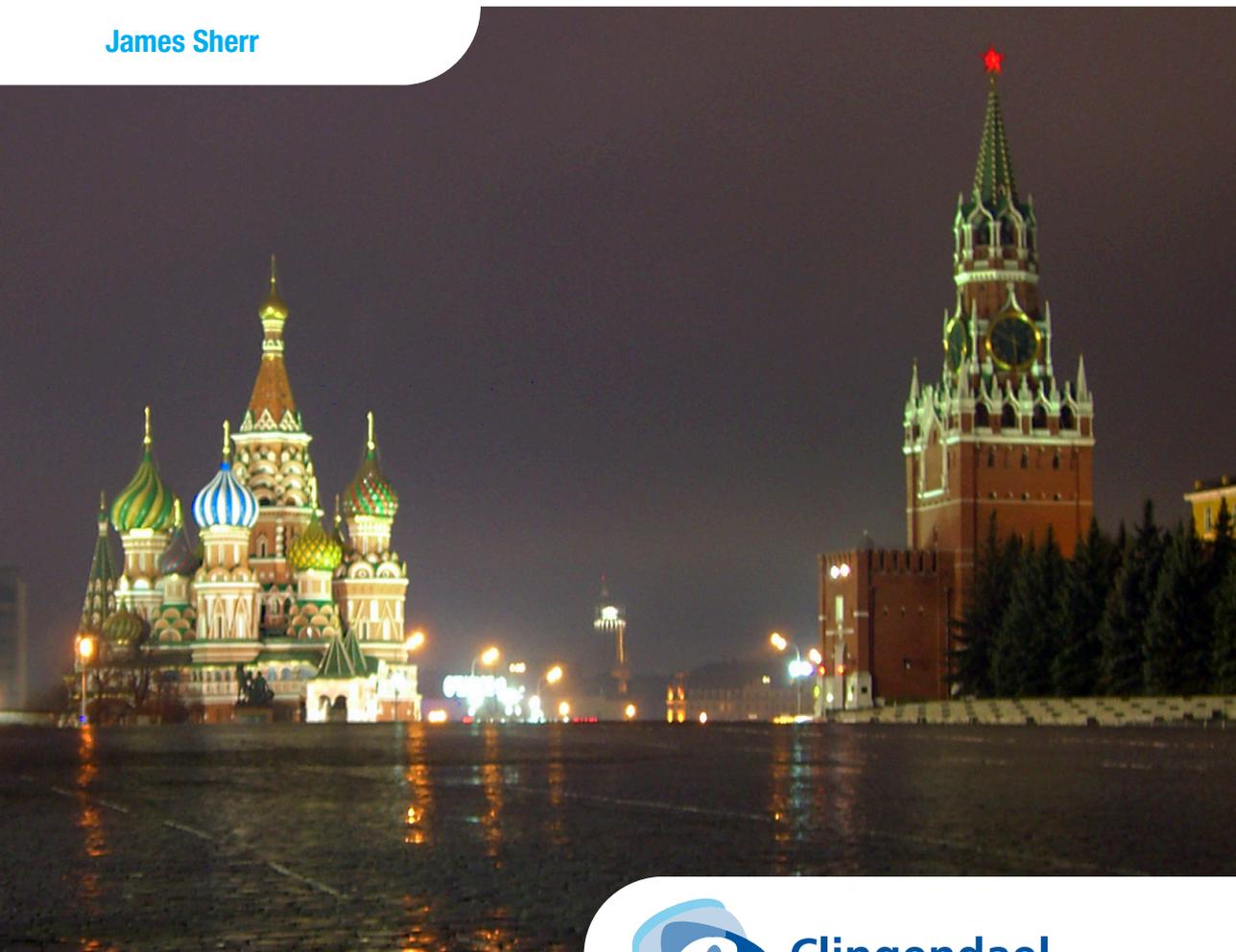


The New East-West Discord

Russian Objectives, Western Interests

Clingendael Report

James Sherr



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Abstract

This report looks at the motives of the Kremlin to engage in revisionist and aggressive policies towards the West and the “countries in between”. Russia has framed western policies as a civilisational challenge to the present regime in the Kremlin. Reviving Russia’s great power status (especially in the post-soviet space, but also in the Middle East) is central to the regime’s hold on power. The author indicates some fundamental changes in Russian policies, challenging the rules of the post-Cold War security order. Furthermore, he notices a change in the means of Russian policies, including a willingness to use force and implement policies from a “whole of government”-perspective: securitising business, trade and energy relations and engaging in information warfare, difficult for the West to deal with.

More specifically, the author focuses on the Ukraine crisis and the challenges posed to the wider Eastern Neighbourhood and to the Baltic states. He also analyses the challenges for the West, as Russia tries to play on divisions between western countries and within western societies. He then recommends for the West to stay united, not give in on principles, and wait for a critical mass of Russia’s elite to change course. Strategic patience and containment remain crucial.

Introduction

The events set in motion by Russia's intervention in Ukraine have obliged both NATO and the EU to abandon a paradigm of East-West partnership that has long been under strain.¹ Over the years, Russia has demonstrated that it is a proud, resentful, apprehensive and ambitious power. It has now annexed the territory of one NATO partner six years after dismembering another; it has provoked and baited NATO allies and, far from its borders, it has thrown its weight behind one of the most reviled regimes in the world. Yet the sources, dimensions and goals of its policy defy easy categorisation, as does the balance sheet of its strengths and weaknesses. Not for the first time, the West is discovering that Russia's understanding of events, its discourse, methods and calculus of risk differ from its own. In part these differences are products of the 'Putin system'; yet that system is also the product of a deeper evolution of the national mood over the past twenty-five years.

The significance of Russia's actions is more important than the complexity of its motives. When it annexed Crimea, Russia also attacked the security order of Europe. Although it vehemently disputes the charge of 'aggression' against Ukraine, it does not conceal its ambition to transform a European and global system that its president calls 'weakened, fragmented and deformed'.² Its discontent with this system is by no means new. Nevertheless, a basic change in policy has now taken place. Formerly, Russia sought to enhance its position in Europe and its 'special responsibility' in the former USSR within the framework of post-Cold War rules emphasizing state sovereignty and freedom of choice. Today it calls for 'new rules' based on the Yalta principles of 'balance of power' and 'respect'.³ The enlargement of NATO and the EU threatens these new rules. By implication, so do the Paris Charter and the OSCE Budapest Document which,

1 Unless qualified, the terms 'Russia' and 'Russian' are employed in this study to mean those who hold power in Russia or make the decision in question.

2 President Putin, Speech to 9th Session of the Valdai Club, 24 October 2014. Also Foreign Minister Lavrov's March 2015 annual statement, where he emphasised the dangerous contradiction between an increasingly 'polycentric' world and 'persistent attempts by the "historical" West to preserve global leadership at all costs'. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

3 On 4 February 2015, State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin warned that Europe either 'relearn the lessons of Yalta' or risk war. 'Dialogue rather than War: Sergey Naryshkin calls upon Western leaders to study the "lessons of Yalta"'. [*Dialog a ne vojna: Sergey Naryshkin prizva liderov Zapada učit' "uroki Yalty"*] *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* [hereafter RG], 5 February 2015. In this he echoed Putin's Valdai Club speech which contrasted the 'mechanisms' established after World War II (based on 'balance of power' and 'respect') with the emergence of US *diktat* after the Cold War. Not a word was said about the post-Cold War system that Gorbachev and Yeltsin co-authored.

like the Helsinki Final Act, have virtually disappeared from official discourse. Russia has withdrawn from the CFE Treaty; it is in *de facto* violation of the INF Treaty, it has called the NATO-Russia Founding Act into question and has pronounced the Budapest Memorandum, the 1997 Russia-Ukraine Interstate Treaty and Black Sea Fleet accords null and void. Only the UN Charter, though *de facto*, the UN Security Council, is upheld as the basis of international law.

A basic change in the *means* of policy has also taken place. Chief amongst these is a willingness to use force against European states when their policies, internal or external, threaten key regime interests. Russia's mode of warfare, which the Russian General Staff terms 'non-linear' or 'ambiguous', has also confronted NATO Allies and Partners with a challenge they have not faced before. The scale of Russia's investment in 'information struggle' and 'information warfare' is without precedent in post-Soviet policy. Under the rubric of 'network diplomacy', Russia now provides moral and financial support to illiberal European movements of the left and right, at the same time using its 'soft power' (culture, language and history) to challenge the 'authenticity' of other nations and undermine state sovereignty. The securitising of business, trade, and energy has created new and unsettling connections between commerce, geo-economics and geo-politics. Like the objectives of Russian policy, these tools and methods have Soviet and Tsarist antecedents. But they have been refurbished to advance 'historically conditioned' interests in a post-modern world.

The West is less well equipped to manage these challenges than it was when it last had a European adversary. Expertise and institutional memory about Russia have eroded. A new political generation has matured in post-Clausewitzian political cultures that question the utility of force and regard integration, interdependence and soft power as intrinsically benign. Its electorates distrust 'certainty' and, after a stream of military misadventures, the wisdom of their own governments. Manifest dangers—Daesh, migration, the eurozone crisis—discourage risk-taking and exposure elsewhere. Given these conditions, the unity displayed over the Ukraine conflict has exceeded expectations, not least those of the Kremlin. But it is not limitless. For Poland and the Baltic states Russia is once again an existential threat. But for many others, the sooner we can return to 'business as usual', the better. Many also believe that an infirm and transient stability is preferable to a worsening of tension.

The primary aim of this study is to assess the character and gravity of security challenges posed by Russia in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in Europe as a whole. Its complementary aim is to provide a baseline of realism for Western policy. We begin by examining the premises underpinning Russia's policy: the Kremlin's core interests, its view of the outside world and the degree to which it can count on public support. The second and third parts of the study are devoted to the Ukraine conflict and the wider challenges that Russia poses in east-central Europe. We then examine Russian methodology: the means and tools devised to achieve policy ends; and we ask whether

these tools are fit for purpose. The penultimate section also gives brief consideration to the connection between events in Syria and events in Europe. Finally, we present a set of policy responses for the West.



Political Map of Russia and Surrounding Countries (Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Central Asia, China)

1 The Kremlin's Cognitive Prism

To understand Russia's actions, one must understand Russia's interests as its leaders define them. Twenty five years of Western dominance have instilled an abiding sense of grievance in the country. As Dmitri Trenin has noted, Boris Yeltsin's team expected that Cold War inter-bloc confrontation would be replaced by a 'benign world oligarchy'.⁴ No one of note believed that juridical independence for former Soviet republics would transform them into fully sovereign states. The first official report on the subject by the MFA stated that Russia had to be 'leader of stability and security...on the entire territory of the former USSR'.⁵ There was surprise and bitterness when the West demurred. Equally, it was expected that when the Warsaw Pact disappeared, NATO would follow suit. Its enlargement fostered ill-feeling and apprehension in equal measure. Between 1992 and 1999, the West's determination to 'ignore Russia' was transformed from anxiety to orthodoxy. By the time NATO intervened in Kosovo, Russia's military establishment was already prognosticating similar interventions on Russia's periphery. By then, responsibility for the internal traumas of 'transition' (and the crippling of Russia's military-industrial might) was also being laid at the feet of the West. As early as April 1994, Yeltsin warned senior officers of the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service) that:

“ There are forces abroad that would like to keep Russia in a state of controllable paralysis...Ideological conflicts are being replaced by a struggle for spheres of influence in geopolitics.⁶

Thus, eight years after the USSR's demise, Putin's promise to revive Russia as 'a strong state...a great state' had a wide and immediate resonance which, as 'economic order' was restored, crystallised into solid support.⁷ In genealogical terms, Putin is the product of the KGB. But in sociological terms, he is the product of the new class that emerged in the Darwinian conditions of the 1990s: business-minded, ambitious, nationalistic and

4 Dmitri Trenin, 'A Less Ideological America', *Washington Quarterly*, Autumn 2008, p 118. <http://csis.org/files/publication/twq08autumntrenin.pdf>.

5 Deputy Foreign Minister Fedor Shelov-Kovedyayev, 'Strategy and Tactics of Russian Foreign Policy in the New Abroad', [*Strategiy i taktika vneshney politiki Rossii v novom zarubezh'ye*], p 2, September 1992. In February 1993, Yeltsin called for the 'UN and other leading states' to 'grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability...on the territory of the former USSR'.

6 ITAR-TASS (cited by BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 27 April 1994) (hereafter SWB).

7 'Russia at the Turn of the Millennium, 30 December 1999.

coldly utilitarian about norms and rules. Putin's methods reflect both of these origins. In the West his emphasis on 'pragmatism' was initially reassuring, and it was meant to be. But in Russia and its 'near abroad', where the term has more cynical connotations, Putin's 'strict promotion of national interests' promised a policy that was 'cold', 'more active' and 'far tougher'.⁸

The difference between the tough but oblique policy of Putin's first term and Russia's forceful assertion of its interests in Georgia in August 2008 is explained by two factors: rising indignation and recovery of national power. This change in dynamic, heralded by Putin's irate speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, was soon given added impetus. On 17 February 2008, Kosovo declared independence and was swiftly recognised by 22 NATO member states;⁹ on 3 April, NATO's Bucharest summit resolved that Georgia and Ukraine 'will become members of NATO'. Although Russia invaded Georgia on 8 August 2008, its targets were NATO and the United States.¹⁰

Yet the differences between Russia's military intervention in Georgia and its more recent intervention in Ukraine are also noteworthy. Putin primed the mechanism of war in 2008, but was assiduous in ensuring that Mikheil Saakashvili started it. Saakashvili's recklessness not only blunted the West's response. It made Georgia complicit in its own misfortune. Ukraine had no such complicity in 2014. No Western government gave credence to Russia's charge that a 'fascist coup' had taken place. Whilst some anticipated a repetition of the Abkhazian scenario in Crimea, not even the most perspicacious anticipated its annexation, and relatively few were prepared to condone it.

The explanation of these differences lies in domestic as much as in international factors. On the eve of Putin's third *de jure* presidential term, Russia's development model was exhausting its economic potential. The vaunted 'power vertical' had degenerated into a system for distributing rent. Subservience of law and money to power had eroded the Putin system's initial strengths: its inclusiveness, its breadth of appeal across the socio-political spectrum and its ability to generate prosperity. In 2012 the public manifestation of urban liberal (but also radical left and right) distaste for this system and the manner of Putin's return to the presidency brought these matters to a head. So did the EU's

8 Terms routinely used by Russian commentators just before and after the new Concept on Foreign Policy was published in June 2000.

9 Russia regards Kosovo's independence as a violation of Article 1 of the Helsinki Final Act and UNSC 1244 of December 1999, 'reaffirming the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'. On 22 July 2010, an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice declared Kosovo's declaration valid under international law, *inter alia* because UNSC 1244 was not a 'final status' document. Today its independence is recognised by 108 of 193 UN member states.

10 As obliquely confirmed by President Medvedev, who stated that Saakashvili had acted at the behest of 'foreign powers' (Valdai Club lunch, 11 September 2008).

initialling of an Association Agreement with Ukraine (December 2011), which threatened to bring Europe's rules and rights-based system into Russia's 'civilisational space', not to say Russia itself.

The result was not an embrace of this European 'choice', but a reconstitution of the regime in a defensive and illiberal direction. The circle of power was narrowed, the tribunes of home-based capital (hydrocarbons, railways, defence) rewarded and the base of mass support shifted to the conservative and non-metropolitan majority. Those whose interests and aspirations lie in European integration have been marginalised, and 'national traitors' exposed. Whereas in 2001, Vladimir Putin appealed to continental Europe on the basis of Russia's centrality to European culture, and did so in markedly cosmopolitan terms, today he demands respect for Russia on the basis of its 'distinctive', 'civilisational' values and its 'historically conditioned' relations with neighbours.¹¹ It is no longer European culture, but the 'Russian world' (*russkiy mir*) that is borderless. In his seminal statement, 'Russia: The National Question' (2012), Putin declared that 'the choice of the Russian people has been confirmed again and again, not by plebiscites or referenda, but by blood'.¹²

Four premises now define the coordinates of policy. Although their most uncompromising proponents are senior figures with security, intelligence and military backgrounds, these postulates are also articulated, sometimes in more modulated tones, by other leading officials, such as Foreign Minister Lavrov, who do not share this DNA.

1.1 US Hostility

The belief that the United States is determined to isolate and incapacitate Russia is not only psychological but, to quote a Western ambassador, 'psychiatric'.¹³ Its focal point is not President Obama, but the US national security establishment. In the eyes of no less a figure than Nikolay Patrushev (Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council and retired General of the FSB), the American threat is 'systemic' rather than political: an 'undeviating course pursued over many decades, changing only in its forms and tactics'.¹⁴ The undeviating element is the pursuit of global hegemony and with it, military superiority and economic dominance. The forms and tactics, which first emerged in the 1999 Kosovo war, have centred on the use of coercive diplomacy, 'humanitarian'

11 Putin's speech to the German Bundestag, 25 September 2001: 'a culture which has never known borders, which has always been our common asset and which has always united peoples'.

12 'Russia: The National Question' [*Rossiya: natsional'niy vopros*], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 January 2012.

13 Confidential discussion with a European ambassador to Russia, late 2014.

14 Interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 'The Second Cold' [*Vtoraya Kholodnaya*], 15 October 2014.

<http://rg.ru/2014/10/15/patrushev.html>.

interventions, the 'mythology' of Western values and 'information struggle' to produce coloured revolutions and regime change in 'problematic' states.

As Putin has emphasised, these aims and methods threaten not only Russia, but global order as such. In the words of his former KGB colleague, State Duma Speaker Sergey Naryshkin, 'Washington seeks instability... to continue old and launch new acts of assault and plunder [*razboev*].' It tries to 'zombify people with mendacious information', 'stir up anti-Russian sentiments in Europe', maintain 'total control over NATO' and manage its huge foreign debt by 'ruining other countries', 'wire-tapping and blackmailing the "premier league" of Europe'.¹⁵ Yet even Naryshkin's commentary is implicitly Russo-centric. Others are more blatant. SVR Lieutenant General (retd.) Leonid Reshetnikov, Director of the 'leading scientific-analytical centre of the President's Administration', insists that US and NATO global policy aims to encircle Russia, 'overthrow President Vladimir Putin and produce fragmentation [*rasko*] in the country'. (For good measure, he adds that the five-to-ten thousand US troops remaining in Afghanistan 'can be expanded into a force grouping of 50-to-100,000 within a month').¹⁶

These narratives are as monochrome as they are strident. They might be designed for public consumption, but that is not their sole purpose. Minus the hyperbole, their core themes find echoes in official documents (e.g. 2014 Military Doctrine), limited circulation defence journals and coded summaries of meetings of the RF Security Council and General Staff, as well as classified documents (e.g. Defence Plan 2013).¹⁷ In most of these sources, US policy is at least the critical variable and often the instigator of policies damaging to Russia, as well as objective changes in contemporary conflict and warfare. Although continuities are discernible, even with the Yeltsin era, the discordances are far more striking. In the late 1990s, the bitterness displayed by Russia was that of a partner spurned. The West sinned more by ignoring Russia than by threatening it. Today the Kremlin indicts the West not only for threatening Russia, but for every feature of the world that it finds unpalatable. The divergence with Medvedev's presidency is equally striking. With the singular exception of the 'near abroad' – on which subject he was as adamant as Putin – Dmitry Medvedev's attitude to the United States and the UK lacked acerbity or malice.

15 Sergei Naryshkin, 'The August of Provocations: A Political Forecast for the Most Alarming Month' [*Avgust provokatsiy: Politicheskiy Prognoz na samiy trevozhniy mesyats*], RG, 9 August 2015 <http://www.rg.ru/2015/08/09/naryshkin-site.html>.

16 'Russian Civilisation' [*Tsivilizatsiya Rossiya*], *Argumentiy Nedeli*, 2 April 2015. <http://argumenti.ru/toptheme/n481/394395>. Founded in 1992 as a closed analytical centre of the SVR, the Russian Institute of Strategic Studies was recently re-subordinated to the President's Administration.

17 For an astute overview of these writings, see Andrew Monaghan, *Defibrillating the Vertikal? Putin and Russian Grand Strategy*, (Chatham House Research Paper, October 2014).

1.2 Decaying and Divisible Europe

The Kremlin perceives that Europe lacks the mettle and cohesion to pay the price that its principles dictate. Business interests *are* Europe's interests in Russian eyes, and these interests, which require a strong and reliable Russian partner, will eventually reassert themselves. Russia's course in Ukraine has been predicated in large part on a faith that resource poverty and the underlying national interests of key European states will eventually restore a reasonable accommodation to Russian interests in Eurasia and the European 'near abroad'. In Moscow's eyes, the EU imposed Tier 3 (sectoral) sanctions on 16 July 2014 (enhanced on 5 September) in response to US pressure. The synchronisation of timing and content between Brussels and Washington – which indeed had been expressing frustration with the EU for some weeks – only confirmed what Moscow believed it knew perfectly well. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's view does not accord comfortably with reality.

