

Part V

**The Russian Conundrum
and the Balkan Backdrop**

Chapter 22

NATO Enlargement 20 Years On

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Introduction

NATO enlargement did not begin in 1999 with the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. There have been, to date, seven enlargements beginning in 1952 with Greece and Turkey and ending (so far) with Montenegro in 2017. Accepting new member states has been the norm rather than the exception as regards the judgment and strategy of the United States and Western Europe.

But the admissions of Central European countries in 1999 and of the Baltic states in 2004 were different. Greek, Turkish, West German and Spanish accession were during the Cold War. Including these states enhanced the power and deterrent capability of NATO *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union. The case for membership was overwhelming. Accession by Balkan countries in 2009 and 2017 had few military implications. They were contested by the Kremlin but, except with Montenegro, did not cause any significant controversy.

In comparison, the Central Europeans and the Baltic states were not just much closer to Russia. The Baltic states had been part of the Soviet Union. All these countries were also formerly part of the Warsaw Pact, and had been deeply integrated into Soviet military strategy. Neither Mikhail Gorbachev nor Boris Yeltsin supported enlargement. The Russian Duma and the military were increasingly hostile. Against that background it is worth noting, however, that only moderate damage was done to Western-Russian relations in the immediate aftermath of the 1999 and 2004 enlargements. The Kosovo War, NATO air strikes in Bosnia, NATO air attacks on Qadhafi's Libya in 2011 and ballistic missile defense programs caused much more serious controversy. Vladimir Putin's first public accusation of bad faith by the West in regard to NATO enlargement was not made until his speech to the Munich Secu-

rity Conference in 2007 and then it was referred to in only a couple of paragraphs in a long speech with many other real or alleged grievances.

Background

The background to NATO enlargement in 1999 was, of course, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War after 1989. It was a curious coincidence that these historic events occurred exactly 200 years after the fall of the Bastille and the French Revolution in 1789. But in reality, 3 separate, though interconnected, events occurred in these momentous years. The Cold War ended; Communism, as an alternative to Capitalism, collapsed throughout the Soviet bloc; and the Soviet Union, which was the Russian Empire, disintegrated being replaced by 15 independent states.

The United States and its European Allies had long sought, and worked towards, the peaceful end of the Cold War. Similarly, the West, obviously, hoped that, one day Communism would disappear but there was no expectation that that would happen in the foreseeable future. A Communist Party could, quite credibly, have remained in power in Russia after the end of the Cold War for many years.

Most extraordinary, and unpredicted, was the simultaneous disappearance, at the end of 1991, of the Soviet Union, otherwise known as the Russian Empire. Today's Russian Federation has, with the exception of the Kaliningrad enclave, European borders that are further from Western and Central Europe than they have been for centuries and are similar to those of Peter the Great's Russia in the 17th and 18th centuries.

That loss of territory, rather than the end of the Cold War or the disappearance of Communism, is what President Putin finds most distressing and unacceptable. In 2018, when asked what Russian historical event he would like to change, he replied "The collapse of the Soviet Union." In 2005 he had described that collapse as "a major geopolitical disaster of the century". He knows that modern Russia cannot be recreated with its previous boundaries but his annexation of Crimea, destabilization of eastern Ukraine and aggression towards Georgia are, in part, a consequence of his belief, and that of many Russians, that their nation's security and realization of its destiny has been imperiled.

It is worth reminding both ourselves and Putin that NATO was neither directly, nor indirectly, responsible for the disintegration of the Soviet Union. That had never been part of U.S. or NATO strategy. Indeed, when it became clear that this was likely to happen Western leaders were disconcerted and uncertain as to what should be their response.

I served as Defense Secretary of the United Kingdom from 1992-95 and as Foreign Secretary from 1995-97. I recall, and took part in, these debates both in London and at NATO meetings. While the British, and other Western governments, all recognized that the disappearance of the Soviet Union would dramatically weaken the risk of future aggression by any government in the Kremlin it was felt that it would also create major new risks and uncertainties.

