

Russia, the United States, and the New Cold War

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The Cold War . . . was a necessary contest that settled fundamental issues once and for all. We have . . . little reason . . . to regret its having occurred.¹

Introduction

The phrase “New Cold War,” referring to the strained nature of United States-Russia relations, especially since Vladimir Putin’s coming to power in the year 2000, has become widely disseminated in commentary on world politics today. Journalists, pundits, and even politicians keep referring to, denying, or debating its existence. Many unquestioningly accept its appropriateness in explaining the two states’ foreign policies. Partisans of one blame the other for its initiation and continuation. It has almost become a term of opprobrium, making its validity problematic. What, if anything, does it mean?

Two journalists’ books, identically titled *The New Cold War*, have undoubtedly helped to popularize, if not to universalize, this terminology for the post-Cold War rivalry between the world’s remaining superpower and the heir of its former counterpart. Mark Mackinnon of the *Globe and Mail* argues that the conflict is “as much about competing commercial interests—and control of the USSR’s vast energy resources—as . . . about political systems or ideologies.” “The weapons,” he writes, are “different, too. Nuclear standoffs and proxy armies . . . [have been] replaced by rigged

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), p. xi.

elections, stage-managed revolutions and wrangling over pipeline routes. But . . . [it is] still Washington versus Moscow.”² MacKinnon portrays American sponsorship of the various “coloured revolutions” in Russia’s neighbourhood as an unfortunate provocation of Russia with the deleterious consequence of encouraging Putin’s policies intended to make his country less, rather than more, democratic. Similarly, the American-sponsored Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan “pipeline was intended to cut Russia out of the burgeoning Caspian oil game,” which meant that it “put Washington’s and Moscow’s interests in the Caucasus . . . on a collision course”.³ It became clear that the United States was anti-Putin; Russia would fight back with energy and other economic weapons.⁴ In the end, MacKinnon almost lapses into conspiracy theory, implicitly blaming the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for the fact that “Russia had become less democratic and more hostile to the West than at any time since 1991”.⁵ There is a New Cold War, Mackinnon argues, and the United States is to blame.

Edward Lucas of *The Economist*, on the other hand, unequivocally finds Russia at fault for what he calls “the new era of uneasy confrontation between the West and the Kremlin.”⁶ “As with the old Cold War,” he writes, “the New Cold War was not started by the West and we are fighting it reluctantly”.⁷ And fight it we must, because in its present condition, Russia is a menace to the rest of the world as well as to itself:⁸ it represses its own citizens; it behaves aggressively and threateningly towards its neighbours in the Former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; it attempts to pry apart the European Union by dealing bilaterally with the leading member nation-states, making them dependent on Russian oil and gas; its crony capitalism is corrupting of Western businessmen; and it eerily resembles Weimar Germany on the eve of collapse. “Until we make it clear,” he warns, “that we believe in our own values, we cannot defend ourselves against the subversion and corruption that are leaking into our citadels of economic and political power. . . . [T]he authoritarian, xenophobic, and distorted

² Mark MacKinnon, *The New Cold War: Revolutions, Rigged Elections and Pipeline Politics in the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007), p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴ Ibid., p. 255.

⁵ Ibid., p. 275.

⁶ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin’s Russia and the Threat to the West*, 1st ed. (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., p. 213.

⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

version of capitalism peddled by their [i.e., the Russians'] rulers is not a new civilization but a dead end.”⁹

Russia’s invasion of Georgia in August 2008, dramatically underscored the alarmist thesis of Edward Lucas: there obviously *is* a New Cold War, and Russia is the culprit.¹⁰

How can we choose between these two divergent interpretations, or even try to refute the notion of a New Cold War altogether? Is it the *old* Cold War that has been renewed/resumed, or is this a completely *new* “cold war”? Does it make any sense at all to talk about a New Cold War?

To answer these larger questions, a few preliminary and/or subsidiary ones come first. Is the term simply a handy label, a stick for beating one’s political opponent, or a truly useful concept? Is it helpful in understanding Russia-U.S. relations, and relations between Russia and “the West” more generally? Is it a reasonable characterization, or merely a caricature? Does it describe the situation and, beyond this, explain anything? In contrast to the label’s simplicity, questions inevitably generated—regarding Russia’s foreign policy and Russia’s relationship to the rest of the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the European Union (EU), and the U.S., and likewise the foreign policy of the U.S. in the post-communist era and its relations with Russia, the FSU, the EU, and the rest of the world—are all vastly complex. Does the term New Cold War signify a continuation of the Old Cold War, or rather an altogether new manifestation of one? Does it mean that the relationship between Russia and the U.S. is a new version of the Cold War? Raising these questions should inhibit any urge to endorse or reject the term New Cold War out of hand. Again, basically, is it “new”? Is it a “Cold War”? Where is it—in observers’ minds as an ideological artefact, or does it exist in real life?

With these questions in mind, this essay proceeds as follows: beginning with a consideration of the Cold War and International Relations (IR) theory, it describes how the Old Cold War has been studied by IR scholars. A distinction is drawn between diplomatic history, study of foreign policy, and IR theory, each of which offers a slightly different account of Russia-U.S. relations. The end of the Cold War has also had serious

⁹ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁰ Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin’s Russia and the Threat to the West*, [rev. ed.] (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. ix-xiii and 139-49.

implications for IR theory, impairing its explanatory value more generally. This rather startling statement is developed more fully later, but for the moment it can be noted that the end of the Cold War was indeed a major challenge to most versions of IR theory leaving them bereft of explanatory power in respect of such a highly significant development in world politics. At a minimum, however, the Cold War's multi-faceted nature is a useful notion that can be carried over to the study of the new one. The essay briefly reviews evidence for a New Cold War in Russia's relations since 1991 with the U.S., with the EU, and with Ukraine and Georgia. This is followed by a summary of some of the leading interpretations of Russian foreign policy, including by one of its strongest defenders. Attention is also directed to the activity of intelligence agencies on both sides, with an attempt to gauge whether the Cold War lives on in the minds of the cloak and dagger crowd. A penultimate section is devoted to U.S. foreign policy since 1991, and to interpretations thereof. In conclusion, the vestiges of Cold War thinking and action are summarized, the changed circumstances—as well as continuities—from the Old to the New Cold War are identified, and the implications are briefly sketched in for relations between Russia and the U.S. in the future.

In schematic terms, the article attempts to deal with the problem at two levels: that of the international system, and at the level of the states concerned. At the system level, it will compare interactions, capabilities, and possibilities of realignment as they appeared in the Old Cold War with how they appear now. At the state level, the comparison will be between then and now in terms of objectives, policy-makers, capabilities, perceptions, and alliances.¹¹

The Cold War and Its Study

A plethora of events, names, and terms is associated with the Cold War of 1948-91, reciting even a few of which readily evokes the flavour of the times, especially for those who lived through them. These include such fondly remembered items as: containment, Communism, arms race, missile gap, proxy wars, client states, non-alignment, Berlin blockade, Cuban missile crisis, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gary

¹¹ This scheme is borrowed from *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, ed. by Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper (London and New York: Routledge, 1985), s.v. "International Relations."

Powers and the U-2, Berlin Wall, détente, nuclear deterrence, Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), and the whole arcana of espionage—moles, double agents, wet operations, and plausible deniability. Space does not allow for a chronology of the unfolding of the Cold War, and for the location of each of these terms within that chronicle, nor is that the purpose of this essay.¹² More immediately relevant is the succession of approaches to and theories of the Cold War that have tried to provide an explanation of it.

