Kto Vinovat?[1] Why Is There a Crisis in Russia's Relations with the West?[2]

SN MacFarlane

The University of Oxford

Abstract

This article addresses the deterioration in relations between Russia and the West from their high point in the early 1990s to the current conflict over issues such as Ukraine and Syria. It discusses the dominant modes of understanding that decline, notably the propositions, on the one hand, that this decline is a result of Western policies and, on the other hand, that the decline follows naturally from the characteristics and aspirations of the Russian state and its leaders. It suggests that the deterioration is best understand as a result of multiple, reinforcing factors related to the internal characteristics of Russian political culture and the political system, and also to Russia's experience in international relations since the end of the Cold War.

Introduction

Since Russia's intervention in Ukraine, there has been a more than usually vituperative exchange among specialists on Russia and Ukraine on who is responsible for Russia's abandonment of the Post-Cold War European and international order. The debate is reminiscent of earlier versions during the Cold War, where people who proposed trying to understand the USSR and exploring possibilities of cooperation with the other pole in bipolarity were pilloried as "fellow travellers," while those who took the opposite view were branded as ideologues and philistines. The purpose of this article is to try to get beyond the polemics in order to provide a dispassionate account of the drivers of the recent deterioration of relations between Russia and the "West". I begin by surveying the transition in Russian-Western relations since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR. I continue with an examination of the current polemics around this outcome. I focus on the exchanges in the US academic and policy community over the Ukraine crisis, because Ukraine is a critical point in the evolution of the debate, and because the USA has the largest Western concentration of scholars and public intellectuals on Russian foreign and security policy. I conclude with a number of observations on how the deterioration in the Russia-West relationship might be understood or explained.

I suggest that the stark dichotomy described above obscures as much it reveals. There is no question that there is significant deterioration in the relationship between Russia and the West. Understanding that phenomenon requires attention to the nature of Russian political culture, history, and cognitive frameworks, as well as Russia's domestic politics. However, it also reflects decisions taken in the West. These two dimensions are interrelated.

I am aware of the analytical issues arising in the term "the West". Although it is possibly useful shorthand, both outside and within Russia, its uncritical use understates the degree of variation there is within the category, not least in attitudes regarding Russia. That variation, and its analytical implications, are explored in greater detail below.

[1] The translation is: Who is to Blame? The phrase is taken from the title of a critical novel by Alexander Herzen, published in 1846. It was picked up by Nikolai Berdyaev in the title of an essay in *Russkaya Svoboda* in 1917. It has since become a popular trope in Western analysis of the Soviet Union and Russia. See, for example, Rozen (2009), who suggests that "the question [kto vinovat], since Soviet times, has been the key question."

[2] The author is grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on a previous draft, and also to several others who read it and provided useful suggestions.

The End of the Cold War

The difficulty in Russia's relations with the West that we are currently experiencing was unanticipated at the end of the Cold War. In the late 1980s, the Soviet government of Mikhail Gorbachev attempted structural reform within the USSR. It embraced a new approach to relations with the West based on the concept of mutual security and reasonable sufficiency in military procurement and deployment. (Kull, 1992) In practical terms, it involved an effort to end the USSR's confrontation with NATO and the United States. The latter worked reasonably well, culminating in a summit meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in November 1990. The summit document (OSCE, 1990), adopted by consensus of all European and Euro-Atlantic states, set out a new vision of Europe. The vision was an integrated barrier-free Europe, guided by democratic political principles, liberal economic principles and the rule of law, a space where movement was easy, force and coercion were absent, territorial integrity was not contested, and cooperation and the peaceful resolution of disputes were the norm.

The unrestrained euphoria in policy circles at the time was mirrored in academic discourse. At the level of grand theory, some posited a world in which history as we knew it had ended as a result of "an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism … the end of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government."[3] At the level of grand strategy, the liberalising shift in Soviet foreign and security policy produced a brief consideration of the possibility of systemic condominium between the USA and the USSR in promoting stability and peace in the international system and fending off the rise of new challengers.[4] Such speculation ended with the collapse of the USSR. The Cold War was over and "we" won. This outcome produced what some called a unipolar moment. (Krauthammer, 1990-91, 23-33).

In international relations theory, the end of the Cold War confrontation, coupled with the forces of globalization and widening multilateral institutionalization, was held to herald a possible move "beyond territoriality" where "the modern system of states may be yielding in some instances to post-modern forms of configuring political space."(Ruggie, 1993, 144, 174) A key example was deemed to be Europe, where the emergence of the European Community made the conduct of a purely territorial national policy hard to conceive, and where emergent structures of security cooperation were deterritorialising security space:

> Despite the severe dislocations that have accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union's East European empire and then of the Soviet Union itself, no one in any position of authority anywhere in Europe to date has advocated, or is quietly preparing for, a return to a system of competitive bilateral alliances. Thus far, all of the options on the table concerning the external mechanisms for achieving security in Europe, East and West, have been multilateral in form. (Ruggie, 1993)

In the meantime, Russia and its neighbours endorsed central principles of the European normative and legal order in their emerging relations with the other former Soviet republics. The December 1991 declaration establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) embraced the sovereignty equality and territorial integrity of members, as well as principles of non-intervention

[3] Fukuyama (1989). This article has often been read as triumphalism. But Fukuyama hardly seemed happy with the victory. In his view, liberalism was hollow and its triumph was a recipe for boredom.

