

America's Warm Wars Enemies: Real or Imagined?

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This article is the fourth and last in a series about the relationships of the United States with China and Russia.

Given that China and Russia (and especially China) are destined to play major roles on the international stage, can America accept the idea of no longer being the only star of the show, that it might have to accept equal billing with others? Will our collective ego allow this incursion into an area where we have called most of the shots for over 70 years? Can we come to realize that the world may no longer revolve around America alone?

Regardless of the media's constant harping that America is in decline and destined for the backwaters of international influence, I believe the answer to the questions above is: We do not have to accept such a role. Our "rivals" for star billing on this stage have considerable barriers before them that could prevent their continued ascension.

Consider China: This country has not come up with a better economic model than the United States. First, its admittedly astounding progress and growth is the result of its cheap labor and of keeping its currency valued to favor exporting its wares. Second, its economic system, centered on debt-ridden, bureaucratically inept state-owned enterprises (SOEs), is one that cannot compete on a long-term basis with America's free enterprise model.

Third, the Communist Party's fear of losing power leads the Party to impose restrictions on enterprises and individuals that severely restrict productivity. Fourth, related to this problem is the existence of a closed, crony legal system. Fifth, corruption is rampant. Graft, kickbacks, and bribes are commonplace. Sixth, its pollution problems are killing thousands of its citizens. To its credit, China is addressing these problems. But it has a long way to go. Seventh, China's recent assertions that it has historical claims to various atolls and reefs in the South China Sea are being met with universal disagreement and condemnation. As China grows stronger and expands its naval power, the United States had best do the same.

Consider Russia: Vladimir Putin continues to lead Russia toward a repressive dictatorship. Independent media is closing down. Opposition groups are being suppressed. The government has passed a law allowing police to open-fire on demonstrating crowds. Elections are routinely rigged. Productivity is stagnant.

Consider the United States: Americans have been conditioned for decades to believe non-democratic countries are (a) dangerous to America's liberty and freedom, and (b) should be changed to reflect the values of the United States.

Regarding point (a), during the time after WWII, Stalin was a danger to Europe, and especially Germany, thus indirectly, to the United States. Indeed, Stalin and Mao colluded during the Korean War to divert America from attention to Europe (and also to give Mao an opportunity to

send thousands of former [Nationalist Army] civil war enemies to their deaths on the Korean battlefields.)

This is no longer the case. Russia is not strong enough to fulfill Stalin-like aspirations, nor does it have the ideological inclination to do so. Mao, killer of millions of his own subjects, has long passed from the scene. China itself has made clear (yes, while building up its military, a subject explained earlier) that it knows it cannot modernize its economy or society if it is on a war-footing with America.

Regarding point (b), Henry Kissinger has made the observation that “American exceptionalism is missionary.” He has said American citizens believe that the U.S. has “an obligation to spread its values to every part of the world.”

America’s politicians cannot hope to be successful if they do not parrot the necessity to keep America free, to preserve our liberties, to maintain our freedom. While making these noble statements, they often refer to the rising power of China. Many Americans have come to view China (and somewhat Russia) as the next bogeyman. Some citizens, such as John Bolton (cited earlier) believe confrontation of another superpower yields better results than attempts at cooperation.

During the recent presidential debates, I lost count of the number of times the candidates mouthed “keeping America free!” From whom? Certainly not Russia or China. They pose no threat to our freedom. Who then? No one, the politicians were mouthing an empty platitude.

Henry M. Paulson Jr., the former Secretary of the Treasury, is quite knowledgeable about China’s politics and finances. During a meeting with high-level American business people, he was asked, “Hank, you’re a real patriot. Why are you helping China?”

Paulson’s answer was simple, “Because it is in our best interests to do so. The problems facing the world (terrorists, the environment, poverty, nuclear proliferation, etc.) “will be easier to solve if the world’s two most important economic powers can act in complementary ways. But these challenges will be almost impossible to address if the U.S. and China work at cross purposes.”

These two nations lobbing missiles at each other would tend to dampen trade and preclude the super powers from aligning with each other to solve world-wide problems. Make no mistake, a close relationship of China and the United States would create an immensely powerful partnership.

The U.S. can do a great deal toward lessening the tensions with China and Russia by simply looking for ways to recognize these powers. In simple terms, in finding ways to give them a seat at the table, but at the same time, making sure America is also sitting at that table. Will that solve all the problems? Of course not, but hanging on to Cold War stereotypes where any nation that does not practice America’s way of life becomes a target for our proselytizing and maybe our bullets is a trite and dangerous way to approach our foreign relations.

Make no mistake. Residing in China or Russia entails living in repressed societies. The exercise of free speech is fraught with danger, especially if the speech (even indirectly) criticizes the government. That stated, it must be remembered that America's freedom, liberty, and security is not in peril because of China or Russia.

America's freedom, liberty, and security, as well as the security of China and Russia, will increasingly become imperiled by the likes of IS, al Queda, and other nihilists. These three nations will always be in competition with one another. But the competition should and can be confined to the marketplace. If missionary America will let China and Russia decide what goes on within the boundaries of their own countries, the three nations could form a powerful triumvirate to combat the world's real enemies: poverty, pollution, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.

Where Russia and China stray from international law, they should be brought to task.