As Steven Hurst puts it, “the historiography of US Cold War foreign policy” has been dominated by a “half-dozen key perspectives.”¹³ It begins, originally, with traditionalism, followed in turn by revisionism, post-revisionism, corporatism, and world-systems theory. Unrelated to these is still another approach, the post-structural or cultural perspective. The traditionalist perspective, during the early Cold War especially, may be seen as “an extension of the prevailing pre-Second World War historiography of American diplomacy . . . [which] was remarkably consensual, and . . . was a celebratory, even triumphalist, interpretation of American foreign policy to that point”.¹⁴ Thus “the traditionalist view [was] that the Cold War was a product of aggressive Russian [*sic*] expansionism, which forced the United States into a global defence of freedom”.¹⁵ This was, of course, a superficial approach, shallow and one-dimensional, focussed exclusively on government decision-makers with little to offer by way of explanation.¹⁶ “Traditionalist accounts,” Hurst justly observes, “depict a Manichaean world of good versus evil in which American policy is always honest, generous and for the good of all and Russian [*sic*] policy always devious, self-serving and a mortal threat to mankind”.¹⁷

A more critical stance towards U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War is notable in the revisionist perspective, wherein economic factors are central and U.S. foreign policy

¹² A useful, if traditional, history is that of Gaddis, cited above, n. 1. For a fuller treatment, see Lester Brune, *A Chronology of the Cold War, 1917-1992*, consulting editor Richard Dean Burns (New York: Routledge, 2006). A concise overview can be found in J. P. D. Dunbabin, *The Cold War: The Great Powers and their Allies* (2d ed.; Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2008), ch. 1.

¹³ Steven Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy: Key Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-26.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

is seen as “expansionist” and dynamic rather than defensive and reactive.¹⁸ This expansionist character is attributed to a corresponding *Weltanschauung* and/or to American capitalism, neither of which theory despite its intuitive appeal is without faults.¹⁹ Suffice to say that the revisionist perspective helps us better understand the Cold War by directing attention to the centrality of the domestic determinants of U.S. foreign policy and by underlining the secondary significance (if not indeed insignificance) of the USSR’s behaviour in the whole equation.

The post-revisionist perspective, ostensibly aiming at a synthesis of domestic and external explanatory factors, manages only to bring geopolitics into the picture, itself not an inconsiderable contribution.²⁰ Post-revisionism is basically realist in terms of orientation; in IR, realism emphasizes that states’ behaviour is determined by considerations of power and interests, within an anarchic system of states. One exponent of post-revisionism presented by Hurst is John Lewis Gaddis, characterised as a neorealist. “While it shares with realism a preoccupation with power and security as the fundamental concerns of the state,” Hurst comments, “neorealism’s innovation is to place the explanation of state behaviour not within the state itself but within the international system”.²¹ So, U.S. policy is seen as being driven by security and balance-of-power concerns. In time, however, neglecting domestic factors altogether and having become more traditionalist and more moralistic, the net result has been that “in Gaddis’s work. . . the Cold War was a struggle between the good guys and the bad guys and . . . the good guys won”.²²

Another representative of the post-revisionist school is Melvyn P. Leffler, whose perspective in certain respects differs from Gaddis. For example, “he depicts Soviet behaviour as defensive, conservative and cautious, bent on seeking security but also on continued cooperation with the West. US fears of the USSR were thus exaggerated and often mistaken.” Like Gaddis, however, there is “the effort to create a multi-causal synthesis that transcends and incorporates previous arguments using a realist-neorealist framework”.²³ In general, according to Hurst, the post-revisionists have

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

¹⁹ Ibid., ch. 2.

²⁰ Ibid., ch. 3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 68.

²² Ibid., p. 72.

²³ Ibid., pp. 75-76.

actually added to our understanding, because their “depiction of policy-makers, seeking certain objectives but unsure of how to reach them, wanting both to avert Soviet domination and yet maintain cooperation, driven by fear as well as by a sense of power, has a greater degree of plausibility than the naivety and innocence of traditionalist accounts or the relentless drive for global control portrayed by some revisionists”.²⁴ Their theoretical contribution consists of an emphasis on the international system within which states must act and respond to necessary constraints. That smaller states possess autonomy and can affect events was also acknowledged first by this approach. But the major weakness is the neglect of domestic factors and sources of foreign policy behaviour. Both Gaddis and Leffler, Hurst comments,

retain an essentially realist conception of the state. In their analyses what has to be defended is a set of consensual values or interests that are shared by a society that is treated as a unified actor and . . . manifested in the . . . [leaders] of state. With those . . . values . . . unchanged over time, all the explanatory power reverts to the international system.²⁵

Post-revisionism, in sum, entails the resurrection of geopolitics, and certainly in 1989-91, the shift “from a bipolar to a unipolar world order” was profoundly significant.²⁶

Corporatism and world-systems theory, unfortunately, have yielded meagre results for the study of the Cold War.²⁷ Rejecting altogether the primacy of geopolitics found in post-revisionism, “corporatism. . . shares with revisionism a focus on the domestic economic sources of foreign policy”.²⁸ But rather than being deterministic, it offers an interactive view of the state and economy. “Corporatist foreign policy,” as Hurst describes it, “is . . . the interaction of the state, competitive capital and the other functional economic groups in the corporate coalition”.²⁹ Actual corporatist studies, however, have never realized their potential, their neglect of geopolitics making them unprofitable for the study of the Cold War, and, as Hurst once again points out, the approach has been abandoned by its originators. On the other hand, “world-systems theory provides . . . an analysis of US foreign policy . . . [explained] primarily in terms

²⁴ Ibid., p. 76.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 84.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

²⁷ Ibid., chs. 4 and 5.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 89.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

of the effects of global capitalism as a structural system and the position of the USA within that system".³⁰ Based on the writings of Immanuel Wallerstein, it contains such key concepts as hegemony, core, and periphery, but is characterised by a crude economic determinism with no account of state autonomy, or of change. Indeed, as far as explanation is concerned, "if we accept world-systems theory as a given, we know all the answers and there is nothing left to do".³¹

Post-structuralism and culturalism step outside the paradigm of state-system duality altogether into the realm of ideas and identity.³² They, too, like the two preceding perspectives, offer more in the way of provocation than explanation. "According to [David] Campbell," a representative of the post-structural perspective to whom Hurst makes reference, "US foreign policy . . . is also about the creation of foreign threats because such threats are needed for the production and reproduction of American identity".³³ Reinforcement of the "self," in this view, "necessitates the production of the 'other'".³⁴ For that enterprise, the state is the vehicle; it has to define otherness and to create threats. "'Foreign policy' is about the creation of those discourses [of danger] and . . . is directed, not only externally at the outside world, but also internally, for the purpose of reproducing the identity of the state".³⁵ The use of metaphors is characteristic of such "foreign policy." "In the Cold War, for example, communism was regularly portrayed as a disease, virus or other pathological condition. . . . By thus transcribing its differences from the USSR onto differences taken for granted in US culture, the process of foreign policy naturalises those differences while also serving to demonise the other."³⁶ This was, as Hurst comments, especially important for the U.S., which tends to indulge in moralising and contemplating the apocalypse. Apart from subverting conventional wisdom, however, post-structuralism tells us relatively little about the Cold War, unless it is that when the USSR collapsed, new

³⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

³¹ Ibid., p. 122.

³² Ibid., ch. 6.

³³ Ibid., p. 142.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

³⁶ Ibid.

"discourses of danger" had to be resorted to, e.g., the war on drugs and the war on terror.³⁷

Cultural studies, while they "are . . . discussing . . . the ideology of US policy-makers," offer an admittedly compelling argument, are of questionable utility. The tendency to reify culture, where it becomes a given, not susceptible to explanation or exploration, is a serious weakness. The claim to causality (culture as a cause of foreign policy) is usually not supported by argument or evidence. No account is taken of power. All in all, the cultural approach is an unconvincing perspective, lacking in explanation.³⁸

What "these various perspectives show," Hurst concludes, is "that US foreign policy during the Cold War had geopolitical, economic, social, cultural, linguistic and ideological dimensions. . . . [T]hey are all also inadequate as complete explanations of that policy".³⁹ Accordingly, for purposes of this essay, it is important to begin our analysis by acknowledging that neither the Old Cold War nor its new counterpart (if one exists) was or is just one thing or phenomenon, but that each has to be examined from a number of perspectives. Every perspective will be partial,⁴⁰ but each state's foreign policy needs to be examined from more than one perspective to be fully understood and explained.

