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CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA IN AMERICA'S WORLD: RUSSIAN NARRATIVES ON  
POST-SOVIET SPACE

by

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Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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Approved by:

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## ABSTRACT

### CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA IN AMERICA'S WORLD: RUSSIAN NARRATIVES ON POST-SOVIET SPACE

Marianna Portniagina  
Old Dominion University, 2018  
Director: Dr. Austin Jersild

This study analyzes Russian perceptions and narratives of the post-Cold War international order, with attention to both Russia's role in this order and to Russia's perceived special mission in post-Soviet space, or what is often referred to as the 'near abroad.' Although Russia's visions of the world and post-Soviet space were constructed, to some extent, during the Soviet era, this study shows that the experience of the US-led world order has had a great impact on contemporary Russian discourse. America often misunderstands the factors that motivate and inspire contemporary Russia, in part because the end of the Cold War resulted in a decline in the effort to study and understand the region. This research, by closely examining concepts and issues such as the 'Russian world,' Eurasian integration, NATO enlargement, Ukraine, and others, will explain the direction in which Russia's policy in post-Soviet space will develop in the near future.

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## NOMENCLATURE

<i>BRICS</i>	An association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
<i>CIS</i>	Commonwealth of Independent States
<i>CSTO</i>	Collective Security Treaty Organization
<i>EEU</i>	Eurasian Economic Union
<i>NATO</i>	North-Atlantic Treaty Organization
<i>USSR</i>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there have been policy discussions in the United States driven by concerns that Russia poses a real risk to regional and global security.<sup>1</sup> According to numerous Western observers, Russia has been falling into “old habits” and implementing a hegemonic policy in the post-Soviet space.<sup>2</sup> With Russia’s actions in Georgia in 2008 and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, American expertise and media outlets have been actively covering the narrative of Russia as “an autocratic, abusive, and revisionist power.”<sup>3</sup> There also has been a great deal of interest in Russia’s confrontation with the West as the illustration of the revival of the Cold War. However, this definition along with others that describe Russia’s behavior as excessively militaristic and hegemonic seems to refer to the Soviet Union to explain Russia’s current domestic and foreign policy strategies.

Due to the lack of consistent study of Russia in the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s, the United States faces the problem of understanding and perception of Russia’s actions in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the American establishment and academia’s interest in studying Russia fell significantly. The United States did not have a “Marshall Plan” for Russia in the 1990s as it had for Europe after 1945. The United States lost interest in Russia and the post-Soviet region, especially compared to the Cold War era. This, in turn, created a

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); Robert Legvold, H-Diplo/International Security Studies Forum 9, no.12 (2017): 1026. Retrieved from <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSFRoundtable-9-12.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Lauren Goodrich, “Russia Falls Into Old Habits,” *Stratfor*, October 25, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/russia-falls-old-habits> (accessed February 18, 2018); Jeanne L. Wilson, “The Russian Pursuit of Regional Hegemony,” *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no.1 (February 2017): 7-25.

<sup>3</sup> Andrei Tsygankov, “The dark double: The American media perception of Russia as a neo-Soviet autocracy 2008-2014,” *Politics* 37, 1 (2016): 19.

generational gap in understanding contemporary Russia as a nation with its own legitimate interests that developed in its own way after the breakup of the Soviet Union. In the United States, Russia is viewed as the country which defeated the Cold War; however, Russians believe that the Soviet Union did not lose the war, but “pulled out before it was over.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, there are misunderstandings and misperceptions of the end of the Cold War between the two countries which had seriously affected American policies toward Russia. The US perception of Russia as a defeated country along with the loss of interest in the region resulted in American inability to project the development of post-Soviet Russia and to understand Russian vision of the international order and its position in the region.

As Andrei Tsygankov, Professor at San Francisco State University, aptly puts it, “Struggling to understand the country’s transition from the USSR, the US media commonly describes Russia in terms of fitting within its old pattern. Media frequently assess contemporary Russian politics not on the scale of how far it has gotten away from the Soviet Union, but, rather, how much Russia became a Soviet-like ‘one-party state’ driven by a ‘KGB mentality’ and dependent on the use of propaganda, ‘Cold War rhetoric’, and repression against internal opposition in order to consolidate state power.”<sup>5</sup>

The representation of Russia as a “neo-Soviet autocracy,” which is often personified by Vladimir Putin (as it was done with Joseph Stalin during the Soviet Union), replaces a deeper analysis of Russia’s behavior in the region and its perceptions and, thus, can hardly be an effective tool for understanding as well as explaining the direction of Russian policy in the post-Soviet

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<sup>4</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, “Perestroika 2014. The Reasons Behind Moscow’s Firm Stance on Ukraine,” *Valdai Discussion Club*, March 19, 2014, [http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/perestroika\\_2014\\_the\\_reasons\\_behind\\_moscow\\_s\\_firm\\_stance\\_on\\_ukraine/](http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/perestroika_2014_the_reasons_behind_moscow_s_firm_stance_on_ukraine/) (accessed January 15, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Tsygankov, “The dark double,” 20.

space. I argue that the American expertise lacks an accurate vision of contemporary Russia and precise understanding of what currently drives Russia in the post-Soviet region.

