

# The sources of Russian conduct: understanding Russian foreign policy

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## Theory, politics, and the Cold War

In this review I examine academic study on Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, with special emphasis on relations with the United States. It is common, when discussing the study of international politics during the Cold War, to refer to the ‘dominance’, or ‘hegemony’, of Realism, and then to argue that the unanticipated end of the ‘bipolar’ conflict demonstrates the failure of the theory for not having been able, due to its focus on structural features of material power, to foresee its peaceful conclusion.<sup>1</sup> Although there is much wrong with Realism as a theory in explaining international politics at this time, it should be noted that there were other contending approaches that also got the Cold War wrong.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, those specialists writing on Soviet foreign policy who shared realist assumptions, and hence constructed their analytical frameworks on the basis of geopolitics and the pursuit of the national interest, were also unable to conceive of an end to the bipolar conflict.<sup>3</sup> Others, who did perceive change on the basis of alterations in the relative power capabilities between the two major powers, predicted that this would lead not to a peaceful resolution of the Cold War, but to violent conflict. This was the view of Edward Luttwak, who suggested in 1983 that the weakness of the Soviet economy would lead to declining faith in the political regime and ultimately to a greater willingness to engage in military adventures.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to IR theorists, and many specialists in Soviet foreign policy, the discipline of Soviet Studies as a whole also failed to predict the radical changes in Soviet policy in the late 1980s and the subsequent collapse of the USSR. Whilst much has been written on the failure of IR theory to get the Cold War right, there

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<sup>1</sup> For example, among many that could be cited, see Richard Ned Lebow, ‘The Long Peace, the End of the Cold War, and the Failure of Realism’, in Richard Ned Lebow and Thomas Risse-Kappen (eds.), *International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 23–56.

<sup>2</sup> For a trenchant critique of International Relations as an academic discipline see John Lewis Gaddis, ‘International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War’, *International Security*, 17 (Winter, 1992–93), pp. 5–58. A more measured review of International Relations theory during the Cold War can be found in Kal Holsti, ‘Scholarship in an Era of Anxiety: The Study of International Politics During the Cold War’, *Review of International Studies*, 24 (December 1998), pp. 17–46.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel L. Sharp, ‘National Interest: Key to Soviet Politics’, in Erik P. Hoffmann and Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., (eds.), *The Conduct of Soviet Foreign Policy* (New York: Aldine Publishing, 1980), pp. 108–117; Alvin Z. Rubenstein, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983).

has been very little on why it was that Soviet Studies got the USSR wrong.<sup>5</sup> This has recently been rectified, however, with the publication of the edited collection, *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse*. In this some of the leading specialists from Soviet Studies look back critically at their discipline.<sup>6</sup> One of the interesting things to emerge from many of the individual contributions in *Rethinking* is that Soviet Studies was broadly divided between conservatives and liberals, with each side's interpretation of the Soviet Union determined by its own subjective political orientations. Sources may have been scarce, but using those few that were available, different scholars reached radically divergent conclusions about the nature of the USSR, the prospects for and likely direction of change, and what therefore Western policy should have been towards the Soviet Union. Any young graduate student coming into the field of Soviet Studies in the 1970s in the United States or the United Kingdom very quickly became aware of this divide in the discipline, and would ineluctably take one or the other side. Moreover, Soviet Studies was more fundamentally politicized than IR theory. Realists ('conservatives') in IR could (and many did) oppose US involvement in the Vietnam War, and US interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union, whilst simultaneously supporting East-West détente on the basis of theoretical postulates. However, in Soviet studies conservatives opposed détente, and supported US attempts to undermine communist influence, whether it was in Vladivostok or Vietnam, on the basis of political conviction. In a rewriting of history many conservative Sovietologists are now saying that the collapse of communism vindicates their views.<sup>7</sup> Insofar as a small number of specialists on the Soviet Union supported the hard-line policies of President Ronald Reagan, one could argue that they have a strong case.<sup>8</sup> However, overwhelmingly, political scientists working in Soviet Studies, both conservative 'hard-liners' and liberals, failed to anticipate the events of the late 1980s as the USSR unravelled.

### **Ideology and ideas**

What does all this mean for how scholars approach the study of Russian foreign policy? In relation to IR theory, the answer is not much at all. Generally speaking, specialists on Russian foreign policy take little notice of what they see as arcane and often confusing debates on epistemological problems that now seem to dominate in International Relations. Many who try to keep up to date with contemporary writings on IR theory often come away confused rather than enlightened. Recent discussions on theory and 'inter-paradigm' debates often seem to those whose

<sup>5</sup> On the failure of both IR theory and Soviet Studies, see Peter Shearman, 'The Collapse of Communism in the USSR, The End of the Cold War, Nationalism and the State', in Sarah Owen Vandersluis (ed.), *The State and Identity Construction in International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 76–106.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Cox (ed.), *Rethinking the Soviet Collapse: Sovietology, the Death of Communism and the New Russia* (London, Pinter, 1999). Contributors to the volume include Peter Rutland, Terry McNeill, Hillel Ticktin, Vladimir Shlapentokh, Robert V. Daniels, Stephen White, David Lane, Mike Urban and M. Steven Fish, Richard Sakwa, Ron Hill, Bob Arnot, Stephen Cohen, and Carl G. Jacobsen.

