



Hey, Congress: How about putting U.S. national security interests above Russia hysteria

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Recently, Congress again passed more sanctions on Russia, which President Trump begrudgingly signed into law. The president **said** that “despite its problems,” he had signed the bill “for the sake of national unity.” However, he also made clear that “by limiting the executive’s flexibility, this bill makes it harder for the U.S. to strike good deals for the American people, and will drive China, Russia, and North Korea much closer together.”

The President couldn’t be any more correct. History has shown that sanctions on Russia do not change the Russian elites’ behavior or foreign policy objectives. Instead, it hurts ordinary Russian citizens and America’s economic interests.

Emma Ashford of the Cato Institute **writes** that sanctions fail 79% of the time when implemented to discourage military conflict. I would add that this figure does not technically correlate with *any* positive success rate. Even the 21% of cases that have brought favorable results may have had little to do with U.S. sanction policy and everything to do with chance timing and other external factors.

Instead of fixing Russia’s political objectives, our sanctions have caused financial hardship for innocent Russian citizens. The country has protected its key decision makers from feeling any impact, all while drastically reducing spending on everything from health care to infrastructure and government salaries for everyone else.

As President Trump has pointed out, the country has even been able to mitigate much of the damage by trading more closely with China. Russia hasn’t budged, but American banks and energy companies have suffered, as have our European allies and other U.S. geopolitical interests.

Although this protectionism has done enough damage already, some members of Congress are considering taking this anti-Russian fervor a step further by having the **Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Agreement (NDAA)** ban the use of Russian assets that are critical to U.S. national security.

Section 1615 of the NDAA will limit funding for Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicles (EELVs) solely to “develop[ing] a domestic rocket propulsion system to replace non-allied space

launch engines,” or “develop[ing] the necessary interfaces to, or integration of, such domestic rocket propulsion system with an existing or new launch vehicle.”

The **Air Force** “strongly objects” to this clause, stating that it “handicaps the Air Force’s eyes and ears in space.” When analyzing the current state of play of our space politics, it is clear that they are absolutely correct. The Trump administration has also weighed in, stating that “the provision limits domestic competition, which will increase taxpayer costs by several billions of dollars through FY 2027 and stifle innovation.”

At present, there are only three major U.S. launch vehicles in the United States – two produced by the United Launch Alliance (ULA) and one by SpaceX. One of ULA’s is an expiring line, and its second one makes use of Russian engines for the first stage of launch. The George C. Marshall Institute **found** that Section 1615 will likely give SpaceX a monopoly over launches, because striking the use of RD-180 Russian rocket engines would cause ULA’s Delta IV heavy costs to rise from \$300-400 per launch to nearly \$1 billion per launch.

The U.S. government already analyzed the situation and found it appropriate for another launch vehicle to be developed. It has invested in private-public partnerships between both Aerojet Rocketdyne, which is developing the AR-1 engine, and ULA/Blue Origin, which is developing the BE-4 engine. The BE-4 is not far from completion, but needs a bit more time to develop, test, and certify.

The NDAA passed the House and is awaiting on a vote by the Senate. Members of Congress that find it necessary to increase punishment on Russia need to ask themselves: to what end?

The Air Force and White House have already been clear: Everyone wants to stop the U.S.’s dependence on Russian rocket engines, but it needs to be done strategically. Banning the use of the RD-180 before an alternative launch vehicle is established will do nothing but increase costs by billions of dollars.

Russia sanctions have never worked, and increasing their potency will not change that. Republicans in Congress need to stop pacifying the Left’s Russian hysteria and instead do what’s best for the country’s national security.