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Title: Getting too cold for comfort

Subtitle: Political tensions between Russia and the West are reminiscent of Cold War struggles

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Recommended Quotes/Call-outs:

“The new race to the Arctic seems to flaunt Russia’s technological prowess just as it had done with the Space race of the 1960s.”

“Putin and Condoleezza Rice can both agree there is no brink of another Cold War in sight”

Russia has made a comeback to front-page news lately, but not in the most positive sense. Some view Russia’s latest political agenda as attempting to gain its worldly influence while others fear this is a throwback to the Cold War.

Perhaps the beginning of the concern began in November 2006 with the poisoning of Alexander Litvinenko, former KGB agent and critic of the Kremlin. His post-mortem statement charges Russian President Vladimir Putin to be behind the lethal dose of polonium-210. British investigations allege Russian spy Andrei Lugovoi to have murdered Litvinenko, however Russia has refused to turn him over, claiming its constitution does not allow for citizens to be extradited.

Britain hasn’t been the only ‘Western’ country encountering problems with the Kremlin. Last July, Russia opposed the installation of US shield involving interceptor missiles in Poland and a radar station in the Czech Republic. While the US claimed the shield is for protection against the “rogue states” such as Iran, Russia insisted that this shield would threaten its own national security. The incident was quickly labeled as the most serious confrontation since the end of the Cold War, seeing that it could easily erupt into a rift of US-backed versus Russian-backed countries along Eastern Europe.

Yet the latest story that topped headlines in Russia and abroad was August’s Russian submarine expedition into the Arctic. Russian explorers ventured into the Arctic to obtain seabed samples in order to prove that Lomonosov Ridge is in fact part of the Russian landmass. However, the explorers also made a geopolitical statement by planting the Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic sea. Back home, the flag-planting was well received and popular, but the four other countries also holding claims over the Arctic—America, Denmark, Norway and Canada—were appalled at the audaciousness of the stunt.

The claim with the flag had no true legal bearing. Nevertheless, the other political leaders stepped up to the challenge of Arctic sovereignty. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper reasserted Canada’s land claims by announcing the construction of a deep military port in the Northwest Passage and plans to spend \$7 billion on eight new vessels to patrol the Arctic.

It’s easy to make some quick comparisons of contemporary Russia to the Soviet Union long past: Litvinenko is the new Trotsky, missiles being placed in a foreign land of both seem to reverberate the dangers of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the new race to

the Arctic seems to flaunt Russia's technological prowess just as it had done with the Space race of the 1960s.

However, it is too early to make such a rash parallel in judgment. According to the Guardian, Sir Anthony Breton, British ambassador to Russia, believes that the differences in the Litvinenko affair are great but Anglo-Russian relations are not in a crisis. US State Department officials believe that strong rhetoric against the shield in Eastern Europe is due to upcoming Russian elections more than an attempt to separate the two hemispheres again. Putin and US Secretary of the State Condoleezza Rice can both agree there is no brink of another Cold War in sight despite the tension caused by the disputes over missile defence and the sovereignty of Kosovo.

Moreover, Russia hasn't been the only country to contest the Lomonosov Ridge. In 2004, Denmark allocated 150 kroner (\$25 million) to investigate their claim that Greenland extended into the region—but there was neither haughty flag planting nor much worldly care about it.

Still, things aren't looking very well in terms of global politics and foreign business for Russia. Being in the spotlight due to butting heads with George Bush and having Russian and British ambassadors expelled in a tit-for-tat battle between the two empires cannot help raise investor confidence.

But while investors are edgy, there's no alarm for a Cold War on the horizon. Skirmishes will inevitably occur on the political battlefield between the old 'East' and 'West' with some sour tensions building on both sides. That is to be expected as each country fends for itself in a world of draining resources, power struggles, and economic strife.