<sup>7</sup> See the special issue of *The National Interest* on 'The Strange Death of Soviet Communism', 31 (Spring, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> See Richard Pipes, 'Misinterpreting the Cold War: The Hard-Liners Had It Right', *Foreign Affairs*, 74:1 (January/February 1995), pp. 154–60.

interest is in substantive issues little more than attempts at one-upmanship, playing out in the academic world a paradigmatic play of a kind of Realist power struggle over academic turf. Rarely, in the most recent discussions between positivists and post-positivists, for example, are substantive questions relating to the real empirical world even mentioned. It is almost as if the world 'out there' did not exist.<sup>9</sup> It is thus not surprising that academic specialists on Russian foreign policy should be disinclined to engage in these grand theoretical debates given their own background. Although often located in political science departments, many essentially come from either Area Studies or Diplomatic History with one or two courses under their belt on IR (at least in universities in the United States).<sup>10</sup> Specialists on Russia became such because they had an interest in Russia, and although often their own subjective political views informed their study, it was at least a political subjectivity relating to the real world, and not to a commitment to a particular method or approach. More was at stake, as far as they were concerned, than which analytical approach would attain primacy. At least this contestation reflected real differences over politics and policies. Those few that followed the methodological fads were, we can now safely say, sent down a blind alley.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps Soviet foreign policy specialists did well to ignore the debates in IR theory during the Cold War, given that the profession generally acknowledges that it failed to predict its end. If there is any agreement at all among the IR community it seems to be that theory in the Cold War was far too narrow in its focus, and that it largely ignored what are most often referred to as 'domestic issues'.<sup>12</sup> In his review of IR in the Cold War, Kal Holsti lists what was 'left out' in most analyses—and here it is instructive to note that all the items on his list were actually *central* questions to specialists on Soviet foreign policy: the normative dimension of policy and politics; issues relating to international law; the role of developing countries; technology and change; individuals; and ideology. It is this last omission which Holsti finds most difficult to comprehend, stating that in '... an era sometimes called the 'age of ideologies', most of the major diagnostic strategies neglected to examine, as an empirical question, the role and functions of ideas in foreign policy and international

<sup>9</sup> Thus even the theoretically-inclined Alexander Wendt recently concluded that the profession as a whole now seemed to be worried too much about method and not enough about explaining 'real world' problems. He noted that 'the central point of IR scholarship is to increase our knowledge of how the world works, not to worry about how (or whether) we can know how the world works'. See Wendt, 'On Constitution and Causation in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 24, Special Issue (December 1998), pp. 101–17, p. 115.

<sup>10</sup> There were some notable exceptions in the late Cold War period where scholars sought to utilize theories and 'models' developed in the IR community. For example, IR specialists and Soviet foreign policy specialists collaborated in a number of studies assessing power and influence and comparing the foreign policies of the USSR and the USA. See, for example, Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Pat McGowan (eds.), *Foreign Policy USA/USSR* (London: Sage, 1982); and Jan F. Triska (ed.), *Dominant Powers and Subordinate States: The United States in Latin America and the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> For example Jerry Hough, one of the leading American (liberal) Sovietologists, employed the concept 'institutional pluralism' in his analysis of the Soviet Union. Writing in the late 1970s, Hough actually suggested that Brezhnev's Soviet Russia was '... closer to the spirit of the pluralist model of American political science than is the United States'. See Jerry F. Hough, *The Soviet Union and Social Science Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Not all of the issues that are often placed under this label can be restricted to the domestic level. For example, some questions relating to culture and identity—such as the idea of the 'world socialist system'—had much wider parameters and meanings.

politics'.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, IR has a case to answer in ignoring these issues—but the same cannot be said for studies of Soviet foreign policy, where (particularly the role of ideology and the function of ideas) they were actually key factors to be analysed.

It is worth discussing this further, for although few foreign policy specialists foresaw the final collapse of communism, many nevertheless focused on ideational and identity issues which they considered important from the outset, whereas IR theorists only belatedly and in retrospect recognized them as having significance.<sup>14</sup> IR theory said little about ideology, values, or identities in the Cold War period.<sup>15</sup> In its (re)discovery of these issues a number of attempts have been made recently to develop theories and analytical approaches to make sense of them, such as 'New Institutionalism', theories of 'Learning', and 'Social Constructivism'.<sup>16</sup> But if we go back to re-examine the writings of Soviet foreign policy specialists during the Cold War, it is evident that non-material factors and domestic politics were considered the key to understand (as George Kennan put it) the sources of Soviet conduct. Kennan argued that the Soviet threat would only diminish with changes to the *internal* nature of the one-party communist system. Kennan's thesis reflected a careful reading and deep knowledge of Russian history, culture and politics, gained through academic training and practical experience. His assessment was based upon the role of ideas, ideology, and institutions, and his central argument was that the Soviet system contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction.<sup>17</sup> In a sense Kennan's analysis can be seen as a 'constructivist' approach to understanding the national interest, with his focus on the normative, cultural, and identity-based determinants of Soviet foreign policy. In later years Kennan stated in his memoirs that he failed to

<sup>13</sup> Holsti, 'Scholarship in an Age of Anxiety', p. 39.

