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new cold war? The moment of
trump

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Abstract:

Throughout recent history, relations between the United States and Russia have suffered several ups and downs. However, rumors about Russia's interference in the US presidential election, and the actions in Ukraine and Syria, have put the relations between the two countries in check. In order to improve the situation, one of the keys is the knowledge of the latest events that have led both countries to this point. Finally, the US administration must opt for a global foreign policy, which will define the future of the relationship with Russia.

Keywords:

Russia, United States, Foreign Policy, Western world, Culture, Realism, NATO.

***NOTA:** Las ideas contenidas en los *Documentos de Opinión* son de responsabilidad de sus autores, sin que reflejen, necesariamente, el pensamiento del IEEE o del Ministerio de Defensa.

Introduction

A few days ago, the first anniversary of the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States was celebrated, and one of the main questions regarding his mandate was what direction he was going to take in foreign policy in general, but with the Russian Federation specially.

A year later, and after some significant advances¹, Russian-American relations are, in the words of the current Secretary of State Rex Tillerson "*at the lowest level since the Cold War and continue to worsen. The two largest nuclear powers in the world cannot have this kind of relationship. We have to stabilize it, starting with finding a way back*"²: To these statements we must add those made by his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov in the same sense³, blaming former President Obama for having done "*everything possible to make relations worse*".

Given this adverse climate⁴, the US administration has, among others, the challenge of stabilizing relations with the Russian Federation; and to be able to complete this objective, it is necessary to know the historical interaction between both actors, following the maxim "*If you know the adversary and you know yourself, do not fear the result of one hundred battles*"⁵.

If you look back, since the Second World War, all US presidents have tried to "reset" relations with Russia. From Truman, who wrote in his personal diary that he was tired of "*babying*" the Soviets when they did not comply the obligations they had assumed in Yalta⁶, Eisenhower and his "*spirit of Geneva*"⁷, Kennedy himself at the 1961 Vienna

¹ The main one being the ceasefire agreed between EE. UU and Russia after the bilateral meeting between the two presidents, in the framework of the G-20 summit held in Hamburg.

² Affirmation made on the NBC program "Meet the Press", on May 14, 2017.: <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/video/full-interview-tillerson-on-russia-comey-and-his-relationship-with-trump-943466051827>

³ See: http://cadenaser.com/ser/2017/04/11/internacional/1491914377_288324.html.

⁴ To which we must add the possible interference of Russia in the US presidential elections.

⁵ Tzu, Tsun, "The art of war", Obelisco, Barcelona, 2009.

⁶ "... Truman confided in his diary that he was tired of "*babying*" the Soviets when they didn't carry out the obligations they had undertaken at Yalta...", Edelman, Eric in "America and Russia: Permanent Confrontation? A symposium on U.S. - Russia relations in the Age of Trump, National Interest, Sept / Oct 2017, p.9.

⁷ In reference to the summit held in that city in which the US president bet the civilian ends of atomic energy.

Summit with Khrushchev, Nixon and his attempt to stop Brezhnev, or Reagan himself with his famous phrase "*We win, they lose*"⁸.

All of them tried to improve relations with the then USSR, however, everything changed after the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

Russian-American relations after the collapse of the ussr

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became a hyperpower⁹. Since then, US relations with Russia have gone through two different stages:

1st Stage (1990-2008):

During this stage, which Mearsheimer calls the "*Golden Age*", the West¹⁰ has lived in peace with Russia, except for the wars in the Balkans, which, however, did not pose a real threat of war between Russia and the West. This fact is due, according to Mearsheimer, to two main reasons.

The first is due to the fact that NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) remained intact. The United States maintained Europe as one of its main international focal points, which meant that it was erected as an arbitrator and the high authority that maintained order in the area. This was good for both European countries and Russia, since it minimized the possibility of conflict between them.