[4] Henry Kissinger reportedly proposed this idea to Mikhail Gorbachev in January 1989. See Document No. 39, Mikhail Gorbachev Report to the CC CPSU Politburo January 21, 1989. In (S. Savranskaya, Blainton, T., and Zubok, V., 2010, pp.349-351).

and non-use of force, and cooperative resolution of disputes among them. (Commonwealth of Independent States-CIS, 1991)

The USSR/Russia was no longer a significant theme in the literature or in the concerns of policy-makers. In security studies, the focus shifted from balancing and bandwagoning in a competitive interstate environment to work on weak and failed states, civil wars, peace-building and state-building, the environment, in the context of a broad questioning of what security was, and how to pursue it after the Cold War. That questioning included not only what security was, but what the referent object (the globe, the international system, the region, the state, society, or individual human beings) was. As one scholar put it:

> With such a fundamental shift in the strategic landscape, security analysts naturally seized on the opportunity to think critically about the meaning and implications of the end of the Cold War for the study of international security. (Dannreuther, 2007, 12)

The diminished place of "geopolitical" threats in the practice of policy-makers was evident in the 1990s in dramatic drops in defence spending among most European and Euro-Atlantic states, as they took the "peace dividend".

Military Expenditure, 1988, 2000 ($US million) (SIPRI)

Country		
	1988	**2000**[5]
Canada	20716	15653
France	69949	61733
Germany	69695	50591
Italy	38038	43050
UK	58215	47988
USA	371075	394097

The Russian decline was even more drastic, reflecting the collapse of the USSR and also the economic implosion of Russia. In 1988, Russia was spending 371075 million and in 2000 31143 million constant (2011) US dollars on defence. That decline reflected not only the improvement in relations with the West, but also the drastic economic decline of the Russian Federation in the early 1990s.

In summary, the Cold War was over, globally and in Europe. Structural bipolarity had evaporated with the Soviet collapse and the successor elite in Russia embraced liberal democratic values. Europe embarked on a new experiment of integration and deepening and widening institutions, ostensibly in cooperation with the Russian Federation. The United States radically downsized its deterrent military capability in Western Europe, and later began a pivot to China in grand strategy.

The End of the End of the Cold War

If Europe was a pacific zone of cooperation in the 1990s, one can safely say that that blissful state has evaporated, particularly in Western relations with Russia. Russia has seemingly abandoned its exploration of a common European home. In 2008, military power returned to Europe's international relations. The Georgian government attempted to re-establish control over South Ossetia. Russia then invaded Georgia, detaching and then recognising two of its regions (Abkhazia

[5] 2000 is chosen as the second year of comparison, because it predates the rise of the terrorist threat in 2001.

and South Ossetia). It then negotiated status of forces arrangements with the two *de facto* states, allowing for a Russian occupation and direct control over their security.

In 2010-11, the Russian leadership embarked on a sub-regional project of economic integration, the Eurasian Union. (Putin, 2011) The first stage of the project, a customs union, ran directly counter to the European Union's Eastern partnership project of association and "deep and comprehensive free trade" arrangements. In the lead-up to the 2013 Vilnius EU Partnership Summit, four partners were in the running for association: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In September 2013, however, after a meeting with President Putin, Armenia's President Sargsian announced his country's withdrawal from the negotiation.[6] In the days before the Vilnius Summit, Putin weaned Ukraine out of the Vilnius Process with a counter-offer of financial support. Four candidates for association became two. Geopolitics had been joined by geo-economics in Russia's approach to Europe.

Ukraine's withdrawal from the Partnership Association project generated a popular insurrection in Kyiv and the flight of Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovich to Russia. The government collapsed and was replaced by a pro-European coalition that returned to the path of EU association. Russia responded by annexing Crimea, and then intervening in civil unrest in the eastern Ukrainian regions of Lukhansk and Donetsk. In due course, the Russian, Ukrainian, German and French governments, acting in the "Normandy Format[7]," negotiated a cease-fire in eastern Ukraine (Minsk 2) in February 2015. The cease-fire was largely ineffectual until September, when Russian attention shifted to Syria.