<sup>14</sup> Fred Halliday's work on the Cold War is an exception to this rule: as an IR theorist, Halliday took ideology very seriously indeed. One of the problems, of course, in taking these issues seriously is that it then requires a different set of skills and different knowledge: one cannot by definition 'count' non-material factors linked to ideas, identity, and culture. Ideational and cultural factors require a different set of analytical skills, including knowledge of languages and societies, history and discourse. It is noteworthy that Halliday speaks a number of languages, and, to his credit, when he worked on his studies of the Cold War he undertook a study of the Russian language to better understand the Soviet side of the conflict. Few IR scholars, judging by the sources they use in their publications, have anything but their first native language. At least this is the case for IR scholars from English-speaking countries. It is not the case for scholars from 'continental' Europe or Asia. I was struck that a book purporting to offer a new paradigm on IR (a clash of civilizations) is based almost entirely on Western English-language sources! See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996). For Halliday's works on the Cold War see his *The Making of the Second Cold War* (London: Verso, 1985), and chs. 8 and 9 of Halliday, *Rethinking International Relations* (London: Macmillan 1994), pp. 170–215. One could also note here that Henry Kissinger, scholar/statesman associated with the Realist school of IR, has often noted the importance of values in the conduct of US foreign policy, and what he sees as the tensions between Wilsonianism/liberalism and Realpolitik/balance of power. This is a theme in his *Diplomacy* (New York: Touchstone, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> However, Deborah Welch Larson, employing social psychological theories, has explained the Cold War in almost purely ideological terms. She argues, for example, that Soviet and US 'vital strategic interests conflicted at no point ... The main sources of conflict were ideological and psychological': Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: US-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 235. See also Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Identity: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> 'X', (i.e., George F. Kennan), 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs*, XXV:4 (July 1947), pp. 566–82). See also the Kennan 'Long Telegram', reproduced in Joseph M. Siracusa, *Into the Dark House: American Diplomacy and the Ideological Origins of the Cold War* (Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1998), 'Appendix 2', pp. 180–91.

make clear exactly what he meant by the containment of Soviet power, for it ‘... was not the containment by military means of a military threat, but the political containment of a political threat’ that he had in mind.<sup>18</sup> One of the problems was that his original ideas pertaining to containment were first hijacked, and then distorted, by an IR community (of academics and practitioners) whose guiding principles were the politics of material power. Other leading specialists writing on Soviet foreign policy during the Cold War period similarly recognized the role of ideology, and the relationship between knowledge/ideas and power/action.<sup>19</sup> As post-Cold War IR theory discovers non-material factors of power, and focuses more on the politics of identity, and the role of culture, ideas, institutions and learning in understanding and explaining world politics, then that extensive body of literature on Soviet foreign policy that was largely ignored by those interested in theory during the Cold War, might still prove to be useful.

### National interest and the politics of identity

A review of the academic writings in IR and Russian foreign policy since the collapse of the USSR in December 1991 reveals an almost universal consensus amongst IR theorists, foreign policy analysts, and area study specialists that identity and ideational factors are key determinants for any understanding of contemporary Russia’s foreign policy. In his introduction to a volume of papers originally delivered at a conference on Russian foreign policy in Moscow in October 1992, Stephen Sestanovich stated that agreement ‘... on Russia’s national interests awaits agreement on its national identity’.<sup>20</sup> Although there is a consensus—following the collapse of the Soviet empire, the demise and discrediting of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the radically altered external and domestic environments—that Russia’s search for a new identity is key to understanding its role and conduct in world affairs, there are nevertheless important differences of emphasis, interpretation, and policy prescriptions for Western governments and other agencies in their dealings with Russia.

In the Sestanovich volume, for example, Henry Kissinger focuses upon Russia’s historical legacies, the assumption being that somehow these historical roots will result in a missionary and imperial foreign policy orientation.<sup>21</sup> Francis Fukuyama

<sup>18</sup> George F. Kennan, *Memoirs: 1925–1950* (Boston, MA: Atlantic-Little Brown, 1967), p. 358.

<sup>19</sup> There is a large number of such works. For a small representative sample of some of those that were in their time influential in Soviet Studies see, Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1953); R. N. Carew Hunt and others, ‘Ideology and Power Politics: A Symposium’, *Problems of Communism*, VII:2 (March–April 1958), pp. 10–30; Adam B. Ulam, ‘Soviet Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy’, *World Politics*, XI:2 (January 1959), pp. 153–72; Barrington Moore Jr., *Soviet Politics—The Dilemma of Power: The Role of Ideas in Social Change* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1963); Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind: Studies in Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (New York: Praeger, 1963); Robert V. Daniels, ‘Doctrine and Foreign Policy’, *Survey*, 57 (October 1965), pp. 3–13; Daniel Bell, ‘Ideology and Soviet Politics’, *Slavic Review*, XXIV:4 (December 1965), pp. 591–603; Rita M. Kelly and Frederic Fleron Jr., ‘Personality, Behaviour and Communist Ideology’, *Soviet Studies*, XXI:3 (January 1970), pp. 297–313; Seweryn Bialer (ed.), *The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1981); Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet Risk-Taking and Crisis Behaviour: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> ‘Foreword’, in Stephen Sestanovich (ed.), *Rethinking Russia’s National Interests* (Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), pp. ix–xii, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, ‘Russian and American Interests After the Cold War’, in Sestanovich (ed.), *Rethinking Russia’s National Interests*, pp. 1–9.

assumes interests to be related to sustained levels of economic growth, out of which a moderate or extreme sense of nationalism will emerge in Russia, which will then guide its foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> Paul D. Wolfowitz argues that historical legacy is not necessarily a country's destiny, and interests in Russia will be determined by *how* Russia is governed and by *whom*, the assumption here being that the interests and foreign policies of a *democratic* Russia would be fundamentally different to those of a Russia under the rule of a dictator.<sup>23</sup> The logic of Kissinger's argument is that Russia is unlikely to change and should hence be contained now (even though Russia in material terms is no threat) to prepare for a future resurgence of Russian power. Fukuyama would leave Russia to largely get on by itself to reorder society along lines most conducive to delivering high levels of economic growth, thereby fostering political pluralism. For Wolfowitz, the 'West', and in particular the United States, should help Russia in its transition to democracy by fostering a strategic partnership in order to integrate Russia into an expanded democratic security community.

