

The New US-Russian Confrontation: Reasons, Prospects and Implications for the International Order

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Let me start with the definition of the US-Russia relations today.

Throughout the Post-Cold war period they were remaining ambiguous and locked in a vicious circle model. Each attempt to build sustainable partnership (there were 3) failed and resulted in another crisis – 1999 around Yugoslavia, 2008 around Georgia and today around Ukraine. However, Russia and the US were neither friends nor foes for each other.

Today this ambiguity is gone. The Ukraine crisis threw the US-Russia relations to their lowest point since the early 1980-s (not even end of the Cold war – since the previous peak of the Cold war) and launched a new period of their relations – the period of the new systemic, although limited, confrontation.

I do not like the definition “a New Cold war”, because it implies the features that are simply impossible today. There is no bipolarity. Instead, we have a polycentric international system, and the abilities of great powers, including the US, to determine results and control events, are very limited. There is not just a tectonic power shift going on in the world (from the traditional West to the non-Western powers), but also power diffusion, which makes regional players, smaller states and non-state actors increasingly powerful, and great powers increasingly dependent on them. Look upon Syria. There is no ideological animosity (the very existence of Putin’s Russia is not really a threat to the US and vice versa). Finally, there is globalization and global crisscross interdependence, which was absent in the time of the Cold war. The world is globally interdependent, and there are common threats and challengers for Russia and the US – such as international terrorism and Islamic extremism. The recent Putin-Obama meeting at the UN General Assembly, our commitment to at least to avoid direct military clash in Syria, the visit of the head of the Russian FSB (former KGB) to Washington counter-terrorism summit in January this year, and our cooperation on the recent Iran nuclear deal – are the best illustrations that this is not a New Cold War.

Still, the relations are confrontational, and this is a systemic confrontation.

Both sides perceive the nature of the other side, internal state of each other, as the cause of the problem.

George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947. Today we have the same kind of analyses.

Since the US links the Russian behavior to the state of its domestic regime (Putin’s problem), the consensus that the US can’t have normal/constructive relations with Russia until current political regime stays in power and President Putin is the Head of State has been built in American foreign policy community.

Russia reciprocates as well, and promotes a myth, according to which the US conduct a deliberately malevolent policy towards Russia and deliberately produce “chaos” in many regions of the world, such as Middle East, so act as a strong destabilizing force is the International system, and do so because of their pursuit of global leadership, which in its turn is caused by “American exceptionalism”.

Remember Putin's article in New York Times on September 11, 2013 "A Plea for Caution from Russia", in which he explicitly addressed the "exceptionalism" problem. So, the narrative goes, exceptionalism makes the US cling for Global Leadership. But as it is no longer possible in a multi-polar world by "normal means", the way to achieve it is containing and undermining those powers, who don't accept this leadership, and multiplying chaos in many of the world's regions.

Thus, the sides consider each other as adversaries. The US and Russia eager to weaken each other's positions where they intersect the most - primarily in the Post-Soviet Space and in Europe. They lessen their interaction on the issues of shared interests. However, the sides do not exclude cooperation whatsoever. **The US and Russia do not proceed to a full-scale military and political confrontation of the Cold War type; and do not make structural adjustments in their foreign and defense policy in accordance with the logic of such confrontation.**

Washington has no intention to enter into a full-fledged confrontation of the Cold War type in military and political spheres; to unleash a massive arm race; let alone to undertake commitments fraud with an escalation up to direct military conflict with Russia. In this vein, Ukraine's accession into NATO is excluded in a foreseeable future (in the period of Obama administration) as well as an idea to deploy even symbolic contingent of US forces on the Ukrainian territory. Moreover, the US is not even willing to give Kiev a little bit serious financial and economic assistance. Washington also has no plans to deploy major combat formations on NATO's eastern borders, their presence in Poland and in the Baltic States likely will have a symbolic character. Finally, the US tries to avoid a military clash with Russia in Syria, which could also spark an unnecessary escalation.

