

Another Cold War? Tensions between U.S. and Russia may be higher now

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Is a second Cold War brewing? Not so fast.

President Trump's expulsion this week of 60 Russian diplomats over the poisoning of a Russian double agent in Britain eclipsed the 55 diplomats then-President Ronald Reagan expelled in 1986 during the height of the Cold War.

Measures to remove Russian diplomats by Western countries, and Moscow's retaliatory expulsions of the same number on Thursday, were a throwback. But much has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russians have new tools at their disposal. The rules of engagement for both countries are less clear. And the United States and its allies are much stronger now.

The differences make the tensions between Russia and the U.S. possibly more volatile, but they also create opportunities for the West. Here are a few ways what's happening now is not like the Cold War:

New ways of hacking

Russia uses propaganda and other techniques to destabilize its adversaries like during the Cold War. But now Russia is using cyber tools, hacking and social media to do so more effectively. Russian hackers worked in conjunction with a revamped propaganda apparatus, through state-owned media such as RT and Sputnik and with an army of human-operated and automated fake social media accounts to influence elections in the U.S., Spain, Britain and elsewhere across Europe.

America still has its old Cold War news organizations such as Voice of American and Radio Free Europe, created in the 1940s to counter Nazi and Soviet propaganda . But Trump and Congress have not funded any one U.S. agency to counter Russia's new efforts. U.S. intelligence agencies believe Russian meddling will continue as the 2018 U.S. midterm elections approach.

'Russia much more dependent on trade'

Russia's economy is now more integrated with the West. During the Cold War, there was limited trade between the Eastern Bloc and Western Europe. Now Russia is a major supplier of oil and gas to much of Eastern and Western Europe.

The Soviet Union's economy from 1960 to 1975 was between 49% and 57% of the U.S. total, according to a 1999 report by the CIA. Now, Russia's \$1.2 trillion economy is

minuscule compared to the U.S.' \$18.6 trillion and the combined \$17.1 trillion economy of the European Union.

"Russia is much more dependent on trade than the Soviet Union was," said Alina Polyakova, a Russia analyst at the Brookings Institution. "This gives the West more leverage over Russia than over the Soviet Union."

Western sanctions over Russia's 2014 seizure of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula and its support for separatist forces who seized territory in eastern Ukraine have hurt the Russian economy but caused only negligible impact in Europe, Polyakova said.

And unlike the days when senior Soviet apparatchiks were confined to vacationing in dachas on the Black Sea, the senior officials and businessmen who are close to Putin have assets in the West and like to vacation and educate their children in places like France, London and Aspen, Colo. That means the U.S. and its allies have more ways to isolate and hurt them, Polyakova said.

Russia is smaller geographically and weaker both diplomatically and militarily compared to the U.S. than the Soviet Union was. Many of the countries it relied on as buffer states and as markets during the Cold War peeled off after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and either joined NATO or the European Union or both. That process continues, with three former Soviet republics, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, entering into association agreements with the E.U. in 2016 and 2017.

'No clear rules'

Unlike during the Cold War when U.S. and Soviet pilots generally would keep a respectful distance to avoid sparking a nuclear confrontation, Russian military pilots now routinely buzz U.S. warships and planes flashing their array of missiles.

- In diplomatic tiffs during the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviets responded to each other in a measured fashion. When Reagan expelled 55 diplomats, the Soviets did not expel any Americans, but ordered 260 Soviet employees of the U.S. Embassy in Washington to stay home, forcing State Department officials to wash and drive their own cars and cook their own food at the embassy.

Later that year, the two superpowers each expelled another five diplomats.

When Obama ejected 35 diplomats in 2016 in response to Russia's interference in the U.S. election, Putin responded by ordering 755 U.S. diplomats out of Russia.

"Now the Russians seem to overcompensate with their retaliation," Polyakova said. "There's no clear set of rules anymore."

