

## Chapter 5

# The End of the Cold War: A View From the Trenches

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I was an intermittent foot-soldier in the vast army of Western officials dealing with the Cold War and its aftermath. Many fine treatises have been written about the strategic dimensions and leading actors of the Cold War. This is not such a treatise. It is simply the personal view of an eyewitness who served for about twenty years in the trenches between 1971 and 2004.

### 1989 and the Momentum of Change in Four Dimensions: *Perestroika*, Politics, Nationalities, Eastern Europe

1989, Gorbachev's fifth year as leader, was when *perestroika* came to a head. It was also the year when the forces of change which he had unleashed, inside the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, ran away from him and developed unstoppable momentum.

To a foreign diplomat or journalist, what was happening in Russia was extraordinary and exciting. To Russians, it was extraordinary—and to most rather frightening. Old certainties were disappearing. They didn't know where their country was heading. Almost every day events were occurring which they, and we, had not expected to see in our lifetimes. Let me start with a small example.

In March of 1989, my wife and I were in a Moscow theatre to see a dramatized version of Yevgenia Ginzburg's account of her time in the gulag, *Krutoi Marsbrut*. Ginzburg's book had been published in the West in 1967,<sup>1</sup> part of the *samizdat* literature seeping out of the Soviet Union. It had made a deep impression on me as an undergraduate student.

A year earlier, Vladlen Dozortsev,<sup>2</sup> the editor of a small-circulation monthly literary journal in Latvia called *Daugava*, had told me that he

was beginning to publish *Krutoi Marsbrut* chapter by chapter to test how far he could get before the Soviet authorities stopped him. He wasn't stopped, and within a year the ice had melted to the point where this subversive work could be placed on public view in Moscow.

On the streets outside the theatre, the election campaign for the Congress of People's Deputies was in full swing: over four thousand candidates competing in 1500 constituencies in the first partially-free general election held in the Soviet Union (partially free, because a further 750 seats had been reserved for the Communist Party and affiliated organizations).

When the curtain fell at the interval, no one in the packed audience moved for some minutes. There was no applause. As we looked around, many of the audience were in tears, reliving the past experiences of their own families. The same happened at the end of the play. Because to admit that one's family had included an "enemy of the people" was taboo, few of those weeping had appreciated the extent to which others had shared their suffering, even years after Khrushchev's de-Stalinization.

The Soviet Union was to last for another 21 months, and few in that audience would have predicted its dissolution; but, if *Krutoi Marsbrut* could be put on stage, and individuals could compete freely for election on differing platforms, there was no doubting the profundity of the change under way to the communist system.

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The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were held together by force. Gorbachev removed the force. He never intended to dismantle the USSR and the Warsaw Treaty organization, but he aspired to change them into voluntary organizations which would work more effectively by consensus and the rule of law than through coercion.

1989 was both the peak of Gorbachev's achievements as a reformer and also the point where he became mired in his own contradictions.

Within the Soviet Union, overlapping battles were being fought over the economy, democratization, and the relationships between the constituent parts of the Union. On the USSR's periphery, communist rule and Soviet hegemony were coming into question. Merely to keep

abreast of these four dimensions as an observer was demanding; to lead and control them, as Gorbachev was trying to do with a relatively small team, turned out to be almost impossible.<sup>3</sup>

It was the failure of the Soviet economy which had induced the Politburo to elect Gorbachev, desperately hoping that a young and dynamic leader could turn it around. A neon slogan on a power station by the Moscow River used to proclaim, quoting Lenin,<sup>4</sup> that “Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country.” The electrification of this vast territory had indeed been a huge achievement. But the most significant achievement of communism was to bankrupt a country with by far the world’s largest stock of natural resources and, most importantly, a country with exceptional human resources and talent—in all areas of science and technology, in culture and the arts.

On my first visit to the Soviet Union in 1961, I stood on Gorky Street to watch the triumphal return of the second cosmonaut, German Titov. I admired Moscow’s historic and grandiose architecture and exploited its fine public transport system. I also queued for the most basic foodstuffs; observed people who almost universally were poorly clothed and badly fed; and peered into communal housing and ramshackle hovels where families lived, often three generations to a room. In the villages outside, living standards were even lower. It did not take an economist to see that the command economy wasn’t working. When I returned in the 1970s and 1980s, there were marginal improvements, particularly in housing, but Russia’s living standards had fallen even further behind the developed world. The USSR’s civilian needs were being sacrificed to the gargantuan demands of its military machine.

Gorbachev was the only Soviet leader to tell his people the truth about the economy: their socialist state was not catching up with the West. As more Western images seeped into the country, the message was reinforced in unexpected ways. A live TV debate screened with a British independent channel featured advertisements for succulent meat and gravy marketed as dog food; a Soviet film intended to highlight Western decadence showed a Russian girl, lured into prostitution in Sweden, driving in a smart car to a supermarket laden with goods unseen in her own country. These small insights had a riveting effect.