How did we get here? How did it happen, that 25 year since the end of the Cold war Russia and the US found themselves in a new confrontational relationship? This is the major question of Consortium for the current year. Why didn't the US-Russia "reset" under Obama and Medvedev prevent the current deterioration and helped to overcome the vicious circle model of US-Russia relations, which I mentioned before?

Is there any chance of improvement? What could be areas of cooperation?

Finally (if I have time), what are the global implications of the new US-Russian confrontation?

These are the questions I would like to address today.

Roots and reasons

Let me turn to the roots and reasons for the new confrontation. I would divide the reasons into 2 groups: systemic and occasional. The former explain why it has started, its inevitableness, the latter – its timing and sharpness.

Systemic reasons

1. The major thing that one needs to take in mind while analyzing the current US-Russia relations is that **is not just about Ukraine, not just about Syria and the fate of Bashar Assad. It is about rules of the game, about nature of the international order.**

The major systemic reason of the current US-Russian confrontation is that **having ended the Cold war, we have failed to agree on the world order that followed.** Rather, there was an illusion of

agreement, as the Western model seemed universal, and Russia itself proclaimed a strategy of joining the West. However, it was an illusion, because from the very beginning even the terms under which Russia was trying to join the West and the place that Russia demanded in the West drastically differed from Western assumptions.

Even understandings of the end of the Cold war itself was different – a victory of the West vs. our mutual victory, with Russia being one of the victorious countries and thus deserving the status of great power.

This incompatible perceptions of the end of the Cold war resulted in incompatible visions of the desired Post-Cold war international order and incompatible assessments of the order that started to prevail in reality. We have clashing understanding of the rules of the game among great powers, clashing understandings of the places we occupy in the international order, clashing visions of how key regions, where our interests overlap most – Post-Soviet space and Europe should look like; different understandings of such fundamental notions of international order, as state sovereignty, what constitutes legitimate government and legitimate use of force, etc.

We have been living in different worlds, and this incompatibility revealed itself in every crisis between Russia and the US since the end of the Cold war – 1999, 2003-2004, 2008 and today.

Putin has emphasized time and again, that what the US describes as a “US-led liberal international order” is perceived in Moscow as unipolar dictatorship (this is very relevant today with the Russian rhetoric towards the TTP). Already since the middle of 1990-s Russia has been claiming that the US understanding of “Europe whole an free” (democratic and based on the enlarged Western institutions) is perceived in Moscow as keeping Europe divided with the dividing line moving eastward and with the major European power isolated from governance of the European security order.

The problem is that the West has not been taking this fundamental difference of the Russian narrative, this systemic Russian disagreement with how the West behaves and where does the West pushes the world, seriously. There was a wrong perception, that ultimately, with all troubles, Russia develops “in a right direction”. Which means, towards becoming a part of the West, that Russia transforms internally according to the Western recipes and tries to be a part of the Western community in foreign policy terms: accept EU-centrism in Europe, accept domination of NATO in European security and establish junior partner relations with both of them, and so on.

All the repeated statements of Russian fundamental disagreement with this logic, such as Putin’s Munich speech, or even before – the accelerated march of the Russian paratroopers to Pristina airport in 1999, were regarded as bluff or tactical difficulties in Russia’s movement to the right direction, within the paradigm that Russia should become a part of the Western world – perhaps the most distant, strange, but still member of the Western family.

One and the same group of questions is the cornerstone of all crises in US-Russia relations of the Post-Cold War period (1999, 2004 and 2008). For more than 20 years Moscow and Washington give the opposite answers on these questions. Whether Russia as one of the independent poles in a multipolar world has the right for its own integration project in Eurasia? Whether great powers have the right for a friendly environment, the right to form a security order along the perimeter of their borders by itself and to be the centers of such orders? Whether the international order in Europe and in Euroatlantic has to be based on the principle of the expansion of the western institutions up to the Russian borders, thus, that Russia is *a priori* excluded from them? Or whether this international order has to be built jointly with Russia on the principles of equal partnership?