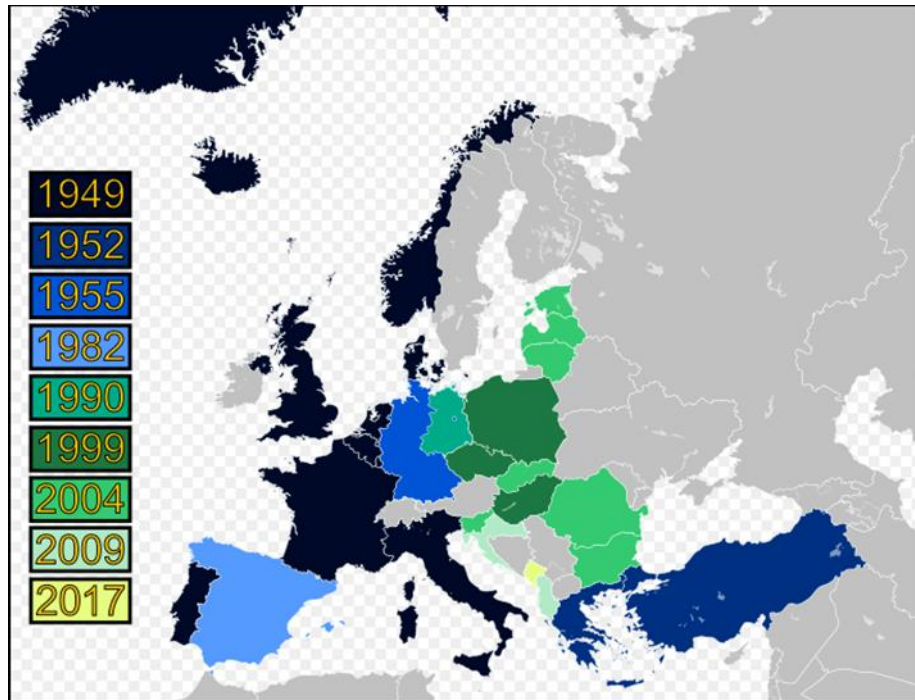
And the second reason is that the West - through NATO - did not threaten Russian interests. Despite opposing the expansion of NATO, the Russians did not see the first two expansions of it as a "deadly threat"¹¹.

⁸ The Reagan administration based its strategy with the URRS on two precepts: to reinforce military power and a positive relationship with Moscow.

⁹ Term coined by the former French Foreign Minister, Hubert Védrine, in 1999.

¹⁰ The use of the term West is intended to highlight the leading role of the United States in Europe, which is Russia's main theater of operations. In it, NATO stands as the main backbone of the transatlantic relationship (US-EU).

¹¹ These two expansions took place in 1999 and in 2004. In the first they were added: Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. And in the second expansion: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.



NATO extensions. Source: Wikipedia.org

At this point, it is necessary to emphasize that Russia did not have the conventional military capacity to oppose such extensions.

It is also worth mentioning the support provided by Russia to the United States at the start of the operation in Afghanistan (2001), facilitating the supply of the forces of the entire coalition, backed by the mandate of the United Nations.

2nd Stage (2008-Present):

The year 2008 is the key date to understand the worsening of the relations not only between United States and Russia, but also between Russia and the European Union. However, sudden changes are not a constant in the story, but they are usually the culmination of a previous process.

However, we can point to the speech delivered by President Putin at the Security Conference in Munich in 2007. In that speech, the Russian president outlined his political agenda, whose main objective was to return Russia to its position of preeminent power respected by the West. In addition, he criticized the unipolar world led by the United

States, being "*contrary to democracy*"¹², and accused the West of betraying the agreements signed after the fall of the Berlin Wall with the successive expansions of NATO.

However, it is in 2008 when the key events are unleashed. In April, the NATO Summit takes place in Bucharest. One of the main themes of the meeting was the possible accession of Ukraine and Georgia to the Alliance. Although this did not occur¹³, there were unequivocal statements: "*We have agreed today that these countries will become NATO members*" and "*MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their way straight to the entrance*" and "*We support the requests of these countries for the MAP*"¹⁴. Despite the strong Russian opposition, NATO went ahead.