Russians are not alone in assuming that business interests define national interests in Europe. Nor are they unique in seeing the EU as divided and divisible. As much as anyone in Brussels, Russia's leaders grasped the precariousness of the eurozone's recovery and the growing weight of Eurosceptic opinion. They understood far better than Brussels the scale of Russia's own investment in corporate ties, lobbying structures, embittered and illiberal movements and a web of political partnerships (and intelligence penetration) unprecedented in scale. (In 2011, one Russian political analyst placed Silvio Berlusconi amongst the inner circle of the Kremlin elite).¹⁸ The Kremlin's error lay in the conviction that these realities were objective and thus immutable to change.

Its understanding of Germany has been particularly flawed. Germany's 20 year investment in 'interlinking' relationships between civic, cultural, economic and political entities testified to its perception of 'strategic partnership' as a normative project designed to embed Russia into the European family of interests and values. To the normative aspect of any project, the Kremlin is usually deaf. What it saw was a business project. Although it viewed Angela Merkel's accession in 2005 as decidedly unwelcome, it concluded, correctly for a time, that she would be locked into a structure of trade and corporate interests (accounting for a €6.5 bn trade turnover in 2013) that had made the German-Russian economic relationship unique in Europe. The Kremlin failed to draw conclusions from Merkel's refusal to block adoption of the reviled Third Energy Package by the equally reviled European Commission. It singularly underestimated her conviction that commercial interests could not override Europe's core security interests

18 Nikolay Petrov, *Russia-2010: Less Stability, More Public Politics* [*Rossia-2010: Men'she stabil'nosti, bol'she publichnoy politiki*], Moscow Carnegie Centre Briefing, Volume 3, March 2011. The insert illustrates three elite models by B Pribylovskiy, E Minchenko and Petrov himself.

and ‘the principles of international law’: views she expressed in March 2014, yet more forcefully in July and with ringing clarity after the November Brisbane G20 summit.

More perilously still, the Kremlin has yet to perceive the sense of betrayal that has set in as the results of Germany’s 20 year commitment to transforming Russia became apparent. The architect of ‘interlinking’, Frank-Walter Steinmeier is indignant that ‘[n]ot just any state, but a permanent member of the Security Council, Russia, has...unilaterally changed the existing borders in Europe’.¹⁹ The President of the German Federation of Industries now declares that sanctions will be worth the pain ‘if we can succeed in giving force to international law in Europe as well as our legal principles’.²⁰ Amongst ordinary citizens, the decline in Russia’s image has been precipitous. In November 2009, 40 percent of respondents said they regarded Russia as a trustworthy partner; in February 2014, 18 percent did so.²¹

Far from being a solitary figure, Angela Merkel is a national leader presiding over a change of opinion in Germany, which coincides with a change of opinion in Europe. Germany’s influence has played a singular role, not only in the adoption of effective sanctions, but the derailing of the South Stream pipeline as well.

If the Kremlin remains impervious to these points, it retains its astuteness on others. It grasps better than most that economic interdependence is not politically neutral. It also understands that in any contest, the weak party is not the party with the most to lose, but the party most afraid of losses. There are those in Europe prepared to withstand the burden ‘however long it will take’. But how long is that, and for how long will others agree?

1.3 Favourable Global Trends

A key premise of Russia’s world view is that the West is ‘losing its monopoly on the globalization process’.²² Lavrov has stated that the end of the Cold War marked the end of ‘a longer stage in global development [of] 400 to 500 years...when the world was

19 ‘Cold War Thinking Decried at UN’, 27 September 2014 (Deutsche Welle) <http://www.dw.de/cold-war-thinking-decried-at-un/a-17959729>.

20 John Lough, *Op.Cit.*

21 Hannes Adomeit, ‘Collapse of Russia’s Image in Germany: Who Is to Blame?’ (Eurasia Outlook, Carnegie Moscow Center, 18 February 2014). Yet the downward trend started earlier. An autumn 2009 survey of foreign policy experts revealed that 74 percent did not regard Russia as a democratic constitutional state, and 92.4 percent believed that its government could not protect the rights and security of its citizens. Adomeit, *German-Russian Relations: Balance Sheet Since 2000 and Perspectives until 2025* (Paris: IFRI, 2012).

22 Sergei Lavrov, ‘The Present and the Future of Global Politics’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 2, April–June 2007, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_8554.

dominated by European civilization...consistently led by the historical West'. He goes on to note:

“ the global financial-economic architecture was largely created by the West to suit its own needs. And now...we are watching the generally recognized shift of financial-economic power and influence toward new fast-growing economies, such as China, India, Russia and Brazil...²³

Russia's global template is a world of 'multiple values centres' in which Russia's reassertion of its own 'zone of privileged interests' is complemented by its resurrection as a global actor working in concert with others to counterbalance the 'rigid Anglo-Saxon model of socio-economic development'.²⁴ 'Strategic partnership' with China – now described as a 'comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination' – along with the growing role of BRICS, the G20 and a proactive Middle Eastern policy have become the cornerstones of a policy designed to reformat and 'democratise' the international order.

But in large part, the wish is the father of the thought. To the Obama administration (and indeed that of George W. Bush), the corollary to the end of bipolarity has not been Russia's increased importance but its diminution. Not even the Ukraine conflict has altered Washington's view that the principal threats to American interests lie elsewhere. As Russians routinely complain, the purpose of the US 'reset' was to make Russia a 'partner' in a policy it plays no part in formulating. For their part, neither China nor India nor Brazil have devised an alternative to today's imperfect global order in which the West remains, if not pre-eminent, more equal than others. Rhetoric aside, each of these countries finds the current setup conducive to the pursuit of its own visibly distinctive national interests. Over Ukraine, none have offered Russia more than qualified rhetorical support and abstention from the sanctions imposed by others.

This said, the pivot of this global structure, Russia-China partnership, rests on solid and growing foundations. A common commitment to state sovereignty, opposition to American hegemony, regional security cooperation, hostility to Islamist extremism, increased energy, trade and military ties give coherence and significance to the relationship. Yet the basic asymmetries set out by Bobo Lo in 2008 remain. On the one hand, Russia's 'indigenous imperial tradition, its European cultural-historical heritage and...America-centric geopolitical culture' continue to create cognitive and cultural obstacles to the kind of relationship that Moscow seeks.²⁵ On the other hand,

23 Sergei Lavrov, 'Russia and the World in the 21st Century', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 9 August 2008.

24 Sergei Lavrov, 'The Present and the Future of Global Politics', *Russia in Global Affairs*, No 2, April-June 2007, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_8554.

25 Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing and the New Geopolitics* (Washington: Brookings/Chatham House, 2008), p 4.

China looks at Russia through a judiciously pragmatic prism and does not confuse Russia's interests with its own. Although trade turnover has increased from \$16 bn in 2003 to \$89 bn in 2015, this puts Russia in ninth place amongst its trading partners, behind Brazil. As we note further on in this study, relations in the energy sphere have experienced setbacks as well as breakthroughs. As Lo has observed quite recently:

“ Ironically, the most important difference [between China and Russia] is where they are often said to be in complete agreement, namely attitudes towards the United States. For Beijing, America is the one truly indispensable partner, of immeasurably greater importance than Russia...Xi's 'new pattern of great power relations' is an openly bipolar concept.²⁶

Even in the Near and Middle East it would be difficult to argue that Russia has not damaged its interests or overplayed its hand. Over the years, these interests have been pursued toughly, consistently and on the basis of local knowledge, which its principal foil, the United States, seems to have forgotten. It has, with marked success, persuaded the latter that, over Iran and Syria, it needs Russia's support even when that provided has been of debateable value. Yet most countries in the region regard Russia as an opportunistic actor. The restoration of its primacy in the Black Sea has impressed and unnerved them in equal measure. Russia has no policy, let alone vision, for the region as a whole. Its interests are confined to keeping *jihadists* out of power and the Americans at bay. To these ends, it will cooperate 'pragmatically' with every country and its worst enemy. Yet for the same reasons, it has incurred the abiding distrust of Saudi Arabia, whose policy in OPEC displays no love of Russia.

1.4 Fragile Neighbours

From pre-Romanov times to the present, Russia has had little historical experience of living with neighbours that have been both friendly and independent. Those who orchestrated the USSR's collapse were products of this history every bit as much as those, like Mikhail Gorbachev, who sought to prevent it. Since 1992, the Russian Federation has equated its own 'vital interests' with the limited sovereignty of former Soviet republics. After the Belovezhskaya accords, the equation seemed self-evident (to Yeltsin, at least, if not the other signatories).²⁷ The USSR was designed to be

26 Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (London and Washington: Chatham House/Brookings, 2015), p. 148.

27 These accords, concluded between President Yeltsin, President Leonid Kravchuk of Ukraine and Chairman of the Belarusian Parliament, Stanislav Shushkevich, on 8 December 1991, declared the USSR dissolved. Even then, Gorbachev, still President of the USSR, termed the move illegal. In the negotiations, Yeltsin warned Kravchuk that if Ukraine refused to join the new 'union', 'we will be on opposite sides of the barricade'. For Kravchuk, the accords were a 'civilised divorce'.

as interdependent as a straightjacket. Its mechanisms of integration and cohesion re-established in modern, totalitarian form a set of 'organic' relationships that the tsars regarded as part of their patrimony. Even emphatic liberals, such as Gennadiy Burbulis (State Secretary to President Yeltsin), were confident that 'there is a logic that will bring the republics back again our way'.²⁸ The old maxim, 'Ukraine will never be able to stand alone' [*samostoyatel'noy Ukrainiy nikogda ne budet*] re-emerges in today's dictum, 'Ukraine cannot live without Russia'. The dictum's negative resonances in Ukraine, not to say Georgia and Kazakhstan, have not diminished its authority in Moscow.

In the early 1990s, it was the weakness of the former Soviet republics that alarmed Moscow as much as their defiance. For Yeltsin's inner sanctum, states in the 'near abroad' were potential progenitors of chaos against Russian compatriots residing on their territories, as well as formations of the ex-Soviet Army still located there. They posed threats to the integrated defence and security system that protected the USSR. It was feared that they also would become exporters of conflict to the territory of the Russian Federation itself. For Yeltsin it stood to reason (at the height of the Tajikistan civil war) that 'the Tajik-Afghan border is practically Russia's border'.²⁹ These were not the views of national chauvinists, but avowed liberals who believed that friendship with the West should be the cornerstone of Russia's policy. When Yeltsin called on the UN to 'grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability' in early 1993, he expected a positive echo in the West.³⁰ Instead, he received a polite silence.

By 1994 leading Western powers had begun to treat the ex-Soviet republics as entities in their own right rather than inconvenient by-products of the Soviet collapse. Russia's liberals simply could not understand why the West would damage relations with a country of such obvious importance as Russia for the sake of countries that never possessed the attributes of statehood. To those who displaced Russia's liberals at the helm of policy (not to say the Armed Forces), this was an anti-Russian policy pure and simple. Fear of 'chaos' receded. Fear of the near abroad becoming a Western *platsdarm* [bridgehead] increased.

In 'this uniquely post-Soviet space' (*pace* Kozyrev) sentiment and pragmatism, interconnectedness and dominance, 'brotherly help' and interference possess an Orwellian unity. In his open 'appeal' to President Yushchenko of August 2009, President Medvedev reaffirmed that Russia and Ukraine were 'two sovereign states'. Yet 'for Russia, Ukrainians since the dawn of time have been and remain not only

28 State Secretary Gennadiy Burbulis in Jeff Checkel, 'Russian Foreign Policy: Back to the Future?', RFE/RL Research Report, 16 October 1992.

29 *Interfax*, 10 June 1993, cited in James Sherr, 'Escalation of the Tadjikistan Conflict', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 1 September 1993.

30 28 February 1993,

neighbours, but a brotherly people', from which it follows that Ukraine is obliged to maintain 'tight economic co-operation' and 'solidly kindred, humanitarian ties'.³¹ In other words: because we love you, you have an obligation to be faithful to us. Less than one year earlier, Medvedev told members of the Valdai Club that 'you [the West] do not belong here.' Russia would no longer 'tolerate' the West's 'unfair and humiliating' policy in 'traditional areas of interests' defined by 'shared, common history' and the 'affinity of our souls'.³²

The war in Ukraine should have exposed the fallacy of these assumptions. Instead, for the Kremlin and for a country under sanction, it has mainly exposed the depth of Western hostility to Russia. Putin perceived the Orange Revolution of 2004 as a US special operation, and he has treated the 2013-14 'revolution of dignity' as a US sponsored coup. Ukraine is seen as a theatre of conflict between Russia and the West, and the conflict will be resolved between Russia and the West.

In December 2004, Lilia Shevtsova described as "unmistakeably weak...those political forces [in Russia] who need to convince Putin that Ukraine is advantageous...not as a sanitary corridor, but as a bridge to Europe".³³ Today, these voices are inaudible.

1.5 Who Decides?

In Russia, it is widely accepted that 'Putin alone decides'. But he does not decide in a world of his own. He is *garant* (arbiter) of a system characterised by rivalry as much as by collective interest. Over Ukraine, he has been advised and assisted at a number of levels. Leonid Reshetnikov doubtless exaggerates when he claims that policy has been developed by just two institutes: his own and the Institute of CIS Countries under Konstantin Zatulin, a figure declared *persona non grata* in Ukraine on three occasions. With hindsight, Zatulin's July 2012 boast that Putin would resurrect the course of Catherine the Great in Crimea and Novorossiya proved to be perspicacious.³⁴

Others have played an important role in the matrix. They include the Kremlin's 'grey cardinal', Vladislav Surkov, who after a brief fall from grace, was brought back into the fold in September 2013 as Putin's special assistant on Ukraine. The principal counter-ideologist to the coloured revolutions of 2003-5 and off-stage maestro of the *Nashi* youth movement, it was Surkov who served as Putin's *de facto* conduit to Yanukovich during the final weeks of the crisis and who serves as his emissary to the

31 'Appeal to President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko' [*Obrashchenie k prezidenty ukrainiy Viktoriy Yushchenko*], <http://kremlin.ru>.

32 Author's notes from Valdai Club lunch, 12 September 2008.

33 Lilia Shevtsova, 'Ukraine's Ordeal: Will Putin and His Regime Endure It?' [*Ispytanie Ukrainiy: Vizderzhit li ego putin i sozdanniy im rezhim?*], novogazeta.ru, 6 December 2004.

34 http://world.lb.ua/news/2012/07/10/160111_zatulin_putin_edet_krim_smenu.html.

Donetsk and Luhansk ‘people’s republics’ now. It was another figure, Sergey Glazyev, ideologist of Russian economic ‘mobilisation’, who drew up the plan for destabilising Ukraine’s economy that persuaded Yanukovich to reverse course on EU integration. Throughout the crisis, Glazyev maintained a close working partnership with Ukraine’s grey cardinal, Viktor Medvedchuk, who has been the most consistent embodiment of Kremlin interests inside the Ukrainian system over the past 25 years. Glazyev is also associated with two other notables. The first is Alexander Dugin, spiritual patron of the ‘Eurasianist’ and ‘national Bolshevik’ causes and a conduit to some of the Donbas separatist leaders in 2014.³⁵ The second (sometime ally and sometime rival) is Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, whose watching briefs have included NATO, Transnistria, and defence industry and whose litany of vituperation and threats (‘tanks don’t need visas’) has raised eyebrows across Europe.³⁶

None of these true believers carries equal weight to the gatekeepers of the Putin system or its top stakeholders. Advisers can be thrown away. The gatekeepers and stakeholders are bound with Putin into a community of fate. In the defence and security spheres, Sergey Ivanov (Head of the President’s Administration) and Nikolay Patrushev (Secretary of the Security Council) constitute the gatekeepers, as to a lesser extent does Sergey Shoygu (Minister of Defence). In these specific domains at least three others enjoy Putin’s confidence: Sergey Naryshkin, his old associate, Viktor Chemezov (especially in defence-industrial matters) and Vyacheslav Volodin (First Deputy Head of Administration and keeper of Putin’s diary). In contrast Sergey Lavrov is a senior functionary, presiding over an institution that has far less clout than the US State Department.

At its core, the system that Putin constructed is defined by a fusion of money and power. It is patriarchal, highly networked and underpinned by 30-40 corporate stakeholders and their overlapping baronial structures. All of them derive as much influence from patronage as from wealth. Whereas some have a large stake in Russia’s primacy in the former USSR; others (notably Igor Sechin, Chairman of *Rosneft*) can afford to be more Russo-centric. Yet not even Sechin, a gatekeeper and pillar of the system, has the

35 Oleg Kashin, ‘From Crimea to Donbass: The Adventures of Igor Strelkov and Aleksandr Borodai [Iz Kryma v Donbass: Prikluycheniya Igorya Strelkova i Aleksandra Borodaya] http://slon.ru/russia/iz_kryma_v_donbass_prikluycheniya_igorya_strelkova_i_aleksandra_borodaya-1099696.xhtml

36 Dmitry Rogozin, one of seven deputy prime ministers, was Permanent Representative to NATO from February 2008 to December 2011, whereupon he was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and in early 2012 Head of the Government’s Military Industrial Commission and Special Presidential Representative for Transnistria. On Rogozin-Glazyev ties, Marius Luarinavicius, ‘Dmitry Rogozin’s Clan: Visionaries and Executors behind Aggression towards Ukraine’, Lithuania Tribune, 19 August 2014 <http://en.delfi.lt/central-eastern-europe/dmitry-rogozins-clan-visionaries-and-executors-behind-aggression-towards-ukraine.d?id=65585356>

capacity to be autonomous. This is a restricted and (since 2012) retrenched elite. Many who enjoy prestige in today's Russia have no power at all. The St Petersburg economists and the Yeltsin era Moscow establishment disappeared from the echelons of power long ago, and the latter's most distinguished exemplar, Yevgeniy Primakov, passed away in June 2015, five months after a valedictory speech implicitly critical of Putin's course.³⁷

The Putin system is not a monolith. It is a yeasty, self-referential world that has steadily been losing its ability to draw realistic conclusions from external reality checks. Its core premises about the outside world provide a narrow and distorting view of the character, motivations and actions of others. Although these views are amplified for public consumption, they also are integral to the culture of power and its discourse. It remains to add that, like their predecessors, Russian and Soviet, today's leaders are chronically obsessed with the connection between events abroad and events at home. This is what Fyodor Lukyanov meant when he stated that 'Ukraine has become an Arab country for us'.³⁸

37 'Russia's Course Cannot be One of Self-Isolation', *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, 15 January 2015.

38 "The borders outlined by world states in the Middle East in their templates are proliferating", *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 5 December 2014 <http://vestnikkavkaza.net/interviews/politics/62976.html>.

2 The Ukraine Conflict

2.1 Causes and Dynamics

The most striking feature of Russia's intervention in Ukraine is its brazenness. Russia is not the only country to have used force against a sovereign state in post-1991 Europe. But the Crimea operation marks the first time it was used without plausible justification and without efforts to resolve the dispute by other means. NATO's 1999 intervention over Kosovo, which Lavrov compares to Crimea's annexation, was preceded by exhaustive diplomatic efforts in which Russia played a key role.³⁹ Although NATO's Operation Allied Force was not authorised by the UN Security Council, it was preceded by the displacement of over 230,000 persons and by three UNSC resolutions harshly critical of Serbia's actions. Prior to Russia's Crimea operation, nothing of the kind took place. Ukraine's record on Russian minority rights, Moscow's ostensible *casus belli*, had earned praise from the OSCE, PACE and, almost a year into the conflict, the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues.⁴⁰ Between the signing of the Russia-Ukraine State Treaty in May 1997 and Yanukovich's fall from power in February 2014, Russia brought no official complaint against Ukraine regarding its treatment of Russian 'compatriots'.⁴¹

Nevertheless, Russia has misrepresented the conflict to itself as much as to the outside world. Its failure to accept Ukraine's 'otherness' is both historical and systemic. As Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko have observed, 'the very idea of a Ukrainian nation separate from the great Russian nation challenges core beliefs about Russia's origin and identity'.⁴² With the singular exception of the 1920s, Russian and Soviet leaders, repressive and reformist, have viewed Ukrainian national sentiment as a threat to the state. Between 1991-2013, it waged 'friendship' against a people it claimed to know better than their national leaders or their political opposition.⁴³ Today it is waging an undeclared war. In this war, Russia and its local allies have shown as little

39 Lavrov press conference, 14 March 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MicqZRnAkOg>.

40 Report of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues: Mission to Ukraine (Human Rights Council, Agenda Item 3), 27 January 2015.

41 The treaty, which obliges the parties to 'respect the territorial integrity and ... inviolability of borders between them', contains general and specific provisions regarding minority rights (Articles 3 and 12). Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, 31 May 1997.

42 Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, *A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine* (Chatham House Briefing Paper REP RSP BP January 2012), p 3.

43 The ironic Soviet era question, 'against whom are you waging friendship?' [*protiv kogo vy druzhite?*] captures this queasy reality.

knowledge of the people they claim to be supporting as those they say they are fighting. After twenty months of insurgency and two major military offensives, the separatist authorities control less than five percent of Ukraine's territory.

