Presidential Hedgehogs:

Perception and Misperception in U.S.-Russia Relations, 1993-2008

by

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, there has frequently been a gap between the expectations of American foreign-policy decision-makers and the reality of subsequent events. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush entered office with a high degree of optimism about the United States' capacity, as the world's sole superpower, to usher in changes in international politics that would create a freer, safer, and more prosperous world. However, policy choices made in pursuit of this goal often produced unintended, unanticipated, and sometimes counter-productive results. One area in which this was the case was the United States' relationship with Russia. Between 1993 and 2008, the Clinton and Bush administrations led efforts to "reset" the bilateral relationship, and build a new partnership that transcended the Cold War's legacy of confrontation and distrust. In both cases, the policies pursued by the United States tended to reinforce Russian suspicion, resentment, and hostility towards American foreign policy and its goals, leaving the Russo-American relationship even worse off.[1]

This study seeks to examine one cause of the disconnect between the anticipated and actual results of American foreign policy choices with regard to Russia during the Clinton and Bush presidencies. The investigation adopts as a model what Keren Yarhi-Milo called the selective attention thesis. She posits that leaders, in their effort to predict the future behaviour of other states, tend to weigh various sorts of information differently. Psychological biases such as confirmation bias and vividness bias tend to cause people to pay more attention to information that supports their existing beliefs

[1] Angela E. Stent identified the reset-disappointment cycle in her book *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

and less attention to conflicting information, especially in cases when there is a difference in vividness between these sorts of information.[2]

The available evidence in public statements, government records, and the memoirs of the presidents and their key advisors shows that information which supported Clinton and Bush's liberal interpretations of international politics received more attention than did information that challenged their assumptions, which was sometimes ignored, misinterpreted, or dismissed. In this sense, they were what Isaiah Berlin called "hedgehogs," i.e. the type of person who seeks to relate everything to a central organizing principle. This pattern of behaviour repeatedly resulted in misperception of their Russian counterparts' own worldviews, priorities, and concerns. Such misperception contributed to the selection of policies that further strained, rather than improved, relations with Russia, and also led to American administrations being more surprised by Russian reactions to US policy than they might otherwise have been.

[2] Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). "Vividness" refers to the degree to which information is emotionally weighty, concrete, proximate in time and space, as well as easily imaginable. For example, dramatic, first-person experiences are highly vivid, while information acquired by reading a technical report tends to be less so.

Of course, like all over-simple classifications of this type, the dichotomy becomes, if pressed, artificial, scholastic and ultimately absurd. But if it is not an aid to serious criticism, neither should it be rejected as being merely superficial or frivolous: like all distinctions which embody any degree of truth, it offers a point of view from which to look and compare, a starting-point for genuine investigation.

- Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, 1951

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Disclaimer

The views and academic opinions expressed in this thesis are mine alone, and do not represent the official views of the Canadian Armed Forces, the Government of Canada, or any agency thereof.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

America's "unipolar moment" seemed to peak almost as soon as Charles Krauthammer coined the phrase, in the title of a *Foreign Affairs* article in early 1990. At the end of 1992, optimism about the prospects for a stable, peaceful, liberal, free-trade, and American-led future were at likely an all-time high. In the intervening two years, the former Warsaw Pact states of Eastern Europe began their rapid realignment with the West, and the Maastricht Treaty furthered integration by transforming the European Community into the European Union. Germany was reunified as a liberal democracy, while Czechoslovakia split peacefully in the Velvet Divorce. America emerged triumphant in the Gulf War, while the Nunn-Lugar Act pushed resources into the former Soviet Union to round up "loose nukes" and prevent proliferation. The new Russian Federation was the largest and most powerful of the new post-Soviet states, but its president, Boris Yeltsin, had met George H.W. Bush at Camp David to formally declare the Cold War over. By Christmas 1992, the USSR had been gone for a year and Bush was soon to be replaced by the young, energetic, and optimistic liberal Bill Clinton. Francis Fukuyama's 1989 article "The End of History?" had expanded into a much-discussed book, with the question mark dropped from the title.[1]

Certainly, not everything was perfect. The peaceful transformation of Eastern Europe failed to push south into the Balkans where the violent breakup of Yugoslavia was already underway. Desert Storm - while militarily decisive - had failed to produce an equally conclusive political outcome, leaving Iraq, alongside the wider Middle East,

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[1] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

stubbornly resistant to a final settlement of its long-standing sources of conflict. And while China was rapidly integrating with global markets and had signed on to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the 1989 crackdown on Tiananmen Square remained an ominous sign of the durability of the one-party system.

Still, when Clinton was inaugurated on January 20th, 1993, these problems appeared to be, at worst, manageable hangovers of the past. America would seize the initiative in shaping a new future. As the newly sworn-in Clinton declared to the crowd at the Capitol, "America must continue to lead the world we did so much to make. While America rebuilds at home, we will not shrink from the challenges nor fail to seize the opportunities of this new world."[2] More importantly, solutions to the world's outstanding problems seemed to be at hand in the form of a liberal internationalist foreign policy. The rising tide of a globalized economy was expected to lift all boats, reducing global poverty while simultaneously spreading liberal social and political values near and far. This process could be managed and defended through the suite of liberal international institutions: the United Nations, NATO, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (soon to transform into the World Trade Organization), and the World Bank, to name only the most prominent. It would be led by a dynamic, invigorated America willing to drive investment and, if necessary, lead military interventions to deal with the most intolerable problem cases and worst human-rights violators. President Clinton's address articulated the prevailing optimism about the state of world affairs and America's ability to midwife a new liberal world order:

[2] William J. Clinton, Inaugural Address Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/219347

> Together with our friends and allies, we will work to shape change, lest it engulf us. When our vital interests are challenged or the will and conscience of the international community is defied, we will act, with peaceful diplomacy whenever possible, with force when necessary. The brave Americans serving our Nation today in the Persian Gulf, in Somalia, and wherever else they stand are testament to our resolve. But our greatest strength is the power of our ideas, which are still new in many lands. Across the world we see them embraced, and we rejoice. Our hopes, our hearts, our hands are with those on every continent who are building democracy and freedom. Their cause is America's cause.[3]

Looking forward to the rest of the 1990s and the new millennium, the general political consensus in Western capitals was that this liberal internationalist model of the world, its future, and attendant foreign policy options were nigh-unassailable. While scholars in the realist tradition were still prominent within the academy, their views did not have many supporters in the halls of government, especially within the American executive.

Yet the decades that followed Clinton's inauguration would be full of surprises for those who embraced the "Standard Model" of liberal internationalism, regardless of whether they happened to prefer a more institutionalist or more interventionist flavour of liberalism. Few would have predicted the grinding intractability of the Balkan crisis, the Israel-Palestine question, and Iraq's disarmament. Fewer still would have suspected the American-led world's willingness to sit out a genocide in Rwanda a mere year later. A tale of getting bogged down in Forever Wars in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and the

[3] Ibid.

Sahel, with Russia carving off bits of its neighbours, while nationalism, protectionism, and authoritarianism all enjoyed a surge in popularity would have come across as a dystopian foreign policy fantasy to nearly the entire Western political and press establishment. And yet those things came to pass.

Why didn't America's unipolar moment produce the anticipated results, in terms of security, trade, and political trends? Fingers have been pointed at various culprits in attempts to explain different aspects of the general failure. Looking at grand strategy and defence, recent responses from the realist tradition place the blame squarely on the American foreign policy establishment and the liberal policy assumptions it represents.[4] Others have focused on the structure of the global economy and financial crises, and their effects on politics.[5] Some liberal hawks have even argued that the West's current problems stem from a failure to push the liberal foreign policy model either aggressively or persistently enough.[6] These arguments have varying degrees of merit and the question of the relative importance of each of the causes they focus on is grounds for a likely interminable debate. Certainly, the complexity of world-historical trends defies neat-and-tidy explanation. Even sufficiently analyzing the role of just one cause or another on a global scale over three decades would lie far beyond the scope of this thesis.

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[4] Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018); Barry Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

[5] Perhaps the most comprehensive treatment of this question is Adam Tooze, *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World* (New York: Viking, 2018).

[6] Bret Stephens, *America in Retreat: The New Isolationism and the Coming Disorder* (New York: Sentinel, 2014); Robert Kagan, "Superpowers Don't Get to Retire," *The New Republic*, May 26, 2014, https://newrepublic.com/article/117859/superpowers-dont-get-retire.

What I propose to do instead is to focus on one specific area in which optimistic expectations met with subsequent disappointment, namely the United States' bilateral relationship with the Russian Federation between the beginning of the Clinton administration and the outbreak of the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. This relationship is useful not only because of its high-profile and linkage to broader strategic questions, but also because it has quite clearly followed a cyclical pattern of renewed optimism followed by deep disappointment that is characteristic of the post-Cold War period generally. The aspect of the relationship that I will seek to investigate is how this cycle of optimism and disappointment was (at least in part) caused by mismatched perceptions of world politics, and an apparent unwillingness or inability to re-calibrate expectations in light of conflicting evidence.

The investigation will be structured around what Angela Stent identified as the defining feature of the post-Cold War Russo-American relations, namely a series of attempts to "reset" relations, each of which was followed by frustration and a deterioration in relations. Stent in fact addresses what she sees as four resets: first George H.W. Bush's and Mikhail Gorbachev's effort to redefine relations and end the Cold War, followed by Bill Clinton's effort to build a new partnership with Boris Yeltsin's rapidly-changing Russia, George W. Bush's effort to forge a new pragmatism with Vladimir Putin based on mutual counter-terrorism concerns in the wake of 9/11, and finally the Obama administration's attempt to explicitly "reset" relations during the Dmitri Medvedev presidency.[7]

[7] Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

My study will set aside the first and last of these resets. While undoubtedly important in shaping the resolution of the Cold War, the Bush 41 reset is in some respects dissimilar from the subsequent three resets. First and foremost, it was, until nearly the end of Bush's tenure, a Russo-American relationship only to the extent that Russia was the centre of the Soviet Union. Bush and Gorbachev were interacting with one eye firmly turned towards the long preceding history of rivalry between the USSR and the USA (and their respective blocs), while attempting to find a way to transcend that history in the future. In this sense, the Bush 41-era relationship belongs more properly to the era of Soviet-American relations, even if it represents the close of that era and the opening of a new historical chapter in which the Cold War rivalry and Warsaw Pact were no longer factors, and in which Russia itself had a new form.

The subsequent three resets represent a new era and new problems in the Russo-American relationship. While some aspects of the Russian Federation's strategic posture have deep historical roots, the state nonetheless represents something new in Russian history. Before the end of 1991, nothing quite like the current Russian nation-state had existed. Russia's previous eight and a half decades were defined by its role at the head of a broader, internationalist, and revolutionary political movement, both within the borders of the Soviet state and further afield. While communism never managed to fully square its internationalist theory with the questions of national difference and Russian dominance of the Soviet Union and many of its allies, the US-Soviet relationship can at no point be seen as being primarily defined by a more narrow set of Russo-American issues.[8]

[8] Even Vladimir Putin's oft-cited comment that he regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century is, I believe, mostly a backwards projection of his

In a similar way, the Russian Federation is not simply a post-communist reversion to some sort of historically "natural" Russia last embodied by the Russian Empire. The Russian Federation's geography and politics are as different from the Tsars' last decades as they are from the Soviet era. What the Russian Federation in fact represents is a first in Russian history: an (at least nominally) secular, non-monarchical, non-revolutionary, multi-party state whose sovereignty is in some sense supposed to be lying with the Russian people and their consent.[9] It is at least formally proclaimed to be the same "type" of state as any of its Western counterparts or Eastern European and Caucasian neighbours. It is not a reincarnation of the Tsars' claim to a divine right to imperial rule, nor does it espouse a world-revolutionary ideology of the type that was never fully detached from Soviet foreign policy.

For these reasons, it is appropriate to set aside the Bush-Gorbachev relationship and focus instead on the subsequent resets, as they represent a distinct new period in the history of Russo-American relations. This new era featured a common motif, even as both the Russian Federation and the United States each progressed through presidential administrations with leaders of remarkably different personality and political style. Within this new era I will also set aside the Obama administration. While it appears that the post-2008 Russo-American relationship continued to exhibit patterns that emerged during the 1993-2008 period, a full investigation of a third administration lies beyond the scope of a thesis of this length. Additionally, many sources have not yet been

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contemporary vision of Russia as an eternal Great Power and would-be balancer against an imperial America in a realist world.

[9] One important consequence of the establishment of a modern Russian nation-state (as contrasted with the preceding multiethnic empire and revolutionary Soviet state) is that the state became more closely related to the idea of an ethnic Russian nation, members of which were left outside the borders of the "home" nation-state due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

declassified or otherwise made publicly available, and historical distance is just beginning to emerge.[10]

The Clinton and George W. Bush presidencies are particularly useful for comparative study, as the presidents came from opposite parties, differed in political style and domestic preferences, and served terms that very closely aligned with the terms of their Russian counterparts, Yeltsin and Putin. These sequential administrations pursued policies of reset, which invariably gave way to deep disappointment and renewed tension. The repetitive disconnect between apparent intent and ultimate results might raise the question of whether the stated desire for a new, better relationship was mere talk. However, there was no malign intent behind the failures of this overarching policy. One can hardly believe that the various attempts to improve relations across three American administrations were all conceived and initiated in bad faith. As we will see, American presidents earnestly hoped for improved relations and believed in the possibility.

The attempts to improve the Russo-American relationship were genuine, and were rooted in the premise that success could be realized. What then can help account for the continual optimism in the face of recurring setbacks, frequently over the same set of issues: NATO expansion, ballistic missile defence and the nuclear balance, and interference in the post-Soviet space? How and why were American leaders (and to a certain extent, other Western leaders) consistently making foreign policy choices that were expected to produce positive results, yet which ultimately ended up resulting in renewed confrontation with the Russian Federation - the opposite of their intended

[10] Under the United States' Presidential Records Act, presidential records from the Obama administration will become eligible for access under the Freedom of Information Act on January 22, 2022. Classification and redaction of some records will likely persist well beyond that date.

effect? Why were perceptions and expectations so consistently out of alignment with reality? Why did American leaders have such a poor record of accurately assessing the likely Russian responses to their foreign policy, and of forecasting the consequences of these responses? These are the questions that will be at the centre of the investigation that follows.

Perception and forecasting are critical elements in the foreign policy behaviour of states. Yet this aspect of international relations is somewhat under-examined at the practical level with respect to its importance, both in terms of our historical understanding and to current foreign policy-making. This is perhaps due to the extreme practical difficulty of the question at hand. Accurately predicting the intentions and future behaviour of other states and their leaders is a task with many serious challenges. First, there is the basic problem of uncertainty about what anyone else is actually thinking. But this simple uncertainty is compounded by several layers of additional uncertainty including, but not limited to: the question of what means are useful for signalling one's own intentions to others, the question of whether any given signal will be interpreted in the same way by all observers,[11] and which factors are important in determining whether a signal will communicate credibility to the intended audience(s).[12] This last question can be further complicated by uncertainty about which individuals or groups in foreign governments are the real foreign-policy decision-makers.

[11] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), especially p. 203-215.

[12] On the role of credibility in international relations see Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Who Fights for Reputation: The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); and Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

At the theoretical level, international relations scholars have produced a wide range of interpretations of how states deal with this uncertainty. The most optimistic liberal institutionalist interpretations hold that supranational organizations provide a means for states to lower uncertainty, build trust, identify common interests, and negotiate disputes through frank dialogue, a sheer increase in the mutual transmission of information, and mutually-beneficial adherence to rules.[13] The most pessimistic of offensive realists argue that the fact that the basic question of uncertainty can never be resolved forces states to rationally fear and assume the worst of all other states and their actions, and thus seek to exploit every opportunity for relative gain.[14]

Across this spectrum of optimism lies an additional theoretical debate about what states do, or should, take into account when attempting to assess both the short- and long-term intentions of their adversaries. Less common, however, are practical assessments of how well these theoretical frameworks line up with the observed historical behaviour of leaders. A useful recent attempt to fill this gap is Keren Yarhi-Milo's evaluation of what political leaders and intelligence agencies actually take into account (and what they ignore) when assessing intentions and how these groups differ.[15] Yarhi-Milo's work tests four theses about what types of information leaders and intelligence agencies rely on when attempting to assess intentions: the capabilities thesis, the military doctrine thesis, the behavioural signals thesis, and the selective attention thesis.

[13] Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
[14] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).
[15] Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

The first three of these theses are relatively straightforward. The capabilities thesis posits that the military capabilities developed, acquired, and/or deployed by a state reflect its intentions, and thus observers should primarily focus on an adversary's military in anticipating its probable future behaviour.[16] The military doctrine thesis is somewhat related but argues that the adoption of offensive or defensive strategic, operational, and tactical doctrines - rather than military capabilities in and of themselves - is the key barometer of a state's intentions. Conversely, the behavioural signals thesis argues that states primarily infer the intentions of other states by monitoring their foreign policy behaviour for costly indicators of hostility or a benign stance.[17] In each of these three frameworks, one would expect the assessments of a state's political leadership and intelligence agencies to converge over time, as each rationally considers an ever-increasing amount of information about the trend in the adversary's military posture, doctrine, or foreign policy behaviour.[18] Yarhi-Milo's conclusion here could reasonably be extended to include an expectation that other observers' views (such as those of academics, or commentators in the press) should also converge towards agreement so long as they are observing the same indicators, which are supposed to reflect information about intentions reliably.

The selective attention thesis, on the other hand, is somewhat more complicated and draws on developments in cognitive behavioural research and psychology. The central idea is that different observers consistently rely on different information when assessing adversary intentions. Yarhi-Milo examines three ways in which assessments

[16] There are additional internal debates within the capabilities thesis, primarily over whether (and/or under what conditions) certain types of military capabilities signal hostile or benign intent.
[17] Costly indicators denotes behaviours that carry costs for a state. The willingness to incur costs (whether in terms of resources, time, or reduced freedom of action) is presumed to indicate a state's commitment to certain objectives, courses of action, or desire to be viewed in a given fashion by others.
[18] Yarhi-Milo, 26-38.

can diverge from each other, which she labels the vividness hypothesis, the subjective credibility hypothesis, and the organizational expertise hypothesis. Briefly, the vividness hypothesis, following from recent psychological work, posits that information that is "vivid" (i.e. emotionally weighty, concrete, proximate in time and space, as well as easily imaginable) plays an outsized role in human decision-making, often crowding out information that is abstract, dry, or less concrete. This tendency increases the importance of first-hand experiences (for example, of direct summit talks with adversary leaders) and "dramatic" events in the minds of decision-makers during the process of forecasting and formulating policy. Equally, it can serve to minimize the importance of abstract, data-heavy, or conceptual intelligence reporting in leaders' thinking about the adversary.[19]

The subjective credibility hypothesis also pertains to decision-making at the individual level. It challenges the view that what counts as a credible signal of intentions or probable future behaviour is widely agreed upon by observers. In fact, observers (in this case political leaders) vary significantly in their perception of what counts as credible, and their perception is strongly shaped by factors such as their past experience and established beliefs. Here well-known psychological tendencies like confirmation bias and denial can manifest at the level of foreign policy decision-making. Leaders, like the rest of us, are prone to paying excessive attention or giving undue weight to information that supports our beliefs, while downplaying or ignoring information that refutes or challenges those beliefs. In the realm of international politics, this means that leaders' established beliefs about both an adversary (or partner, for that matter) and the very nature of the international system can have significant impact on policy selection

[19] Ibid., 16-20.

and implementation.[20] As I will argue in detail below, this type of psychological behaviour has been a major factor in the history of Russo-American relations since the end of the Cold War.

Finally, the organizational expertise hypothesis posits that in making assessments intelligence organizations will give priority to information that aligns with their prime competency, namely evaluating the numbers and capabilities of other states' militaries generally and weapons systems in particular. Intelligence organizations' emphasis on "hard" (i.e. quantifiable) military data has two main effects. First, it means that intelligence organizations tend to behave as the capabilities thesis would in fact expect: they derive their conclusions about adversary intentions and probable future behaviour from their estimate of the adversary's military capabilities, while tending to downplay other types of information. In light of this, Yarhi-Milo invokes a well-known categorization scheme: Isaiah Berlin's comparison of "hedgehogs" and "foxes". As the ancient Greek poetic fragment goes, "the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." Berlin used this to create two general categories of people: those who relate everything in the world to "a single, universal, organizing principle," and those who view the world as consisting of multiple, even contradictory things and currents, all lacking a common anchoring point.[21] With regard to assessments, Yarhi-Milo views intelligence organizations as hedgehogs primarily devoted to the centrality of military capabilities, whereas political leaders are more like foxes, willing to take a greater variety of information into account in shaping their views of the adversary.[22]

[20] Ibid., 20-23. See also Jervis, 143-202.
[21] Isaiah Berlin, *The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History,* 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).
[22] Yarhi-Milo, 24.

While this distinction is useful at one level for distinguishing a key difference between how leaders and intelligence organizations operate, I will argue that American political leaders from 1993-2008 were in fact also hedgehogs in another way: they consistently related all the problems, events, and forecasts of the Russo-American relationship to a general, all-encompassing liberal interpretation of international politics.[23] Furthermore, this tendency had important consequences for the Russo-American relationship, and helped to fuel the reset-disappointment cycle that characterized the post-Cold War period.

Before undertaking that investigation, however, it is important to address the second effect of intelligence agencies' reliance on quantifiable data and a capabilities-oriented worldview. As noted previously, this is a source of divergence between intelligence assessments and the thinking of the policy-making leadership. Through her case-studies of British assessments of Nazi Germany in the 1930s and American assessments of Soviet intentions both during the collapse of détente and during the final phase of the Cold War, Yarhi-Milo makes a convincing case for the selective attention thesis. States typically lack an internal agreement about what is relevant to assessing adversary intentions, with different branches and individuals within administrations disagreeing about what is important and even what a given signal means. This

[23] While the Clinton and Bush administrations varied in their views towards liberal institutionalism versus liberal interventionism, they shared core convictions about the nature of the international system, especially the importance of democracy promotion, the role of markets and trade in promoting peace and spreading values, and the probability that not only are liberal values universal, but will be quickly adopted by people everywhere once political barriers to doing so are removed. For an extended discussion of the persistence of the liberal foreign policy "playbook" across administrations, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

frequently leads to internal disagreement about how other states are likely to behave in the future, whether on their own initiative or in response to one's own actions.[24]

What does this mean for policy-making? Given that intelligence agencies (at least in Western-style democracies) typically do not propose foreign policy options, leaders are faced with several choices when presented with intelligence reporting that is not in alignment with their existing views. The first option is to work cooperatively with intelligence agencies to quickly and constantly adjust policy views in light of new information, including a conscious weighting of intelligence reporting against all available sources of information (although it must be said that this seems to be an infrequent behaviour; leaders and intelligence professionals more frequently exhibit mutual frustration).[25] More common is to either dismiss intelligence reporting entirely or to adhere only to those parts that support one's own assessment while jettisoning the rest (confirmation bias).[26] Lastly, leaders can politicize intelligence, sending agencies back to either look for evidence that supports their pre-existing conclusions or re-evaluate the available evidence to do the same.[27]

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[24] Yarhi-Milo acknowledges that her case studies are limited to Western liberal democratic states, and that authoritarian or non-democratic states may have different internal dynamics (see pg. 250). However, support for the general applicability of the selective attention thesis (although he does not use this term) is given by Raymond L. Garthoff in *Soviet Leaders and Intelligence: Assessing the American Adversary During the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015). Garthoff finds similar splits between the USSR's political leadership and intelligence agencies throughout the Soviet period.

[25] Further discussion of the often fraught relationship between political leaders and the intelligence community is provided by Robert Jervis, "Why Intelligence and Policymakers Clash," *Political Science Quarterly* 125, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 185-204.

[26] It is important to note here that this behaviour is not intrinsically good or bad. At the end of the Cold War, both Reagan and Gorbachev ignored intelligence assessments that were far more skeptical and hawkish than their own judgments. Even though their judgments were highly personalized and rested to a very large degree on their first-hand summit interactions, they correctly perceived each other's basic non-hostility and desire to end the Cold War confrontation (see Garthoff pg. 74-101). On the other hand, Neville Chamberlain's slowness in recognizing that Hitler was not a good-faith counterpart, even after warnings of his potential aggression began arriving from British intelligence 1936, was not so beneficial (see Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary*, 94-113).