Both Gorbachev and Yeltsin were moderate leaders who were determined to forge positive relations with the West and were anxious to modernize their countries and create open and more democratic societies. None of us knew who might end up as the leaders of an independent Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus as well as other newly created states. Furthermore, these three countries, in particular, had large numbers of Soviet nuclear weapons stationed on their territory. Would they insist in holding on to them and becoming nuclear weapon states themselves?

These concerns even led to President George H.W. Bush visiting Kyiv, his address to the Ukrainian Parliament, and his unsuccessful attempt to persuade Ukrainian members of parliament to reconsider their demands for independence from Moscow. The Ukrainians, unimpressed, have, ever since, referred to his visit as the “Chicken Kiev” speech.

German Reunification

During the first year after the collapse of the Berlin Wall the predominant issue for both the United States and the Soviet Union was not the future of NATO *per se* or of the former Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe.

Rather it was whether the two divided parts of Germany should be allowed to reunite and, if so, on what terms. It is highly doubtful

whether reunification could ever have been prevented given the enthusiasm of the East German people and of Chancellor Helmut Kohl for the merger of the German Democratic Republic with the Federal Republic. Margaret Thatcher tried to stop or delay it but found no allies.

It did not necessarily follow, however, that a reunited Germany would be able to be a member of NATO. That would extend NATO's borders, for the first time, to the Polish border. Soviet consent for such an enlarged NATO was not only required for diplomatic reasons. There were still very large numbers of Soviet troops and weaponry in the former GDR. Their withdrawal back to the Soviet Union, and the timing of that withdrawal, would require Soviet consent which could not be assumed.

It was during discussions on the relationship of a united Germany to NATO that the issue of future enlargement of NATO to include member states of the crumbling Warsaw Pact was first raised. The initial exchanges were between the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker and Mikhail Gorbachev in February 1990. It appears that Baker gave assurances that NATO would "not move an inch towards the east" and that NATO expansion would not be approved of by the United States.

It was also recorded that Gorbachev indicated that "a broadening of the NATO zone is not acceptable" and Baker responded "We agree with that." The German Foreign Minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, had indicated a similar view saying that "NATO should rule out an expansion of its territory towards the East."

The "Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany" was signed in Moscow in September 1990. Its terms were consistent with a reunited Germany being part of NATO, including the territory of the former GDR. The United States, the Federal Republic and other Western signatories, for their part, accepted that, apart from German troops, no other NATO troops nor any nuclear weapons would be stationed in the territory of the former GDR.

It is undeniable that both Baker and Genscher indicated to Gorbachev that there was no interest in the expansion of NATO beyond the territory of the former GDR. It seems also to be the case that that was, at that time, the sincerely held view of the President of the United States and the Governments of other NATO members.

However, these were incidental, verbal statements. They do not appear to have been replicated in any formal written exchanges between Moscow and Washington. Nor is there any reference to them in the Treaty that led to German reunification. Furthermore, I am not aware that Gorbachev sought any written statements or legally binding assurances which were refused by the West.

It is interesting, in this context, to compare the Treaty on German reunification with the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 which led to the Soviet withdrawal of all its forces from Austria. The Austrian State Treaty was signed in May 1955 by the USSR, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Austria. The issue of whether Austria would be free to join NATO or be neutral was not mentioned in the Treaty, though political union with Germany was forbidden. However, as soon as all Soviet troops had left Austria, the Austrian Parliament, in October 1955, declared permanent neutrality for the country which meant that it could not join NATO. It was well understood that the Soviet Union would not have withdrawn from Austria if that commitment had not been given in advance.

While it would have been inappropriate to include, in a Treaty providing for German reunification in 1990, commitments that NATO would not seek, nor permit, further enlargement of the Alliance, there was no procedural nor legal reason why there could not have been a separate written assurance to that effect, at that time, between the Soviet Union and the Western powers if both sides were in agreement. No such formal commitment was given. So far as I am aware, no such request was made by Gorbachev.

