



Cold peace

Highlights:

1. The Geneva summit between U.S. President Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin has set a pragmatic tone for engagement between the two competing powers.
2. Relations have hit the lowest point in recent years since the end of the Cold War. The U.S. has accused Russia of interfering in its elections and launching cyberattacks and criticised its stifling of internal dissent, while Moscow has slammed America's "interventionist" foreign policy.
3. Despite these differences, the leaders held talks on all critical issues, bringing diplomacy to the centre stage. After the summit, they have struck cautious optimism that is rooted in self-interest.
4. Mr Biden sought a more predictable, rational engagement, while Mr Putin said relations were "primarily pragmatic". They have decided to return their ambassadors to the Embassies and announced "a strategic stability dialogue" to discuss terms of arms control measures.

Structural issues

1. There are structural issues in the U.S.-Russia ties. When Russia ended its post-Soviet strategic retreat and adopted a more assertive foreign policy under Mr Putin, partly in response to NATO expansion into eastern Europe, the West saw it as a threat to its primacy.
2. The 2008 Georgia war practically ended the romance between "democratic Russia" and the West. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 renewed tensions. Russia was thrown out of the G8, and western sanctions followed. But such steps did not deter Mr Putin.
3. Ties hit rock bottom after allegations that Russian intelligence units had carried out cyberattacks and run an online campaign to get Donald Trump elected President in the 2016 U.S. election.
4. Mr Biden and Mr Putin cannot resolve these geopolitical and bilateral issues in one summit. But they can certainly take measures to prevent relations from worsening.



5. For the U.S., cyberattacks are a red line. Russia, which had amassed troops on the Ukraine border earlier this year, sees NATO's expansion into its border region as a threat.

The U.S. should be less pessimistic about Russia's foreign policy goals. Whether the Americans like it or not, Russia, despite its weakened economic status, remains a great power. Mr Putin should also realise that if his goal is to restore Russia's lost glory in global politics, he should be ready to cooperate with the West. Permanent hostility with other powers cannot be of much help to Russia.