Seven years after Sestanovich's volume was published, Russian 'national interests' and its foreign policy orientation have still to be fully determined, because there is still no agreement in Russia on Russia's 'national identity'. It is necessary to know who we are, before we can properly define our interests. Likewise it is necessary to know where we are going, before we can draw up a map to guide us to our destination. During the Cold War Russia's identity and its destination were defined by the Soviet empire/state and the mission/ideology of the Communist Party. Identity and destination were both linked to the conflict between 'East' and 'West'. Although this conflict was 'bipolar' in the sense that there were two sides, it was multifaceted in terms of its nature, incorporating not only a struggle for material power and influence, but also a struggle between two different socioeconomic systems. When the empire collapsed along with the communist project, Russia was left in limbo, with an uncertain sense of identity and a fundamental conflict among the political elite over Russia's future direction. Without a fixed identity since 1992, Russia has verged on chaos, with occasional political and economic crises, like the

<sup>22</sup> Francis Fukuyama, 'The Ambiguity of National Interest', in Sestanovich (ed.), *Rethinking Russia's National Interests*, pp. 10–23. Of course Fukuyama is more famed for his 'End of History' thesis and his writings on the imperatives of modernization. See his *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992). But Fukuyama first made his name as an academic specialist on Soviet foreign policy, especially Soviet-Third World relations. It is interesting to note that in his writings on these issues he nowhere referred to the peaceful influence of liberal ideas as a force for change in Soviet ideology (a central argument of his 'End of History' argument). Indeed, in these works Fukuyama comes across as adhering to the more classical assumptions of geopolitics. For example see Francis Fukuyama, 'The Nature of the Problem: A Systematic Soviet Strategy for the Third World?', in Dennis L. Bark (ed.), *The Red Orchestra: Instruments of Soviet Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), pp. 32–46; and Francis Fukuyama, 'Military Aspects of US-Soviet Competition in the Third World', in Marshall D. Shulman (ed.), *East-West Tensions in the Third World* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1986), pp. 181–221. As with many IR theorists Fukuyama came late to recognizing the influences of identity and ideas on radical political change—although, with creative energy, he very quickly capitalized upon them. It is also true that his original thesis on the end of History was published in article form as the Cold War was still in the process of unravelling in 1989. Since then Fukuyama has further demonstrated his ability in quickly but skilfully addressing the salient moral and social issues of the day. See Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (Touchstone Books, 1995; and *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Paul D. Wolfowitz, 'The US–Russian Strategic Partnership', in Sestanovich (ed.), *Rethinking Russia's National Interests*, pp. 52–67.

dispute in Chechnya and Yeltsin's siege of the White House, leading to violent conflict.

It should be noted here that media coverage, theories linked to processes of globalization, and much comparative political analysis tend to view Russia's post-communist development, along with other former communist states, in terms of 'transition', the assumption being that Russia is, albeit with all kinds of difficulties, inexorably moving towards a market economy and liberal democracy.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the logic implies, Russia does have an emerging identity (as a democratic state) linked closely to its new destination (as a modern capitalist economy). However, this downplays the politics of contemporary Russia where these questions are contested. Transitologists therefore tend to ignore Russian history and culture, and to assume, in determinist fashion, that all post-communist societies are following the same trajectory. This can be contrasted with Kissinger's thesis, where too much is read into a history based upon the machinations of individual great statesmen. Neither of these approaches pay attention to social history and culture. To anyone who has spent time in contemporary Russia it is evident that moral, cultural and ideational factors make any prospect for democratic development and the construction of mature capitalism a dim hope, at least in the near term. This is an argument put forward by the sociologist Tim McDaniel, who suggests that if these cultural and moral questions are not confronted and Russian reformers and '... their foreign mentors ... continue to insist that reform of Russia is primarily a technical and economic question, it is all the more likely that capitalism will continue to be wild and immoral, and that formal democracy will have a profoundly antidemocratic content'.<sup>25</sup> This has important implications for both the conduct of Russian foreign policy, and for how the West, and in particular the United States, should deal with Russia during these difficult times.

### **Democratization and 'Westernization'**

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the political leadership in Moscow under Yeltsin denounced the communist past and set out to construct a new democratic future as part of the capitalist West. This 'westernizing' approach to Russian foreign policy has been well documented in Western academic accounts of the early years of post-Soviet Russia.<sup>26</sup> It was assumed that the objective was to transcend the traditional imperatives of geopolitics and strategic balances of power to integrate Russia into what was commonly referred to by Russian reformers as the 'civilized

<sup>24</sup> This literature is huge. For a critical appraisal see Richard Sakwa, *Postcommunism* (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Tim McDaniel, *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Bruce D. Porter, 'Russian and Europe After the Cold War: The Interaction of Domestic and Foreign Policies', in Celeste A. Wallander (ed.), *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996), pp. 121–45. In this excellent essay Porter demonstrates how internal foreign policy orientations are profoundly affected by the external post-Cold War security environment. He lists three categories of external threats that impact on internal debates and ultimately foreign policy strategies: objective, perceived, and contrived. Following an initial pro-Western orientation, political elites have been contriving the idea of a Western external threat.

nations'. Yet many specialists on Russian foreign policy recognized at the outset that the policies being pursued to achieve these stated aims were somewhat 'utopian'. Under the direction of Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in this early period foreign policy did not enjoy the support of critical domestic constituencies. In an uncertain, changing, and complex institutional setting, there were no clear divisions of competencies in the formulation and implementation of policy. This in itself made it difficult to conduct coherent policy, and has been well documented in the works of Neil Malcolm and others.<sup>27</sup> Yet it was the absence of consensus, outside a very small circle of officials, that undermined the legitimacy of these 'pro-western' policies. Foreign policy was heavily criticized from all sides of the political spectrum for not placing sufficient emphasis on neighbouring states that were formerly part of the USSR, and for making what were seen as a never-ending series of unilateral concessions to the United States.

