

# From Wary Collaboration to Wary Competition? U.S.-Russian Security Cooperation Since the End of the Cold War<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

In September 1990, President George H.W. Bush called for a *New World Order*. Believing as others did back then that the end of the Cold War between the US and USSR offered real promise for an entirely different approach to international relations and security cooperation, his address to a joint session of Congress in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, pointed to the effort to respond collaboratively with more than 20 other partners. Indeed, he made this call just after returning from a summit meeting in Helsinki with Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. This ushered in a phase of hope that a new international system of peace and cooperation could be built. A long line of scholars and commentators argued for the dismantling of Cold War security institutions like NATO, suggesting that regional economic organizations like the European Union and global institutions in the United Nations system could now attain prominence with the end of the U.S.-Soviet deadlock, especially in the UN Security Council. Realists like John Mearsheimer, however, soon cautioned that the emerging epoch might well mean a return to the conflict and instability of previous decades, indeed centuries, as pressures and ambitions long held in check by the stability of the Cold War alliance systems and Mutual Assured Destruction nuclear weapons policies, would now spring force in ugly and hateful ways.

The record since those early years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall has been mixed. Neither the United Nations system nor the European Union has emerged as an effective alternative institutional approach to the chief political and security challenges facing Eurasia. Accordingly, NATO has not been dismantled. Indeed, it has grown in scope and function to include new relationships, indeed some degree of partnership with both the former members of the Warsaw Treaty

Organization and also with many of the successor states to the Former Soviet Union. The promise of increased security collaboration, even partnership between the U.S. and Russia, that looked substantial to the optimists of the early 1990s, was in fact realized in part, at times, with the drawing down of conventional military forces in Europe, the denuclearization of some parts of the former Soviet Union, and the more general negotiated reduction in nuclear weapons held by the two powers. The establishment of NATO's Partnership for Peace, the Russia NATO Council, and the concrete elements of U.S.-Russia AntiTerrorism cooperation in the wake of 9/11 must be noted as well. But the promise of a *New World Order* was certainly not realized. Indeed, recent examples of political conflict and rivalry may

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suggest a possible return to the “bad old days” of the Cold War or at least the evolution of a 21<sup>st</sup> Century international system that is not all that different from the great power rivalries of previous centuries. What remains to be seen is whether U.S.-Russian relations will be characterized by increased tension and rivalry, with the prospect of military confrontation again not out of the question, or will common interests and the initial efforts to work out means of cooperating in the face of common challenges prevail.