Whether the US has the right to declare some states and regimes sovereign and legitimate and others not; the right to overthrow regimes unacceptable to Washington one way or another?

By the way, the same problem – disagreement on the basic rules of the game - but to lesser extent - characterizes the relations of the US with all others non-western centers of power, regardless of their political regime – with China, India, Brazil. This is not only Russia's problem. Russia has only expressed its irritation in the most extreme way. Why? A) Its vital interests have been touched; B) And the specifics of the balance of power in the world and its dynamics.

In this regard the distinctive feature of the Ukrainian crisis is that the extent of mutual irritation and numerous violations of those rules, which some consider necessary, has reached its apogee. Each of the sides has made actions excluding any possibility of a quick de-escalation and a new improvement of the bilateral relations. The US supported a coup d'état in the country which Russia considers existentially important for its national security, identity and development, and then began quickly to confirm the revolution's geopolitical results, to try to transform Ukraine into anti-Russian state integrated into the western community, into a part of some kind "sanitary cordon". Russia, on its part, broke a territorial integrity of the largest European country and supported, even though not directly and not in a military way, an armed uprising on its territory, one of the parties in the civil war which began in Ukraine.

2. Aversion of the Putin's Russia in the US, the extent of irritation of which has overcome all permissible limits.

Already by the middle of the 2000s "Putin's Russia", from the US point of view, has become a bright example of a “wrong” development of a state and a symbol of wrong development of the international relations in the world that emerged after the US "victory" in "the Cold War". In the world, in which, in the US understanding, the democracy and the free market have to reign while an US global leadership has to be a guarantee of such order.

Already at that time Russia has been challenging an American heritage of the US "victory" in the Cold War and already then Russia has become both a geopolitical and ideological challenge to the US.

Geopolitically – for the US interests to keep the Post-Soviet Space geopolitically split. Russian attempts to consolidate it round itself present a challenge to the vivid geopolitical evidence and heritage of "victory" of the USA in the Cold War.

Ideologically – by establishing an authoritarian empire Russia is rolling back the process of global spread of democracy. And it does so in a sensitive region which symbolizes the US victory in the Cold war.

Already then, in the middle of the 2000s, Washington started to pursue a policy of active deterrence of Russia in the Post-Soviet Space. The Bush Administration suggested that **the best way to deter Russia and to achieve its democratic transformation was to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into NATO.**

This led to the war of 2008 between Russia and Georgia, which put an end to NATO expansion to the Post-Soviet space.

Then there was a "reset" of US-Russia relations at the time of the first Obama administration, one of the main prerequisites of which was Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, on whom Washington laid high hopes. In the US some believed that Medvedev will stand for the second term, distance himself from Putin and will return Russia to the "right" way of development.

News that Vladimir Putin comes back to presidency caused a big disappointment in Obama's administration. It grew during his election campaign in which anti-Americanism played an important role, and especially after its return to the Kremlin.

It seemed that the domestic and foreign policy which Moscow started to pursue since spring-summer of 2012 confirmed all American fears and stereotypes concerning the Russian leader, including the main thing: that while he stays in power Russia will severely accelerate its movement to authoritarianism; the restoration of the "empire" and a systemic opponency to the West and the US. Already then – a year before to the Ukrainian crisis – some in the US started to perceive Moscow's more decisive actions in the Post-Soviet Space precisely as a restoration of an empire. **Hillary Clinton still as a Secretary of State was among the first who pointed it out. At the end of 2012 she declared that Russia tries to "re-Sovietize" the Post-Soviet Space.**

So, **there are 2 major narratives** explaining Russian behavior in 2014.

The 1st is shared by Russia and the Western realists, such as John Mearsheimer – that Russia has been consistently unhappy with the Western policies both globally and especially regionally - in the regions, where Russia has vital national interests, and eventually when it came to Ukraine, Russian patience ended. This is what I have just described.