The EU and the US responded to the annexation of Crimea and evidence of Russian intervention in eastern Ukraine by imposing limited sanctions on the Russian Federation. EU restrictive measures included the suspension of the summit process with Russia and support for the suspension of Russian participation in the G8 (now G7) and suspension of negotiations over Russian adherence to the OECD. The Union also imposed asset freezes and travel restrictions against individuals and entities with responsibility for actions that undermined the "territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine." Also targeted were people who the EU deemed responsible for misappropriation of state funds in Ukraine. Further measures (import and investment bans and restrictions on tourism) focused on Crimea and Sevastopol. These were accompanied by restriction on the export of technologies associated with oils, gas, and mineral extraction. Later in 2014, the EU added sanctions on Russia concerning Russian access to European capital markets, trade in arms, EU export of dual-use technologies for military end-use customers in Russia, and Russian access to some categories of technology related to oil exploration and production. Finally, the European Council requested that the European Investment Bank restrict its economic cooperation with the Russian Federation and suspended a number of EU-Russia bilateral economic cooperation programmes.[8] These sanctions remain in effect. Russia imposed counter-sanctions on European and American exports.

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[6] The reasons for the Armenian reversal have not been fully articulated. But, Armenia's security vulnerability, Russia's security guarantee to Armenia, its arms transfers to Azerbaijan, the role of Russian citizens and enterprises in the Armenian economy, and Armenian remittance income from Russia gave President Putin substantial leverage in the conversation.

[7] The Normandy Format for facilitation of a settlement to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine originated in a meeting on the side lines of the 2014 commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings, in Normandy France. The meeting, and subsequent telephone exchanges, included the President of France, the Chancellor of Germany, and the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine.

[8] For the sequence and the details of EU sanctions, see http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/.

NATO turned to the strengthening of alliance capacity on its north-eastern fringe, through forward deployment of small combat forces, and by increasing its engagement in military exercises inside Ukraine.[9] The larger theme in US and NATO discourse is a return to deterrence vis-à-vis Russia.[10]

Taking the Georgian war and the Ukrainian crisis together, it appears that Russia has abandoned its own commitments and also European and international norms regarding the aggressive use of force (Georgia), non-intervention (Eastern Ukraine), and territorial integrity (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea). (Markedonov, 2015) In general, Russia appears to have abandoned whatever European project it had previously entertained. As Aleksei Arbatov noted: "Beginning in 2012, [Russia] declared 'we shall no longer follow the European path, but will rely on our own resources, on our national tradition, on the Customs Union, on the Eurasian Economic Union." (Temirgaleev, 2015)

Outside its immediate neighbourhood, in the autumn of 2015, the Russian government dramatically upgraded its assistance to Syria's Assad government, initiating a bombing campaign against the regime's opponents. It did so without consultation with the US-led coalition directed against the Islamic State (IS).[11] Russian aircraft repeatedly violated Turkish airspace, a pattern that culminated in the downing of a Russian SU-24 that, according to the Turkish government, had crossed the border. Turkey then requested an emergency meeting of the NATO Council, leading to an acceleration of planned NATO air defence assistance to Turkey. (Taylor and Emmott, 2015)

Russia responded to the incident by upgrading surface to air missile defence and fighter-interceptor capabilities at its base in Latakia. Given the commitment of most major Western states to the removal of the Assad government, Russia's actions in Syria can be interpreted as an explicit effort to contest Western policy in the region. In the meantime, Russia has increased air and naval patrols in the Baltic and around the western edges of Europe, and into the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

The final point here concerns trends in Russian military affairs. The Putin governments have steadily increased military expenditure since the low point in 1998 ($20780 million) to $91694 million in constant 2011 dollars.[12] Its military doctrine has shifted towards combined arms and mobile forces. The programme to procure appropriate equipment to support this shift is well-advanced. Military exercises have focused on scenarios that suggest preparation for action in the event of confrontation with the USA and NATO. One prominent Western analyst suggested that the fabric of regional arms control that played a large role in laying the basis for a peaceful end to the Cold War is now under significant strain. As he put it:

> At present, NATO and Russia have suspended their main direct arms control talks and are undertaking major military buildups directed at each other. There are no prospects of new European arms control arrangements anytime soon. (Weitz, 2015)

The recent Russian economic downturn has affected the pace and scale of these programmes. The intended expansion in spending has been reduced in nominal terms. The 2016 budget is nominally equivalent to that of 2015. Given rouble depreciation, that shift amounts to a spending reduction in real terms. The declining value of the currency makes military imports more expensive, and it has

[9] In July, 2015, NATO held a joint exercise (Rapid Trident) in western Ukraine. The Russian foreign ministry condemned what it deemed to be a provocative action that might undermine the Minsk framework for conflict termination and political settlement of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Deutsche Welle, 2015.
[10] Erlanger, Davis, and Castle, 2015.
[11] There is an element of negative reciprocity here. The US-led coalition displayed little interest in consulting with Russia either.
[12] Figures are in constant 2011 US dollars. (SIPRI, various dates).

contributed to inflation which makes domestic procurement more expensive.[13] Whether economic difficulties alter the direction or tone of doctrinal development (Putin, 2015c) and Russian behaviour remains to be seen.