Ukraine's chronic defect has been irresponsible governance, not regional divisions, which in themselves are no greater than Italy's. Ukrainians from the Donbas have felt estranged from central government whoever has held office. In 2010 Yanukovich was elected by 75–80 percent of the region's voters, but by April 2011 only 15.4 percent 'fully' supported him, and by February 2013 42.6 percent declared that they did not support him at all.⁴⁴ Separatism in Ukraine's six eastern *oblasts*, even in russophone Donbas, has been a minority sentiment and a Russian fostered project. As recently as April 2014, Pew Research found only 18 percent support for right of secession in the east, and Gallup's figures were markedly lower. Support for 'federalisation' (however defined) was only somewhat greater.⁴⁵

Had Russia shown respect for Ukraine's differences as well as its commonalities, relations between the two countries might have taken a very different course from that of the past twenty-five years. The fact that five Ukrainian presidents have made Ukraine's 'European choice' a national priority has done little to shake Russian perceptions that its independence is a Western geopolitical project and a historical aberration. Neither has the large role played by eastern and Russian-speaking elites in Ukrainian state building. It was Leonid Kuchma, the 'candidate of the east' in 1994 who co-authored a Distinctive Partnership with NATO with the goal of *de facto* integration. By emphasising Ukraine's organic unity with Russia, Russia's leaders have aroused hostility in Ukraine and compounded their internal and external security problems. They have made Ukraine both the pivot and Achilles heel of the 'Russian world' project. The Kremlin's fear is that by entering Europe, Ukraine will transform Russia's 'civilisational' model into a purely Russian one whose legitimacy Russians might increasingly question. Yet the Kremlin's policies have only advanced that prospect.

The presumptive threat from the West reinforces the Kremlin's view that Ukraine's future is tied to Russia's own. For Reshetnikov (*the director of the Presidential Administration's own analytical center*) and presumably others, the purpose of Ukraine's 'federalisation' is not to protect Russia's compatriots, but Russia itself. A 'federated' Ukraine would 'make

44 'Do You Support the Activity of Victor Yanukovich', Razumkov Centre (Kyiv), April 2014.

45 The Gallup/IRI figures were 5–8% for the right of oblasts to secede, 35% for a federal state, 49% for a unitary state – Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Ukraine, April 3–12, 2014, www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20April%20Survey%20of%20Residents%20of%20Ukraine,%20April%203-12,%202014.pdf; Pew's figures in Chapter 1. Ukraine: Desire for Unity Amid Worries about Political Leadership, Ethnic Conflict, May 8, 2014 www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/08/chapter-1-ukraine-desire-for-unity-amid-worries-about-political-leadership-ethnic-conflict.

it impossible to site [NATO] military bases, its new echelon of BMD'. (*Ballistic Missile Defence*)

“ From Lugansk or Kharkov, tactical cruise missiles can reach beyond the Urals, where our primary nuclear deterrent is located. And with 100 percent certainty they can destroy silo or mobile-based ballistic missiles in their flight trajectory.⁴⁶

In making this assertion, Reshetnikov confirms three points that Russia's diplomats obfuscate. First, he is explicit that NATO's existing BMD programme poses no such threat.⁴⁷ Second, he confirms that Russia's model of federation would deny Kyiv the prerogatives enjoyed by other federal governments: foreign policy, national security and defence. Third, his reference to Kharkiv (which lies outside separatist control) also confirms that autonomy for the so-called DNR and LNR (Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics) will not be enough to satisfy Moscow.

Other issues raise the stakes for Russia even further. It is manifestly true, as Reshetnikov warns, that a rupture of defence-industrial ties would constitute a 'serious blow' to Russia's defence sector. Yet thanks to the war that Russia started, it has already taken place. Ukraine's entry into the Eurasian Economic Union, and its predecessor, the Customs Union, which has been stagnating since 2013, is also a lost cause.⁴⁸ But as a transit corridor for energy, strategic battles are still to be won or lost. At least half of Ukraine's shale reserves are located in the Donetsk-Luhansk-Kharkiv region, reason enough not to return the territory to Ukraine or, as the Kremlin sees it, the West.

As long as this threat assessment is in place, Ukraine's independence will be incompatible with Russia's interests. A neutrality agreement analogous to the 1955 Austrian State Treaty will not solve the problem unless it guarantees non-association with the EU as well as NATO. It is easy to forget that the Russia-Ukraine crisis of 2013 did not arise over NATO but over the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. Yanukovych's Ukraine was a 'non bloc' state. As Prime Minister, Yanukovych blocked Ukraine's path to MAP in 2006; as President, he signed a law on Ukraine's non-bloc status in July 2010. Three months earlier, he dissolved by decree the country's six specialised structures coordinating NATO – Ukraine integration. One month later, on 19 May, Ukraine's Security Service (SBU) concluded an agreement establishing comprehensive cooperation with

46 Not surprisingly, he states that 'such plans exist'. Reshetnikov, *op cit*.

47 'At present, this region [behind the Urals] is inaccessible to them [US anti-missile systems] from Poland, Turkey or Southeast Asia.' *Ibid*.

48 On Eurasian integration see Arkady Moshes, 'Will Ukraine Join (and Save) the Eurasian Customs Union?', Policy Memo 247, PONARS Eurasia, April 2013.

Russia's FSB.⁴⁹ None of this spared him from increasingly brutal pressure from Moscow as the deadline for signing the Association Agreement approached. Exactly one month before the EU Vilnius summit, this pressure culminated in direct threats to cripple Ukraine's economy and damage the financial interests of the Yanukovich 'family'⁵⁰. Already in September, the European Parliament cited 'alarming pressures in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and on the Eastern Partnership project itself'.⁵¹

The entire record of Yanukovich's presidency should dispose of the fallacy that conceding Russia's 'legitimate interests' will moderate its behaviour. Not only did Yanukovich seize the initiative on NATO, he conceded an extension of the Black Sea Fleet's lease in Crimea by 25 years (to 2042) in exchange for an all too evanescent gas discount. Yet, as we wrote at the time, 'instead of diminishing Russia's ambitions by virtue of pre-emptive concessions, Yanukovich has only whetted them'.⁵² When he finally protested Russia's relentless pressure for deeper integration, Medvedev publicly replied, 'it's only the beginning'.⁵³ What the past two years have shown is that Russia's 'legitimate interests' differ from any reasonable interests that the West or Ukraine can afford to concede.

Nevertheless, by intervening militarily after Yanukovich's fall from power, Russia committed an error of enormous proportions. It grossly underestimated Ukraine's resilience and the capacity of its fighting forces. Ukrainian national sentiment and civil society have been strengthened by the war, especially in the east. Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Mariupol have become symbols of patriotism, collective sacrifice and solidarity. In Donetsk oblast, Igor Girkin (alias Strelkov), first defence minister of the Donetsk People's Republic, lamented:

“ one cannot find even a thousand men ready to risk their lives even for their own city. Amongst the volunteers, the majority are men over 40 who acquired their upbringing in the USSR. But where are they, the young, healthy lads? Perhaps in the brigades of gangsters who, enjoying the absence of authority, have thrown themselves into plunder and pillage in all cities and right across the oblast.⁵⁴

49 For a fuller discussion, see James Sherr, *The Mortgaging of Ukraine's Independence*, (Chatham House REP BP August 2010) pp 11-15.

50 The author received broadly consistent accounts of the October 2013 Putin-Yanukovich Sochi meeting from both official and opposition sources. For an inventory of economic pressures, see *Ekho Moskvii's* interview with Party of Regions MP Inna Bogoslovskaya 5 December 2013.

51 Statement of 12 September 2013.

52 *Ibid.*, p 10.

53 Medvedev: 'It's only the beginning' [*Medvedev: Eto tol'ko nachalo*], Glavred, 17 May 2010, www.glavred.info.

54 Igor Strelkov, 'Is that all that you are capable of?' [*Eto vse, na chto viy sposobniy?*], *Vzglyad*, 18 May 2014, www.vz.ru/world/2014/5/18/687251.html, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-T68YLCV0HA>.

The Ukrainian counteroffensive between May and July 2014, which regained control of 23 of the 36 districts seized by the rebels, demonstrated support for the state and foreclosed military collapse.

Russia's all too predictable response to these reverses was to raise its game. The two Russia/separatist military offensives of September 2014 and January-February 2015, backed by Russian general purpose forces and advanced weaponry, created the prerequisites for the two Minsk accords and the fraught and fragile stalemate that still prevails. These offensives were designed to demonstrate:

- Russia's military dominance and capacity to annihilate Ukraine's forces at will;
- its determination to use any means necessary to block unilateral revision of the post-February 2014 status quo;
- its capacity to inflict economic damage on Ukraine and deny it the baseline needed for political sustainability, fiscal solvency and investor confidence;
- the failure of the West's 'punitive' sanctions policy;
- the folly of 'arming' Ukraine;
- the impossibility of solving the conflict at the expense of Russia's interests.

These offensives were tools of policy, not mere applications of force. They aimed to discredit Western narratives as well as modify Western policy. Yet, as the International Crisis Group has documented, they also reflected a difference in aims between the separatist leadership – who wanted to expand their holdings into a viable economic and administrative entity – and Moscow, which views them as a means of exercising a proxy, but institutionalised veto over Ukraine as a whole.⁵⁵

2.2 From Minsk to Paris

The Protocol on the Results of Consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group (Minsk-I) and the Package of Measures for Implementation of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk-II) were not consensual documents in the equitable sense of the term.⁵⁶ They were products of *force majeure*, mitigated by negotiation. It is the cease-fire and withdrawal provisions (Arts 1-3) that form the most consensual parts of the implementation package (Minsk-II). But other provisions in both accords call into question Ukraine's sovereignty and are at variance with positions previously articulated by Western governments.

55 *Eastern Ukraine: A Dangerous Winter*, International Crisis Group, Europe Report No. 235, 18 December 2014, pp 10-15.

56 Minsk-I, 5 September 2014: www.osce.org/home/123257 (in English); Minsk-II, 12 February 2015: www.osce.org/cio/140156 (in Russian).

By combining a cease-fire with provisions of a political settlement, both accords violate sound diplomatic practice. Cease-fires emerge out of urgency. Peace settlements require deliberation (which in a democracy must include representative structures of power). Constitutional changes require the same if they are to be sound, workable and legitimate. They should not be dictated by arbitrary deadlines or imposed at gunpoint. Moreover, the accords grant a *de jure* status to those whom neither Ukraine nor the West hitherto regarded as lawful authorities. They preserve the fiction that Russia is an interested party, rather than a protagonist in the conflict, not to say the instigator of it. Several provisions of Minsk-II are particularly problematic. Although restoration of border control by Ukraine is supposed to 'begin' one day 'after' the holding of local elections, the election modalities and constitutional reform are directly or indirectly subject to the agreement of the separatists (Articles 4, 8, 9, 11, 13), who have license to withhold their consent indefinitely.

Taken in the round, the Minsk agreements provided a framework for armed truce rather than stabilisation, let alone reconciliation. Having exploited the West's fear of escalation before, Russia repeated the exercise as soon as the ink on the agreement was dry. Military harassment and intimidation resumed, and a sharp but brief military offensive was launched in May 2015. Yet on this occasion, Ukraine's Western partners behaved more skilfully. The diplomatic resources of Washington, Paris and Berlin were mobilised as Moscow had hoped. Under strong inducement from the United States, the Verkhovna Rada on 16 July passed the first reading of The Law on Implementation of Changes in the Constitution of Ukraine. Yet the purpose of the manoeuvre was made plain by Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland: to show that 'Ukraine has done its job' and ensure 'there would be no excuses on the other side for renewed violence'.⁵⁷ And there, US pressure on Ukraine stopped.

July's modest legislative steps left Moscow with a Hobson's choice: either to escalate conclusively or parley on the basis of the small and devastated territory that its proxies control. Russia's Novorossiia project (the 'gathering of lands' conquered by Catherine) died in 2014. For Moscow, the sole utility of the DNR and LNR is to serve as a bridgehead for securing Ukraine's transformation into a dysfunctional state: 'federated', 'neutral' and without European prospects. In themselves, they are neither absorbable by Russia nor sustainable in the long term. Moscow's dilemma is sharpened by the fact that a frozen conflict in the Donbas now suits Kyiv's purposes more than its own. Today, as *de facto* occupying power, Russia is obliged to support the region. Ukraine no

57 Kyiv Press Conference, 16 July 2015, <http://ukraine.usembassy.gov/statements/nuland-07162015.html>.

longer does so. For Ukraine, the re-integration of DNR/LNR under Moscow's federative formula would be the equivalent of a cyanide pill. The status quo is better.⁵⁸

Rather than escalate, Moscow shifted tack once again. In July 2015, it reshuffled the DNR leadership in a less belligerent direction. On 1 September, the guns in eastern Ukraine fell silent. On 2 October, under OSCE auspices, the 'Normandy' parties (France, Germany, Russia, Ukraine) reached a number of understandings designed to unblock the Minsk process. These understandings reflect a revised correlation of forces. From Russia's perspective:

- The cumulative impact of Tier-3 sanctions is taking its toll on the state budget, the capital-intensive energy sector and a defence-industrial complex dependent on Western technology for critical modernisation (and some 800 current weapons systems). Their swift renewal, without dissent, by the EU in June possibly came as a surprise;
- Washington and Berlin have issued unmistakable, well-substantiated warnings that further escalation will meet with a sharp augmentation of sanctions well beyond Tier-3 levels;
- The military system is showing signs of strain. Russia's battle groups are not occupation forces. They are designed to shatter resistance and annihilate enemy force groupings. They strike hard and withdraw. While the Russian army as a whole benefits from the tactical and combat experience of rotation to the Ukraine front, force generation and the maintenance of 40-50,000 troops in theatre have placed demands on Ground Forces units as far away as Armenia, Kazakhstan and Vladivostok.⁵⁹ Morale is becoming problematic, and deployment of general purpose forces in hostile Russian-speaking areas of eastern Ukraine is restricted.⁶⁰ Efforts to recruit non-Russian contingents and scale up training of indigenous forces have had only limited success.
- The burdens of war, annexation and occupation have failed to destabilise Ukraine, retard its military modernisation or deflect its Euro-Atlantic course. Ukraine's resilience, civic and military, has defied expectations.

From Ukraine's perspective:

58 For a Ukrainian and Russian view respectively, see Denis Kazansky, 'Revolution in DPR means that Kremlin gives up on Donbas and conflict will be frozen – expert', 20 September 2015, http://joinfo.com/world/1008311_revolution-in-dpr-means-that-kremlin-gives-up-on-donbas-and-conflict-will-be-frozen-expert.html; Vladimir Frolov, 'Kremlin is Caught in a Trap with Minsk-2', Moscow Times, 16 August 2015.

59 Igor Sutyagin, *Russian Forces in Ukraine* (RUSI Briefing Paper, March 2015). These figures do not include an estimated 26-29,000 in Crimea, including 13,000 in the Black Sea Fleet.

60 e.g. Aleksandr Golts, 'Victory of the Tractor Drivers – Defeat of Russia' [*Itogi Nedeli. Pobedy 'Traktoristov' – Porazhenie Rossii*], *Ezhednevnyy Zhurnal*, 20 February 2015 www.ej.ru/?a=note&id=27139#.

- The prospect of defeating the separatists by force no longer exists;
- Ukraine lacks the financial and institutional means to assume the economic and humanitarian burden of the Donbas. The prospect of adequate external finance for these purposes is virtually nil. For want of a better alternative, de facto autonomy in the short-term, reintegration over the longer term are the outcomes most consistent with Ukraine's interests and possibilities.

The (so far oral) Paris agreements, based on the unpublished plan of Pierre Morel (chairman of the OSCE working group on political affairs) incorporate several improvements over Minsk. First, there is to be an immediate and complete cessation of hostilities. Second, the 31 December Minsk-II deadlines are postponed for an unspecified period, but at least until March 2016. Third, OSCE contingents are to be augmented and granted immediate, unimpeded access to all facilities and all sectors of the 400 km Ukraine-Russia border. Fourth, consistent with Minsk-II, Ukraine is required to agree election modalities and adopt a 'law on special status' with the concurrence of the DNR/LNR representatives. Fifth, DNR/LNR special status will come into effect only on the day of elections (and temporarily); they will take permanent effect only when the results are declared legitimate by the OSCE. Sixth, immediately following the elections, Russia must withdraw its forces, weaponry and military equipment and return the border to Ukraine's full control.

By comparison to the baleful Minsk implementation package, Ukraine has gained from the accords. The principal gain is the linkage established between legitimate authority and transfer of powers. Return of the border is now strictly sequenced according to the election timetable and not dependent on the consent of the current DNR/LNR leadership. Ukraine also gains from the immediate enhancement of transparency inside the DNR/LNR and on its borders. Not least important, failure by Russia or its proxies to observe one of these provisions invalidates the whole.

For its part, Russia has secured two key objectives, albeit more modest than those in sight after Minsk-II. First, enhancement of sanctions is now off the table, and Moscow can reasonably hope that the current sanctions regime will be softened and, after June 2016, withdrawn altogether (apart from the Crimea package). Second, the obligation on Ukraine to agree election and 'special status' provisions with *current* DNR/LNR representatives is now unambiguous.

These changes provide small ground for encouragement. There still is everything to play for. Russia and its proxies will do their utmost to ensure that the law on special status confers veto-wielding powers over such issues as Ukraine-NATO cooperation and EU membership. So long as they do, Ukraine will find itself constrained to delay the process. The election modalities will be equally contentious. In principle, they must correspond to the laws of Ukraine, but in practice, the DNR/LNR will have a considerable say in the formation of election commissions and the dominant voice in determining the eligibility

of parties and candidates. All the post-Maidan parties – including the Poroshenko bloc (*Solidarnist*), Yatseniuk's National Front and the grass-roots 'Self Help' (*Samopomich*) – are likely to be excluded. For their part, President Poroshenko's Western partners are wagering that even after unfair elections, restoration of the border will deprive Russia of its principal means of influence and put an end to the 'people's' regime of intimidation, abuse, pillage and plunder described by the UNHCR and the former DNR leadership itself.⁶¹

Yet prudence and realism point to harsher conclusions. No fair election can take place as long as Russia remains in occupation and controls the border. The OSCE has no means of guaranteeing this result. Even after 'augmentation', its resources will be limited and overstretched. For its part, Russia will not return the border until it gets the 'federal' solution and enforced neutrality it wants. In other words, the price for relinquishing Ukraine's eastern border is the control of its Western border. Neither Ukraine's leaders nor its parliament will accept this trade off, and it is most unlikely that the country will do so either.

Nevertheless, high-profile Russian figures still echo the forecast presented to the author by a regime ideologist in November 2014: 'by next winter, there will be no Ukraine'.⁶² Then the forecast had the sound of conviction. Today it sounds strained. As of 1 September, and for the first time since the war started, a real cease-fire came into effect. On 4 September, Moscow facilitated the replacement of the truculent leader of the DPR with a more pliable and plausible representative. This betokens a shift to a longer and more complicated struggle.

It is likely to proceed on three axes. The first is energy supply. In April 2015 the IEA stated that Ukraine faced an 'unprecedented' crisis. Donbas coal, which accounts for the bulk of production from Ukraine's 300 coal mines, is no longer delivered to power stations in central Ukraine. Gas transit volume and income have declined sharply since 2013.⁶³ Both the war and Ukraine's still discouraging regulatory environment are major obstacles to exploitation of Ukraine's indigenous hydrocarbon resources, and Chevron has withdrawn from the country. Nevertheless, the underlying trend is not in

61 Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine, 15 May 2014, p. Igor Strelkov, *op. cit.*

62 As recently as April 2015, Reshetnikov described the outlook for Ukraine as 'partial or even complete collapse'. In July, Naryshkin, who flatly denies the presence of Russian 'military subunits' in Donbas, opined that in any military action 'against Russia', Ukraine's armed forces would be unable to continue beyond five days. 'Naryshkin talks about Ukraine's prospects in war with Russia' [*Naryshkin rasskazal o perspektivakh Ukrainiy v voyne s Rossiey*], 23 July 2015. [Lenta.ru/news/2015/07/23/narishkin_war](http://lenta.ru/news/2015/07/23/narishkin_war).

63 Cited by *EurActiv*, 14 April 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/energy/ukraine-faces-unprecedented-energy-crisis-313742>.

Russia's favour. The chronically indebted Naftohaz, which has been a major drain on the economy and an obstacle to energy security, is now on the verge of profitability. Ukraine, which imported 70 bcm of Russian gas in 2007, imported 14 bcm in 2014, less than it imported from Europe. *Gazprom*, which until recently boasted that Ukraine would no longer be a transit corridor to Europe by 2019, has now had to abandon this target.

The second axis is covert influence inside Ukraine's political system and force structures. Russia's congenital devotion to penetration, psyops and 'false flag' operations is explored later in this study. Suffice it to say that since the 1920s, Russian 'active measures' have included the manipulation, and where possible the creation, of national-patriotic organisations in order to discredit the patriotic cause. In both the 2004 and 2014 *Maidan* protests, provocateurs emerged clothed as revolutionaries and patriots. When it comes to *Pravij Sektor* and other allegedly 'fascist' groups, it is possible that they are doing the same.

The third and most important axis would be the opening of a new strategic front. Russia's startling deployment of forces in Syria and dramatic call for a grand coalition with the West against Daesh might serve just this purpose, whatever regional objectives are also present. In the 1980's warned that in Leninist practice, a retreat on one front is usually a sign of advance on another. Calm in Donbas along with this latest reminder of Russia's global importance could be just the amalgam needed to force the West to reconsider Russia's 'isolation' and the sanctions regime.