The 2nd narrative is shared by American liberals and many Europeans – that **the main factor behind the crisis is Putin, that he drags Russia into the wrong direction, and that his foreign policy behavior is a dangerous deviation from the norm and challenge to the international order, while the reason of this behavior is internal as well - Russian domestic politics coupled with economic situation.**

So it is a clash between **“Putin challenging International order”** (the order is OK while Putin is not) vs. **“Russia trying to end the period of international disorder through escalation”** (Russia maybe is acting in a destabilizing way, but it is compelled to do so, because the order is not OK).

According to the 1st narrative, the logic and philosophy of Russian policy did not change in 2014, and its behavior should not be regarded as smth. unexpected. Russia has been warning that it will severely oppose attempts to include Ukraine into the Western orbit, and this is what it did. From this perspective annexation of Crimea is a signal to the US, that the era, when only the West was violating rules (Kosovo, Libya, support of coup in Ukraine) is over, and Russia will also violate rules. And if we don't stop now and don't agree on the rules of international order, rules of relations among great powers and how geopolitics of Europe and Post-Soviet space should look like, we will find ourselves – and the world - in deep and dangerous crisis.

According to the 2nd narrative, the problem is Putin, who started to distort Russia from the “right” course of development back in the 2000-s, and intensified this policy both domestically and internationally after comeback to the Kremlin, and finally evolved into a typical policy of revisionist authoritarian imperialism in 2014. From this perspective Putin is re-establishing a Russian empire, primarily on the territories with the Russian speaking population, and does so in order to compensate for the domestic weakness of the regime, economic troubles and inability to modernize. So Russia is a revisionist country, and as it always happens with revisionist states, if it is not stopped firmly in Ukraine (though containment), it might go further and attack Estonia and Latvia.

The narrative you choose depends on the system of coordinates you select – your understanding of the Post-Cold war period. If you believe that the “US-led liberal international order” has become

universal, and Russia has no alternative than to join it, you will prefer the 2nd narrative. The problem is though that Russia does not accept this system of coordinates, and if you analyze Russia FP through an analytical prism that Russia rejects, you inevitably make profound mistakes. And these mistakes are obvious – predictions of Russia’s attacks against the Baltic countries or its description as a revisionist power keen on re-establishing the Russian empire within the so-called “Russian world” or “Pax Russica” defined ethnically, linguistically or culturally.

So, as Russia has been rejecting the idea of a universal “US-led liberal international order” since the 1990-s, and since its objections about the rules of the game and development of order in key regions, such as Europe, have been genuine, persistent and not dependent on Putin, the 1st narrative is more correct. Again, perhaps Russia is wrong when it rejects the idea of a universal US-led international order. But since it does so, one should analyze the Russian FP within its system of coordinates, not an alien system of coordinates.

3. Based on their according narratives, both Russia and the US regarded each other’s actions on Ukraine as a systemic challenge to each other, and in some kind as an unspoken declaration of war.

Moscow perceived US actions on Ukraine as a challenge to Russia itself - against the background of thinly veiled US irritation of the Vladimir Putin’s return to presidency; the growing non-acceptance of the Russian foreign and domestic policy; pointed refusal of attempts to find a positive model of relations with Russia "after reset" already in the summer-fall of 2013 (**the summit Putin – Obama in September 2013 was cancelled**) and unprecedented since 1980s information campaign against the Olympic Games in Sochi. Even before Yanukovich's overthrow in February 2014, some in Moscow believed that **the US had already made a deliberate choice in favor of confrontation.**

In this context it is not surprising that the US decisive support of the revolution in Ukraine with an evident purpose to fasten Ukraine in the western orbit and the following US attempts to fix the geopolitical results of the coup d’état by all means were perceived by Moscow as a political and economic **war against Russia, an attempt to make Ukraine a part of a new anti-Russian "sanitary cordon" and to deprive the Russian Federation of its major foreign policy achievements of several years before that.**

These steps left no space for a dialogue and de-escalation. It was simply impossible for Russia to leave the precedent of the US helping to topple a Russia-friendly regime in Ukraine down and rapidly bringing the country to the Western orbit unanswered. **And so Russia answered with annexation of Crimea and support of one of the sides of the civil conflict in Ukraine,** including through unrecognized military interference into the war in Eastern Ukraine.