Gorbachev’s initial approach was to try to modernize and “accelerate” the command economy, rather than to attempt radical restruc-

turing: "For some time we indeed hoped to overcome stagnation by relying on such 'advantages of Socialism' as planned mobilisation of reserve capacities, organisational work, and evoking conscientiousness and a more active attitude from the workers."<sup>5</sup> He then tinkered at the edges with small experiments in private enterprise, such as "cooperative" restaurants. As a lifelong socialist, however, he could not bring himself to make the big leap into private property and market economics advocated by his more liberal advisers. His critics complained that he was trying to cross an abyss in small steps.

Democratization became the second dimension of Gorbachev's struggle. From the outset he had encouraged greater openness through *glasnost*. The resistance that Gorbachev encountered to economic reforms, however, convinced him of the need for more fundamental changes to dismantle the top-down command system. He came to recognize that economic, political and constitutional reforms were inseparably linked.<sup>6</sup>

In the summer and autumn of 1988 Gorbachev fought his way through the 19<sup>th</sup> CPSU Conference and past heavy opposition from the Party's old guard to secure agreement for a reconstructed Supreme Soviet, to be chosen by an elected Congress of People's Deputies.

In 1989 Gorbachev's experiment with democracy was put into operation. Beginning with the selection of candidates for the Congress of People's Deputies in January, moving into elections in March and April, and sessions of the Congress of People's Deputies and the reformed Supreme Soviet from May to December, the experiment ran through the year and effectively beyond the President's control, breaching (although not yet breaking) the Communist Party's monopoly of power.

As with his economic reforms, Gorbachev was not able to make the final leap. He had alienated much of the Communist Party, from which some of his key advisers were departing. He had allowed Boris Yeltsin back into the political arena, making the running with non-communists such as Andrei Sakharov (until his death in December 1989). But the Party was still Gorbachev's political base, and he dared not leave or demolish it: "I can't let this lousy, rabid dog off the leash. If I do that, all this huge structure will be turned against me."<sup>7</sup>

The third dimension of internal change was what used to be called “the nationalities question.” The coexistence within one country of over a hundred national and ethnic groups had theoretically been resolved with the establishment of the Soviet Union in 1922 as a purportedly federal state, enlarged in 1939 with the annexation of the three Baltic states. Stalin had used extreme force to suppress dissenting national groups, including forced deportations. From the West, it was hard to assess the extent of ethnic tensions within the USSR, not least because 90% of Soviet territory was off limits to foreigners and visits to the other 10% were tightly controlled by the organs of security. We were aware of the deep longing of the Balts for the return of their freedom, but the superficial appearance was that the other nationalities incorporated for far longer in the Soviet and Russian empires had settled for their lot and in some cases were benefiting from it. That said, I recall a perceptive analysis written in the late 1970s by an expert in the Foreign Office’s Research Department<sup>8</sup> which argued that the nationalities question could boil over if the Stalinist lid was ever lifted off the saucepan.

Starting in 1987, steam was escaping from the saucepan. Protests grew in the Baltic states, Ukraine and Georgia, and conflict between Armenians and Azeris erupted in Nagorno-Karabakh in February 1988. By the end of 1988, Popular Front movements had been established in each of the Baltic republics, and a campaign for independence was also under way in Georgia. In April 1989 Soviet troops, acting in panic and under local command, killed two dozen unarmed demonstrators in the Georgian capital. Early that year, Rukh, which was to develop as an independence movement, was founded in Ukraine.

Gorbachev was slow to appreciate the risk of nationalist unrest. He sought to conciliate the nationalities, not coerce them. Anatoly Chernyaev has recorded Gorbachev’s (remarkable) conclusions following a Politburo discussion of the Baltic states in May 1989: “we have to learn to communicate with them ... If we hold a referendum, not one of the three republics, even Lithuania, will walk out. What we need to do is bring Popular Front leaders into government, give them positions in the administration ... in general we must keep thinking how to transform our federation or else everything will really fall apart ... Use of force is out of the question.”<sup>9</sup>

In September Gorbachev told Thatcher that a Plenum of the CPSU had decided to “create mechanisms...to remove tensions from inter-ethnic relations without interfering with the basic interests of individuals, nationalities, and society in the economic, cultural and other spheres. Otherwise inter-ethnic tensions could bury *perestroika*.”<sup>10</sup>

Once again, the processes he had facilitated ran beyond Gorbachev’s ability to direct them. In regional elections in 1990, the CPSU lost control of six Union Republics—the three Baltic republics, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. Lithuania and Estonia declared independence in March and Latvia in May. All six republics boycotted the referendum of March 1991 to approve Gorbachev’s new Union Treaty, designed to consolidate the Soviet Union as a looser, voluntary federation. By September, after the failed coup in Moscow, the Baltic states had achieved internationally recognized independence and membership in the UN; and in December a referendum in Ukraine produced a majority for independence in every region, including Crimea. The pot had boiled over. Nationalist movements had buried not just *perestroika*, but the Soviet Union.

The developments on the USSR’s periphery that we were observing from Moscow from 1989 were a no less dramatic fourth dimension.