In spite of all its setbacks, Russia's ultimate wager is that the West will finally ask, 'is Ukraine worth it?' Despite Ukraine's defiance of every doom-laden prophecy, Naryshkin's characterisation of it as a 'bankrupt economy, corrupted leadership and a state in the deepest socio-political crisis' might still be borne out if Russia's strategic investment in Ukraine's failure exhausts the West's strategic patience.⁶⁴ However urgent or apocalyptic other threats might be, the issues at stake in Ukraine are substantial for the West as a whole. First, a political settlement on Russia's terms would threaten the Euro-Atlantic system and Russia itself. It would not be accepted by Ukrainian society or by those who bear arms. The results would not stabilise Ukraine but tear it apart. The radical cause would prosper, and a compromised national government would lose legitimacy. Some volunteer battalions would do what Ukrainians do best in time of war: transform themselves into partisan brigades, drawing Russia into deeper and more internecine conflict. That, rather than the reinforcement of Ukraine's statehood, is the route to wider conflict. Even without such a conflict, state failure in Ukraine would send shock waves across Europe.

64 Naryshkin, *op cit.*, 23 July 2015.

Second, the EU and NATO would be discredited throughout east-central Europe. The Eastern Partnership and NATO-Georgia Distinctive Partnership would be abandoned or reduced to ornamental importance. Third, many in the Baltic states and Poland would view Ukraine's 'betrayal' as a moment of truth for themselves. If key Western allies were too risk averse to support Ukraine by all means short of war, who would have confidence that they would fight more than a 'phony war' on their behalf? Fourth, Russia's success in Ukraine would be illusory. Russia would be incapable of managing either a radicalised or a disintegrating Ukrainian state. It cannot be excluded that some Ukrainians would take the conflict to Russia. The 'anarchy, lawlessness and chaos' of Putin's nightmares would become the principal legacy of his success.

3 Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion in Russia's Neighbourhood

Throughout its modern history, Russia has been a country in which the frontiers between nation, state and empire have been difficult, if not impossible to draw. Its internal order has tended to be in a state of tension with its international surroundings. In part for these reasons, Russia has brought to Europe a security dilemma that has caused injury to itself as much as others: a set of security 'needs' out of kilter and scale with those of most European powers. These needs issue from an amalgam of factors that have operated in malign reinforcement: a tendency to resolve geopolitical indeterminacy – the multi-national demographic of the state and the absence of natural frontiers – by creating client states and widening defence perimeters; a cultivation of civilisational or ideological distinctiveness; and (at least from 1815 onwards) a political and economic structure that lagged behind that of European rivals, yet which, despite its increasing brittleness, was seen as indispensable to the stability of the state.⁶⁵ Given this geopolitical conundrum, it always has been possible to argue the case for a greater Russia or a smaller one.

This indeterminacy has fostered a grim determinism in defence matters. Policy and military doctrine are based on the premise that advantage will be used and weakness exploited. The factors that frequently offset one another in a Western threat assessment – capability, interest and intention – are invariably compounded in Russian threat assessments on the basis of worst-case assumptions. This tendency is assisted by the premise (not confined to the military) that 'no one is interested in a strong Russia except Russia' (Yeltsin 1994). Since the draft military doctrine of May 1992, threat and danger have been defined by the 'presence' of foreign military forces 'in the vicinity of Russia's borders' rather than their purpose. The retention of Soviet borders as the baseline of 'vicinity' enlarges the threat perceived. During the Kosovo conflict, it was customary to refer to Yugoslavia as a country 'in the vicinity of Russia's borders', despite the fact that the nearest Russian city, Novorossiysk, was 1,000 km away.

65 For a schematic analysis of this imperial legacy, see John P LeDonne, *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831* and on client societies in particular, pp 61-81, 198-212, 219-233 (Oxford University Press, 2004).

To these imperial dispositions, the Soviet Union added another: an equation between friendship and integration. In this particular, there is an uneasy correspondence with the EU which, as Kataryna Wolczuk has noted, pursues integration policies inside Europe rather than foreign policies as such.⁶⁶ The contrasts are more telling. To the EU, integration is a 'choice'; to Russia, it is 'historically conditioned'. The EU stands or falls on the basis of adherence to norms and rules. It has leaders, even paymasters, but it does not have a hegemon. Without a hegemon, it is doubtful that Russia's integration projects would even exist. Unlike European integration, accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) does not require states to improve standards of governance, reform systems of justice, strengthen property rights or apply criteria of 'best practice' to the relationship between business, the consumer and the state. What it requires, as even presidents Lukashenka and Nazarbayev have remonstrated, is acceptance of Russian primacy.

To Russia, primacy in the former Soviet Union is an entitlement. Friendly relations are equated with 'brotherly' relations, which do not rule out the independence of others, but which are based on the premise that Russia should define what sovereignty and independence should mean in practice. Failure to 'consult' and in practice 'coordinate' over such matters as relations with NATO or European integration is regarded as an unfriendly act. As noted in the first part of this paper, these premises underpinned policy from the Yeltsin period. Upon replacing Andrey Kozyrev as Foreign Minister in January 1996, Yevgeniy Primakov affirmed that Russia's first foreign policy priority would be 'the strengthening of centripetal tendencies on the territory of the former USSR'.⁶⁷ The first official policy to bear Putin's stamp (*Concepts of Foreign Policy*, June 2000) called for the formation of 'a good-neighbourly belt along the perimeter of Russia's borders' and 'conformity of...cooperation with CIS states to the national security tasks of the country.' Success in this effort would depend upon:

- 'joint efforts towards settling conflicts in CIS member states...particularly in combating international terrorism and extremism';
- 'serious emphasis on the development of economic cooperation, including...joint rational use of natural resources';
- to 'uphold in every possible way the rights and interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad', to 'popularise the Russian language' and to ensure 'preservation and augmentation of the joint cultural heritage in the CIS'.⁶⁸

66 Kataryna Wolczuk, 'Implementation without Coordination: The Impact of EU Conditionality on Ukraine under the European Neighbourhood Policy' (Europe-Asia Studies, University of Birmingham, 1 March 2009).

67 Transcript of press conference ['*Zapis' Press-Konferentsii Ministra Inostrannykh Del Rossii E.M. Primakova*', 12 January, 1996].

68 Welcoming approval of the draft Concept by the RF Security Council on 24 March, Putin claimed that it would defend 'the interests of our compatriots...more attentively, in a more balanced way and at the same time more aggressively'.

With the benefit of fifteen years hindsight, one can see in these early pronouncements the germ of a policy that equates rights with language rather than citizenship and privileges 'historically conditioned relations' above the 'notorious principle of national self-determination' and statehood itself. Putin has been remarkably explicit about these differences:

“ The choice of the Russian people has been confirmed again and again – not by plebiscites or referendums – but by blood⁶⁹

There is nothing to distinguish these views from those that Putin expressed when he welcomed Crimea's 'incorporation' [*prisoedenenie*] in 2014. In his speech to the Federal Assembly of 18 March, he drew a clear connection between 'the unification of East and West Germany' and 'the aspiration of the Russians, of historical Russia, to restore unity'.⁷⁰

'Historically conditioned relations' and 'firm good neighbourliness' have been Russia's answers to 'a Europe whole and free'. They also have been continuous, intense and multi-vectored pursuits. In no European country of the former USSR does Russia support the status quo. Having pre-emptively conceded Russia's core demands upon Ukraine in 2010 – abandonment of NATO integration and extension of basing rights for the Black Sea Fleet – President Yanukovych was abruptly informed by President Medvedev that 'this is only the beginning'.⁷¹ Armenia's CSTO membership did not exempt President Sargsyan in 2013 from brutal pressure to abandon EEU Association and join the Eurasian Economic Union. Since acceding to the EEU, it has been induced to cede its strategic industries and infrastructure to Russian control. Albeit the initiator of the Union State with Yeltsin's Russia, it took Alyaksandr Lukashenka little time to discover that Vladimir Putin's conception of union was incompatible with Belarusian sovereignty.

One unfortunate effect of the Ukraine conflict has been to divert Western attention from recent Russian efforts to undermine the security of other states in the EU's Eastern Partnership. Since 2013 these efforts have been particularly pronounced in Moldova and Georgia, but they are also unsettling the hitherto stable metabolism of Belarus. In the first two countries, one of Russia's principal innovations, the 'frozen conflict' has been used to secure leverage, poison the wider body politic and orchestrate conflict, extant and potential. It is indicative that one of the 'curators' of the frozen conflict in Moldova,

69 Vladimir Putin, 'Russia: The National Question' [*Rossiya: Natsional'ny Vopros*], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 23 January 2012.

70 Speech to the Federal Assembly, 18 March 2014.

71 'Medvedev: This is only the beginning' [*Medvedev: Eto tol'ko nachalo*], Glavred, Kyiv, 17 May 2010, www.glavred.info.

former KGB Lieutenant General Valdimir Antufeyev, emerged as Deputy Prime Minister of the Donetsk People's Republic in summer 2014.

Russia's policies in these countries demand scrutiny in their own right. Each affords a revealing optic on Russia's levers and methods of influence. In each, Russia's policy also sheds light on its broader objectives in Europe.

3.1 Moldova

Even more than Ukraine, Moldova has been the laboratory in which Russia's toolkit of influence has been honed and refined. From the outset of the post-Soviet era, Moscow understood that Moldova was contested ground. The Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic was proclaimed on the left bank of the Dniester two months before the USSR's dissolution. For the better part of the past twenty years, Russia and Russian entities used (and arguably instigated) the Dniester conflict to fragment Moldova and then undermine it.⁷²

The most direct lever afforded by Transnistria is its determinant role in Moldova's unity and sovereignty. Officially, Russia contests neither. It has no embassy in Tiraspol, only a consulate. But in practice it has placed before Chisinau and the OSCE a 'federal' model that would give its left bank proxies an arm lock on Moldova's foreign relations, both political and economic. Yet Moscow's more arresting proclivity and skill has been to parlay the Transnistrian issue against others that constitute levers of influence in their own right. A principal one is energy. Thanks to an elaborate scheme entered into with *Gazprom*-owned *Moldovagaz* and *Tiraspoltransgaz*, Transnistria has amassed a debt to *Gazprom* that is larger than Ukraine's and eight times the size of that of right bank Moldova. Yet in the words of Dmitry Rogozin (Special Presidential Representative for Transnistria), 'if Moldova will not recognise Transnistria, then it means that the gas consumed by Transnistria...is Moldova's debt, and Moldova should pay for it.'⁷³ In other words, Moldova must assume responsibility for a system that Russia has created over its objections and that it is powerless to alter. Inasmuch as Russia has not recognised the independence of Transnistria, this argumentation is doubly perverse.

72 In conditions of late-Soviet and Yeltsin era 'multivoicedness', the principal instigators were the 'local' but non-Moldovan commanders of the Soviet 14th Army, acting in alliance with the Ministry of Defence and supportive political factions in Moscow.

73 Nicu Popescu and Leonid Litra, *Transnistria: A Bottom-Up Solution* (European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/63, September 2012), p 5. As the authors point out, '[t]he money collected from gas consumers in Transnistria is not transferred to *Moldova Gaz* and *Gazprom*, but instead is spent by the secessionist authorities'.

Today the Dniester conflict is comparatively dormant. In part, this reflects the anxieties that have gripped Tiraspol after Russia's reverses in Ukraine.⁷⁴ But it also reflects the proliferation of other means of damaging the Moldovan state. As in many post-Soviet countries, bad governance has been the handmaiden of Russian influence. The country is even more vulnerable today than it was during the eight-year presidency of Vladimir Voronin (2001-9) who, like his fellow communist, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, exercised a tough and baleful authority in the country. The liberality of Moldova's parliamentary constitution, which tempered Voronin's authority, has in his absence – and in the absence of civic cohesion and national self-confidence – given local oligarchs, Russian capital and the Kremlin everything to play for. Not only are the oligarchs stronger than state institutions, they have effectively captured the state in alliance with 'pro-European' parties that seek EU funds for reform whilst obstructing the reforms themselves. Placed inside this amoral maze, genuine reformers, such as Iurie Leanca (Prime Minister from April 2013 to February 2015) face a Hobson's choice between marginalisation or guilt by association with coalition partners who have robbed the country blind. In these conditions victory of the pro-Moscow parties is not a necessary condition for the perpetuation of Moldova's dependency upon Russia. This dependency is most acute in the areas of:

Trade: Russia is Moldova's biggest trading partner (enjoying preponderance in the areas of fruit, vegetables, meat and wine), its biggest foreign investor (some 37 percent) and the main destination for expatriate workers, whose remittances constitute 25 percent of Moldova's GDP.⁷⁵ Yet its precipitate imposition of swingeing embargoes beginning in September 2013 has undercut its threat of punishment for Moldova's accession to the EU Association Agreement, which was only signed on 27 June 2014. Whereas Moldova's exports to the EU rose by 16 percent between January and August 2014, Russia's diminished trade share (down 20 percent in the same period) arguably reduces leverage rather than enhances it, and its restrictions on Moldovan workers have been less Draconian than feared.⁷⁶

More effective leverage is exercised in *energy*. Since 1991, Russia has been Moldova's sole gas supplier. *Gazprom's de facto* ownership of *Moldovagaz* (63 percent) has not only facilitated opaque transactions with its owner, it has served as a braking mechanism on the construction of interconnectors with the EU via Romania. Russian agreement to renew the gas supply agreement (which expired in 2011) has been tied to Moldova's withdrawal from the Third Energy

74 Paul Goble, 'Encouraged by Initial Russian Moves in Ukraine, Transnistria Now Fears for Its Future', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol 12, issue 11, 20 January 2015.

75 The official 24 percent figure for Russian investment is sharply augmented by Cyprus registered companies.

76 Largely because the 300,000 to 500,000 Moldovan workers fill a gap in Russia's economy. Kamil Calus, 'Russia is Playing Harder for Moldova', Institute of Eastern Studies [hereafter, OSW], Warsaw, 2 April 2014.

Package and the Energy Community. This linkage between gas and politics is blatant. One needn't unravel internecine transactions and intermediary structures (as in Ukraine) to see it.

Banking: The November 2014 banking scandal, the pretext for the fall of Moldova's government on 29 October 2015, illustrates the malign synergy between domestic corruption and Russian interests. Within recent years, Moldova's banking sector has come under *de facto* control of Russian banks and financial interests.⁷⁷ On the eve of the manoeuvres that invisibly transferred 1 bn from three leading banks to Moldovan companies in themselves partially owned by Russian banks, Russian capital controlled 70 percent of the sector. The 'rescue' of these banks by the National Bank of Moldova sharply diminished the country's foreign currency reserves and further depressed the *leu*, which had already lost 12.3 percent of its value against the euro in 2013.⁷⁸ In June and July 2015, the IMF, World Bank and EU belatedly faced reality and suspended most of their financial assistance. In keeping with the character of this entire affair, the principal orchestrator of the European coalition's downfall, Vlad Plahotniuc, was its least plausibly European member and an alleged beneficiary of the banking scandal itself.⁷⁹

This haemorrhaging of the Moldovan political system is now complemented at the territorial-administrative level. In 2014, the 'special legal status' of Gagauzia (a 'national-territorial autonomous unit' since 1994) assumed an anti-state character. In a February 2014 referendum, whose legality was contested by Chisinau, 98.7 of Gagauzia's Turkic-Orthodox population voted in support of joining the Eurasia Customs Union, and a majority vowed to seek independence if Moldova joined the EU. In response, Russia promptly exempted Gagauzia (whose 150,000 inhabitants comprise 4 percent of Moldova's population) from its embargo on Moldovan alcohol. In yet a further demonstration of Russia's disregard for Moldovan statehood, Irina Vlah, victor of the March 2015 Gagauz elections, was openly supported by Sergey Naryshkin and his Russian Federation Council counterpart, Valentina Matviyenko.⁸⁰ Added to these ills, the ethnically Bulgarian district of Taraclia is now seeking autonomy under its Moscow supported Socialist Party leadership. Local election victories of other pro-Moscow

77 Kamil Cafus, 'Russian Sanctions Against Moldova: Minor Effects, Major Potential, OSW, 6 November 2014.

78 Kamil Calus, 'A Captured State? Moldova's Uncertain Prospects for Modernisation', OSW 22 April 2015.

79 On these points at least, OSW and Vladimir Socor agree. Kamil Calus, 'Moldova: A New Prime Minister, the Old Order', OSW 12 August 2015, Vladimir Socor, 'Moldovan Billionaire Overthrows Coalition Government From Within', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol 12, issue 199.

80 Vladimir Socor, 'Moldova, the EU and the Gagauzia Issue', *New Eastern Europe*, 14 February 2014 and 'Russia Orchestrates Gagauz Election in Moldova, Ponders the Next Steps', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol 12, issue 59, 31 March 2015.

figures threaten to confer *de facto* autonomous status to Moldova's second largest city, Balti.

Moldova provides a template of how Russian capital and Russian inspired constitutional reform can be used to dismantle a sovereign state. According to SACEUR and Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council, the prerequisites of hybrid warfare have also made their appearance.⁸¹ If prior to the Ukraine conflict, Russia sought to undermine Moldova, it is now fair to say that it is promoting Moldova's disintegration.

Nevertheless, several contrasts between Moldova and Ukraine should be noted. Not the least of these are the fortitude of Ukrainian civil society and the demonstrated recovery and resilience of the Ukrainian state. Moreover, four differences between the 'frozen conflicts' in Moldova and Ukraine command attention. First, the stationing of two contingents of Russian forces in Moldova has a legal basis within the framework of the Joint Control Commission and (in Russia's interpretation) the bilateral 1992 Cease-Fire Agreement, whose validity Russia affirms despite its 1999 OSCE Istanbul commitments. In Ukraine there is no such legal basis, and Russia denies that its forces are present. The Minsk accords mandate the 'withdrawal of all foreign armed formations, military equipment, as well as mercenaries' (Art 10). Second, whereas there has been no annexation of territory in Moldova, Crimea was 'incorporated' into the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014. Third, whereas the Transnistrian conflict arose in the context of Soviet disintegration, Russia's intervention in Crimea and eastern Ukraine took place seventeen years after the Russia-Ukraine State Treaty bound both parties to 'respect the territorial integrity and...inviolability of borders between them'. This treaty also has legal implications for the expropriation of Ukrainian assets, civil and military, valued at several billions of dollars. Finally, the infrastructure of Transnistria is intact and that of the Donbas heavily damaged.

For all of these differences, there is an ominous affinity between the mandated 'special regime' in DNR/LNR, the autonomy of the Pridnestrovian Moldovan Republic and the 'special legal status' of the National-Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, as well as the use of the term 'federalism' to denote a regime of *liberum veto* in both countries.

3.2 Belarus

Few are reproached for forgetting Belarus. Although Ukraine's role as the 'pivot' in European security became a diplomatic *cliché* almost from the moment that Britain's former Prime Minister John Major uttered this phrase, no Western government has been

81 'Ukraine NSDC: Russian 'Little Green Men' Appeared in Moldova', *Euromaidan Press*, 9 September 2015; 'Top NATO General Concerned About Little Green Men in Moldova', *Atlantic Council*, 17 September 2014.

tempted to characterise Belarus in such terms, and most do not give the country much thought. Since the signing of the Belovezhskaya accords that disbanded the USSR in 1991, close relations between Belarus and Russia have been an almost unquestioned norm. Neither of the two models that have characterised Ukrainian statehood – ‘multi-vectorism’ and the ‘European course’ – have taken root in Belarus. Yet the war in Ukraine is having an unsettling effect on this supposedly inert country,

History and natural resources have turned Belarus and Ukraine into two very different entities. Although the territory of today’s Belarus lay almost entirely within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before 1772, nationalist and anti-Russian sentiment have been distinctly subdued by Ukrainian standards. The country’s sovietisation was even more rigorous than Ukraine’s and far less doggedly resisted. Whilst the six oblasts of Belarus are far from monochrome in their heritage or interests, the regional divergences and political vitality that characterise Ukraine’s far more variegated landscape of 24 oblasts are not to be found. Although the Belarusian language is closer to Ukrainian than to Russian, 70 percent of the country’s 9.5 million citizens are Russian speakers (whereas only 29 percent of Ukraine’s 45 million claim Russian as their first language).⁸² Energy presents a similar contrast. Whereas Ukraine’s total energy import dependency stood at 39 percent prior to the current conflict, Belarus imports 85 percent of its energy, 95-98 percent from its eastern neighbour.⁸³

These comparisons explain why Moscow regards Belarus as intrinsically manageable. It is axiomatic in Moscow that it must remain so, since a serious Belarusian ‘deviation’ would threaten Russia’s future as a European power. This context largely explains why, since his election in July 1994, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has presided over an overtly authoritarian and officially russophone state. Not only has he made Belarus a party to the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO – entities that every Ukrainian president has refused to join – he is the initiator and co-founder of the Union State of Russia and Belarus that came into effect in January 2000. In marked contrast to the dynamic set in motion by the 1996 NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership, the Union State has facilitated the integration of Belarus’s early warning system, air defences, ground forces and defence infrastructure with Russia’s own.