Doing so, Russia pursued several goals:

First, to prevent any chance of Ukrainian membership in NATO and to remove this hypothetical question from the agenda once and for all.

Second, to break the post-Maidan status quo in Ukraine, which was totally unacceptable for Russia, and to prevent Ukraine’s consolidation as an anti-Russian state and a part of the new anti-Russian *cordon sanitaire*; to push for such a state organization in Ukraine, which would allow its regions, including Donbas, to impact the national domestic and foreign policy and veto those its directions, which Russia regards unacceptable. Such as NATO membership or breakdown of relations with Russia.

Third and most important, to send a clear message to the US that its actions violating Russia's vital national interests (namely, what Obama called "brokering a power transition in Ukraine) have crossed all possible red lines, and that **if it does not stop, Europe and the world in general could get into chaos**). All the previous attempts to convince the West to stop failed. So Russia decided to raise the stakes and deepen the disorder even more, thus sending a message that **either we both stop violating rules, sit down, elaborate new rules of the game and start respecting them, or we end up in chaos**.

At the same time, the US perceived Russia's actions as emergence of a new norm of Russian foreign policy in the Post-Soviet Space. It seemed an old American geopolitical nightmare was beginning to come true: an "authoritarian" Russia came over to aggressive reconstruction of an "empire". It threatened to deprive the US of an important component of its heritage of the "victory" in the Cold War, which is one of pillars of the US global leadership.

Besides, from the US point of view Russia's actions created a precedent of American inability as the self-proclaimed leader and guarantor of the international security to prevent or turn back a serious violation of the established world order by a "regional power". It presents a powerful challenge to US possibility not only to play a role of the global leader, but also even to claim it. Indeed, if the US is not able to prevent a violation of sovereignty of the largest state in Europe and the important "strategic partner" by a state, which aspires for regional dominance, can it guarantee a security of its allies and other partners? What if other centers of power start behaving similarly? First of all it refers to China which aspires for a regional hegemony, has territorial disputes with the majority of countries in East and Southeast Asia and, thus, has a potential of nuclear deterrence and is in a situation of an economic interdependence with the US. The major pillar of the US leadership in the international system – their global alliances system – was questioned.

A group of occasional or tactical reasons:

1. The US-Russia "reset" failed to overcome the fundamental problems of US-Russia relations, those that have been preventing the sides to establish sustainable partnership throughout the last 25 years. What are these fundamental reasons? The top among them are:

- Different perceptions of the end of the Cold War and of the Post-Cold war international order, a sort of clash of world orders.
- Strategic deterrence philosophy as the imperative of US-Russia relations in security and arms control filed and determinant of the sides' defense policy especially of the Russian defense policy. What is strategic deterrence philosophy? It is a conviction that the US-Russia relations must be based on mutual assured destruction and strategic parity. If any of the sides makes a step outside this framework, the other feels compelled to compensate and balance it. This makes them potential adversaries. And this eliminates trust. We have been perceiving each other through the prism of a rifle.
- Contradictions at the Post-Soviet space, which are also a result of the clashing perceptions of the world order. For Russia establishing a Russia centric economic and security community in its near abroad is absolutely natural thing – a normality in a multipolar order.
- No constituency in either Russia or the US interested in positive relations. No economic interdependence. Russia's role in US trade is miserable. We are competitors in the major sphere of Russian economy – energy. And there is no Russian lobby in the US.

The reset didn't overcome them. Moreover, it was not even desired to overcome three out of these four factors. It tried to increase economic cooperation, but it's not enough and it takes time.

This is why as soon as the easy agenda was exhausted and US-Russia relations faced the problems of MD and US interventionism, the rest failed.

2. By the fall of 2013 the last attempt of the Obama administration to build non-hostile relations with Moscow after a crash of "reset" failed.