The year began—optimistically—with the end of the Soviet Union’s ill-fated military involvement in Afghanistan (although President Najibullah’s Soviet-backed regime hung on until April 1992, outliving the USSR). General Gromov led the last troops out on February 15, 1989. Gorbachev (as we have since learned) had resisted pressure to deploy a fresh brigade in January, and then to mount air strikes in March, in breach of the 1988 Geneva accords. Chernyaev records him as arguing that “I won’t permit anyone to trample the promise we made in front of the whole world.”<sup>11</sup>

The invasion of Afghanistan had been recognized as a strategic error. The view from Moscow towards Central and Eastern Europe was different. These were countries integrated militarily and economically into the Soviet bloc. Soviet control was expensive to maintain, but seen as vital to strategic defence. We had watched Soviet tanks crush Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Nonetheless, in his speech to the UN of December 1988, Gorbachev announced that the USSR would withdraw six armored divisions from the GDR, Czechoslovakia and Hungary by 1991. He stressed freedom of choice and refraining from the use of force in international affairs. Both his message and his rhetoric differed sharply from Soviet orthodoxy, and were rightly acclaimed.

Three months later Gorbachev set out the principles of relations with socialist countries as “unconditional independence, full equality, strict non-interference in internal affairs, and rectification of deformities and mistakes linked with earlier periods in the history of socialism.”<sup>12</sup> For all his fine words, we assumed that, whatever licence they were given in their internal affairs, the East Europeans would have to remain within the constraints of the Warsaw Treaty; and that the Soviet Union would retain its large military presence in the GDR and a tight grip on that country. I do not think that any of us in the Embassy would have conceived in December 1988 that within twelve months the Soviet leadership would have allowed Communist regimes to collapse throughout the Warsaw Pact area, the Berlin Wall to be breached and the Iron Curtain to be eroded.

Gorbachev’s refusal to licence the use of force will stand eternally to his credit. It allowed new post-Communist leaders such as Lech Wałęsa in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia to assume power peacefully and democratically. A small vignette: in early 1990, Havel visited Moscow as the new President of Czechoslovakia. The political counsellor at the Czechoslovak Embassy came to me in a panic to ask if the British could provide contact details for the reformers and ex-dissidents whom Havel was asking to meet. He also sought a crash course on how to report on the policies and internal affairs of the Soviet Union—previously off limits for Warsaw Pact diplomats.

## **The End of the Cold War—and of the Soviet Union**

When Gorbachev came to power in 1985, there were few expectations in the West that he would make dramatic changes to the Soviet system<sup>13</sup> or the USSR’s foreign policy. Fears were expressed that, by revitalizing the Soviet economy, he would make the Soviet Union a stronger opponent.

From 1987, this initial caution was progressively replaced in Western Europe by a desire to work with Gorbachev, notably on the part of Margaret Thatcher and Helmut Kohl. The caution was reciprocated on the Soviet side. Politicians, officials and generals in both East and West were putting out feelers, but struggled to move beyond deeply ingrained suspicions and the fear of being tricked.<sup>14</sup> Chernyaev records that as late as Gorbachev's meeting with Thatcher in April 1989 he was striving to convince a skeptical Gorbachev that "Thatcher was genuinely well-meaning toward us" and helping *perestroika*, notwithstanding years of hostility between the UK and the USSR.<sup>15</sup>

Ronald Reagan had followed a similar course, reviving détente and arms control negotiations through five summit meetings with Gorbachev between 1985 and 1988; but the U.S./Soviet relationship went cold when George H. W. Bush succeeded Reagan in January 1989. Bush's closest advisers had reverted to the idea that Gorbachev was potentially more dangerous than his predecessors and persuaded the President to hold off meeting Gorbachev while the U.S. administration reassessed its policy. Bush changed his view in mid-year and met Gorbachev on a ship off Malta in December 1989, less than one month after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Gorbachev told Bush that the USSR was ready to cease considering the United States as an enemy; Bush assured Gorbachev of his support for *perestroika* and readiness to give concrete assistance.

This effectively brought Bush into line with the Western Europeans. The West would support Gorbachev. So long as he could maintain his position and hold off his hard-line opponents, the Cold War was over. A great deal of work remained to be done to implement this fundamental realignment of relations and, especially, to resolve the status of Germany and its relationship to NATO; but, by September 1990, the Two Plus Four Treaty had been signed, leading to the reunification of Germany on October 3, 1990. The six remaining Warsaw Pact states declared the end of their alliance in February 1991, and it was formally dissolved on July 1. The final chapter saw the discrediting of the Communist Party and the KGB in the failed coup of August 1991, the supplanting of Gorbachev by Yeltsin from his power base as President of the Russian Republic, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December.