For all this, the most interesting truths about Belarus are counter-intuitive, and thanks to the Ukraine conflict, they are becoming more visible. Belarus is Russia’s ally, but Lukashenka is an irksome vassal with the determination and guile to defend his own turf. His election in 1994 was a small act of defiance in itself, as Yeltsin had favoured Vyacheslav Kebich, the outgoing prime minister. On becoming president, Lukashenka

82 According to Ukraine’s most recent census, 2001.

83 IEA, *Ukraine 2012*, p 21; Alena Rakava, *Energy Security of Belarus: Stereotypes, Threats, Trends* (Office for a Democratic Belarus, Brussels; BISS, Vilnius, April 2014), p 3.

swiftly moved Moscow's men out of the political *apparat* and the KGB. He made a virtue of the country's sovietisation, maintaining state control of the economy and keeping Russian oligarchs and corruption out. He grasped that this country of industrial workers and collective farmers preferred full employment and rudimentary social welfare to the hazards of post-Communism. With the same artfulness, he has used the Union State as a platform to assert the equality of its two constituent parts. In the same way, he used defence integration and loyalty to Moscow's geopolitical model as a means of extracting economic subsidies at the expense of Russia's increasingly cost-conscious energy sector. Since Russia needed to take Belarus for granted, Lukashenka concluded that he could exact tribute. His high standing amongst the Russian public (whose trust in him extends to 61 percent) has arguably provided him with an added margin of safety.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, since coming to power in 2000, Vladimir Putin has used stealth and pressure to destroy this malign synthesis, and Lukashenka has responded with duplicity and defiance. Nevertheless, he has been slowly losing. In 2011, he accepted Russia's poisoned chalice, a \$3 bn loan, in exchange for the 'privatisation' of \$7.5 bn of jealously guarded state assets. In this exchange as in many others, Lukashenka has been weakened less by the threat of internal instability than by his own ham handed approach to Western institutions and the EU. As much as Viktor Yanukovych, Lukashenka cannot understand why the EU would spurn a self-evident geopolitical prize for the sake of free elections and other trifles. He also seems unable to grasp that the West knows as well as he that this prize is not his to offer as long as Russia remains the country it is.

Russia's assault on Ukraine has been a jolt to Belarus's metabolism and Lukashenka's own. The economic implications are bad enough. The sharp decline of the Russian rouble has boosted Russian imports and damaged the fortunes of Belarusian producers. Russia's ban on EU food products (and Belarus's alleged re-export of banned produce to Russia) has led to the first trade embargo against the country since 2010. Yet there is a greater and more existential fear – that Belarus's future as an independent state is now hostage to the war and its outcome. As recently as 2013, some Western analysts were claiming that Belarus was becoming less vital to Russia for defence purposes than it had been previously.⁸⁵ Yet the remilitarisation of NATO policy in Europe and the sharp rise in tensions between Russia and its Baltic neighbours have raised the stakes throughout Russia's western borderlands. These dynamics have brought the deficiencies of Belarus's air and ground forces under the harsh scrutiny of Russia's Ministry of Defence. They are also straining Moscow's tolerance for Lukashenka's perceived petulance. Some of those who claimed last year that Crimea was received as a gift from Russia

84 Grigori Ioffe, 'Year-End Turbulence in Belarus', *Eurasia Daily Monitor* (hereafter EDM) (Jamestown Foundation, Washington), Vol 12, Issue 3, 7 January 2015.

85 Anaïs Marin, 'Trading off sovereignty. The outcome of Belarus's integration with Russia in the security and defence field', OSW Commentary No 107, 24 April 2014.

are now saying the same about Belarus's three western oblasts.⁸⁶ In January 2015, one insider claimed that General Reshetnikov's Kremlin think tank was drawing up plans for Lukashenka's ouster.⁸⁷

In response to his predicaments, Lukashenka is accentuating every contradictory element of his existing policy. Where his views are convergent with those of Moscow, he goes out of the way to advertise the fact. His speech at the UN General Assembly of 28 September 2015 was a model reiteration of Kremlin boilerplate against those who export revolution, produce 'artificial regime changes' and plunge 'stable countries' into 'chaos and anarchy'. But he also is acting like the leader of a state under threat. Having quietly deflected Sergei Shoigu's intention of establishing a Russian airbase on Belarusian territory for two years, Lukashenka has now openly rounded on the idea. 'Why would I want to create a base? Why would I want to bring *foreign* aircraft and pilots here?' [author's emphasis].⁸⁸ Not even seven hours of verbiage at his 29 January 2015 press conference concealed the scale of his foreboding. 'If it had been up to me' nuclear weapons never would have been withdrawn from Belarus in 1994, 'because you see what happens in the world, where might makes right' – scarcely the most veiled reference to what befell Ukraine and why.⁸⁹ Moreover:

“ We don't need somebody else's land. Our wish is to hold onto our own country and surrender nothing to anybody. When I have heard enough from those who say that Putin will come tomorrow with his battalions and grab our territory, I then say that for the Russians there is no justification. I am making no claims on Smolensk, Pskov, Bryansk and Kaliningrad...Belarus is a sovereign, independent state and in no way a part of the Russian world, as many think. And we will make others respect that! Based on our capabilities, we are adapting the army for future conflict. *Our forces must have the capability within half the night to redeploy from Brest to Vitebsk and deal a blow to the aggressor...*I have enough authority and strength to prevent a fratricidal war. If somebody wants to fight, let him go to another hot spot. To Syria, for example.⁹⁰ [author's emphasis]

86 'Is Belarus and Russia's Brotherly Love Coming to an End?', *The Guardian*, 29 May 2015.

87 Paul Goble, 'Russian Think Tank that Pushed for Invasion of Ukraine Wants Moscow to Overthrow Lukashenka', EDM, Vol 12, Issue 16, 27 January 2015.

88 Yauheni Preiherman, 'Minsk Breaks Silence on Russian Airbase Issue', EDM, Vol 12, Issue 181, 7 October 2015.

89 Excerpts from press conference [*Prezident: Global'nykh oshibok my ne sovershill*] <http://news.tut.by/politics/433463.html>.

90 Excerpts from press conference [*Bryansk ne nash: Lukashenko o pretenziyakh na rossiyskie zemli i "perspektivakh" belorusskogo Maydana*] <http://news.tut.by/society/433467.html>.

With greater deliberation, Lukashenka is pursuing five lines of counter-attack. First, he is doing his utmost to be useful to both sides in the Ukraine conflict (hence, the Minsk process) but without any pretension of brokering a settlement ('I will be on call to bring you tea, pens and pencils'). Second, he is solidifying Belarus's long-standing relationship with Ukraine and strengthening his personal bond with Petro Poroshenko, stating that he will 'do anything that Poroshenko asks us to do'. In December 2014, he went so far as to say:

“ Belarus would never allow other countries to use Belarus's territory for military intervention in Ukraine. We support Ukraine as an integral, unitary state along the lines of the acting constitution, which rules out federalisation.⁹¹

Third and in parallel, he is being supportive of other Eastern Partnership countries. Since July 2014, Minsk has been issuing Belarusian certificates of origin for Moldovan fruit embargoed by Russia.⁹² In April 2015, Lukashenka made his first state visit to Georgia. (Like other CIS states, Belarus did not recognise the independence of the so-called Republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008). The visit was a sufficiently bold gesture in itself. But Lukashenka's public declarations were suitably cautious.⁹³ He walked an equally fine line at the Eastern Partnership summit in Riga, showcasing Belarus's membership of a forum routinely denounced by Russia, signing a summit declaration affirming 'respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity', but at the same time blocking direct characterisation of Crimea's annexation as 'illegal'.⁹⁴

Lukashenka's fourth and arguably main effort has been to present himself as the defender of the nation at home. In Belarus as in most other European countries, Russia's image has noticeably declined in recent years, if from a far higher baseline.⁹⁵ Lukashenka's standing has been proportionately enhanced.⁹⁶ His novel promotion of

91 Grigori Ioffe, 'Reasserting Belarus's Independent Voice', EDM, Vol 12, Issue 14, 23 January 2015.

92 Kamil Cafus (OSW), op. cit.

93 'Lukashenko: 'Belarus, Georgia can create solid foundation for future relations', 23 April 2015. <http://eng.belta.by/president/view/lukashenko-belarus-georgia-can-create-solid-foundation-for-future-relations-11909-2015>.

94 Owing to Belarusian and Armenian objections, the Declaration merely states that '*the EU* reaffirms its positions...on the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol' [author's emphasis]. Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015).

95 Grigori Ioffe, Op.Cit. In December 2007, only 37 percent opposed unification with Russia. By December 2014, the proportion had risen to 58.4 percent (according to the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies).

96 A September poll by the Western funded Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) showed 45.7 percent support for Lukashenka's re-election (translating into 56 percent given turnout demographics), up from 38.6 percent in June. Grigori Ioffe, EDM Vol 12, Issue 181.

the Belarusian language after twenty years of neglect might be seen as opportunistic at home, but it does nothing to calm Russian irritation. Of greater import was his election to a fifth presidential term on 11 October 2015. Whilst structurally and ‘manually’ rigged, the election was the cleanest on record since 1994. The changed domestic climate facilitated the release of all six opposition candidates from prison two months prior to the vote. That gesture has given impetus to the fifth pillar of Lukashenka’s policy, rapprochement with the West. On 12 October, the EU suspended most of the sanctions (asset freeze and travel bans, but not arms) that have been in place since 2007.

Today it would be most unwise for the West to forget Belarus. Although Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s initiatives are hedged with ambiguity and laced with guile, they reveal the air of menace that hangs over Belarus and the Eastern Partnership countries as a whole. When the veteran Kremlin political technologist (now turned Kremlin critic) Gleb Pavlovsky warns that Lukashenka risks being branded a Fascist by Moscow, it is difficult to ignore the schemes of Reshetnikov’s institute or dismiss as fantasy rumours about the possible creation of a Mogilev People’s Republic on Belarusian soil.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Moscow would be hard put to replicate in Belarus the measures it set in motion in Ukraine. Belarus is hardly stateless. Unlike post-Yanukovich Ukraine in February 2014, there is no vacuum of power. Its robustly authoritarian president has just been re-elected to a fifth term, if not by the official 83.4 percent, by a proper majority. Its institutions have not collapsed. The ‘vertical of power’ is as effective in Belarus as it is in Russia, probably more so. There is no ethnic factor to play with, no linguistic factor to distort, no ‘independent’ oligarchs who answer to Moscow, no separatist cause to defend and no insurgency to train or finance. Prudence would suggest that some known figure (‘democratic’, ‘reformist’, ‘pragmatic’, perhaps English speaking) is or will be Moscow’s anointed successor, but he or she will have to wait their turn. In the meantime, they will have to contend with Lukashenka, who is possibly the most astute and seasoned political figure in Europe. Hybrid war is ruled out in Belarus, and *coup de main* (by economic pressure) is far more feasible than *coup d’état*.

The fact is that Moscow has no need to repeat its Ukraine gambit. Belarus can build bridges to the West, but under its current regime it cannot go there. Unlike Ukraine, it has no hydrocarbons to exploit, no means of reversing pipelines and no offer of gas to pump through them; it has no Association Agreement with the EU, no Distinctive Partnership with NATO and no Western coalition willing to impose sanctions and assume risks on its behalf. Lukashenka is an irritant, not a threat to Russia, and his objectives are limited. He has no ability and no wish to become the spearhead of another anti-Russian ‘deviation’ in east-central Europe. But as we have seen in Ukraine, Putin does not always know when he is ahead.

97 Grigori Ioffe, Op.Cit (EDM, 23 January 2015).

3.3 Georgia

Relations between Russia and Georgia must of necessity and without exaggeration be called complex. This is because Georgia, unlike Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine is situated on the fault lines of four geopolitical and civilisational zones: the North and South Caucasus, the porous demarcation between Europe, Turkey and the Near East, the ever more fraught divide between the Christian and Muslim worlds, as well as the conflicting undertows between 'East' (Russia/Eurasia) and West. As in the other three Eastern Partnership countries, Russian policy in Georgia is also a reflection of internal politics and imperatives. Two overarching issues, energy and defence, confound efforts to keep these categories separate. So does Russian state policy, which here and elsewhere tends to entangle what the Western mind is trained to distinguish and separate.

The old Russian axiom, 'he who wishes to control the North Caucasus must control the South' continues to exert a hold on Moscow despite the disasters it has repeatedly produced. Yet despite the Great Caucasus Range that geographically separates the two regions, the connections between them are multiple and undeniable. Stalin's celebrated 'solution to the nationalities problem' multiplied these connections by establishing administrative boundaries at variance with ethnic and cultural affinities of long standing. The Soviet model of *divide et impera* (russ: *razdelit' i pravit'*) was designed to make the USSR indivisible. Once the USSR collapsed, it naturally divided. Borders were contested, and tensions and conflicts became almost inevitable. Collapse produced a multiplicity of power vacuums, not just one. If in the European metropolitan centres of Russia, the departure of the state meant the arrival of oligarchic politics, on the Caucasus ridge, it cleared the path to banditry and anarchy. Thanks to their undifferentiated modernist outlook, Moscow's post-Soviet elites, both 'democratic' and 'imperial' sought by inconsistent and insufficient means to cajole, control and repress the presumed culprits: the indigenous religious and clan-based structures of authority, which in the days of Brezhnevian *zastoi* (stagnation) and Gorbachevian *perestroika* had begun to rise from the dead.⁹⁸ The result by the end of Putin's first term was an exponential rise in corruption, lawlessness and radicalism, culminating in the terrorist outrage in Beslan in September 2004.

Georgia, whose border spans almost the entire Great Caucasus Range, could not possibly be insulated from these dynamics. In common with Armenia, it is the legatee of an ancient Christian kingdom with a vibrant civil society, an expressive intelligentsia and the structures of statehood. Yet it is also a multi-national state 'plagued by extreme

98 For a discussion of this dynamic, see Charles Blandy, *North Caucasus: On the Brink of Far-Reaching Destabilisation* (05/36 Conflict Studies Research Centre [hereafter CSRC], Camberley), August 2005.

fragmentation reminiscent of feudal patrimonial feuds'.⁹⁹ The Abkhaz, South Ossets, Avars and Chechen-Kettins (who inhabit the Pankisi Gorge) are North Caucasian peoples, and they have been used in imperial power games for centuries. When Russia sent 100,000 troops to crush the Georgian Republic in 1922, it first fomented uprisings in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, exactly as it was to do in 2008. Today as much as in the past, Georgia's independent character has created a spurious connection in Moscow between North Caucasus 'extremism' and its own defiance, although it was the GRU-backed Abkhaz separatists who enlisted the services of the notorious Chechen insurgent, Shamil Basayev in their war against the Georgian state in 1992-3. Russia's 'special' border regimes and the two Chechen wars, which inflamed Chechen radicalism and metastasised it, only added to the pressures on Georgia's territorial integrity between the recognition of its independence in 1992 and the 2008 war.¹⁰⁰

This context partially explains why Eduard Shevardnadze, who had been deeply connected with the Soviet system and whose assumption of the Georgian presidency had been backed by Moscow, gradually lost confidence in the possibility of retaining Russia's trust and preserving Georgia's independence. The first war in Chechnya (1994-6), which destroyed 'the means of its independent existence', and Russian backing of Abkhaz separatism (thanks to which a minority of 93,000 Abkhaz expelled 250,000 Georgians from the territory) effectively ensured that the psychological effects of the April 1989 'massacre of spades' in Tbilisi would not be overcome. But this is not the whole story.

Shevardnadze returned to Georgia at the height of the West's post-Cold War euphoria and during the warmest period of its relationship with Yeltsin's Russia. Until at least 1994, the United States and most of its allies pursued a 'Russia first' policy, based uncritically on the assumption that the influence of 'democratic Russia' in the newly established CIS was synonymous with stability. The bloody ouster of Georgia's freely elected president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, by a combination of former Soviet apparatchiks, local warlords and Russian special services, passed without comment in Washington as did the sanguinary war in Abkhazia, whereas the even more ferocious war in Chechnya (which, of course, is juridically part of Russia) produced nothing more than hand-wringing. Shevardnadze (whose standing had been high in Washington throughout the Gorbachev era) therefore saw no contradiction between his russophone orientation and his wish to develop the full menu of cooperation with the West, including NATO.¹⁰¹

99 Georgi Derluguian, 'The Forgotten Abkhazia: Anatomy of a Post-Socialist Ethnic War', PONARS Policy Memo 163, Northwestern University, November 2000. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pm_0163.pdf.

100 For a thorough grounding, see CW Blandy, *Pankisskoye Gorge: Residents, Refugees and Fighters* (P37, CSRC) March 2002.

101 For a full and balanced discussion, see Thornike Gordadze, 'Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s' in Svante Cornell and S Frederick Starr eds, *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia* (M.E. Sharpe and Routledge, 2009).

That Russia saw things differently was not the result of Boris Yeltsin's duplicity but his weakness. Russia's so-called period of 'multi-voicedness' was a period of incoherence and turmoil, mitigated by intermittent attempts to execute policy and convert *de jure* authority into actual power. In this precarious situation, the Armed Forces, which maintained 600,000 troops in the non-Russian republics at the time of the USSR's dissolution, found itself making policy by default. Where Georgia and its Black Sea littoral republics of Abkhazia and Ajaria were concerned, this swiftly became an aggressive policy, aggravated by loathing of Shevardnadze, whose perceived 'treachery' was deemed to have destroyed the USSR. Whereas the West, like Russian Defence Minister Andrey Grachev, saw only 'an army of ruins and debris', the Georgians, Moldovans and even Yeltsin's reformers understood that they were dealing with a mighty, wounded beast. In the parliamentary elections of December 1993, the army voted overwhelmingly for the party of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy. Faced with these realities, Yeltsin was constrained to adopt a far tougher policy with respect to the near abroad. The Foreign Policy Concepts of December 1992 called for strengthening 'the unified military-strategic space' and ensuring 'the provision of strict observation...of human and minority rights'. Moreover, security would depend on:

“ our ability to uphold with conviction, and in extreme cases with the use of means of force, the principles of international law...and to achieve firm good-neighbourliness.¹⁰²

By 1994 the Ministry of Defence had identified its chosen instrument for achieving these aims: peacekeeping, or in Russian 'peace-making' (*mirotvorcheskiye operatsii*). According to the commander responsible for such operations, General Boris Pyankov, in contrast to UN mandated peacekeeping operations as they then were understood:

“ Here in Russia, everything is the other way round...First we use overwhelming force, *then* we bring the parties to the negotiating table.¹⁰³

It is scarcely irrelevant that as these views coalesced, perceptions of Western policy hardened. When in February 1993 Boris Yeltsin called upon the United Nations and other international bodies to 'grant Russia special powers as guarantor of peace and stability' in the former USSR, there still was hope that the West would support his efforts. In the aftermath of the Abkhaz war, Foreign Minister Kozyrev's rhetoric at the UN was somewhat tougher: 'No international organisation or group of states can

102 *Foreign Policy Concepts of the Russian Federation [Kontseptsiya Vneshney Politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii]*, pp. 2 and 4 respectively.

103 Michael Orr, 'Peacekeeping: A New Task for Russian Military Doctrine', *Jane's Intelligence Review - Europe*, July 1994.

replace our peace-making efforts in this specific, post-Soviet space'.¹⁰⁴ As noted above (chapter 1), by April 1994 Yeltsin was by implication accusing the West of seeking to keep Russia in a state of 'controllable paralysis'. Five years later, apprehensions were greater and indictments less muffled. The connection between what NATO was doing in Kosovo and what it *might* do in the Caucasus became a fixation in much of the military establishment.

One year after the Rose Revolution and the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, such fears were becoming mainstream. Colonel General Leonid Ivashov (President of the Academy of Geopolitical Affairs and former Head of the MOD Department for International Cooperation) summed up the geopolitical situation in the following terms:

“ Splitting the Caucasus and Caspian region from Russia is what the United States is after....It is the populations of Ajaria, Javakhetia and Abkhazia that welcome the Russian military presence and protest against withdrawal of Russian military bases. For the time being, Abkhazia is more than Saakashvili and his masters across the ocean can bite off and swallow.

He went on to say:

“ The events in Iraq, Chechnya, Dagestan and Georgia are intertwined. Meeting with failure in the Mideast, the United States is in a hurry to set up a base in the Caucasus because the Caucasus is a key to Caspian, Iranian and Kazakh oil, a bridgehead from which pressure may be put on Iran, Central Asia, Turkey, Ukraine and Russia.¹⁰⁵

By 2004 the assessment of General Ivashov (who in the 1990s was seen as an 'old thinker') was converging with that of the Kremlin, much as General Reshetnikov's views do today. In their respective *schéma*, it is the views of Georgia's and Ukraine's 'masters' that matter. Their own views do not count. In fairness, they do not believe that the views of small states count for the Western masters either.