[27] Agencies may respond by "cooking" their assessments by reframing their conclusions or providing additional possible conclusions, or in extreme cases - such as in the late Stalinist period - ensuring that all

I will seek to show that the tendencies that Yarhi-Milo identified in case studies of the history of Soviet-American relations persisted in the post-Soviet era. While the advent of a new Russian state and the novel strategic dynamics of American unipolar primacy do mark a distinct era in the history of Russo-American relations, the selective attention thesis and its attendant hypotheses remain a good framework for evaluating the assessment, forecasting, and foreign-policy behaviour of the United States after the end of the Cold War. As we will see, the Clinton and Bush White Houses were selective in the attention they paid to various sources of information. Pre-existing beliefs about the nature of international politics shaped the way that these administrations responded to interpretations that complicated or challenged their worldview, whether those were coming from intelligence agencies, other branches of government, or from outside voices in academia, think tanks, and the press. Their mental pictures of the world also affected both the way administrations interpreted Russian foreign policy behaviour and how they weighed different information ranging from Russian military posture to the personal diplomacy of Russian statesmen.

One recurring factor which helped to reinforce this selective attention was the highly personalized nature of the Russo-American relationship. As Stent noted, in the 1990s the United States-Russian Federation relationship inherited relatively few institutional connections - such as in trade, diplomacy, and defence cooperation - due to the preceding adversarial stance between the US and USSR. The relative lack of well-established business ties and cooperative diplomatic links, not to mention non-existent military contacts, meant that information and trust flowed between the two states

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reporting was closely in line with the leader's orthodoxy, no matter what evidence was available (see Garthoff pg. 1-16). See also: Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts: National Security and the Politics of Intelligence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

primarily at the level of national executives.[28] This increased the importance of presidents' personal experience and first-hand contacts with their counterparts in terms of foreign-policy selection. The vividness and subjective credibility hypotheses emphasize the importance of these factors in international political decision-making at a basic level. The additional importance placed on leaders' perceptions by the highly-personalized nature of Russo-American relations only magnified the impact of this dynamic during the post-Cold War era. As we will see, personal diplomacy came to matter a great deal in efforts to forge a better bilateral relationship, from Clinton's rapport with Yeltsin through to George W. Bush's claim to have gotten a sense of Putin's soul.

Of course, none of these leaders' personal interactions took place in a vacuum. Each American president, and often other key policy-makers around them such as Secretaries of State, interpreted their experiences through the lens of a liberal understanding of international politics. The argument that follows will often highlight how this pre-established worldview frequently undermined opportunities to either legitimately improve Russo-American relations, avoid pursuing counterproductive policies, or at least reduce the risk of surprise. However, before moving on with this argument, it is worth underscoring one additional complicating factor. In some cases, the Russian state quite legitimately appeared to be behaving in accordance with the expectations of a liberal interpretation of international politics. Russia's eagerness to join multilateral organizations like the G7 (latterly, the G8) and WTO, and rapid integration into international finance and global resource markets certainly suggested

[28] Stent, 260. Consider, for contrast, America's relationship with the newly re-unified Germany. The US's longstanding and extensive political and economic partnership with the Federal Republic during the Cold War allowed for a great deal of open communication, trust, and information flow between Washington and Berlin during the reunification period.

an enthusiasm for aspects of a liberal world order. But in other areas of international relations - most importantly security, political norms, and cultural politics - Russia adopted different organizing principles. The foreign policy of the Russian Federation could thus be described as more "foxy" or, alternatively, schizophrenic (or at least more opportunistic) than that of the US during the Clinton and Bush presidencies. This foxiness has not been an unalloyed "good" for the Russian Federation and has sometimes resulted in the various strains of Russian policy and interests working at cross-purposes. But from 1993-2008, it exacerbated the difficulty American "liberal hedgehog" administrations had in both correctly reading their foxy Russian counterparts, and in charting an effective policy course in response.

Chapter 2 – The Clinton-Yeltsin Era

As the preceding chapter made clear, the analogy of the hedgehog and the fox is a central element in this study's argument. But it is not the first time Isaiah Berlin's concept has been applied to the person of William Jefferson Clinton. Indeed, none other than President Clinton's long-time friend and close advisor Strobe Talbott also saw Clinton as a hedgehog, at least in one respect. Talbott, who served as Deputy Secretary of State from February 1994 through the end of Clinton's presidency at the start of 2001, titled the introductory chapter of his memoir of the Russo-American relationship during the Clinton-Yeltsin era "The Hedgehog and the Bear". Of all the great many people (myself included) who have invoked the idea of the hedgehog and the fox, Talbott is in a remarkable position to do so. Having received a Rhodes Scholarship in 1968 (alongside Clinton, as well as his future Secretary of Labor Robert Reich), Talbott pursued his graduate studies at Oxford, where he attended the lectures of Isaiah Berlin himself. Looking back on the Clinton-Yeltsin relationship, Talbott concluded about Clinton:

> [He] knew one big thing: on the twin issues that had constituted the casus belli of the cold war - democracy versus dictatorship at home and cooperation versus competition abroad - he and his friend Boris Yeltsin were now, in principle, on the same side.[1]

[1] Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002), 10.

I see no reason to doubt the validity of Talbott's assessment of Clinton on this point.[2] However, I will argue that this one big thing that he apparently "knew" about Yeltsin was in fact a more narrow manifestation of a larger "big thing" that Clinton and other post-Cold War American presidents believed: that international politics conforms to the expectations of liberal interpretations of the world order.

A study of this length cannot hope to address every facet of the Russo-American relationship, and how each relates to the primary questions at hand concerning perceptions of the international order and adversary intentions. This chapter on the Clinton-Yeltsin era, like the chapters that follow, will focus on only the most important issues in the bilateral foreign-policy relationship. While the United States has also had significant involvement with Russian domestic policy, politics, and economics, especially during the dramatic upheavals of the 1990s, a thorough examination of these dynamics lies beyond the scope of this study. Russian domestic issues will appear primarily as context for major events in Russo-American diplomacy. Additionally, major foreign-policy sticking points were an issue in Russian domestic politics, and also coloured the more routine or low-profile interactions between the US and Russia. Most importantly for our purposes here, they also served as the pivot points around which the characteristic reset-disappointment cycle of the relationship turned. For these reasons, the three main problems in the Russo-American relationship will form the structural core of the assessment that follows.

During the Clinton-Yeltsin period, these main issues were the nuclear balance and arms control, the future European order (most importantly the question of NATO

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[2] Clinton, in his own autobiography, endorses Talbott's memoir and confirms that the aforementioned view of Yeltsin was indeed "one big thing" that he knew. He also confirms that Talbott's quotations "are not reconstructions; they are, for good or ill, what we actually said." See William J. Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 504.

expansion, but also including the future of the EU and OSCE), and the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, especially the Kosovo war.[3] While these issues will be examined separately for the sake of clarity and structure, each had an effect on how both sides viewed the other issues, and the broader Russo-American relationship generally. These main three are additionally useful in that they highlight points of contention and misperception that outlived the presidencies of both Clinton and Yeltsin, and continued to pose problems for the Russo-American relationship in the twenty-first century, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate. While the Clinton administration in fact largely achieved its main policy aims in these areas, cracks were exposed in both the new American relationship with the Russian Federation and in the expectation that the post-Cold War era would feature a smooth and natural transition towards a liberal order in these areas. As Stent summed up, "all of the successes were on issues where Washington had persuaded Moscow to take actions it initially resisted."[4]

From the very beginning of the post-Cold War period, Russian leadership showed its attachment to a power-politics vision of international relations, in which status and prestige were non-trivial interests. As early as June 18, 1992, Boris Yeltsin was rejecting the image of Russia taking "handouts" and insisting that "Russia is a great power" in response to what he interpreted as condescension from then-candidate Clinton, who had brought up American economic assistance in a pre-election meeting.[5] While Clinton and Yeltsin would subsequently develop a strong personal rapport that helped manage individual issues and to a significant degree papered over the gap between Russian and

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[3] Stent's chapters on the Clinton-Yeltsin years highlight these issues, and I have adopted her "big three" as the cases through which to examine my main lines of inquiry. See *The Limits of Partnership*, 27-45.
[4] Stent, 17.
[5] Talbott, 32.

American perceptions, the nineties did not produce a real reconciliation in terms of foreign policy frameworks. This clash between liberal and great power visions of the world order sharpened after Vladimir Putin ascended to the presidency and has received more attention in recent years. But as we will see, the mutual incompatibility of leaders' perceptions and interpretive frameworks has been a constant complicating factor in the Russo-American relationship for the entire post-Cold War period.

The Nuclear Balance and Arms Control

Deciding the order in which to address the big three issues is a difficult task, given their aforementioned interrelatedness. A sensible choice seems to be the nuclear question, as this issue was inherited from the Cold War period and extends to the present day, thus forming a sort of background for other more acute events like the 1998-1999 Kosovo war. As a global issue, it also helps to cast light on the differences in American and Russian perceptions of both the international order, and each other's posture within the system.

Upon taking office in January 1993, President Clinton took over key arms control efforts begun by his predecessor during the final phase of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the second half of 1991, George H.W. Bush had concluded the START I agreement with Gorbachev and signed the Cooperative Threat Reduction legislation (better known as the Nunn-Lugar Act after the names of its bipartisan congressional co-sponsors, Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN)) into law. Finally, Bush signed the START II treaty with Yeltsin just three weeks before Clinton took office. The handover of these programs between administrations of

opposing parties was remarkably cooperative by the standards of current American politics, with the outgoing National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft working to ensure these important strategic initiatives transitioned smoothly to the incoming Clinton staff.[6]

While the handover went smoothly, the administration moved quickly to redefine its relationship with Russia and distance itself from the Cold War legacy of preceding presidents. In the early months of 1993 Yeltsin had been actively pressing for an early summit meeting with the newly-inaugurated Clinton, and the parties eventually agreed on a meeting in Vancouver on April 3-4. Clinton voiced his opinion that this should be "seen as something new,"[7] and Talbott, his newly appointed Ambassador-at-Large and Special Advisor to the Secretary of State on the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union (an *ad hoc* title for an *ad hoc* position) responded with a memo that clarified the new administration's broad outlook towards Russia. The memo, sent to the White House on March 15 with the heading "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform," called for a basic rethinking of the American relationship with Russia, which was to be recast along optimistic, liberal-internationalist lines. Talbott argued that American policy towards the former Soviet Union had been defined negatively, "in terms of what we do *not* want to happen there," namely a nuclear conflagration, widespread unrest due to economic and political turmoil, and/or the return of dictatorship and cold war. Instead, the US should seek to define the relationship as a positive project:

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[6] Ibid., 28.
[7] Ibid., 51.

> Russia is on the path toward becoming a modern state, at peace with itself and the world, productively and prosperously integrated into the international economy, a source for raw materials and manufactured products, a market for American goods and services, and a partner for American diplomacy.[8]

Clinton confirmed this vision for his Russia policy two days before the start of his summit with Yeltsin in Vancouver, in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors which carried the same title as Talbott's original memo. Clinton rejected the balance-of-power strategies which he believed characterized the Cold War era, invoked the democratic peace theory, and argued in favour of a strategy of advancing liberal democratic norms, especially in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Clinton identified four distinct opportunities that he saw in a reformed relationship with Russia, including partnership in solving global problems, a peace dividend for America, and a much more profitable trade relationship. But first on the priority list was the opportunity to dramatically increase nuclear security, both by rounding up Soviet warheads in Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan, and by radically reducing the overall number of strategic weapons.[9]

While not the first in-person meeting between the two presidents (Yeltsin had previously paid a courtesy call to Clinton while the latter was still the Democratic Party's nominee for the US presidency), the Vancouver summit came at the very beginning of Clinton's presidency, and as Yeltsin weathered one of many domestic political

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[8] Ibid., 52.

[9] Bill Clinton, "A Strategic Alliance with Russian Reform," US Department of State Dispatch Vol. 4, No. 14 - April 5, 1993 (April 1993): 189-194.

showdowns with his opponents in the Russian Duma. It did much to solidify the personal rapport that would be a prominent feature of the Russo-American relationship for the remainder of their presidential tenures. By the end of the first evening, a characteristically inebriated Yeltsin (Yeltsin's bare-minimum drink count, according to Talbott: three afternoon whiskeys and four glasses of wine at dinner) was proclaiming his friendship with "Beeell."[10] By the end of the summit Clinton had more confidence in Yeltsin and concluded that he liked him.[11]

But the kickoff summit of what Stent called the nineties' "Bill and Boris Show"[12] also revealed cleavages in Russia's and America's approach to international politics, including on the question of arms control. The major issue at stake on this front in Vancouver was Russia's contract to build a nuclear reactor for Iran. The summit's discussions provide a good example of how Russian and American perceptions of how the post-Cold War international sphere should operate diverged right from the beginning of the Clinton presidency. The Americans were staunchly against any transfer of nuclear technology to Iran and believed this to be an area in which Russia and the US had mutual interests and could work more cooperatively. Talbott records how the American delegation argued their position, invoking a logic firmly grounded in a liberal vision of international politics. The line of argumentation began with view that Iran was a rogue regime that defied norms of state behaviour, namely by supporting terrorism beyond its borders and opposing the Middle East peace process. Furthermore, the type

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[10] Talbott, 64. A full transcript of the presidents' Vancouver dinner discussion is available at George Washington University's National Security Archive project, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4950559-Document-01-Memorandum-of-Conversation-Working

[11] Clinton, *My Life*, 508. As for Yeltsin's propensity for drinking, Clinton thought favourably of "what Lincoln allegedly said when Washington snobs made the same criticism of General [Ulysses S.] Grant [...]: 'Find out what he drinks, and give it to the other generals.'"

[12] Stent, chapter 2.

of modern state Russia ought to become was one that abided by "export controls that met international standards," in exchange for the benefit of receiving the investment needed to transform its state-controlled military-industrial complex into a civilian-oriented market economy. It was reasonable to expect Russia to ditch short-term Iranian profits in favour of long-term access to Western markets. Rounding out the American position was the seemingly self-evident assertion that it was in Russia's own security interest to prevent Iran from entering the nuclear club.[13]

This was not exactly how the Russian delegation saw the issue. Their understanding of the global free market did not include the US dictating which customers were or were not acceptable, using the fig leaf of non-proliferation to cover its own interests. The liberal norms that the Americans were invoking appeared more like an affront to national dignity and sovereignty. Only Russians could legitimately determine what their own commercial and security priorities were.[14]

Information regarding the importance of status and reputation to the Russians was available within the Clinton administration, even at this early date. A preparatory memo to the president from the Department of Defense for the Vancouver summit highlighted this dynamic. The memo identified the Russian officer corps as a key institution and possible centre of counter-reform, underscoring their day-to-day difficulties, disillusionment, and low morale in the post-Soviet era. The DoD recognized that "engaging senior Russian military leadership in ways that create for them real stakes in a cooperative US-Russian relationship is a principal strategic objective of your Pentagon," and argued to the president that such efforts must account for Russian

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[13] Talbott, 66.
[14] Ibid., 66-67; Stent 30-34. Stent notes an additional angle: Russian accusations of hypocrisy, considering the US did little to reduce its status as a major arms exporter during the 1990s.

perceptions of the process. In the future, it would be critical for the Russians to believe that: "(1) the US recognizes and respects [emphasis in original] Russia as a great nation and great power (we are anti-Communist but pro-Russian); (2) we do not regard them as our enemy and don't want them to think of us as an enemy; (3) we genuinely want them to succeed and are eager to cooperate with them to that end; and (4) cooperation with the US offers their best/only hope for reconstruction of a Russia of which they can be proud patriots."[15]

Setting aside the potential contradiction between points 1 and 4, the memo, along with Clinton's aforementioned meeting with Yeltsin in which the latter rejected "handouts" and affirmed Russia's great power status, shows that the potential importance of Russian prestige and power politics were not hidden from the American executive. Despite this, the American delegation in Vancouver pursued a diplomatic line on Iranian proliferation that at best ignored, and at worst implicitly dismissed, the importance of Russian status and sovereignty as considerations in jointly confronting the problem. The factors that the Americans emphasized (and appear to believe should have mattered to the Russians) were central pillars of liberal foreign policy: international standards, the divide between good and rogue states, and access to markets and investment. The result was a setback, rather than an advancement of the effort to beneficially reset Russo-American relations. This pattern continued throughout the remainder of the 1990s within the arms control relationship.

The next major event in this area was the agreement to return the 176 Soviet intercontinental ballistic missiles still in Ukraine to Russia. These had been causing an

[15] Memorandum for the President, "Thickening Our Defense Relationship With the Russian Armed Forces", March 31, 1993, National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russia," Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 17, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57249.

increasing amount of concern in Washington and Moscow, especially as Ukraine struggled with the social and economic transition away from communism to an even greater degree than did Russia. The Kremlin wanted the weapons returned post haste, no strings attached, and predictably ran into resistance on the Ukrainian side, which recognized the value of their bargaining chip, were wary of irredentist voices in the Russian Duma, and had to grapple with their nation's complex and fraught history with its larger neighbor.[16]

As he set about attempting to broker a deal, Strobe Talbott once again encountered the distinction between American and Russian perceptions. A key feature of the American posture towards the former Soviet space was reflected in Talbott's long-winded title: the words "New Independent States." The US position from the very beginning was that the former constituent states of the Soviet Union were now equal with respect to the fundamental question of sovereignty and legitimacy, and in its final year the Bush administration demonstrated American commitment to this premise by opening embassies in all of the new successor states. This gesture, along with the ongoing refusal to recognize the Commonwealth of Independent States, signaled American rejection of spheres of influence and support for the liberal internationalist values of equal sovereignty and national self-determination.[17]

Attempts to get Russia to engage Ukraine on this basis, with the US as an honest, neutral, third-party broker encountered immediate resistance. Russian deputy foreign minister Georgiy Mamedov, despite his personal pragmatism in working with the US, warned Talbott that "many on our side will resent your meddling in something that they

[16] Talbott, 79.
[17] Stent, 7, 18.

believe is none of your business" and reminded him that "anything between us and the Ukrainians is a family affair, and any disagreement we have is a family feud." The Russian ambassador Vladimir Lukin, who would go on to co-found the liberal-oriented Yabloko party, nonetheless voiced the view that Russo-Ukrainian relations were "identical to those between New York and New Jersey" and that as far as the US was concerned, the former USSR ought to be a "black box." The more conservative Yevgeny Primakov (then head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service), for his part, compared the Ukrainians to children in possession of a firearm and wondered aloud if American efforts to play the broker were not in fact a thinly-disguised attempt at encirclement. Even Yeltsin, who consistently rejected the irredentism emanating from the likes of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, did not refrain from complaining about the US "coddling" the Ukrainians and needed to be convinced that there were not ulterior American motives.[18] He never fully reconciled his view of Ukraine with the assumptions of a liberal world order, relating in his memoir that Russo-Ukrainian relations are a "special, complicated topic", because "to Russians, Ukrainians are the same kind of kin as Belarusians" and "Ukraine is the cradle of our national identity, [...] without Ukraine it is impossible to imagine Russia."[19]

Ultimately the US was able to achieve its policy aim and broker a deal that removed Ukraine's nuclear weapons. The disparity in diplomatic clout that existed between the parties due to Russia and Ukraine's reeling in the early post-Soviet era certainly helped the Americans get their way. But another factor was Yeltsin's personal intervention and concern for his personal diplomacy with Clinton. Yeltsin forced the

[18] Talbott, 80-81.
[19] Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 243. It should be noted that such views of Russo-Ukrainian kinship were well within norms of popular opinion and sentiment in both Russia and Ukraine prior to 2014.

issue on the Russian side during the July 1993 G-7 meeting in Tokyo, to which Russia had been invited as a guest for the first time, and where Yeltsin was determined to have positive, starring role alongside Clinton. While some additional, even last-minute diplomatic steamrolling was needed, the main turning point had been passed now that the Russian and American presidents had agreed that they wanted a deal.[20]

This was an example of the personal connection between Bill and Boris papering over real differences between American and Russian foreign policy views. The final push to conclude the deal included Clinton cornering, in person, both Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk and Yeltsin to confirm their intent to sign, the latter intervention coming at a dinner the evening before the ceremony was set to take place (Yeltsin's drink count: five glasses of wine and "several" vodkas). At the signing ceremony in Moscow in January 1994, Clinton appeared to be the only enthusiastic participant among the three presidents present, having regarded the outcome as a successful diplomatic win-win.[21] But while Clinton perceived the episode as a positive sign for the direction of Russo-American relations in the realm of arms control, deeper problems persisted. Yeltsin apparently still harboured some irritation over having to deal with Ukraine as an equal counterpart state and resentment over American intervention in Russia's "near-abroad" continued to simmer in Russian politics and levels of government below the executive. While American policy produced a short-term win, it also contributed to a growing narrative on the Russian side that the US was running roughshod over Russian interests in a part of the world in which it had no business dictating terms.

[20] Talbott, 84; 107-109; 112-114.
[21] Ibid.; See also Clinton, 570-571, and Stent, 28.

It was not as if the Clinton White House was unaware of arguments that the potential existed for the emergence of a vicious cycle in Russo-American relations, in which short-term wins in the reset effort could provide fuel to reactionary hardliners, and thus undermine the development of better relations over the long term. In fact, the words "vicious cycle" were invoked to this effect in a memorandum from Talbott to Secretary of State Warren Christopher during the preparatory phase for Clinton's trilateral meeting with Yeltsin and Kravchuk.[22] While the memo recognized the potential ramifications of resurgent reactionary sentiment within Russian politics, it also showed that the American policy line had a sort of imperviousness and remained centred on the person of Yeltsin. Talbott's memo addresses the worrying change in posture of Russian Prime Minister Andrei Kozyrev, a reform advocate that had begun to adopt more hard-line and nationalist positions. The potential policy problem is framed mainly as one resulting from his relationship with the president, "since Kozyrev still has a lot of influence on Yeltsin" (as opposed to loud, but excluded figures like Zhirinovsky). Concerns about the potential of revived nationalism to influence Russian policy at the presidential level did not, however, result in attempts to re-calibrate American policy to take this factor into account. America's "basic message" at the Moscow summit should be that "the underlying premise of our policy toward Russia remains firm: we think the overall trends are favorable; reform will prevail; and that is a credit to President Yeltsin and the key members of his team, [Kozyrev] prominently included." The intent remained to make it "apparent how resolute we are in our determination to work with Russia toward its full integration into the community of democratic nations." While the

[22] Strobe Talbott, "Your Meeting with PM Kozyrev," Memo to Secretary of State Warren Christopher, National Security Council and Russia, Ukraine, Eurasian Affairs Office, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russia and Belarus," Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 17, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57236.

Clinton administration "is under attack [from domestic opponents in Congress] for being naive about the fundamental nature of Russia", the view that "we're [i.e. Russia and the US] essentially on the same side" held firm within the American executive.

The Clinton White House believed that liberal reform in Russia could and would prevail with the support of America, realizing the promise of its attempt to reset relations. But the reactionary elements within Russian politics could not be entirely steamrolled and prevented from stymying arms control priorities, as they had been in the case of the Ukrainian ICBMs. The most prominent example of this is the fate of the START II treaty. When it was signed by Bush and Yeltsin in January 1993, START II was thought to be a landmark advancement of bilateral arms control and a pillar of future efforts to continue the positive trend in cooperation on nuclear security.[23] In fact, it proved to be a symbol of how the hoped-for improvement in Russo-American relations derailed over the remaining years of the 1990s.

The US Senate and Russian Duma were required to ratify the treaty in order for it to come into effect. While the US Senate did eventually ratify START II in January 1996 (with some legislative caveats),[24] the Duma refused to do so.[25] The nationalist opposition essentially held the treaty hostage against what it saw as a pattern of ever-more-imperious American behaviour in Russia's sphere of influence, especially with regard to military intervention in the Balkans and NATO expansion in Eastern Europe. In retrospect, Secretary of Defense William Perry regarded START II as "a casualty of

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[23] The centrepiece of START II was its prohibition of MIRVs (multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, i.e. multiple warheads capable of striking different targets) on intercontinental ballistic missiles.
[24] The US Congress passed legislation prohibiting arms reductions below the previously-adopted START I levels in the absence of START II ratification by the Russian Duma. See Talbott, 376.
[25] START II was eventually rammed through the Duma in the early days of Vladimir Putin's presidency, in April 2000. By that point it was essentially a "lame duck" treaty permanently hamstrung by disagreements over ballistic missile defence, discussed further below. Russia withdrew from START II two years later in response to the US withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

NATO expansion".[26] This was a prime example of a major American strategic priority becoming a victim of the reset-disappointment cycle. While the members of the Duma opposition clearly hold the greatest responsibility for the failure of START II, their position and political narrative were reinforced by American assertiveness in the former Yugoslavia and firmness on the future of NATO. As will be argued below, American policy on both of these other "big three" issues was tightly linked to the Clinton administration's liberal-order understanding of international politics. In neither case did Clinton demonstrate serious consideration to adjusting American policy to account for Russian interests that fell outside the liberal logical framework. This is remarkable, given that his policies in these areas were undercutting both the American effort to build a more positive partnership with Russia and the US position on strategic weapons - the only one of the "big three" issues that involved a real security risk to the US homeland.

American homeland security was the central question when Russo-American arms-control relationship reached its Clinton-era nadir. At issue was the American effort to develop ballistic missile defenses capable of protecting the entire country. Bilateral limits on strategic missile defense systems had been in place since 1972, which marked the signing of the Anti-Ballistic missile (ABM) treaty. The logic of limiting such systems is, briefly, that they are a threat to the principle of mutual assured destruction, which underpins nuclear stability through deterrence. In theory, a sufficiently advanced countermeasures system could remove the disincentive to initiate a nuclear first strike. While contemporary technological horizons do not include a system capable of defeating a wave of thousands of warheads, a system capable of destroying a small number of

[26] Perry is quoted in Stent, 29. See also the analysis of former US Ambassador to the USSR Jack F. Matlock, Jr. in *Superpower Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray - and How to Return to Reality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 161-164.

incoming ICBMs is more firmly within the realm of feasibility (although the performance test record of such systems remains poor). Such a system would nonetheless be strategically destabilizing, because it raises the prospect that one side (in this case the US) could target and destroy a sufficiently large proportion of the other's (in this case Russia) nuclear force with a first strike, and then remain safe behind the cover of an ABM system capable of dealing with the opponent's remnant second-strike retaliation. By removing the guarantee of destruction from one side of the equation, ABM systems are perceived by counterparts as greatly increasing the threat of nuclear pre-emption.

During the 1980s, President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative represented the first major attempt to realize an ABM system. However, major technological shortcomings and changes in the political dynamic between the US and USSR after the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev as the Soviet leader prevented SDI from truly disrupting the nuclear balance and kept both states in the ABM treaty. American interest in ballistic missile defence continued after the end of the Cold War, albeit predicated on different logical grounds. Clinton believed that at least as far as Russia and the United States (the owners of by far the world's largest arsenals) were concerned, the nuclear standoff could be transcended by a new strategic partnership and consigned to the previous era. During a defense policy meeting at the White House in 1994 he railed against the "overkill" that still existed in the American strategic missile force. "The Cold War is supposed to be over!" he said, with frustration, before adding: "Are we stuck in some sort of time warp, or what?"[27] In Clinton's view, the threat was no longer Russia, but rather rogue regimes such as Iran, Libya, North Korea, and Iraq that might acquire a

[27] Talbott, 376.

nascent strike capability. This was most likely to come in the form of intermediate range weapons that could target Europe and Israel, and perhaps a small number of missiles capable of reaching the US. In this context, defensive systems oriented towards both defeating the intermediate-range missiles these countries were likely to deploy and protecting the entire US from a small number of rogue-state weapons should not pose a threat to Russian security interests. The biggest problem is that the line between a more limited theatre missile defense (TMD) system, and national missile defense (NMD) is quite blurry, especially from a technological research and development standpoint. Nonetheless, Clinton hoped that American technological advances in these areas might eventually be shared with other states, including Russia, thus dissolving the security fear and opening political space for amending the ABM treaty to allow for such systems.[28] At the end of his presidency, he told Vladimir Putin:

> We're caught in a time warp here. Thirty years from now people will look back on the Cold War and the US-Russian nuclear stand-off as ancient history. Our countries will be working together against new threats [...] How do we get on the right side now for that point in the future? How do we make sure that we're part of the same system working together? How do we not let ourselves be trapped in the Cold War mentality while at the same time keeping mutual deterrence strong between us until we come up with something better?[29]

[28] Clinton, 751; 908.

[29] Talbott, 393. Clinton's acknowledgement of continued importance of mutual deterrence nonetheless reveals his belief that it is transitory and will be replaced in the developing liberal order.

Russian views of the ballistic missile defense question were considerably less optimistic. As Talbott puts it, the Russians viewed any advancement towards TMD as a "stalking horse" for a strategic defense system that would neutralize their nuclear deterrent. Here the gap between Russian and American interpretive frameworks for international politics is quite clear. The American view was that only rogue dictatorships presented a threat to members of the modern liberal-democratic club of states (that now included Russia), that only rogues had anything to fear from America, and that American defense systems were plainly oriented accordingly. These assumptions could not be reconciled with the power-politics vision of the world that prevailed within the Russian government and military. In this view, there was no difference in kind between American power in the post-Cold War era and the clout of any other historical great power. The one difference that might exist was the sheer amount of power which America wielded in comparison to others, which was leading it to exert its particular interests in an apparently unlimited fashion.

This disconnect between perspectives was especially prominent in the confrontation over nuclear security, because this was perhaps the last element of state power in which a struggling Russia was capable of maintaining equal footing with America. Talbott, a key player in the diplomatic wrangling over missile defence, reports that "on the core issue of whether the proposed American plan for [national missile defense] threatened the Russian deterrent, we might as well have been debating whether the earth was round or flat".[30] America nonetheless persisted in its efforts to get Russia to accept a new position on missile defense that included space for both TMD systems in Europe and, ultimately, NMD for the US. Clinton made some headway with

[30] Talbott, 384.

Yeltsin during their March 1997 summit in Helsinki. The American delegation managed to move their Russian counterparts towards accepting standards of technical differentiation between TMD systems and the sort of NMD prohibited by the ABM Treaty, in exchange for further bilateral cuts to offensive systems (cuts that would regardless maintain mutual deterrence and represent progress towards implementing START II). However, resistance in the Duma remained and START II continued to languish.

In fairness to the Clinton administration, pressure from Congress to adopt a hardline stance on NMD was an equally key factor in the downward spiral of Russo-American relations on this topic. But the administration's attempt to hammer out a solution for missile defense before the end of Clinton's second term put the American side in a position of appearing to drive a hard bargain. The idea was to corner the Russian side into choosing between the devil they knew, i.e. Clinton's vision for NMD that at least attempted to preserve the ABM treaty, and the devil they didn't, i.e. the next American presidential administration, which might very well ignore Russian concerns entirely.

By 1999, the diplomatic standoff over arms control was overshadowed by the much more acute crisis over Kosovo. Yeltsin was ailing and increasingly marginalized in Russian decision-making, so the personal connection between him and Clinton could not be summoned to bridge the fundamental gap between the parties. Soon, Yeltsin was out of office and Clinton was so close to the end of his own final term that there was little incentive for the Russian side to reinvigorate negotiations rather than simply wait to see what sort of American administration they would have to deal with in the not-too-distant future. The new Russian President, Vladimir Putin, was flush with political

capital and pushed START II through the Duma, but only with the caveat that further American advancement of NMD would prompt Russia to "withdraw not only from the START II treaty but also the whole system of treaties on limitation and control of strategic and conventional weapons".[31] When Putin and Clinton met in Moscow in June 2000, the former was positioning himself as a president who would stand up to the US. The meeting ended with Putin threatening a "maybe quite unexpected, probably asymmetrical"[32] response to any future American action to advance NMD.[33]

The Russo-American relationship on strategic arms control had bottomed out in the final months of the Clinton presidency. Clinton's administration had begun with high hopes of resetting this aspect of the relationship for the post-Cold War era. But incompatible worldviews and the tension engendered by the great disparity in power between a triumphant America and a crippled Russia helped drive these hopeful expectations aground. While the strong personal connection of the "Bill and Boris Show" helped solve some key problems (notably the Ukrainian ICBMs issue) and kept the potential for compromise alive for many years, it could not entirely dissolve all of the self-defeating aspects of the American policy approach. The arms control question embodied the reset-disappointment motif over the 1993-2000 period, a pattern that was equally reflected in the Russo-American confrontation over European security.

[31] Talbott, 389.
[32] Ibid., 396.
[33] See Stent, 29-30, and Talbott, ch. 15 "On Defense" 370-397; 411-412.

The Balkans

The Clinton-Yeltsin era began with a European security crisis already in full swing. The end of communism in Yugoslavia did not produce the sort of bloodless transition that accompanied the breakup of the Soviet Union. Quite the opposite, in fact. By the time of Clinton's inauguration in January 1993, the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia had been underway for two years. Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia had all spun off from the Serbia-led rump of the Yugoslav state, but the drive for independence sunk the latter two into a mire of ethnic war.[34] The end of 1991 and the year 1992 had seen the rapid escalation of the crisis in the Balkans. The fighting between Croats and the Serbs resulted in sieges at Vukovar and Dubrovnik, and the establishment of the unrecognized Republic of Serbian Krajina within the declared borders of independent Croatia. Bosnia's declaration of independence in March 1992 similarly resulted in the formation of an unrecognized Serbian statelet, the Republika Srpska, and serious fighting. Sarajevo, which had hosted the Olympics only eight years before, came under a brutal siege which attracted major international attention. The international response, in the form of the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR), was proving incapable of putting a halt to the violence.

Bill Clinton entered office faced with the question of what road America should take in response to this dismal scenario, having argued during the campaign that the use-of-force option should remain on the table.[35] There was more to consider than the

[34] While Slovenia's independence was not achieved entirely bloodlessly, the country largely escaped the grinding warfare that for years beset its southern neighbours. Its ten-day war of independence in the summer of 1991 marked the beginning of the Yugoslav wars, but was mercifully short and resulted in far fewer casualties than the subsequent Balkan crises.

[35] Clinton, 510.

complexities of geography and ethnicity at the ground level. The problem of what to do about war on European soil in the post-Cold War era necessarily implicated America's relationships with longstanding continental allies, and with Russia. Peace in Europe was a well-established strategic priority for the US, but there was also concern that failure on the part of the West (or the international community generally) to halt the crisis might encourage irredentists elsewhere to consider violence, with possibly even more dangerous consequences.[36] Serbia's historical ties to its Slavic cousins to the northeast also meant that the new Russian Federation would have to be part of the political equation. Still, there was hope that an opportunity existed for Russia and America to advance their new "partnership" by working together to solve a tragic setback to the promise of a new, better world at century's end.

The Balkan crisis was thus an immediate foreign-policy priority for the administration. Intelligence reporting was prepared to frame the issue for the newly-arrived principals at the cabinet level. On January 25, 1993 (five days after Clinton's inauguration) the National Intelligence Officers for Europe and Russia & Eurasia sent a memo to Clinton's Acting Director of Central Intelligence on the subject of "Serbia and the Russian Problem". The first sentence alerted "the new policy-making team to the growing danger of Russian alienation from a Western policy toward Serbia". The memo went on to argue that an American approach narrowly oriented towards Serbia and the problem of Serbian aggression would likely result in a widening rift between the US and Russia over the Balkan question, which could prompt Russia to veto use-of-force resolutions at the UN Security Council. This assessment was based on the CIA's read of the factors driving Russia's position on the issue, which included ideas about pan-

[36] Talbott, 73.

Slavism and spheres of influence within Russian politics. While rejecting the premises of these views, the authors nonetheless acknowledged their influence. More importantly, the memo pointed out that "they [the Russians] feel, however, that the West is painting the situation in black and white terms, rather than recognizing that all warring parties must share some of the blame - a view which also is held by the Intelligence Community". Of course, the memo noted, America's Yugoslavia policy could not be "mortgaged to Russia", but it concluded:

> Keeping Russia - and other [Permanent Members of the UN Security Council] - working with us is more likely to further our aims of halting the fighting and managing the crisis. A strategy that tries to enlist Russian influence with the Serbs, along with other Western partners who have influence with Croatia and the Bosnian Muslims, is more likely to be successful than one that simply punishes those who are judged as the guilty. Such a strategy would have to contain both sticks and carrots.[37]

Spinach, rather than carrots, was what turned out to be on offer. The first major Russo-American diplomatic interactions over the Balkans of the Clinton presidency took place between the April 1993 Vancouver summit, and that July's G-7 meeting in Tokyo.

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[37] Roger Z. George and George Kolt, "Serbia and the Russian Problem", Memorandum for the Acting Director of Central Intelligence, January 25, 1993, CIA Library Historical Collection: Bosnia, Intelligence, and the Clinton Presidency, accessed January 22, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/5235e80d993294098d51755e. Intelligence community assessments about the likely consequences of various policy options were elaborated at greater length in a briefing paper prepared by the DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force for the Principals Committee of the National Security Council. "BTF Assessment: 'Yugoslavia' Policy Options: Likely Responses," February 1, 1993, CIA Library Historical Collection: Bosnia, Intelligence, and the Clinton Presidency, accessed January 22, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/5235e80c993294098d5174da

The situation on the ground in Bosnia had continued to deteriorate through spring and early summer, with mounting numbers of Serb attacks and displaced Bosnian Muslim refugees. The American line began to harden in favour of a more robust (possibly even unilateral) response, including air intervention against Serbian forces and lifting the arms embargo in place on Bosnia.[38] Attempts to garner Russian support for airstrikes against Serb positions were met with resistance, as had been predicted in the CIA analysis. The generally liberal-leaning ambassador Lukin voiced the opinion that the US was engaged in an "anti-Serb vendetta" and setting the stage for future incursion into Russia's "near abroad."[39] The Russian defense minister, the ex-Soviet general Pavel Grachev, pointed to another factor that had not received much attention: Russia's fraught relationship with the Muslim world. This reflected not only his personal experience in Afghanistan and brewing trouble in the Caucasus, but also a belief that if Bosnian Muslims (characterized as "extremists and terrorists") succeeded in their drive for independence, "the Turks and Iranians would gain a foothold on the continent."[40] Whether expressing fear of an imperial America or a civilizational clash with Islam, these views reflected a basic adherence to the idea of spheres of influence in international politics which ran counter to American liberalism.

The US certainly could not endorse the more toxic manifestations of these fears, such as Grachev's blunt Islamophobia. But there was no clear attempt in the spring of

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[38] Revealingly, a memo from then-Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright to National Security Advisor Anthony Lake on the subject of whether to use American air power to supplement an enhanced UNPROFOR presence in Bosnia and Serbia did not even address relations with Russia in its discussion of possible consequences. Madeleine Albright, "Options for Bosnia", Memorandum for the National Security Adviser, April 14, 1993, CIA Library Historical Collection: Bosnia, Intelligence, and the Clinton Presidency, accessed January 24, 2019, https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/1993-04-14.pdf

[39] Talbott, 77.

[40] Ibid., 75. Even Yeltsin showed a degree of prejudice in this regard, remarking to Clinton during the Vancouver summit dinner that "the arms in that area [Bosnia] could make for thousands of deaths, especially if you know the Muslims." See note 10 above.

1993 to present any “carrots” to help bring Russia onside in the Balkans. With the next Clinton-Yeltsin meeting in Tokyo looming and a UN peace initiative having collapsed, Secretary of State Christopher dispatched Strobe Talbott to Moscow to try to win Russian support for airstrikes. Talbott prepared “a detailed argument on how it was in Russia’s own interest to join us in threatening military retribution against the Serbs.” Prime Minister Kozyrev cut him off in the middle of his presentation: “It’s bad enough having you people [the Americans] tell us what you’re going to do whether we like it or not. Don’t add insult to injury by also telling us that it’s *in our interests* to obey your orders” (emphasis recorded by Talbott). After the meeting Victoria Nuland (then a young assistant to Talbott[41]), summed up a certain contemptuousness in how America looked at Russian positions: “That’s what happens when you try to get the Russians to eat their spinach. The more you tell them it’s good for them, the more they gag.” It was not a one-off comment. Talbott recalls that “among those of us working on Russia policy ‘administering the spinach treatment’ became shorthand for one of our principal activities in the years that followed,” i.e. a largely futile attempt to convince Russia of the basic goodness of America’s liberal worldview and attendant policy positions.[42]

Despite their broader strategic perspective, the Russians were finding it increasingly difficult to refuse to cooperate with the US and its European allies in the Balkans. The mounting destruction was impossible to ignore, and Russia’s already-

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[41] Nuland would go on to play her own significant role in Russo-American relations as the US Ambassador to NATO from 2005-2008 and as President Obama’s Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs from 2013-2017.

[42] For the remarks quoted for this exchange see Talbott, 76. He notes a further roadblock to this effort: Clinton made a strong effort to bolster bilateral ties with all the former Soviet states, in order to “convince everyone in that region that ‘Russia’s not the only game in town.’” US diplomats found that everyone in the “near abroad” was wary of Russia and wanted American support as a hedge against Moscow. The US put this on the agenda “whenever possible, [...] feeding the Russians’ darker misgivings about what we were up to,” 78.

weakened international status was further threatened by being seen as a flagrant obstructionist while real human tragedy unfolded on front pages and TV screens everywhere. Thus began a period of reluctant cooperation, albeit not the sort of "partnership" that the Clinton administration had hoped would characterize the post-Cold War relationship. By June 4, 1993 Russia acquiesced to UNSC Resolution 836 authorizing the use of force by NATO air assets and UNPROFOR peacekeeping forces to protect the so-called "safe areas" on the ground. The situation improved little over the remainder of that year, and the first half of 1994 brought a renewed American diplomatic effort to find a more proactive solution to the crisis.

A February 1994 Serb mortar attack on a market in besieged Sarajevo which killed 69 people and wounded nearly 200 more proved to be a turning point. NATO Headquarters issued a demand that all Serb artillery be removed from within a twelve-mile buffer around Sarajevo within ten days, or face destruction from the air (no strikes ended up being launched against Serb targets in the buffer zone). The threat of airstrikes again ratcheted up the tension, resulting in direct discussions between Clinton and Yeltsin. Yeltsin initially refused to concede the need for airstrikes.[43] However, once the first one was called in on April 10 (in defense of a safe zone centred on the Muslim town of Gorazde, under the authorization of UNSCR 836) the personal diplomacy between the two presidents helped to minimize the political fallout and sustained the diplomatic effort to bring the main parties together to find a solution. Yeltsin remained opposed to further strikes but did not want to abandon his personal partnership with Clinton, which he suggested could itself sustain a more general Russo-American partnership under

[43] Talbott, 121-122.

stress.[44] The Bill-and-Boris rapport was again papering over widening cracks in the Russo-American strategic relationship.

The effort to keep diplomacy working resulted in the formation of the Contact Group for Bosnia, which brought Russia "inside the tent" with the US and its major European allies. Keeping Russia in the loop in this fashion (in contact, but outnumbered) helped keep diplomatic proceedings smooth. As Secretary of State Christopher put it, it ensured that Russia was "sullen but not obstructionist".[45] This came at the cost of further compromising America's standing within Russian domestic politics. Opposition elements in the Duma criticized Yeltsin and his senior staff for allowing Russia to be "used" by the Western powers, who clearly would simply do what they wanted, but with the added cover of apparently having Russia on board. These anti-Western pressures emanating from Russia's domestic politics continued to undercut American efforts to win Russian support on other key strategic initiatives, like the question of NATO expansion (discussed further below).[46]

The year 1995 brought an end to the war in Bosnia, with the negotiation and signing of the Dayton Agreement between November and December. The road to the agreement was very difficult, given the number of interested parties and the complexities of the conflict on the ground. Among the challenges were yet more difficulties within the Russo-American relationship. These re-emerged as violence once again spiked in the summer of 1995, pushing Bosnia to the top of the international

[44] Of particular note are the telephone conversations between Clinton and Yeltsin which took place on April 10 (in the immediate aftermath of the first NATO airstrike) and April 20 1994. Transcripts of these calls are available through the National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 27, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57568.
[45] Talbott, 123.
[46] Ibid., 123-124.

agenda. In July, Serb forces under Ratko Mladić overran the town of Srebrenica and massacred thousands of unarmed Muslim captives in what was the worst mass killing in Europe since the Nazi and Stalinist era. The following month, another shelling of a Sarajevo market had Bosnia's foreign minister demanding "no more fucking around with the UN!" and calling for immediate, unilateral NATO airstrikes.[47]

By this point the US and Russia had agreed on the probable necessity of NATO bombing in stopping the violence on the ground, with Russian assent being given in exchange for a promise of a "dignified and meaningful" role in whatever peacekeeping mission was to follow.[48] The vagueness of this agreement left the door open for Russian backpedalling. Bombing began in earnest on August 30, under the campaign name Operation Deliberate Force. A pause was announced two days later in order to allow for negotiations. When these proved fruitless, NATO bombing resumed despite the objections of the Russians. Having been sidelined on the air campaign issue, they had stomached the first show of force but now even Yeltsin was calling the air campaign an "execution of the Bosnian Serbs" in a diplomatic letter.[49]

Again, private diplomacy between the presidents served to keep the partnership approach alive in the face of public spats. A follow-up phone conversation to Yeltsin's letter showed little of the animosity that was characterizing the public image of the Russo-American relationship. By the end of the call, Yeltsin had accepted Clinton's invitation to a meeting the next month at Hyde Park in New York.[50] In the interim,

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[47] Ibid., 169-171.
[48] Ibid. Here again the importance of status considerations to Russian policy decision-making is clear.
[49] Ibid., 172-173.
[50] "President's Discussion with Yeltsin on Bosnia, CEE, Hyde Park and a Vice Presidential Meeting with Chernomyrdin", September 27, 1995, National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 27, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57568.

American and Russian diplomats went back to work trying to craft an end-game plan for Bosnia. The question of Russian status was once again at the fore. The Russian camp was insistent that “Russia was a major power with a world-class military made up of warriors [...] entitled to a [...] ‘dignified and serious’ role”. It would not accept being relegated to support roles, but equally could not accept its military contribution being subordinated to NATO. For the Americans, a command role for NATO rather than the UN (which had been discredited by the performance of UNPROFOR) was the *sine qua non* for the post-conflict peacekeeping mission. The sides managed to square this circle with an elegant (if arcane) arrangement in which the Russian contingent would serve under the authority of the double-hatted American General George Joulwan in his capacity as the commander of US European Command, but *not* in his simultaneous capacity of Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR, i.e. NATO’s top officer).[51]

Before any such plans could be implemented there needed to be a peace settlement to uphold and Yeltsin’s blessing would need to be secured. While meetings between the warring parties at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio were quietly arranged for November, Yeltsin showed possible signs of flagging commitment to the “partnership” approach. He publicly voiced his displeasure with his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev, a liberal usually conciliatory towards American positions, and announced he was searching for a replacement. Kozyrev told Talbott that in his opinion Yeltsin was coming increasingly under the sway of hardliners. When Yeltsin arrived for the Hyde Park meeting Clinton cajoled him into agreement by playing off his ego, suggesting they conspire to disappoint the press corps, who, he assured Yeltsin, were expecting a diplomatic disaster. While leaving some details to be hashed out, Yeltsin’s

[51] Stent, 42-43; Talbott, 174-176.

approval for the general direction of the Bosnia plan, which allowed for Russian "inclusion but not subordination", was secured over lunch (Yeltsin's drink count: three glasses of wine to lead off the meal, followed by "several" more).[52]

The arrangement held, and the Dayton agreement brought an end to the violence in Bosnia in December 1995. By the end of the decade, however, the Balkans would again prove to be a fault line in the Russo-American relationship, this time in Kosovo. Yeltsin's health had continued to deteriorate, and by 1998-1999 his ailments left him increasingly marginalized within his own government. His own commitment to the liberal-partnership vision of relations with the US also seemed to flag as the crisis wore on. This weakened the ability of the Bill-and-Boris connection to override the preferences of reactionary and nationalist elements in Russia, who were more interested in confrontation than partnership. Hostility towards the West was bolstered by looming NATO expansion, and by the 1998 economic meltdown in Russia, which raised further skepticism about doing things the American way.[53] The conflict in Kosovo was the chance these elements were looking for to repudiate the idea of cooperation with the West, however reluctant, and demonstrate that Russia was still a power that could and would act unilaterally.

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[52] Talbott, 177-178; 182-186. See also the transcript of the official portion of the lunch conversation, "Memorandum of Conversation: Lunch with Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation", October 23, 1995, National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 27, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57568. Yeltsin's inebriated appearance at the podium during the post-lunch press conference produced a memorable scene, in which Yeltsin told the gallery that their predictions of disaster allowed him "for the first time, [to] tell you that *you're* a disaster!" As Clinton put it, "Yeltsin could get away with saying the darndest things", *My Life*, 676.

[53] John Norris, *Collision Course: NATO, Russia, and Kosovo* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2005), xxiv; Talbott, 290. Talbott quotes then-Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov blaming Russia's problems on American-backed "darlings, the young reformers" and "university boys who come here to teach us as though we were dunces". Mikhail Kasyanov, a rising power in the Ministry of Finance, remarked to G-8 counterparts, "We're not here to take exams or listen to lectures from your professors. If our Western partners had had all the solutions to all our problems, we wouldn't be in this mess now, given how hard earlier Russian governments worked to do what you people told us we should do."

Serbia (in the form of the rump Yugoslav state) and its leader Slobodan Milošević were once again at the centre of the conflict. Kosovo, wedged between Serbia and neighbouring Albania, was home to a large population of ethnic Albanian Muslims. The province had been granted greater political autonomy under the 1974 constitution of Yugoslavia, but was subsequently repressed as Serb nationalism became a stronger force within Yugoslav politics. Its autonomy was cancelled in 1990. The splintering of Yugoslavia in the mid-90s led to calls for independence in Kosovo, especially in the face of violent Serb resistance to the exit of other areas. The situation spun out of control through 1998, as a pro-independence insurgency ramped up and was met with harsh crackdowns from the Serbian side, furthering the spiral of violence.[54]

The prospects for Russo-American cooperation on Kosovo seemed real enough when it first emerged as a pressing issue. During an April 6, 1998 discussion, Yeltsin said that he believed that "through joint efforts we will be able to resolve current problems, like the Kosovo problem in the framework of the Contact Group, and my belief is that we will not depart from the path which you and I have jointly set forward". Clinton's view was that "it's like Bosnia and Iraq; we have to keep working until we get negotiations between Milošević and Kosovo". Yeltsin responded that "here we see eye to eye with you. Bill". The Bill-and-Boris conviviality was still on display as late as their May 17 at the G-8 meeting in Birmingham, England. Yeltsin pushed back against the public perception that their relationship was faltering. While he voiced disagreement with the idea of NATO intervening, it was clear that both he and Clinton believed that joint diplomatic pressure and a continuing role for the UN could produce a political solution. Yeltsin went on to wax sentimental about "co-leadership", the presidents'

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[54] Norris, xix-xx.

achievements over the previous five years, and their good faith. The meeting ended with an embrace. A follow-up discussion on June 15 was similarly optimistic about the prospects for cooperation.[55]

It was downhill from there. Fighting continued to escalate through the second half of 1998. There were signs of trouble by mid-August. With casualties mounting and the refugee exodus topping 200,000, Clinton pressed Yeltsin to keep the pressure on Milošević, adding "the only way to avoid this is if Milošević knows that we are united. Only you and I and our two countries can do this". Yeltsin held that "the most important thing now is to prevent a military solution to the conflict", a decidedly open-ended formulation. Clinton warned that that was precisely what Milošević was trying to achieve, perhaps under Russian diplomatic cover. Yeltsin summoned up the sentiment of their relationship, saying that "when we are in agreement, there is no problem we can't successfully resolve". Clinton offered only qualified agreement: "I agree, but I ask you to remember that I think that if Milošević believes he has a green light from Russia for a military solution, it will be much harder to get him to negotiate. You will have to keep the heat on him and get him to negotiate."[56]

American patience began to run out by October. NATO, with expansion to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic imminent, threatened to once again launch airstrikes in the Balkans if Serb forces were not pulled back. It became clear that Yeltsin would cooperate no further. Clinton and Yeltsin spoke on October 5, and Talbott reports

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[55] Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President Yeltsin, April 6, 1998; Memorandum of conversation with President Boris Yeltsin of Russia, May 17, 1998; Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, June 15, 1998, National Security Council and NSC Records Management System, "Declassified Documents Concerning Russian President Boris Yeltsin," *Clinton Digital Library*, accessed January 29, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/57569.

[56] Ibid., Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President Yeltsin, August 14, 1998.

that the latter was “nearly unhinged on the subject of Kosovo”, ranting for twelve minutes and declaring a use of force by NATO “forbidden”. Clinton seems to have been surprised by his long-time partner’s embrace of the antipathy more widely shared amongst his countrymen: “Well, he hasn’t done *that* before. I guess we’ve got a real problem here.”[57]

It became increasingly clear that NATO intervention Kosovo represented a point at which the basic differences in worldviews could not be reconciled or overridden by personal diplomacy. To those in Russia who adhered to a power-politics view of international relations, Kosovo was the culmination of the post-Cold War pattern of America throwing its weight around everywhere from the UN, to the Middle East, to European security. Fear of just how far this might go was compounded by the obvious (but facile) comparison of Kosovo to Chechnya. Could the day come when the US and the West used protection of a Muslim minority as the pretext for a war against Russia itself? Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov summed this up in a comment to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: “Don’t you understand we have many Kosovos in Russia?” The standoff between sovereignty and liberal standards (and interventions to enforce them) created a downward spiral. Talbott saw it as an irony that “the Russian government, in its desperation to stop NATO from bombing, was increasing Milošević’s confidence that he could get away with murder - and thereby making more likely the NATO intervention that the Russians most feared”.[58]

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[57] Talbott, 300. He notes that Yeltsin several times used the word “нельзя” (*nyelzya*), which has “the strongest possible prohibitive connotations”. Unfortunately, the transcript of this call remains heavily redacted, including the entirety of Yeltsin’s outburst. Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President Boris Yeltsin, October 5, 1998, National Security Council and Records Management Office, “Declassified Documents concerning Russia,” Clinton Digital Library, accessed January 29, 2019, https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/16202.
[58] Ibid., 300-301; Norris, xxiv-xxv.

Things finally came to a head in March 1999, with Serb advances pushing tens of thousands of Kosovar refugees from their homes. A last-ditch attempt by the American special envoy Richard C. Holbrooke to reach a peace deal with Milošević failed. The Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, en route to the US for a long-scheduled meeting with Vice President Gore, had his plane turned around over the Atlantic when he was informed that NATO intervention was imminent. In the final hours before bombing began on March 24, 1999, Clinton called Yeltsin to inform him about the upcoming operation. Clinton held out hope that the situation could be reconciled with the broader hope for a cooperative relationship with a liberalizing Russia. He told Yeltsin, "I know that you oppose what we are doing, but I want you to know that I am determined to do whatever I can to keep our disagreement on this from ruining everything else we have done and can do together in the coming years". In his view, Milošević was "not important enough for us to allow him to wreck the relationship between the U.S. and Russia and all the European support".

But Yeltsin would not accept the principle of intervention. The day before, he had sent an official letter questioning "on what basis does NATO take it upon itself to decide the fates of peoples in sovereign states? Who gave it the right to act in the role of the guardian of order?" During the call he vaguely threatened that Russia had "many steps to aim against your decision, maybe inadmissible steps", before signing off, "since I failed to convince the President [of the US], that means there is in store for us a very difficult, difficult road of contacts, if they prove to be possible. Goodbye." and hanging up.[59]

[59] Norris, 1-6; Memorandum of telephone conversation with Russian President Yeltsin, March 24, 1999, George Washington University National Security Archive, accessed January 31, 2019,

Yeltsin expounded on his position in his memoirs. He hated Milošević and his cynical propensity for violence. Despite this, and despite all of his support for liberalization and personal connection with Clinton, Yeltsin would not accept basic elements of the liberal interpretation of world politics. "The West," he writes, "persistently believes that the war in Yugoslavia was a specific retaliation against Milošević, a fight for national minorities and human rights. We, in contrast, think the Kosovo crisis is a global crisis". For Yeltsin, it represented nothing less than the collapse of the postwar order and UN rules. The top value was sovereignty; "there is nothing more dangerous to humanity than the idea that international force should be used to retaliate against any one country." The US and its European allies believed in the basic logic of a liberal model that limited states' rights in the name of human rights, and thought Russia should do the right thing, "eat its spinach", and get on board. Yeltsin rejected the premises, holding that "when you violate the rights of a state, you automatically and egregiously violate the rights of its citizens, including their right to security."[60] Hopeful reset had again disintegrated into renewed hostility, not due to a specific disagreement about Milošević, but rather due to the basic incompatibility of Russian and American leaders' worldviews.

The bombing campaign itself dragged on, as did continued Russian opposition to it. Fortunately, it did not result in a complete breakdown of negotiations. Both sides

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https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4950575-Document-16-Memorandum-of-Telephone-Conversation. A typo in the date-time group for the record lists the year as 1998, rather than 1999.

[60] Yeltsin, 255-256, 265-266. Yeltsin highlights what he holds was another misperception. In the March 24 phone call, Clinton told him that, "I'm sorry he [Milošević] is a Serb. I wish he were Irish or something else, but he is not". Yeltsin wonders, "Did Clinton really think that the problem was our national sympathy for Serbs? Didn't he understand that we were talking about America's approach to the Kosovo problem, about the fate of all of Europe, about the fate of the whole world? This was not just a question of some special 'Slavic kinship' attributed to Russian-Serbian relations. We would have reacted the same way if it were a question of any other country - Poland, Spain, or Turkey. The country or nationality was irrelevant."

continued to engage in the diplomatic process, no matter how fraught. Adding to the difficulty was Yeltsin's precipitous decline in health, which opened up an opportunity for the rivalries and disorganization within Russia's politics and power ministries to spill over into international affairs. These were most clearly, and alarmingly, on display during the endgame of the crisis. The May-June 1999 negotiations in which Talbott participated featured, *inter alia*, the sacking of Russian Prime Minister Primakov (one of four times during 1998-1999 that Yeltsin changed Prime Ministers), MFA Ivanov repudiating the deals made by Russia's main negotiator Viktor Chernomyrdin, and shouting matches between different elements of Russian delegations.[61]

The most dangerous moment came after Milošević had finally agreed to a withdrawal deal. Amidst crunch negotiations to determine how NATO and Russian troops would move into Kosovo to fill the security vacuum, Yeltsin's authority, and indeed civilian authority generally, seemed to badly disintegrate. With the world watching via CNN, Russian ground elements made a sprint to control Kosovo's main airport in Priština, risking an inadvertent clash with NATO forces. By all accounts, this was the result of the Russian Army Chief of Staff Anatoly Kvashnin and loyal subordinates countermanding the direction of the Foreign and Defence Ministries and ordering the commander on the ground, Colonel-General Zavarzin, to make the dash to the airport. The resulting standoff was defused after two days, but not before one more call between Clinton and Yeltsin revealed the latter to be badly out of touch with the situation and nearly incoherent, ratcheting up the tension.[62]

[61] Talbott, 315-331.
[62] Norris, 285-267; 281-282.

This final breakdown of the Bill-and-Boris connection, while NATO and Russian troops faced off at close proximity, demonstrated just how fragile their efforts at partnership ultimately were. Clinton had bet on Yeltsin being the force able to steer Russia away from confrontation with the West, but America and the new Russia never managed to come to an agreement with regard to the international order during years of Balkan crises. Instead, they found themselves in the tensest confrontation since the Cold War's second spike in the early 1980s. In his memoir, Yeltsin claimed to have personally issued the order to seize the airport at Priština. While this seems (given the available evidence) more likely an effort to save face than an accurate description of Russian command-and-control during the crisis, his judgement of what it meant is revealing: "This last gesture was a sign of our moral victory in the face of the enormous NATO military, all of Europe, and the whole world."[63] Yeltsin and Clinton had a real connection and indeed shared views on many things, not least of which was disgust with the person of Slobodan Milošević. In the end, however, this did not extend to the philosophical underpinnings of the international order, a disagreement that was widely reflected in the administrations of the two states. This helped place limits on the prospects for trust, cooperation, and mutual understanding, especially within the realm of international security. The Balkans crises were clear cases of this. But perhaps the clearest example of this divide in perception is the Russo-American engagement over the expansion of NATO.

[63] Yeltsin, 266.

NATO Expansion

The future of the NATO alliance was cast into immediate doubt by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union. With communism and the Warsaw Pact gone from the European continent, NATO had no immediately obvious object for its military deterrence, and thus the alliance's decades-long *raison d'être* was suddenly on the brink of evaporating. In the early 1990s, there were essentially three possible conceptual futures for NATO. The first was what might be called the "relic" option. In this option, NATO member states would recognize that the alliance was an obsolete tool to address a problem that had been resolved. The alliance could be dissolved, or it could live out a sort of quiet afterlife until it was replaced or subsumed by new European security structures for the post-Cold War era, perhaps built around the OSCE or the EU. In either case, little to no effort would be made to reinforce the alliance, let alone build or expand it. This would entail a significant reduction to the American role in Europe's security affairs. The second option was to explicitly maintain or expand NATO as an ongoing deterrent to Russia (and perhaps a reinvigorated, Russia-led CIS in the future) and nearby "rogues" like Iran and Libya. This option had backers in Eastern European states, it received little support amongst the established Western allies, as it would fly in the face of support for reform in Russia, risk a dangerous return to cold war, and negate the possibility of a "peace dividend" via reduced defense expenditure. The final option was to maintain NATO by redefining and expanding it, mainly by recasting it as a structure devoted to broadly-defined European security and political integration. The major difficulties with this approach were figuring out how to transcend NATO's basic

function of outward-looking deterrence, charting a new, non-adversarial relationship with Russia, and determining how and when expansion would take place.[64]

Of these three broad options, the third won out. This was in no small part due to the preferences of President Clinton and his White House, given the outsize role America played as the *de facto* leader of the alliance. Clinton's liberal internationalism imbued him with a strong optimism about NATO's future potential. Under his direction the US set out on a path of consistently buttressing and expanding NATO, a feature of American foreign policy that would outlive the Clinton presidency itself. In doing so Clinton and his foreign policy team would be forced to wrestle with the "Russia question", a process that ultimately demonstrated how the President's liberal optimism about the potential for reset could itself contribute to a worsening of Russo-American relations.

One of the first complications facing the Clinton White House was that the George H.W. Bush administration had already engaged the USSR on the question of NATO expansion while the two sides were bringing the Cold War to an end. Between 1990 and 1991, American and Western European leaders repeatedly reassured the Soviet leadership that the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, the reunification of Germany, and the end of the Cold War standoff would not result in NATO's eastward expansion and the compromise of the USSR's security interests. The question of what exactly Gorbachev was promised subsequently became the subject of significant debate. Much of the debate centered on whether Western reassurances (especially those given by US

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[64] For an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of these options and their various problems and challenges, see Charles-Philippe David, "Fountain of Youth or Cure Worse Than Disease? NATO Enlargement: A Conceptual Deadlock," in *The Future of NATO: Enlargement, Russia, and European Security*, ed. Charles-Philippe David and Jacques Lévesque (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 9-25.

Secretary of State James Baker in his February 1990 meeting with Gorbachev) that NATO would not move east were meant to apply only narrowly to the disposition of NATO forces in a reunified Germany, and did not constitute a broader pledge to not accept former Soviet-bloc states into the alliance in the future. However, the most recently declassified records show that the Soviet leadership in fact received a veritable "cascade of assurances" on NATO expansion during this period. Some the statements from Western leaders were quite broad, and could not have been reasonably mistaken as applying to anything other than the general future of NATO. Perhaps the clearest example is British Prime Minister John Major's response when questioned by Soviet defense minister Marshal Dmitry Yazov about the interest in NATO membership shown by Eastern European governments. Major told him that "nothing of the sort will happen."[65]

These assurances were made under the assumption that the USSR would continue to exist for the foreseeable future. While that assumption proved incorrect, Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union and the country around which its security concerns had revolved had reason to believe that it rightfully inherited the promises made to Gorbachev and other senior Soviet leaders. Thus, the Clinton-era drive for NATO expansion began in a context that included not only the potential for a clash of over what counted as legitimate regional interests, but also a perception on the Russian side that expansion represented America going back on its word. This perception in and of itself undermined confidence in the idea that what the US was really promoting was a liberal order based on mutual trust, dialogue, and adherence to

[65] Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton, "NATO Expansion: What Gorbachev Heard", George Washington University National Security Archive Briefing Book #613 (December 12, 2017), accessed February 3, 2019, https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017-12-12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early.

rules and agreements. That the about-face came at a moment of Russian weakness only bolstered the credibility of those who argued that America was simply unilaterally expanding its sphere of control as far as it could, with no regard for other great powers. Of course, Clinton and others in his administration did not perceive the situation in this way. The gap between American and Russian perceptions of what NATO expansion really meant defined the sides' subsequent interaction on this issue, and was never bridged.

The first major interaction of the Clinton-Yeltsin era regarding the NATO issue came in October of 1993. Secretary of State Christopher and his assistant Talbott travelled to meet with Yeltsin and other senior Russian leadership at a dacha outside of Moscow. Both Christopher and Talbott later recorded that Yeltsin was out-of-sorts, perhaps in a state of drunkenness (as per Christopher) or suffering the effects of an earlier bout of drinking.[66] At the meeting, the American delegation unveiled Clinton's proposal for a "Partnership for Peace" (PfP) as the way forward for European security. Yeltsin greeted Clinton's PfP idea with great enthusiasm, declaring it a "stroke of genius" that would "dissipate all of the tension which we now have in Russia regarding East European states and their aspirations with respect to NATO". This embrace of the PfP was built on, and subsequently helped perpetuate, a basic misperception at the heart of the NATO expansion question.

On the Russian side, Yeltsin misread what the PfP represented. He believed that it was essentially an alternative to NATO expansion, a new structure that would include

[66] Talbott, 101. Talbott records that Yeltsin greeted them "looking like a stunned bull" and was subsequently confused and nearly incoherent. Later at p. 115 he confirms that this statement was referring to a state of drunkenness on Yeltsin's part. Christopher's own assessment of drunkenness is quoted by Savranskaya and Blanton. As Savranskaya and Blanton note, the official transcript of the meeting makes no note of Yeltsin's physical or mental state. It does, however, note his enthusiasm and exuberance at various points.

all of Europe (including Russia) without exclusion via a membership or two-tier mechanism. Pointing to the core issue, he said, "It would have been an issue for Russia particularly if it left us in a second-class status. Now, under your new idea we are all equal and it will ensure equal participation on the basis of partnership". This reflects basic preoccupations of the Russian perception of international politics, namely that it was crucial that as a great power Russia not be excluded from the dominant security structure in Europe nor be reduced to an unbecoming status within it. Yeltsin added, "it is important that there is an idea of partnership for all, and not new membership for some".[67]

However, the PfP was intended as a precursor to, rather than a possible alternative to NATO expansion. Christopher stated as much during the meeting, albeit in somewhat vague terms, saying that the US "will in due course be looking at the question of membership as a longer-term eventuality. There will be an evolution based on the development of a habit of cooperation, but over time. And this too will be based on participation in the partnership. Those who wish to can pursue the idea over time, but that will come later".[68] It is important to note that a major reason for Christopher's vagueness is that within the administration no clear decision on what NATO expansion should look like had been made. In October 1993 the internal debate between "fast-trackers" and more cautious voices like Strobe Talbott was ongoing.[69]

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[67] "Secretary Christopher's Meeting with President Yeltsin, 10/22/93, Moscow" George Washington University National Security Archive, accessed February 5, 2019, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4390822-Document-08-Secretary-Christopher-s-meeting-with. See also Talbott, 115.

[68] Ibid.; Clinton, 569. In Clinton's words, the PfP's purpose was "to increase our security cooperation with Europe's new democracies until we could achieve the expansion of NATO itself".

[69] James M. Goldgeier is the authority on this internal dynamic on the American side. See especially his book *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), 24-44, and article "Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin Was Told

Nonetheless, this invocation of the long term and a principle of openness allowed the Russian side to anticipate a future that did not feature NATO expansion in the short- to medium-term, and that would not exclude Russia from the main European security organs. Of course, the idea of the long term is open to interpretation. Within the political context of four-year presidential election cycles, the long term is considerably shorter than what might otherwise be assumed. Yeltsin ascended to leadership in a political system that did not feature the pressures of "permanent campaigning."[70] While he proved to be a talented campaigner, he emerged from a Soviet environment that operated on somewhat different political timescales than did the election-cycle-driven American system. Yeltsin would come to appreciate the extent election cycles influenced presidential politics, but at this point he could be forgiven for believing that the "long term" did not refer to the next four or eight years.

In reality, the Americans were already considering a far more rapid timeline for NATO expansion that included membership for European Free Trade Association states (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland) by 1996, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and "possibly" Bulgaria and Slovenia by 1998, and Romania, Albania, and the Baltics by 2000. Only membership for Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia itself was envisioned as delayed beyond the limit of a two-term Clinton presidency, and even that was to be achieved by 2005. The clear goal was to use NATO as a main tool to achieve the integration and consolidation of the liberal order in Europe. Even if Russia experienced backsliding or "otherwise [emerged] as a threat to states in the region",

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About NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters" *War on the Rocks*, July 12, 2016, https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/promises-made-promises-broken-what-yeltsin-was-told-about-nato-in-1993-and-why-it-matters/.

[70] The phrase Sidney Blumenthal coined to describe the new style of American presidential politics in the late-twentieth century, in his 1980 book *The Permanent Campaign: Inside the World of Elite Political Operatives* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980).

expansion could be stopped at "phase III" (i.e., before Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia itself) as a defensive safeguard for liberal Europe. Apparently, "this need not be seen as threat to Moscow".[71]

This vision for the future of NATO shaped the Clinton administration's perception of what Yeltsin's endorsement of the PfP meant. Yeltsin saw an alternative that accounted for Russian interests and equal status, with the possibility of expanded membership forestalled beyond the horizon, perhaps permanently. What was really on offer was the immediate establishment of an on-ramp to NATO with Russia last in line, even if there remained disagreement within the US government about how quickly Eastern European states should be able to drive up the ramp. But it was now possible to expect that Yeltsin, and Russia itself, agreed in principle and could be guided through the process. The expectation that Russia could be brought along with the liberal project of NATO expansion without serious damage to the Russo-American relationship underwrote the ensuing decision to pursue the expansion project relatively quickly from 1994 onwards and the subsequent diplomatic effort to realize the policy. This belief also helps explain why the Clinton administration rejected warnings which pointed to the risks and likely outcomes of NATO expansion.[72]

The road to expansion and the effort to allay Russian fears would not be smooth. In January 1994, Clinton made stops in Brussels and Prague en route to Moscow for the

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[71] Savranskaya and Blanton, "What Yeltsin Heard"; Lynn Davis and Stephen Flanagan, "Strategy for NATO's Expansion and Transformation", memorandum for the Secretary of State, September 7, 1993, George Washington University National Security Archive, accessed February 5, 2019, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//dc.html?doc=4390816-Document-02-Strategy-for-NATO-s-Expansion-and.

[72] Goldgeier discusses in some detail how the "fast-trackers" within the Clinton administration won the internal policy debate in 1994, largely by leveraging the statements of the president himself. The more cautious Talbott, while recognizing that expansion would strain the Russo-American relationship, nonetheless believed that it was "the right thing to do" and that "the challenge was how to do it right", *The Russia Hand*, 92.

summit meeting to resolve the Ukrainian nuclear question. In Brussels he said that the PfP "sets in motion a process that leads to the enlargement of NATO". At a press conference with Central European leaders in Prague, he affirmed that the question was "no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how". These statements not only put to rest lingering internal confusion about whether the US had a pro-expansion policy, but also renewed Russian suspicions, including towards the PfP itself. At the Moscow summit, Yeltsin quickly pushed back against the idea of admitting new members piecemeal. By June, Russia was slow-walking its commitment to join the PfP against the backdrop of the Bosnian crisis. Prime Minister Kozyrev, having signed a statement of intent to join the PfP (although only at an unspecified future time), again revealed Russia's power-politics mentality: "It is one thing if a small poodle tries to walk through these gates, but quite another matter when an elephant like Russia tries to do the same thing."[73]

Clinton paid little heed to statements such as these which indicated that plans for a phased expansion were basically incompatible with the Russian view of international politics. He consistently supported the principle and possibility of Russian eligibility for membership at some point in the future. He dismissed critics of this view, such as Henry Kissinger, for "thinking in yesterday terms". He wanted to think in "tomorrow terms" and believed, as Talbott put it, that "the alteration of national and international politics that would enable Russia to enter NATO was no more unimaginable than the changes that had occurred in the last decade". Instead of viewing European security "as a

[73] Talbott, 111, 115, 124.

technical problem, he saw it as a conceptual one".[74] Here Clinton's commitment to the establishment of a liberal order in Europe is on full display.

So too was his "hedgehog" mentality, which sought to relate all complexity to this central organizing principle. With another meeting with Yeltsin looming in September 1994, Clinton tasked Secretary Christopher and Talbott with coming up with a phrase to replace the backward-looking term "post-Cold War era", which would encapsulate the new American project. The two discussed the idea with George Kennan, telling him that Clinton was looking for something like "containment", Kennan's term which "reduced a big complicated task to a single word. Talbott's passage regarding the episode is highly revealing:

> Kennan [the realist] replied with some passion that we shouldn't try. He was sorry he had tried to pack so much diagnosis and prescription into three syllables. He certainly regretted the consequences, since containment had led to 'great and misleading oversimplification of analysis and policy'. We would be better off, he said, if we did not follow his example and, instead, contented ourselves with a 'thoughtful paragraph or more, rather than trying to come up with a bumper sticker'.

Clinton, the hedgehog, was amused but dismissive of this realist defense of difficulty and complexity. When Talbott reported Kennan's advice, he replied "Well, that's why Kennan's a great diplomat and scholar and not a politician".[75]

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[74] Ibid., 132.
[75] Ibid., 132-134.

Clinton's optimism would soon run into Russian hostility, despite personal assurances to Yeltsin that the forthcoming expansion would feature "no surprises, no rush, and no exclusion". A communiqué issued at the end of a NATO ministerial meeting stated that the alliance would spend 1995 examining criteria for new members. Even though no timetable for admitting new members was established, the Russian camp took this as a betrayal of both the initial spirit of PfP and Clinton's assurances. As Kozyrev put it, "now partnership is subsidiary to enlargement". In December 1994 in Budapest, in front of the press and with Clinton at his side, Yeltsin warned of a "cold peace" settling in over Europe. Shortly after, he rebuffed a conciliatory reminder from Vice President Al Gore that NATO expansion could include Russia. Yeltsin rejected this as nonsensical by comparing a "big" Russia to a "small" NATO, explicitly aligning Russian policy with a power-politics vision of the international order.[76]

Russian opposition to NATO enlargement taking place over the second half of the 1990s was not backed by a diplomatic ability to do anything about it. The disparity in influence between the US and Russia in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War was enormous. Once the process began, there was very little the Russian side could do to slow it, let alone stop it. Pacing was to be determined almost entirely by the US, which equally had a great deal of influence over the other NATO allies. The US did make some effort to stick to its "no rush" principle, but this again reflected the importance of the Clinton-Yeltsin connection. Both presidents faced elections in 1996, and Clinton understood that NATO expansion was a domestic liability for Yeltsin. Clinton had an overriding interest in ensuring that his liberal partner in Moscow was not removed and replaced by a communist or ultra-nationalist. As 1995 progressed, the expansion

[76] Ibid., 139-141. Goldgeier, 84-88.

timetable was managed to ensure that only preparatory work would take place through 1996, pushing expansion itself into each president's (hypothetical) second term. Clinton nonetheless rejected entreaties from Yeltsin to commit to a delay beyond 2000 and badgered him to finally sign on to the PfP, which Russia conceded to do in May 1995.[77]

The question of Yeltsin's future became pressing over the course of the next year. His polling numbers were wallowing in the single digits with the presidential election looming. Clinton opted to unleash a full-court press to ensure Yeltsin's victory, which included everything from enabling the ascendancy of the oligarchs in Russia's political system to quietly supplying his own campaign operatives to the Yeltsin camp. As he notably put it to Talbott, "I want this guy to win so bad it hurts". This effort was predicated on the expectation that Yeltsin really was his great partner in realizing the liberal project in Europe, and that the two of them would be able to successfully navigate the process of NATO expansion (among other issues) during their respective second terms.[78]

There were signs, however, that Yeltsin didn't fit quite so nicely into the Clintonian worldview. At the start of 1996 he moved Yevgeny Primakov, an outright great-power-competition realist who rejected the "power of ideas", into the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. In an April meeting with Talbott, with the Russian presidential campaign in full-swing, Yeltsin went on an extended riff about his and Russia's insistence on equality and distaste for American flaunting of superiority,

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[77] Ibid., 161-165. Goldgeier, 91-93.

[78] Stent 22-23; Talbott 205-209. Talbott notes that "one consideration prevailed in our thinking: our agreement with the reformers on the importance of a Yeltsin victory outweighed our disagreement with them over some of the methods they were using to ensure that victory, principally the enrichment and empowerment of the oligarchs".

capped off with the guarantee that “Russia will rise again! I repeat: Russia will rise again!”[79]

Such statements did not result in recalibration of either Clinton’s views of Yeltsin or the plan for NATO expansion. With each president having managed to secure re-election, NATO expansion resumed its progress toward the next step of the process: establishing names and dates for new membership. Clinton believed that his partnership with Yeltsin could help Russia transform itself on the issue and its inevitability, but getting him to “‘absorb’ or ‘internalize’ enlargement as ‘one of those things in life that you can’t avoid - you just have to get used to and learn to live with’”.[80] Accordingly, the administration forged ahead with renewed vigour.

The first step was to confirm and advance the progress that had been made between Yeltsin’s July 1996 re-election and Clinton’s own victory in November. In September, the other members of NATO had agreed to announce new members at the alliance summit scheduled for mid-1997. At the same time, NATO’s Secretary General Javier Solana floated the idea that Russian endorsement (or at least acceptance) could be secured by the establishment of a “consultative mechanism” before the summit. As the administration pressed forward on these initiatives in the first half of 1997, criticism of the project from outside the White House began to gain volume.[81]

There was already a well-established wariness about expansion within the US military and Defense Department, but this camp had lost during the internal policy debate in 1993-1994.[82] Now, voices from outside government began to warn that rather

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[79] Talbott, 194, 197.
[80] Ibid., 217.
[81] Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 170-174; Talbott, 218-219.
[82] Ibid., 28-29; Talbott, 97-98; Goldgeier 26-29.

than helping to build a better future for Russo-American relations, NATO expansion as then conceived would likely have deleterious effects on the prospects for partnership. Talbott recalled that "virtually everyone I knew from the world of academe, journalism, and the foreign-policy think tanks was against enlargement". Amongst this group were Robert Legvold, Marshall Shulman, Jack Matlock, and John Lewis Gaddis, who wrote that NATO enlargement violated "*every one* of the strategic principles" he regarded as basic.[83]

Perhaps most prominent was George Kennan, who penned a *New York Times* op-ed warning of the likely consequences of NATO expansion. In it, he put forth the view "that expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold-War era". He went on to list a series of probable consequences that were remarkably prescient:

> Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking. And, last but not least, it might make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to secure the Russian Duma's ratification of the START II agreement and to achieve further reductions of nuclear weaponry.
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> [...]

[83] John Lewis Gaddis, "History, Grand Strategy and NATO Enlargement," *Survival* 40, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 145-151. See also Talbott, 219-220, 449*n2*, *n4*.

> I am aware, of course, that NATO is conducting talks with the Russian authorities in hopes of making the idea of expansion tolerable and palatable to Russia.
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> [...]
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> [But] Russians are little impressed with American assurances that it reflects no hostile intentions. They would see their prestige (always uppermost in the Russian mind) and their security interests as adversely affected. They would, of course, have no choice but to accept expansion as a military fait accompli. But they would continue to regard it as a rebuff by the West and would likely look elsewhere for guarantees of a secure and hopeful future for themselves.[84]

Lest it be thought that such alternate views were not brought to Clinton's attention, he in fact read Kennan's article. Talbott recalls entering the Oval Office to find the President having just finished reading it. In what was perhaps his most "hedgehog" moment, Clinton sought for a way to discount the argument, which went directly against his liberal internationalist organizing principle for global affairs. Turning to Talbott, he asked, "Why isn't Kennan right?" Talbott eased the President's mind by restating the (liberal internationalist) logic of the administration's policy and projecting "that the Russians were already making the transition from stomping their feet and emitting primal screams to talking seriously with us about a solution". In reality, the Russian leadership saw things the way Kennan suspected they did. The next day Yuri Mamedov

[84] George F. Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *New York Times*, February 5, 1997, https://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/05/opinion/a-fateful-error.html

told Talbott, "We just gave our Prime Minister [Chernomyrdin] a copy of George Kennan's brilliant article. Your hero has saved us having to write talking points on your NATO folly".[85]

Kennan was correct about many things, including that Russia basically had no choice but to live with what the US decided was its NATO policy. Talbott described the American approach as "table and stick", i.e. "go straight to your bottom line and stick with it; wait until the other side bends".[86] This technique was indeed effective in achieving specific foreign policy goals given the large gap in diplomatic clout within the Russo-American relationship. As early as February 8, Chernomyrdin told Vice President Gore, "I understand that the decision [on enlargement] has been made, and we know you can't reverse it, but we need help on managing our domestic politics on the issue". Gore replied, "We'll do that, as long as you can find a way to declare victory in what we can offer."[87] During the ensuing diplomatic exchanges over the spring of 1997, it became clear that Russia's leadership could not win any of the concessions it felt could lessen the damage to the future of Russian politics. In March in Helsinki, Yeltsin told Clinton, "I need to take steps to alleviate the negative consequences of this for Russia. I am prepared to enter an agreement with NATO, not because I want to but because it's a step I'm compelled to take". He asked for private assurances that NATO would not subsequently expand onto the territory of the former Soviet Union. This argument for tacit acceptance of spheres of influence was anathema to Clinton's liberal internationalism, and he rejected it outright. He was in a bit of a Catch-22 situation: he knew that a promise to limit NATO expansion would both violate the rights of states to

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[85] Talbott, 232.
[86] Ibid., 382.
[87] Ibid., 233.

choose their allies and foreclose the possibility of future membership for Russia. On the other hand, the way NATO expansion was unfolding was itself lending credibility to a narrative within Russian politics that expansion was a predatory move by the US at Russian expense, a fact that was equally likely to foreclose the idea of eventual membership for Russia. But Clinton believed that Yeltsin could still partner with him to transcend the dilemma by finding a "solution to a short-term problem that doesn't create a long-term problem by keeping alive old stereotypes," something different than "the old Russia and the old NATO." At this, Yeltsin gave up on negotiating, and accepted a deal that traded Russian agreement on expansion for American support for Russian membership in the World Trade Organization and G-8.[88]

In May 1997, Clinton was back in Europe to sign the NATO-Russia Founding Act at a ceremony in Paris. Ever the optimist, Clinton believed that "NATO's Cold War adversary was now its partner".[89] In reality, the first wave of NATO expansion was not the result of a collaborative effort to build a new European security structure. Russia's signing did not so much demonstrate the next step in building a better Russo-American relationship through partnership, but rather that it had been on the receiving end of "table and stick". As we have seen, this aspect of the Clinton-era reset attempt ended in disappointment when hostility to the NATO settlement helped scuttle arms-control efforts and fuel dangerous brinkmanship over Kosovo. It also helped set the stage for another round of confrontation over NATO once Clinton and Yeltsin left the scene by providing fodder to a narrative of resentment that Vladimir Putin was all too happy to exploit.

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[88] Ibid., 238. Clinton 750-751. It is worth noting that Russian perception of WTO and G-8 membership had much to do with status and prestige, while from the American standpoint (especially for Clinton) it was a positive sign of Russian reorientation towards integration in a liberal world order.
[89] Clinton, 756.

Conclusion

What does all this tell us about the first revolution of the reset-disappointment cycle in post-Cold War Russo-American relations? President Clinton and his top appointees have been at the centre of this story. Of course, as has hopefully been clear, they were not the only factors determining the direction of the relationship. Domestic political pressures constrained both the American and Russian executives in terms of their available policy options. Members of the US Congress and the Russian Duma had a vote, so to speak, on the limits within which their national executives could manoeuvre. This was literally true for when their consent was needed to ratify treaties, but also true in the broader sense of bringing public or private political pressure to bear on the executives. Politicians who chose to promote virulent ethno-nationalism, or vigorously endorsed rapid NATO expansion, bear responsibility for the effect their choices had on the course of Russo-American relations. There was also simply no way to avoid the fact that in the immediate post-Cold War period there was an enormous gap between the US and Russia in terms of economic and diplomatic strength. Factors such as these set the conditions within which the presidential administrations operated and established boundaries on their freedom of action.

Nonetheless, both presidents had quite broad authority to direct the foreign policy of their states. As such, their decision-making processes, and those of their key subordinates and advisors, were an important factor in determining the trajectory of the bilateral relationship. Clinton and Yeltsin's behaviour in this regard supports the selective attention thesis discussed in chapter one. Their approaches to dealing with the "big three" issues in the Russo-American relationship fit with the expectations of the

thesis' core hypotheses, namely the role of vivid information and the subjective credibility of information. To a certain extent in Clinton's case, there is also support for the aspect of the organizational expertise hypothesis that expects a gap between policymakers and other observers (primarily intelligence agencies, but extended here to include observers in academia, think tanks, and the press).

The important role that the close personal rapport between Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin played in Russo-American relations between 1993 and 1999 is in line with the vividness hypothesis. As we have seen, both leaders placed a great deal of weight on their personal interactions (perhaps the quintessential form of vivid information). Their amiability and capacity for deal-making led to overestimation of the likelihood that their personal capacity for partnership would translate to their states' broader strategic relationship. It also led to underestimating the fragility of deals that in effect papered over serious differences in perspective. For example, Clinton's initial ability to bring Yeltsin into deals over arms control, Bosnia, and even NATO expansion obscured the fact that Yeltsin and other Russian leaders did not perceive the international relations context of these arrangements the same way. Clinton was subsequently surprised when Russia refused to cooperate any further with American priorities, and instead pushed back with a dangerous gamble in Kosovo.

The vividness of Clinton's good personal interactions with Yeltsin interacted with his subjective assessment of the credibility of information in important ways. For Clinton, his personal diplomacy with Yeltsin unfolded within the context of a liberal-order interpretation of international politics. Clinton's persistent optimism about the prospects for Russo-American partnership were in part due to his generally optimistic character. But it was also supported by confirmation bias, through which he attributed

greater credibility to aspects of Russian leaders' behaviour that seemed to fit with his liberal-order worldview than to those aspects that didn't. From their very first meeting in 1992 onward, Yeltsin and other key leaders had indicated their adherence to a vision of Russia as a great power deserving of prestige and being treated as an equal partner. Nonetheless, Clinton seems to have paid relatively little attention to the importance of this in predicting the likely Russian responses to American policy initiatives. Instead, he placed more emphasis on instances when Yeltsin (and/or other Russian leaders) demonstrated willingness to act in accordance with (some) liberal principles, such as signing a bilateral arms deal with independent Ukraine, integrating into global markets and organizations such as the WTO and G-8, and sending troops for a peacekeeping force in Bosnia. This resulted in an under-appreciation for the medium- and long-term risks associated with policies such as ballistic missile defence advancement and short-term NATO expansion. Opportunities to plan for mitigating such risks or to identify lower-risk options were missed.

Finally, the subjective credibility hypothesis is further supported by the relationship between Clinton and his senior staff and outside voices that put forth alternate interpretations or predictions. Clinton did not place much stock in intelligence assessments about others' likely future political behaviour or responses to American policies. He had a notably weak relationship with his intelligence chiefs, meeting with them only rarely. In his two-year tenure as CIA Director, James Woolsey had no one-on-one meetings with the President, and only two semi-private meetings. Woolsey would later say that "it wasn't that I had a bad relationship with the president. It just didn't

exist".[90] John Deutch, who served as Clinton's Director of Central Intelligence from May 1995 to December 1996 (a period that covered the end-game in Bosnia and planning for NATO expansion) receives a paltry three passing mentions in Clinton's 957-page memoir. By the end of the decade, members of the intelligence community were complaining "that the administration sometimes plays down or dismisses intelligence analysis that conflicts with its policies."[91] Clearly, intelligence analyses that predicted Russian push-back against administration policies and highlighted opportunities to mitigate risk (for example, by using carrots as well as sticks) did not feature strongly in White House decision-making under Clinton. Similarly, not much credibility was attributed to informal input from outside experts such as the academic community. Clinton's near-*a priori* dismissal of George Kennan's analysis ("Why is he wrong?") is the most emblematic episode of this tendency.

The result was a selective-attention decision-making process that contributed to the first reset-disappointment cycle in post-Cold War Russo-American relations. Clinton's liberal-internationalist interpretation of international affairs contributed, via confirmation bias, to greater weight being placed on those aspects of Russian behaviour that were in line with the pre-established organizing principle. This dynamic was only enhanced when confirming information came via vivid interactions with Clinton's "friend" Boris Yeltsin, who in many ways - but not all - agreed about liberal norms. These optimistic aspects thus received greater attention in the decision-making process, while information that was difficult or impossible to reconcile with the liberal organizing

[90] Kathryn Jean Lopez, "Clinton's Loss?" *National Review*, September 11, 2003, http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/980466/posts
[91] James Risen, "The Nation; The Clinton Administration's See-No-Evil C.I.A.," *New York Times*, September 10, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/09/10/weekinreview/the-nation-the-clinton-administration-s-see-no-evil-cia.html

framework was downplayed or ignored. This was especially the case when dissenting analyses (such as those coming from intelligence professionals or academics) appealed to much less vivid forms of information, such as broader historical or political trends in Russia.

Ultimately, this helped introduce counterproductive elements into American foreign policy under the Clinton administration. The President was a hedgehog who sought to reconcile everything to his central organizing principle for international relations. His was a highly optimistic liberal internationalism, and Clinton set out with strong belief that Russo-American relations could be dramatically recast along these lines for the coming new century. But this led him, and his administration, to selectively discount or ignore available information that indicated that there were fundamental divisions between Russian and American foreign policy, not least of which were incompatible views of international relations theory itself. This information could have been used to more clearly evaluate the ways in which American policy options risked being counterproductive, and to what degree. Whether a more complete risk-reward analysis would have resulted in different policy choices is not clear. Clinton and his team might have selected the same policies, if they were still regarded as the best available options. At a minimum, however, it would have come as less of a surprise when the preferred American policy options contributed to renewed tension and disappointment, rather than producing a successful reset.

Chapter 3 – The Bush-Putin Era

The year 2000 appeared to present another ideal opportunity to attempt to reset the Russo-American relationship. In the final days of 1999, Boris Yeltsin had resolved to resign from the Russian presidency at the close of the year. In mid-December he told his hand-picked successor, then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin (who would become acting President), that "the new century must begin with a new political era," but swore him to secrecy about the decision for the time being. No one else was told about the decision until December 28th, and even then only Yeltsin's closest associates were let in on the plan. When Yeltsin's New Year's address was broadcast announcing the hand-over of power, it came as a surprise to nearly everyone.[1]

Yeltsin's resignation and the elevation of Putin caught political opponents flat-footed. The Presidential election scheduled for mid-2000 was moved up to March, and Putin cruised to a majority victory in the first round. At that stage, it was not clear what the future would hold for Vladimir Putin, or for Russia. Putin had been Prime Minister for less than five months, and before that had been a low-profile bureaucrat in the political worlds of St. Petersburg and Moscow. What the change in power would mean for the Russo-American relationship was uncertain. Putin's youth (he was then just 47 years old) and relative lack of prior political baggage suggested that he might be a leader willing and able to move Russia beyond the confrontational dynamic which had dogged the Clinton-Yeltsin attempt at partnership. His background as a field-grade KGB officer in East Germany suggested the opposite.

[1] Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 1-14.

Either way, much would depend on the future direction of American politics. By the time Putin won his election on 26 March, it was clear that Clinton's replacement in the White House would be either his incumbent Vice President Al Gore, or the Governor of Texas, George W. Bush. Gore was quite familiar to the Russian leadership, not only because of his close association with Clinton, but also due to his extensive work on the bilateral relationship as part of the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. Bush, on the other hand, had very little foreign-policy experience.[2] Nonetheless, it was possibly a good omen that he was the son of an earlier President Bush, George H. W., who was well-respected in Russia for his work in managing the end of the Cold War. The American election in November 2000 was close-fought and highly contentious, requiring a recount and a Supreme Court case before it was determined that Bush would become the 43rd President of the United States.

The incoming administration's approach towards foreign policy, and the relationship with Russia in particular, would come into clearer view after Bush entered the Oval Office. Still, some characteristics that would later define the Bush-Putin years were already becoming visible. Amongst these was that Bush was less of a "driver" of foreign policy than Clinton had been. While both had come to the Presidency from the arena of state-level politics, Clinton had well-established views about certain aspects of foreign policy and challenged subordinates to find solutions that would realize his policy preferences. Bush, on the other hand, viewed his role as President as being centered on the task of making decisive decisions between the available options. This is most notably reflected in the title of his memoir, *Decision Points*, which he self-consciously organized

[2] Stent, 55. She notes that when Bush first interviewed Condoleezza Rice for a foreign-policy role in his team, he told her "I don't have any idea about foreign affairs."

around this "most important part of the job."[3] This meant that to a certain extent, foreign policy options flowed up to the Oval Office more than they had under Clinton, whose views had played a stronger guiding role in the policy-making and debate process at lower levels. Thus, figures such as Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, National Security Advisors Condoleezza Rice (later Secretary of State) and Stephen Hadley, and Secretaries of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and Robert Gates, as well as important deputies like Richard Armitage and Paul Wolfowitz, played a more proactive role than their equivalents in the preceding Clinton administration. This will be apparent as a difference between the preceding chapter and the analysis that follows. That being said, Bush's role as "decider-in-chief" was of considerable importance. For example, Colin Powell notes that by January 2003, "the President did not think war [against Saddam Hussein's Iraq] could be avoided. He had crossed the line in his own mind, even though the NSC (National Security Council) had never met - and never would meet - to discuss the decision."[4] Operation Iraqi Freedom began two months later.

There were additional differences between the two administrations, not least of which was how centrally Russia would feature in their overall foreign policies. Relations with Russia had been a major focal point for Clinton, and featured prominently in his thinking about problems such as strategic arms control, the Balkans, and NATO expansion. Bush and his team had campaigned against the Clinton-Gore record on this front, arguing that relations had become over-personalized and that Russia should not play such an outsized role in American foreign policy given the result of the Cold War

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[3] George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010), xi.
[4] Colin Powell, *It Worked For Me: In Life and Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 217.

and Russia's much-diminished status. Russia would still be a consideration, of course, but only one re-balanced against many new and pressing concerns. For Bush's supporters within the Republican party, a recalibration of priorities was needed to emphasize what they viewed as more important problems (such as rogue states), and de-emphasize the weight of Russia's opinion to bring it in line with the realities of America's unipolar moment.[5] The relative importance of Russia in the American foreign-policy outlook would decline further in the mid-2000s as a global campaign against jihadist terrorism and wars in the greater Middle East dominated attention. It would take an acute crisis in the former Soviet republic of Georgia to bring relations with Russia back to centre stage.

Furthermore, the incoming administration did not share Clinton's enthusiasm for and dedication to multilateralism. While the words "Bush Doctrine" came to be most closely associated with the unilateralism inherent in the concept of pre-emption and with the Iraq War, the term was in fact first used to point (approvingly) to the administration's evident preference for unilateralism as early as June 2001.[6] This penchant for unilateralism would have important effects on the Russo-American relationship, complicating America's diplomacy with European allies vis-à-vis Russia and tending to reinforce the perception of "steamrolling" already developed during the 1990s.

