

WHAT'S NEXT FOR US-RUSSIA RELATIONS IN2015?

RD Exclusive: Top experts in Russia and U.S. give us their take on what to expect from the U.S.-Russia relationship in the year ahead.

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As the year draws to a close, it is customary for *Russia Direct* to poll experts about the prospects for U.S.-Russian relations in the coming year. In 2014, the military confrontation in the southeast of Ukraine and Crimea's incorporation into Russia prompted [the West to impose sanctions against Russia](#) and sharply aggravated [U.S.-Russian relations](#). There was even talk of a new Cold War.

Not surprisingly, when it comes to relations between the two countries in 2015, expert forecasts are not overly optimistic. However, all recognize the importance of maintaining at least a minimum level of dialogue between Moscow and Washington.

Andrei Kortunov, general director of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC)

I see no grounds to be optimistic about U.S.-Russian relations in 2015. The main problem will be the impact of anti-Russian sanctions on relations between Moscow and Washington. It is not a question of whether relations between the Kremlin and the White House will be neutral or bad, but of how bad.

The main thing is to avert a worsening of the crisis and to try to maintain a dialogue. Issues such as [combating terrorism](#), [preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction](#), [Iran's nuclear program](#) and [Syria](#) could provide a way to extend opportunities for dialogue.

Environmental issues and climate change could also be points of tentative contact between Russia and the West next year. But under U.S. President Barack Obama's present administration, no one should expect U.S.-Russian relations to stabilize.

Evgeny Buzhinsky, senior vice president of the PIR Center for Policy Studies

AS LONG AS CRIMEA REMAINS PART OF RUSSIA (APPARENTLY FOREVER), U.S.-RUSSIAN RELATIONS WILL BE VERY STRAINED.

Relations between Russia and the United States in 2015 will become increasingly aggravated. As long as Crimea remains part of Russia (apparently forever), U.S.-Russian relations will be very strained. Even if sanctions are lifted eventually, there will be no partnership between Moscow and Washington in the foreseeable future.

I do not rule out the fact that cooperation will continue on Iran's nuclear program and the fight against terrorism, but with far less enthusiasm than before. Moscow's political support for the international coalition will be the only avenue of collaboration in [the fight against Islamic State](#), and only then, on condition that the purpose is not to overthrow the regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad. [Cooperation on the International Space Station will continue](#) until 2020, but overall, joint efforts in space will be gradually phased out.

Nikolai Zlobin, president of the Center on Global Interests (CGI)

The United States and Russia are set for further confrontation, so the development scenario for bilateral relations in 2015 is negative. The events in Ukraine are merely a pretext to lock horns over what system will replace the so-called "post world order" and what geopolitical niches Moscow and Washington will occupy in it.

The United States still has more allies, as well as financial and ideological clout, so its vision of the new world order will prevail, but Russia will continue to actively resist. The antagonisms will become more acute across a range of regional issues. A crisis similar to the one in Ukraine could flare up anywhere from the Baltics to the Caucasus, provoking a new wave of international tension.

MOSCOW AND WASHINGTON WILL INCREASINGLY VIE FOR THE SYMPATHIES OF CHINA, INDIA AND EVEN CUBA

In 2015 Russia will explore ways to split the Western world, driving a wedge between the U.S. and the EU on one side, and between Japan and the West on the other. The U.S., meanwhile, will try to make the Western world close ranks on all international issues, including sanctions against Russia, the continued existence of [the G20](#) and G7, and the fight against Ebola. Moscow and Washington will increasingly vie for the sympathies of China, India and even Cuba.

Terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation and energy security are the three classic areas in which dialogue is possible, but the corridor is too narrow to improve bilateral interplay. The jaundiced relationship between Russia and the United States will last at least a decade, until the next generation of politicians takes over.

Ariel Cohen, director of the Center for Energy, Natural Resources and Geopolitics of the Institute of Analysis of Global Security, director of International Market Analysis Ltd.

The development scenario for U.S.-Russian relations in 2015 will be 90 percent dependent on Moscow. A resumption of hostilities and an offensive on Melitopol by pro-Russian separatists eager to punch a corridor through to Crimea will further aggravate U.S.-Russian relations.

However, a restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and a truce in [the Donbas region](#) could mark the beginning of negotiations on the gradual abolition of sanctions and counter sanctions.

And if the Kremlin were to tone down [the anti-American rhetoric](#), stop searching for "internal enemies" and initiate a democratic dialogue with the Russian opposition, relations could improve not only with the United States, but also with the West in general.