Despite this geopolitical *grafik*, Putin and his foreign minister, Igor Ivanov, were instrumental in facilitating the departure of Aslan Abashidze from Ajaria after the Rose Revolution (much as Viktor Chernomydin had with Milosevic), and this fact immediately muddled Mikheil Saakashvili's grasp of the art of the possible. Far from pursuing the passionately anti-Russian course later associated with him, both he and his foreign minister, Salomé Zourabichvili, unveiled a new model of relations with Russia that

104 Andrey Kozyrev address to UN General Assembly, 28 September 1993.

105 'Black Shadow Over Batumi' [*Chernaya ten' nad Batumi*], *Military-Industrial Courier* [*Voенно-Промышленны Курьер*], No 17, May 12-18 2004, pp 1,7. <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/914>.

veterans of the Shevardnadze system found overly optimistic and naïve. The ‘new approach’ rested on the assumption that Moscow could be made to see the merits of the Ajaria precedent for resolving the more tenacious (and, for Russia) strategically central issues of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In exchange for a cordial and economically prosperous relationship, Zourabichvili hoped that Moscow could be ‘brought to realise that military bases in Georgia are of little value’.¹⁰⁶ Within a short period of time, Georgia found itself flooded with representatives of Russian business, some of whom (e.g. *Gazprom* and United Energy Systems), had agendas transcending the conventional boundaries of commerce.¹⁰⁷ On other fronts, there was no movement; indeed, Russia was probing the interfaces as aggressively as before. When Tedo Japaridze (Secretary of the Georgian National Security Council under Shevardnadze) asked a senior Russian official how long this would go on, he was bluntly told:

“ You turn your back to the West and to your NATO-EU-US aspirations and come back to the Collective Security Treaty and other CIS elements, and positively resolve the military base issues! And then Russia will become flexible on the conflict resolution issues, especially in South Ossetia.¹⁰⁸

Realising that he had misjudged Russia, Saakashvili then proceeded to a more fateful set of misjudgements. Having failed to restore Georgia’s territory with Russian assistance, he proceeded to oppose Russia directly. In doing so, he took little heed of the correlation of forces and even less heed of the mood of Russia following recognition of Kosovo’s independence (February 2008) and NATO’s Bucharest summit (April 2008). Although he understood that Russia had no respect for weakness, he wrongly and rashly assumed that it would respect toughness as a substitute for strength. Towards the aspirations and apprehensions of Georgia’s *de jure* citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, he showed even less understanding. Finally, though the culpability was not exclusively his, he had an existential faith in the backing of the United States, which he manipulated and stretched.

Russia, which also misjudged US intentions, accurately judged its capabilities, which after five years of war in Iraq were woefully overstretched. Having rightly perceived that Saakashvili’s cardinal flaws were those of temperament, Moscow set about using it to his disadvantage.¹⁰⁹ Convinced that he would strike at some point, Putin was determined that he do so on his terms. Exercise Kavkaz-2008 delivered this result. It was a classic

106 Meeting notes from her presentation at the Carnegie Center, Washington, 2 June 2004.

107 Irakly Areshidze, ‘Will Russian Investment Win Georgia’s Heart?’, *Moscow Times*, 11 May 2004.

108 Private correspondence, August 2004. Quoted with permission.

109 In spring 2006, the Kremlin circulated an elaborately forged report, *Mikhail Saakashvili: A Psychological Study of the Character*, falsely co-authored by several real and bogus Western psychiatric research centres.

example of provocation and preparation of the battlefield for the initial period of war as well as reflexive control over the opponent.¹¹⁰

Russia viewed the 2008 war with Georgia as a defining moment in its realisation of a revisionist agenda. It succeeded in its main objective: to take NATO enlargement off the table, not as a matter of principle, but practical policy. Yet it failed to realise two other objectives: to unseat Mikheil Saakashvili (not through force of arms but disgrace); and to de-stabilise Georgia. Instead, like Ukraine in 2014, Georgia consolidated. But NATO had already retreated. On 12 August, more than four days after hostilities began, it convened an extraordinary meeting of Allied ambassadors and, on August 19, a special foreign ministerial session of the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Given NATO's 14-year investment in Georgia, this was a feeble signal to send to both Russia and Georgia. For symbolic purposes alone, the NAC should have been convened at the highest level. Second, having wisely accepted the French EU presidency's lead role in negotiating what became the six-point peace plan, NATO walked away from the process. Military conflict between Russia and a key PFP Partner was NATO's core business, and it should have made its weight felt at every stage.

Lack of any prospect of hard security guarantees is arguably one of several reasons why Saakashvili's party of confirmed Westernisers, the United National Movement (UDM), lost power in the October 2012 parliamentary elections to Georgian Dream, a coalition of confirmed Westernisers, known sceptics and unknowns (at least in Western capitals), notably the party's leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili. Despite the welcome given to this changing of the guard by President Medvedev, Russia's response has been remarkably similar to that which followed the Rose Revolution. Its first, notably conciliatory steps included lifting much of the 2006 trade embargo imposed when relations with Saakashvili were entering their downward spiral. But as it became clear that Ivanishvili's administration would continue to pursue the Association Agreement with the EU (including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area), signed in June 2014, the whole complex of pressures has reappeared and intensified. The rules of the Eurasian Economic Union oblige Russia to apply its common external tariff once Georgia enters the DCFTA. Yet the series of proposed countermeasures now being presented go well beyond this even if they do not approach the scale of those that Putin put to Yanukovych prior to the 2013 Vilnius summit. In addition and more ominously, Russia's actions now include:

“ Ossetian...declaration of territorial claims against Georgia, creation and funding of pro-Russian political parties and NGOs, increased propaganda activities [including] alleged threat to Russia by Islamic State militants [in] Pankisi Gorge, strengthening ties with the anti-Western Georgian Orthodox Church and activation of [separatism] in Javakheti region.¹¹¹

110 CW Blandy, *Provocation, Deception, Entrapment: The Russo-Georgian Five Day War*, CSRC, March 2009.

111 Maciej Falkowski, 'Georgia: Political Crisis and Russian Threats', OSW 19 November 2014.

Two additional channels of pressure have emerged since the signing of the EU-brokered six-point peace plan of August 2008. The first has been the steady erosion of autonomy of the supposedly independent Republic of Abkhazia. Within a few weeks of Russia's recognition of its statehood, the country's then president, Sergei Bagapsh, confided to OSCE representatives that he had already lost to Russia all the independence he had gained from Georgia. Moreover, since the 2008 war, Russia has pursued a policy of 'creeping annexation' of Georgian territory under the cover of 'border demarcation'. On 10 July 2015 it raised the *ante*, moving the border 1.5 km further into Georgian territory, in the process, transferring 1 km of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline to the territory of South Ossetia.¹¹² The timing of this step to coincide with a long planned NATO-Georgia military exercise possibly has more than one purpose. One of these might be info war: to demonstrate the powerlessness of NATO and the futility of the West's pipeline diversification policy. A second might be to enhance Russia's ability to dominate a pre-conflict situation and an 'initial period of war'. A third might be to strengthen its deterrence against 'extreme' sanctions by the West.

In view of these pressures, how is one to interpret the political crisis that Georgia's new leadership has foisted upon itself? On 4 November, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili sacked the three senior ministers most visibly associated with the country's Western course: Defence Minister Irakli Alasania, Foreign Minister Maya Panjikidze and Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Aleks Petriashvili. The simultaneous dismissal of figures who to Washington and Brussels were guarantors of Georgia's geopolitical course is an obvious signal, but of what and to whom? Those who have always seen Ivanishvili's rise to power as a Moscow 'project' fear that their worst forebodings are being confirmed. Ivanishvili, who resigned the premiership in November 2013 but ultimately calls the shots, made his career and his \$5.2 bn in Russia. It is undeniable that the movement he founded includes avowed proponents of and reluctant converts to a multi-vector and more regionally focused policy. It is also true that Russia's financial influence runs far and deep. But despite the country's diminished faith in its Euro-Atlantic future, a pro-Russian position would be ruinous to any political movement that sought to hold power and maintain it.

The simpler and less sinister explanation is that the dismissals are nothing more or less than acts of appeasement. The logic is also simple: Russia is strong, Georgia is weak; Russia is making demands, the West is not opposing them. It cannot be excluded that dismissals were amongst these demands. On three occasions Moscow presented Leonid Kuchma with lists of individuals 'unhelpful' to cooperation. Five days before his inauguration in 2010, Yanukovych was presented with a similar list by Sergey Naryshkin.

112 For a good analysis, see George Mchedlishvili, 'West Will Rue Ignoring Russia's Moves into Georgia', Chatham House, 20 July 2015. <http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/west-will-rue-ignoring-russia-s-moves-georgia>.

Why should Georgia be deprived of such advice? Anatoly Chubays, herald of the unrealised 'liberal empire' and former Chairman of United Energy Systems, had one refrain when conducting business in Georgia: 'Russia is nearby, the West is far away'. Whatever the long-term significance of the EU Association Agreement, it is far away from the average Georgian citizen, even the average Georgian millionaire. Whilst the West is designing arenas, Russia is playing the game.

3.4 Russian 'Counter-Offensives' Against Western Enlargement

One consequence of Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has been the revival of NATO as a serious military instrument in Europe. Yet the Alliance is starting from a very low baseline. In the 1990s NATO's fundamental premise in its relations with Russia *and* its new members was that military force had ceased to be a tool of policy in Europe. For this reason, Germany saw no contradiction between its role as Russia's committed partner and its firm support of the first wave of NATO enlargement in 1999. For NATO the justification for enlargement was political, not military. What military requirements there were would be focused on the new inventory of 'soft security' challenges on Europe's periphery.

When hard power did reappear, it was in a four month conflict with Serbia that only expanded the post-conflict requirement for peacekeeping and stabilisation forces. The events of 9/11 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were exceptions that proved the rule: hard power, but reshaped for expeditionary activities far from national borders. In Donald Rumsfeld's formulation, NATO would become a 'toolbox'. Balanced capabilities were no longer needed; smaller states would contribute 'niche capabilities' to the whole and dismantle such superfluous capability as they had. Thus, in the Baltic states, where doctrinal innovation had been greatest, the NATO accession process curtailed efforts to devise models of national mobilisation and armed forces for 'psychological' and territorial defence against a future threat of 'indirect aggression': exactly the threat faced today.

Far from concluding that its own policy bears responsibility for NATO's reinvestment in deterrence and defence in Europe, Russia's state leadership perceives that it has been on the defensive since NATO first mooted the idea of enlargement. As summarised in the author's evidence to the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 2007:

“ The notion that NATO is anything other than a classically military alliance is regarded as risible by Russia's military establishment. The notion that NATO is not what it used to be—an anti-Russian alliance—is, in Russian eyes, made equally risible by NATO enlargement...Discussions about the stabilising effects of NATO membership, the benefits to internal security, destruction of surplus weapons and toxic materials, force reductions and professionalisation, the demilitarisation of police and border services, democratic control of the

security sector and the right of independent states to choose their own models and partners fall on deaf ears. The premise of Russian military planning and policy has been that any activity undertaken by NATO near Russian territory is a threat to Russia.¹¹³

Nevertheless, NATO has inadvertently reinforced these Russian perceptions in two ways. The first was its model of cooperation. Whereas Russia expected the NATO-Russia Council would become a high-level forum for resolving security issues in Europe, NATO focused the Council's work on practical cooperation (e.g. terrorism, maritime security and, so it thought, missile defence). Thus, areas of agreement received more attention than areas of disagreement. The formalistic and programmatic approach of NATO bureaucracy – defining objectives and monitoring their fulfilment – has not helped. It has imparted an artificially technical character to an intrinsically political relationship. This approach led many inside NATO to believe that relations were better than they were. Thus, the trust developed between technical experts in the joint working group on missile defence left Allies poorly prepared for the Russian leadership's vehement opposition to the US deployment decision. Long before NATO suspended NRC meetings after the August 2008 war, Moscow had concluded that NATO-Russia cooperation was a sham.

Yet these sins of omission pale into insignificance by comparison to the effect of NATO's military intervention in Kosovo. However compelling NATO's justification for launching Operation Allied Force, from that day forward NATO no longer could claim to be a 'strictly defensive alliance'. Naturally, Russian thoughts turned to other areas where coercive diplomacy and armed force could be employed. The widespread charge – 'today they are bombing Yugoslavia but aiming at Russia' – also testifies to this frame of mind.¹¹⁴ As we forecast at the start of the campaign:

“ The most serious consequence of the Kosovo crisis is likely to be the legitimisation of anti-Western perspectives that Russia's moderates have thus far kept under control. [Should] an anti-Western leadership come to power [after Yeltsin], four axes of breakout would arouse interest: (1) 'reviving Russia' by a 'strong', regulated economic policy and a stronger and larger 'Slavic core' (to Ukraine's possible peril); (2) a serious, long-term commitment to revive Russia's military power; (3) the Baltic states, where 'intelligence struggle' will

113 'Summary of Published Material Offered in Evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee', Conflict Studies Research Centre, RMA Sandhurst (hereafter CSRC), May 2007. Also see author's 'Evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee', February 2009.

114 *Krasnaya Zvezda* [Red Star], 27 March 1999. Along similar lines, (then) Lieutenant General Leonid Ivashov told NTV, '[i]f the world community swallows this large-scale aggression, this barbarity, then it is today difficult to say who will be next, but there will be a state that is going to be next in line without fail'.

be enlisted to undermine Western allies and clients; (4) a search for 'strategic partnerships' with India, China and possibly Arab countries and Iran.¹¹⁵

In the Russian understanding, *geopolitika* has always referred to 'struggle' between *ethnoses* (ethnicities/civilisations) as much as 'power complexes'. The perceived integration in Western policy of democracy promotion, civil society mobilisation, 'coercive diplomacy' and military intervention with advanced technology weapons has combined these threats in a new setting and redefined the template of threat perceived by Moscow. It is not as a military bloc *per se*, but as a 'military-civilisational' force – and as a pole of attraction—that NATO is deemed to pose a 'danger' and potential threat to Russia and its patrimonial order. NATO's insistence that new members adopt its liberal-democratic framework enhances this presumptive danger to Russia and appeal to others, at the same time rehabilitating Stalin's maxim that every army exports its socio-political system with it. Behind the charge that NATO seeks to promote a 'civilisational schism' in Europe is the anxiety that enlargement of NATO's political-*cum*-security framework would transform Russia's 'civilisational' model into a purely Russian one, whose legitimacy Russians might increasingly question.¹¹⁶ It therefore is not surprising that Russia's two most recent military doctrines (2010 and 2014) have identified NATO's 'force potential' as the greatest 'basic external danger' (*opasnost'*) to the Russian Federation.¹¹⁷

It is indicative that the scenario for *Zapad 2009*, the first operational-strategic exercise directed explicitly against NATO since the Cold War, began with a NATO intervention in support of Polish 'compatriots' in Belarus and concluded with a nuclear strike on Warsaw. Although the exercise might have served to warn and intimidate, ten years after Kosovo and four years after Ukraine's Orange Revolution, it is likely that its primary purpose was to rehearse responses to potential threats as the Kremlin and General Staff perceived them. *Zapad 2013*, which to all intents and purposes simulated an all-out attack on the Baltic states, probably was conceived for a similar combination of reasons.¹¹⁸

115 James Sherr and Steven Main, *Russian and Ukrainian Perceptions of Events in Yugoslavia*, CSRC, 25 April 1999.

116 See Major General Vladimir Dvorkin, cited in Lilia Shevtsova, *Lonely Power: Why Russia Will Not Become Western and Why Russia Will Remain Difficult for the West* [*Odinokhaya Derzhava: Pochemu Rossiya ne stala zapadom i pochemu Rossii trudno s zapadom*], (Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Centre, 2010), p 101.

117 There are interesting nuances. Both stop short of calling NATO a 'threat' (*ugroza*). The 2010 Doctrine describes the danger as the '*aspiration* to focus NATO on global functions...the approach of its infrastructure to Russia's borders, including by means of the bloc's enlargement'. The 2014 Doctrine retains the same wording but refers to the *growth* (*narashchivanie*) of this potential.

118 Stephen Blank, 'What Do the Zapad 2013 Exercises Reveal' (Pt 1-2), *Eurasian Daily Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation, Washington), v 10, Issues 177 and 180, 4 and 9 October 2013.

Given the emphasis it places on the 'civilisational' threat from the West, it was only a matter of time before Moscow assigned equal weight to EU enlargement. During most of the Yeltsin era, the EU was viewed in a benign, indeed favourable light. Finland's accession in 1995 aroused virtually no concern at all. But after the treaties of Amsterdam, Nice and the 2003 Treaty of Accession, Yeltsin's successors correctly understood that the EU, in its essence, was an integration project. They could also see that this project was designed to institutionalise norms of business, law and administration – not to say political and social life – at variance from those of the post-Soviet world.

It is fateful that just as the first wave of NATO enlargement coincided with the Kosovo conflict, the first wave of EU enlargement coincided with Ukraine's Orange Revolution. By then it was clear that two normative systems had emerged in Europe: the first based on rights and rules, the second on connections, clientelism and the subordination of law to power. Thus, some five years prior to the Eastern Partnership, Moscow concluded that EU enlargement and NATO enlargement were parallel projects designed to isolate Russia from its 'historical centres of influence', diminish its security and undermine its internal order. In response Russia is applying its tools of influence to circumvent the European normative system and undermine it. Even before the eurozone crisis, it first identified and then cultivated discontented constituencies of the far left and right in order to reinforce its own 'civilisational' challenge to post-modernism and liberal Western 'messianism'. The Kremlin's relationship with *Syriza* and Le Pen's *Front National* are the most visible symbols of a counter-offensive aimed against a perceived threat to vital regional interests and regime legitimacy.

This entire civilisational *cum* military context explains why the Baltic region has now acquired such considerable importance. Russia's fundamental aim in the Baltic states is to persuade them (and, as far as possible Europe) that they are part of a grey zone *between* East and West and that they should behave accordingly. In other words, Moscow wants the EU and NATO to recognise that the systemic divide in Europe lies not between them and Russia, but between the 'historical West' and the 'Russian world' (which, as Putin affirms, exceeds 'Russia's geographic boundaries and even the boundaries of the Russian ethnos')¹¹⁹ Sergey Lavrov's comment at the 2014 Valdai Club session – 'Moldova and the Baltic states should consider events in Ukraine and draw conclusions' – is but one of many pronouncements illustrating the gap between treaty-based demarcation lines and the civilisational maps drawn in Moscow. For this reason, the Baltic states have borne the brunt of Russia's policy on 'compatriots': a category with no status in international law, but one that Russia has defined with breath-taking permissiveness. Whilst Russian military doctrines characteristically have defined threats

119 Speech at the Congress of Compatriots Residing Abroad, 11-12 October 2001 [*Vystuplenie VV Putina na Kongress sooteestvennikov porzhivavuyushchikh za rubezhom*].

to Russian *citizens* abroad as a threat to Russia itself, this supposed restraint has largely dissolved given Russia's generous proclivity to provide a Russian passport to almost any 'compatriot' who asks for one. Moreover, Putin has stated that Russia will defend the 'interests' of 'compatriots' and provide them with 'comprehensive assistance'.¹²⁰

Wanting as Russia's civilisational divide is in legal terms, it retains practical relevance in the Baltic states even eleven years after their accession to the European Union. High energy dependency on Russia, *nomenklaturist* networks in business, weak and still poorly professionalised regulatory structures and law enforcement, ambivalence on the part of part of the russophone population and the pervasive power of money preserve pockets of opacity just where transparency is needed. As Agnia Grigas has noted:

“ It is difficult to make clear distinctions between the cultural, economic and business spheres of activity since influence in the political sector is often achieved through economic and energy networks.¹²¹

These factors can make it difficult to distinguish between constructive and malign Russian influence or establish where the latter begins and ends.

120 *Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation [Obzor vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii]*, p 431, 27 March 2007. <http://www.mid.ru>.

121 Agnia Grigas, *Legacies, Coercion and Soft Power: Russian Influence in the Baltic States* (Chatham House Briefing Paper: REP RSP BP 2012/04), August 2012, p 9.

4 Means of Coercion and Influence

Putin's Russia is the legatee of doctrines, disciplines and habits acquired over a considerable period of time in relations with subjects, clients and independent states. Its view of the world and its culture of influence pose as great a challenge to other countries as any particular tool or method that it employs.

Static indices of national capacity offer little insight into this struggle's dynamics or potential. Conflicts are not decided by GDP ratios, but by the ability to convert economic, social and other national endowments into usable power.¹²² Many of the 'powers' of a liberal democracy are latent or dormant. The Kremlin has securitised most dimensions of Russia's far more limited powers. It knows that they are limited, but it uses them to the full. In the long run, such an approach might fail. But in the meantime, it can do untold damage.

The state, as Trotsky said, 'is not pure spirit'. To Putin as much as to Trotsky, it is as a self-interested and self-aggrandising entity. Fear, flattery, deception and mendacity are essential tools of statecraft in what is still seen as an unforgiving and Darwinian world. In Russian experience 'stability', which to many a Western government is akin to virtue, is invariably the breeding ground for new threats. Today as in Soviet times, Moscow seeks a 'dynamic status quo' that puts others off balance and keeps history moving forward. For this reason alone, Russia's neighbours find that issues apparently resolved are rarely closed. Instead, as Keir Giles notes, they are 'stockpiled' for future use.¹²³

The Soviet legacy remains of profound importance. But the Soviets brought little to the Russian matrix that was exclusively Marxist. What they managed to do was revive 16th Century Muscovite principles for 'defeating a stronger enemy' and dividing opponents. Like Lenin, Putin understands that when dealing with a stronger power, the indirect approach is both safer than a direct challenge and less susceptible to detection. Russia's boldness in both Georgia and Ukraine is a reflection of confidence that in its own back yard Russia is stronger than those who might oppose it.

122 After its attack on Pearl Harbour, Japan imposed a four-year war on the United States (and inflicted 360,000 casualties) with a GDP one-seventh the size.