Another important event was the creation of the European Union Eastern Partnership, in May 2008. This fact highlighted the intention of the European Union to expand towards the East (Ukraine). Three months later, the conflict between Russia and Georgia broke out. This fact will be the first warning to NATO and the European Union.

In November 2008 the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States took place. In this sense, Obama tried, like his predecessors, to "restart" relations with the Kremlin. However, according to Robert Kagan, this fact was perceived as "*the first blow to the reputation of the United States as a reliable ally*". He adds: "*Right after the Russian invasion of Georgia it seemed (Obama's position) as a prize for the aggression of Moscow*"¹⁵.

Therefore, we can affirm that the year 2008 was the *annus horribilis* for relations with Russia.

¹² See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44>

¹³ It counted on the vote against Germany and France, mainly.

¹⁴ Phrases extracted from DEL POZO, Fernando. "After the NATO Summit in Bucharest", Instituto Elcano, ARI 60/2008: http://realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/!ut/p/a0/04_Sj9CPyKssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGjzOKNg318fEKcHX1NTZz9QgKNXI0NDSBAvyDbUREAbg0Kqw!!/?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/elcano/elcano_es/zonas_es/ari60-2008

¹⁵ "...". Reset "relations with Russia struck the first blow to America's reputation as a reliable ally. Just after the Russian invasion of Georgia it appeared to reward Moscow's aggression ". In KAGAN, Robert, "Backing into World War III", Brookings Report, February 2017, p.7. See: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/backing-into-world-war-iii/>

And after seeing the actions taken, the following question arises: was the Russian response predictable?

Historical constants of Russian strategic thinking

For George Kennan, author of "*The Sources of Soviet Behavior*"¹⁶ and the main architect of the Containment Doctrine, the Russian response was more than predictable. It was something sure. In an interview conducted by Thomas Friedman¹⁷, Kennan said that "*it was the beginning of a new Cold War*" to the question about the decision of the Clinton administration to expand NATO in the territory of the former Warsaw Pact. Excluding Russia, of course.

In addition, in that same interview he added: "*I think the Russians are going to react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. It's a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this at all. No one was threatening anyone else. This expansion would cause the Founding Fathers of this country to revolve in their graves. We have subscribed to protect a whole series of countries, although we do not have the resources or the intention to do it in a serious way. [The expansion of NATO] was simply a carefree action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs*"¹⁸.

If we accept Kennan's thesis, it seems that the real problem lies in the second conditioner of the phrase of Sun Tzu, previously cited: the (un) knowledge of the "adversary". Colonel Pardo de Santayana has defined it as "*lack of understanding of Russian sensibility*"¹⁹.

¹⁶ Popularly known as " Long Telegram" or "Article X". This article was an extension of a cable directed from the US embassy. in Moscow to the Department of State in which the bases of the doctrine of contention were fixed. See: KENNAN, George F. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", Foreign Affairs, July 1947.

¹⁷ See FRIEDMAN, Thomas, "Foreign Affairs; Now to Word from X ", The New York Times, May 2, 1998: <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>

¹⁸ "*I think the Russians will gradually react adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way. [NATO expansion] was simply a light-hearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs*".

¹⁹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA GÓMEZ OLEA, José M^a, "Historia, identidad y estrategia en la Federación Rusa", IEEE, Documento de Análisis 16/2017, 15 de marzo de 2017. See: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA16-2017_Federacion_Rusa_JMPSGO.pdf

And in order to better understand our "adversary", it is necessary to know the main ideas that define Russia's strategic thinking.

As Colonel Pardo de Santayana points out, it has always been very complex for the West to understand the international behavior of Moscow. Examples of this are the statements of the former Ambassador of Russia to the United Nations Vitaly Churkin: "*They (the Obama administration) do not understand us. They are not treating us the right way*"²⁰

One of the characteristics that the author points out is the "*great Russian epic*"²¹, which meant a process of uninterrupted territorial expansion from the 16th century until the end of the Second World War, when it reached its maximum extension.