The role of internal factors on Russian foreign policy has been a major focus of analysis among Western specialists, and some useful studies have been undertaken which highlight the political level rather than those relating to capabilities. Most common have been examinations of different institutional groups' perceptions, from which typologies of competing foreign policy orientations have been identified.<sup>28</sup> The one clear conclusion from these assessments of internal debates is that the initial dominance in policy circles of the 'liberal westernizers' soon gave way to a more 'conservative' and 'pragmatic nationalist' approach to foreign policy. Following the very large vote for the nationalists and communists in the Duma elections in 1993, even the person most closely associated with the liberal Westernizing orientation, Andrei Kozyrev, toned down his own pro-Western rhetoric, taking on a more 'pragmatic' nationalist approach. Clearly, responses to the nationalist mood within Russia were having a much greater impact than any preferences of the Western states. This was reinforced in the subsequent elections to the Duma in 1995 (in which the communists came out on top) following which Yevgeny Primakov, associated with a more hard-line stance towards the West, replaced Kozyrev as foreign minister. A more assertive policy began to emerge at this time, especially in relation to the 'near abroad' of former Soviet Republics.<sup>29</sup>

What is perhaps most interesting in reviewing these recent works on Russian foreign policy is the focus of many studies, although not always within any rigorous theoretical framework, on the politics of identity and culture. In many ways one can see this as a continuation of the earlier Cold War scholarship on Soviet foreign policy with its stress on ideology. But it also now links up with similar ideas being debated among the community of IR theorists. In the same way that one cannot explain, say, the international politics of Germany or Japan through the theoretical lens of neorealism (one thinks here of John Mearsheimer's predictions as the Cold

<sup>27</sup> Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> Alex Pravda, 'The Politics of Foreign Policy', in Stephen White, Alex Pravda, and Zvi Gitelman (eds.), *Developments in Russian and Post-Soviet Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 208–36. See also Neil Malcolm and Alex Pravda, 'Introduction', in Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 1–32.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander V. Kozhemiakin and Roger E. Kanet, 'Russia and Its Western Neighbours in the "Near Abroad"', in Roger E. Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemiakin (eds.), *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 28–48.

War was ending<sup>30</sup>) it is also not possible to explain Russian foreign relations through the prism of power politics. Cultural and societal changes and the norms that these foster are considered to be the key factors in explaining the development of the non-militaristic policies of postwar Japan and Germany.<sup>31</sup>

The cultural-institutional context is important in the development of security and foreign policies and in the construction of concepts of the national interest. It matters what type of institutions a state has, and the form that this takes is dependent upon cultural factors linked to the politics of identity. In the absence of a real threat (or the perception of threat) Russia has nevertheless taken a strong anti-Western stance on issues such as Iraq and NATO expansion. Studies have demonstrated through careful assessments of elite discourse, official statements, policy documents, strategic concepts and opinion polls, that the expansion of NATO is not perceived as a real threat to Russia in military terms. In Russia the main issue with NATO expansion relates to questions of prestige, status, identity, and domestic politics. Although exogenous factors and the structure of the international system are not here seen as determining Russian security and foreign policies (at least in realist terms relating to the balance of power), international factors do help to shape state identities.<sup>32</sup> Political leaders who make policy do respond to the external strategic environment, but they do so on the basis of their own perceptions of the world and the realities of domestic politics. Specialists have sought to explain the radical changes in Soviet foreign policy in the late 1980s by focusing on changing elite perceptions of the external environment and re-conceptualizations of interests and identities linked not only to strategic issues but, more particularly, to ideological and ideational factors.<sup>33</sup>

Jeffrey Checkel has demonstrated, in analysing Soviet behaviour at the end of the Cold War, that international political change can occur through *ideas* as well as power and material interests. His argument is that ideas and new knowledge had a decisive influence in the foreign policy changes under Gorbachev, with a key role performed by a small number of policy 'entrepreneurs' operating through particular domestic institutions.<sup>34</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson has similarly argued in a case study of Soviet policy leading to the withdrawal from Afghanistan, that changes in policy were due to a mobilization of new ideas that resulted in changes to institutions and ultimately to changes in international structure.<sup>35</sup> As with other studies in this genre, for Mendelson the key to understanding these radical changes is the important influence of 'expert communities', the role of individuals and institutions at the

<sup>30</sup> John Mearsheimer, 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War', *International Security*, 15:1 (1990), pp. 5–56. See also Kenneth N. Waltz, 'The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security*, 18:2 (1993), pp. 44–79.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas U. Berger, 'Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan', in Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 317–46.

<sup>32</sup> See Alexander Wendt, 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory', *International Organization*, 41:3 (1987), pp. 335–70.