123 Keir Giles, 'Russia's Toolkit', *The Russian Challenge* (Chatham House Report, June 2015), p 41.

One danger in Moscow's policy lies in its *passionar'nost'*: the belief that force of will and moral vigour will prevail over 'decadent' powers whose only strengths are material.¹²⁴ For Kremlin ideologists, the weaker party is not the one with the most to lose but the one who is most afraid of losses. The manners and 'tonality' of toughness have always been important in Russia. Today they are crucial. Its leaders have misjudged 'moral' variables before. The appearance of Western fecklessness can be deceptive, and it can lead to miscalculation, even if unintentional.

The present toolkit of Russian policy includes:

4.1 'Hybrid Warfare' and Hard Power

The essence of what the West calls 'hybrid' or 'next generation' war (based on Russian concepts of 'ambiguous', 'non-linear and 'network' warfare) is invasion by stealth. In 2014, the House of Commons Defence Committee presented the challenge in terms of:

“ Russia's ability to effectively paralyse an opponent...with a range of tools including psychological operations, information warfare and intimidation with massing of conventional forces.¹²⁵

Yet this encapsulation misses two key elements: reliance on informal networks and foreign clients. For hundreds of years, irregular wars on the fringes of the empire, Tsarist and Soviet, followed principles that are not fundamentally dissimilar to those observed today in Donetsk and Luhansk. Such wars were characterised by accommodations with client societies and reliance on semi-autonomous paramilitary structures, of which the Cossacks are the most celebrated. They were untidy and adaptable, covert and vicious. Then as now, these wars had four objectives: to disguise the real protagonists and their aims; to blur the distinction between peace and war, to erode the frontier between civil and interstate conflict, and to exert 'reflexive control' over the opponent's actions. The Defence Committee rightly notes that in today's context, 'such operations may be designed to slip below NATO's threshold for reaction.'

Thus, the protagonists of the war that broke out in Donbas were not only serving officers of *Spetsnaz* and FSB, but retired servicemen and deserters, the private security forces of oligarchs, Cossacks, Chechen fighters, adventurers and criminals. Finance has come not

124 The French social Darwinist, Henri Bergson, had a similar term: *élan vital*. In the dismissive words of a Russian friend, 'Europe is a shopping superpower'.

125 *Towards the Next Security and Defence Review: Part Two—NATO* (Third Report of Session 2014-15), House of Commons Defence Committee, 22 July 2014, p. 17.

only from the coffers of the Russian state, but nominally private banks and businesses, as well as Yanukovich's pocket oligarchs. When 'local' forces have proved inadequate, they have been supplemented by regular troops of the Russian Ground Forces, who in the event strike swiftly and withdraw. For all of these reasons, Kremlin 'control' is disputable; its military backing visible but deniable.

The best defence against hybrid war is good governance. At the start of the insurgency in Donbas, the Ukrainian state had all but collapsed. For years Yanukovich had hollowed out professional institutions and enabled Russian loyalists, agents and money to penetrate the armed forces, security service and police. By December 2013 the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) found itself under de facto Russian subordination. In the days before Yanukovich's departure, Russian-directed operatives were able to erase codes, undermine the integrity of communications systems and destroy records.¹²⁶ These actions crippled the state before it knew that a war had begun.

The Baltic states are in a very different position to that which confronted Ukraine in early 2014. But the same principle applies: 'look for your vulnerabilities, and there you will find the KGB'.¹²⁷ Security and counter-intelligence services are not always fit for purpose; moral and financial defences against corruption in politics, business, law enforcement and journalism are inadequate; whilst Russian-speaking minorities are neither mistreated nor alienated, it cannot be said that they are fully integrated into the social mainstream or display high levels of trust in state authorities. Defensiveness, denial and deflection of responsibility by the latter hinder remedial action.

For all this, the Baltic states might be even more vulnerable to surprise attack than to invasion by stealth. In the words of Michael Hurt, Deputy Director of Estonia's International Centre for Defence and Security:

“ A realistic scenario against the Baltics would be a 'normal' Russian snap exercise that without notice turns into a quick assault on one or several of the Baltic states' capitals. Such an attack would have greater probability of success than the hybrid scenario we saw in Crimea.¹²⁸

126 Taras Kuzio, 'Yanukovich Authorizes the Return of Russia's FSB to the Crimea', 24 May 2010, <http://www.moldova.org/yanukovich-authorizes-the-return-of-russias-fsb-to-the-crimea-209210-eng>. On Russia's role in 2013–14, the author consulted senior security officials in March 2014. See also 'Diplomatic Journal: Pavel Felgenhauer on the Defence of Russia's Perimeter', 22 March 2015, <http://rus.delfi.ee/daily/diplomaatia/zhurnal-diplomatija-pavel-felgengauer-o-zaschite-perimetrarossii?id=71061427>.

127 The axiom of Stanislav Levchenko, Deputy *resident* at the Tokyo embassy who defected to the United States in the 1980s.

128 <http://europe.newsweek.com/russian-snap-military-drill-could-turn-quick-assault-baltic-capital-308752>.

The pedigree of the scenario adds to its credibility. From the death of Stalin to the ascendancy of Gorbachev, the Soviet General Staff viewed strategic surprise and its complement, strategic deception, as critical to the course and outcome of war. Both the 1956 intervention in Hungary and the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia took place under the cover of exercises, significantly at the point when it appeared that the crisis had peaked. Under Putin, this tradition has been revived. Forty years after the crushing of the Prague Spring, the preliminary stages of Russia's attack on Georgia were set in motion by exercise *Kavkaz-2008*. But today's innovations deserve even greater attention. The difference between surprise invasions under the cover of exercises and snap exercises is that the exercises themselves are a surprise.

In addition, the theatre wide context has been transformed, even by comparison to 2008. Russia has used the intervening years to invest heavily in escalation dominance in local and regional war. As borne out by *Zapad 2009*, theatre nuclear weapons are not only viewed as means of *sderzhivanie* – deterring and constraining the enemy – but as tools of de-escalation in war itself.

Nevertheless, it would be unwise to assume a direct correspondence between doctrine (which is forward looking), plans (which invariably presuppose faultless execution) and current or foreseeable capability. Russia's defence-industrial complex (OPK) is again the recipient of priority attention, but its capacity continues to fall short of the demands placed upon it. Some 840 weapons systems depend on Western components that now are blocked by Tier 3 sanctions, and Ukraine's OPK, which continued to function as an adjunct to Russia's own, has halted deliveries, some of them sophisticated and not easily substitutable. Russia's vaunted military might is a mixture of magnificence, muddle and make-believe. The state can rely on potent nuclear forces and proficient elite units, but it remains 'ashamed of what is in the middle', and 'the vast majority of its conventional forces consistently fall short in exercises.'¹²⁹ The war in Ukraine has compounded the strains on this system. Force generation and the maintenance of 40-50,000 troops in theatre have placed demands on Ground Forces units as far away as Armenia, Kazakhstan and Vladivostok.¹³⁰

The Ukraine conflict has been accompanied by displays of provocative, daring and occasionally dangerous behaviour by Russian air and naval forces in the NATO treaty area, as well as hostile activity by border and security services. Over 400 NATO intercepts of Russian military aircraft were carried out in 2014, four times the 2013 total. Large, combined-arms snap exercises have been staged near the borders of

129 Jacek Durkalec, *Nuclear-Backed Little Green Men: Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis*, PISM, Warsaw, July 2015.

130 Igor Sutyagin, *Russian Forces in Ukraine* (RUSI Briefing Paper, March 2015). These figures do not include an estimated 26-29,000 in Crimea, including 13,000 in the Black Sea Fleet.

NATO states (as well as Ukraine) without notification and sometimes to the surprise of NATO commands. Whereas the USSR treated nuclear matters (and arms control) with existential respect since the late 1960s, the past year has seen incidences of nuclear messaging and blackmail reminiscent of the Khrushchev era. On a number of choicely timed occasions, Putin and other prominent figures have issued ostentatious reminders of Russia's nuclear potential, and threats to escalate the Ukraine conflict have been issued more than once.

Whatever the future might bring, Vladimir Putin's record in using force has been based on a cold and unsentimental pragmatism. That record serves as a warning to opponents who fail to address their own weaknesses or who bluff in spite of them. But it provides no examples of reckless behaviour against a stronger opponent. So far, Putin's risks have been calculated risks. Nevertheless, he has misjudged Ukraine, and he might be tempted to misjudge NATO as well.

4.2 Information

Under Vladimir Putin, the methodology of Russian secret services has become integral to the methodology of the state. Information and disinformation are now key components of national policy. History, culture and business have become tools of geopolitics; language and identity have become justifications for intervention and war. Current Russian practice builds upon the USSR's long experience of 'ideological struggle' and 'active measures': operational initiatives designed to disorient an opponent, influence his actions and undermine his effectiveness. Russia's undeclared war in Ukraine is a war of narratives as well as arms. It is based on brutality, bluff, fabrication and the cynical manipulation of ignorance and fear.

Yet in the West, Russian 'information war' is largely seen through the narrow prisms of propaganda, media campaigns and lobbying. Lacking a 'whole of government' approach to most endeavours, it is not surprising that liberal democracies tend to compartmentalise directions of activity that Russians regard as complementary and reinforcing. Despite the importance the West now assigns to 'strategic communication', it is not integrated into overall policy. Financial stringency, lack of knowledge, loss of institutional memory, bureaucratic demarcation lines, short political horizons, intellectual taboos and stereotypes – not to say other acute priorities – compound the West's difficulties of responding to a 'network state' that has been eroding the frontiers between state and private, political and commercial, civil and military, and peace and war. As Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss have documented, it also seeks to demolish the distinction between truth and falsehood.

“ [To the practitioners of Russian info-war], all political philosophy becomes political technology, and the point of ideas and language are not what they represent, but what functions they fulfil. The point of any statement is its effect rather than any notion of truth.¹³¹

According to the 2011 ‘Conceptual Views’ of the Ministry of Defence on the information space, information war encompasses:

“ undermining the political, economic and social system, and massive indoctrination of the population for destabilizing the society and the state, and also forcing the state to make decisions in the interests of the opposing party.¹³²

‘Undermining’ is not the same as persuading. A prime purpose of Russian information campaigns is to sow doubt in post-modern societies already distrustful of ‘certainty’. People brought up in a culture of white lies have difficulty understanding a culture of black lies. One of the purposes of Russia’s black lies is to persuade its interlocutors that they are white lies in disguise. In this Russia is often successful:

“ Western liberal media training proved initially to be no match for the unity of message emanating from Russia. In fact, the opposite is true: the emphasis on ‘balance’...ensures that Russian narratives, no matter how patently fraudulent, are repeated to European and American audiences.¹³³

When combined with blatant coercion, disinformation and deceptive messaging can influence governments as well as television audiences. The absence of armed resistance to Russia’s ‘little green men’ in Crimea was a symptom of state paralysis after Yanukovich’s sudden departure, but it was streamed into a well developed narrative about the ‘artificiality’ of Ukrainian statehood and the absence of popular support for it. Even the US State Department’s first instinct was to ‘off-ramp’ a ‘crisis’ rather than respond to an attack upon a sovereign state. Over the ensuing weeks, Russia’s deployment of battle groups on Ukraine’s borders served to focus Western minds on the hypothetical of all-out invasion and distract attention from the real war taking place inside the country.¹³⁴ President Obama’s robust message of reassurance to Estonians in

131 Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money*, (Institute of Modern Russia, The Interpreter, 2014), p 10.

132 ‘Conceptual Views Regarding the Activities of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the Information Space’ [*Kontseptual’nye vzglyady na deyatel’nost’ Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii v informatsionnom prostranstve*], RF Ministry of Defence, 2011.

133 Keir Giles, *Op. Cit.*, p 47.

134 As witnessed in those early weeks by the author’s meetings with senior Western officials.

September 2014 provided a pretext for a series of provocative actions plainly designed to show that such assurances were hollow. More intriguing is the role of info war on the margins of the Minsk accords. The Russian and separatist offensive of January 2015 was accompanied by suspiciously sourced leaks of Kremlin deliberations about escalating the conflict to the nuclear level. It is not known whether this theme featured in Putin's phone calls to Merkel, though he had made veiled threats of escalation to EU Commission President Barroso only a few months before.¹³⁵ What is known is that Minsk-II was launched without proper consultation with allies, without military input and with precipitate haste, entirely out of keeping with Angela Merkel, who for months had been a stalwart of Transatlantic unity and firmness.

The foregoing examples illustrate five main tasks of info war: disinformation, deception, diversion, intimidation and reflexive control. Russia's current military doctrine (December 2014) is the latest indication of its determination to integrate the information dimension into threat assessment, defence planning, conflict management and war-fighting. The newly established National Defence Control Centre (also launched in December 2014) takes this ambition one step further. Modelled on the *Stavka* (High Command HQ) in the Great Patriotic War, it not only illustrates the state leadership's 'consistent commitment to strategic thinking and planning'.¹³⁶ It institutionalises its intention to centralise the management of all variables related to conflict and war.¹³⁷ In these respects it is the wartime analogue of the political technologist's wish to control reality and, ultimately, create it.¹³⁸

135 The Kremlin's furious reaction when Barroso publicised the comments suggests that their purpose was intimidation rather than propaganda. 'Leaked Putin Comment on Ukraine Spurs Diplomatic Showdown', CBS News, 2 September 2014 <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/leaked-putin-remarks-on-ukraine-enrage-russia>.

136 Andrew Monaghan, *Defibrillating the Vertikal? Putin and Russian Grand Strategy*, Chatham House Research Paper, October 2014, p 8.

137 According to Lt Gen Mikhail Mizintsev, Chief NDCC. '[t]he closest analogy in the past in terms of functions and tasks was the Commander-in-Chief HQ in 1941-45, which centralized all controls of both the military machine and the economy of the nation in the interests of the war' (author's emphasis), 'Russia launches 'wartime government' HQ in major military upgrade', RT 1 December 2014 <http://www.rt.com/news/210307-russia-national-defence-center>.

138 In the words of Russia's emeritus political technologist turned critic, Gleb Pavlovsky, 'in Soviet times the concept of truth was important. Even if they were lying they took care to prove what they were doing was "the truth". Now no one even tries proving the "truth". You can just say anything. Create realities.' Pomerantsev and Weiss, *op cit*, p 9.

4.3 Soft Power

Well before the Ukraine conflict, the very idea of Russian soft power aroused scepticism. Today it provokes derision. In no country could Russia's historical claim to soft power be greater than Ukraine. But it has all but vanished in the desecrated cities of the Donbas. Russia's support for the victims of Ukraine's 'Fascist junta' has persuaded a 'kindred people' that it is a mortal foe.

Yet even today there are reasons to remind ourselves why the subject matters. First, Russia's 'civilisational' attacks on Western 'messianism' have secured both latent and tangible support amongst the discontented constituencies of Europe. The ills of the eurozone coupled with the migration crisis have given additional force to Russia's indictment of post-modernism, multi-culturalism and liberal democracy itself. In the Russian narrative moulded by Pavlovskiy and Surkov, it is culture, history and identity that bind, not 'values', and this critique has resonance amongst many who have no particular admiration for the Russian 'civilisational' model itself. Even in Britain, despite Nigel Farage's endorsement of Putin, UKIP emerged with the third largest popular vote in the 2015 UK general election, a 9.5 percent rise over its support five years before.¹³⁹

Second, in parts of eastern and southeastern Europe, 'European integration' has been a flag of convenience for corrupt interests who are despised by ordinary people. This plainly is the view of Moldova's electorate, the majority of whom have lost their appetite for joining the EU. The same phenomenon is present, sometimes dramatically so, in Bulgaria and Hungary, despite continued majority support for remaining inside the EU. In this respect as in many others, Ukraine is the exception. Pro-European politicians are distrusted, even scorned, but the European idea is a potent mobilising force.

Third, there are perfectly rational and pragmatic individuals who find Russia's network-centred business model more attractive and financially rewarding than the EU's elaborately codified, rules and rights-based model. Those with connections and without moral complexes can make big money in Russia. They also can lose it, but this is not always a deterrent to foreign equivalents of the 'young wolves' who supported Putin's rise to power or to major Western energy companies who believe that their stakes are absolutely secure 'as long as you do what they want'.¹⁴⁰

Fourth, Russia's deceptively coherent advocacy of a rules-based *Realpolitik*, based on the 'Yalta principles' of spheres of influence and 'respect' has reinforced the

139 In the general election of May 2015, the UK Independence Party came a clear third with 12.6 percent of the vote. Nevertheless, they only secured one parliamentary seat. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election/2015/results>.

140 As relayed to the author by a senior adviser to one of the energy majors.

views of many self-proclaimed ‘realists’ alarmed by Western moralism and the hyper-interventionism of the Bush and Blair years. When Fyodor Lukyanov, the most intellectually cogent ideologist of Russian policy, argues that the West has ‘made a mess’ wherever it has intervened, he is echoing a home-grown Western critique reinforced by the chaos engulfing Libya at present. The connection between these misadventures in the Middle East and Western support of Ukraine (a ‘basket case’ and ‘failed state’) is as easy to make as it is spurious.

In unconventional, counter-intuitive ways, these examples illustrate Russia’s points of influence amongst defined constituencies and elites in Europe. Nevertheless, these examples also say more about the limits of Russian soft power than the scale of it. They better illustrate the ‘power of attraction’ of Russian critiques of the West than anything authentically attractive about Russia itself. Even many genuine points of attraction are tendentious. Although many insist that ‘it is possible to do business in Russia’, even the most successful Western energy company believes that a rules-based system would make it more possible. In Hungary, anti-liberal sentiment is high, but support for joining Russian integration projects is minute. Finally, the affinity between Marine Le Pen and the leaders of other anti-establishment movements merely gives reinforcement to the establishment view that Russia is a spoiler in Europe and elsewhere. Its overall image in Europe has plummeted.

What Russia practitioners call ‘soft power’ has little relationship to the power of attraction, and the Russian term is *myagkaya sila* translates as ‘soft force’ or, as we have termed it, ‘soft coercion’.¹⁴¹ President Putin’s definition of the term makes no reference to attraction:

“ [Soft power is] a matrix of tools and methods to reach foreign policy goals without the use of arms but by exerting information and other levers of influence.¹⁴²

The first difference between Russian and Western soft power is that the former is state power, and it is to be ‘exerted’. Moreover, state power encompasses dimensions of activity that Western governments control with difficulty or not at all. What can be instrumentalised is invariably securitized. ‘Russia’s mighty energy sector is an instrument for the conduct of internal and external policy’.¹⁴³ Business enhances Russia’s ‘foreign

141 James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia’s Influence Abroad*, Chatham House 2013; published in Russian as *Zhestkaya diplomatiya i myagkoe prinuzhdenie: rossiyskoe vliyaniye za rubezhom* (Razumkov Centre, Kyiv, 2013).

142 Vladimir Putin, ‘Russia in the Changing World’, 2012.

143 *Energy Strategy of Russia to 2020*.

policy potential'.¹⁴⁴ Culture is 'an instrument to ensure Russia's economic and foreign policy interests and positive image in the world'. The 'Russian World' is a 'transnational and transcontinental association' displaying 'loyalty' to Russian culture.¹⁴⁵ 'The Russian diaspora abroad provides social and humanitarian support for the implementation of the policy of the Russian Federation in post-Soviet countries.'¹⁴⁶

The second difference complements the first. Russia is a networked state in which money and power are closely entwined, property rights tenuous and the distinction between state and private unstable and amorphous. Prior to the Ukraine conflict, half the Russian economy was in state hands, and the other half had difficulty remaining independent. In 2009, Arkady Dvorkovich (then Assistant to President Medvedev, now Deputy Prime Minister), stated that 'there is no legal small business in the country'.¹⁴⁷ Business abroad implies the expansion of Russia's business model abroad. 'Special services' play a facilitating and enabling role in leading economic entities with foreign investments and interests. Ownership structures are opaque. Information is treated as a source of power rather than a public good; 'financial-informational struggle' is the norm. Networked states are good at hybrid wars.

Third, Russia's so-called soft power is intended to divide rather than unite. This is especially true in former Soviet countries, where policies designed to protect 'compatriots', promote Russian culture and 'correct distortions of history' challenge the 'authenticity' of majority national cultures. Terms like 'kinship' and 'compatriots' are defined on the basis of 'history' rather than affinity, depriving actual people of a say in who they are.¹⁴⁸ Instead of getting them 'to want what you want' (*pace* Joseph Nye), Russia's practice is to tell others what they want and 'mobilise those who already want it'.¹⁴⁹

Finally, Russian soft power is rarely employed in isolation from other tools. Invariably, it is accompanied by covert measures and by harder forms of influence. Expressions like 'coerce into friendship' (*ustupat' v druzhby*) and 'against whom are you waging friendship?' (*protiv kogo vy druzhite?*) translate awkwardly into Western thinking and practice.

144 Sergey Lavrov, 'Diplomacy and Business', *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn' [International Affairs]*, 6 April, 2004.

145 'Foreign Policy Review of the Russian Federation' [*Obzor vneshney politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii*], 27 March 2007.

146 'Guide to the Congress of Compatriots', *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn'* No 6, 2009.