Polish, Czech and Hungarian Membership

The circumstances in which expansion of NATO was agreed in 1997 and occurred in 1999 were fundamentally different to those of 1990 and this should be borne in mind when allegations of bad faith are made. Not only had the Warsaw Pact dissolved itself in 1991 but the Soviet Union had ceased to exist at the end of that year and had disintegrated into 15 separate states of which Russia and Ukraine were the largest.

In May 1990 Gorbachev had suggested to James Baker that a new security structure should replace both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

However, the subsequent collapse of both the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union created a security vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe which had a profound impact on thinking in Washington. The new Russian Federation would not have been able to replace the Soviet Union by filling that security vacuum as they could never have received the consent of the newly liberated East Europeans and Baltic states. It also followed, that NATO, with or without new members, could, no longer, be presented as an anti-Soviet coalition. What, as a consequence, became much more attractive was a NATO whose membership would transcend the old boundaries and reflect a new Europe with shared democratic values and security interests.

U.S. and European views as to whether NATO expansion would be acceptable were also influenced by Yeltsin, who had become President of the new Russian Federation after the disappearance of the USSR. In speeches in Warsaw and Prague in 1993 he indicated that, based on the Helsinki Final Act, every state could decide, for itself, whether to join an alliance.

The Poles and others used Yeltsin's remarks to put pressure on the West to allow them into NATO, alleging that it was now clear that Russia would be relaxed if they did. Yeltsin changed his position because of pressure from the Duma and Russian military, but by then the damage had been done.

Yeltsin, subsequently, argued for a new European security structure which would include Russia. He proposed that Russia should have a privileged relationship with NATO. This led, not to any offer to Russia of membership in NATO, but to the U.S. initiative of a Partnership for Peace (PfP) which would cover all European states including Russia and which could be a basis for possible long-term NATO membership. In January 1994 Clinton informed Yeltsin that he did not wish to speed up NATO expansion but that Russia could not expect to have a veto. The refusal to allow a Russian veto on enlargement was repeated on several occasions.

It needs to be borne in mind that while the Americans and European governments were changing their views on NATO expansion to the East the main pressure for enlargement was coming not from the existing members of NATO but from the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians. This was partly because they were nervous that Russia, one day,

might again threaten their independence and freedom. But it was also their deep belief that their economic as well as their security interests required their full integration in both NATO and the European Community and that both of these objectives should be achieved as soon as possible.

They received strong support from Germany for these aspirations but other Western Europeans, including the UK, were more cautious. Most of the East and Central Europeans, apart from Poland, would bring little significant military capability to NATO, relations with Yeltsin might be damaged and London and other capitals were much more concerned about the collapse of Yugoslavia and the war in Bosnia than about NATO enlargement.

During my own years as British Defense Secretary and then Foreign Secretary, from 1992-1997 it was Bosnia and not NATO enlargement that dominated my time. There was not only concern that the war in Bosnia might spread throughout the Balkans but that Turkey and Greece might get drawn in. Géza Jeszenszky, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, visited me in London in December 1993 to lobby for NATO membership. In his chapter in this volume he has recorded that I “listened politely” to his words “but I saw that he remained skeptical.”

It was also a consideration that during these years the Russian Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, was helpful rather than obstructive as Britain, France and the United States sought to resolve the Bosnian crisis. Russian support could not be taken for granted. Historically, they were very close to the Serbs and were strongly opposed to any use of NATO in air strikes against Milošević’s Bosnian Serb allies. I chaired the Lancaster House conference in London, in 1995 shortly after the Srebrenica massacres. The Americans, British and French were determined to use air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs if there were further attacks on “safe areas.” At Lancaster House Kozyrev could not support the use of NATO for this purpose but he was willing to abstain rather than wreck the unity of the conference. That co-operation was much appreciated.

However, it was the case that over these first few years after the end of the Cold War the interests and priorities of existing members of NATO and the new applicants were gradually coming into alignment in important respects.

Despite the end of the Cold War the United States saw a continuing need for NATO not only to guarantee European security but as part of Washington's wider determination to ensure the continuity of its own global leadership. That pointed not only towards maintaining the NATO alliance but also allowing new states, which now shared Western values, to join if they so wished.