My account has focused heavily on Gorbachev and events within the Soviet Union because the ending of the Cold War was a by-product rather than the central purpose of the upheaval in the USSR. The Cold War ended because of the unravelling of a system, an ideology and an empire. The West claimed “victory” (President George H. W. Bush declared, “It’s a victory for the moral force of our values. Every American can take pride in this victory”<sup>16</sup>), but it was the peoples of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact countries who ended the Cold War by overthrowing Communism. That the Cold War ended when it did, and how it did, was due, not to Ronald Reagan, but to Mikhail Gorbachev, and to the legacy of the failing system which he inherited and tried to reform.

Gorbachev knew that the Soviet Union needed relief from the pressure of the superpower competition with the United States. He knew that it was becoming harder to sustain both the USSR’s dominance of Eastern Europe, especially with Poland and the GDR becoming deeply indebted to Western lenders, and the Soviet ability to project power globally and subsidize allies such as Cuba. He therefore worked to achieve a more harmonious relationship with the West and to reduce armament levels, but by reinvigorating the economy he aspired to maintain the Soviet Union’s status as a Great Power with a socialist model of development, protecting its zone of influence as the head of an alliance of neighbors. Had he achieved his vision of a “Common European Home,” I believe it would have been on a basis of peaceful coexistence rather than full integration.

### **The Aftermath: Russia and the “West” Since 1991— Is the Cold War Really Over?**

There is a myth, assiduously propagated and widely believed in Russia, that the West plotted the breakup of the Soviet Union, and then set out to humiliate, weaken and even dismember the Russian Federation through the 1990s and beyond.

Vladimir Putin has given voice to this sense of victimhood on many occasions, in progressively more direct terms, even to the extent of comparing the West to Hitler. In 2004 he complained that “It is far

from everyone in the world that wants to have to deal with an independent, strong and self-reliant Russia.”<sup>17</sup> By 2007 he was claiming that

Some, making skilful use of pseudo-democratic rhetoric, would like to return us to the recent past, some in order once again to plunder the nation’s resources, and others in order to deprive our country of its economic and political independence. There has been an increasing influx of money from abroad being used to intervene directly in our internal affairs ... Some are not above using the dirtiest techniques, attempting to ignite inter-ethnic and inter-religious hatred in our multiethnic and democratic country.<sup>18</sup>

Announcing the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, Putin said that: “the infamous policy of containment, led in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, continues today. They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner.” When the USSR had broken up, Russia “was not simply robbed, it was plundered.”<sup>19</sup>

In December of the same year, speaking of the 1990s and early 2000s, Putin declared that:

the support for separatism in Russia from across the pond, including information, political and financial support provided by the special services, was absolutely obvious and left no doubt that they would gladly let Russia follow the Yugoslav scenario of disintegration and dismemberment ... It didn’t work ... Just as it did not work for Hitler ... who set out to destroy Russia and push us back beyond the Urals.<sup>20</sup>

He later accused the West of controlling a whole series of “color revolutions:” “the real masterminds were our American friends. They helped train the nationalists, their armed groups, in Western Ukraine, in Poland and to some extent in Lithuania. They facilitated the armed coup.”<sup>21</sup>

It was after the 2004 Beslan massacre, shockingly mishandled by Russian security forces, that Putin (and his adviser Vladislav Surkov) first made the ludicrous accusation that the West was supporting Chechen terrorism. It has been repeated by Putin’s close associate and former colleague from the Leningrad KGB, General Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, who claimed that in Chechnya, “extremists and their adherents were supported by the US

and British intelligence services, as well as allies in Europe and the Islamic world.”<sup>22</sup> In the same interview, Patrushev asserted that the Soviet collapse had been the result of a plot by Zbigniew Brzezinski to undermine the economy and dismember Russia. In a press conference of December 2014 Putin declared: “After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia opened itself to our partners. What did we see? A direct and fully-fledged support of terrorism in the North Caucasus. They directly supported terrorism ... this is an established fact.”<sup>23</sup>

From a different angle, Russian liberals and some Western commentators have argued that the 1990s were a “lost opportunity for institutionalising cooperation” and that the chance should have been kept open for Russia to join the European Union and possibly also NATO.<sup>24</sup>

Did the West seek to precipitate and exploit the breakup of the Soviet Union? Did we try to sweep Russia into a corner?

My impression was the opposite. The overriding preoccupation of Western policy from 1989 onwards was to support (but not try to direct) a peaceful transition and minimize the huge potential risks to European and international stability from the Soviet collapse.

This was an argument used by Margaret Thatcher against the reunification of Germany when meeting Gorbachev in September 1989: “We do not want the unification of Germany. It would lead to changes in the post-war borders, and we cannot allow that because such a development would undermine the stability of the entire international situation and could lead to threats to our security. We are not interested in the destabilization of Eastern Europe or the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty either.”