<sup>33</sup> See Peter Shearman, 'New Political Thinking Reassessed', *Review of International Studies*, 19:2 (1993), pp. 139–59; also Robert G. Herman, 'Identity, Norms, and National Security: The Soviet Foreign Policy Revolution and the End of the Cold War', in Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 271–316.

<sup>34</sup> Jeff Checkel, 'Ideas, Institutions, and Gorbachev's Foreign Policy Revolution', *World Politics*, 45 (January, 1993), pp. 271–300.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah E. Mendelson, *Changing Course: Ideas, Politics, and the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

domestic level, rather than assessments relating to material state interests, as in realist theories.

However, in post-Soviet Russia, whilst it is much easier, in the absence of the rigid censorship and ideological controls that were a feature of the Soviet system, to articulate and propagate new ideas, it is much more difficult to get them implemented. Checkel notes in an updated version of his earlier thesis that the different institutional setting is now less autonomous and centralized, which makes it easier for ideas to filter up to the top. However, due to the fact that the elite is no longer insulated from societal pressures, it is actually more difficult for policy entrepreneurs to make a difference.<sup>36</sup> Now, politics matter much more. As in Robert Putnam's conception of two-level games, the Russian foreign policy elite needs to balance the representation of domestic interests and pressures whilst minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.<sup>37</sup> Yeltsin's foreign policy approach towards the West, for example, has consistently been complicated by the need to balance domestic interests that have been stridently critical of US, NATO, and IMF policies and actions. And these interests are not simply reflections of material power, but are defined through far more complex processes of social and political developments. It is on these developments that most contemporary specialists on Russian foreign policy focus their analysis: as Lena Jonson states it is '... apparent to most observers that Russian foreign policy is dependent on the power constellations of domestic politics'.<sup>38</sup>

### **Russia and the United States**

With the end of the Cold War two basic views emerged about the effect political and social developments would have on Russian foreign policy. The prospects for improved bilateral relations with the United States were good, since, one view posited, the normative orientations of Russian leaders on questions of international security and cooperation were now similar to those of the US.<sup>39</sup> Those who held this view, however, argued that this normative orientation conducive to cooperation would only survive if the United States committed itself to helping Russia integrate into the Western liberal international order. According to the second view, Russian authoritarian traditions would not alter radically, and interests would be defined in more aggressive policies that could threaten the West.<sup>40</sup> Among Western scholars of

<sup>36</sup> Jeff T. Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behaviour and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games', *International Organization*, 42 (1988), pp. 427–60.

<sup>38</sup> Lena Jonson, 'The Foreign Policy Debate in Russia: In Search of a National Interest', *Nationalities Papers*, 22:1 (1994), pp. 175–91, p. 175.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Kull, 'Cooperation or Competition: The Battle of Ideas in Russia and the USA', in James E. Goodby (ed.), *Regional Conflicts: The Challenge to US-Russian Cooperation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 209–23.

<sup>40</sup> This view is more closely linked to a small number of specialists who have been active in policy circles. See for example Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'A Geostrategy for Eurasia', *Foreign Affairs*, 76:5 (September–October, 1997), pp. 50–64. Sergei Kortunov states that in this article Brzezinski 'goes further than the plans of Nazi Germany', for, unlike Hitler, Brzezinski implies that it would be best for international stability if Russia were split into three separate states: Sergei Kortunov, 'Is The Cold War Really Over?', *International Affairs* (Moscow), 44:5 (1998), pp. 141–54, esp. p. 154.

Russian domestic politics there is a division (some would see this as a new ideological/political divide) between optimists and pessimists over the prospects for democracy in Russia.<sup>41</sup> In terms of how this relates to foreign affairs and US–Russian relations the big question is becoming: who will be to blame for ‘losing Russia’: the West or Russia, the IMF or the old *nomenklatura*? A consensus seems to be emerging among specialists on Russian foreign relations that in large part it is the West that is to be blamed, due to policies that have not taken sufficient and careful account of the social and cultural issues relating specifically to questions of identity in post-Soviet Russia. One can perhaps locate the second view above within a broadly realist understanding of inter-state relations, focusing more upon traditional state interests, geopolitical concerns, and historical imperial tendencies, whereas the first view reflects a more eclectic group of assumptions that cannot easily be defined in terms of a single theoretical approach (although ideas close to both neoliberal institutionalism in some cases and social constructivism in others can be identified).

In an assessment of the likely direction of Bill Clinton’s policy towards Russia following his election in 1992, Michael Cox noted that Clinton had criticized his predecessor’s policies on three basic counts, arguing that George Bush’s Soviet strategy had failed due to (1) too much loyalty to Gorbachev, (2) a concern with order rather than the promotion of democracy, and (3) failing to provide economic assistance to facilitate transition to the capitalist market.<sup>42</sup> Cox noted that Clinton’s stated goal was to construct a ‘strategic alliance’, or new ‘democratic partnership’, with Russia. However, many Soviet foreign policy specialists have taken Clinton to task for focusing policy only on Yeltsin, and for a lack of concern with internal developments in Russian society as a whole. Clinton has also been criticized for directing the relatively small amounts of economic assistance into the hands of a corrupt elite. Insofar as a partnership was formed, one could argue, it has been with a small group of mainly corrupt new capitalists who gained their wealth through fireside sales of Russian state enterprises. The so-called ‘Washington Consensus’ under Clinton, with its emphasis upon liberalization and privatization, came to be widely attacked by many specialists on Russia for lacking any proper calculation regarding its suitability to Russian conditions, and for ignoring societal factors. What was absent in assessments of Russia’s predicament was the moral dimension. Many specialists argue that properly monitored assistance for the construction of institutions would have been much more useful in improving Russia’s prospects for democracy, and in establishing a functioning market economy, than simply encouraging the selling of state assets to a closed circle of oligarchs surrounding Yeltsin. Distributing state assets to this small group in the absence of proper legal institutional structures, whilst the rest of the population’s savings were wiped out and many people worked without receiving wages, was hardly conducive to the development of a stable and democratic society based upon moral principles. The infrastructure of modern society (such as education, public housing, and the health