European members of NATO shared this view. They were not only sensitive to the enthusiasm of Poles, Czechs and Hungarians to join their ranks. They also remained very nervous that the political instability and economic collapse that was continuing in Russia might lead to a power grab by extreme nationalist politicians who would have little interest in Yeltsin's reform agenda and desire to move closer to the West.

Furthermore, the collapse of Yugoslavia and the subsequent savage conflicts in Bosnia and Croatia as well as in the Caucasus was a reminder of how latent nationalist and ethnic rivalries in Hungary, Romania and elsewhere in Central Europe could lead to massive internal instability if the countries between NATO and Russia were left in a limbo outside both NATO and the European Community.

To those general considerations one other advantage of enlargement should be mentioned. Much has been made, over the years, of common membership of the EU being crucial to Franco-German reconciliation after centuries of mutual enmity. In a similar way Poland becoming a partner of Germany not just in the EU but also in NATO, was a historic change for the better.

The outcome of these developments was the invitation that was made at the 1997 NATO Summit in Madrid to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join the Alliance which they did in 1999.

To try and reassure the Russians that the enlargement of NATO did not imply indifference or hostility to them a NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council had been agreed before the Madrid Summit. This was accepted by Yeltsin but it is doubtful if he was very impressed. It had already been emphasized by the United States and others that Russia could not expect any veto either on NATO membership nor on NATO's actions out of area.

Further Enlargement of NATO

In 2002, a further 7 countries, the Baltic states, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia were invited to join NATO. They did so in 2004. Croatia and Albania joined in 2009, Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia is expected to become a member in the near future.

The most contentious of these admissions were the Baltic states: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Unlike the other new members, they had formerly been part of the Soviet Union. Their acceptance into NATO was seen as a particular provocation by many Russians especially as it would bring NATO's borders close to St. Petersburg. The Russians were reminded, however, that the forced annexation of the Baltic states into the Soviet Union by Stalin in 1940, during the Second World War, had never been recognized *de jure* by the United States, the United Kingdom and many others.

Quite apart from Russian hostility to their admission there was a serious debate within the Alliance as to whether NATO would be strengthened or weakened by Baltic membership. Joining NATO meant that the Baltic states would receive the same defense guarantee as any other member under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. But they would be at the geographic extremity of NATO territory, sharing a border with the Russian Federation and with only a relatively narrow corridor of land linking them to Poland and the rest of the alliance. Being very small they would be unable to add, significantly, to NATO's military capability.

As the UK's Defense Secretary, I shared these concerns. I had visited the Baltic states in 1993. While in Riga I met the President of Latvia who wanted to know when his country would be admitted to NATO and why there seemed likely to be such a delay. I had advised him to be patient and had pointed out that if anyone ten years earlier had predicted that in 1993 the President of an independent Latvia would be discussing with a British Defense Secretary Latvia's admission to NATO they would have seemed to be living in a world of fantasy!

Over the subsequent years Western leaders accepted that to make an exception of the Baltic states would be unreasonable and unwise. They would have become a no man's land between Russia and NATO, like Belarus. They were non-Slav and, historically, part of Central Eu-

rope. While their defense against serious Soviet aggression would be extremely difficult, that had been even more true of West Berlin during the Cold War. As with West Berlin it has been essential, in recent years, that NATO as a whole make clear to Moscow, unambiguously, that it takes its obligations to the Baltic states as seriously as to any other member.

The Baltics, especially Estonia, have been the victims of Russian attempts at destabilization in recent years but, unlike Ukraine and Georgia they have not lost control of any of their national territory. Being members of NATO must be, at least part of, the explanation.

Should NATO have refused enlargement to the East?

It was always open to NATO to refuse to enlarge the Alliance after the end of the Cold War. No country was guaranteed membership even if it met the normal NATO criteria of being democratic, respecting the rule of law and observing Western values.