In 2013 Obama administration tried to build non hostile relations with "Putin's Russia", having proposed to begin negotiations on a new round of nuclear arms reduction (including tactical nuclear weapons), and having offered a concession on missile defense (stage 4 of the EPAA was cancelled). However this attempt failed too. Russia declared that the concession on missile defense was insufficient, and linked negotiations on new reductions of nuclear weapons with such conditions which were *a priory* unacceptable for the US.

This convinced Obama administration that further attempts to patch up ties with "Putin's Russia" are senseless, and that there is no way for Russia to be a useful partner. Against the background of the growing clinch on Syria and Moscow's refusal to extradite Edward Snowden to Washington, Russia ceased to be perceived as a partner cooperation with whom was desirable for promotion of the American interests.

On the contrary, Russia started to be perceived as a problem and a challenge. Exactly at that time and in that context– the US cancelled Obama's visit to Moscow and the bilateral summit of presidents of the two countries – for the first time in history of US-Russia relations.

It is this context that determined the US attitude and reaction to Russian attempts to prevent signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and to the beginning of the Euromaidan.

3. The prevailing opinion in the US that regime change in Russia is a quite reasonable and achievable way to respond to the challenge that "Putin's Russia" presents. In Washington it is taken for granted by the majority of policymakers and experts that Vladimir Putin's regime is weak, and Russia in general (in contrast with China) is an illusory "great power".

The US paid much attention to the mass protests in the large Russian cities in 2011-2012 and concluded that Russian regime is unpopular among the forward-minded part of the population, whereas support from the others is based on "oil wellbeing" and propaganda.

4. The prevailing consensus in the US is that a new confrontation with Russia is quite affordable and not dangerous. It is affordable because since there is no economic interdependence between our 2 countries, it cannot hurt the US economy. And it is not dangerous, because as Russia is a weak and declining country, it will not pose a real threat to the US and is unable to create serious damage. And if it tries to do this, the costs would exceed the benefits.

5. By the end of 2013 Russia reached the peak of its tactical strengthening. It's economy started to stagnate already then, despite the then high oil process. The Kremlin understood that Russia

would start weakening relative to the other centers of power quite soon. On the other hand, it was much stronger, than it had been in 2004, whereas the US was much weaker, than in the 2004.

Why did Russia decide to start the battle for the new rules of the game in Europe in 2014 – and had not done so, for instance, in 2004 or 2008, when the US policy had been similar and the Bush administration officially promoted MAP for Ukraine? Because of power shift and power dynamics. In 2004 the US was still at the zenith of its power, while Russia still “weak and poor”, and the global power shift was only about to be recognized. The world was still unipolar. Whereas in 2014 the situation was fundamentally different.

At the same time, the dynamics of power transition in 2013-2014 was not in Russia’s favor. The year 2013 was widely regarded as a the cornerstone for Russian development. Russia reached maximum international influence and was going to enter a period of decline, which has nothing to do with the Russia-Western relations. Russian economy was stagnating already in 2013, while the US was resuming fast growth. The oil prices were about to start falling down – this was anticipated by many analysts, including Russian ones. So, the Russian leadership concluded that if it didn’t act then, it would be far more difficult to act afterwards, when it would already be weaker.

Prospects for relations:

I don’t expect US-Russia relations to change fundamentally in the observable future. They have acquired a new more or less stable state, **and the current parallel wars that we are conducting in Syria speaks in favor of stabilization of the US-Russia relations, not for a change to the better.**

2 years that passed since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis proved, that none of the sides is ready for substantial compromise and return to “business as usual”. Not just the West, but Russia is also claiming that a return to the pre-confrontational mode of relations with the US and the US is unacceptable.

This time proved, that the West, especially the US would not agree with Russian annexation of Crimea and with Russian attempts to avert the political and geopolitical status quo in Ukraine.

At the same time, this year and a half also proved, that Russia is ready to sacrifice a lot – relations with the West, some economic benefits, and even the lives of Russian citizens and servicemen, to break the post-Maidan status-quo in Ukraine, to prevent Ukraine from consolidating on an anti-Russian basis and integrating with the West, and to promote its own vision of multipolar international order, its own vision of the rules of the game with the West.

