



By using this website, you consent to our use of cookies. For more information, visit our [Privacy Policy](#) X
(<https://www.thenation.com/privacy-policy/>)

[FOREIGN POLICY](#) [COLD WAR](#) [RUSSIA](#)

Russian Diplomacy Is Winning the New Cold War

Washington's attempt to "isolate Putin's Russia" has failed and had the opposite effect.

By [Stephen F. Cohen](#)

NOVEMBER 21, 2018

The John Batchelor Show

SUBSCRIBE



The John Batchelor Show

SUBSCRIBE



The John Batchelor Show, November 21

Stephen F. Cohen, professor emeritus of Russian studies and politics at NYU and Princeton, and John Batchelor continue their (usually) weekly discussions of the new US-Russian Cold War. (Previous installments, now in their fifth year, are at TheNation.com.)

On the fifth anniversary of the onset of the Ukrainian crisis, in November 2013, and of Washington “punishing” Russia by attempting to “isolate” it in world affairs—a policy first declared by President Barack Obama in 2014 and continued ever since, primarily through economic sanctions—Cohen discusses the following points:

1. During the preceding Cold War with the Soviet Union, no attempt was made to “isolate” Russia abroad; instead, the goal was to “contain” it within its “bloc” of Eastern European nations and compete with it in what was called the “Third World.”
2. The notion of “isolating” a country of Russia’s size, Eurasian location, resources, and long history as a great power is vainglorious folly. It reflects the paucity and poverty of foreign thinking in Washington in recent decades, not the least in the US Congress and mainstream media.
3. Consider the actual results. Russia is hardly isolated. Since 2014, Moscow has arguably been the most active diplomatic capital of all great powers today. It has forged expanding military, political, or economic partnerships with, for example, China, Iran, Turkey, Syria, Saudi Arabia, India, and several other East Asian nations, even, despite EU sanctions, with several European governments. Still more, Moscow is

the architect and prime convener of three important peace negotiations under way today: those involving Syria, Serbia-Kosovo, and even Afghanistan. Put differently, can any other national leaders in the 21st century match the diplomatic records of Russian President Vladimir Putin or of his foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov? Certainly not former US presidents George W. Bush or Obama or soon-to-depart German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Nor any British or French leader.

4. Much is made of Putin's purportedly malign "nationalism" in this regard. But this is an uninformed or hypocritical explanation. Consider French President Emmanuel Macron, who recently reproached Trump for his declared nationalism. The same Macron who has sought to suggest (rather implausibly) that he is a second coming of Charles de Gaulle, who himself was a great and professed nationalist leader of the 20th century, from his resistance to the Nazi occupation and founding of the Fifth Republic to his refusal to put the French military under NATO command. Nationalism, that is, by whatever name, has long been a major political force in most countries, whether in liberal enlightened or reactionary right-wing forms. Russia and the United States are not exceptions.

5. Putin's success in restoring Russia's role in world affairs is usually ascribed to his "aggressive" policies, but it is better understood as a realization of what is characterized in Moscow as the "philosophy of Russian foreign policy" since Putin became leader in 2000. It has three professed tenets. The first goal of foreign policy is to protect Russia's "sovereignty," which is said to have been lost in the disastrous post-Soviet 1990s. The second is a kind of Russia-first nationalism or patriotism: to enhance the well-being of

the citizens of the Russian Federation. The third is ecumenical: to partner with any government that wants to partner with Russia. This “philosophy” is, of course, non- or un-Soviet, which was heavily ideological, at least in its professed ideology and goals.

6. Considering Washington’s inability to “isolate Russia,” considering Russia’s diplomatic successes in recent years, and considering the bitter fruits of US militarized and regime-change foreign policies (which long predate President Trump), perhaps it’s time for Washington to learn from Moscow rather than demand that Moscow conform to Washington’s thinking about—and behavior in—world affairs. If not, Washington is more likely to continue to isolate itself.

Stephen F. Cohen Stephen F. Cohen is a professor emeritus of Russian studies and politics at New York University and Princeton University. A *Nation* contributing editor, his most recent book, *War With Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate*, is available in paperback and in an ebook edition. His weekly conversations with the host of *The John Batchelor Show*, now in their sixth year, are available at www.thenation.com.

To submit a correction for our consideration, click [here](#).
For Reprints and Permissions, click [here](#).

COMMENTS (3)