147 Valdai Club lunch, 12 September 2009.

148 Medvedev *obrashchenie*, Baltic compatriots.

149 Alexander Bogomolov and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, *A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine*, Chatham House Briefing Paper, REP RSP BP 2012/01, January 2012.

4.4 Energy

Of all the dimensions of Russian policy developed in the Putin era, it is energy policy that has been the most strategic in ethos and content. Russia's economic revival has been the basis of its political revival, and hydrocarbon resources have been the engine of this process. The contrast with the Yeltsin era has been dramatic and far-reaching. Then the energy sector testified to the incoherence of the Russian state. It lay largely outside the tax net and the *de facto* remit of state authority, though as Vladimir Milov and others have testified, it was neither unproductive nor inefficient.¹⁵⁰ When confronted with supply cuts, the first quandary for Ukraine was 'who should we talk to?' Yet by the time Russia suspended oil deliveries between December 1999 and April 2000, it was immediately clear that something had changed. Ukraine realised that it was confronting a power, and not simply a problem. Over four months, Russia's Acting President drove that crisis from its economic pretext to its political conclusion (which included the dismissal and demotion of members of Kuchma's team deemed 'unconstructive' by the Kremlin). By 2003, the publication date of Russia's *Energy Strategy to 2020*, it had already become obvious to Russia's neighbours that:

“ [Russia's] mighty energy sector is...an instrument for the conduct of internal and external policy [and that] the role of the country in world energy markets to a large extent determines its geopolitical influence.¹⁵¹

The energy crises of 2006 and 2009 made this proposition increasingly credible in other parts of Europe. The Ukraine conflict has made it easy but perhaps perilous to forget that geo-economics – the use of economic instruments for political gain – has been a *leitmotif* of the Putin era.

Nevertheless, despite its strategic animus, Russia's energy 'complex' has been a highly diverse one in which gas, oil, coal, electricity and nuclear power develop according to their own dynamics and imperatives. Three dimensions – geopolitical, commercial and 'subjective' (personal, clan, institutional) – have always been in play and, like primary colours, they must be combined in order to see properly. The emergence of *OAQ Novatek* and the dramatic rise of *Rosneft* could not possibly be explained by geopolitics alone.

Until recent years, it was Russia's gas sector that was most successful in devising a system capable of realising long-term goals. In the alchemy of this process,

150 Vladimir Milov, 'The Power of Oil and Energy Insecurity' (Moscow: Institute of Energy Policy, January 2006), pp 1, 6-10.

151 *Energy Strategy of Russia to 2020 [Energeticheskaya strategiya rossii na period do 2020]* (Government of the Russian Federation, 28 August 2003, No 1234-g).

the distinction between politics and commerce lost much of its meaning. Whether the rationale of Russia's 'gas model' has been geopolitical or commercial, it has been the model itself – 'the regulation from a single centre of regimes of extraction, transport, underground storage and sales' – that has posed the greatest challenges to Europe's energy security and market based relations.¹⁵² To the European Commission, monopoly is the antithesis of markets, which, in principle, mean choice for buyer and seller. To *Gazprom*, monopoly is the most effective way of ensuring 'reliability'. From the Commission's perspective, reliability (*aka* security) is guaranteed by an impartial and effective regulatory framework and by 'diversity with regard to source, supplier, transport route and transport method'.¹⁵³ But from the Russian supplier's standpoint, security means 'control of the entire value chain' and hence, as far as possible, the market itself.

Yet this most strategic of Russian undertakings concealed a strategic myopia: the failure of *Gazprom*, *Rosneft* and the Russian state to anticipate the unconventional energy revolution despite its evident prosecution by Western political and entrepreneurial interests. Moreover, EU enforcement of the Third Energy Package has been a slow moving tsunami for Russia's pipeline gas industry. Muscle and counter-measures of a stale and templated kind (support of anti-fracking movements, entryism and pressure) have been a poor surrogate for systemic responses and remedial action, not to say innovation, which is in deficit throughout the Russian economy. The inflationary pressures intrinsic to a rent-addicted system have compounded these difficulties.¹⁵⁴ Russia's new and ostentatiously bold investments in outdated technology (e.g. the Eastern Siberian-Pacific Ocean pipeline) not only risk being uncompetitive, but uneconomic. At a time when the projected cost of ESPO was one quarter the present figure, Mikhail Krutikhin estimated that it would take 40 years for the project to break even.¹⁵⁵

Even Russia's most celebrated response, the 'pivot to Asia', is a Rubik's cube rather than a straightforward task. Asian markets are becoming increasingly competitive. In 2009 Russia lost its monopsony status in Central Asia, which now supplies China with 40 percent of its gas imports. Australia, Canada and the USA are entering the

152 Alexei Miller, address to EU ambassadors, 18 April, 2006, Moscow (pg 1) [*Rasshifrovka viystupleniya Predsedatelya Pravleniya OAO <Gazprom> Alekseya Millera na vstreche s poslami stran Evropeyskogo soiuza v rezidentsii posla Avstrii*].

153 'Communication from the Commission to the European Council and the European Parliament: An Energy Policy for Europe' (SEC(2007) 12) (Brussels 10 January, 2007 COM(2007) 1 final), pg 3 [Hereafter, 'Communication'].

154 Clifford G Gaddy and Barry W Ickes, 'Russia after the Global Financial Crisis', *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol 51, No 3 2010, p 282.

155 Mikhail Krutikhin, 'ESP Pipeline to be Russia's Costliest', RBC, 18 February 2008, <http://rzd-partner.com>.

market in earnest. Yet Russia continues to behave like a monopolist. China long ago took the measure of its negotiating tactics, and this continues to colour relations even though President Xi Jinping is more favourably disposed to Russia than his predecessor. Despite ratification in May 2015 of the 30-year gas supply agreement via the yet to be completed *Sila Sibirii* (Power to Siberia) gas pipeline, it is still not clear whether the ten year pricing dispute is resolved. In July the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) indefinitely postponed constructing its western branch, *Sila Sibirii-2*. Sergei Sanokoyev's summary of the pricing dispute is emblematic: '*Gazprom* refuses, and China does not hurry'.¹⁵⁶

On the eve of the Ukraine crisis, the IEA presented this assessment:

“ Russia's oil and gas sectors are no longer sufficient to ensure steady and robust economic growth as the economy has slowed since the end of 2012 to growth levels of around 1.5%. In order to maintain oil production and export volumes at the current historically high levels, Russia will need to develop new resources, maximise the remaining potential at existing brownfields, make the transport sector more efficient, and develop gas use for transport.¹⁵⁷

Within nine months of Crimea's annexation, Russia all but lost the capacity to follow this advice. In themselves, the 50 percent drop in oil prices and the corresponding fall of the rouble (and rise in inflation) have impelled *Rosneft* to seek \$43 bn from the State Welfare Fund in order to finance its dollar and euro-denominated foreign debt, \$21 bn of which became due in April 2015.¹⁵⁸ The near trebling of capital flight (to \$152 bn in 2014) compared to the 2009-13 average has further darkened the picture. Yesterday's mega project, the South Stream pipeline, centrepiece of Russia's European gas strategy and an eight-year investment in infrastructure and alliance building, was cancelled in December 2014 without a word of warning to *Gazprom's* partners. Thanks to Tier-3 sanctions, which *inter alia*, bar the supply of advanced technology to Russia, modernisation is also off the table. Within a month of the enhancement of sanctions, all Exxon-Rosneft projects in the Arctic were suspended. The industry's response to its current woes has been a burst of project mania (e.g. Turkish Stream and *Sila-Sibirii-2*), but already, expectations have been disappointed.

156 'Russia-China Deal on 2nd Gas Route Postponed', RT, 22 July 2015 www.rt.com/business/310451-gazprom-cnpc-gas-deal.

157 IEA *Russia 2014 Energy Policy Review*, pg 9.

158 'Putin Readies Aid as Rosneft's \$21 billion of Debt Looms', Bloomberg, 17 November 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-11-16/putin-readies-aid-as-rosneft-s-21-billion-looms-russia-credit>.

However swiftly the sanctions regime is relieved or removed, the outlook for the gas sector (and oil) is discouraging. Yet it is not one that will likely displace Russia from 'its position as one of the most important energy players globally.'¹⁵⁹ What it does promise is a future in which Russia no longer derives political leverage from gas exports. It is noteworthy that it has required a war to realise this long-standing objective of Western energy policy.

4.5 The Syrian Connection

The suggestion that there is a connection between events in Syria and the issues raised in this study will cause umbrage to those in Washington, London and Berlin who reiterate *pro forma* that there is none. But in the minds of Russian policy makers, there would appear to be at least two: to divert the West strategically from Russia's primary interests in Europe, which are the West's primary interests as well; to discredit the West amongst the opponents of Assad and its traditional allies, already unsettled by its (possibly illusory) rapprochement with Iran.

Russia's policy in the Middle East is not primarily about the Middle East. It derives from more fundamental interests of an internal, global and Eurasian character, and for this reason, its policy often appears opportunistic to countries in the region and other external players. Nevertheless, Russia's interests are pursued consistently and toughly, and they will not be lightly compromised or deflected. For these reasons, Russia is reluctantly respected by regional actors who are afraid to rely upon it. Within recent years, it has appreciably strengthened its positions in Egypt and Israel. It stands to do so in Iraq as well. Here and elsewhere, Russia's aims must be put in the context of its broader hierarchy of interests.

As we noted at the outset of this study, the primary aim of Putin's regime (and its predecessors) is the preservation of the system of power at home. Today, quite a few Western and Russian analysts believe that, with memories of Russia's Afghan war not extinguished, this still limited expeditionary undertaking puts that objective at risk. But this is a somewhat narrow perspective. The fall of such a long-standing client as Assad would be a serious blow to Putin's image, not a matter of indifference. More significantly, 'the authorities in Moscow appear to believe that by helping Assad they are protecting Russia's national interests'.¹⁶⁰ From Moscow's perspective, Assad's fall would produce another Libya on a far greater scale and significantly closer to Russia.

159 IEA, *op. cit.*, pg 9.

160 Nikolay Kozhanov, 'No Changes in Moscow's Stance on Syria' *Chatham House Expert Comment*, 10 September 2015. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/no-changes-moscow-s-stance-syria#sthash.74JF30xb.dpuf>.

Russia's Muslim population of 20 million is 40-50 percent larger than in 1989 and increasingly radicalised. It is widely predicted that at these rates, the majority cohort in the Russian Armed Forces will be Muslim by 2020, and Aleksey Malashenko has warned that Muslims might be Russia's majority population in fifty years' time. Despite its diplomatic offensives (notably after September 2001 and today), Moscow does not share Washington's commitment to a 'global war on terrorism'. But it does wish to keep *jihadis* out of Russia and the former USSR. This fact gives credence to the research of investigative journalist Elena Milashina, who contends that 'the Russian special services have controlled' the flow of Islamist radicals from the North Caucasus to Syria 'from the very beginning.'¹⁶¹

Russia's second aim, and the main focus of this study, is predominance in East-Central Europe. As Moscow perceives it, its main obstacle is not the resistance of countries in the region, but Western policy. What we wrote after 9/11 bears repeating after the Paris attacks of 13 November:

“ Putin immediately grasped that the tragedy in New York and Washington had changed the coordinates of world politics, and he rose to the occasion. But whereas Western governments viewed these changes with foreboding, he viewed them as an opportunity. It was the West that now needed Russia.¹⁶²

Putin accepted President François Hollande's proposal for a 'grand coalition' with alacrity because of its clear invocation of the wartime coalition that established the Yalta principles that lie at the heart of Moscow's policy. That the French foreign policy establishment has been less at odds with these principles than the German, British or American is well understood in Moscow, as is Hollande's increasingly discordant attitude on the extension of sanctions. Moreover, as noted by the veteran French Russianist François Thom:

“ For France after 13 November, a coalition with Russia is a panacea. In our disarray, Moscow's propaganda has been interiorised to a degree unimaginable even a month before. [Kremlin propaganda] is reproduced by our politicians and media without the slightest degree of critical distance, in a total amnesia about

161 Cited in Paul Goble, 'Novaya Gazeta – FSB Helps Islamists from Russia Go to Syria, Only Worried When They Come Back', *The Interpreter*, 31 July 2015. <http://www.interpretermag.com/novaya-gazeta-fsb-helps-islamists-from-russia-go-to-syria-only-worried-when-they-come-back>.

162 James Sherr, *Russia and the West: A Reassessment* (Shrivenham Papers No 6, UK Defence Academy, January 2008), p 13-14.

Russia's conduct over the past 15 years.¹⁶³

Russia's third aim is global legitimacy and status on an equal footing in any area it deems of interest as well as the extension of UN Security Council rules (which enshrine Russia's veto) to global affairs writ large. Largely thanks to the West's lack of a consistent and toughly pursued policy, Russia's refrain that there can be no solution to the problems of Syria or Daesh without its consent, has become almost incontestable. Less than three months after Washington asked Greece and Bulgaria to close its airspace to Russian overflights, it now finds itself hostage to the hope that Russia can be induced to modify a coherent and increasingly realistic set of aims. These objectives, agreed in negotiations with Tehran (and subsequently Damascus) are:

- to secure Assad's regime and consolidate 'useable' Syria in the populated Alawite areas on the Mediterranean littoral, where most of Assad's secular opponents are concentrated and Daesh is not;
- to help Assad crush these opponents or facilitate their departure, irrespective of the demographic implications for Lebanon, Jordan or Europe;
- to engage Daesh only in those areas where its forces oppose Assad's and, apart from strikes of demonstration value, leave most of central and eastern Syria to them;
- to isolate and discredit the state most directly opposed to it, Turkey, whose aims are almost diametrically the reverse of Russia's own. Although Turkey's downing of a Russian Su-24 on 24 November (at least the third such overflight) probably was not expected by Moscow, Russia could not have been unaware that the Turkmen tribes being bombed were being armed and supported by Turkey.

Over a month before the Paris attacks, Igor Sutyagin summed these matters up in the following way.

“ The feeling is rapidly spreading among the Western-backed armed opposition that they have been betrayed by their supporters: to them, it looks like the West has secretly made the deal with Russia and washed its hands, letting Russian and Syrian forces methodically destroy them. This means a general weakening of the Western credibility and soft-power influence, both in Syria and elsewhere – outcomes very much welcomed by the Kremlin too.¹⁶⁴

163 Françoise Thom, 'Guerre Contre Le Terrorisme: Que Veut Vraiment La Russie?' Huffington Post, 30 November 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/francoise-thom/guerre-terrorisme-russie_b_8680140.html.

164 Igor Sutyagin, 'Russia's War Plans in Syria', *RUSI Analysis*, 2 October 2015. <https://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C560E9A3D1FCD8/#.Vm9w0RFGyCk>.

For the past four years, the West has had a narrative about Syria rather than a policy. As in so many other areas, Russia's successes are the reward for Western fecklessness rather than its own attractiveness or strength. Françoise Thom is probably right to say that 'the goal of Russia's intervention in Syria is to show the Europeans that Putin is more resolute than Obama', and persuade them that Russia is a more reliable partner as well.¹⁶⁵ President Obama has built his policy and much of his reputation on a 'doctrine of restraint'. But the Syria conflict demonstrates that in troubled times, allies and opponents will put more store in resolution and purpose.

165 Françoise Thom, *Op.Cit.*

5 Principles and Recommendations

Russia today is waging what Lenin termed a ‘persistent struggle—bloody and bloodless, violent and peaceful, military and economic, educational and administrative’.¹⁶⁶

The Ukraine conflict is the pivot of what has become a struggle over the future of the security order in Europe and beyond it. Several principles should guide Western policy:

1. Policy must be based on Russia as it is, not on *ex cathedra* beliefs, however reasonable they are. Russia is not an ‘existential enemy’, but it is an antagonist, and its self-declared interests in Europe diverge from those of the vast majority of European states. It might be the case that ‘by working together’, Russia and the West could alleviate many problems in the world.¹⁶⁷ But that does not mean we can work ‘with Russia’ as it now is, have confidence that agreements will be upheld or that goodwill and trust will not be misused or traduced.

2. Without clear objectives, without a definition of the end state that diplomacy and force are designed to achieve, ‘policy’ is not a meaningful term. Russia is a country that knows its interests and pursues them. If the West cannot do the same, it will be at a disadvantage whether Russia is adversary or partner. Process cannot be a substitute for policy. Neither the ‘Minsk process’ nor the ‘Vienna process’ will deliver results in the absence of coherence between ends and means.

3. The first responsibility of NATO is to maintain security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area irrespective of what might occur inside Russia. The aim must be to afford Allies equal security whether they are in the vicinity of Russia or far away from it. These commitments are the bedrock of the Alliance and cannot be made conditional upon Russia’s consent.

4. The principle on which we must base our policy in Partnership countries is the independence and sovereignty of states. We are not there to conduct a crusade. It is not our place to ‘promote democracy’ in Russia or elsewhere, let alone regime change. Russian democracy is Russia’s business. But Ukrainian democracy is not Russia’s business, and neither is Ukraine’s choice of partners. If that distinction is lost, confidence in the West will unravel, and so will European security.

¹⁶⁶ V I Lenin, ‘*Left-Wing*’ Communism: *an Infantile Disorder*’ (1920), Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981, p 30.

¹⁶⁷ John Kerry, ‘Remarks with Russian Foreign Secretary Lavrov’, US State Department, 7 May 2013.

5. The EU must shoulder as much responsibility for European security as NATO. The defences needed against potential 'hybrid' threats are societal, economic and administrative as well as military. For at least ten years, EU institutions have been the lead agencies supporting economic, judicial and law enforcement reform in central and eastern Europe. Their role in energy security is crucial. EU competencies in capacity building require a higher security profile and closer coordination with NATO than exists at present.

6. An effective Western response to Russia's multi-dimensional challenge requires a whole of government approach. But it does not require the substitution of one acute security priority for another. What it demands is the ability to show electorates just how much our security would suffer if we ignore the dangers we face. Unless governments are able to articulate the strategic rationale for their priorities, they will not be supported or properly resourced. Unless non-defence arms of government (judicial, financial, regulatory) understand the defence and security implications of their responsibilities, they will not be fit for purpose. A free media should not be defenceless in the face of trolling, state-sponsored manipulation and cyber attack. The corporate and financial sectors need reminding that commercial interests are not always the same as national interests. Recovery of expertise (and better deployment of experts) is required to provide perspective and to warn. Very little in Russia's 'new' toolkit is new. Much of what has occurred in Ukraine (and Georgia) was forecast but not heard.

7. The issues at stake in Ukraine are credibility and reputation, Euro-Atlantic cohesion and security in central Europe. They will be imperilled if the cause the West articulated in 2014 is discredited or compromised: to ensure, *pace* Angela Merkel, that 'old thinking in spheres of influence [and] the trampling of international law not...succeed.¹⁶⁸ Moscow would dearly love to offer 'peace' in exchange for the surrender of these principles, and it is using the Minsk process to this end. The West has nothing to gain from such a process.

8. Risks are inherent in a contest with high-risk players. Success in such a contest demands nerve, firmness, patience and the willingness to accept costs and inconvenience. In this contest, the West is the stronger party, but it has not been the more resolute. Much depends on whether we recover faith in ourselves and project it. Russia's spurious narratives should not be the baseline for public discussion, let alone government deliberations. Governments must remind the Russians and our own publics of the actual (as opposed to 'perceived') record of the past twenty-five years, and they should counter charges built on half-truths, distortions and falsehoods. We dare not forget that deportment is as important as policy. Russia's leaders have learnt to

168 She added that such a policy would be opposed, 'no matter how long it will take, however difficult this might be and however many setbacks it might bring.' Comments following the November 2014 G20 summit.

test foreign representatives by snubs and minor humiliations, and they draw political conclusions from the responses they receive. So long as our interests are antagonistic, our official exchanges should be business-like, courteous and cool. Cosiness should be avoided. We should not be afraid to stand our ground over small matters. Russians will never extend us more respect than we accord ourselves.

9. There is no contradiction between a firm policy towards Russia and dialogue with it. Putin is driving Russia down the path to self-isolation. The West should not help. Between armed forces and security services, relations must be maintained as a matter of prudence and safety. The full spectrum of diplomacy should be employed to inform, warn, clarify differences, explore opportunities and listen. Track 2 discussions and expert roundtables have intrinsic merit, so long as the forums are not corrupted or abused. The presence of Russian pupils in our schools, students in our universities, scientists in our research establishments and musicians in our concert halls is an affirmation of our faith in Russia's future and our own.

Russia's policies will change when a critical mass of elites conclude that its current course is damaging the country's interests and their own. We can have no certainty about when this will occur, but we can be confident that at some point it will. Today as so often in the past, Russia has inverted the traditional 'security dilemma'. Its manner of responding to threats, real or perceived, enhances the danger it faces as well as that which it poses. Putin's Russia has perfected the art of securing lose-lose outcomes. This syndrome cannot go unaddressed forever. For this reason we should be alert to signs of 'new thinking' in the country. We should be taxing our minds with the contours of a diplomatic settlement that Russia might one day wish to honour. But until these changes occur, the foundation of our policy should be rigorous containment.

List of Abbreviations

CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DNR	Donetsk People's Republic
ECU	Eurasian Customs Union
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
IEA	International Energy Agency
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces
LNR	Luhansk People's Republic
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
RF	Russian Federation
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics