

## Russia, a rogue nation?

Russia made headlines for all the wrong reasons this week, when a clutch of countries led by the [U.S. expelled more than 100 of its diplomats](#) and intelligence officers over suspicion that the Kremlin was behind a [nerve agent attack on a Russian spy](#) and defector to the U.K., Sergei Skripal, and his daughter Yulia, in Salisbury on March 4. Besides the U.S., 14 member-states of the European Union, including Germany, France, Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands and Latvia, undertook coordinated expulsions, with Australia also joining them. In a sense this move, seen as the most dramatic, concerted such purge since the Cold War years, has been coming for some time. Last week the U.K. led the way when it expelled 23 Russian diplomats, but the week before that the U.S. had slapped Russia with sanctions against multiple individuals and entities for interfering in the 2016 U.S. presidential election through covert online propaganda, including fake news. Beyond these specific charges lie other alleged violations: in Afghanistan, President Donald Trump's senior-most ground commander has accused Russia of arming Taliban militants; on the North Korean crisis Mr. Trump mentioned in January that Russia was helping Pyongyang avoid UN sanctions; and the EU last year voted to extend into 2018 sanctions that prohibit its businesses from investing in Crimea. Has Russia truly gone rogue, and is this its grand strategy to reclaim its superpower status?

The answer is yes and no. To an extent the U.S. response, significant though it may appear on the surface, signals to Russia an inconsistent application of any principles of bilateral and multilateral engagement. Scarcely a week ago, Mr. Trump congratulated Russian President Vladimir Putin on his re-election, apparently against the advice of senior White House officials, and this drew sharp criticism even from fellow Republicans. He apparently did not deem the nerve agent attack a subject deserving of mention on that phone call. Yet, shortly thereafter he replaced National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster with John Bolton, a long-standing Russia hawk. What would concern democracy-minded Americans is that the expulsion of Russian diplomats might serve as an easy distraction device in the ongoing investigation into whether Mr. Trump or his associates colluded with Russian entities to influence the 2016 presidential election. Whatever the true intentions of the current U.S. administration are, it would be naive to assume that Moscow will miss any opportunity to tighten its strategic grip on global geopolitics, whether in terms of influencing foreign elections, undermining Western coalition forces in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, or shadow manoeuvres that exacerbate instability in the context of North Korea and Iran. Contrarily, it is imperative that the West, perhaps led by the U.S. or the EU, find some means to bring Mr. Putin to the negotiating table, the corollary of which is that he must eschew his current preference for political subversion.

The revival of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, sans U.S., must buttress the free trade debate

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com