Nor would we interfere in internal processes in Eastern Europe and spur decommunization. She added that President Bush had asked her to tell Gorbachev that “the United States would not undertake anything that could threaten the security interests of the Soviet Union, or that could be perceived by Soviet society as a threat.”<sup>25</sup> Concern about the risks to stability led President Bush, like Margaret Thatcher, to support Gorbachev’s proposed Union Treaty, providing for a decentralized federation combining “greater autonomy with greater voluntary inter-

action,” in his much-criticised speech to the Ukrainian parliament on August 1, 1991.<sup>26</sup>

The Soviet collapse presented the West with a formidable list of headaches and challenges. First among them was to ensure that the USSR’s vast arsenal, including some 35,000 nuclear weapons as well as stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons, remained under secure control, and that Soviet adherence to arms limitation and non-proliferation agreements was maintained. This was a prime reason for accepting the Russian Federation as the legal successor state to the USSR and for transferring the USSR’s seat at the UN and Permanent Membership of the UN Security Council directly to Russia (whereas the other new states emerging from the Union, except for Ukraine and Belarus, were required to apply for membership). Negotiations then took place to arrange the transfer of nuclear weapons to Russia from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus, culminating in the Budapest Memorandum of December 1994 in which security guarantees were given to these three states by Russia, the United States and the UK. The United States provided practical and financial assistance in the dismantling of stockpiles under the Cooperative Threat Reduction Act (better known as the Nunn-Lugar program) which widened into a multinational initiative under the G7, and which lasted until 2015. By 1997 the United States had sent 33,000 fissile material containers to Russia. The G7 program contributed around a billion dollars to the construction of a plant in the Urals to decommission chemical weapon agents.

Control of weaponry, however, was only one element of a daunting agenda confronting Western policy-makers as the Soviet Union dissolved. Russia was reeling from the loss of nearly half of the USSR’s population. The Russian economy was in deep distress as shock therapy was applied to make the transfer from socialism to the market. In 1992 inflation in Russia reached an annual rate of 2,300%. Fourteen other new states, with a combined 140 million people, had emerged as independent, self-governing entities—with no preparation, ill-defined borders, interdependent economies and security arrangements, mixed populations, and (with the exception of the Baltic states) little recent history of nationhood. There were fears of regional conflict and mass migration across the European continent. In Central and Eastern Europe, six former members of the Warsaw Pact and CMEA comprising 110 million people, with a stronger history of nationhood, were strug-

gling to convert and develop their economies and establish sustainable democracies. While their transformation was remarkably peaceful, in the former Yugoslavia Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia were at war for the first half of the decade. Coping with war in the Balkans became the top priority for European governments and NATO, diluting their attention to developments to the East.

The resources of Western governments, the EU, NATO, the UN (especially in Bosnia) and other multinational organizations were stretched to the utmost. As the head of the Foreign Office department dealing with the former Soviet Union, I was constantly asked to submit briefings on different possible scenarios. Our most optimistic projection was that somehow the region would “muddle through” without a major catastrophe. I recall the Director for Defence and Intelligence looking at one of my papers and saying that the only answer was to get under the bedcovers with a bottle of whisky.

As it turned out, the former Soviet empire did better than to muddle through the aftermath of the Cold War. However imperfect and variable the process and the results, all of these states began to function, and—except in the former Yugoslavia—with very low levels of conflict. The primary actors were the peoples of the countries themselves, but very substantial help was given from outside—by the EU, the IMF, the IBRD, the EBRD, and national governments, including through technical assistance programs. As late as 2003, my own government was spending around £50 million a year on technical assistance programs in Russia ranging from educational reform, regional administration, agricultural development, combating HIV/AIDs and tuberculosis to the retraining of military officers for civilian life (under the latter program we assisted some twenty thousand officers to find new careers).

None of this—and a thousand more examples could be quoted, especially of the efforts made by Western companies to build cooperation and investment in Russia—supports the narrative that the West’s objective was to weaken, undermine and isolate Russia. Russian attitudes to Western help were ambivalent. As the progeny of a Great Power, the Russian people did not want to be in receipt of charity or to be patronized, but in every sector they were keen to form partnerships and to absorb modern practices previously denied to them. They were eager to attract foreign investment: in Putin’s words, “Russia is extremely

interested in a major inflow of private, including foreign, investment. This is our strategic choice and strategic approach.”<sup>27</sup>

Some have argued that the West should have done yet more to help Russia (for example, that the inherited Soviet debts should have been wiped off the slate), but that is a different point.

What about the argument that we could and should have gone further to integrate Russia into Western structures in the 1990s? This was not a question of will so much as one of feasibility.

The Group of Seven (G7), being not an organization but a club with an annual meeting, had the flexibility to start inviting, first Gorbachev (to the 1991 London Summit) and then Yeltsin to sessions tacked onto its meetings. Putin pressed for full membership, although Russia was not one of the world’s eight largest economies; it was granted when Washington wished to reward him for support over Afghanistan after 9/11.