The Alliance had to decide not just whether an applicant state wished to join and shared NATO's values. A decision also had to be reached by NATO as to whether it was in the Alliance's own interest to accept all new applicants or any one of them. Two questions, on this aspect, needed to be answered.

First, would security in Europe, as a whole and for existing members of NATO, be enhanced or diminished by enlargement? The Alliance concluded that enlargement would enhance Europe's security. There is little evidence to suggest that that judgment was wrong. The new members have been well integrated into the Alliance; there have been significant increases in their defense spending; and both old and new NATO members have responded well to Russian destabilization by agreeing robust forward positioning of a NATO presence in the Baltic states and Poland.

The other question that needed to be considered before accepting a new member state was whether NATO members, especially the United States, would be prepared to deliver the Article 5 guarantee, both in letter and in spirit, if the applicant state was subject to aggression by a third party. Delivering the Article 5 guarantee did not, automatically, mean going to war if a member state was attacked but a military

confrontation with an aggressor was implied if other measures did not stop aggression. The worst outcome for NATO would be to promise an Article 5 guarantee to a new member state but not deliver it despite aggression from a third party. There would not only be legitimate cries of betrayal from the country concerned. The whole credibility of NATO as a source of security for all of its existing members would also be gravely undermined.

It was for these reasons that despite being a strong champion of Ukrainian and Georgian independence I, and many other NATO ministers, have never supported their membership in NATO. It was never credible that, for example, Russian aggression towards Georgia over South Ossetia or against Ukraine in the Donbas would have led to war between Russia and NATO if Russia refused to desist. It is difficult to believe that these two countries could have been fully integrated into NATO or that the political will would have existed in the United States or Western Europe for an all-out war with Russia on their behalf.

In contrast, any attack on NATO territory in Central or Eastern Europe would be a quite different matter as it would have been if there had been aggression against any member state during the Cold War.

Some have argued that the benefit of NATO membership would have been that Russia would never have risked aggression towards Georgia or Ukraine if they had become members of NATO. One can never know what might have happened but one should not enter into solemn treaty obligations, involving a potential declaration of war, based simply on an assumption that one would never be called upon to honor such obligations.

Would Putin be much friendlier to the West today if there had been no enlargement?

The admission of former Warsaw Pact states must have been a factor in Putin's disillusion with the West, but the evidence points to enlargement being only one consideration and not the most serious.

The most virulent criticism by Moscow of NATO began with the Kosovo War when NATO planes bombed Serbia for over two months without any U.N. Security Council resolution and in the face of strong Russian protests. The bombing began 12 days after Poland, the Czech

Republic and Hungary joined NATO. There were riots outside the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and the Russians saw this as hard evidence that NATO, when the West so wished, would be an offensive not just a defensive alliance.

The Kosovo war occurred while Yeltsin was still President. The use of NATO air power to help destroy the Qadhafi regime in 2011 caused equal anger with Putin and convinced him that the United States was determined to use NATO as a prime arm of its foreign policy and in a manner that would often be in direct conflict with perceived Russian interests.

NATO has declined to accept Ukraine and Georgia as new members but the United States had sought to propose otherwise at the Bucharest Summit in 2008. Their views did not prevail with other NATO members but Putin has continued to believe that this might still happen. Putin also chose to believe that the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the overthrow of Yanukovich in the Maidan in 2014 were orchestrated by the United States with the support of other NATO powers. That, and not earlier NATO enlargement, was the excuse used by Putin to try to justify the annexation of Crimea.

Should Russia have been offered membership?

A more intriguing question is whether a historic mistake was made, at the time of the NATO enlargement agreed in 1997, by not inviting Russia, also, to become a member of NATO or, at least, to have a more formal relationship with the Alliance. Such a proposal might seem naïve and extraordinary today but it had some respectable advocates at the time.

Until the Madrid NATO Summit in 1997, which agreed to invite former Warsaw Pact states to join the Alliance, their remained powerful opposition to enlargement from within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Shortly before the Summit a letter was delivered to President Clinton, arguing that NATO enlargement would be a historic mistake. It was signed by many luminaries including Robert McNamara, Gary Hart, Edward Luttwak, Paul Nitze, Sam Nunn and Richard Pipes.

