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The Russian Alliance You Really Have to Worry About

Concern over a Trump-Putin friendship is misplaced. Instead, watch for the global order to be overturned by a different relationship.

- Richard Palmer
- 10-03-2017

Donald Trump and Russia. It has become one of the most discussed potential romances of our time.

The United States abandoning its traditional Western allies and siding instead with Vladimir Putin would be the most dramatic realignment in global politics since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It won't happen. America may try to draw close to Russia, but no close alliance is possible.

Instead, there is *another* alliance coming that the world should really pay attention to.

A Short-Lived Alliance

Just weeks into Mr. Trump's presidency, the wheels already seemed to be coming off the much-anticipated U.S.-Russia alliance. National Security adviser Michael Flynn, the most pro-Russian of Mr. Trump's advisers, was fired. The U.S. said it will not end sanctions on Russia and that it expects Russia to return Crimea to Ukraine.

Meanwhile, Russia went back to business as usual, violating the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and buzzing U.S. ships in the Black Sea.

Mr. Trump is about as well known for his consistency as he is for his modesty, so this could change. But there are more fundamental reasons to expect this Russo-American détente to fail.

Barack Obama began his presidency with his infamous "reset" with Russia. George W. Bush declared Putin a man Americans could trust. Bill Clinton's collapse into uncontrollable laughter at a 1995 press conference with President Boris Yeltsin suggested, if not trust, then at least an absence of fear.

No president starts his term wanting conflict with Russia. But no recent president has avoided one. Why? Because alliances are not based on intention or good will. We live in a world founded in selfishness. An alliance works if both sides get what they want. The alliance must be in the self-interest of both parties.

A Russo-American alliance has continually failed because it is in neither nation's long-term interests.

What Are These Nations' Interests?

America's number one interest is to prevent any power from rising up to challenge it. The only place such a power could come from in the foreseeable future is Eurasia. "[O]ur constant concern in peacetime must be to see that no nation or alliance of nations is allowed to emerge as a dominating power in either of the two regions of the Old World from which our

security could be threatened," wrote Prof. Nicholas Spykman, one of America's greatest thinkers on the subject of international relations (*The Geography of the Peace*). He was referring to Europe on the Atlantic, and East Asia on the Pacific.

During the last 70 years, that potential challenger has been Russia—particularly in the form of the Soviet Union. And so the U.S. has opposed Russia.

But Russia is not Mr. Trump's top concern. China is a massive and assertive trade power. Germany is using the euro to economically dominate the eurozone. Therefore, Mr. Trump believes, America could ally with the declining power of Russia and oppose Germany, China and also radical Islam.

But what can America offer to persuade Russia to turn against China and to confront Europe?

Russia's top interest is to dominate Eastern Europe. It has no natural frontiers there. This is why Russia constantly pushes as far west as it can. Historically, this extra space between Europe and Russia's heartland has thwarted most attempts to conquer Russia.

Russia also has an interest in confronting Islamic terror and in gaining access to Western finance and technology.

There are complementary interests and the potential for an alliance. But the problem is that the *price* Russia would have to demand—to make it worth its while to turn on China and Germany—is higher than the U.S. can afford. Russia would need help in achieving its main interest: more space in Eastern Europe.

America cannot afford that. America cannot be certain that Russia is no longer its top threat. Though Russia lacks the economic heft of either the European Union or China, it has a formidable military and, most importantly, a formidable leader. In backing Russia, many even in Mr. Trump's administration fear that the U.S. could be building up its own worst enemy.

An alliance with Russia then, actually threatens America's number one interest. Of course Mr. Trump would love to get Russia on his side without giving much in return. But that is not how the world works. Thus, no long-term alliance is on the cards.

There could be *short-term* arrangements. In the Middle East, for example, America and Russia could work together. And it would be possible for America to make concessions in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. But we will not see a wholesale global realignment around a U.S.-Russia alliance.

The fundamental difference in interest between the U.S. and Russia has meant that they have allied together only once in history: in World War ii. This addressed an urgent threat to both powers, but it was short-lived and immediately gave way to a nuclear-armed Cold War rivalry.

But there is another power with more compatible interests—one that Russia has allied with repeatedly.

The Real Power Couple

Germany's core interest is to avoid encirclement—a hostile France in the West and hostile Russia in the East. This interest is taken care of, thanks to the EU. Germany has no fear of a French invasion.

Another important interest is a secure export market for its heavily export-dependent economy. This it meets primarily through the eurozone. The countries of the eurozone are locked into a common currency and cannot raise their exchange rates. This means that imbalances that would normally fix themselves over time cannot—so Germany can export far more to these countries than it imports. It also provides Germany with a de facto subsidy when exporting to other markets.

The migrant crisis and radical Islam make the Middle East another important interest for Germany.

Russia and Germany have much to gain by working together. Historically, Russia could only dominate Eastern Europe when European powers were weak, or when they acquiesced.

Meanwhile, the two have several complementary interests. Economically, they go together hand in glove. Germany has excellent technology and manufacturing, and needs to export. Russia needs to buy Western technology and know-how. Russia has energy commodities, and Germany is among its best customers. Russia's deep ties to the Middle East make it the perfect partner for a Germany that needs to stem the tide of refugees into Europe. Russia has even edged its way into the euro crisis—its strong ties to Cypriot and Greek financial systems mean that it could hurt or help Germany's economic ambitions.