<sup>41</sup> For example see Michael McFaul, ‘The Perils of Protracted Transition’, and Dmitry Glinski and Peter Reddaway, ‘The Ravages of Market Bolshevism’, both in *Journal of Democracy*, 10:2 (April, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Cox, ‘The Necessary Partnership? The Clinton Presidency and Post-Soviet Russia’, *International Affairs*, 70:4, pp. 635–58. For a more recent debate on whether or not the Bush administration got its Russia policy wrong, see various postings on the *Johnson Russia List*, June/July 1999, with contributions from Ira Straus, Melvin A. Goodman, and Fritz Ermath.

system) has been decaying at the same time that a small number of former communist officials have enriched themselves. A postmodern America is seen by many Russians as enforcing a process of demodernization on the Russian state.

Janine Wedel relates the story of how the Clinton administration channelled its aid to Russia through private programmes to a small clique of Kremlin aides, resulting in the transfer of huge sums of cash into private hands through corrupt means. Banks purchased companies for ridiculously small figures in auctions that the banks themselves ran. The Harvard team that was awarded the contract to disburse and manage aid to Russia did not even have to compete in a tendering process, and ultimately it too was caught up in allegations of corruption.<sup>43</sup> By making a strategic partnership with a small clique around Yeltsin, the United States ultimately undermined its own interests in Russia (assuming those to be the development of democracy, stability, and the market) by helping to foster hostility to Western-style liberalism among a large cross-section of Russian society. The irony here is that propaganda from Soviet days about the inequities of Western capitalism is seen by many ordinary Russian citizens to have been verified through the experience of really existing transition. In this context, Raymond Garthoff has noted that the strong support for the communists in Russia in the late 1990s comes not from those privileged by the old Soviet order, but from those hurt most by the reforms of the new order.<sup>44</sup>

Yeltsin's war in Chechnya, his enforced dissolution of the parliament in 1993, his tendency to fire prime ministers through what often seems little more than a jealous whim, or perhaps to prevent allegations of corruption reaching his own family, all add to the general decline in moral and ethical standards within society. Under such circumstances it is possible to foresee a new form of authoritarianism where a more assertive sense of nationalism will provide the cement gluing the state together, providing it with a new sense of identity that again will become essentially anti-West. Some also see the prospects of anarchy and chaos as Russia becomes a failed state, with the centre no longer able to collect taxes and maintain governing control over the regions. Either one of these two scenarios would perhaps be the logical corollary of a Western policy advocated by that small band of Realists who still think of international politics in terms of game metaphors, where the internal dynamics of states is largely discounted.<sup>45</sup> Yet the new literature in IR on 'democratization' as a process (as opposed to the 'democratic peace' thesis with its focus on the outcome) suggest that the transition period can easily lead to dangerous and aggressive foreign policies. Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, for example, examines the effects of democratization and concludes that elections are being used in Russia by nationalists and communists to erect a new world view based upon '... a complex structure that connects three foreign policy elements—imperialism, neo-Eurasianism, and anti-Westernism—to the closely related idea that is concerned

<sup>43</sup> Janine Wedel, *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe, 1989–1998* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), see especially chapter 4.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, 'Western Efforts to Shape Post-Soviet Behavior: Contemporary Developments in Historical Perspective', in Karen Dawisha (ed.), *The International Dimension of Post-Communist Transitions in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 1997), pp. 13–32, esp. p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> The title of Brzezinski's recent book is indicative of the approach of this school: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

primarily with Russia's domestic situation—the concept of a “third way”.<sup>46</sup> The fundamental defining characteristic of the third way, Kozhemiakin argues, is a rejection of and a *challenge to* the West. Thus, problematical democratization could easily lead to a Russian foreign policy guided by an identity in conflict with the West, as it was in the Cold War. This time the nature of this conflict would not be the same, due to differences in power capabilities and the absence of an ideological divide based upon political economy. It would be a conflict based upon cultural differences as articulated by the new nationalist elite. Perhaps we can understand Primakov's call for a ‘strategic triangle’ to incorporate Russia, China, and India to counter-pose US ‘unipolarism’ as an example of this tendency.<sup>47</sup>

It is generally acknowledged that Clinton's policies have actually served to strengthen the anti-Western forces in Russia. This is the case not only in relation to the manner in which economic aid has been administered, but also in other areas of substantive policy. Part of Gorbachev's new thinking in Soviet foreign policy was the idea of a ‘common European home’. Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin sought to have Russia integrated into a wider Euro-Atlantic community, and although this was linked to material incentives (aid and trade), it also reflected an internal debate about Russia's fundamental identity.<sup>48</sup> For the first time since Peter the Great, Russia's leadership was setting out on a path of integrating itself into the West. The US-led process of NATO expansion has had a great impact on this debate. Most academic specialists who know Russia have opposed this policy, resulting in a coalition of forces which includes those from the left and the right of the political spectrum, whereas many of those who are in favour of NATO expansion know little of Russia, and/or base their views on realist assumptions.<sup>49</sup> For most analysts NATO expansion is wrong, insofar as it is a limited expansion that has excluded Russia, due to the potential it has to strengthen the forces of reaction and hyper-nationalism. A limited expansion of NATO to incorporate former communist states in East Central Europe is helping to redefine the boundaries of the common European home, with Russia still left on the outside. The majority of Russians, the elite and the wider population, has been consistently opposed to NATO expanding closer to Russia's borders, not out of any sense of direct military threat, but due to psychological factors linked to questions of prestige and identity.<sup>50</sup> Specialists on

