

# US-Russia Relationship: “at an all-time and very dangerous low”?

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin\*

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that 755 US embassy workers “must stop their activity in the Russian Federation” on September 1<sup>st</sup>. This escalation in diplomatic tension follows Trump’s signing of a new package of sanctions on Russia, which were passed by Congress with an overwhelming majority from both the Republicans and Democrats, and Trump was forced to accept their decision. He complained on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August that the US-Russia relationship is “at an all-time and very dangerous low.” However, things are not as they seem, and relations between the different branches of government in the US are lower than the US-Russia relationship. Furthermore, US sanctions have a hidden target.

Trump scorned Congress for the new sanctions: “You can thank Congress, the same people that can’t even give us healthcare!” Congressmen from his own Party, such as Senators Bob Corker and Ron Johnson, responded that Trump should blame Putin; “the murderous dictator who attacked our democracy” as the Representative Adam Kizinger said. Congress has a historic mistrust of Russia, which has changed little since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but congressmen seem to trust their own President even less, which is why they passed legislation to stop Trump from openly improving relations with Russia. Relations are so poor that Senator Jeff Flake published an excerpt last week of his upcoming book that described the Republican alliance with Trump as a “bargain with the devil”. Senator Tim Scott said after Congress passed the new sanctions package that “we work for the American people. We don’t work for the president.”

Congress has also introduced two bills to stop Trump from interfering with Robert Mueller’s judicial investigation into Trump’s relations with Russia. John Thune, a major Republican senator, said, “I think it’s important that Congress assert its authorities under the Constitution and be an equal branch of government.” Tension between Trump’s administration and Congress is similar to tension with the judiciary and the intelligence services, and Trump and his supporters claim that there is a conspiracy against the new administration. Former leader of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, declared, “I regard the Mueller example as the deep state at its very worst and it worries me. It fits the whole case that we’ve seen the Justice Department at times being out of control.” The continuing infighting between the branches of US government and between White House staff and the continued leaks of sensitive information about Trump indicate that US politics does seem to be a deal between devils. Problems center around the US relationship with Russia, and yet despite the noise and the sanctions and the mutual diplomatic reprisals, Russia and the US appear to working hand in glove in a number of ways.

Since the Obama administration the US has been coordinating against the revolution in Syria, and this has increased with the cessation of CIA dirty money to some rebel groups. The US also set up a special representative on Ukraine, Kurt Volker, to seek a resolution to the tension with Russia in Ukraine, and Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, endorsed that by saying on Rossiya24 state TV that “We would be interested to see what impression the US special envoy has on the current state of affairs.” Lavrov also said that at last week’s meeting Asian Summit in Manila his talks with US Secretary of State Tillerson were lengthy and covered a wide range of topics, from the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula to coordination plans between Russia and the United States to withstand attacks. While coordination with Russia continues, some of the US’s allies in Europe are feeling under threat from the US.

German Economy Minister, Brigitte Zypries, asked the European Commission to look into possible countermeasures against the United States, following sanctions against Russia that could potentially hit European companies: “The Americans cannot punish German companies because they operate economically in another country. There are partnerships for natural gas and petroleum.” In June, Germany and Austria issued a joint statement: “Europe’s energy supply is a matter for Europe, and not the United States of America!” Now, the US and the EU are competing with each other to target sanctions against Russia (supposedly) that harm their supposed ally while leaving room for their own companies to exploit the ensuing lack of competition. Russia’s *Sputnik News* laughed at the EU response to US sanctions in a headline on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August: “US Firms ‘Will Shamelessly Occupy New Niche’ in Russian Market Amid EU Sanctions.” The US is harming the EU far more than it is harming Russia, and that does not seem to be an accident.

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