Russian expansion until nineteenth century. Source: Europe Sovereign Blog.

Throughout that period, Russia maintained its territorial unity, something in which they differ from the then Western powers, which expanded beyond the seas. In addition, Moscow has been considered as the capital of an empire-nation²².

According to Pardo de Santayana, there are three pillars of the Russian nation-empire:

²⁰ "... They just do not get us. They're not dealing with the right way. ", Cited in: ALLYN, Bruce, "Russian to Judgment, "The National Interest, July / August 2017, p.43.

²¹ PARDO DE SANTAYANA GÓMEZ OLEA, José M^a, op.cit., p. 3-4.

²² This is another difference with the Western powers. While in Europe and America the concept of nation-state was consolidated, in Russia the concept of the empire did.

Slavic identity; Russia has always had the vocation to protect the entire Slavic world. Within this pillar we can locate the "Doctrine of Limited Sovereignty" or "Brezhnev Doctrine"²³.

Orthodox religion; This is considered a vital part of their culture and as a differentiating element of the West. This pillar is really important, as it is explicitly mentioned in the latest *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*²⁴ (December 2015) as one of the main features of the Russian people. In the document it can be observed that the story of the Orthodox Church (and, therefore, of Russia) survives as a true heir of the Roman Empire and the authentic seat of the Christian Church.

Nationalism; related to one's own story. This nationalism is characterized by "*its own imprint culture, its ability to overcome very adverse circumstances and conditions of life characterizes a society very given to extremes*"²⁵. This trait allows us to understand the need to have a strong leadership in a recognizable figure that unites the traditional Russian values and can successfully face the challenges posed to the nation-empire.

In addition, Pardo de Santayana adds another important factor of Russian character: the "*steppe warrior impetus*"²⁶, which has become one of the most characteristic features of Moscow's international behavior. This factor owes its existence to the geographical nature of the space inhabited by Russia; its immense size and lack of prominent geographical features make the Russian steppe a vulnerable target to any enemy. Therefore, one of the constants in Russian international behavior has been the obsession to have mattress territories to avoid being directly exposed to an invasion.

Finally, another imperative in Russian foreign policy is worth noting: the need for access to "hot" seas. An example of this need was the one known as the "*Great Northern War*"²⁷,

²³ The idea of this doctrine was to justify the intervention of the Warsaw Pact in any country inside it that had the will to change the block. This doctrine was implemented retroactively in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

²⁴ See: LABORIE IGLESIAS, Mario, "La Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional de la Federación Rusa (diciembre 2015)", IEEE, Documento de Opinión 25/2016, 11 de marzo de 2016 : http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEEO25-2016_ESN_Rusia_MLI.pdf

²⁵ PARDO DE SANTAYANA GÓMEZ OLEA, José M^a, op.cit, p-7. : http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA16-2017_Federacion_Rusa_JMPSGO.pdf

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5. Ver en: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA16-2017_Federacion_Rusa_JMPSGO.pdf

²⁷ it is interesting to note how Ivan Mazepa, leader of the Cossacks in Ukraine, allied himself with the Swedish king Charles XII against Peter I. With this alliance, the Cossack leader sought independence from the Russian yoke. At present, it can still be seen on the 10 hryvnas bill (Ukrainian currency).

at the beginning of the 18th century, which confronted Russia with the hegemonic power of the region, Sweden.

With the final Swedish defeat, Pedro I annexed the Swedish Baltic provinces and founded the city that bears his name today, Saint Petersburg and Russia secured the exit to the Baltic Sea, beginning to lay the foundations for its preponderance in the region.

Russian strategic thinking contemporary (2000-2017)

After this brief summary of the main constants of Russian thinking in foreign policy, we can analyze in more depth the latest actions undertaken by Russia in the international arena²⁸, such as the cases of Crimea and Syria, for example²⁹. In these conflicts, Russia has shown that it is capable of using conventional (non-nuclear) military power successfully.

Since the dissolution of the USSR, the main shield behind which the Federation was protected was its nuclear arsenal. In the face of any aggression, the primary response would be a nuclear counterattack. However, since the coming to power of Vladimir Putin, we can affirm that a profound change has taken place in Russian strategic thinking. During his first two terms (2000-2008), Putin reconfigured the three main concepts³⁰, which had been drawn up between 1997-1999, and which positively valued Russia's cooperative role in international institutions.

²⁸ For a detailed analysis, see: VVAA, "Rusia bajo el liderazgo de Putin. La nueva estrategia rusa a la búsqueda de su liderazgo regional y el reforzamiento como actor global", Cuaderno de Estrategia 178, IEEEE, Madrid, 2015.

²⁹ For an approach to Russian behavior in the conflicts cited, see SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, "Rusia: ¿el retorno al paradigma del empleo de la fuerza militar? IEEEE, Documento de Análisis, 32/2016, May 11, 2016. See: http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2016/DIEEEA32-2016_Rusia_retorno_fuerza_militar_PSH.pdf and SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro, "Crimea: A" new advanced position "in Russia?", IEEEE, Analysis Document 13/2015, March 3, 2015. See at: http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2015/DIEEEA13-2015_Crimea_NuevaPosicionRusa_PSH.pdf

³⁰ National Security (prepared by the Security Council of the Russian Federation, is an organ chaired by Putin, and coordinated by the foreign and defense ministries), Foreign Policy (prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Military Doctrine (defined by the Ministry of Defense).

First, the *concept of foreign policy* defines a new vision of Russia³¹: as a great power, whose main objective is to strengthen its role in global international politics especially in the space belonging to the former USSR. Other key document points are:

- Russia against the West and NATO, considering its expansion to the East as "expansion".
- The concepts of *za rubiezhëm* ("the near exterior") and *sootochestvenik* (compatriot) acquire a central role in the document, and having the great Russian Diaspora as an instrument of foreign and security policy.
- Terrorism as one of the great threats; Let us take into account the pressing conflict in Chechnya and the attacks of September 11.

In addition, the Russian executive drafted the document "Revision of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" in 2007. It lists the regions in which Russia has special interest and the main tools to defend its interests:

- Multilateral diplomacy, which shapes Russia's vision in international organizations.
- Economic diplomacy, which defines the integration of Russia in the international economic system and the use of energy resources as a *soft power* tool in international relations.
- Humanitarian Diplomacy, which manages the protection of the rights of Russians outside of Russia (the compatriots).
- Diplomacy to ensure foreign policy, which establishes the political instruments to improve regional cooperation (CIS) and diversify Russian actions in other scenarios.

And, finally, the document that comes to mark the line of action to be followed by the Russian Federation in the coming years, Strategy 2020, prepared in February 2008. In it, Russia defines NATO as its main threat, and has as fundamental axes the energy security and the protection of the compatriots.

³¹ See MILOSEVICH-JUARISTI, Mila, "El proceso de reimprialización de Rusia, 2000-2016", Real Instituto Elcano, Documento de Trabajo nº 11/2016, 16 de julio de 2016, pp. 7-12. See on: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/6a1149ad-2ed5-400e-8e0f-e40b1d5c6c4b/DT11-2016-MilosevichJuaristi-Proceso-reimprializacion-Rusia-2000-2016.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=6a1149ad-2ed5-400e-8e0f-e40b1d5c6c4b>

After the conflict in Georgia, and with Dimitri Medvedev as president, the reform and modernization of the Russian Armed Forces and the ratification of Putin's National Security policy will be initiated through the approval of various documents, the so-called "*Medvedev Principles about security and foreign policy*" the most relevant. In this document, it emphasizes the primacy of international law, the need for multipolarity in the world order, the search for good relations with the West, and, above all, two more ideas in the text: Russia will respond to any attack on its compatriots (inside or outside its borders) and the preponderance of the Kremlin over some regions (mainly the post-Soviet space).