<sup>46</sup> Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, *Expanding the Zone of Peace? Democratisation and International Security* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1998), p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> It is true that Primakov made this suggestion in a discourse that fits neatly into classical balance of power terms. He stated that it was desirable to tie the ‘... three great states occupying a large part of Eurasia in a strategic alliance in order to create a new pole in world politics’. See *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, December 22, 1998. However, as many demonstrate, this has to be seen in the context not only of material power considerations, but also in terms of identity, status, and prestige.

<sup>48</sup> The debate concerning Russia's relationship with Europe can be traced back to that between the Slavophiles and westernizers of the 19th century. See Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>49</sup> On the various positions relating to NATO expansion and Russia see Peter Shearman, ‘NATO Expansion and the Russian Question’, in Robert G. Patman (ed.), *Security in a Post-Cold War World* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 157–80, and Peter Shearman, ‘Russian and NATO Enlargement: The Case Against’, in Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross (eds.), *Russia After the Cold War* (Harlow, UK: Addison Wesley, 1999), pp. 299–316.

<sup>50</sup> Interviewing a large number of senior political and military figures in Russia in 1996, Flora Lewis found widespread opposition to NATO expansion. She was struck by the fact that in almost every case opposition did not come from fear about NATO's intentions or security dilemmas, but rather ‘... again and again, psychological factors [were] given pre-eminence’. See Flora Lewis, ‘Why NATO—Not the United States—Frightens Russia’, *Transition* (23 February, 1996), pp. 50–51.

Russia were not surprised by the strong negative reaction of Russian officials to NATO's military action against Yugoslavia over Kosovo. Despite the fact that the media in Russia is predominantly owned by a very small group of oligarchs whose self-perceived interests are in maintaining Russia's pro-Western orientation, opinion polls still found that the vast majority of Russians were totally opposed to NATO's actions.<sup>51</sup> For those whose focus is not on Russia's material capabilities (acknowledged to be limited) but on issues of identity, then NATO's bombing will only serve the interests of political leaders who advocate a 'third' and more nationalistic 'way' for Russia's future. Russia is being left out of the co-binding practices, the networks of institutional cooperation, the integrating (and pacifying) intergovernmental organizations and regimes that together (or so it is thought by Liberal theorists) help to manage anarchy in world politics in ways that can prevent violent conflict.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

We now know much about Russian foreign policy. We are no longer denied access to people, society, and documentary sources as we used to be in the Cold War period. Now many IR theorists and specialists on Russian foreign policy share similar assumptions about some of the important determinants of political/social action in world politics. Now is the time to speak to one another, and to perhaps engage in joint research projects where respective skills are pooled in a joint endeavour to further what we know about world politics in a way that could be constructive for policy. As Stephen F. Cohen puts it, 'Getting Russia right is not just an academic matter'.<sup>53</sup> Given Russia's geographical position, its demographic make-up, and its power resources, the direction it takes in its foreign policy will have a major impact on world politics. Through understanding the sources of Russian conduct Western scholars and political leaders will better be able to construct policies that provide the best prospects for ensuring peace and stability. It is important that we don't get Russia wrong, for doing so could lead to dire consequences. Although the emphasis of much recent scholarship on Russian foreign policy stresses the role of domestic politics, societal forces, and identity issues, we cannot ignore material factors. However, in considering them we should be careful to avoid the sort of primacy they are accorded in the arguments of those like Kissinger and Brzezinski. Their focus on Great Powers and their (geo)strategies, devised without any consideration of ideational or cultural factors, can only complicate Russia's relations with the West.

<sup>51</sup> A number of polls have shown opposition among Russians to NATO actions in Kosovo was in excess of 90 per cent. See, for example, *Interfax*, 31 March, 1999. After the NATO bombing campaign on the Serbs most Russians also described themselves as 'hostile' towards Americans and now 70 per cent saw NATO as a real *military* threat to Russia. See *The Guardian*, 15 April, 1999. Opposition to NATO's action came from across the political spectrum. Egor Gaidar, architect of shock therapy and radical liberal reformer, argued at the time that '... every strike on Yugoslavia is a blow to the prospects of maintaining democracy in Russia'. Quoted in Tatyana Matsuk, 'War or Peace', The Reasons For and Possible Consequences of Anti-Western Feeling in Russia', *The Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, no. 8, part 2, 23 April, 1999.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, 'The Nature and Sources of Liberal International Order', *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999), pp. 179–96.

<sup>53</sup> Stephen F. Cohen, 'Russian Transition or Tragedy?', in Cox (ed.), *Rethinking The Soviet Collapse*, pp. 241–50, esp. p. 241.

After all, one thing IR has surely told us is that perceptions are more important than any conception of objective reality. The sources of Russian conduct, as in the middle of this century, so into the next, will not be found in simple conceptions of the balance of power. We will not get far in our understanding of Russian foreign policy unless we take seriously the domestic, cultural, and ideational factors that much of recent scholarship is indeed telling us are important. Let us not ignore or distort the message again.