Yet there were important similarities between the Clinton and Bush administrations when it came to foreign policy, including with regard to Russia in

[5] Stent, 54-60; Talbott, 383-403. Stent notes that within the State Department bureaucracy, Russia's status was downgraded by folding the dedicated Russia office into a wider regional Bureau that covered fifty-four states in Europe and Eurasia.
[6] Charles Krauthammer, "The Bush Doctrine: ABM, Kyoto, and the New American Unilateralism," *The Weekly Standard*, June 4, 2001, https://www.weeklystandard.com/charles-krauthammer/the-bush-doctrine-1776

particular. As Stephen M. Walt noted, certain liberal assumptions about international politics transcended party boundaries in the post-Cold War era.[7] Both presidents agreed with the basic democratic peace theory of liberal interpretations of international relations, and were enthusiastic supporters of democratization. They were also liberal free-traders, and regarded economic interests as a pre-eminent (if not entirely dominant) consideration in interpreting the foreign-policy motives of other states. They mutually rejected the legitimacy of spheres of influence in international relations.

Perhaps the most important similarity between the two presidents was the way they related to such concepts. In the preceding chapter, I argued that Clinton was a hedgehog, and that this had important effects on the trajectory of Russo-American relations between 1993 and 1999. Below, I will make the argument that Bush was equally a hedgehog, and that this helps explain why a reset-disappointment cycle came to characterize Russo-American relations during his presidency, as it had for Clinton and Yeltsin. Clinton, as we have seen, was dedicated to an optimistic vision of multilateral internationalism, including an enthusiasm for certain specific institutional aspects of it, such as the UN and arms-control treaties.[8] Bush (and several close advisors), on the other hand, was much less optimistic about the institutionalist version of the liberal interpretation of international politics. Yet he was equally a liberal hedgehog, albeit one whose organizing principle was somewhat more nebulous, but just as powerful. The lens through which Bush viewed the world was liberty. Linking together a broad swathe of modern history, Bush set forth his basic understanding of politics:

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[7] Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).
[8] Regardless of the downward trajectory of the Russo-American relationship vis-à-vis the START II and ABM treaties during his tenure, Clinton sought to preserve, not destroy them. See pages 33-38 above.

> China's experience [during the Cultural Revolution] reminded me of the French and Russian revolutions. The pattern was the same: People seized control by promising to promote certain ideals. Once they had consolidated power, they abused it, casting aside their beliefs and brutalizing their fellow citizens. It was as if mankind had a sickness that it kept inflicting on itself. The sobering thought deepened my conviction that freedom - economic, political, and religious - is the only fair and productive way of governing a society.[9]

In examining the similar ways in which their hedgehog characters affected relations, it is helpful that during the Bush-Putin years Russia and America continued to confront the same set of problems that Clinton and Yeltsin had wrestled with, but had been unable to resolve decisively. Ballistic missile defence and non-proliferation were key points of contention from the very beginning of the new presidential relationship (in fact, the fate of the ABM Treaty had been a feature of Bush's campaign platform). Questions of conflict, intervention, and sovereignty moved from the Balkans to the Middle East and Caucasus, and became even more contentious. Meanwhile, NATO expansion continued, bringing the confrontation over that issue onto the territory of the former Soviet Union and right up to the borders of the Russian Federation.

As was the case for my examination of the Clinton-Yeltsin era, I will examine these issues in turn for maximum clarity, with an eye towards how they related to each

[9] Bush, 23. The conviction that all people everywhere would be better off if governed in accordance with liberal principles is a deeply rooted inheritance in American politics. Despite their many policy disagreements and differences of political style, Clinton and Bush shared this bedrock liberal assumption.

other. The similar impact of perception, misperception, and hedgehog thinking on relations during both decades should be apparent. This approach will also help make clear that continuity, rather than change, was the main feature connecting the Bush-Putin era to the Clinton-Yeltsin era. This is, of course, not to say that there was no change. Indeed, the relationship was in a worse state by the end of Bush's second term in 2008 than it had been at any point previously since the end of the Cold War. But familiar problems, perspectives, and policy choices - rather than truly novel developments - helped to produce that situation. Ultimately, recognizing this can help us make sense not only of the reset-disappointment pattern that Angela Stent identified in the Russo-American relationship, but also help us sort through the myriad recent assessments of current confrontations (including, but not limited to Ukraine, Syria, hacking, disinformation, and intermediate-range nuclear weapons).

Missile Defence and SORT

Much like the Clinton-Yeltsin era, the Bush-Putin phase of the Russo-American relationship began with tension over the issue of strategic arms control and the nuclear balance. Once again, initial optimism and apparent progress towards a reset would temporarily conceal a more serious split on the issue. Both sides regarded the stalemate that emerged by the end of the 1990s as undesirable, and looked to end the impasse. Efforts to launch a reset attempt began even before Bush entered office, when his campaign made the future of American missile defence an election issue.

Members of the Bush team approached the question from the opposite perspective of the Clinton administration. Clinton viewed the end of the Cold War as an

opportunity for the United States and Russia to take the treaty-centred model of arms control even further. Now that the mutual hostility had abated, the sides could work together to build trust and control the danger of nuclear weapons through progressively more comprehensive and binding arms-reduction treaties. Even as START II remained stalled in the Duma, the Clinton administration persisted in looking forward to a subsequent START III as the next step in controlling strategic weapons with a legal framework. Indeed, Strobe Talbott believed that "had START II been implemented in 1993, Clinton might have concluded a START III treaty with Yeltsin in his first term and been well into START IV by the second." The Bush team had no enthusiasm for this model, viewing it as an anachronism that kept the US locked in Cold War structures which were increasingly divorced from strategic reality.[10]

Condoleezza Rice was the clearest articulator of this view. In early 2000, and writing as the foreign-policy advisor to the Bush campaign, she published her vision for the future of American strategy in *Foreign Affairs*. She rejected Clinton's dedication to institutions and multilateralism, which should never be "ends in themselves". Instead, Rice argued that Americans should become more comfortable with global power politics and the exercise of American power explicitly on behalf of the national interest, as opposed to on the behalf of some ill-defined "international community". Rice appealed to ideas drawn from the realist tradition, stating bluntly that "the United States needs to recognize that Russia is a great power, and that we will always have interests that conflict as well as coincide."[11]

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[10] Talbott, 375; Stent 72.
[11] Condoleezza Rice, "Promoting the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January-February 2000): 45-62. See also Stent 54-58 for her interpretation of the 2000 Bush campaign and Rice's role in it.

At first glance, it might appear that such a stance might lead US leaders to more reliably appreciate the importance of status, security, and the power-politics outlook for their Russian counterparts. But Rice added another layer to her vision for American foreign relations, one which was just as universalist as Clintonian institutional internationalism. She acknowledged that realist foreign policy arguments have often been countered with the claim that they insufficiently account for the importance of values and morality in foreign policy. Rice added:

> This polarized view - you are either a realist or devoted to norms and values - may be just fine in academic debate, but it is a disaster for American foreign policy. American values are universal. People want to say what they think, worship as they wish, and elect those who govern them; the triumph of these values is most assuredly easier when the international balance of power favors those who believe in them. But sometimes that favorable balance of power takes time to achieve, both internationally and within a society. And in the meantime, it is simply not possible to ignore and isolate other powerful states that do not share those values.[12]

The connection to a strategy of unlimited geographical range - and thus the rejection, again, of spheres of influence as illegitimate - was quite clear. In a general sense, "America's military power must be secure because the United States is the only guarantor of global peace and stability," crucial for the human rights, individual liberty,

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[12] Ibid., 49.

and free trade economy (i.e. liberal order) that flow from it. With regard to Russia and its "near abroad" in particular, the ongoing war in Chechnya was "a reminder of the vulnerability of the small, new states around Russia and of America's interest in their independence." Nonetheless, rogue regimes were the ascendant security threat.[13]

In articulating her overall position, Rice revealed herself as more of a fox than many other contemporary senior American officials. Her hybrid policy stance recognized that "great power" and status concerns remained potent motivators in international politics, particularly for Russia. Rice recognized that:

> Strategic stability [...] was not the real issue for the Russians. I do not mean to suggest that Moscow, particularly the Russian general staff, was unconcerned about the military balance. But in a larger sense, an end to arms control as we had come to know it also meant an end to the equality between the Kremlin and the White House that it had come to symbolize. [...] Only in terms of nuclear weapons was Russia by any stretch of the imagination equal to the United States. The Russian national security elite said all of the right things about cooperation in the post-Cold War era and even acted that way much of the time. But deep inside there was a nostalgia for the time when Moscow stood astride the international system challenging Washington and its allies with an alternative view of how human history would evolve. Arms control and the ABM Treaty were integral to that reality and thus talismans against decline.[14]

[13] Ibid., 50; 60-62.
[14] Ibid., 60.

Nonetheless, she simultaneously endorsed a universalist liberal argument for the exercise of American power that cared little for such concerns, while anticipating from an early stage that this was likely to cause friction with Russia. She apparently judged this an acceptable risk. As we will see below, this stance complicated Rice's relationships with other members of the administration, including President Bush himself, who more closely related to only the universalist liberal aspects of her views and were slower to recognize the probable costs of related policy initiatives. In any case, it was these liberal, global, and unilateral features that came to define the Bush Doctrine and Freedom Agenda.[15]

This marriage of unilateralism and global concern quickly came to the fore in Bush's first interactions with Vladimir Putin, at a meeting in Slovenia in July 2001. This was reminiscent of Clinton's first summit with Yeltsin at Vancouver in 1993, in which strategic weapons and proliferation were the first order of business for the new presidents. The twenty-first-century version of American unilateralism was the ideological underpinning of the Bush administration's effort to break the impasse with Russia over missile defence.[16] This effort was embodied by Bush subsequently giving Putin (in December 2001) the requisite six-month notice that the US would withdraw from the ABM Treaty in order to freely pursue missile defence systems, which were

[15] It is interesting to note that Isaiah Berlin made his original distinction between hedgehogs and foxes in order to explain the thought of Leo Tolstoy, who Berlin took to be "a fox who believed in being a hedgehog." I believe something similar can be seen in the person of Condoleezza Rice, who through her scholarly background understood the illiberal aspects of state behaviour, but ultimately sought to reconcile this with a universal, values-based political outlook.

[16] Stent, 60. She notes that Bush addressed missile defense in his very first address to Congress, saying "to protect our own people, our allies and friends, we must develop and we must deploy effective missile defenses. And as we transform our military, we can discard Cold War relics and reduce our own nuclear forces to reflect today's needs."

restricted under the treaty's terms. America would in tandem pursue unilateral cuts to its strategic arsenal. Despite this new diplomatic style, there were remarkable similarities with the Clinton administration in several of the underlying assumptions of the American policy.

The major goal going into the Slovenia meeting was to secure Russian acceptance of America's forthcoming withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. First among the underlying assumptions of the American position was the idea that it should be self-evident to the Russian side that the missile defense systems the US had in mind for the European theatre were not targeted at Russia, nor did they constitute a threat to its strategic deterrent. Secondly, the American delegation arrived prepared to argue that it was in Russia's own interest to cooperate with the endeavour, since Russia was geographically closer to the most concerning rogue regimes (Iraq, Iran, and North Korea). It is perhaps ironic that the new administration, determined to differentiate itself from the Clinton years, relied on such similar reasoning. In both cases the American side was confident that a persuasive pitch of their argument could reduce or dissolve the tension over the issue.

All of the senior American foreign-policy leadership, with the partial exception of Secretary of State Colin Powell (see note 18 below), adhered to this view. Rice, as noted above, appreciated that the Russians had additional concerns, but thought that these were basically illegitimate (for example, the desire for Russia to have a special say in the affairs of states in the "near abroad") and could be managed or overcome. She believed that a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States was not just increasingly unlikely, but in fact "no longer imaginable". Why then should the US approach the issue

via the anachronistic structure of bilateral, binding treaties?[17] Vice President Cheney thought that "rather than compromising on policies that were in our national interest out of concern that we would offend other nations, we should do what served our country best, while undertaking diplomatic efforts to bring out allies and partners along."[18] Donald Rumsfeld, who had chaired the Ballistic Missile Threat Commission in the late 1990s, recalled that "with the Soviet empire gone, with the Russian government seeking improved relations with the West, [...] I was surprised to see what had changed in congressional discussions of the issue - practically nothing." He told senators during his confirmation hearing for the position of Secretary of Defense that the real problem was the risk of ballistic blackmail by hostile regimes or terrorists. He later appealed to the Russians' self-interest, forwarding an economic argument that foreign investment would be more likely to flow to Russia so long as it sided with the West against rogue regimes (the real object of missile defence). Rumsfeld evidently believed that this interest could prevail over lingering questions of status and respect.[19] Bush himself, facing skepticism from Putin, simply told his counterpart, "the Cold War is over" and "we are no longer enemies."[20]

There were signs that Russian perceptions might not align with those of the American leadership. The problems that the Clinton administration had encountered on this issue over its eight years in power were part of the public and diplomatic record.

[17] Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 59.
[18] Richard B. "Dick" Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 325. Cheney reports that "it became clear that the State Department had another view. There was concern that withdrawing from the treaty would put unnecessary strain on our relations with Russia, which led Secretary Powell to argue that we should stop short of abrogation and negotiate loopholes in the treaty for developing missile defenses."
[19] Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 287-288; 306-309.
[20] Bush, 432. It was at the Slovenia meeting that Bush notably told the press that he trusted Putin, and that he had been able to "get a sense of his soul," see 196.

Besides Rice's own interpretation of the Russian mindset, a National Intelligence Council strategic forecast issued in December 2000 highlighted the importance of the strategic weapons balance in the Russian outlook. It predicted that "as Russia struggles with the constraints on its ambitions, it will invest scarce resources in selected and secretive military technology programs, especially WMD, hoping to counter Western conventional and strategic superiority in areas such as ballistic missile defense." Russia's nuclear might and permanent seat on the UN Security Council would be central aspects of a Russian foreign policy that sought to maintain the last vestiges of its prior power as the head of the Soviet Union.[21]

Perhaps more alarming was an episode during a visit by Rumsfeld to Moscow in August 2001, in the immediate aftermath of the Slovenia summit. At a dinner attended by Russia's then Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov, General Yuri Baluyevsky (then Russia's second-highest-ranking military officer) told Rumsfeld that the American missile defence project was really the brainchild of Lyndon Larouche, the long-time American conspiracy theorist and fringe presidential candidate. Rumsfeld found it "troubling" that Russian leaders would have such bizarre, unfounded, and paranoid views about the workings of the American government and its policies.[22] Nonetheless, this does not seem to have sparked any general reappraisal of the administration's approach to the issue, including assumptions about how the Russian side was likely to respond to American unilateralism in this area.

In another parallel with the Clinton era, Bush came away from the summer of 2001 believing that progress towards a successful reset had been made (thanks in part to

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[21] National Intelligence Council, *NIC 2000-02 Global Trends 2015: A Dialogue About the Future With Nongovernment Experts* (Washington, DC: National Foreign Intelligence Board, 2000), 53, 69. https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Global%20Trends_2015%20Report.pdf
[22] Rumsfeld, 309-310.

personal diplomacy), when in reality the existence of a divide had been confirmed. Much like Clinton, Bush regarded personal diplomacy as important. “Getting to know a fellow world leader’s personality, character, and concerns,” he later wrote, “made it easier to find common ground and deal with contentious issues.”[23] In Slovenia, Putin and Bush discovered that they had good personal chemistry, especially after Bush managed to break the ice during their first meeting with a non sequitur question about Putin’s religious life. When Bush told him that he intended to take the US out of the ABM Treaty, Putin said he couldn’t agree, but did not threaten retaliation and agreed to work together to find a non-confrontational way ahead.[24]

At the follow-up meeting with Rumsfeld in August, Putin conveyed to the Secretary of Defense that he was interested in better ties with the West and comprehended the American view of missile defense. But he added that he could not politically accept the end of the ABM Treaty without protest, and warned against Russia “being pushed out of the system of civilized Western defense.”[25] Still, Putin ultimately acquiesced to Bush’s decision, in part due to the fact that Bush had agreed to formalize the new reality in a treaty, which offered at least an appearance of bilateral equality. It also codified Bush’s unilateral cuts to the American offensive arsenal, which presented an opportunity for cost savings via similar cuts on the Russian side (Russia was not yet benefitting from the high oil and gas prices which came later in the decade). The final result was the Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT, also known as the Moscow Treaty), signed the following May.[26]

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[23] Bush, 195.
[24] Rice, 62-63.
[25] Rumsfeld, 309.
[26] Stent, 72-75.

Bush recalls this entire progression from the Slovenia meeting to the signing of SORT in 2002 as one of his and Putin's "biggest achievements".[27] Putin and Bush's personal rapport was at its strongest at this stage of their presidencies, with the leaders having also met during the aftermath of 9/11 in Washington, D.C. and at Bush's private ranch in Texas. Bush believed that this good personal connection had helped move the Russo-American relationship in the right direction. But once again, the presidents' personal diplomacy was papering over a gap between American and Russian foreign policy views. The entire episode is reminiscent of Clinton's earlier engagement with Yeltsin in 1993-94 on the issue of Ukraine's nuclear weapons, complete with an enthusiastic and optimistic American president travelling to Moscow to sign an arms-control agreement with a reluctant Russian counterpart. Like Clinton, Bush perceived that his policy had gotten the reset attempt moving in a positive direction. In fact, the Russian side continued to harbour skepticism and resentment towards America's unfettered supremacy and the loss of equality between the powers. The former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov saw Russia's acceptance of SORT as an attempt put some constraint on American unilateralism, which it feared would break free of all other international obligations.[28] Bush's early attempt to implement a reset via a new approach to arms control actually helped reinforce these suspicious sentiments on the Russian side, even as the 9/11 terrorist attacks provided new avenues for partnership.

[27] Bush, 432.
[28] Primakov quoted by Stent, 74. See also Yevgeny M. Primakov, *A World Challenged: Fighting Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: The Nixon Center and Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 65-67, 109-110.

9/11 and a New Basis for Partnership

Al-Qaeda's attacks on 9/11 drastically transformed America's foreign policy outlook. How, where, and when to respond immediately became the top priority. This set of questions was ultimately answered in two ways. The first identified a specific target: the al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, and the Taliban regime that harboured them. President Bush made this clear in his September 20, 2001 address to a joint session of Congress:

> The United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al-Qaeda who hide in your land. Release all foreign nationals, including American citizens, you have unjustly imprisoned. Protect foreign journalists, diplomats and aid workers in your country. Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities. Give the United States full access to terrorist training camps, so we can make sure they are no longer operating. These demands are not open to negotiation or discussion. The Taliban must act, and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate.

But Bush quickly pivoted to a second answer, which was much more nebulous and wide-ranging:

> Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. [...] We will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.[29]

How Russian and American leaders perceived these two responses shaped the Russo-American relationship during what became the Global War on Terrorism. It was not immediately clear how Russia would fit itself into the new reality. Putin understood jihadist terrorism as a common enemy of Russia and America - one that included Russia's enemies in Chechnya - and immediately perceived an opportunity to pursue a more equal relationship by aligning in a common cause. He believed Russia should be taken seriously on this topic. Not only did Russia have lengthy experience dealing with the problem in Afghanistan and Chechnya, Putin himself had passed warnings to the US about the danger before 9/11. He was the first foreign leader to contact the Americans in the immediate aftermath of the attacks.[30]

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[29] George W. Bush, Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, September 20, 2001, George W. Bush White House Archives, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html

[30] Rice, 62-63; Stent 62-64. At the July 2001 Slovenia summit, Putin went on a tangent about the danger of the links between Pakistani intelligence, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda. Rice recalls that in the following years "he never let us forget it". Putin also called Bush on September 9, 2001 to alert him to the assassination of the anti-Taliban leader Ahmed Shah Massoud, which he believed signaled impending attacks.

On the other hand, Putin was wary about the potentially unlimited character of the American response spelled out in the second part of Bush's address. He was particularly concerned about the possibility of the US establishing a long-term presence in central Asia, an area that was considered part of the "near abroad" in which Russia had a special interest. When it became clear that the rulers of the central Asian republics would welcome American involvement, Putin decided to pursue a strategy of cooperation with the US. What he hoped to achieve was two-fold. First, he sought recognition (and thus status) from the US that Russia - despite its current economic and structural problems - was a special partner in both the fight against jihadism and in the international order. Second, he hoped that the US would respond to Russia's support by reducing its criticism of Russian internal affairs (especially in Chechnya) and by recognizing Russia's interest in the "near abroad". To this end he made it clear that he supported the US presence in central Asia on the assumption it would be a limited and temporary measure to counter a common enemy. As Stent notes, the goal was "an equal partnership of unequals".[31]

The American leadership did not perceive the situation in the same way. While appreciative of the support that Russia did ultimately offer, they did not attribute any special quality to it, and in fact viewed it as mostly underwhelming. During the early phase of the war in Afghanistan, Rumsfeld received "generous" advice in person from Putin, but noted that "tangible" assistance had been denied and wondered if lingering embarrassment over the Soviet failure in that country was why "President Putin refused to allow the United States to move military equipment through Russian territory and sought to constrain our developing relationships with the neighbouring former Soviet

[31] Stent, 69-70. She attributes this particular characterization to Dmitri Trenin.

republics."[32] Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet concluded that Russia was a disappointing ally in the War on Terror, "preoccupied with Chechnya" and stuck in a "spy versus spy" mentality when it came to the US.[33] Bill Burns, who became the American Ambassador to Russia from 2005-2008, observes: "this kind of transaction was never in the cards. [...] From Washington's view, there was no desire - and no reason - to trade anything for Russian partnership against al-Qaeda."[34]

Bush's interactions with Putin during the immediate post-9/11 period also reveal how perceptions were misaligned. Reflecting on a call with the Russian president on September 22, 2001, Bush recalls: "I suspected he would be worried about Russia being encircled," (he was) "but he was more concerned about the terrorist problem in his neighborhood" (he was not). Bush believed that Putin was coming around to the American liberal vision of international politics, telling Putin that he "appreciated his willingness to move beyond the suspicions of the past."[35] For the following summit in November 2001, Bush invited the Russian president to his ranch in Texas, an invitation intended to signal "a personal commitment to a relationship with a head of state."[36] However, the Russian delegation initially interpreted the invite to Bush's distant "dacha", instead of to the White House, as a slight. They insisted on an Oval Office meeting in advance. Nonetheless, the visit turned out to be very cordial.[37] Again, an American president was mistaking his personal rapport with his Russian counterpart for evidence that a reset in relations was succeeding, when in reality the American approach

[32] Rumsfeld, 396-397.
[33] George Tenet, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 275-276.
[34] William J. Burns, *The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for Its Renewal* (New York: Random House, 2019), 208.
[35] Bush, 196-197.
[36] Rice, 174. See also Stent, 68.
[37] Stent, 68, 299 *n*. 76.

was increasing Russian paranoia. The presidents' personal diplomacy buoyed the second reset through the spring of 2002, but as the year progressed it became increasingly clear that this was not enough to bridge fundamental divides.

The Iraq War

The Bush administration's unwavering commitment to its unilateral and unlimited liberal foreign policy framework became even more apparent through 2002. In January's State of the Union address, Bush declared that "far from ending there [Afghanistan], our war against terror is only beginning." Moreover, Bush hoped that all nations would heed America's call. "But some governments will be timid in the face of terror. And make no mistake about it: if they do not act, America will." Finally, he added a grand liberal vision:

> America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance. America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.[38]

[38] George W. Bush, The President's State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002, George W. Bush White House Archives, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html

It was this last section of the speech that had commanded the most attention from the administration's senior leadership during the drafting phase. Rice recalls both her and the President being stunned when the most headline-friendly phrase of the speech, "axis of evil" commanded media attention (alongside the equally soundbite-ready "For too long our culture has said, 'If it feels good, do it.' Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: 'Let's roll.'").[39] However, the broad ethos of the administration's foreign policy was abundantly clear.

The "axis of evil" speech was followed by the President's commencement address to the newest graduates of West Point. A team including Rice, her Deputy National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley (later NSA himself), White House Chief-of-Staff Andy Card, and the political advisor Karl Rove drafted a speech defending the principle of pre-emption. The relevant passage was short, but subsequently drew a great deal of attention: "Our security will require transforming the military you will lead - a military that must be ready to strike at a moment's notice in any dark corner of the world. And our security will require all Americans to be forward-looking and resolute, to be ready for pre-emptive action when necessary to defend our liberty and to defend our lives." The speech spoke positively of Russia, referring to it as "now a country reaching toward democracy, and our partner in the war against terror."[40] But American foreign policy was already heading in a direction that would produce a clear, public split between the US and the Russian Federation.