The new confrontation with the West didn’t force Russia to capitulate. On the contrary, Russia is adapting. It is building a new geopolitical reality in Eurasia: strategic partnership with China, consolidation of Eurasia in geoeconomic and geopolitical sense, which is actually a nightmare for American realists – Kissinger like.

So Russia is adapting and keeping on promoting or even imposing its vision of the rules of the game – based on multipolarity, mutual multilateral decision-making, and so on. This is reflected in the Russian policies in Ukraine (constitutional reform as a new negotiated political status quo in this country, negotiated with the Russian participation and partly on the Russian terms). It is also reflected in Russian policies in Syria, which has become a 2nd front of the Russian “battle for the new rules of the game”.

These rules are still unacceptable for the US, and so it is unlikely that the US would agree to cooperate with Russia on Syria on a political reconciliation there and on creation of a new “wide counter-terrorist coalition”. Thus, the new strange confrontation is quite likely to last at least until the end of the next presidential cycle in the USA, in other words, until the middle of the next decade. And it will end with profound weakening of one of the parties and an establishment of the new (or old – depending on who wins) rules of the game in their relationship.

Moreover, we haven't reached the bottom – after 2016 there might be an escalation of the confrontation. The US new administration is likely to be more assertive and messianic.

In the USA – 2 groups: moderate and hawks.

They disagree on methods, but are of the same mind in the understanding of the purpose.

Moderates are convinced that Russia is doomed for failure both in Ukraine and Syria, and in general, simply because it is too weak to withstand a prolonged confrontation with the US. So escalation according to moderates is unnecessary and dangerous, and Russia should be allowed to “die its natural death itself”. This is largely the approach of the current US administration.

Hawks call for escalation in order to accelerate the collapse of “Putin's Russia”, and claim that substantial casualties in Ukraine and/or Syria coupled with stronger sanctions would destroy the Russia's current regime in months, if not weeks.

Those who would support a compromise "big deal" with Russia (realists) are a tiny minority. They are not present in official establishment.

Thus, there are two basic alternative outcomes of how this new period of Russia-Western confrontation might end, and both presume substantial weakening of either Russia or the US. They are:

1) Regime change in Russia and the country's new collapse comparable with the break-down of the USSR. Russia's ambitions to act as an independent power center on par with the US and China, to have its own integration project in Eurasia and its own regional security system will be severely undermined. It would be thrown back into the 1990-s in a way.

This outcome can happen in two ways.

Scenario 1 is a quicker and more dramatic one. It is that Russia commits an open and official invasion into Ukraine and perhaps occupies the whole South-Eastern part of the country. In this case the West will impose even harsher sanctions, Russia will lose tacit support of China and the other non-Western great powers, aggravate relations with its allies in the Eurasian Union and CSTO, and ultimately overstrain and collapse.

This scenario is unlikely as long as Obama Administration keeps the White house. **However, it might be more likely after Obama, if a more hawkish administration comes.**

Scenario 2 is a longer one, and presumes that Russia would simply not stand a decades-long confrontation with the West, - will not stand continues economic sanctions, much less favorable external economic environment (low oil prices), and so the ultimate change of the regime would happen as a result of economic crisis, gradual reduction of social welfare and standard of living, and Putin looking less and less successful in foreign policy. In this case the change will not be revolutionary, but rather Putin will decide to step down and pass the authority to his heir. However, the new President would have to change the Russian foreign policy dramatically to improve relations with the West.

2) Establishment of new “Russia-friendly” rules of the game in Europe and in the world. According to them the West recognizes the limits of expansion of its order to the East, de facto recognizes the Russian sphere of influence at the Post-Soviet space and agrees to establish partnership with Russia on the basis of what Russia is, including Putin’s regime, not on the basis of what the West would like Russia to be. According to this scenario, Ukraine either becomes neutral and decentralized, with its regions possessing a veto power over decisions on the ways of its development, or collapses into two states, one of which associates with the EU, and the other – with Russia and the Eurasian Union.

