

There is a growing consensus in the international community that the world is on the threshold of a second Cold War. But more than a battle of ideologies, it will be a fight between a declining superpower and resurgent countries such as Russia and China that want a return to a more democratic, multipolar world and respect from the West for their sovereignty and national interests. Russia, like the U.S., is now an avowedly capitalist country, and ideology is not the key guiding factor behind the new alliances that are emerging. However, Russia and China are united in their opposition to the “hegemonic” policies being pursued by the U.S. and its allies.

How can we gauge that the world is on verge of second cold war?

- It started with the American decision in 2002 to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty)
- Recent months have seen tit-for-tat expulsions of diplomats on a scale that was not witnessed when the previous Cold War was at its height. In the last week of March, Russia ordered the expulsion of 60 American diplomats. This was after scores of Russian diplomats were designated as persona non grata in several Western capitals.
- Another strong signal that a new Cold War was in the offing was the Donald Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review released in February this year. The document provided a blueprint for increasing the already large American nuclear arsenal and the rationale for a more permissive use of nuclear weapons.
- In 2016, the U.S. installed a \$800-million anti-missile system in a Romanian military base.
- Vladimir Putin’s State of the Union address on March 1 in which he announced the development of new nuclear and missile systems that had the capability to strike any corner of the world. Putin made it a point to emphasise that the new weapons systems Russia possessed had the capability of piercing the much-vaunted missile defence shields the U.S. had set up all around Russia’s borders.
- Responding to growing military alliances of USA in Asia-Pacific, Chinese defence minister has said that in terms of international issues, China and Russia have a united position and there is close cooperation between the armed forces of the two countries.
- The two leaders have agreed to replace the U.S. dollar with a gold standard as the reserve currency for trading. China has already started paying for some of its energy imports in yuan. The two countries have already established systems for global trade that bypasses the dollar.
- USA is for regime change in Syria and is supporting the Kurdish forces. Russia on the other hand is supporting the Assad regime thereby bringing the two powers against each other. (The U.S. and its allies during the Cold War days either intervened militarily or backed their surrogates with arms and money in “Third World” countries where progressive political movements had either gained power or were on the ascendant. In contemporary times too, the West has targeted broadly progressive governments and countries such as Iran that have refused to bow down to the diktats of the U.S.)
- A democratically elected government in Ukraine, aligned to Moscow, was overthrown with the active involvement of the U.S. and the European Union. This set in motion a chain of events. Civil war broke out in Ukraine, and the people in the Crimean peninsula voted overwhelmingly to revert to Russia.
- This led to imposition of sanctions against Russia which harmed Russian economy as well as the European economy dependent on Russian supplies of Oil and Natural Gas and Food Products.

- China is attempting to dominate the Asia Pacific region around South China Sea as tactic earlier used by Cold war nations.
- President Trump has authorised the sale of heavy weaponry, including anti-tank missiles, to the pro-Western government in Ukraine. Pro-Russian Ukrainians in the east of the country have refused to recognise the government in Kiev.
- Turkey, a NATO member, has signed a deal to purchase the Russian-made S-400 long-range missile-defence system. Russia is also contracted to build a nuclear plant in Turkey, whose relations with the West have become frosty. Ankara suspects that Washington was aware of the coup attempt that almost succeeded in overthrowing the civilian government. Turkey accuses the European Union of tacitly supporting the Kurdish separatists and stymieing its long-pending membership of the organisation.

Scramble for Africa

- Like in the latter half of the 20th century, there is a furious scramble for military bases by the leading powers in the African and Asia-Pacific region. In the last decade, the U.S. has built a network of bases on the African continent. In 2007, using “war on terror” as a pretext, Washington set up the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM).
- After the West-initiated regime change in Libya and the rise of Islamist forces such as Boko Haram and other Al Qaeda affiliates in sub-Saharan Africa, the U.S. and its allies such as France further expanded their military influence by adding on more bases. The latest African country to formally cede a military base to the U.S. is Ghana.
- Both China & Russia are expanding their economic relations with the African countries (unlike USA which relies on military relations). For ex- Belt-Road initiative, favorable terms of trade being offered to African countries
- Russia has become a player in the conflict in Libya by throwing its support behind the forces of General Khalifa Haftar.
- Egypt is already buying advanced weaponry from Russia and the Saudis have signed big petroleum deals with Russian companies.

Today there is also a proliferation of tactical nuclear weapons. This has increased the chances of an accidental flare-up which could lead to a full-scale nuclear war. The new generation of leaders, especially those currently holding the levers of power in some Western capitals, seem to have forgotten the lessons of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The revised “Nuclear Posture Review” released by the Trump administration in November envisaged a nuclear response to a conventional arms attack and even to a cyber threat. The Barack Obama administration had decreed that nuclear weapons could be used only “in extreme circumstances” to defend the “vital interests” of the country and its important allies.