

The Real Reason for the New Cold War with Russia

Interview with Vladimir Pozner by International Man, 4 April 2020

and **What it Means for the Markets and World Peace**

Editor's Note: Vladimir Pozner is Russia's most influential TV political-talk-show host, journalist and broadcaster.

Pozner has hosted several shows on Russian television, where he has interviewed famous figures such as Hillary Clinton, Alain Delon, President Dimitri Medvedev and Sting.

Pozner has appeared on a wide range of networks, including NBC, CBS, CNN and the BBC. In his long career, he has been a journalist, editor (Soviet Life Magazine and Sputnik Magazine) and TV and radio commentator, covering all major events in Russia.

Pozner has appeared on The Phil Donahue Show and Ted Koppel's Nightline.

He co-hosted a show with Phil Donahue called Pozner/Donahue. It was the first televised bi-lateral discussion (or "spacebridge") between audiences in the Soviet Union and the US, carried via satellite.

In 1997, he returned to Moscow as an independent journalist.

Doug Casey's friend Mark Gould sat down with Pozner in Moscow to help us better understand the relationship between the US and Russia.

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International Man: Naturally, Americans have a lot of misconceptions about Russia. The US government and media offer an overly simplistic and unfavorable view of the country.

What does the US government and media get wrong?

Vladimir Pozner: That's a very difficult question to answer. It's not only what they get wrong, but what they deliberately say that is not true.

It's a combination of things.

It's one thing not to understand another country.

For instance, I was in Japan, and it took me a very long time to begin to understand things because the Japanese do things very differently—not good or bad, just different.

It's another thing to have a prejudice about another people or another country and to present things in a negative light.

Broadly, the relationship between Russia and the United States has been a difficult one for most of the 20th century, starting with the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. It was very threatening to the United States and to capitalism.

The goal of having a world revolution and having socialism everywhere initiated things like the Red Scare in the United States back in the 1920s.

These things evolved over the years all the way up to the postwar period when you had Joe McCarthy and all of those things.

There was a deep ideological difference between the USSR and the United States, that pretty much, in my opinion, formatted the way people looked at "Russia," because for most Americans, the USSR and Russia, was exactly the same thing.

Although, the USSR consisted of a lot of other countries that were not Russian at all, like Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, what have you.

So that's one side of it. The negative attitude over a 70-plus-year period became part of the American outlook.

Then things changed. Suddenly the USSR became a different country. Suddenly the USSR became a different country. Gorbachev, Glasnost, and Perestroika... we were going to be friends.

Everyone was overjoyed on both sides of the fence. The American side was saying, "Now they're going to be like us, finally."

That was the average view.

The view at the top was that Russia had better behave now and do what we tell them to do. They lost the Cold War. They are no longer a superpower, and so they just better do what we tell them and shut up.

That attitude, which wasn't evident immediately, gradually became more evident. It really broke out with the bombing of Yugoslavia in the late '90s when Boris Yeltsin—who was supposedly a great friend of America—said, "No, this we will not stand for."

The problem from that point on was that Russia was no longer willing to follow the American lead. This led to tremendous anger on the part of the American establishment, which was reflected in statements and in the media.

When Vladimir Putin came around, he initially wanted to be a member of the West. He officially proposed that Russia join NATO and that Russia become part of the European Union.

He was officially told, in politer terms, to go do "whatever." In fact, he was told that Ukraine and Georgia would become part of NATO well before Russia.

This is official. This isn't something that I'm dreaming up.

Ultimately, in 2007, in Munich, Putin made a famous speech, saying that we no longer agree to be treated like a second-rate nation. We have our global aspirations and interests, and we are going to protect them.

From that point on, Putin became monster number one, and Russia became negative.

So, it's not so much that there are misconceptions. It's that there are certain views that have been repeated time and time again in the media.

After all, where do people get their information about another country? Basically from television and newspapers.

If you take a good, hard look at US media over the past 12 years, try to find anything positive about Russia. I mean anything, like there are good restaurants in Moscow, for example. You're going to have a real problem.

So, it's not surprising that the average American and even not-so-average American has a very negative view of Russia.

When I go to America, and I say I have a show on Russia's Channel 1 in which I have criticized Putin more than once and said that I don't agree with some of his policies, they say, "You mean you're still alive?"

They have this view of today's Russia being the Soviet Union under Stalin when people were shot, put in the gulag and God knows what.

That is the kind of image that gradually has been reinstated in the United States.

International Man: As an esteemed journalist in both countries, you've had visibility into the unique dynamics and intricacies that very few people have.

How have US and Russian relations changed since the Cold War?

Vladimir Pozner: Here are the major points, in my opinion—and everything I say is my opinion.

Let's say that the Cold War ended with the bringing down of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

I would say that was pretty much the end. Certain agreements were made. There was a certain understanding that was reached. For instance, the US Secretary of State, James Baker, told Mikhail Gorbachev that if he allowed the taking down of the Berlin Wall, he could promise that NATO would not move one inch to the East.