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[39] Rice, 150.
[40] George W. Bush, Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1, 2002, George W. Bush White House Archives, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020601-3.html. For Rice's account, see *No Higher Honor*, 152.

In September 2002, just after the one-year anniversary of 9/11, the White House released its new National Security Strategy (NSS).[41] The document was intended to give notice of America's new, uncompromising outlook for the new era. Condoleezza Rice was a principal author. The strategy opened with the blunt recognition that "the United States possesses unprecedented - and unequaled - strength and influence in the world," before going on to set out American objectives in what Rice self-consciously recognized as "stark ideological terms."[42] It retained an apparent optimism about relations with Russia:

> Having moved from confrontation to cooperation as the hallmark of our relationship with Russia, the dividends are evident: an end to the balance of terror that divided us; an historic reduction in the nuclear arsenals on both sides; and cooperation in areas such as counterterrorism and missile defense that until recently were inconceivable.
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> [...]
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> We are attentive to the possible renewal of old patterns of great power competition. Several potential great powers are now in the midst of internal transition—most importantly Russia, India, and China. In all three cases, recent developments have encouraged our hope that a truly global consensus about basic principles is slowly taking shape. With Russia, we are already building a new strategic relationship based on a central reality of the twenty-first century: the United States and Russia are

[41] The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/63562.pdf
[42] Rice, 154.

> no longer strategic adversaries. The Moscow Treaty on Strategic Reductions is emblematic of this new reality and reflects a critical change in Russian thinking that promises to lead to productive, long-term relations with the Euro-Atlantic community and the United States. Russia's top leaders have a realistic assessment of their country's current weakness and the policies - internal and external - needed to reverse those weaknesses. They understand, increasingly, that Cold War approaches do not serve their national interests and that Russian and American strategic interests overlap in many areas.[43]

This was a bad misreading of what was going on among the Russian leadership, despite the strategy's subsequent assertion that America was "realistic about the differences that still divide us from Russia and about the time and effort it will take to build an enduring strategic partnership".[44] Senior national security officials like Tenet and Rumsfeld knew that Russia was not rushing to join a "truly global consensus," and that it did not perceive that a non-adversarial relationship was a "central reality." To the contrary, Putin had participated in the post-9/11 reset because he believed that the events of that day demonstrated that Russia had been "right" about certain issues, and that an opportunity existed to get the US to take other Russian perspectives and interests more seriously.[45] But in any case, reassuring Russia was not a central objective of the strategy document. As Rice candidly notes, "the national security strategy left no doubts: we would be aggressive in confronting threats and assertive in pursuing the United States'

[43] National Security Strategy 2002, 13, 26-27.
[44] Ibid., 27.
[45] Stent, 70.

national goals and values. This stance was meant to unsettle our foes. Apparently, it succeeded in unsettling many of our friends as well."[46] Russia, at least, was indeed increasingly unsettled.

The Bush administration began to publicly build its case for war with Iraq in the autumn of 2002. Within the context of the Russo-American relationship, this effort took place against the background of a renewed push for NATO expansion. At NATO's November summit in Prague, invitations to begin the accession process were extended to Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. This was not only a second eastward expansion of NATO, but also involved the potential inclusion of former constituent parts of the former Soviet Union (the Baltic states). For the first time, NATO jurisdiction would be brought right up to the borders of the Russian Federation.[47] NATO expansion was a major issue facing the Russo-American relationship during the Bush-Putin era, and will be examined in greater detail below. But it is worth highlighting here that Russia and America's engagement over the case for war in Iraq unfolded at the same time as pressure was mounting over the question of European security.

America's stance towards Saddam Hussein's Iraq brought back to the fore disagreements with Russia that had become apparent during the Balkan crises of the 1990s, but now with an even higher profile and greater stakes. As we have seen, Yeltsin had staked out a position on Bosnia and Kosovo that centered on opposition to America's increasingly broad scope for intervention, and emphasized the apparently

[46] Rice, 156.
[47] This is not counting the short stretch of border between Poland and the Kaliningrad exclave, which became a point of contact after Poland's 1999 accession. Norway, an original NATO member since 1949, also shares a small piece of border in the distant far north, which Russia inherited from the USSR. By contrast, Latvia's eastern border is only 600 km from Moscow, while Estonia is a mere 160 km from St. Petersburg.

sacrosanct principle of sovereignty. Now, America was once again posing military intervention as the solution to a problem which diplomacy had failed to solve. There were, however, key differences between the situations. First and foremost, the proposed intervention was not aiming to halt bloodshed in an already ongoing conflict, as was the case in the Balkans. Rather it was a pre-emptive strike against a regime which, for all its numerous problems and internal oppression, was not at that time engaged in widespread civil war within its territory.[48] Second, while Clinton had to lead America's European allies to support an interventionist policy, ultimately the internal debate did not result in a public split, and the interventions went ahead under the united banner of NATO. Iraq, on the other hand, divided the Western allies. As this rift started to become more visible, Russia would have to make a choice, and in Stent's words, "Russia presented itself to the world as a status quo power, whereas it viewed the United States as a revisionist power" (an historical irony given both its earlier Soviet revolutionary outlook, and subsequent actions in Georgia and Ukraine).

Ultimately Europe divided into what Donald Rumsfeld called "Old Europe" and "New Europe" (he regretted this choice of words).[49] On January 22, 2002, French President Jacques Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder announced their mutual opposition to regime change in Iraq by military means. Thus, "Old Europe," with Germany holding a temporary seat on the UN Security Council alongside France's permanent member veto, had given notice that America was unlikely to gain UNSC authorization for an invasion. They were unmoved by Colin Powell's subsequent presentation to the UNSC about the apparent danger of an Iraqi WMD program (he too

[48] Saddam Hussein had, of course, responded violently to uprisings in the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991, and to internecine fighting between Iraq's Kurds in the mid-90s. However, US and allied air campaigns halted and contained Saddam's efforts after 1997.
[49] Rumsfeld, 444-445.

later had regrets).[50] Shortly after, ten Eastern European nations formally aligned themselves with the US. Referring obliquely to their prior experience inside the Soviet orbit, they cast their support as stemming from the fact that "our countries understand the dangers posed by tyranny and the special responsibility of democracies to defend our shared values." "New Europe" had declared it was with the Bush administration.[51]

It was not immediately clear which way Russia would go. Germany and France actively sought Putin's support for their anti-war position, inviting him to Berlin and Paris, where he was greeted with the pomp of an important state visit. Conversely, no top US official engaged Putin to try to win him over.[52] The prevailing dynamic was thus an "Old Europe" which made clear appeals to Russian status and valued the UNSC (one of Russia's last sources of international eminence), versus an America that appeared to care little for either. Putin sided with France and Germany.

The episode was another example of the US misperceiving the underlying motives of Russian foreign policy behaviour. Liberal interpretations of international politics (of all stripes) place a high degree of importance on economic considerations in explaining state behaviour. Reflecting on the period, Bush writes, "Vladimir Putin didn't consider Saddam a threat. It seemed to me that part of the reason was Putin didn't want to jeopardize Russia's lucrative oil contracts."[53] Rice believed that "Russia had made it

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[50] Powell, 217-224.
[51] Rumsfeld, 445. The countries of the Vilnius Group that signed the initial declaration were Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the then-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (now North Macedonia), Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia. Poland and Ukraine would later add their support and each deploy more than 1500 troops to Iraq.
[52] Stent, 90.
[53] Bush, 233. The importance of this lens to Bush is further shown as he goes on to ascribe the same motive to the French: "France also had significant economic interests in Iraq. I was not surprised when Jacques Chirac told me he would support intrusive weapons inspections but cautioned against threatening military force."

clear that it was concerned mostly about its economic interests in Iraq."[54] It is unlikely that economic considerations played no role in Russian decision making. Iraq owed $8 billion worth of debt to Moscow, and after the invasion Putin told Rice that repairing relations would require Bush being "aware of Russian economic interests in the rebuilding of Iraq."[55] But it appears that other factors were equally, if not more, important.

Richard Haas, who served in both the Bush 41 and 43 administrations, told Stent that the difference between the two Bushes approach to Russia was important. Before the first Gulf War in 1991, the George H.W. Bush White House had consulted closely with the Soviet Union at the highest levels. The fact that this did not occur in 2003 highlighted Russia's diminished status, reinforced the impression that Americans placed no stock in others' concerns, and was a major blow to the credibility of the UN generally (and the UNSC in particular) - the venue in which Russia still wielded the influence commensurate with a "great power."[56]

Yevgeny Primakov, who had become an advisor to Putin, wrote in 2004 that:

> Putin's restraint and Russia's generally reserved policies in this crisis period were guided by the principle that a military solution to the problem of Iraq was unacceptable. Our position was that a war with Iraq would further divide the world along religious lines, destabilize many of the

[54] Rice, 202. Interestingly, she has a different read than Bush on France, seeing them as "more principled if patronizing, viewing the Iraqi dictator as a necessary evil in an area of the world that needed strongmen to ensure stability."
[55] Ibid., 214.
[56] Stent, 92-93.

> Middle East's more moderate regimes, and weaken the international support enjoyed by the United States after September 11.[57]

He concluded that "it is not appropriate for Russia to be relegated to playing a supporting role in world events" and urged Washington to grasp "how futile and counterproductive it is to try to turn Russia into a vassal subservient to US policy and will."[58] Two months after the invasion, Putin's chief-of-staff Alexander Voloshin presented a litany of complaints about the state of the Russo-American relationship. He touched on Afghan politics, the CIS, Radio Liberty broadcasts in Ukrainian, and the Jackson-Vanik amendment, before concluding that it all amounted to "a political signal that we are not good partners" despite Russian "glad-handing."[59] There was no mention of losses incurred in Iraq, but quite a bit of feeling hard done by.

What can help explain the Bush administration's misreading of Russia on the Iraq issue? Part of the issue might be that in some other areas, Russian foreign policy seemed to fit within the liberal model. For instance, Russia remained keen on joining the World Trade Organization. US support for Russia's candidacy for membership was highlighted as part of the 2002 NSS, as part of the strategy's sixth objective, "Ignite a New Era of Global Economic Growth through Free Markets and Free Trade."[60] In this sense, Russian foreign policy was "foxy," engaging in a sort of selective liberalism in

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[57] Primakov, 90.
[58] Ibid., 132-133.
[59] Stent, 94. The Jackson-Vanik amendment was a 1974 US legal provision linking trade relations within the Soviet Union to its tolerance of Jewish emigration. It remained in force against the Russian Federation (as the USSR's successor state) for many years after the end of the Cold War, a major embarrassment and annoyance to the Russian side. It was not repealed until 2012, when it was simultaneously replaced with the Magnitsky Act, to which Russian elites have reacted with even greater anger.
[60] National Security Strategy 2002, 17-18.

some domains, while viewing other issues through very different lenses. Additionally, as we have seen above, Bush interpreted Russia's signing of SORT and his good personal rapport with Putin as evidence that Russia was moving in the right direction and that the reset was succeeding. The selective attention thesis posits that leaders are affected by confirmation bias in their analyses of other states' behaviour. It seems likely that the Bush White House placed an over-emphasis on the "liberal" indicators of Russian behaviour, while downplaying aspects of the Russian position that did not fit with the interpretive model. Compounding the dynamic was the fact that Russia had been significantly downgraded in terms of importance to American foreign-policy decision-making. This meant the bilateral relationship received less consideration - especially when more pressing issues were at hand. Instead, the Bush administration appears to have initially taken Russian support for granted, and only belatedly realized that Russia was at risk of swinging into the Franco-German anti-war camp. Stent records that action was finally taken "at the eleventh hour," with Voloshin heading to Washington for crunch talks with "all the key US officials." He later told Stent that "he concluded that Washington mistakenly believed that Russia's only interest in Iraq was material," and that American efforts to make a deal centred on "material compensation for Russia's potential economic losses from the war."[61] It was all too little, too late, and Putin resolved to stand with Chirac and Schroeder. The reset attempt had been dealt a serious blow. Now Russia and America were publicly at odds, and soon political upheavals much closer to Russia's core interests would further deepen the division.

[61] Stent, 90-91.

The Colour Revolutions & Russia's "Near Abroad"

America's decision to topple Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq - and subsequent failure to find evidence of a dangerous WMD program in the country - dominated world attention through most of 2003. Towards the end of the year, however, there began a series of events in former Soviet states that captured a share of international interest, especially for those concerned with the bilateral relationship between Russia and the US. Between November 2003 and March 2005, mass street protests succeeded in instigating government change in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, in what became popularly known as "colour revolutions." Divergent perceptions of these events amongst Russian and American leaders would further strain the two nations' relationship, which again was clearly moving rapidly from reset to disappointment.

The first colour revolution broke out in Georgia at the end of 2003. The south Caucasian state had experienced a turbulent split from the former Soviet Union. When Georgia declared its independence, two regions - Abkhazia and South Ossetia - themselves declared their independence from Georgia and violence erupted. Russian peacekeeping troops moved in and quelled the armed conflict, but never left Abkhazia and South Ossetia, making the regions de-facto autonomous areas. In 1995, Eduard Shevardnadze, the Georgian former Soviet foreign minister during the Gorbachev era, became president of Georgia. His role in helping end the Cold War had made him a highly-respected figure in Washington, but his eight years in power in Georgia had not moved the country towards Western-style economic and political reform. This resulted in both rising levels of popular discontent and increasingly vocal opposition amongst younger politicians. In the run-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for November

2003, street demonstrations demanding change to the status quo began to appear. When observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and independent NGOs declared that the elections were not free and fair according to international standards, the street demonstrations ballooned.

The young reformist politician Mikheil Saakashvili, then 35, emerged as the leader of the opposition movement. He spoke fluent English, was enthusiastically pro-Western, and had extensive ties to the United States, having studied at both Columbia and George Washington Universities. When Shevardnadze tried to open the new session of parliament on November 22, Saakashvili and a crowd of supporters moved from the street into the chamber and shouted Shevardnadze down. Shevardnadze was whisked away by his security detail and attempted to order the armed forces to clear the street demonstrations, but the military refused to move against the unarmed protestors. Meanwhile, the opposition managed to get its views broadcast by a major TV channel.

Russia was caught off guard by the developments and quickly sent its foreign minister to Tbilisi to try to broker a deal. An agreement designed to allow Shevardnadze to stay in office was reached, but the aging president quickly went back on its terms and was forced to resign. His exit was quickly followed by a new presidential election, in which Saakashvili scored an overwhelming victory on January 2, 2004. The young new president used his inauguration ceremony three weeks later to loudly signal his intention to reorient Georgia towards the West. After the Georgian flag was raised, the flag of the European Union was raised alongside it, and the national anthem was followed by the playing of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," the EU anthem (despite, of course, Georgia not being an EU member state). Both Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and US Secretary of State Colin Powell were in attendance, and were surprised by

Saakashvili's posturing. Powell was surprised for a second time when Saakashvili invited him into Tbilisi city hall for a photo-op, and the wall in the backdrop was lined with side-by-side American and Georgian flags. Once settled in office, Saakashvili quickly set about pursuing a policy of Western integration, including seeking NATO membership.[62]

On January 20, 2004, in between Saakashvili's electoral victory and dramatic inauguration day, President Bush delivered the annual State of the Union Address to a joint session of the United States Congress. With the WMD search in Iraq having turned up empty, Bush used the occasion to refocus on and confirm the broader objectives of American foreign policy. He spelled out the basic concept of what came to be known as his Freedom Agenda:

> We also hear doubts that democracy is a realistic goal for the greater Middle East, where freedom is rare. Yet it is mistaken, and condescending, to assume that whole cultures and great religions are incompatible with liberty and self-government. I believe that God has planted in every human heart the desire to live in freedom. And even when that desire is crushed by tyranny for decades, it will rise again.
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> [...]
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> America is a nation with a mission, and that mission comes from our most basic beliefs. We have no desire to dominate, no ambitions of empire. Our aim is a democratic peace - a peace founded upon the dignity and rights of every man and woman. America acts in this cause with friends and allies at

[62] Stent 104-107; interview with Colin Powell in *Putin, Russia and the West*, episode 2, "Democracy Threatens," produced by Norma Percy, aired January 26, 2012, on BBC Two, https://vimeo.com/149735065.

> our side, yet we understand our special calling: This great republic will lead the cause of freedom.[63]

The effort to make encouraging the spread of liberal democracy a central tenet of American foreign policy was a long-standing objective of neoconservative members of the Bush administration. This view did not have consensus support within the administration, with some pragmatists - even hawkish ones such as Donald Rumsfeld - voicing their concerns about "shifting the goalposts" in Iraq (and elsewhere).[64] However, democracy-promotion had advocates in influential positions, especially the Vice President's office, and the view meshed well with Bush's spiritual understanding of liberty.[65] The Freedom Agenda subsequently became perhaps the most pronounced aspect of the administration's foreign policy during both the President's 2004 re-election campaign and his second term. As we will see, this affected the way political developments in Georgia - and Ukraine - fit into the Russo-American relationship.

At the same time that Saakashvili was getting his presidency underway, another colour revolution was brewing in Ukraine. Like in the US, 2004 was a presidential election year. Leonid Kuchma had held the office since 1994, presiding over a political system that was opaque and dominated by networks of wealthy oligarchs and their

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[63] George W. Bush, The President's State of the Union Address, January 20, 2004, George W. Bush White House Archives, https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2004/01/20040120-7.html

[64] Rumsfeld, 497-500. Rumsfeld records that he is not sure "exactly where the President's far-reaching language about democracy originated [...] I didn't hear rhetoric about democracy from Colin Powell or State Department officials. I know it did not come from those of us in the Department of Defense. Condoleezza Rice seemed to be the one top advisor who spoke that way, but it was not clear to me whether she was encouraging the President to use rhetoric about democracy or whether it was originating with the President." Rumsfeld's speculation about Rice is not unreasonable, given her linking of power politics and liberal universalism in foreign policy statements for the 2000 campaign and the 2002 NSS.

[65] Burns ascribes a more aggressive Freedom Agenda influence to Vice President Cheney's office; see *The Back Channel*, 230, 241. Rice describes Liz Cheney, the Vice President's daughter and a deputy assistant secretary in the State Department, as "a fierce proponent of the Freedom Agenda", *No Higher Honor*, 416.

supporters. Economic, political, and social progress had not lived up to hopes for renewal in the post-Soviet period. Kuchma was on his way out of politics, but had an anointed successor standing for the presidency: Viktor Yanukovych, who hailed from Ukraine's Russian-speaking southeast. His main opponent was Viktor Yushchenko, who had previously been prime minister and a central banker during Kuchma's tenure. Now, he aligned himself as a more pro-Western candidate and positioned himself against the large influence Russia wielded in Ukraine. While his links to the US were not as extensive as Saakashvili's, his wife was an American who had worked in the Reagan administration.[66]

Russia had been caught flat-footed by Saakashvili's rise in Georgia and sought to avoid another surprise in Ukraine, which holds a special place in the Russian outlook given the long, complex, and very close relationship dating back to the medieval period. Putin deployed his best "political technologists" to help the Yanukovych campaign. Putin himself made several visits to Ukraine during the campaign, in an effort to burnish Yanukovych's credibility as a statesman. Pro-Yanukovych signs appeared in major Russian cities. Nonetheless, when Yushchenko clearly began to gather momentum, the Kremlin attempted to open secret communications with his team, but the back channel appears to have been largely rebuffed and resulted in only a few unproductive meetings. Oleh Rybachuk, a Yushchenko campaign manager, claims he told the Russians bluntly that a Yushchenko presidency would seek to make Ukraine a

[66] Stent, 111-113.

"European democracy" and NATO member, which his Russian counterparts regarded as "too dogmatic."[67]

Through the summer of 2004, the Ukrainian election trail drew more and more attention from both Americans and Russians. Sensing a chance for a positive change in the direction of Ukrainian political life, high profile American figures (including the elder President Bush and Clinton's former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright) visited Kiev, while Western NGOs worked hard to help Ukrainians prepare for a free and fair election. While these individuals and entities avoided endorsing candidates and focused on the electoral process, the Russian side suspected that there was coordinated Western effort to elect Yushchenko (despite some American operatives being willing to work for Russian interests[68]).

Political tensions heightened further after Yushchenko fell seriously ill after a dinner in early September. It subsequently emerged that he had been poisoned with dioxin. American experts received blood samples, and announced that the poison was of a pure form that was not easily accessible and only produced in a few Soviet labs. Yushchenko was knocked out of the race for a few weeks, but survived and made a dramatic return to the campaign despite being reliant on intravenous painkillers and his face having been disfigured. Polls swung sharply in his direction.[69]

The first round of the presidential election did not produce a majority winner, but the run-off round between Yanukovych and Yushchenko on November 21 quickly

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[67] Ibid.; Interviews with Oleh Rybachuk and Sergei Markov in *Putin, Russia and the West*, episode 2, "Democracy Threatens."

[68] Stent, 113; Paul Manafort subsequently became the most notable in this regard, although he began working for Yanukovych only after the Orange Revolution was in full swing. See Steven Lee Myers and Andrew E. Kramer, "How Paul Manafort Wielded Power in Ukraine Before Advising Donald Trump," *New York Times*, July 31, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/us/paul-manafort-ukraine-donald-trump.html.

[69] Ibid., *Putin, Russia and the West*, episode 2, "Democracy Threatens."

became contested. Before the results were announced Putin publicly congratulated Yanukovych on his "win." The electoral commission also accorded Yanukovych the win, even as exit polling and NGOs' parallel count indicated Yushchenko had been elected. At this point, events began to more closely resemble the situation in Georgia. A huge crowd of protesters assembled in Kiev's central square, and found a media outlet for their views via a TV station owned by a Yushchenko ally. With pressure building and after some hesitation, the US announced that it would not recognize the election as legitimate. After weeks of permanent protest, the Ukrainian Supreme Court declared the election result void, setting up a rerun of the second round, which Yushchenko won by a clear margin on December 26. He was sworn in as Ukraine's new president on January 23, 2005, with Secretary of State Powell again in the audience. Yushchenko subsequently travelled to Washington, where he was fêted and invited to address Congress. He was greeted by the assembled American lawmakers with the same chants of "Yush-chen-ko" that protesters had belted out in Kiev.[70]

In the month following Yushchenko's inauguration, one more colour revolution broke out, in the central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan. A similar sequence of contested elections, mass protests, and eventual exit of the incumbent bloc unfolded. But while Russia regarded the central Asian states as part of its "near abroad," it was much less invested in the political trajectory of Kyrgyzstan as compared to Georgia and Ukraine, as was the United States. As such, Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution" had a significantly lower profile in the Russo-American bilateral relationship.[71]

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[70] Ibid., 114-115; *Putin, Russia and the West*, episode 2, "Democracy Threatens."
[71] Ibid., 116-118.

Clearly, the preceding narrative of the colour revolution period is abbreviated and does not delve into the domestic political complexities of the states in question. Nonetheless, the broad outline of events is sufficient for this analysis, because it was the differences between general interpretations of events that had the most consequential impact on the Russo-American relationship. The two sides had starkly different understandings of what the colour revolutions represented, and this gap helped further derail the Bush-Putin era reset.

The Russian leadership did not perceive the events in Georgia and Ukraine as being the result of genuine, spontaneous, and popular desire for change amongst the population. Instead, they saw carefully planned and executed regime-change operation on the part of the United States. That they should see it this way is not entirely surprising. Russia's leadership had a strong belief in the supposed "manageability" of democratic systems. Russia had witnessed the power of American campaign specialists and their techniques when they helped save Boris Yeltsin's foundering election effort in 1996. Russian confidence in the ability of "political technologists" to produce desired election outcomes was evident in their deployment to Ukraine in 2004, and the inclusion of Putin's personal energies in the overall campaign plan. The centralization of power in Russia's political system under Putin also helped reinforce a tendency to overestimate how coordinated and organized decision-making was within the American political system. Ultimately, Putin and his associates came to view "colour revolution" itself as an advanced political technology deployed by the US government through deniable funding streams, carefully calibrated rhetoric, and NGO proxies, intended to directly challenge Russian interests via regime change in core areas of the "near

abroad."[72] Putin advisor Sergei Prikhodko summed up the resulting sentiment, saying, "Americans can decide where their tax dollars go - towards the nation's welfare or to mythical democracy groups in Georgia and Ukraine. But those efforts did affect Russo-American relations, and not in a good way."[73] Additionally, the Russian leadership was not convinced that their American counterparts had a genuine concern for liberty and democracy, given the United States' alliances of convenience in the war on terror with non-democratic states in the Middle East and central Asia.[74] Russia subsequently embarked on an effort to build pro-government youth groups and limit foreign NGOs freedom of action within Russia as a pre-emptive defence against what it viewed as the colour revolution threat.