Any impression that later perspectives may have superseded the earlier ones would be misleading. Relatively recently, for example, a professor at Ohio State University writing in the *Political Science Quarterly* was explaining the Cold War retrospectively as essentially ideological, caused by the expansionism of the USSR, perceived as a threat by the West, and countered by resistance and containment—a wholly traditionalist view.⁴¹ Nor is it reasonable to agree with Gaddis's pessimistic (not to say devastating for IR) conclusion at the end of the Cold War to the effect that international relations theory has been no better than story-telling in explaining that

³⁷ See also Barry Buzan, "Will the 'Global War on Terrorism' be the New Cold War?" *International Affairs* (London) 82, no. 6 (2006): pp. 1101-18.

³⁸ Hurst, *Cold War US Foreign Policy*, pp. 151-64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴¹ John Mueller, "What Was the Cold War About? Evidence from Its Ending," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 4 (2004-5): pp. 609-31.

phenomenon—indeed, worse. In a long, 54-page article published just a year after the collapse of the USSR, he asserts flatly that “the ‘scientific’ approach to the study of international relations appears to work no better, in forecasting the future, than do the old-fashioned methods it set out to replace.”⁴² In the end, though, he softens the blow when he writes:

My point, though, is not to suggest that we jettison the scientific approach to the study of international relations; only that we bring it up to date by recognizing that good scientists, like good novelists and good historians, make use of *all* the tools at their disposal in trying to anticipate the future. That includes not just theory, observation, and rigorous calculation, but also narrative, analogy, paradox, irony, intuition, imagination, and—not least important—style.⁴³

Gaddis, too, still basically represents the traditionalist perspective, and his own ability to foretell the future is no better than the IR theories he had earlier trashed.

In his 2005 monograph condensing a lifetime’s study of the subject Gaddis draws several conclusions about the meaning of the Cold War that were soon to become, or were already, questionable, if not unsustainable. One was that “*war itself—had become . . . an anachronism.*”⁴⁴ This was written after President George H. W. Bush had fought the Gulf War in 1991 and his son, George W. Bush, had launched the war on Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2001 and on Saddam Hussein in Iraq in 2003. “The Cold War may well be remembered,” wrote Gaddis, “as the point at which military strength, a defining characteristic of ‘power’ itself for the past five centuries, ceased to be that.”⁴⁵ In a sense Gaddis is right, except that, in light of America’s prolonged entanglement in the Middle East, obviously such a realization or consciousness did not affect the thinking of Messrs. Bush Jr., Cheney, and Rumsfeld. A second lesson, that “during the Cold War . . . Western leaders disproved Marx’s indictment of capitalism as elevating greed above all else,”⁴⁶ seemed abruptly and spectacularly to have lost its validity with the global

⁴² Gaddis, “International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War,” *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1992/93): p. 56.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 57-8.

⁴⁴ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 262. Emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 263.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

financial crisis of 2008.⁴⁷ Regarding Gaddis's third dictum about "*the globalization of democratization*,"⁴⁸ we might ask, if and when relapses occur such as in an important state like Russia reverting to authoritarianism, does that mean the world is back into a Cold War? These are rather inconclusive conclusions and they illustrate well the quite limited utility of the traditionalist perspective, underlining at the same time perhaps its ideological foundation.

Beyond the key perspectives reviewed above, one other useful tool emerges from the literature on the end of the Cold War. This is the idea that foreign policy actions are the result of perceptions held by foreign policy makers; it is on such perceptions and their formative influences that analysis should focus.⁴⁹ Whatever these influences—historical, ideological, economic, strategic, political—relevant to foreign policy making generally, and to U.S.-Russia relations in particular, the "key causal variable," as Richard K. Herrmann emphasizes, has to be perception.⁵⁰ Of course, perceptions will vary with the presence of different leaders, and so a change of leadership may bring a change in perceptions, which raises the possibility of the New Cold War being specific to a particular point in time, namely, the George W. Bush-Vladimir Putin interlude. In sum, conditions or structures influence, but alone do not dictate, foreign policy and international relations, and they require the additional intervention or intermediation of leaders with fresh or at least different perceptions, otherwise nothing changes.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Michael Comiskey and Pawan Madhogarhia, "Unraveling the Financial Crisis of 2008," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42, no. 2 (April 2009): pp. 271-5; and Lawrence Jacobs and Desmond King, "America's Political Crisis: The Unsustainable State in a Time of Unraveling," *ibid.*, pp. 277-85.

⁴⁸ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 264. Original emphasis.

⁴⁹ Richard K. Herrmann, "Policy-Relevant Theory and the Challenge of Diagnosis: The End of the Cold War as a Case Study," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): pp. 111-42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁵¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, ch. 6. This point is also made in a rather pedestrian way by Norman A. Graebner, Richard Dean Burns, and Joseph M. Siracusa, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev: Revisiting the End of the Cold War* (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger Security International, 2008). To their credit, unlike Gaddis, they do at least devote considerable attention to America's Cold War policies in Latin America, including the Iran-Contra affair. This is the "dark side" of the Cold War, glossed over or not covered at all in traditionalist accounts.

Looking for Evidence of a New (or Renewed) Cold War

The United States and Russia

“Cold War stereotypes linger,” writes Thomas Graham, “particularly in the bureaucracies,” by which he means principally the security structures of the two states.⁵² Accordingly,

by the end of President Putin’s second term in May 2008, it was curious how much of the content of U.S.-Russia relations reflected a Cold War agenda. The focus was on the balance of forces in Europe: NATO expansion, U.S. bases in Bulgaria and Rumania, planned U.S. missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the Balkans (particularly Kosovo), and European energy dependence on Russia.⁵³

Likewise, according to Dale Herspring and Peter Rutland in their review of Putin’s foreign policy, the Moscow bureaucracy has manifested a similar inertia. “The Russian military, one of the most conservative institutions in the country,” they tell us, “was still locked into the mentality of the Cold War, deeply suspicious of anything that came from the United States and frozen by inertia into anti-U.S. policies—arms proliferation, nuclear deterrence, provocative military exercises.”⁵⁴ This was accompanied by a high level of propaganda on both sides, as noted by many observers in diverse contexts.⁵⁵ In July 2008, the new president of Russia, Dmitriy Medvedev, voiced his opposition to the deployment by the U.S. of the anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic, signalling continuity with the policy of his predecessor.⁵⁶ Ostensibly, the missile defence system is meant to deal with rogue states like Iran, but Russia sees it as directed instead at itself, making it categorically unacceptable. Early in 2009, however, after U.S.

⁵² Thomas Graham, “U.S.-Russia Relations: Facing Reality Pragmatically,” CSIS (Center for Strategic & International Studies), July 2008: p. 2.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵⁴ Dale R. Herspring and Peter Rutland, “Putin and Russian Foreign Policy,” in *Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, ed. by Herspring (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), p. 238.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 10-17; Julianne Smith, “Munich Security Conference Harks Back to Cold War,” *CSIS Commentary* (Washington), 12 February 2007; Andrew C. Kuchins, “The Specter of the Cold War Continues to Haunt Europe,” *ibid.*, 13 April 2007; “International: Not a Cold War, but a Cold Tiff; Russian and America,” *The Economist* (London), 17 February 2007.

⁵⁶ *International Herald Tribune*, 15 July 2008.

President Barack Obama sent him a private communiqué in which a deferral of the installation of the anti-missile system was offered in exchange for Russian help in discouraging the development of nuclear weapons by Iran. President Medvedev welcomed the opportunity to discuss the issue and expressed a willingness to talk.⁵⁷

This initiative by Obama followed as part and parcel of what Vice-President Joe Biden had referred to as a move to “press the reset button” on relations between Russia and the U.S. The idea of these relations needing to be “reset” was welcomed by Medvedev: “We are counting on a reset,” he was quoted as saying. “I hope it will take place.”⁵⁸ When the two presidents met for the first time in London at the beginning of April 2009, they agreed to cooperate on a number of issues “including Afghanistan, Iran’s nuclear program, nuclear proliferation and reviving the global economy.”⁵⁹ “We, the leaders of Russia and the United States, are ready to move beyond cold war mentalities,” read their joint statement, promising a “fresh start in relations between the two countries” while acknowledging that problems still remain in their mutual relations.⁶⁰ Thus, the two new presidents appear to have managed to overcome the Cold War mentality of distrust and confrontation, and to replace it with dialogue and a spirit of cooperation, but whether they will succeed in dragging their hitherto immobile security-related bureaucracies with them on this new path remains to be seen.