In short, there has been a very large, and largely unanticipated, negative shift in Russia's relations with the western great powers. The focus on both sides of this divide seems to be returning to deterrence and the militarization of relations between East and West in Europe, and active competition for influence in the Middle East. Whether or not the Cold War has returned[14], it is clear that the vision of one Europe whole and free is history.

The Debate

This realization has engendered a vituperative debate over who is to blame. On the one hand are those who suggest that our mishandling of relations with Russia poisoned what was a real potential for opening a non-territorial cooperative space across Europe and a full integration of Russia into international society. The West had the opportunity to co-opt or socialize Russia into a positive sum game. They blew it:

> The chance for a durable Washington-Moscow strategic partnership was lost in the 1990s after the Soviet Union ended. Actually, it began to be lost earlier, because it was Reagan and Gorbachev who gave us the opportunity for a strategic partnership between 1985 and 1989. And it certainly ended under the Clinton administration, and it didn't end in Moscow. It ended in Washington—it was squandered and lost in Washington. (Cohen, 2015)

On the other hand are those who suggest that Russia is incorrigible, that its foreign and security policy is driven by imperial nostalgia and rising power sensibilities in what Russian policy-makers deem to be an essentially geopolitical and zero-sum international system. Furthermore, given Putin's approach to consolidating and sustaining power at home, external assertion is required for internal legitimation. In an article discussing the continuing relevance of George Kennan's analysis of the sources of Soviet conduct, Alexander Motyl suggested that:

> No one in Putin's regime believes in Marxism. But the superiority of Russia and Russian civilization are still closely held values, as is the belief that the West is hostile and that the country needs a strong leader, Putin, to assert Russia's greatness and combat Western influence … Putin's neoimperial ideology and his standing as Russia's all-powerful leader require him to gather former imperial territories.[15]

In this view, Russian policy-makers conceive Western initiatives in the former Soviet space to be an effort to encircle and eventually destroy Russia. They consider their control over the former Soviet space as a matter of right, and consequently do not accept the sovereignty claims of neighbours such as Ukraine. In the larger global system, they interpret the policies of the United States and its allies to be hegemonic, limiting the power and autonomy of others, and denying Russia its status as a global power. In consequence, they seek to undermine the US position in world affairs, not least through the pursuit of multipolarity as a systemic structure, and anti-American alignment within that form.

[13] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bring this point up.
[14] For claims of the emergence of a new Cold War, see Lucas, 2008, and Charap and Shapiro, 2015. For nuanced analyses that question the Cold War analogy, see Shevtsova, 2015 and Monaghan, 2015.
[15] Motyl, 2014. See also Lucas, 2008, and Sherr, 2015.

In policy terms, this version translates into a sustained Russian effort to undermine the statehood of neighbours (*e.g.* Georgia, Ukraine, and, farther afield, Moldova). Russian policy-makers systematically resist the efforts of these neighbours to integrate westwards, as well as the rather halting efforts of Western states and institutions to reach out, and associate with, the non-Russian former Soviet republics.

The dichotomous discussion of the roots of the crisis in Ukraine reflects several debates that are fundamental in international relations. Is state behaviour externally determined by the structure of the international system and by the actions of other states or is it a product of domestic factors (memory, legacy, leaders' efforts to maintain their authority and/or their capacity to extract rents)? Is it power and capacity that determine state behaviour or ideas and cognitive frames?

The crisis in Ukraine has served as a lightning rod in this broader and historically deep debate. The dispute has become very heated and personalised. For example, a recent comment on the disagreement refers to Professor Cohen as "sinking to the level of a pro-Kremlin internet troll." (Young 2014) Another refers to him as one of the "Kremlin's useful idiots." (Sierakowski, 2014) Cohen, in a response to what he deems to be a systematic American media demonization of Putin, commented on one critic's analysis of Putin's Russia as follows: "A compilation of chats with Russian-born Ioffe's disaffected Moscow acquaintances and titillating personal gossip long circulating on the Internet, the article seems better suited (apart from some factual errors) for the Russian tabloids, as does Ioffe's disdain for objectivity."(Cohen, 2014) It has spilled over into the internal politics of the principal global academic grouping, the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ASEEES).[16]

Understanding the Deterioration of Relations between Russia and the West

As is usually the case in severe academic disputes, there is some truth on both sides, and balance lies somewhere in between.

How should we understand the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West? A full rendering will not be possible until archives are opened on all sides. In the meantime, some preliminary observations may be useful. These pertain to the emergence of the deterioration; the instrumental manipulation of events by Russian leaders in order to promote division in the West and to strengthen the Russian regime internally; leadership sensitivities to status in international politics; and the cognitive framework that structures elite perceptions of the international system.