Rationally speaking, I believe that all international issues, including [the fight against Islamic State](#), the curtailment of Iran's nuclear program, negotiations on [the future of Afghanistan](#) and, above all else, Ukraine and [European security](#), offer scope for cooperation between Russia and the United States in 2015.

UNLESS INTEGRATED INTO THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, RUSSIA WILL FIND IT HARD TO ADOPT INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS IN BUSINESS AND POLITICS, AND DIVERSIFY ITS ECONOMY

Moscow need only appreciate the problems — namely [its economic crisis](#), [dependence on raw materials](#), growing military spending and high level of corruption — and draw the right conclusions. Unless integrated into the global economy, Russia will find it hard to adopt international standards in business and politics, and diversify its economy. And without the supremacy of law, including an independent judiciary, there is no clear way out of the crisis. It is the highway of international development. Alternatives have been tried, and the results are plain to see.

Andrei Sushentsov, head of the Foreign Policy agency, Valdai Club expert, associate professor of MGIMO

The Ukraine crisis in 2014 hit U.S.-Russian relations very hard indeed. But despite the sanctions and heightened antagonism across a range of issues, I think relations between Moscow and Washington have stood firm. Neither country is interested in geopolitical rivalry; therefore, in 2015 I predict a positive scenario for U.S.-Russian relations.

The United States has conditioned better relations with Russia (in particular, the lifting of sanctions) on [the implementation of the Minsk agreements](#), although it is not a party to the negotiation process in Minsk. If the truce between the self-proclaimed republics in the Donbas region and the authorities in Kiev holds, Ukraine will cease to dominate the international agenda, and Russia and the United States will gradually establish a dialogue on issues of common interest.

Russia has initiated many [effective solutions in the Middle East](#). 2015 will be a watershed moment for a deal with Iran. Moscow's participation in the talks with Tehran is very important, and its Western partners understand that. The situation in and around Afghanistan is also unclear following [the withdrawal of NATO troops](#). Russia's involvement in maintaining security is vital. Thus, in 2015 Russia and the United States will strengthen cooperation, if not on a bilateral basis, then at least on a multilateral basis, with the involvement of other parties.

Pal Dunay, director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek

In 2015 relations between Russia and the United States (and the West in general) will be neutral.

The conflict has less to do with the Ukraine crisis than with the difference in value navigators.

THE CRISIS OVER UKRAINE IS A CONTINUATION OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST AS TO WHICH SIDE HAS THE RIGHT TO DEFINE THE VALUE NAVIGATORS FOR THE TRANSITIONAL POST-SOVIET COUNTRIES

When the Cold War ended, Moscow tried to integrate into the Western world order, which was perceived by Washington as a threat. Realizing this, Russia began to build its own order around its borders. The construction of the Eurasian Union marked the point at which the Kremlin moved from words to action. The crisis over Ukraine is a continuation of the conflict between Russia and the West as to which side has the right to define the value navigators for the transitional post-Soviet countries.

Significant next year will be the question of who undertakes to subsidize the Ukrainian economy.

Obviously, this will not be Moscow. Washington or Brussels then, but which? For Washington, Kiev's economy is not of paramount importance, and therefore the White House is likely to focus its attention elsewhere.

Brussels will start to withdraw sanctions against Moscow by virtue of the EU's own economic fragility. The first to be lifted will be on agriculture, which are pounding European exporters to Russia of fruit and vegetables. The U.S. will come to terms with Brussels' position.

Yuri Fedorov, Russian political scientist, professor of Metropolitan University Prague

A year ago, no one could have imagined that Euromaidan in Kiev would grow into a war in the southeast of Ukraine, and that Crimea would become part of Russia. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the fate of U.S.-Russian relations in 2015.

I rule out neither an unexpected improvement nor a sharp deterioration — all the way up to a military-political crisis comparable in scale to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. The negative scenario still seems to me to be the more realistic of the two, since the prerequisites for deterioration are in greater supply.

Russia continues to support the separatist groups in the Donbas, Kharkov and Odessa regions. There is a growing threat, too, that Russia could beef up its presence in the Baltic region, including the siting of Iskander missiles in the Kaliningrad exclave.

A new wave of international strain in connection with Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty cannot be excluded, which could provoke the United States to withdraw from the agreement and deploy missiles in Europe.

This prospect has already been mapped out in recent speeches by members of the American establishment. U.S. foreign policy on Russia in 2015 will aim to squeeze and supplant Russia from areas where its influence is noticeable. The restoration of ties with Cuba is a case in point.