“The most concrete thing that the two countries agreed to” at this initial presidential meeting, “was new arms control talks.”⁶¹ In fact, talks between Russian and American negotiators to renew the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) of 1991 began in earnest in May 2009. The treaty expired in December 2009, but was continued indefinitely in force pending a successor agreement, expected in April 2010. Obama has also promised to push forward on the U.S. Senate’s ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (rejected by the Senate a decade ago), on agreeing to stop weapons-grade plutonium and uranium production, and on reviving

⁵⁷ Ibid., and *Washington Post*, 3 March 2009; *New York Times*, 4 March 2009. In May, a team of US and Russian experts reported on the basis of a year-long study that the missile shield against Iran would be ineffective and unnecessary. *Washington Post*, 19 May 2009.

⁵⁸ *Washington Post*, 21 March 2009.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2 April 2009.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, 2 April 2009.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the comatose Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968.⁶² Commenting on the philosophical shift, John Bolton, who had served as Bush's undersecretary of state for arms control, acknowledged that in his time "arms-control negotiations reflected an adversarial approach from the Cold War days," something he admitted was no longer appropriate.⁶³

No similar change in philosophical outlook has been apparent in NATO, this being most commonly attributed to bureaucratic inertia supported by American muscle and determination. Acknowledging the paradox of the survival of an alliance long after the threat it was created for had disappeared, and the challenge this represents for realist IR theory, Celeste Wallander has offered a different and novel explanation.⁶⁴ She argues that NATO has managed to adapt to the post-Cold War circumstances by capitalizing on and expanding capabilities—beyond meeting the Soviet threat—that were originally developed for coping with the Cold War. In particular, it has abandoned the specific assets addressed to the external threat, namely, flexible response, positional defence/forward deployment, and high readiness, replacing them with other of its assets. This was possible because:

many of NATO's distinctive features had nothing to do with coping with the Soviet threat at all and were a result of NATO's more subtle purpose of preventing a cycle of mistrust, competition, and instability in security relations among its members. NATO therefore developed specific assets for coping with risks among its members. . . . These . . . include mechanisms for political-military integration, multinationality of alliance structures, supranational defense policy, and the principles and procedures of civilian democratic control of defense affairs.⁶⁵

NATO has added to the category of specific assets designed to cope with mistrust and instability two new elements: combined joint task forces, and the Partnership for Peace programme. Having thus transformed itself institutionally, it survives and thrives.

⁶² *Washington Post*, 2 April and 8 May 2009.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8 May 2009.

⁶⁴ Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO After the Cold War," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 705-35.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 716.

But Wallander does not deal at all with the question of NATO's eastward expansion into Eastern Europe and the FSU, or with NATO's relationship to Russia, questions highly relevant to this article's purposes. A rather different interpretation of NATO's survival is offered by Canada's former ambassador to Yugoslavia. James Bissett points out that "Article 1 of the NATO treaty stipulated that NATO would refrain from using or threatening to use force in the resolution of international disputes and would always act in accordance with the UN Charter."⁶⁶ In 1999, however, when NATO attacked Serbia in contravention of its own principles, he says, "the alliance was suddenly converted from a purely defensive organization . . . into an aggressive military machine that could use force whenever and wherever it might choose to do so." While this may not be in fundamental contradiction to Wallander's thesis of NATO adaptation, it is difficult not to view the expansion of NATO other than as a latter-day realization of the doctrine of containment which was at the very heart of the Cold War. NATO's unplanned expansion and random undertaking of various "out of area" assignments, it has been argued, reveals the organization's loss of clear purpose and aggravates its internal divisions.⁶⁷

Despite calls for a measured approach to NATO expansion, the momentum appears unstoppable and unrelenting. Ronald Asmus, a former Deputy Assistant Secretary in the U.S. Department of State, for instance, has urged a rethinking of the strategy of using NATO rather than the EU to lead the democratic transformation of post-communist Europe. Unfortunately, that strategy has in an important sense backfired by making Russia, as he says, "more authoritarian and adversarial." The Obama administration, meanwhile, appears to have adopted a two-handed approach: in March 2009, the foreign ministers of NATO agreed to resume the work of the NATO-Russia Council, suspended in 2008 after Russia's invasion of Georgia; and, at the same time, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced that the door to NATO membership would remain open for both Ukraine and Georgia.⁶⁸ This would be in line with recommendations by former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Steven Pifer, to the effect that "the Obama administration should continue to support Ukraine's integration into

⁶⁶ *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 12 May 2009.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13 July 2009.

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, 5 March 2009. In June 2009, formal cooperation between NATO and Russia was in fact resumed. *Ibid.*, 26 and 27 June 2009.

NATO,” but that this be done “on the basis of Ukraine’s annual national program” rather than a formal Membership Action Plan (MAP) (which, in any case, does not automatically guarantee membership), and that the subtle difference between a MAP and an annual national program be carefully explained to Moscow.⁶⁹ “While respecting Russia’s legitimate security interests, U.S. policy should ultimately uphold the right of Ukraine to determine its own foreign policy course, including its right to enter alliances of its choosing.”⁷⁰ Like NATO’s MAP, this policy is not guaranteed of success.

Consistently with the NATO narrative, the world of Russian and American spooks has also not yet shaken off its Cold War habits. Notwithstanding its failure to anticipate either the collapse of the USSR—its principal adversary—in 1991, or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or to verify Iraq’s possession of weapons of mass destruction in 2003, the intelligence community in the United States has grown substantially since the end of the Cold War.⁷¹ Similarly, we are told, Russian intelligence agencies and their activities have also been burgeoning, especially during the tenure of President Putin; making use of old networks from other ex-communist states, links with organized crime, and business opportunities.⁷² Accordingly, following the expulsion of two Russian diplomats from NATO headquarters in Brussels for spying, Russia expelled two officials of NATO’s Information Office, both attachés at the Canadian Embassy, from Moscow likewise for spying.⁷³

Contrary to the impression given by Edward Lucas and by Mark MacKinnon individually in their two books, energy and pipelines as a source of discord between America and Russia did not originate in the post-Cold War (or New Cold War, as they call it) era.⁷⁴ When President Ronald Reagan rejected the Yamal pipeline for Europe, his opposition was based on the notion that it:

⁶⁹ Steven Pifer, “Averting Crisis in Ukraine,” Council on Foreign Relations, Council Special Report No. 41 (January 2009), pp. 44-5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 46. See also Steven Pifer, Anders Aslund, and Jonathan Elkind, “Engaging Ukraine in 2009,” Brookings Institution Foreign Policy Paper Series, Number 12 (March 2009).

⁷¹ John M. Tidd, “From Revolution to Reform: A Brief History of U.S. Intelligence,” *SAIS Review* 28, no. 1 (Winter-Spring 2008): pp. 13-17.

⁷² Julie Anderson, “The HUMINT Offensive from Putin’s Chekist State,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 20, no. 2 (2007): pp. 258-316.

⁷³ *New York Times*, 7 May 2009.

⁷⁴ Lucas, *New Cold War* (2009), ch. 7; MacKinnon, *New Cold War*, ch. 13.

would enhance Soviet power and influence in Europe at the price of Western security. . . . [It] would give the Kremlin a stranglehold over western Europe's energy supplies. Such advantage the Soviets could exploit politically by threatening the Western governments with either higher prices or the actual cutting off of gas supplies. . . . [Furthermore,] the \$8 billion in annual gas export earnings would enable the Soviet economy to support high levels of military spending.⁷⁵

Europe depends on imports for 60 per cent of its gas; half of that comes from Russia. Dependency of individual countries on Russian gas varies from lows of 13 per cent for Switzerland, 17 per cent for the Netherlands, and 23 per cent for France, up to as much as 100 per cent for a half-dozen other countries, as of 2006. The Nord Stream pipeline project, sponsored by Russia, would transport natural gas to Germany underneath the Baltic Sea, sidestepping problems with Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland. It was to be completed by 2010, but this seems unrealistic.⁷⁶ The rival project, Nabucco, scheduled for completion in 2014 or 2015 and favoured by the EU with backing from Washington, would bring gas from Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Austria. A subsidiary line would connect Turkey, Greece, and Italy. An agreement to speed up construction was signed in 2009 between the EU and Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and Egypt. The United States is hoping to bring Iran and Iraq into the picture as well.⁷⁷ In July 2009, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania signed a transit agreement with Turkey for the Nabucco pipeline.⁷⁸ The following month, Prime Minister Putin travelled to Ankara to enlist Turkish support for its rival, the South Stream pipeline.⁷⁹ Both projects were, at the time, hampered by the absence of a gas supplier at the upstream end of the pipe; they were actively courting and counting on Azerbaijan. Just as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline succeeded in sidelining Russia in the oil exporting game, so the Nabucco gas pipeline is Washington's effort to curb Russia's ability to play energy politics in, with, or against Europe. It is much the same old game played on the same chessboard.

⁷⁵ Graebner *et al.*, *Reagan, Bush, Gorbachev*, p. 29.

⁷⁶ Lucas, *New Cold War* (2009), 164–8. Bulgaria, Slovakia, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are the countries 100 per cent dependent on Russian natural gas.

⁷⁷ *New York Times*, 9 May 2009; and *Den'*, 14 May 2009.

⁷⁸ *New York Times*, 14 July 2009.

⁷⁹ *Globe and Mail* (Toronto) (Alberta edition), 5 August 2009.

Overshadowing these issues—survivals of a Cold War mentality in security policy, NATO expansion, tit-for-tat in the spy world, and pipeline politics—all of which are illustrative of continuity with the Cold War period, is the theme of American Exceptionalism and its manifestation in U.S. foreign policy. Fathered by Woodrow Wilson, the notion of Exceptionalism has been for almost a century the basis for unilateralism, interventionism (if not imperialism), instability, a weak commitment (if any) to diplomacy, and the abandonment of ethical principles in the practice of American foreign policy. According to Joan Hoff, it reached its zenith during the Cold War when “the United States entered into a number of Faustian bargains and deceived the American public about them because ideological victory and/or control of resources became more important than either ethical or humanitarian principles.”⁸⁰ By Faustian bargains, she means the whole series of presidentially-approved CIA operations, including support of the Taliban and Osama bin Laden, the Iran-Contra affair, and military aid to prop up dictatorships such as Pakistan, all justified by the supposed need to fight the enemy using the enemy’s underhanded methods, fighting fire with fire. In the post-Cold War era, U.S. foreign policy remained locked in the grip of this messianic urge to reshape the world in its image, especially during the presidency of George W. Bush, asserting its hegemony militarily while masking it in the name of promoting democracy, freedom, and the “war on terror.”⁸¹ Unfortunately, today influential opinion leaders like political scientist Joseph Nye still cleave to the idea of America’s special mission to implant democracy in the rest of the world.⁸² Would there have been a Cold War in the first place without this?

Russia and the United States

While some observers see Russia’s principal foreign policy objective to be the recapture of superpower status at any cost, most seem to agree that Putin’s policy orientation can more properly be characterized as pragmatic or realistic, and that Putin

⁸⁰ Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 14.

⁸¹ Ibid., chs. 4-6. See also Buzan, “Will the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ be the New Cold War?”; and Rein Müllerson, “Promoting Democracy without Starting a New Cold War?” *Chinese Journal of International Law* 7, no. 1 (2008): pp. 1-31. On the CIA’s covert operations, see also Gaddis, *The Cold War*, pp. 161-76.

⁸² Joseph Nye, “Taking Democracy to the People,” *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 13 May 2009.

himself is a practitioner of *realpolitik*.⁸³ Putin does not place Russia on a par with the United States, the superpower, but still wants Russia to be treated as an autonomous great power, to be taken into account in international affairs, and to be able to pursue its own interests. At the same time, he wants Russia to have good relations with the United States, because its esteem is needed by Russia for its claim to status among nation-states. His bold move to offer assistance immediately after the attacks on 11 September 2001 was a dramatic departure from Cold War confrontation and mistrust. The perceived lack of reciprocity on the part of the United States, however, particularly on the issue of national missile defence (NMD), together with a shift in domestic political mood towards anti-Americanism, coupled with the American attack on Russia's client Saddam Hussein, meant that relations started to deteriorate beginning in 2003. It is out of this discrepancy between perceptions of national interest and of defensive aggression that the New Cold War has developed.

In an effort to understand the Russian viewpoint, the revival of the Cold War is due, according to Richard Sakwa, to four (Western) failures: "political, strategic, intellectual and cultural."⁸⁴ The principal political failure, in Sakwa's judgment, was in not dismantling security and ideological structures equally on both sides of the divide at the end of the Cold War. Thus the survival of NATO, and its acquisition of the task of supervising the transition to democracy in the other camp, makes for an intolerable asymmetry as well as allowing for revival of confrontation.⁸⁵ A lack of mechanisms "for integrating rising great powers"⁸⁶ is the major strategic failure, an impasse that likewise fuels the new Cold War. Specific strategic failures include lack of control of nuclear weapons, the asymmetrical expansion of NATO, the overlooked security implications of EU expansion, the breakdown of the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) agreement (Russia withdrew from it in December 2007), and the political struggles over energy

⁸³ Michael Rywkin, "Russia: In Quest of Superpower Status," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 30, no. 1 (2008): pp. 13-21; Herspring and Rutland, "Putin and Russian Foreign Policy," pp. 225-6 and pp. 230-42; Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Whose World Order? Russia's Perception of American Ideas after the Cold War* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), pp. 116-21; Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), ch. 9; Leon Aron, *Russia's Revolution: Essays, 1989-2006* (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2007), ch. 21; and Sakwa, "'New Cold War' or Twenty Years' Crisis? Russia and International Politics," *International Affairs* (London) 84, no. 2 (2008): pp. 241-51.

⁸⁴ Sakwa, "'New Cold War' or Twenty Years' Crisis?" p. 252.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 252-4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

and pipeline routes.⁸⁷ As to intellectual failure, Sakwa criticizes the lack of imagination during the first post-Soviet years in not incorporating Russia into the West, the revival of the totalitarian model, and American “democratic messianism.” The cultural failure, finally, refers to an inability to transcend the West’s 300 years’ ambivalence towards, if not outright fear of, the “Russian problem” and uncertainty about which “civilization” it is part of.⁸⁸ “The term ‘Cold War,’ therefore, is a contemporary international relations metaphor for a fundamentally strained relationship that cannot be resolved within the framework of the world views of either party but requires a rethinking of both.”⁸⁹ Unlike Gaddis, whose epigram begins this essay, Sakwa compares the present situation to the interwar period, one of crisis emanating from the First World War’s unresolved problems: “Just as the Second World War was a legacy of the failed peace settlement following the First, so this ‘new’ Cold War is the outcome of the inability effectively to overcome the structures and sentiments that accompanied the original struggle.”⁹⁰ In a way, due to Western failures, the Cold War never properly ended.

Can Mr. Putin, on the other hand, speaking for Russia, be taken at his word in wanting to transcend the Cold War? “Putin’s over-riding purpose from the very first days of his presidency was the normalisation of Russian foreign policy,” says Richard Sakwa in his biography of Putin. “Russia was to be treated as neither supplicant nor potential disruptor, but as just one more ‘normal’ great power.”⁹¹ Again, in his later article on the Cold War Sakwa reassures readers “that Russia’s view of itself as a great power is complemented by a no less deep desire to ‘normalize’ its relations with the world.”⁹² Furthermore, Sakwa characterizes “Moscow . . . [as] insisting on the sovereign right of each country, if not to claim a *Sonderweg*, then at least to choose its own path and to define democracy as it saw fit: the new ideology of ‘sovereign democracy’ that came to the fore after Ukraine’s ‘Orange’ revolution in late 2004.”⁹³ Unfortunately, as subsequent events have shown all too well, when it comes to the sovereignty of Georgia and Ukraine, “normal” goes out the Kremlin window. To be fair to Sakwa, he did warn, back in 2004, that “one test whether Russian foreign policy

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 254-60.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 261-5.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 266.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 265.

⁹¹ Sakwa, *Putin*, p. 207.

⁹² Sakwa, ““New Cold War’ or Twenty Years’ Crisis?” p. 243.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 252.

has become ‘normal’ is the country’s ability to establish balanced relations with countries that had once been in its orbit,” and he already thought then that Russia’s relations with Poland had failed that test.⁹⁴

“Lavrov Sees New Cold War,” read a headline in *Kommersant* on 20 June 2008. It paraphrased the Russian Foreign Minister as saying that “Russia and the United States had more trust and respect for one another during the Cold War than now.” In July of that year, according to the *Kyiv Post*, “Russia’s Prime Minister Vladimir Putin warned Ukraine over its NATO bid and threatened to terminate lucrative deals with Ukrainian arms and space facilities if the ex-Soviet neighbor joins the alliance.”⁹⁵ This negative stance towards Ukraine, along with Georgia, joining NATO was confirmed about the same time by President Dmitriy Medvedev in approving the latest version of Russia’s foreign policy white paper.⁹⁶ These warnings were realized on 8 August, when Russia’s five-day war against Georgia began, resulting in a humiliating defeat for the latter and the declaration of independence of its two hitherto autonomous enclaves, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The occupation, liberation, and recognition of the two mini-states was justified by Russia on the basis of a parallel with the recent independence and recognition of Kosovo, carved out of Serbia and strongly supported by the United States. The war against Georgia was widely condemned outside the FSU, but no action against Russia was taken either by the United States or the EU. It was, of course, read in Ukraine as well as abroad, as a lesson for Ukraine, all the more pointed since to Putin’s annoyance Ukraine had materially assisted the Georgian defence. Russia’s invasion of Georgia was seen by informed observers as the very lowest point in U.S.-Russia relations since the Cold War, if not affirmation of a new Cold War itself.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Sakwa, *Putin*, p. 229.

⁹⁵ *Kyiv Post*, 1 July 2008.

⁹⁶ BBCUkrainian.com, 15 July 2008; and *Ohliadach*, 15 July 2008.

⁹⁷ Charles King, “The Five-Day War: Managing Moscow After the Georgian Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (November/December 2008): pp. 2-11; Stephen Sestanovich, “What Has Moscow Done? Rebuilding U.S.-Russian Relations,” *ibid.*, pp. 12-28; *New York Times*, 10 August 2008; Lincoln A. Mitchell, “Georgia Postbellum,” *The American Interest* (May-June 2009). For coverage of the war, including from the Ukrainian perspective, see: *Dzerkalo tyzhnya*, pp. 9-15 and 16-22 August 2008; BBCUkrainian.com, 9 August 2008; Polit.ru, 10 August 2008; UNIAN, 11 and 15 August 2008; *Ohliadach*, 11 August 2008; *Ukrainska Pravda*, 12, 13, 15, and 21 August 2008; *Vysokyi zamok*, 12 August 2008; and *New York Times*, 12 August 2008.

Russia's action against Georgia, and its threatening posture towards Ukraine, must be read in the context of relations with the United States, particularly in view of the American response. That response having been rhetorical rather than practical or coercive, the episode clearly shows the hollowness of U.S. support for Georgia and Ukraine. For Russia, it is an assertion and affirmation of its much-sought-after equality with the United States, at least in the immediate proximity of its borders. It means that Russia can go ahead with cultivating its sphere of influence, that invading Georgia is like the U.S. invading Iraq, and that Russia has no inhibitions on using hard power rather than soft power to expand and consolidate its sphere of influence. Whether this incident marks a permanent shift in U.S.-Russia relations is a moot point.

"The post-Cold War period," emphasizes one of the brief Caucasus war's many observers, "is over."⁹⁸ But, he concludes, "to see Russian use of force against Georgia, as thuggish as it was, through a Cold War lens is absurd." The reason, he claims, is that no vital interest of the U.S. was affected, and the current conflict between Russia and the U.S. is neither ideological nor economic, as in the Cold War. The sole reason for concern about this Russian aggression, he says, is that it challenges "the coherence of NATO." What this overlooks is that NATO is a relic of the Cold War.

In May 2009, Russia signed treaties with South Ossetia and Abkhazia permanently allowing its border guards to be stationed on their territories and to jointly patrol their borders with Georgia.⁹⁹ At the same time, NATO announced it was holding "a simulated crisis response operation and peacekeeping exercises at a Georgian military base formerly used by the Russian air force," involving over 1,000 troops.¹⁰⁰ As expected, the United States and Russia objected respectively to the two events.¹⁰¹ Obviously, Russia is determined to act unilaterally in its declared sphere of influence; the United States is equally determined to deny to Russia the regard and consideration to which it believes itself entitled from Washington and without which its claim to great power status is nothing.

As Russia demonstrates its true weakness by flexing its muscles to deter NATO and the United States, it creates a perception of the very instability that motivates

⁹⁸ Mitchell, "Georgia Postbellum."

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, 3 and 5 May 2009.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 6 May 2009.

¹⁰¹ *Kyiv Post*, 10 May 2009.

NATO's persistent presence. The situation is fraught with uncertainty. Spurred by the acknowledged shortcomings in communications and weapons revealed in the otherwise successful Georgian operation, the Russian defence minister announced, in October 2008, a major and radical reform of the military.¹⁰² This would: reduce to one million the size of the armed forces by 2012, including 150,000 officers; eliminate 200 of 1,100 generals; simplify the command-and-control structure of the forces down to three levels from four; replace the "mobilization" model with a "permanent readiness" one; and, among other things, upgrade weapons and equipment so as to have 70 per cent of the army with modern weaponry by 2020.¹⁰³ Such a sweeping change was necessary and overdue, but the immediate U.S. response was lukewarm; certainly the reform's full realization was doubtful in view of the global economic crisis.¹⁰⁴ Although the restructuring appeared by early 2010 to have been hugely successful, the prospect of modernization was more elusive.¹⁰⁵ According to a German analyst, the modernization of the Russian military is unlikely for social and economic reasons to be realized, nor is it a threat to NATO members, but Russia's intervention in neighbouring states facilitated by it could spur NATO itself to intervene.¹⁰⁶

Shortly after he came to office, President Medvedev approved a new Foreign Policy Concept replacing that of his predecessor promulgated in the year 2000. Observers' attention was immediately focussed on whether the document had departed significantly from Putin's foreign policy, but the consensus ultimately was that continuity had prevailed over change.¹⁰⁷ While the Russian Federation would no longer refer to itself as a "great power," neither would it commit to reductions in nuclear weapons, and the document contained no significant changes with respect to the U.S. Echoing Richard Sakwa's thesis, one scholar pointed out that Russia had had no part in the design of a new global security system after the USSR's collapse, but had been

¹⁰² Roger N. McDermott, "Russia's Conventional Armed Forces and the Georgian War," *Parameters* 39, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 65-80.

¹⁰³ Johnson's Russia List, 2008-#187, 14 October 2008; 2008-#188, 15 October 2008; and 2009-#53, 17 March 2009; BBC News, 17 March 2009; *New York Times*, 18 March 2009; and *Kommersant*, 18 March 2009; and *Washington Post*, 18 March 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Johnson's Russia List, 2008-#191, 20 October 2008.

¹⁰⁵ Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#31, 16 February 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#37, 23 February 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Johnson's Russia List, 2008-#129, 9 July 2008; #133, 17 July 2008; #134, 18 July 2008; #138, 25 July 2008; and #139, 30 July 2008.

treated as a conquered enemy rather than a potential partner. Medvedev, he asserted, wants to fix this situation.¹⁰⁸ That element of resentment probably accounts for the apparent ambivalence of Russian post-Cold War foreign policy. As another scholar sums it up, "President Medvedev's foreign policy appears to consist of preserving traditional ties with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and making Russia a full-fledged member of the developed world. Russia has a potentially key role to play in Eurasia as it seeks to create parallel security structures and institutions to prevent unfriendly interference in what Moscow views as its sphere of 'privileged interests.'"¹⁰⁹

On the heels of the Foreign Policy Concept, a new Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation was promulgated by President Medvedev early in 2010.¹¹⁰ Most significantly, it identified the country's principal military danger as being constituted by NATO's assumption of global security functions. It also purportedly renounced the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons, reserving these solely in case of a threat to the existence of the state.¹¹¹ Unfortunately, the targeting of NATO was totally at odds with the Foreign Policy Concept, which had instead identified international terrorism as the number one threat.¹¹² Coincidentally, it was intriguing to read of Russia's representative to NATO saying at exactly this time that relations with his country were "quite constructive."¹¹³ Viewed positively by some as less aggressive and more restrained than its predecessor, the new doctrine was dismissed by others as unrealistic and a public relations exercise for domestic consumption.¹¹⁴

During their first summit meeting in July 2009, Presidents Medvedev and Obama reached agreement on several key issues hitherto dividing their two countries, a significant development in "resetting" Russia-US relations despite its modest scope.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2008-#139, 30 July 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2009-#175, 22 September 2009. As Peter Rutland correctly points out, Medvedev did not speak of a Russian "sphere of influence," but said rather that "There are regions in which Russia has privileged interests." Ibid., 2008-#187, 14 October 2008.

¹¹⁰ For the text of the document, see Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#35, 19 February 2010.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2010-#27, 10 February 2010, and 2010-#31, 16 February 2010.

¹¹² Ibid., 2010-#26, 8 February 2010.

¹¹³ Ibid., 2010-#37, 23 February 2010.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2010-#26, 8 February 2010, and 2010-#27, 10 February 2010.

¹¹⁵ For coverage of the summit, on which this paragraph is based, see: Gregory Feifer, "Will U.S.-Russia Summit Finally Begin 'Reset'?" Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 2 July 2009; *Washington Post*, 2, 5-7, and

The principal agreement, spelled out in a ten-point document, was on strategic offensive (nuclear) weapons. Whereas the two powers currently allowed themselves 1,600 delivery systems and 2,200 warheads, they would reduce these to between 500-1,100 of the former and 1,500-1,675 of the latter by 2012. As was pointed out in newspaper articles citing various analysts at the time, the numbers themselves indicated the gap still separating the two sides' positions as well as the modesty of their proposed reductions. Nonetheless, this agreement did set the stage for a replacement of START, for further cuts in their nuclear arsenals, and ultimately perhaps for total elimination of nuclear weapons. The other important result of the summit was agreement by Russia to the transit of American military supplies across its territory to Afghanistan. There was, however, no agreement on the missile defence system proposed by the U.S. to be built in Eastern Europe against a supposed threat from Iran but considered as a threat to itself by Russia. Nor could the two sides agree on a common position regarding Iran, and the Georgian question was effectively left suspended in mid-air. They did, however, agree to share data about missile launchings hostile to themselves and to work to dispose of some weapons-grade plutonium, neither of which was an entirely new initiative both having been introduced in the 1990s but never completed. Altogether, while the summit could not be described as a dramatic breakthrough, it was certainly a step towards improved, cooperative relations uncharacteristic of the New Cold War. That it constituted a reversal of U.S. foreign policy was explicitly confirmed by none other than John Bolton, George W. Bush's erstwhile hatchet man at the UN, who bemoaned the consequent weakening of the U.S., accused Obama of giving away the shop to the Russians, and inexplicably declared the reduced number of strategic nuclear missile delivery systems "shockingly low."¹¹⁶

In September 2009, to the undoubted consternation of the Boltonites and the readily vocalized outrage of Republicans, President Obama announced he was abandoning plans for the long-range missile defence system based in Poland and the Czech Republic.¹¹⁷ This was another explicit departure from the policy of George W. Bush; it was seen in Washington as a concession to the Russians but in Moscow as a

¹¹⁶ 13 July 2009; *New York Times*, 5-8 July 2009; as well as *Kommersant*, 6 July 2009; and *Ukrains'ka Pravda*, 8 July 2009.

¹¹⁷ *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), (Alberta edition), 8 July 2009; and *New York Times*, 7 July 2009.

¹¹⁷ *Washington Post*, 17 September 2009; and *New York Times*, 18 September 2009.

positive move towards better relations. The Bush plan was to be replaced by a system of shorter-range missiles initially ship-borne but eventually land-based, perhaps even in the same two countries. Obama's announcement would likely remove an obstacle to the replacement of START.¹¹⁸

By early 2010, the replacement for START had still not yet been signed—although said to have been 97 per cent ready—and assessments of the success of the effort to “reset” Russia-U.S. relations were generally lukewarm.¹¹⁹ Disagreements on missile defence were dragging out the START negotiations; even were a treaty to be signed, ratification could be killed by the U.S. Congress.¹²⁰ A Russian expert claimed that the U.S. needed START for its goal of world domination.¹²¹ Confusion was also sown by occasional dissonance between the utterances of Medvedev and Putin.¹²² Undoubtedly, at the root of these difficulties in settling on a follow-up to START, as well as in establishing trust and cooperation between the U.S. and Russia, are their fundamentally different conceptions of their strategic interests.¹²³

Cold Wars, Old and New, and International Relations

There are good reasons to support an argument that a New Cold War, in reference to U.S.-Russia relations, does not exist. Recalling what was said earlier about the analysis of international relations being carried out at the system level as well as the state level, it may be easier to see why. If we compare, at the system level, the period of the Cold War (1948-1991) with that of the post-Cold War, in terms of the global interactions of states and their quality, capabilities of the major actors, and potential for realignment, we definitely see more changes than continuities. The greatest changes

¹¹⁸ For some intelligent commentary, both American and Russian, on this development, see Johnson's Russia List, 2009-#174, 21 September 2009.

¹¹⁹ Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#32, 17 February 2010; 2010-#20, 29 January 2010; 2010-#23, 3 February 2010; 2010-#26, 8 February 2010; and 2010-#29, 12 February 2010.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2010-#33, 18 February 2010.

¹²¹ Ibid., 2010-#23, 3 February 2010.

¹²² Compare, for example, “Medvedev Optimistic on Arms Deal with U.S.,” *Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 2009, with “Putin Sounds Warning on Arms Talks,” *New York Times*, 30 December 2009.

¹²³ Johnson's Russia List, 2010-#29, 12 February 2010; and Andrew Monaghan, “An Enemy at the Gates’ or ‘From Victory to Victory?’ Russian Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs* (London) 84, no. 4 (2008): pp. 732-33.

have been in capabilities and alignments, of course. Whereas in the Cold War the USSR and USA were both superpowers in an attitude of confrontation in the previous period, only the USA is one now. Alignments were relatively frozen during the Cold War, but change triggered by the collapse of the USSR and a thawing of alignments allowed Eastern European as well as some former Soviet states to join the EU, something unthinkable during the Cold War. Under the heading of interactions among states, the overarching change was from a bipolar to a unipolar world. Accompanying this, ideology, nuclear standoff and deterrence, as well as the arms race have either disappeared or been downgraded in relations among states and within the international system, by comparison with the Cold War. Soft power has presumably replaced hard power in international relations, at least in theory if not in practice. In these terms, the Cold War is definitely over.