First, as noted earlier, the Ukraine crisis is an extreme manifestation of a problem in Russia-Western relations that has been brewing for a long time. This deterioration is not sudden, or even recent. It dates back in more muted form to the early days after the Soviet collapse and the emergence of Russia. For example, the end of the USSR occasioned efforts by Russia to create a regional structure through which it would dominate the former Soviet space (the CIS). That structure envisaged deep economic and defence integration. That was followed in 1992 by the establishment of a rudimentary collective security system (the Tashkent Treaty), in which Russia, as the asymmetrically powerful member, could control decisions.

As the economic and social crisis in Russia deepened in 1992, Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev delivered a "wakeup call" to a CSCE meeting in Stockholm, warning of the risk that the evolving

[16] See Schuessler, 2014. See also the summary of correspondence within ASSES at http://www.aseees.org/news-events/aseees-news-feed/stephen-f-cohens-letter-aseees-regarding-cohen-tucker-fellowship.

situation might cause reformists in Russia to lose control to conservatives who would return Europe to the Cold War. (Elsner, 1992) From 1993 onwards, Russian policy-makers, political figures, and public intellectuals claimed a zone of special interest in the former Soviet space (the 'near abroad'), stressing the large number of ethnic Russians in the other republics, as well as the implications of instability there for Russian security. They claimed that this situation implied special rights and duties for Russia in the region. It also implied limitations on the freedom of choice of neighbours, to the extent that their choices might be deemed to threaten Russian security interests.[17] In 1994, an article by this author pointed to the weakening of liberal foreign policy perspectives in Russia, and the crystallization of a traditional, territorial conception of the country's security, and warned of the emergence of two fundamentally different conceptions of regional security as a result. (MacFarlane, 1994)

When the issue of NATO expansion (now referred to as enlargement) came onto the table in 1994-5, Russian concerns were immediately expressed in official statements and in academic commentary. On the policy-making side, at the 1994 OSCE Summit Boris Yel'tsin responded with uncharacteristic clarity to a speech by US President Bill Clinton that sought to convert the Russians to the idea of NATO expansion with a warning that a US-led effort to expand NATO would generate a "cold peace": "History demonstrates that it is a dangerous delusion to suppose that the destinies of continents and of the world community in general can somehow be managed from one single capital."

On the academic side, in 1996 a leading Russian expert on European security stated that: "Of the numerous issues in international politics that separate Russia from the west, the enlargement of NATO has to be among the most sensitive and politically explosive ... For the top 'ten thousand' of Russia's decision-makers and opinion shapers, the issue is a crucial litmus test foreshadowing the future of relations between Russia and the west." (Kortunov, 1996, 69, 72) These were echoed by some Western analysts at the same time. Another chapter in the volume just cited suggested that NATO enlargement would ineluctably "create new lines of demarcation in the undivided Europe that NATO members were supposed to have sanctified with the Charter of Paris." (Law and MacFarlane, 1996, 46)

Efforts to manage this contradiction through the Partnership for Peace, the NATO-Russia Council, etc., did little to mitigate these Russian concerns. Growing Russian interest in multipolarity was formally embraced by Yevgenii Primakov, the foreign minister, in 1996. The Russian exploration of multipolarity targeted in particular China and India, and was specifically aimed at restraining American dominance of the international system and creating a more equal and plural order.[18]

Many of these themes were picked up by Vladimir Putin in his speech at the 43rd Munich Security Conference in February 2007: the condemnation of unipolarity; the emphasis on political expediency over norms and law in the former Soviet region; the strengthening of multipolarity; the authority of the UN Charter in the wider international system; the Western effort to divide the continent once again; the condemnation of NATO "expansion"; and the use of the OSCE "by certain countries" in cooperation with state-funded NGOs to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign members. The speech was a comprehensive rejection of Western approaches to the development of the European

[17] That effort to limit freedom of choice is also present in the draft treaty proposed by Russia in 2009 concerning the reform of the European security framework. "European Security Treaty" (29 November, 2009). http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152.

[18] See "Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order" (23 April, 1997). (New York: UN General Assembly, 52nd Session, A/52/50). http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-153.htm. This theme is also revisited in a somewhat sharper form in Putin, *Strategia Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti* (2015).

international system. (Putin, 2007) In other words, the major lines of what we see today in Russian foreign and security policy, and in Russian perspectives on world order, go back to the beginnings of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy.[19]

So do the major lines of the debate. Stephen Sestanovich summarises the point well:

> The debate, now a quarter of a century old, will doubtless be with us for decades. The sides don't seem to change much, nor do their arguments. Those who opposed the enlargement of NATO in the 1990s treat the war in Ukraine as proof they were right all along. Enlargement supporters, of course, claim vindication just as vehemently. (Sestanovich, 2015, 1)

Although there is little that is new in the articulation of Russian policy or in the debates around it, what is new is the Russian capacity (and willingness) to act on its regional and broader global concerns. As Roderic Lyne put it: "Russia was becoming richer." (Lyne, 2015, 15). The Russian government put an increasing amount of resources into military modernization. In its immediate region, it has military superiority. The Syrian episode suggests that the Russian authorities are moving beyond their immediate region and re-entering a broader international competition, seeking recognition as an equal partner in the management of the international system. Given Russia's reliance on oil and gas rents, its failure to reform and diversify its economy, and the precipitous drop in oil prices and state revenue, the country is no longer "becoming richer." The question arising is how responsive the Russian leadership will be to this deterioration in their capacity.