The European Union, as an organization tightly defined by treaty and its “acquis,” had less flexibility. It was able, with some difficulty then and now, to incorporate former members of Comecon because of their size (Poland being the largest, at 38 million), because their economies could be turned around fairly rapidly with substantial EU help, because they established acceptable standards of democracy and the rule of law (from which there has been some backsliding), and because they were keen to accept the conditions of membership. None of these factors applied to Russia. Russia has never sought EU membership. It is inconceivable that Russia would buy into the acquis or accept subordination to qualified majority voting even if it reached the point of meeting the economic and democratic criteria for membership. The EU therefore adopted the approach of seeking to build cooperation with Russia progressively in as many areas as possible (articulated, for example, in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1997 and the “Road Maps for the Four Common Spaces” of 2005), against the declared and ambitious objective of trying to create a strategic partnership.<sup>28</sup> Until Russia and the EU found themselves in conflict over Ukraine, the Russian government did not treat the enlargement of the EU as hostile or threatening to its interests. In 2004, Putin spoke positively of the accession to the EU of the three Baltic states and four former Warsaw Pact members (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic

and Slovakia): “The expansion of the European Union should not just bring us closer geographically, but also economically and spiritually ... This means new markets and new investment. Generally it means new possibilities for the future of Greater Europe.”<sup>29</sup>

Much ink has been expended on the question of who said what to whom about the future of NATO in the frantic times leading up to the end of the Soviet Union. These semantic debates seem to me to miss the three central points.

First, Russia has never asked to join NATO or shown any serious desire to do so;<sup>30</sup> is not within sight of meeting the criteria; could not, hypothetically, adapt its armed forces to the requirements of the Alliance within decades; and would not accept the pooling of sovereignty and subordination to NATO command, but would insist on the power of veto over NATO decisions.

Second, far from seeking to provoke, “encircle” or threaten Russia, NATO sought to implement enlargement in a cautious and deliberate way which would not destabilize relations with Russia. A twin-track policy was adopted of developing closer relations between NATO and Russia in parallel with preparing to admit applicant states which manifestly met NATO’s criteria. A critical step was the Russia-NATO Founding Act, signed by President Yeltsin in Paris on May 27, 1997 on the explicit understanding that NATO was on the path to enlargement. As Yeltsin explained to the Russian people, “Any split is a threat to everybody, and that is why we opted for talks with NATO. The task was to minimize the negative consequences of the North Atlantic alliance’s expansion and prevent a new split in Europe... We trust each other more and have begun to get to know each other really well ... there will be a new peaceful Europe, not divided into blocs.”<sup>31</sup> This cleared the way for the eventual accession to NATO in 1999 of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland—eight years after they had applied.

The Russians froze their relationship with NATO in response to the bombing of Belgrade in 1999, but it was then unfrozen less than a year later by Vladimir Putin, one of whose first decisions as acting President was to invite NATO Secretary General George Robertson to Moscow. The twin-track approach resumed.

In 2002, NATO upgraded the NATO-Russia Council at a summit with Putin in Rome. Like Yeltsin before him, Putin then publicly acquiesced in the further enlargement of NATO (to include the three Baltic states and Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia), notwithstanding the objections of his generals.<sup>32</sup> Where NATO went wrong was at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, when the George W. Bush administration sought to put Ukraine and Georgia on the path to membership—neither country being in a condition to join, no consensus within the Alliance, and with the certainty of triggering a violent Russian reaction. While Chancellor Merkel succeeded in blocking this outcome, a compromise communique was adopted which faced, absurdly, in two opposing directions and placed incendiary matter in the hands of Russian hard-liners.

The third, and most fundamental, point is that what separates Russia from “the West” is not NATO, *per se*, but irreconcilable views of the sovereignty of the states now on Russia’s periphery and formerly within the Russian and Soviet empires. To the West, the sovereignty of these member states of the United Nations is paramount. They must be free to determine their own affiliations without threat or coercion, and Russia should respect its formal pledges in numerous international agreements to respect their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Russian view is that these countries (above all Ukraine and Belarus) have been closely linked to Russia historically and through myriad personal and economic connections, form Russia’s security perimeter, must be recognized as within Russia’s sphere of strategic interests<sup>33</sup> or “zone of influence,” and not be permitted to form affiliations deemed to be contrary to Russia’s interests. Russia claims the former Soviet Union as its “Near Abroad,” as part of its value system, and as the home to Russian “compatriots,” who (like expatriates of many countries) have chosen not to return to the motherland but over whom the motherland still asserts rights and responsibilities. In the Russian view, these countries enjoy limited rather than complete sovereignty.<sup>34</sup>

The expansion of NATO is a proxy for the sovereignty dispute. It is this which has led to Russia’s deepening confrontation with the United States and the leading actors of Western Europe since the Orange Revolution in Ukraine of 2005, the Bucharest Summit and Georgian war of 2008, and especially since the ouster of Viktor Yanukovich, the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s intrusion into eastern Ukraine five years ago. It is a confrontation which would have arisen, sooner or later, with



or without the enlargement of NATO; which long antedates the present Kremlin regime; which is underpinned by Russia's self-image as a "Great Power" with satellites; and which no longer requires the physical occupation of territory. It has been well described by Keir Giles:

Russia is content to exert control remotely, including organising state capture without any military intervention at all. This attitude is related to the permanent and persistent belief throughout history that Russia's land borders present a critical vulnerability and that, in order to protect itself, Russia must exert control far beyond them ... Russia demands a veto over security arrangements within its self-declared sphere of influence.<sup>35</sup>

It is misleading to label this a "new Cold War." The present situation differs in so many respects: it is not a war between ideologies; it is not a bipolar global struggle between two superpowers; Russia is not threatening to expand into Central and Western Europe; the Russian Federation is not the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, we are dealing with the *legacy* of the Cold War. Russia hankers after a variant on the Yalta and Potsdam understandings under which, during the Cold War, the West *de facto* accepted Soviet control of the territories behind the Iron Curtain. Behavior and attitudes in the current confrontation have inevitably been influenced by Cold War DNA. Most of the leading figures in Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, and many of their Western counterparts, were in their late twenties or thirties when the Soviet Union collapsed (Putin was 37 when the Berlin Wall was breached, serving far from *perestroika* and *glasnost* in Dresden). They had been born and brought up, and their outlook formed, in the Cold War (which is not to say that they all—or we, for I am of this generation—remained life-long Cold Warriors). Not only the mentality but also some of the structures and doctrines of the Cold War remain, adapted to a greater or lesser degree: the Russian General Staff, the GRU, the successor organisations to the KGB, and (necessarily) elements of NATO. The Cold War embedded in both East and West an "enemy image" which has yet to be dispelled, and which leads to mutual paranoia.

I witnessed a cameo of this paranoia in 2003. Vladimir Putin's state visit to the UK, the first by a Russian leader for a century and a half, marked a high spot in the warm relationship which had developed be-

tween the Putin and Blair administrations. At around the same time, a British court of law rejected a patently unsound Russian request for the extradition of a Chechen political representative (and former theatre director), Akhmed Zakayev—a man who the Russians themselves had previously declared not to have “blood on his hands.” Shortly afterwards, the British government had no choice, on judicial grounds, but to grant asylum to Putin’s critic, Boris Berezovsky. The Russian government demanded the return of Zakayev and Berezovsky. I was told that they could not understand why Mr Blair’s government had taken these hostile “political” decisions. My efforts to explain that, in the UK, the government did not control the courts cut no ice with the Kremlin. I suspect that the Russian intelligence agencies were telling Putin that his friend Blair (for whatever reason) had betrayed and humiliated him. General Patrushev, then the head of the FSB, told me bluntly that, if we did not send Zakayev and Berezovsky back, we could expect “reciprocal measures.”

These duly arrived in the form of raids on the offices in Moscow and other cities of the British Council by leather-jacketed security agents, who stole computers and detained and interrogated staff. The British Council ran libraries and cultural and educational programs in fifteen centers across Russia, as an important part of our policy of building closer relations, and greatly to the benefit of the Russians. It was an entirely open organization, employing mainly Russian nationals; but the KGB and its successor, the FSB, had always been hostile to the Council, presumably seeing the spreading of enlightenment and Western values as subversive. The paranoid reaction to a false analysis of legal decisions in the UK—a knee-jerk from the Cold War—did material damage to Russia, and began a downward spiral in relations with the UK which has continued to this day (notably with acts of murder and attempted assassination carried out on British soil).

To conclude, for about seventeen years, from 1987 to 2004, Russia and the West were on broadly convergent courses. There were disagreements and points of serious tension (notably the wars in former Yugoslavia and Chechnya in the 1990s), but significant progress appeared to have been made towards the erasure of the dividing lines in Europe and in Russia’s closer association with Western organizations, reaching a high point when Russia became a full member of the G-8 in 2002. Russia’s attitude to integration, however, was ambivalent. It

wished to have a seat at all the top tables, but even more strongly aspired to act as an independent Great Power with a cluster of subservient neighbors, not constrained by international law or the rules of any club it might have joined. On this, the post-Cold-War integration foundered.

Vladislav Surkov (perhaps seeking to provoke, as is his wont) has described this as “the conclusion of Russia’s epic journey towards the West, the ending of numerous fruitless attempts to become part of Western civilisation, to inter-marry with the ‘good family’ of European nations” and the precursor to “100 years of geopolitical solitude.”<sup>36</sup>

Many in Russia would share this pessimistic view, though I do not. I doubt if recent history would have been greatly different under any other likely successor to Boris Yeltsin. Putin’s strength has rested in large part on his ability to reflect and enhance the perceptions of his countrymen about Russia’s identity and place in the world.

Russian history has followed a cyclical pattern, with periods of Westernization and emulation of Europe alternating with introverted, socially and spiritually conservative nationalism.<sup>37</sup> At some point, though perhaps not for another decade, the present cycle of xenophobic nationalism and alienation from the West will be subsumed by a renewed desire to modernize. Russia will enter a new phase of development. The Cold War generation will have gone. New leaders will need to plot Russia’s course—as a huge country which wishes to be an independent power, but with a diminishing population and a backward economy, overshadowed by a much more powerful and assertive neighbor in China. NATO does not encircle Russia; but under the slogan of One Belt, One Road, China is investing heavily in countries on Russia’s periphery, from Central Asia all the way around to Belarus. This will pose some awkward choices for Russia’s future leaders. The perception of the West as an enemy, seemingly interred by the events of 1989 to 1991 but resurrected by the Putin administration, may well change.