On the state level of analysis, however, there appears to be a more problematic mixture of continuity and change from the Cold War to the post-Cold War, giving some support to the New Cold War thesis. Recalling the categories under which international relations at the state level are usually analyzed—objectives, policy-makers, capabilities, perceptions, and alliances—we can in a nutshell and with some degree of certainty make the following observations. In regard to USSR/Russia-U.S. relations a three-way periodization may be more useful, i.e., Cold War, Putin-Bush presidencies, and Medvedev-Obama presidencies, so as to see not only whether the New Cold War term is justified, but also if it was a feature peculiar to the Putin era or not. The most noticeable changes from each of these periods to the next have been observable in terms of each state's foreign policy objectives. In the Cold War, the USSR's objectives could be summarized as resisting the U.S., maintaining a threatening posture towards Europe and America while endeavouring to pry the Western alliance apart, and using international organizations in support of its confrontations with the U.S. The objectives of the U.S., meanwhile, were containment of the USSR, promotion of free trade throughout the world, and the sale of arms. In the Putin-Bush era, as discussed earlier, the objectives changed considerably. As articulated by Putin himself, Russia's objectives were: good relations with the U.S.; to be regarded as a "great power"; and to be a "normal" state with respect to relations with other sovereign states. The U.S., for its part, had as its post-Cold War objectives: to act unilaterally as deemed necessary; to fight the global war on terrorism; to promote freedom and democracy worldwide; to

ignore or to sideline Russia; and to promote the American model of capitalism. Under Medvedev, Russia initially shifted objectives again, towards resisting the U.S. (rather than primarily seeking good relations) and using hard power (instead of the norms and institutions of international relations common to “normal” countries). The U.S. under Obama is still concerned with fighting terrorism, but is now interested in getting Russia onside with respect to Iran and to the negotiating table on arms control. In a way, arms control talks are reminiscent of the Cold War, so this engagement of Russia can be seen as both a step forward from the Bush regime and a step back to where the Cold War left off. A major and significant continuity, spanning all three periods, is the competition over energy and pipelines, with the U.S. trying to sideline Russia and Russia attempting to break the virtual blockade, a clash of objectives as deep and fundamental as can be imagined in an energy-dependent world.

Where there has been the most obvious change in relations between the USSR/Russia and the U.S. is in terms of the top policy-makers, their leadership styles and initiatives in foreign policy. In the USSR, there was, in the 1980s, a dramatic shift from Brezhnev and his immediate successors in the gerontocracy, on the one hand, to Gorbachev, on the other. Out went détente, stability, stagnation, the war in Afghanistan, and “real existing socialism”; in came openness, nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from Afghanistan, and mutual interest in survival. Later on, there was a marked change from the rather chaotic foreign policy leadership of Yeltsin to the more disciplined and focussed approach of Putin. Then again, early Putin (2000-3) was different from later Putin (2003-5). Today, of course, Medvedev is president, but Putin remains present in spirit as well as in body. On the American side, Reagan was succeeded by Bush Sr., who was succeeded by Clinton, but policies did not change much. The change from Bush Jr., to Obama appears to offer the prospect of significant changes in foreign policy, whereas Medvedev’s presidency gives the impression so far of continuity on that side of the divide.

In terms of capabilities of the two states, the historic change comes at the end of the Cold War when the USSR was revealed to have been a Potemkin Village masquerading as a superpower. That situation—the U.S. being the only superpower—did not change in 2008, so either the New Cold War of the Putin-Bush era continues for now or else it never existed in the first place.

Perceptions, as noted earlier, include vestiges of the Cold War mentality which have survived to the present day, as well as the notorious idea of "American Exceptionalism" which has prevailed throughout. Although Barack Obama exudes the air of having a fresh perspective on the world, there remains in his rhetoric a hint of that same "American Exceptionalism"—perhaps for domestic consumption—that has historically caused so much grief for U.S. foreign policy.¹²⁴ Together with the fact that Putin in his time as president shifted from pragmatism to a mixture of statism, nationalism, and old-fashioned geopolitics,¹²⁵ this does not bode well for the improvement of U.S.-Russia relations, reinforcing the trepidation associated with the notion of a New Cold War.

The most mixed score at the state level in relations between the U.S. and Russia comes under the heading of alliances, and the principal surviving alliance from the Cold War is NATO. While the Warsaw Pact dissolved with the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and of the USSR itself, and while post-Cold War Russia has cultivated new alliances, the Western military alliance keeps going like the proverbial Duracell bunny. Having "adapted" itself to the changed circumstances of the post-Cold War, NATO pursues a policy that understandably would be perceived by Russia as containment, part of the very essence of the Cold War.

At the state level, therefore, a mixed picture emerges in respect of USSR/Russia-U.S. relations over the period from the Cold War to the present day. There have been significant changes away from the conditions of the Cold War in terms of objectives, leadership, and capabilities of the two states. At the same time, the continuities—in perceptions and alliances—are remarkable: the persistence of American-Russian competition, the unabated spying, NATO's ongoing expansion, the U.S. reliance on "threats" as engine of foreign policy, and, above all, the survival of that "American Exceptionalism." If the Cold War ended in 1989, because communism and the USSR were no longer a threat, and if in 1991 the USSR collapsed altogether, but then a New Cold War developed as an irreconcilable conflict between the U.S. and Russia, then

¹²⁴ For a full litany of the grief, see, in particular, Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2000), and idem, *Nemesis: The Last Days of the American Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2006).

¹²⁵ Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

perhaps the United States has been the driving force all along from the very beginning. It may well be that the New Cold War so-called is not new at all, but a continuation, something that will likely persist until and unless the culture of American capitalism *cum* imperialism *cum* liberal democracy is altered away from its messianic direction by new elites and leadership, or perhaps by the global economic crisis. Putin's and Medvedev's Russia could, surely, be handled diplomatically—there is no need for Cold War. The original Cold War was a displacement or replacement of diplomacy, a substitute for it; it made no sense in international relations theory, and the current version does not, either.

Speaking of international relations theory, and harking back to the half-dozen varieties of it alluded to earlier in this paper, none of them would be able to explain the deterioration of Russia-U.S. relations in the post-Cold War period. Certainly this is true for realism, revisionism, post-revisionism, and world-systems theory. Perhaps it is less so with the cultural or ideological theories. Instead, it seems that fluctuations such as we have seen in this relationship are liable to be better accounted for first, by actions and reactions; and second, by the perceptions and misperceptions of the parties concerned.¹²⁶ Consider just a few notable turning-points: Putin's offer of assistance to the United States after September 11, 2001, or Russia's more confrontational posture to the U.S. after 2003, or the invasion of Georgia in 2008. Likewise, George Bush's sidelining of Russia, or Obama's opening of dialogue with Russia and the start of arms reduction talks, might be considered from the other side of the dyad. In none of these turning-points were there developments that conventional IR theories consider to be critical or determining: no shift in power or interests (realism); no change in either American or Russian domestic politics (revisionism); and/or no alteration of the global system of capitalism and trade (post-revisionism and world-systems theory). After the recognition of Kosovo's independence, there were plenty of warnings—from the Russians as well as outside observers—that Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be next. Deteriorating or improving relations between the U.S. and Russia appear related more closely to antecedent events (as reactions to them) and/or to perceptions (or misperceptions) than they are to the would-be rules of the game of international relations.

¹²⁶ For a strong, theoretical defence of the latter, see *ibid.*, chs. 1 and 2.

Conclusions

Whether there is today (2010) a New Cold War between Russia and the U.S. depends on three elements: the definition of Cold War, who is telling the story and the level of abstraction in the analysis. A traditional narrative of diplomatic history, for example, would likely lead to a positive conclusion, particularly if the narrator were to emphasize the points of conflict and contention. A narrow definition of Cold War, limited to ideology and nuclear weapons, and its characterization as a standoff between the two superpowers, would produce a negative assessment, showing the absolute inappropriateness of the analogy for post-Cold War Russia-U.S. relations. At a high level of abstraction, focussing on the transcendence of the bipolar international system as well as the collapse of the Soviet superpower, not to mention the configuration of economic powerhouses and alignments emerging in today's world, we also cannot see the so-called New Cold War. But if diplomats (who choose to be undiplomatic) and politicians (who can also be undiplomatic), or journalists for that matter, want to blame the other side for stoking a New Cold War, then there is nothing academics—with their theories of international relations--can do to stop them. What we do know for certain is that Gaddis got it wrong: the Cold War was unnecessary; it failed to settle issues once and for all; and we are living to regret it.