Second, that NATO enlargement and the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative pose a direct strategic threat to Russian security is difficult to accept. One point concerns NATO cohesion; there has not been, and there is not any consensus on, further eastward enlargement. The 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit displayed clearly the lack of political agreement among NATO members. The United States and some new eastern members (*e.g.* Poland and the Baltic Republics) were enthusiastic, seeing the inclusion of Georgia and Ukraine as part of a broader effort to deter Russia in the region. Germany, France, and Italy took the opposite view out of concern about the consequences of enlargement for their relations with Russia.

The EU has never committed to eastward enlargement beyond its current eastern line. The then President of the European Commission declared in 2003 that the European neighbourhood policy (ENP) was not a path to membership; it was a replacement for membership. (Prodi, 2003) Eastern members were enthusiastic about bringing neighbours in; the rest were facing the costs of prior enlargements and sensitive to the diluting effect of moving the line farther to the east. The Eastern partnership policy, added to the ENP in 2009, reflected the same dissensus, but in the context of Russian reassertion. There was no consensus in either institution for enlargement through accession of states in the eastern neighbourhood after the Baltics joined in 2004. The commitment of European institutions to further enlargement was weak. There was, and is, no imminent threat of further institutional enlargement to Russia's frontier.

[19] Of course, the temperature of the Russia-West relationship varied along the way. For example, there was a short, but significant, warming of the relationship in 2001-3 after the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. But that quickly foundered in the face of the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty, and then the invasion of Iraq. Likewise, the Obama administration attempted a "reset" of the US-Russian relationship in 2009, after the war in Georgia. By this time, however, the lines of the competition had been set and hardened by the decision of the United States and the major European NATO members to proceed with recognition of Kosovo.

Turning to military aspects of threat assessment, throughout most of the post-Soviet period, NATO defence spending declined significantly. Although US defence spending remained more or less constant across the 1990s, and then increased in the 2000s (owing to the war on terror and the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq), the American presence in Europe shrank precipitously during the post-Cold War era from a very large force at the beginning of the 1990s to a complement of under 30,000 in 2014. NATO combat forces were not forward deployed on the territory of eastern members of NATO until the Ukraine crisis. Their subsequent deployment into the Baltics and Poland was miniscule and symbolic. Moreover, that deployment was a reaction to Russian intervention in Ukraine, not a cause of it.[20]

NATO policy-makers maintained that the purpose of greater engagement in the eastern neighbourhood was benign or positive. It responded to the desires of sovereign states to choose their own security arrangements; it was a vehicle to spread stability, democracy and the rule of law. EU policy-makers defend the Eastern Partnership as a means of promoting the same purposes and also advancing wider cooperation in Europe.

If that is so, then why did Russia inflate the threat? Doing so may have had some instrumental value in that it provided ammunition for those who claimed that the deterioration in the relationship was the West's fault. If so, the causal value of the enlargement factor is questionable.

However, what may seem obviously benign to people in the West may not be so clear to people in Russia. The latter have a long cultural/historical narrative of partial encirclement and insecurity, and a historically deep social construction of external threat emanating from their western fringe. Putin and his colleagues in the Soviet security apparatus were acculturated into this perception of isolation, hostility, and threat in their formative years. That formation may affect the cognitive framing of their current situation. In other words, despite the possible instrumental value of their rhetoric, they may also believe what they say about the threat from the West.

Moreover, institutional enlargement or military capability are not the only ways to assess threat. Since 2004, Putin and his colleagues have taken the democratisation of neighbouring countries, notably Ukraine, to be a compelling threat, not so much to Russia, but to the structure of power and profit he and his colleagues have attempted to build in Russia. The perceived threat, in other words, is contagion. Although NATO, the EU, and the United States may see the diffusion of liberal, purportedly universal values as benign, the Russian leadership see these efforts quite differently. With some justification,[21] they see this diffusion as an effort to destabilise the Russian political system and their own rule, and the rents (Dawisha, 2014) accruing therefrom.