That was not written on paper, but it was written down by secretaries who were listening to his conversation, and you can find that. It's not someone's imagination.

That was one very important thing for the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union saw NATO as an aggressive military force. So the fact that it would not move eastward was extremely important for the feeling of safety on the part of Soviet leadership. That was one thing.

The second thing was that your average Russian felt that now we could be friends, arms spread wide open, because "we are the ones, we took down communism, not you guys."

"We, in our own country, did it. We've changed the system."

So, we're buddies now? Are you going to like us?

When that didn't happen in Russia proper, a kind of resentment gradually grew.

Why aren't we being treated like everyone else?

Why has NATO moved in our direction? And against whom is NATO then moving?

Are we still considered the enemy?

So, what we've seen is a gradual downhill movement from the apex of the Berlin Wall coming down. We're friends. We're going to work together.

From that, gradually the graph went down with hardly any positive movement—hardly anything was achieved realistically.

Now with the Trump administration, some extremely important arms agreements have been pretty much cast aside.

As I've said before, I'm not a big fan of President Putin, but given the possibility, Putin would have worked to have a close relationship with the West.

He was told in no uncertain terms that there was no interest in that, and his reaction was as follows.

About a year and a half ago, I was invited to lecture at Yale University, and the title of my lecture was *How the United States Created Vladimir Putin*.

It's true. That's what happened. That's really the tragedy of it because working together, the United States of America and Russia—having their own interests but still working together—could achieve phenomenal things both in the area of fighting climate change as well as in the area of putting an important amount of opposition to China.

In fact, there is very little the two countries could not do together.

As I see it, it's a tragedy. Because of the Wolfowitz Doctrine in 1992—which basically said that the US is now the only superpower—the US has to see to it that other countries do not challenge it, including Western European countries, and we have to keep Russia down.

That was a way of looking at it, and the other way of looking at it is to say, "We have a window of opportunity here. We can evolve a kind of Marshall Plan as we did after World War II."

We can not just give Russia money, but we can direct it in a certain way to see to it that democratic institutions are developed in a country that had none whatsoever.

Ultimately, the choice was made by President Clinton to enlarge NATO with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary.

That was the first signal that we're not going to go the way of a Marshall Plan. We're going to go in a different direction. With all due respect, I find it very hard to blame Russia for any of this.

International Man: After the Cold War ended, the expansion of NATO continued. It certainly caused greater tensions between Russia and the US.

How has US foreign policy in eastern Europe and Ukraine impacted relations between the two countries? How do Crimea and the idea of Russia's near-abroad factor into this? Are we headed toward or into another Cold War?

Vladimir Pozner: Not immediately, but it did.

I think we already are in a certain kind of Cold War.

One of the things people often say about Putin is that he called the collapse, the disappearance of the Soviet Union, a huge catastrophe, and so on — not his exact words, but something like that.

Immediately, it was said that he wanted to go back to the Soviet Union. He said that the disappearance of the Soviet Union was a terrible calamity.

What he was referring to was the fact that 25 million ethnic Russians suddenly found themselves living in foreign countries — in the Baltic States, in Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan.

Not only that, but their families are separated because some were living in Russia proper, and they were living in one of the Russian republics or the Soviet republics—now, this was all gone.

It was a tremendous shock. It was a global catastrophe for them.

Do you just forget about 25 million people?

Do you just say, "Well, too bad," or do you try to do something to make their lives somehow more comfortable, or at least to protect them in some way?

When we talk about Ukraine, Crimea, what have you, I'm going to have to remind you about 1962.

In 1962, Fidel Castro and Nikita Khrushchev agreed to deploy Soviet missiles on Cuban soil. Now, they were two independent gentlemen representing their countries, and they completely had the right to make that agreement.

However, when the United States discovered that this was going on, President Kennedy made it very clear that either the Russians would turn their ships around and sail back (and pull out whatever they'd already installed), or they would be attacked by the United States. If World War III was the result, then so be it—and we were on the very brink of World War III. Thank heavens the two men had the intelligence not to push it.

The Russians pulled out their missiles and so did the Americans, who had missiles in Turkey.

Of course, they didn't make a lot of noise about that, and most Americans don't even know that that was the case because there was a loss of face.

What I'm saying is, President Kennedy infringed on international law. These two countries had the right to agree to place their missiles where they wanted on their own soil.

Yet the president of the United States said, "No, we won't allow it."

Why?

Because he saw this as being an existential threat to the United States, and when a country or its leadership sees an existential threat, it will do what it needs to do to protect itself, regardless of international law.

Okay, now we come back to this situation with Ukraine.

Ukraine has a very large border with Russia, on the south-western side of Russia.

