

Why Russia is the Tea Party Of International Politics



By [Brian Frydenborg](#) September 3, 2013

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Photo Credit: AP

The Cold War is over, and I have no problem admitting it to anyone who asks: I am a big fan of the Russian people, and I admire Russian culture and love Russian history. Despite all that, the one word which best describes my personal feelings about the Putin regime in Russia is

"contempt." Vladimir Putin and Russia may *think* they are helping their interests and are looking strong by "[standing up](#)" to the U.S. and [being obstructionist](#), but they really aren't. Instead, Russia is confirming that under its current leadership, there is little more that it is capable of being than a nuisance and a distraction. This is quite a fall from the days of the czar's armies [marching into Paris](#), having defeated Napoleon Bonaparte, in 1814; from being giants in two world wars (and being the deciding factor in victory over Nazi Germany); from, in its own way, sometimes standing up for revolutionaries fighting for freedom all over the developing world; from sending up the Sputnik and the Mir Space Station; from helping eradicate smallpox from nature.

Today? Russia is only capable of saying "Nyet."

Apart from [attacking Chechnya](#) and [Georgia](#) and planting [its flag under the North Pole](#), what has Russia *actually done* lately? When there's a crisis, when does Russia offer a helping hand? Russia might think that by opposing the U.S. as an almost automatic tic is in its own interests, but that is an incredibly narrow and myopic view to take.

Just like the Tea Party, Russia has no new ideas, bold programs, or any willingness to compromise. Instead, it behaves in a way that is geared towards its concept of an ideal world rather than trying to work within the real world which actually exists. Russia, in Russia's ideal world, is a great power and must counter the U.S. ambitions. The Tea Party, in its ideal world, is a lone fighter for Liberty and can stop the changing of America into a socialist dictatorship.

In reality, Russia is a regional power, severely downgraded from its heyday a few decades ago. It can occasionally send a plane to violate, say, [Finland's](#) or [Japan's airspace](#), or [put a few ships in the Mediterranean](#) here and there, but that does little more than kindle

nationalist sentiment back home and waste fuel. Russia really thinks it can turn back the clock on American supremacy in the international order. Meanwhile, in the real America, the Tea Party often comes off as a group that doesn't like the changing colors of America and has absolutely no clue, like Russia, what living in the 21st century actually entails.

[The Republican Party has been partly hijacked by the Tea Party](#), that party won only one single demographic group in terms of both race and gender in the 2012 election: white men. Women and all non-white groups all went for Obama. Like Russia, Tea Partiers want to go back in time rather than face the realities of where the world is going or be part of solving common problems. They want to bring America back to what they consider to be America's heyday, something like the 1950s (but a version of the 1950s in which Fox News had already been invented). They haven't made serious attempts to win over non-whites or women. You'd hope they would have realized that a clear majority of an ever-changing America did not share their vision in 2012, and that support for that vision is only certain to shrink even further. But, surprisingly, [Tea Partiers reacted to the loss by saying that Republicans need to be *more conservative*](#). Just like Russia thinks it needs to be *more* hostile to U.S. interests.

The power of "nyet" is very limited. The world wants great powers to work together to face down the challenges of war, terrorism, genocide, poverty, disease, climate change, international trade, and many other problems. Russia's mighty "nyet" merely retards progress on all these issues but will not affect their outcome. It will only increase Russian isolationism and irrelevancy. The Tea Party is in the same boat: It can be part of dealing with problems and shaping the future through cooperation and compromise, or it can simply stall almost certain progress that an increasing majority of Americans want to see happen.

The House of Representatives, controlled by Republicans and dominated by Tea Partiers, [voted in August for the 40th time to repeal Obamacare.](#) [Putin can send some Russian Navy ships to the Mediterranean,](#) but at best that will slightly hinder and slightly complicate any American action in Syria. In an ideal world, Russia and the Tea Party would grow up. It's a good thing that Obama is prepared to govern in a less than ideal world and solve problems, rather than scream like a child from the sidelines.