The other element of narrative and memory that is relevant here is status. Since the 16th Century, Russia has been the largest state in Europe. Russia has been a European great power since the wars between Russia and Poland and Russia and Sweden. It was a central player in the Concert of Europe, and a key member of the Triple Entente in World War I and the Grand Alliance in World War II. The outcome of World War II left Russia as the dominant military power in Europe. Its status was embodied in its permanent membership of the UN Security Council. During the Cold War, the USSR was the centre of one of two poles in the bipolar international system. With the collapse of the USSR, and then the collapse of the Russian economy and Russia's military establishment, Russia was marginalised. Its preferences (for example, with regard to NATO enlargement and the former

[20] For a similar view from a leading Russian scholar, see Temirgaleev, 2015.

[21] In September 2013, the president of the American National Endowment for Democracy wrote that "Ukraine's choice to join Europe will accelerate the demise of the ideology of Russian imperialism that Putin represents." The National Endowment for Democracy is funded by the US Congress. (Gershman 2013)

Yugoslavia) were ignored. The statements of Russian officials display considerable sensitivity on this point. (Putin 2015a) Their insistence, for example, on the centrality of the UN Security Council in the management of international conflict (Putin, 2007; Putin 2015b) can be explained by the fact that it is the one arena where the great power status of Russia is internationally institutionalised and in which, because of the veto, the Russian perspective cannot easily be ignored.

Taking all of this together, the proposition that the Russian behaviours that the Western governments find problematic are in part a consequence of policies adopted by Western institutions and governments seems plausible, when considered through the lens of Russian cognitive frameworks and the domestic interests of the Russian leadership. This conclusion is plausible whether or not one agrees with Cohen's (2015) contention that the West "squandered" the opportunity for a strategic partnership with Russia, or whether one accepts Mearsheimer's (2015) proposition that "most" of the responsibility lies with the US and its European partners.

Third, the point just made is related to the causal significance of domestic politics. When Putin came into power, he sought to rebuild the Russian state. His model was the concentration of political power and the rebuilding of an effective, hierarchical political system. The legitimation of this evolving system has involved at least three factors: improving economic well-being, resurrecting Russian nationalism, and restoring Russian status as a central player in the international system. Concerning the first, the 2000s rise in global oil prices provided means to enhance public services and enable sustained growth, but Russian growth has faltered with the collapse in oil prices, the failure of economic diversification and, lately and to a limited extent, the growing impact of US and EU sanctions.

The second and third dimensions of Putin's model have been pursued in various ways since 2000, and, in the current moment, serve to compensate for the weakening of the economic component. Public opinion polling suggests a high level of personal popularity for President Putin[22], and that the use of force abroad (both in the former Soviet region and now in Syria) is popular with the Russian electorate. Russian assertion in the former Soviet Union has been explicitly linked to the historical legacy of the Russian Empire by President Putin.

> In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice, and was passed from generation to generation, over time, under any circumstances, despite all the dramatic changes our country went through during the entire 20th Century. (Putin 2015a)

The policies in question and the associated discourse play to a nostalgia for Russia's previous stature, as well as to the nationalist view that Russia should reclaim what was once theirs. But the fact that they work suggests that they resonate in popular culture. One Ukrainian writer notes that only 3% of Russian voters consider that the occupation of Crimea should be reversed: "It follows that the basic problem in our relations with neighbours lies not with **Putin** and his kleptocratic regime, but in the insanity (*pomeshatel'stve*) of the Russian people." (Portnikov, 2015)

This brings me to a **fourth** point. There has been a great deal of effort among scholars and in the *kommentariat* to dissect Putin's personality, psychology, and motivations. No doubt there is some

[22] There is reason to question the reliability of Russian polling on this point, in view of possible respondent concern about the anonymity of the polling process and possible punishment that might arise in the event that polls could be used to identify people who were not supportive of Putin. However, in a carefully constructed experiment with polling behaviour, a recent study concluded that Putin's support ranges from 79 to 81%. See Frye *et. al.* 2015.

value in this exercise, but it is worth dwelling on the origins of Putin's rise to power. The 1990s witnessed the near collapse of the Russian economy and state and its loss of influence over its periphery and in world politics more generally. These conditions provided fertile ground for the return of a "strong man". In this respect, Putin's emergence was a product of evolving socio-economic and political circumstances. He was as much an effect of crisis as a cause of crisis.[23] Moreover, the presumption that he is the problem suggests that, if he lost power, the problem would disappear. There is no obvious reason to believe that is so. In the first place, it is more likely than not that, if Putin were shunted aside, the succession would occur within the group that currently dominates Russian politics.