These last two ideas are key to understanding the development of contemporary Russian foreign policy. After the conflict in Georgia, the "protection of compatriots" acquired a new meaning; it became the main *casus belli* of the use of military force in neighboring countries.

And in order to carry out this protective mission effectively, the Russian government has opted to maintain high military spending, oblivious to the economic situation³².

To conclude this brief review, we need to analyze how the National Foreign Security Policy was definitively configured during Putin's third presidential term (2012-2017). In the National Security Strategy for 2016 (published in December 2015) Russia is committed to hard power as a first level tool in International Relations. In summary, the main lines in foreign policy are maintained, with the inclusion of the concept of "*color revolutions*"³³, which is defined as "*threat to regional stability, because the practice of overthrowing legitimate political regimes, causing internal instability and conflict, is becoming more widespread*"³⁴, insisting on NATO and the US as the biggest threats facing the Russian Federation.

³² According to SIPRI, the Russian defense budget has never been less than 3% of GDP. (since 1991). See: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-share-of-GDP.pdf>

³³ consequence of the crisis in Ukraine.

³⁴ LABORIE IGLESIAS, Mario, "La Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional de la Federación Rusa (diciembre 2015)", IEEE, Documento de Opinión 25/2016, 11 de marzo de 2016. See: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEEO25-2016_ESN_Rusia_MLI.pdf

Conclusions

Based on the analysis, the following question is posed: what should President Trump do?

The best option for the US administration to improve relations with Russia and, therefore, continue to be the hegemonic power³⁵ is the strategy of *Offshore Balancing* or Marine Balance.

This has been the traditional strategy of the United States for most of its history. It is based on the belief that there are three regions in the world that are strategically vital for the United States: Europe, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Its main objective is to make sure that no country dominates any of these areas, since it would put at risk the dominance of the Western Hemisphere. With this strategy, it is sought to ensure that dangerous rivals (rival powers to US power³⁶) in other regions are forced to focus their attention on their own "backyards" instead of having the freedom to intervene in areas where there are American interests.

The best way to achieve this goal is to rely on local powers to confront aspiring regional hegemonic powers, supporting or creating antagonistic regional powers to the powers hostile to US interests. Some examples are Saudi Arabia or Israel (as counterpowers to Iran), South Korea or Japan (as counterpowers to China) and the European Union (to balance the power of Russia). In the event that this is impossible, the US troops, which at first should be kept in the background, would support these counterpowers and act, to withdraw once the regional balance has been verified and restored.

This strategy, if we transfer it to relations with a "*revisionist power*"³⁷ like Russia, would mean transferring the weight of the conflict to the European Union and preventing the escalation of the conflict. For this to happen, the US administration should avoid falling into false idealisms and think that it is impossible to return to the *status quo ante*³⁸ and focus on real scenarios.

³⁵ With global reach.

³⁶ Like China, Russia or Iran.

³⁷ KAGAN, Robert, "Backing into World War III", Brookings Report, February 2017, p-1. See: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/backing-into-world-war-iii/>

³⁸ Before the crisis in Ukraine.

In summary, President Trump must resume the bad relations with Russia, inherited from the previous administration, and assume certain risks (and losses) in the negotiations, focusing attention on the points that unite both countries (the fight against terrorism, nuclear proliferation). This will mean abandoning the liberal tradition of previous administrations and accepting Kennan's words as a rule:

" One thing we may be sure: no great and enduring change in the spirit an practice of government in Russia will ever come about primarily through foreign inspiration or advice"³⁹

The time of idealism is over. The time for realism has arrived.

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* NOTE: The ideas contained in the Opinion Documents are the responsibility of their authors, without necessarily reflecting the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defense.

³⁹ KENNAN, George F, "American Diplomacy", The University of Chigaco Press, Chicago, 2012, p.158.