The legendary George Kennan, who had drafted the Long Telegram in 1946, described enlargement as the most fateful error in the entire post-Cold War era.

Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski took the opposite view. Kissinger was characteristically eloquent and blunt in his evidence to the U.S. Senate:

Basing European and Atlantic security on a no man's land between Germany and Russia runs counter to all historical experience, especially that of the interwar period. It would bring about two categories of frontiers in Europe, those that are potentially threatened but not guaranteed, and those that are guaranteed but not threatened ... NATO expansion therefore represents a balancing of two conflicting considerations: The fear of alienating Russia against the danger of creating a vacuum between Germany and Russia in Central Europe.... I would strongly urge the Senate to ratify NATO enlargement.¹

Those who opposed him argued that Russia was being humiliated. They suggested that enlargement to the east would be like the Versailles Treaty which had led to Hitler and another world war, whereas after 1945 Germany and Japan had, successfully, been brought back into the family of nations as partners and as new democracies.

Some suggested that if enlargement was necessary it should include Russia. Charles Kupchan of Georgetown University made that case. But there was a crucial qualification made by Kupchan. He wrote that "As long as Russia continues down the path of democracy"² its membership of NATO would be appropriate.

As British Defense Secretary, in January 1994, I sent a paper to the Prime Minister, John Major, suggesting that, while it was unrealistic for Russia to become a member of NATO, a new category of associate member could be created to meet Russian interest in closer integration with Western security. This did not seem unrealistic to me at the time.

George Kennan made a similar assumption to that of Kupchan about Russia's new democratic credentials. He argued "Russia's democracy is as far advanced, if not farther, as any of these countries we've just signed to defend from Russia."³ That might have been true in 1997. It has, certainly, not been true since Putin's rise to power. Today, there

may still be more freedom in Russia than during Soviet times, but democracy and the rule of law are noted by their absence. Russia has reverted to an authoritarian dictatorship where the Russian people have little power to determine their ultimate destiny.

The reality is that, even in 1997, Russian membership of NATO would have been impossible unless the West could have accepted that NATO would cease to be a military alliance and become just another political organization like the OSCE. The Russians could never have accepted that their armed forces would become part of the Integrated Military Structure under overall American leadership. Even France had balked at that under de Gaulle.

Nor could NATO have accepted a Russian *de facto* veto on its operations which the Russians would have insisted on. If America was going to continue to guarantee the security of Europe it had to be through a NATO that could be used “out of area” as in Bosnia, Kosovo and Libya without the need for the Kremlin’s consent.

If NATO had not enlarged, might Putin have permitted Russia to continue to move towards a more pluralist and democratic political system?

While Putin paid lip service to democratic values in his first years in power he soon lost interest. There is no evidence that supports any suggestion that NATO enlargement was relevant to his increasing authoritarianism and hostility to democracy.

Yeltsin, and Gorbachev to some degree, appear to have been genuine in their desire to transform Russia into a democratic and pluralist society. They were comfortable with Western values, which they felt could be adopted by post-Communist Russia.

Putin was different. It was not just his KGB background that explains his enthusiasm for centralizing power and eliminating organized opposition. The reality is that Gorbachev and Yeltsin, as reformers interested in pluralism, were more unusual in Russian history than is Putin. He, rather than either of them, is the natural successor to the Tsars and autocrats of Russian history.

Many in the West assumed that as Communism collapsed the Russian people, and their leaders, would not only adopt a capitalist eco-

conomic model but would be attracted to liberal multi-party democracy and a vigorous and independent civic society.

That might have had a chance of happening if Yeltsin had nominated someone like Boris Nemtsov to succeed him. Fatefully, he chose Vladimir Putin instead. Putin's immediate priorities were not to expand democracy. They were to rescue Russia from a descent into internal anarchy and to crush the insurgency in Chechnya. The more he consolidated his personal power the less he was interested in sharing it with the Russian people.