Also, according to these rules neither the US, nor someone else has the right to unilaterally declare some regimes legitimate, and others not; and to claim from the very beginning that only regime change allows to solve the crisis. Instead, development (at the UN’s level) of precise criteria of the regime and government’s legitimacy – those enabling to distinguish between a real national uprising and the one inspired from the outside and not having a nationwide support coup d’état - is necessary. Double standards on what is what should be kept to minimum.

Besides, according to these rules an outside support of regime change – by means of "color revolution", support of military opposition or direct intervention - should be claimed illegal and stopped. According to these rules not only the USA, but also other centers of power can determine events and create a new political reality in these or those regions, and Washington has to accept it. And finally, according to these rules key decisions, including on how international orders in these or those regions should look like – be it the Middle East, Asia Pacific or Europe, should be taken collectively and inclusively - via complex and complicated negotiations of global and regional players, but not via an imposing by one of the parties of its vision over all the rest, and ignoring the opinion of the others. This is what Russia is trying to achieve in Syria.

No question, this scenario is unrealistic in the next 10 years. As long as the US remains committed to its current understanding of its global leadership, this scenario will remain unrealistic. Thus, this confrontation is very likely to prolong at least till the end of the 2nd cycle of Putin’s Presidency and the end of the next Presidential cycle in the US. **This is 2024.**

Chances for cooperation:

Globalization, power shift and power diffusion bring new dimensions to the US-Russia relationship: they are compelled to cooperate on some common challenges (Iran deal, ISIS), and the US is compelled to acquiesce to the fact that it is no longer the only actor capable of creating a geopolitical reality – forging coalitions, projecting force, conducting peacekeeping, etc.

This again brings me to Syria. It is still unlikely that it might result in a new fundamental improvement of the US-Russia relations on the basis of counter-terrorism. Despite the wisdom of Obama administration not to block the Russian actions militarily and the start of the Vienna negotiations, the US is still very critical of Russian actions and skeptical about prospects of a compromise between Assad regime and the opposition (which is essentially between Iran and Saudi Arabia).

Nevertheless, rejection of cooperation would also be costly: aggravation of relations with the Europeans, who are genuinely interested in bringing of the Syrian conflict to end; and allowing Syria to turn into complete chaos and safe haven for radical Islamist terrorism, which sooner or later will result in a 2nd 9\11.

So, we have a very interesting model – very illustrative for the non-linear and complicated world we are living in, where Russia and the US maintain predominantly adversarial relationship, but at the same time conduct parallel fight against common challenges. Not jointly, but in a parallel way.

The major avenues for US-Russian cooperation are:

- 1) Common transnational challenges and threats – terrorism, ISIS ИГИЛ, Syrian political development (Russia wants Geneva-3), Афганистан (Taliban and ISIS), Central Asia. The predominant model would be parallel action, not joint.
- 2) Since this is a systemically confrontational relationship, it needs to be managed. Its costs need to be taken seriously by both sides. Thus, we need measures preventing uncontrolled escalation and confidence-building measures, transparency and arms control.
- 3) Cybersecurity – again transparency, prevention of accidental crisis
- 4) Arctic. Cooperation on the Arctic problems. Prevention of spread of general confrontational logic of the relations to the Arctic
- 5) Asia Pacific. We need to come to understanding that Russia's cooperation with regional allies and partners of the US is mutually beneficial for Washington, Moscow and these countries.

Global Implications of the US-Russian confrontation

1) Emergence of a “New Bipolarity”

- Consolidation of the “Bigger West” – Atlantic and the Pacific (strengthened NATO + TTIP; TTP + strengthened Pacific alliances by the US)
- Consolidation of Eurasia (coordinated development of the EEU and EBSC; enlargement of the SCO)

This is very dangerous in conditions of a globalized and globally interdependent world.

2) Duplication and fragmentation of Global Governance mechanisms. Emergence of alternative financial institutions within BRICS and the SCO.