Crimea, which was part of Ukraine, has the city of Sevastopol, which is the naval base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Imagine for a moment that Ukraine becomes a member of NATO. Very realistically, that means that you're going to have NATO forces on Russia's border in the Southwest, and instead of having the Russian Navy in Sevastopol, you'll have the Americans' Sixth Fleet.

For the Russian leadership—and I'm not arguing whether they were right or wrong—that was seen as an existential threat.

Putin said, "We will not allow it." Was he infringing on international law?

Yes, he was—but it's the same kind of reasoning. We will not allow Ukraine to become a member of NATO, and if we have to put our soldiers there, we will. They will not allow Sevastopol to become a base for any Western fleet, especially the US.

That is basically what happened.

Let alone the fact that the vast majority of people in Crimea wanted to be part of Russia and, historically, it's part of Russia. I'm not even going to argue about that. That's a whole different story.

What do you do when the majority of the people, like the people of Kosovo, didn't want to be members of Yugoslavia, and with the help of NATO, they became "independent?"

That seemed to be okay. I'm not going to go into that part of it, although one could. The basic story here is an existential threat to the security of a country. That's what the whole Ukrainian and Crimean issues are about.

It's very simple, really.

If you put up a map of the United States and Mexico—and I've done this with Americans—you see the border.

Let's imagine that tomorrow there's a revolution in Mexico and that the people who come to power are not friends of the United States.

Imagine for a minute that fearing the US government is a bit threatening to them, the new Mexican government invites 10 Russian military divisions to protect their border. Do you think the United States will allow that?

That's what I always say.

International Man: In 2016, then-candidate Trump repeatedly said, "wouldn't it be a great thing if we could get along with Russia."

Trump seemed genuinely interested in ending the antagonist relationship that his predecessors had with Russia. What's your take on why there has been no meaningful policy change toward Russia?

Are sanctions the main issue? Do you see these as acts of war? If these were done away with, how would relations be between the two countries?

Vladimir Pozner: Question number one about what Trump said during the presidential campaign. Certainly, that was appreciated in Russia because his opponent, Hillary Clinton, compared Putin to Hitler.

When one candidate says your president is Hitler, and the other said it would be good to have better relations, it's obvious what your choice will be.

One of the things that was used immediately after the election—to everyone's surprise when Hillary lost—was that Trump had won because the Russians had somehow infiltrated the system and interfered in the elections.

That was a big feather in the Russians' cap. Imagine how extremely powerful and influential Russian propaganda is to get a guy from Kansas or Iowa to vote for Trump instead of Hillary Clinton and using no money whatsoever.

Who are the Americans to complain when you consider how much the United States has interfered in elections all over the world, including by use of military force?

We're not going to even talk about that. However, this whole story made it pretty impossible for Trump to do anything pro-Russian because immediately, it would be, "See, he's in collusion. He is doing this."

The whole story with Mueller, and all of that. Finally, Mueller comes out saying that they found no collusion, but how long did it take? It took two years, and even so, they're still talking about it.

I think he honestly would have preferred to have normal relations with Russia, not that he's madly in love or anything, but it would be better for the United States, and for the rest of the world. Obviously, he couldn't do it with the situation he had.

That's point number one.

Point number two, the sanctions that were introduced. Have they hurt?

Yes, they have. Is it an act of war? No, it's not. They've hurt economically, in Russia—people's standard of living has gone down in part because of that.

Real wages have fallen in part because of that. Russia cannot get credit from foreign banks because of that. Without that credit, Russia cannot buy the kind of modern machinery it needs to modernize its own industries. So yes, the sanctions have hurt.

Have the sanctions had any positive effect?

Yes, they have. Russia's agriculture is now booming precisely because nothing could be imported. Today, Russia's agriculture is number two in terms of the amount of funds that it brings into Russia—after gas and oil and more than the arms industry.

So now the farmers in this country say, "Please keep the sanctions" because they're doing great with all of that.

The sanctions have given the Russians more of a sense of independence. "See, we can do it, we can do it, we can take it."

Russians are pretty good at living in hard times. They're much worse at living in good times than in bad times. Russians are very tough.

If tomorrow the sanctions were removed, there would have to be a reason; and if the reason was that the sanctions were counterproductive, the world has become too dangerous of a place. There is no trust. The danger of a nuclear mistake is very great. Let's try to sit down and find ways to cooperate.

I think the initial reaction would be, can we trust them, or is this another one of those ploys?

But, by and large, of course, the vast majority of Russians would be overjoyed.

It would be good not only for Russia but also for all the Western European countries who want to export to Russia and are currently unable to.

Editor's Note: There are so many momentous events unfolding right now, including a stock market crash and a global pandemic.

The biggest financial bubble in human history has popped... and the coming financial volatility will be unlike anything we've ever seen before.

It will be an increasingly dangerous time for retirees, savers, and investors.

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