It is clear that whatever might have happened with regard to NATO enlargement would not have influenced Putin in his exercise of power within Russia over the last two decades.

Without NATO enlargement might Ukraine and Georgia not have been subject to Russian aggression and deprived of their territorial integrity?

There was little doubt that, after the overthrow of Yanukovich, the new Ukrainian Government would be fiercely pro-Western and aspire not only to membership of the EU but also of NATO.

Although membership, at least in the short term, was never likely there had been some Western leaders advocating NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia. Putin's fears were understandable even though his reaction was indefensible.

The timing of the annexation of Crimea and the aggression in the Donbas were influenced by the downfall of a pro-Russian President in Kyiv but they were part of a much wider strategy already developed by Putin. Putin realizes that Ukraine can never be reabsorbed into a new Russian Empire. But he has long believed that it could be fatally weakened by loss of control of much of its territory bordering the Black Sea. Georgia has been suffering similar loss of its territorial integrity for years, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Putin had held those views for some time, but while Yanukovich was in power he felt he could rely on a compliant Ukraine without resorting to overt aggression. The Maidan in 2014 changed all that.

Conclusions

There are fundamental, geopolitical considerations that help explain why NATO enlargement to the East was right and why we are highly likely to have very difficult relations with Russia for the foreseeable future.

There was an assumption in the West that the collapse of Communism, the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union would lead to a Russia that would recognize that it was no longer one of the world's two superpowers and might, therefore, become "another" European power like Germany, France or the United Kingdom.

But the Cold War after 1945 did not occur just because Moscow was ruled by Communists with a global, Marxist ideology. The Soviet Union was also the successor to the Russia of the Tsars which, for several hundred years, had extended its territory, absorbed much of historic Poland as well as what are now the Baltic states, and during the nineteenth century, after the Congress of Vienna, exercised unprecedented power in helping determine the destiny of much of Europe.

Soviet leaders, ruling from the same Kremlin as the Tsars, inherited many of these aspirations and expectations. That, as well as a desire to spread Communism, explains why they enforced their control of the countries of Eastern Europe that they had liberated from the Nazis. When the Soviet Union disintegrated and old Russia reappeared it is hardly surprising that a new generation of Russians, and Putin in particular, should, in the absence of an ideology, have returned to traditional Russian nationalism which has characterized Russian history since the days of Peter the Great.

Indeed, it is arguable that even if Putin had been willing to allow Russia to evolve towards a democratic and pluralist society that might have been combined with an expansionist foreign policy not that different to what we have experienced.

Russia, because of its massive size, its Orthodox Church, its Slav heritage and its Eurasian landmass can never be just another European country. It is quite possible that, whoever succeeds Putin in due course, will, like him, wish to see a Russia that has the power to limit the independence of its self-proclaimed "near abroad" and help direct the

future of Europe as a whole. That will make Russia an uncomfortable neighbor for the rest of Europe.

This is the challenge we have faced not just from 1917 or 1945 but since the early nineteenth century. That should concern but need not depress us. It is worth recalling the remark of Lord Palmerston during the Crimean War:

The policy and practice of the Russian Government has always been to push forward its encroachments as far and as fast as the apathy or want of firmness of other Governments would allow it to go, but always to stop and retire when it met with decided resistance.

The West will need, both by diplomatic means and through NATO, not only to protect the independence of its member states but also to impress on Moscow the unacceptability of Russia seeking to limit the freedom of Ukraine, Georgia and other post-Soviet states to determine their own destiny.

The British, French, Spanish and other former empires have gone forever. Russia, too, ceased to be an empire at the end of 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is time for the Russian Federation to recognize not only the letter but the spirit of that historic change.

Notes

1. Testimony by Henry A. Kissinger to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, October 30, 1997.

2. Charles A. Kupchan, "The origins and future of NATO enlargement," *Journal of Contemporary Security Policy*, Volume 21, 2000, pp. 127-148.

3. Thomas L. Friedman, "Foreign Affairs; And Now a Word From X," *New York Times*, May 2, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>.