

## Behind The Lines!

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### SOVIET BEHAVIOR REVISITED

Russia under Vladimir Putin continues to play its quizzical game *vis-à-vis* the United States. The political jabs and feints remind one of a patient boxer who attempts to keep his opponent off balance and is content to wait for just the right opening to score a major blow. The boxing analogy is not lost on Russia whose actions in the international arena have become increasingly more assertive and bellicose. Even bizarre campaigns like a "Day of Conception" in September, which are reminiscent of Soviet times, are set to coincide next year in June with the national holiday "Russia Day" towards improving Russia's alarmingly low birth rate.

Now we are witnessing an expanded and highly orchestrated range of events in July and August that unquestionably are sanctioned by the Kremlin and have both military and political implications for the long term:

- Well-publicized efforts by Putin himself and both first deputy prime ministers Ivanov and Medvedev to rally two key elements of contemporary Russian society – the re-emerging Russian military and the new generation of vocal Russian youth. Russian young people in organized national groups such as Наши ("Ours"), Молодая гвардия ("Young Guard") and Наша страна ("Our Country") bring back images of Komsomol youth groups from the Soviet period. These youth are very supportive of Putin and readily express their political views with a palpable anti-American sentiment;
- Boastful announcement with much fanfare lauding deployment of the highly sophisticated S-400 "Triumf" (NATO designator "Growler" [SA-21]) land-mobile air defense system with high-explosive warheads around the Moscow national capital area along with other strategic cities and centers to follow;
- Strategic probes by Russia's long-range air force Tu-160 "Blackjack" bombers and more recently a pair of Tu-95 "Bear" bombers staging from a base near Blagoveshchensk in the Far East Military District on a training mission targeted against U.S. military assets in Guam;
- Renewed discussion among Russia's top naval brass to establish a permanent Mediterranean presence with a base at Tartus and/or Latakia, Syria;
- Pending sale of Russian Su-30MKM "Flanker-H" multirole fighters and Il-78MKI "Midas" aerial tankers to Iran that will provide the Iranian Air Force with the capability to conduct air strikes and airborne refueling operations throughout the Middle East;
- Curious claims by Russian scientists, and publicly supported by Putin, that Russia's continental shelf is contiguous with the Lomonosov Ridge which extends to the North Pole. Ergo, the Arctic and the North Pole with their vast gas, oil and strategic mineral resources are implicitly *de facto*, if not *de jure*, Russian territory!;
- Reports that Russia's espionage efforts against the West have reached levels not seen since the end of the Cold War. Putin's address at a recent meeting with military and civilian intelligence officers reiterated the necessity for increased espionage capabilities on the part of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (Служба внешней разведки [CBP]), thus evoking memories of Stalin's rallying claim of "encirclement by an ever-present enemy" from another era.

Let's face it – Russians and Americans just don't trust each other. Historically there has never been long-term, genuine trust between the United States and Russia. Even during wartime and the Nazi threat to both the U.S. and the Soviet Union as so-called allies during World War II, Stalin was anything but benevolent in his view towards the United States. Perhaps Ronald Reagan captured the real emotion of the Russian-American relationship best with his succinct "trust but verify" <доверяй но проверяй> during the waning Soviet period.

So where is the genuine trust? Certainly not in Moscow. Bush's decision to expand the NATO defensive presence eastward with missiles and radar systems in Poland and the Czech Republic respectively was met with a vigorous "Nyet" from the Kremlin. Putin's empty counterproposal was to offer the U.S. access to Russia's leased and outdated Soviet-period radar in Gabala, Azerbaijan. Moreover, his initial retaliatory response was suspension of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty signed in 1990 between the USSR and the U.S. If the U.S. proceeds with its European missile and radar plans, and apparently it will, these are just the first jabs in the early rounds of a heavyweight bout between two old opponents.