## Notes

1. Published in Russian by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milan 1967, and in English, entitled *Into the Whirlwind* by Collins/Harvill, London 1967.

2. Vladlen Dozortsev was taken by his mother as a child to Riga, following the arrest of his father, a Party member, in a Stalinist purge. He became a successful playwright and a liberal supporter of Latvian independence, joining the Latvian Popular Front on its first day and becoming an influential member of its governing board and a member of the post-Independence parliament. As an ethnic Russian, he then found himself classified as a non-citizen and joined the People's Harmony faction, lobbying for the rights of non-citizens long resident in Latvia.

3. The policy overstretch was well illustrated by Chernyaev's observation that: "Even in the most dramatic moments, even in the period of German reunification, [foreign policy] took up only five or six percent of the considerations of Gorbachev and the Politburo, of their time and their nerves." Quoted in William Taubman, *Gorbachev: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017), pp. 465-466.

4. VI Lenin, *New Internal and External Position and the Problems of the Party*, 1920.

5. Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), p. 217.

6. As Gorbachev explained to Margaret Thatcher in their meeting in Moscow on September 23, 1989, "How can you reform both the economy and politics without democratizing society, without *glasnost*, which incorporates individuals into an active socio-political life?" National Security Archive/Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation.

7. Gorbachev to Chernyaev, 11 June 1990. Quoted in William Taubman, op. cit. p. 519.

8. Martin Nicholson, later to serve as Minister-Counsellor at the British Embassy in Moscow.

9. Anatoly Chernyaev, foreign policy adviser to Gorbachev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, English edition (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2000), p. 227.

10. National Security Archive/Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation.

11. Chernyaev, op. cit., p. 208.

12. Quoted in Odd Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (London: Allen Lane, 2017) p. 586.

13. *New York Times* editorial, March 13, 1985: “Continuity, caution and consensus characterize a system revolutionary in doctrine but deeply conservative in practice. Whatever his ambitions, Mr. Gorbachev is unlikely soon to make waves.” *The Times* (London), March 12, 1985: “It will take years for a shake-up in party organisation to have any real effect, to judge by President Andropov’s failures. The Gromyko-Ponomarev line in foreign policy will continue at Geneva and other East-West negotiations.”

14. One example of this suspicion was a story fed to Gorbachev by the KGB and apparently believed by him that a special CIA group had been set up to discredit him. See Taubman, *op. cit.*, pp. 470 and 474.

15. Chernyaev, *op. cit.*, pp. 221-2; and Chernyaev’s diaries, 1972-91, published as *Sovmestniy Iskhod* by ROSSPEN, Moscow, 2008, pp.788-9.

16. Television broadcast by President Bush, December 25, 1991.

17. President Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly, May 26, 2004.

18. President Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly, April 26, 2007.

19. Address in the Kremlin by President Putin, March 18, 2014.

20. President Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly, December 4, 2014.

21. TV documentary on Crimea broadcast on the “Rossiya” channel, March 14, 2015.

22. *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, October 15, 2014.

23. Press conference, December 18, 2014.

24. See Westad, *op. cit.*, pp. 618 and 623.

25. National Security Archive/Archive of the Gorbachev Foundation.

26. <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/3267>

27. President Putin’s Address to the Federal Assembly, April 25, 2005.

28. The EU’s Common Strategy on Russia, 1999, looked towards “Russia’s return to its rightful place in the European family in a spirit of friendship, cooperation, fair accommodation of interests and on the foundations of shared values.”

29. Annual address to the Federal Assembly, May 26, 2004.

30. Yeltsin played around with the idea in conversation, but also acknowledged to Vice President Gore that Russia was too big to join NATO. See Timothy J. Colton, “*Yeltsin: A Life*” (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 269.

31. Boris Yeltsin, radio address, May 29, 1997. Quoted in Leon Aron, *Boris Yeltsin: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 667.

32. At a joint press conference with the NATO Secretary General in Brussels on November 11, 2002, Putin said that, if cooperation continued to develop and NATO continued to transform in a way that corresponded with Russia's security interests, Russia could consider "a broader participation in that work." He hoped that enlargement would not undermine the military stability and security in the common European space.

33. President Putin: "we see the CIS area as the sphere of our strategic interests." Address to the Federal Assembly, May 16, 2003.

34. To justify Russia's conflict with Georgia in 2008, Defense Minister Serdyukov said that Georgia was part of Russia's "zone of influence" while Foreign Minister Lavrov spoke of Russia's "historically conditioned mutually privileged relations" with its ex-Soviet neighbors.

35. Keir Giles, "Moscow Rules," Chatham House and Brookings 2019, p. 26.

36. *Russia in Global Affairs*, April 2018.

37. Well analyzed by Professor Iver B. Neumann in "Russia's Europe, 1991-2016: inferiority to superiority," *International Affairs*, Chatham House, Vol. 92, No. 6, November 2016.