

# Ike Brannon: China, not Russia, should be the focus of U.S. foreign policy

Posted on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2020

China's lack of cooperation with the U.S. and other developed countries to help them discern when and how the Novel Coronavirus occurred has further frayed an already tenuous relationship between the two countries. It will undoubtedly lead to our government reconsidering its relationship with the world's most populous country.

Regardless of who is president next year, this relationship will not be repaired anytime soon, at least not until China changes its untoward behavior. At the very least, this would entail ending its wholesale theft of intellectual property, its continued repression of its peoples, and its increasingly brazen military incursions across Southeast Asia, among other things.

The way the U.S. dealt with a wayward Soviet Union during the Cold War was to build a coalition of Western countries to present a united front against its perfidy, but that is more difficult these days, as we no longer have countries split into two neatly divided camps.

The Trump administration has tried — albeit clumsily — to assemble such a coalition, but it has proved rough going. Part of this strategy has been to pursue some sort of detente with Russia — another corrupt, repressive and flawed state but less of a threat — to encourage its joint participation, or at the very least to keep from pushing it into a rapprochement with China.

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However, it's not clear that Congress will allow the Trump administration to pursue

such a foreign policy. Shortly before the pandemic occurred, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee passed the Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act, or DASKA. Its intent is to punish Russia and Vladimir Putin for its objectionable actions, including its attempted interference with U.S. elections and the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula.

The bill would impose sanctions on several of the country's key political officials, including Vladimir Putin, as well as Russian banks, and any energy projects its companies are engaged in, domestically or abroad.

U.S. Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin was one of five in the chamber to oppose the legislation. His objections to the bill were that it could complicate the administration's ability to conduct foreign policy, as well as cost U.S. industries engaged in commerce with Russian businesses affected by the sanctions. Hurting U.S. manufacturers in an attempt to punish Russia in a way that complicates our efforts to isolate China is a bank shot that should be dispensed with.

Russia is a wayward regime, but China's perfidy should be the number one focus of U.S. foreign policy. Pursuing legislation that complicates efforts to isolate and punish China's poor behavior while also harming U.S. business constitutes a poor strategy.

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