Furthermore, an alliance with Germany does not require Russia to drop its alliance with China. Thus it needs much less from Germany to make such an alliance worth its while.

Germany, then, can afford to pay the price Russia requires, while the U.S. cannot. The cost-benefit calculation looks very different.

A Russo-German alliance still carries risks. Done recklessly, it could alienate much of Central and Eastern Europe. But with

care, allowing Russia to expand its sphere of influence into parts of Eastern Europe would actually drive the remaining countries to Germany. Germany would also have to be sure it was rewarded enough to make up for the extra insecurity that would come from an expanded Russian sphere of influence.

But Germany, whether it wants it or not, is being forced into this alliance.

Germany Has Little Choice

The other major part of President Trump's foreign policy is a withdrawal from the world. He believes the U.S. is spending far too much money intervening beyond its shores.

If America withdraws from Europe, Germany is left with little choice but to cut a deal with Russia. Economically, the EU dwarfs Moscow—but militarily, Russia is a force to be reckoned with. Right now Europe could not stand up to Russia alone. So, what do you do if you can't beat them?

Writing during the latter half of the Cold War, Hans Morgenthau, in a later edition of *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace,* outlined what could happen if America withdrew from Europe. The nations of Europe are "ambivalent towards the United States, whose support they need but resent," he wrote. If the U.S. withdraws, these countries "may then perceive themselves as having been abandoned by the United States and having to face the Soviet Union alone, unchallengeable in its military power." This, he wrote, would force the nations of Europe to "accommodate themselves with Russia."

If Germany does this, it "would signify a drastic change in the distribution of world power," Morgenthau concluded. For Germany, there are "rational arguments … in support of an Eastern orientation."

Today, the Russian military is not as overwhelming as it once was. But if America pulls out of Europe, Germany still faces a similar dilemma.

Trump's openness to an alliance with Russia has also made it easier for European powers to draw closer to Russia. The top leaders of Germany's Christian Social Union (csu), part of Germany's ruling coalition, have remained close to Russia, despite their nation's sanctions against it. In 2016, Bavarian State Premier Horst Seehofer and Honorary csu Chairman Edmund Stoiber visited Russian President Vladimir Putin. Stoiber welcomed the election of Donald Trump, partly because he believed it could help open the door for closer relations between Germany and Russia. Trump, he said, will "set a new tone in foreign policy."

A History of War

These same pressures now heaped on Germany have led to similar alliances in the past. From 1772 to 1795, Prussia, Austria and Russia divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth among themselves. At that point, Poland extended much farther eastward than it did today, including almost all of present-day Belarus.

Shortly afterward, German generals helped modernize the Russian Army. As Leo Tolstoy noted in *War and Peace,* one Russian general was so irked by the commanding role Germans played in the Russian Army that he reportedly asked the emperor if he could be promoted to the rank of German.

While Otto von Bismarck united the German states, he worked hard to stay on Russia's good side. As he famously said, the secret to politics is to "make a good treaty with Russia."

In the early 20th century, the German high command rejected Bismarck's advice, thinking Germany had a shot at defeating Russia. Russia collapsed during World War i, but Germany lost in the West. The fall of both Russia and Germany allowed Poland to become an independent state for the first time since it had been divided. Other smaller nations sprouted up. The next time Germany tried to take over Europe, it made a treaty with Russia first. The Rapallo Treaty helped Germany rise from the ashes of World War i. Then Poland was again divided in the infamous Hitler-Stalin pact, also known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact.

Shortly thereafter, Hitler caught Stalin napping and attacked Russia, a decision he may or may not have lived long enough to regret.

The history between Germany and Russia proves not only that their self-interests align better with each other's than with America's. It also proves that self-interest is *self-interest:* Once one nation thinks it can gain more by stabbing its "ally" in the back, it will do so.

Another Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

The shared interests here are so powerful that the *Trumpet* has long forecast a new alliance between these two nations.

In May 1962, the *Plain Truth*—predecessor of the *Trumpet*—wrote, "Once a German-dominated Europe is fully established, Germany will be ready to negotiate and bargain with Russia—and behind the backs of the Western allies if necessary."

“When a Russo-German deal is made, you can be sure that the doom of the United States and Great Britain is on the horizon,” warned the same article.

Sound far-fetched? Eminent scholars in the field of international relations made the same warning! To Morgenthau, such a deal would be “a drastic change in the distribution of world power.” Spykman warned that the lack of a unified power in Europe or in East Asia “is an absolute prerequisite for the independence of the New World and the preservation of the power position of the United States.”

“The United States must recognize once again and permanently, that the power constellation in Europe and Asia is of everlasting concern to her, both in time of war and in time of peace,” Spykman wrote.

Under threat is America’s most core interest of all: its very survival.

This coming Russo-German alliance will last only as long as it is in the interests of both parties. Historically, that has not been long.

“[L]ook at history,” warns *Trumpet* editor in chief *Gerald Flurry*. “Every time competition between Russia and Germany heats up, they form a deal with one another—just before going to war!” (*Russia and China in Prophecy*).

Those wars have expanded to engulf the world and have turned these allies-of-convenience against each other in devastating manner.

There are already strong signs that the two sides have been talking and dealing. Germany has emerged, more recently, as Europe’s leading opponent to Russia—although even as it has rallied other nations to keep pressing sanctions, it has continued to work on some potentially lucrative pipeline deals with Russia.

But pressure is now building on these two powers to work together much more closely—a development that will quickly change the world. ▪