Bill Burns, who started his term as US Ambassador to Russia in 2005, warned Condoleezza Rice and the State Department that Russian attitudes were hardening, and that while there were still opportunities for cooperation, the prospects for a comprehensive reset had faded dramatically. He cabled Washington:

> Our relationship with Russia is clearly at a new stage, where the notion of full-blown partnership doesn't apply - if it ever really did. [...] Some might argue that this suggests a "paradigm lost," a sense that a partnership that once was firmly rooted is now gone. The truth is that the roots for a genuine strategic partnership have always been pretty shallow - whether in the era of euphoric expectations after the end of the Cold War or in the

[72] Rice, 360. Rice notes that this was not explicitly said initially, but the view was already implied as early as her April 2005 meeting with Putin.
[73] Interview with Sergei Prikhodko in *Putin, Russia and the West*, episode 2, "Democracy Threatens."
[74] Stent, 140-141.

> immediate aftermath of September 11. Russia is too big, too proud, and too self-conscious of its own history to fit neatly into "a Europe whole and free." Neither we nor the Europeans have ever really viewed Russia as "one of us" - and when Russians talk about "nashi" [ours] these days, they're not talking about a grand Euro-Atlantic community.[75]

In a subsequent cable, he narrowed in on the question of colour revolutions and democracy-promotion rhetoric, which Putin himself had publicly described as "demagogic":[76]

> Uncomfortable personally with political competition and openness, [Putin] has never been a democratizer. He feels little pressure to change course now - least of all in response to American criticism, which much of the Russian political class sees as motivated by a desire to use democratization and color revolutions as means of limiting Russia's Great Power revival. It is important to note that national sensitivity to outside, and especially American, criticisms often includes even the most progressive voices in Russia. Yegor Gaidar, for example, emphasized to me a couple of weeks ago that he feared that the tone of American public criticism of Russian backsliding on democracy is counterproductive, and undermines liberals here - especially when Russians juxtapose it with what

[75] Burns, 209-211. The declassified original cable from Burns is available via the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, see William J. Burns, "Lavrov's Visit and Strategic Engagement with Russia," Memo to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, February 28, 2006, https://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/back-channel/2006Moscow1925.pdf
[76] Stent, 122.

they see to be a softer line on some of their neighbors, like Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan.[77]

Nonetheless, there remained considerable enthusiasm for the colour revolutions in Washington, especially amongst those who viewed them as validation of the basic premises of the Freedom Agenda.[78] Bush himself clearly saw the events in Tbilisi and Kiev as successes of this policy. “Despite the setbacks for the freedom agenda,” he writes, “there were many more examples of hope and progress. Georgians and Ukrainians joined the ranks of free peoples.”[79] Bush’s 2005 visit to Tbilisi, in which he shared the stage with “a true lover of freedom, Saakashvili,”[80] provided vivid confirmation of his core convictions about liberty. Crucially, Bush and the supporters of the Freedom Agenda did not conceive of support for democratization as being, in principle, some sort of direct American challenge to Russia. There were a few components to this. First, there was a focus on institutions and procedures, not direct political support and endorsement of individuals (at least before Saakashvili and Yushchenko actually managed to secure power). Second, because there was no hidden command-and-control mechanism for the ways in which American influence existed - or appeared to exist - in the colour revolutions, US leaders were slow to recognize just how seriously Putin believed the whole thing had been orchestrated by Washington. Finally, the events appealed to the universal liberal side of the American outlook, in which the street protests represented a basic human yearning for liberty (which exists in Russian

[77] William J. Burns, “Your Visit to Moscow,” Memo to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, June 26, 2006, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed March 19, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/back-channel/2006Moscow6759.pdf
[78] Stent, 122-123.
[79] Bush, 436.
[80] Quoted in Stent, 123.

hearts too) and were not primarily - or even essentially - geopolitical in nature. In the years following the colour revolutions, Bush strongly backed Ukraine and Georgia's attempts to integrate with Europe and join NATO. While Bush did understand that Putin would be hostile to such a result, the gap between the two presidents' perceptions of events resulted in the Bush's delayed or diminished appreciation of the risks involved.

NATO and Georgia

As noted above, the beginning of the Iraq war and the colour revolutions in Eastern Europe unfolded against the background of a second round of NATO expansion from 2002 to 2004. This process had begun before a major and sustained rise in global hydrocarbon prices began towards the end of 2003. The price spike brought windfall revenues, which were a boon to Putin. These allowed him to reinforce his domestic position through state spending, which had suffered mightily through the upheavals of the 1990s. Russia's international standing also rose thanks to high growth rates and its increasingly important place in a key global economic sector. This dynamic was reinforced by the growing state control of Russia's oil and gas industry, especially via the giant Gazprom corporation. This process increased Putin's overall confidence and assertiveness as an international statesman. As Bush put it in retrospect, "he became more aggressive abroad and more defensive about his record at home."[81]

Putin's increased belligerence was on full display at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, a high-profile annual gathering of international leaders to discuss strategic issues. On February 10 he delivered a speech that constituted a direct, blunt, and

[81] Bush, 432.

sustained attack on "unipolarity" and the foreign policy of the United States, which "overstepped its national borders in every way." NATO expansion was singled out as a particular problem for Russia:

> I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them.[82]

Despite the provocative contents of Putin's speech, the American response was measured. Robert Gates, a former Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) and now Bush's new Secretary of Defense, played down the tension with humour and declared, "one Cold War was quite enough."[83]

But it was clear that the reset attempt that had seemed on track from 2000-2002 was truly derailed. In the aftermath of the Munich Conference, Gates met with President Bush for a debriefing. He shared with the President his belief that:

[82] Vladimir Putin, Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, February 10, 2007, https://web.archive.org/web/20120309232547/https://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml

[83] Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 155-156.

> From 1993 onward, the West, and particularly the United States, had badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation in losing the Cold War and then in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which amounted to the end of the centuries-old Russian Empire. The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the internal psychological impact of the precipitous fall from superpower status) had led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness.[84]

This amounted to a rather accurate account of the emotional response to historical developments amongst Russian leaders since the beginning of the Clinton presidency. But Gates left out of his personal briefing to the president some critical assessments:

> What I didn't tell the president was that I believed the relationship with Russia had been badly mismanaged after Bush 41 left office in 1993. Getting Gorbachev to acquiesce to a unified Germany as a member of NATO had been a huge accomplishment. But moving so quickly after the collapse of the Soviet Union to incorporate so many of its formerly subjugated states into NATO was a mistake. Including the Baltic states, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary quickly was the right thing to do, but I believe the process should have been slowed. [...] Trying to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO was truly overreaching. [...] When Russia

[84] Ibid., 157.

> was weak in the 1990s and beyond, we did not take Russian interests seriously. We did a poor job of seeing the world from their point of view, and of managing the relationship for the long term.[85]

Why Gates declined to voice this to the president is not clear. It seems he did so out of a sense of duty (perhaps unsurprising given the title of his memoir): "All that said, I was now President Bush's Secretary of Defense, and I dutifully supported the effort to bring Georgia and Ukraine into NATO."[86] This is a remarkable admission. It is entirely appropriate within a cabinet system of democratic government for a cabinet-level official to be expected to support government policy in public. Yet it appears that Gates went further, and engaged in an act of self-censorship in his private reporting to the president. This occurred during a time in which the American intelligence community - in which Gates had served as the single most important figure, DCI - had come under withering scrutiny for the way politics and intelligence had interacted during the run-up to the war in Iraq. Nonetheless, he delivered only a partial analysis to the president, and from an office (Secretary of Defense) in which he was no longer bound by the institutional restrictions which rightly prevent intelligence professionals from adding policy advice to assessments.

Through 2007 and into 2008, the United States forged ahead with a policy supportive of moving Georgia and Ukraine closer to NATO membership. At the same time, Mikheil Saakashvili was becoming more vocal about his desire to reintegrate Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Georgia, and Georgia as whole with NATO, much to

[85] Ibid., 157-158.
[86] Ibid.

the Kremlin's chagrin. Ambassador Burns had highlighted the tension as early as 2006, reporting to Washington that "no one evokes greater neuralgia in Moscow these days than Saakashvili" and that Putin's message to Georgia was "you can have your territorial integrity, or you can have NATO membership, but you can't have both." He followed this up with another cable that said:

> Punishing Georgia for lack of deference to its very large neighbor is the most dangerous external example of Russian misanthropy these days. Nothing unites Russian politicians - from the most knuckle-dragging *silovik* [a politician with a background in the security services] to the most passionate progressive - like antipathy for Misha Saakashvili. For Putin, this is about showing that Russia's strategic retreat is over, and that it is not going to sit by and watch as Georgia moves toward a NATO membership whose purposes very few Russians can understand. It is also about that most grievous of all sins in Putin's eyes, lack of respect. As Sergey Ivanov put it to me with his usual subtlety last week, "Saakashvili can ignore us and try to go around us if he wants, but Georgia will pay a high price." [87]

Still, Burns perceived in Washington "a kind of geopolitical and ideological inertia at work, with strong interest from Vice President Cheney and large parts of the interagency bureaucracy in a 'Membership Action Plan' (MAP, for NATO membership) for Ukraine

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[87] Burns, *The Back Channel*, 221; "Your Visit to Moscow," Memo to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, October 25, 2006, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, https://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/back-channel/2006Moscow11939.pdf

and Georgia."[88] In one final effort to ward off a push to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, he emailed Rice with the message that:

> I fully understand how difficult a decision to hold off on MAP will be. But it's equally hard to overstate the strategic consequences of a premature MAP offer, especially to Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations [...] I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests. At this stage, a MAP offer would be seen not as a technical step along a long road toward membership, but as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today's Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze [...] It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. On Georgia, the combination of Kosovo independence[89] and a MAP offer would likely lead to a recognition of Abkhazia [...] The prospects of subsequent Russian-Georgian armed conflict would be high.[90]

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[88] Ibid., 230.

[89] The issue of Kosovo re-emerged as a point of contention between the United States and Russia shortly before the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war. Russia insisted that American recognition of Kosovo on February 18, 2008 constituted a precedent for the legitimacy of breakaway states, and was wary of how American power had assisted in the *de facto* and then *de jure* establishment of Kosovo's independence. This was rooted in longstanding concern about the fate of Chechnya, but was subsequently held up as justification for unilateral military intervention in support of separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

[90] Burns, 233. The declassified original email from Burns is available via the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, see William J. Burns, "Russia Strategy," email to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, February 8, 2008, https://carnegieendowment.org/pdf/back-channel/2008EmailtoRice1.pdf.

Bush had reached one of his “decision points”: whether to make MAPs for Georgia and Ukraine short-term policy objectives for his waning presidency, or take a more cautious approach to Russia’s “near abroad.” In the spring of 2008, the question of these MAPs became the main issue facing the NATO summit in Bucharest. Within the Bush administration, Gates and Rice were less inclined to press ahead (although Rice offered no recommendation[91]), while the Vice President, National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, and Victoria Nuland (who by this point had become the US Ambassador to NATO) encouraged granting MAPs. Bush decided in favour of granting MAPs, which was in line with his interpretation of Georgia and Ukraine’s place within the Freedom Agenda. He hoped that this would provide an additional incentive for Georgia and Ukraine to address domestic problems that continued to linger in the wake of their colour revolutions.[92] Rice, conscious of the much more cautious attitude prevalent in the capitals of “Old Europe”, set out for Bucharest to try to implement Bush’s decision.[93]

In Bucharest, an intense diplomatic engagement ensued, centered on Rice and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who flatly insisted that states with outstanding territorial disputes could not join NATO. Again, “New Europe” and America were at odds with “Old Europe”. Rice spelled out the main line of argument in favour of MAPs: “MAP does not confer immediate membership, but it is of great value to Ukraine and Georgia - and it is deeply desired by our new members. Moscow needs to know that the Cold War is over and Russia lost. We can’t let it split the alliance.” Merkel subsequently seized the initiative and led a group negotiation, crafting a joint declaration line-by-line.

[91] Rice, 671.
[92] Bush, 431.
[93] Rice, 672-673.

MAPs were not to be granted, but the declaration said in no uncertain terms that "Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO" (albeit at some unspecified date in the future).[94]

As Stent notes, this left an open question: was the German-American compromise solution (which both promised membership and denied a MAP) "an invitation to Saakashvili to try and resolve the territorial Abkhazia and South Ossetia issue by force?" Or rather "an invitation to Russia to ensure that Georgia would never join NATO by dismantling its territorial integrity?"[95] A precise answer to this question is far beyond the scope of this thesis, and indeed the ensuing Russian-Georgian war of August 2008 - and responsibility for it - has been the subject of substantial investigation, including a three-volume, 1787-page European Union report.[96] What is clear, however, is that the outbreak of violence did not align with President Bush's expectations, which were shaped by his liberal outlook, even as the Russo-American relationship once again bottomed out.

Bush's conclusions about the strategic dynamics of bringing Ukraine and Georgia closer to NATO, and his assessment of Russia's probable reaction were quite different from what his ambassador in Moscow was reporting. Bush writes, "I thought the threat from Russia strengthened the case for extending MAPs to Georgia and Ukraine. Russia would be *less likely* [emphasis added] to engage in aggression if these countries were on a path into NATO." He recalls thinking during the height of the crisis that "it was clear

[94] Ibid., 674-675.
[95] Stent 168.
[96] Council of the European Union Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, Final Report, September 2009, https://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/HUDOC_38263_08_Annexes_ENG.pdf; http://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/IIFFMCG_Volume_II1.pdf; https://web.archive.org/web/20110706223252/http://www.ceiig.ch/pdf/IIFFMCG_Volume_III.pdf

the Russians couldn't stand a democratic Georgia with a pro-Western president. I wondered if they would have been as aggressive if NATO had approved Georgia's MAP application."[97] The hedgehog dynamic is clear. Bush, the liberal universalist, perceived that liberal-democratic principles of governance were at the core of the conflict, when in reality Moscow viewed democracy and democratic rhetoric as mere tools deployed in a great power struggle over spheres of influence. Warnings to the contrary, exemplified by Burn's cables and emails to Washington, appear to have carried little weight in his decision-making.

Conclusion

In 2008, another cycle of reset and disappointment in the Russo-American relationship reached its conclusion. Several key issues from the Clinton-Yeltsin cycle - most prominently missile defence, military intervention, and NATO expansion - carried over to the first decade of the new century, and were at the heart of the Bush-Putin era relationship. Additionally, personal diplomacy between the presidents remained a central element of bilateral relations, despite the fact that Clinton's opponents in Bush's Republican Party had criticized him for "over-personalizing" the foreign policy when it came to Russia.

It is not surprising, then, that we see similar evidence in line with the selective-attention thesis and its supporting hypotheses. While Bush's understanding of a liberal international order and its implications for foreign policy were different than Clinton's, he too was a hedgehog that comprehensively related Russo-American relations to his

[97] Bush, 431, 435.

liberal framework. Admittedly, Bush "grew" into his position more than Clinton did. Initially, he did not have a well-established foreign-policy outlook, but during his first term he quickly adopted one that meshed the views of key advisors with his own overarching beliefs about the universal human condition, liberty, and justice in politics. The Freedom Agenda, which was a main feature of his second term, was the fullest expression of his version of liberal foreign policy.

We can see this hedgehog mentality at work in each of the main issues Bush and his administration wrestled within the Russo-American relationship. Bush's early optimism about the prospects of a reset show that subjective credibility was at work. His ability to secure a deal on SORT and strong personal diplomacy with Putin weighed heavily on initial expectations of where the relationship was headed. The importance of these pieces of information was reinforced by Bush's vivid first-hand experiences, such as the formal SORT signing ceremony in Moscow, and cordial extended summit visits with Putin. These factors overshadowed less vivid information, such as the more cautious assessments included in the National Intelligence Council's 2000 strategic outlook. Later, the administration was slow to recognize the underlying divisions in the relationship and assumed that Russian support for American foreign policy was broadly secure. Bush and his team had to resort to a last-minute attempt at damage control when it became impossible to ignore that this was not the case, during the run up to the Iraq war in 2003. Finally, as Putin became more authoritarian at home, Bush paid more attention to the role that democracy and liberty (broadly speaking) played in their increasingly confrontational relationship. These were central organizing principles for Bush (and some key advisors, especially the Vice President), who overestimated the role they played in the Russian perspective, in which questions about democratic politics

were more complexly intertwined with narratives of great power status and competition. Information flowing to the White House that challenged the central assumptions of Bush's liberal organizing principle does not appear to have resulted in reassessment or recalculation.

As had been the case in the 1990s, these elements helped to introduce counterproductive elements into the American foreign policy approach to the Russian Federation. The clearest example is the way the MAP issue unfolded. Again, it is not entirely clear that a more balanced risk analysis would have resulted in substantially different policy selections. I do not wish to engage in counterfactual thought experiments, and in any case it is quite clear that there existed (as Stent put it) "limits of partnership" in terms of what was realistic for the Russo-American relationship. Nonetheless, American perceptions of Russia's motivations, outlook, and probable behaviour were not as aligned with reality as they might have been. The selective-attention dynamic, characteristic of the liberal hedgehog mindset, led to over-emphasis on some factors and under-attention to conflicting information. While a more complete assessment - one which more thoroughly questioned underlying assumptions and took into greater account the fundamental differences between Russian and American perceptions of international relations - would likely not have resulted in a successful reset of the kind envisioned at the beginning of the Bush-Putin era, better assessments would likely have produced higher-quality forecasting to support decision-making. Washington might at least have more proactively prepared for the challenges and confrontations of the Russo-American relationship, rather than reacting to acute spikes in tension.

Conclusion

This study began by noting that American foreign policy has in recent decades been afflicted by a gap between the expectations of policy-makers and the reality of subsequent events. The factors that produced this disconnect are complex, and are highly contested amongst observers of international relations from various disciplines. This debate will certainly persist over the long term. What I have attempted to do is contribute, in a small way, to the emerging overall historical analysis of international politics in the post-Cold War period. The vehicle for doing so was a more narrow examination of the bilateral relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation, over a span of two pairs of "mirrored" presidencies - the Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin era of 1993-1999 and the George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin era of 2000-2008. While there was some overlap of the presidential pairings in the year 2000, their broad symmetry provides a useful opportunity to examine continuity and change across a period in which presidential administrations of differing parties, outlooks, and style held power.

What the available evidence shows is that these two eras were characterized more by continuity than change. This is an important observation given many of the themes present in popular discussion of the relationship between the United States and Russia, which since the Ukraine crisis of 2014 and the US presidential election of 2016 has received more attention than perhaps at any time since the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the first instance, the person of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin has received an enormous amount of attention and commentary. To the casual observer, it might appear

that Putin, the individual, has been the single biggest driver of the deterioration of relations between Russian and the West in recent years. Certainly, his longevity in power, the opacity of the Russian economic and political system, and his past as a KGB officer all lend themselves easily to narratives featuring Putin as the source of all ills. There is, of course, much to criticize in Putin's domestic oppression, foreign adventurism, and hostility to most aspects of what Henri Bergson and Karl Popper called "the open society."[1] But this study could not have functioned without recognizing, following Angela Stent, that Putin's confrontation with the US revolved around issues that predated his rise to power. On issues ranging from strategic weapons, to NATO, to the "near abroad," Putin's insecurity and hostility is not idiosyncratic or far outside the norm in Russia.[2] Realistic assessments about the future of Western relations with Russia should take this into account. Even in the highly unlikely event that Putin's eventual successor is much more liberal and chosen via free and fair elections, these challenges will not dissipate overnight.

The cyclical similarity of the reset-disappointment dynamic over the better part of the last three decades also reinforces the broad continuity of the post-Cold War era. As we have seen, there were numerous equivalencies between the reset attempts that began in 1993 and 2000, at the beginning of new presidential administrations. Despite this record, a third iteration of reset - this time accompanied explicitly by the use of the word - began when Barack Obama replaced Bush in the White House and perceived a potential window of opportunity to reshape relations while Dmitry Medvedev (temporarily) replaced Putin in the Kremlin. Nonetheless, the path from a photo-op

[1] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945).
[2] Perhaps the most poignant example of this is the 2014 annexation of Crimea, which was widely condemned internationally but greeted with a surge in popular approval of Putin domestically.

featuring a smiling Hillary Clinton, Sergei Lavrov, and a literal reset button, to the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass war was strikingly familiar. While an examination of the Obama era is beyond the scope of this thesis, it seems probable that many of the same factors of perception and misperception highlighted in this study were at play. Investigating this question would be a profitable avenue for future research.

Recognizing that the strategic balance, NATO, and differing perceptions of the international order are - and will likely continue to be - persistent points of confrontation would be central to adopting a realistic, managerial approach that could help improve the relationship over the long term. Additional attempts to dissolve all problems and disagreements via a short-term, comprehensive reset are unlikely to be much more successful than past efforts. However, adopting a new approach would require (amongst other things) an honest appraisal of the effects presidential decision-making has had on the relationship.

Acknowledging the drawbacks of a highly personalized bilateral relationship is not to say that individuals and personalities don't matter. What is important is recognizing the *ways* that personalities, outlooks, and perceptions became part of a wider pattern. The history of the Clinton-Yeltsin and Bush-Putin eras shows that these factors operated in similar ways. Clinton and Bush behaved as anticipated by the selective attention thesis, as spelled out by Keren Yarhi-Milo.[3] They weighed the credibility of information about Russia subjectively, giving more weight to information that aligned with their liberal interpretive frameworks and paying less attention to information that challenged their assumptions. This tendency was reinforced when information confirming their worldviews came in a vivid form, such as their personal

[3] Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary*, 15-26.

interactions with their Russian counterparts. A clear example is the arms control agreements each president managed to secure early in their first term. These seemed to indicate that relations with Russia were moving in the desired direction, were in line with their respective liberal views, and featured highly vivid episodes of personal diplomacy and treaty signing ceremonies. Both Clinton and Bush took these events as evidence that their resets were working, while evidence that their Russian counterparts saw things differently received less attention. The presidents also ignored, disputed, or weighed less heavily information that challenged their assumptions, such as in the cases of Clinton's reaction to George Kennan's commentary, or the muted reaction within the Bush White House to Ambassador Bill Burns' messages from Moscow. Compounding this aspect of the subjective credibility effect was the fact that conflicting information often came in less vivid forms, such as diplomatic cables and written reports from other government departments, including intelligence agencies.

The relationship between executive decision-making and assessments from other areas of government is an area addressed by this study that presents additional opportunities for further research. Recent declassification of records from the Clinton era has shed light on the White House's communication with other offices (as well as his communication with Yeltsin and other foreign leaders). At present, the archival record of the Bush administration's intragovernmental communications remains redacted or classified to a greater extent than is the case for the Clinton White House. Future declassifications will allow for a more granular view of the inner workings of Bush-era foreign policy, including the record of his personal diplomacy with Putin. Additionally, the views expressed by Bush and other key administration officials in their memoirs will be contextualized in a broader documentary record. This will present opportunities for

more detailed comparisons with both the Clinton administration and subsequent presidencies.

The overall pattern of executive decision-making with regard to Russia is clear, however. The influence of perception and misperception on the quality of leaders' forecasting - and thus, in turn, on policy selection - should be kept in mind as a factor when assessing the bilateral relationship, past or present. Attention to this aspect of political behaviour helps identify the origins of contemporary challenges in Russo-American relations. To be properly understood, the current atmosphere of hostility must be seen as the product of longer-term patterns that have prevailed since the end of the Cold War. The continuities of the post-Cold War era transcended individual administrations in both countries. The selective-attention dynamic prevalent in the behaviour of American leaders, and its role in driving a cycle of reset and disappointment is one such pattern. Whether or not this pattern will continue in Russo-American relations is an open question. But observers should keep in mind that the phenomenon is not limited to one party, or linked to other aspects of politics such as personal style or domestic policy preferences. What the history of Russo-American relations from 1993-2008 shows is that leaders as different - in many ways - as Clinton and Bush could both approach international politics in the same way: as liberal presidential hedgehogs.

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