trend."¹⁵ At the Valdai International Discussion Club XI session in 2014, Putin clearly pointed out the harm caused by a "unipolar world," stressing that "The growing strength of one single power center is unable to effectively control the global process."¹⁶

Russia advocates in the strongest way a multipolar world. The United States, on the other hand, makes every effort to "preserve" its "unipolar status." This comprises a structural contradiction between Russia and the US. "The United States does not want any other country to share in this global hegemony. Naturally Russia and other influential nations (like China) are not satisfied with this state of affairs. This is by and large the basic source of disagreements between Russia and the US."¹⁷ "The current US-Russia conflict is essentially centered on the question of a new international order,"¹⁸ Russia's struggle with the US and NATO in Ukraine has shown its strategic intent to resist US attempts to build a unipolar world. The Russia-US

15 Путин В. В. Выступление и дискуссия на Мюнхенской конференции по вопросам политики безопасности.

16 Путин В. В. Мировой порядок: новые правила или игра без правил?

17 Мария Меркулова РФ и США "зависли" на перезагрузке. 9 Сентября 2014, <https://ria.ru/radio/20140909/1023377375.html>.

18 Dmitri Trenin, "Europe's Nightmare Coming True: America vs. Russia...Again," *The National Interest*, July 29, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/europes-nightmare-coming-true-america-vs-russiaagain-10971?page=show>.

rivalry on the Ukraine issue has clearly the features of strategic conflict and antagonism, but here Russia was on the defensive while the US was on the offensive. As for Russia's military action in Syria, it is the result of careful consideration aiming to "establish new rules for the world order"¹⁹ but in full compliance with international law. Therefore the Western countries had

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to give a clear and positive response and even support to some extent, an outcome not easy for the overall bilateral relations which has been badly impacted by the Ukraine crisis. However, by attempting to contribute to the solution of the Syrian issue and forcing the US to concede to Russia a leadership role, Russia has asserted its concept of a multipolar world,

which the US is by no means prepared to accept. The total breakdown in US-Russia relations in 2014 was primarily due to a determination by Washington based on a series of conditions: in contrast to other powers (such as China), Russia is no longer needed by the US. Moscow didn't rise like other non-Western countries, but declined. It can therefore not pose any resistance to the West and must therefore accept the rules of the road as dictated by the US.²⁰

In order to balance its relationship with the US and to promote multi-polarization, Russia is bound to seek other diplomatic partners and emerging powers are its priority targets. Therefore, Russia actively participates in the strategic cooperation among BRIC countries, and pays closer attention to the East. It must be noted, however, that the development of China-Russia relations has its own inherent logic, and is not merely a response to, or simply a timely action in the face of, US strategic pressures. The strategic

19 Дмитрий Сулов Игра по новым правилам - Что операция в Сирии значит для российско-американских отношений и миропорядка. 12 ноября 2015, <https://lenta.ru/articles/2015/11/12/suslovonrelations/>.

20 Дмитрий Сулов Игра по новым правилам - Что операция в Сирии значит для российско-американских отношений и миропорядка.

orientation of China-Russia relations is that of a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, whose continuous development and stability shows that the two great neighbors have completely discarded the Cold War thinking, found an excellent path to develop their mutual relations in a proper fashion, and formed a new type of major country relations. The development of this partnership is entirely determined by the respective national interests of the two countries.

Russia is also concerned about the EU's attitude in the process of building a multipolar world, and would like to guide it to play an important role in this process. Although member countries of the EU are dissatisfied with this or that aspect of US policy, the EU as a whole still follows the US, which leads to Russia's failure in taking advantage of the contradictions between the EU and the US. Although the relationship between the EU and Russia has worsened since the Ukraine crisis, the EU bears the main burden of the economic sanctions against Russia. Severing the close economic ties with the EU will only be Russia's resort, as Russia needs the technology and investment from the EU and the EU needs the huge Russian market and its energy resources. The problem is that there is not only inequality in the US-Russia relationship, but also in the US-EU relationship. The EU's foreign policy is largely subordinate to the United States, which makes the situation more complicated.

In recent years, Russia has increased efforts to improve relations with Japan, and thus the two countries have seen booming exchanges and interactions. However, as one of the most important US allies, Japan's diplomacy lacks autonomy. Once Japan gets too close with Russia, the US will not hesitate to intervene and "correct" the situation.

Conclusion

There exists a structural contradiction in the relationship between Russia and the West. Russia hopes to be treated as equal by Western countries, especially the United States. However, for the foreseeable future, the US will not view

Russia as an equal partner but rather as a country of a “different nature.” In the opinion of the West, Russia under the Putin administration is a country refusing Western “reforms.” The US attitude toward Russia goes like this: If you don’t accept the “reforms,” you will have to live under a system of restrictions and outside pressures.

The unequal relationship between Russia and the US is largely a result of the Cold War, its conclusion and the subsequent disintegration of the

Soviet Union. Russia, considered by the US-led West as the loser of the Cold War, has been pressured in a variety of ways, and forced to launch a process of strategic resistance. Faced with the “carrot and stick” pressure, but too weak to contend directly, Russia was in a strategically passive state. Since the beginning of

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the 21st century, Russia has achieved a gradual recovery, giving rise to a higher state of vigilance in the West, which pays close attention to Russia’s involvement in the CIS countries. For the US and other Western countries, preventing Russia from reconstructing its Soviet-style superpower in the CIS is their strategic bottom line. Therefore, the wrangling between Russia and the Western countries in the CIS will become ever more intense.

Despite the structural contradictions, the tension between Russia and the West will not reach such a level of antagonism that we will have another cold war. The rise of Russia needs a good international environment, at least a relatively peaceful one. This requires on the part of Russia a certain degree of strategic restraint and keeping its national defense within certain limits in order to ease relations with the US and other Western countries as far as possible. Russia’s priority remains finding a development path suited to its own conditions, transforming the development model overly dependent on energy, establishing a more effective system, promoting economic prosperity and elevating people’s living standards, and avoiding as far as possible having its domestic

development affected by its strategic contest with the US and the West. Meanwhile, the US and other Western countries are also facing various challenges and need to cooperate with Russia. For example, countering international terrorism requires the two sides to strengthen cooperation, the European refugee issue cannot be solved without Russian efforts, and the complicated situation in the Middle East cannot be addressed without joint efforts of the international community.

In a strategic sense, the multipolar world advocated by Russia is obviously meant to change the unipolar world dominated by the United States, and with the continuous development of the increasing trend toward a multipolar world, Russia can increasingly draw on international sources. Among these, the emerging countries represent an important international force that Russia can cooperate with and rely on to change the unipolar world. In this way, Russia will be more active in developing its relations with emerging countries, pay more attention to the role of the BRICS, and will focus more on regional international organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Russia will attach greater importance to the development of China-Russia relations. In contrast to the unequal relations between Russia and the US, China-Russia relations is based on equality and mutual benefit. Under great pressure from the US and the West and having suffered continual insults of its national self-respect, Russia can find equality, dignity and common understanding in its engagement with China. Non-aligned, non-confrontational, no targeting of third parties, and non-ideological, these have become important principles and approaches in the development of China-Russia relations. Therefore the relationship, characterized by a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, provides the post-Cold War world with an appropriate model for a new type of major country relations. 🇷🇺