



Trump should selectively emulate Trump

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Perhaps the greatest evidence of the hubris surrounding American uber-hawks of both Neoconservative and liberal interventionist nature is their willingness, even determination, to make multiple enemies simultaneously around the globe. Hence their constant refrain that the world is dangerous and military spending must go up, ever up.

Yet if the hawkish U.S. "perpetual threat" lobby really believes its rhetoric, it has only itself to blame. After all, increasingly treating both China and Russia as adversaries has done the otherwise impossible: pushed the Cold War allies turned enemies into friends and possible allies again.

Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union provided vital assistance to Mao Zedong's Communist rebels. After his victory, Mao generally accepted Stalin's leadership. However, the Soviet leader died in 1953, only four years after the PRC's creation.

De-Stalinization by Nikita Khrushchev led to ideological disputes over which government offered an uncorrupted vision of Marxist-Leninism. By 1961 the Chinese Communist Party was denouncing Soviet leaders for being "Revisionist Traitors." The two countries created rival revolutionary and state networks and battled for influence within nominally Communist nations.

Border conflict broke out in 1969. Casualties were modest and fighting ceased later in the year, though a formal border agreement was not reached until 1991.

The brief Sino-Russian shooting war apparently convinced Mao that he needed to reduce tensions with at least one of the PRC's potential adversaries, opening the way for the Nixon administration. Rapprochement between the U.S. and China began with Richard Nixon relaxing trade and travel restrictions on the PRC in 1969.

In 1971 the two countries engaged in so-called "Ping-Pong diplomacy," with the visit of an American table tennis team to China. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger surreptitiously visited Beijing as part of an official trip to Pakistan in July 1971, setting in motion a second visit in October and U.S. support for the PRC's entry into the United Nations and possession of the Chinese Security Council seat.

Richard Nixon's famed visit to China came in February 1972. Although formal diplomatic ties did not come until 1979, under President Jimmy Carter, the U.S. and PRC continued to expand contacts and commerce.

Washington effectively neutralized one potential security threat and prevented recreation of a Sino-Soviet coalition against the U.S. Geopolitically America gained flexibility and leverage in confronting the U.S.S.R. Washington could enjoy global preeminence if not dominance at lower cost.

Chinese-Russian relations improved as the Cold War ended and ideological conflicts waned. But tensions remain real.

However, under President Barack Obama the U.S. has courted conflict with both powers. To constrain China the administration staged the "pivot" or "rebalance." Washington strengthened alliance ties, added troop deployments, and increased military maneuvers.

The resources involved have been sufficient to irritate but not enough to scare the PRC. Beijing perceives that Washington hopes to contain China, whether or not the former is willing to admit the obvious.

Against Russia the U.S. has followed what appears to be an overtly hostile policy: dismissing the former's Balkan interests, especially breaking apart historic Slavic ally Serbia (which Imperial Russia backed in World War I); bringing old Warsaw Pact members and even Soviet republics into NATO, with invitations seeming likely for Georgia and Ukraine (the latter an integral part of both the Russian Empire and Soviet Union); supporting "color" and street revolutions against Russo-friendly governments in Georgia and Ukraine; pushing regime change, including by Islamist insurgents, against Moscow's Syrian ally; imposing economic sanctions against Russia; and building up U.S. military forces in Europe.

The result has been greater cooperation between China and Russia. They found their dislike and distrust of Washington to be greater than their bilateral disagreements. In the short-term that means cooperating to limit American influence.

Ultimately the objective could become to deter U.S. military action against both nations. American dominance will fade.

Should Russia and China forge closer military bonds, the U.S. eventually might find itself facing a much less hospitable international environment. That likely would constrain Washington's responses, and increase the costs and risks if conflict resulted.

America is a great power. But it should not needlessly create enemies and encourage them to ally with each other. If Donald Trump succeeds in improving relations with Russia, he would have the salutary side-effect of discouraging creation of a common Russo-Chinese front against the U.S.

Richard Nixon's China policy offers a model for the incoming Trump administration: Make up with at least one of the important powers arrayed against America. The U.S. should need not take on the rest of the world.

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