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## We restarted the Cold War: The real story about the NATO buildup that the New York Times won't tell you

Our leaders and media push time-worn nonsense about American innocence, while taking aggressive moves. Look out

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Vladimir Putin, U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter

Have you picked up on the new trope du jour? We are all encouraged to bask in our innocence as we lament the advent of a new Cold War. The thought has been in the wind for more than a year,

of course, at least among some of us. But we witness a significant turn, and I hope this same some of us are paying attention.

As of this week, leaders who know nothing about leading, thinkers who do not think and opinion-shaping poseurs such as Tom Friedman are confident enough in their case to sally forth with it: The Cold War returns, the Russians have restarted it and we must do the right thing—the right thing being to bring NATO troops and materiel up to Russia’s borders, pandering to the paranoia of the former Soviet satellites as if they alone have access to some truth not available to the rest of us.

James Stavridis, the former admiral and NATO commander, quoted in Wednesday’s New York Times: “I don’t think we’re in the Cold War again—yet. I can kind of see it from here.”

I can kind of see it, too, Admiral, and cannot be surprised: NATO has missed the Cold War since the Wall came down and the Pentagon’s creature in Europe commenced a quarter-century of wandering in search of useful enemies. At last, the very best of them is back.

The inimitable (thank goodness) Tom Friedman on the same day’s opinion page: “This time it seems like the Cold War without the fun—that is, without James Bond, Smersh, ‘Get Smart’ Agent 86’s shoe phone,” and so on.

Leave it to Tom to recall the single most consequentially corrosive period in American history by way of its infantile frivolities. He is paid, after all, to make sure Americans understand events cartoonishly rather than as historical phenomena with chronology, causality and responsibility attaching to them.

You have here a classic one-two. Stavridis’ successors in the military get on with the business of aggressing abroad and trapping Russia in a frame-up J. Edgar Hoover would admire, while Friedman buries us in marshmallow fluff sandwiches.

A couple of columns back I wondered aloud as to what all the talk of renewed Russian aggression, begun in mid-April, was all about. It certainly had nothing to do with Russian aggression for the simple reason there was none. If you saw any, please tell us all about it in the comment box.

A couple of columns earlier I questioned why John Kerry met Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov, his foreign minister, in Sochi. Altogether weirdly, the secretary of state suddenly appeared to make common cause with the Russian president.

My worst predictions are now realities. We have just been subjected to a tried-and-sometimes-true campaign preparing us for a Cold War reprise—begun, like the original, by spooks and Pentagon planners ever eager to escalate unnecessary tensions in the direction of unnecessary conflict.

Think with history, readers. We are now back in the mid-1950s by my reckoning, when the template at work today was perfected in places such as Guatemala. The Dulles brothers double-handedly transformed Jacobo Árbenz, offspring of a Swiss druggist and Guatemala's second properly elected president, into an agent of "Communist aggression," as the Times helpfully described him at the time. Árbenz was deposed in 1954, of course, and most Americans were obediently relieved that another "threat" had been countered. (I have always loved the purely American thought of an aggressive Guatemala.)

On through the decades, from Ho to Lumumba to Allende to the Sandinistas—every single case falsely cast as a Moscow-inspired challenge to the "free world," every case in truth reflecting America's ambition to global dominance. There is a golden rule at work here, so do not miss it: Americans never act but in response to a threat to human freedom originating among the mal-intended elsewhere.

Any good historian—and stop being so negative, you find good ones here and there—will tell you that the golden rule has applied without exception since the 18th century. It applied to the Mexicans in the 1840s, the Spanish in the 1890s, and countless times during the century we call American.

Even now, the golden rule is inscribed in any American history text you may pick up. It is integral to Americans' consciousness of themselves. And in consequence it is near to impossible for most of us to grasp our role in events as they unfold before our eyes, never mind our true place in history.

So long as the rule applies, all notions of causality and responsibility are erased from the story. This reality is very close to the root of the American crisis, if you accept the thought that we are amid one.

I view the marked deterioration of the West's relations with Russia since April in precisely this historically informed light. We have entered upon a new Cold War, all right, and its similarity to the last one lies in one aspect more important than any other: Washington instigated this one just as Truman set the first in motion when he armed the Greek monarchy—fascist by his own ambassador's description—against a popular revolt in 1947.

You would think it something close to a magician's trickery to conduct a century and more's worth of coups, political subterfuge and military interventions and keep Americans convinced that all done in their names is done in the name of good. But we live through a case in point. We now witness an aggressive military advance toward Russia's borders on a nearly astonishing scale, yet very few Americans are able to see it for what it is.

Such is the power of our golden rule.

The theme of new Russian aggression sounded over the past couple of months reeked of orchestration from the first, as suggested in this space when it was first sounded. It was too consistent in language, tone and implication, whether it came from the Pentagon, NATO or Times news reports—which are, naturally, based on Pentagon and NATO sources.

Anything counted: Russia's military exercises within its own borders were aggressive. Russian air defense systems on its borders were aggressive. Russia's military presence in Kaliningrad, Russian territory lying between Lithuania and Poland, was an aggressive threat.

The caker came 10 days ago, when Putin promised his generals 40 new intercontinental ballistic missiles. Aggressive times 10, we heard over and over. "Loose rhetoric" was the incessantly repeated phrase.

In this connection I loved Ashton Carter in an exclusive interview on CBS Tuesday morning. Announcing NATO's new plans for deployments in Eastern Europe and the Baltics, the defense secretary cited Putin's "loose rhetoric." The correspondent must have lost the playbook and had the temerity to ask him to explain. Whereupon the wrong-footed Carter mumbled, "Well, it's... it's... it's loose rhetoric, that's what it is."

Got it, Ash. Loose rhetoric.

Does the secretary mind if we spend a few minutes in the forbidden kingdom known as historical reality?

Putin has not uttered a syllable of rhetoric—no need of it—since the Bush II White House floored him with its 2002 announcement that it would unilaterally abandon Nixon's 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. "This, in fact, pushes us to a new round of the arms race, because it changes the global security system," the Russian leader said subsequently. Whereupon Russia set about rebuilding its greatly reduced nuclear arsenal, of which the 40 new ICBMs are an exceedingly small addition.

There are no secrets here—only chronology and causality. In the context, I view the 40 new missiles as a very measured message—and of little consequence in themselves—in reply to the immodest lunge into frontline nations Carter disclosed in Estonia this week.