It is hard to assess the possible foreign policy position of potential successors outside the inner circle, since it is hard to identify any plausible successors. But any successor would likely reflect the understanding of the recent and deeper history of Russia's relations with the West personified by Putin. Given Russia's deepening economic troubles (Hanson 2015, 14-22), addressing the needs of Russia's population will be problematic for any successor government for the foreseeable future. In consequence, the legitimising effect of threat inflation would be equally, or more, valuable to Putin's successors than it has been for the current government. Changing the threat assessment would also risk alienating powerful elites, notably the security services and the military. In short, there is little evidence to suggest that the situation would improve in Putin's absence. There is reason to believe that it might be worse.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the blame game does not help much with careful analysis of the current situation in relations between Russia and the West. Both positions in the debate have merit. It is implausible that Russian policy develops independently from Western choices affecting Russia's immediate surroundings. There is a substantial accumulation of evidence suggesting that the Russian leadership pre-Putin and during the Putin era has been very unhappy with the enlargement of NATO. The closer (in geographical terms) the prospect of enlargement gets, the more aggravated they become. It is also quite clear that Putin and his colleagues believe Western efforts to promote democracy are intended to destabilise the political system they have constructed in Russia. The policies of the US and NATO, not only in the former Soviet region, but also in Yugoslavia and the Middle East, have challenged Russian views of Russia's appropriate status in the international system. In short, one, probably unintended, consequence of the Western approach to engagement (or failure to engage) with Russia since 1991 has been the alienation of Russia and its return to a territorial and power-political approach to international relations with the region.

On the other hand, the nature of Russian political culture predisposes Russian elites to think the worst of policies undertaken by traditional adversaries. Moreover, the nature of state-building in Russia since the arrival of Mr. Putin runs directly counter to the liberal preferences of Russia's western interlocutors. Transitions deemed liberal and democratic in neighbouring states are perceived to, and possibly do, threaten the consolidation and survival of authoritarian rule in Russia, as well as Russian leaders' rent-seeking behaviours. In other words, the events that have crystallised the emergent contradiction in Western-Russian relations emanate also, and in a profound way, from factors peculiar to the Russian domestic cultural, political and policy-making environment.

Recalling the various strands of scholarly debate on state behaviour mentioned earlier, it appears that the explanandum under consideration (the deterioration of relations between Russia and the

[23] For a similar contextualisation of Putin, see Hill and Gaddy (2015).

West) is a consequence of multiple factors operating at different levels: power politics, domestic logics, and incompatible worldviews. These factors are not autonomous, but are mutually reinforcing.

If the initial objective of Western policy at the end of the Cold War was the creation of a stable and mutually beneficial relationship with Russia, the policy has failed. It has failed in a way that is undermining the post-Cold War liberal and denationalised understanding of international relations that appeared to dominate in the 1990s and for much of the 2000s. Strategic and power-political competition has returned to Europe, and, in a more modest way, to the international system as a whole. The emergence of this contradiction in world politics impedes collective action on significant matters of concern in global politics, from peace and security through human rights and modes of domestic governance, to name but a few.

Since there is no evidence that suggest that the current political elite in Russia will be socialised into the self-proclaimed hegemony of liberal-democratic values, or that this elite's demise is imminent, the obvious question is how the breakdown should be managed. It is not the purpose of this article to address this issue. But several propositions do emerge from the analysis above. One is that it is highly unlikely that the West and its institutions would be able to resist forcefully or to push back. The existing limited measures, for example sanctions and modest deployments and exercising of small forces, are about all NATO and the EU are capable of, given the profound divisions within those institutions on Russia. Some have suggested that even the current level of retaliation may be difficult to sustain, given the desirability of Russian cooperation in resolving the Syrian conflict. (Meister, 2015)

But, to the extent that policies such as NATO enlargement and democracy promotion are deemed to be contributors to the current impasse, perhaps they should be reconsidered. Moreover, there remain a number of areas of immediate and significant mutual interest: non-proliferation, the management of the threat from terrorism, and, plausibly, energy security and climate change. At the regional level, since Russia is the largest player in Europe in territory, population, and military capability (although definitively not in economic capacity), and since Russia is alienated from the existing so-called European security framework, it is worthwhile to consider whether there should be a more serious multilateral discussion of adjustment of that framework. Recognition of what Russia sees as its entitlement to equal treatment as a great power in the international system might facilitate movement in these areas. Such movement, over the long term, could restore a modest positive momentum to the relationship.

Bringing these matters up is not to suggest capitulation in the face of Russian assertion. But that assertion carries real costs for Russia's neighbours and, indirectly, for the rest of us, since we pick up a large share of the tab for cleaning up the broken glass. There is no easy way to row back from our current problem in relations with Russia. It will require better coordination among western players. It will also demand strategic patience.

One of the major shortcomings of policy to date has been inattentiveness to Russia and evolving trends in our shared neighbourhood. As a select committee of the UK House of Lords noted in a 2014 study on the Ukraine crisis, the EU and NATO had been slow to reappraise and adapt to the changing realities of Russia and its foreign policy, and so had "sleepwalked" into the crisis. (House of Lords, 2015, 6). Paying more serious analytical and policy attention to events in that region would be a good start to the development of effective policy.

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