This study addresses the issue of trends and discourses that are predominant among the Russian political elite and foreign policy experts dealing with post-Soviet space.<sup>6</sup> Drawing primarily from the Russian political elite's statements, popular discourses in Russia, and the expert community views, this research shares the original Russian perceptions of the world order, threats, and its narratives of post-Soviet space. It analyzes Russian perceptions and narratives of the post-Cold War international order, with attention to both Russia's role and to Russia's special mission in the post-Soviet space in order to better understand Russia's future direction in the region. It also analyzes the conditions under which the Russian visions of the world order and threats were produced. Though Russia's visions of the world and the post-Soviet space were constructed, to some extent, during the Soviet era, the study shows that the experience of the US-led world order had a great impact on the contemporary discourse.

The focus on the logic and arguments that Russia uses in its relations with its near neighborhood can be much more valuable as an explanation of the direction of Russian politics in the post-Soviet space. This research, by closely examining current debates in the Russian expert community, will show the direction in which foreign policy of Russia in the post-Soviet space will develop in the near future. Moreover, it will throw light on how the Kremlin would most likely to respond to potential challenges.

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<sup>6</sup> Though the post-Soviet space does not exist as a political unit anymore, the notion of the post-Soviet space is rather psychological and inertial in nature: it exists in the minds of politicians and the public, but not in the reality. In this study, I use the definition of the 'post-Soviet space' mainly because this notion is actively used in the official documents and statements of the Russian political leadership as well as in the research of Russia foreign policy analysts whose work I am researching here.

This study is organized as follows. The first chapter discusses the state of Russian Studies in the United States and identifies current American assumptions of Russia. It also attempts to find specific gaps and misperceptions in studying contemporary Russia in the United States. The second chapter provides Kremlin's official narratives of the world order and threats within the existing order. Furthermore, it explores Russia's perception of its position in the world and its special mission in the post-Soviet space expressed in policy documents and President Putin's speeches. The third chapter focuses on current debates prevailing in the Russian expert community – a world often ignored in America – regarding Russia's policy in post-Soviet space. Though in general the Russian elite and foreign policy experts' views are mostly consistent, experts have distinctive ideas from the political establishment regarding some issues and go further in their analysis. In this sense, the discourse and views of Russian leading experts can lay a pathway and explain which discourses will prevail in elite circles in the near future.

## CHAPTER II

## THE STATE OF RUSSIAN STUDIES IN THE UNITED STATES

With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was no longer perceived to be significant in the eyes of the American establishment. This was reflected in the drastic decline of funding for Russian studies which, in turn, resulted in a decrease in the number of scholars and intelligence analysts in the United States who specialized in the post-Soviet space. In 2012, there were no more than 1000 intelligence analysts in the United States who specialized in Russia, compared to 13,000 specialists during the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, the quantity and quality of Russia-related research have decreased immensely over the past few decades. To some extent, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States saw the collapse of Russia.

Due to the lack of comprehensive and consistent research on Russia during the 1990s and 2000s, there are misperceptions of what is going on in Russia from the American side. This misunderstanding resulted in miscalculation regarding Russia's foreign policy. Today, American perceptions of Russia, to some extent, remain stuck in a Cold War frame.<sup>8</sup> However, in contrast to the Cold War era, when the main challenge for the United States was the lack of access to sources due to the closed character of the Soviet system, today America faces a different problem. The decision makers of American foreign policy misunderstand or in most cases do not want to understand the distinctive political and social system of contemporary Russia. In other words, the United States faces a lack of a comprehensive understanding of *what* Russia is today, that, to a large extent, was caused by a generational gap in studying Russia and the post-Soviet space as well

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<sup>7</sup> "Think Tank Atlas: Russian Studies Abroad Report," *Rethinking Russia*, 2016, <http://rethinkingrussia.ru/en/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Think-Tank-Atlas.pdf> (accessed January 20, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Tsygankov, "The dark double," 34.

as the lack of continuous monitoring of the situation in the region. As the experts note, “the tradition of ‘know your enemy’ was never entirely transformed into a program of ‘know your friend.’”<sup>9</sup> There never was a Russian studies field before the early 1990s, but a Soviet Studies that dealt with a geographic and political unit that currently does not exist. Besides, Russia today has no driving ideology that would direct the country the way it did during the Soviet era.

In light of current tensions between the United States and Russia over Ukraine and meddling in the 2016 presidential election, Russia is once again perceived as a challenge, if not a threat. Today, the desire of the American establishment to learn Russia, as well as its socioeconomic development and a distinctive political system, is rather urgent.

In order to understand where the incomplete perception of Russia lies in the United States, it is necessary to analyze the state of Russian Studies in the US, its roots, and prevailing trends in studying Russian matters in the academia and the expert community. This chapter aims to show how the narratives of Russia have been developing over the course of several decades, and what the experts on Russia assume about Russia and its legitimate interests. Therefore, the chapter seeks to identify the problem of misperception that currently exists in studying Russia in the United States.

### *Soviet Studies during the Cold War*

Soviet Studies was exclusively a product of the Cold War. Before the end of the World War II there was not a field called Soviet Studies, but Slavic Studies that engaged in the history, culture, and languages of the Slavic areas in general. The interest in the Soviet Union was intense – decision

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<sup>9</sup> “Think Tank Atlas: Russian Studies Abroad Report.”

makers needed experts with a solid knowledge of the Soviet Union in order to shape policy towards the country.

The desperate need for experts who understood the nature of the new world power – the Soviet Union – and its regime and people was the primary stimulus to Soviet Studies in the period immediately following World War II. Due to the lack of contact with and access to the Soviet Union, Soviet life was “even more of an enigma.” As David Engerman puts it, “the need for good information about the Soviet Union was as great as the obstacles to obtaining it.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the need for more specialists who would have an understanding of what was behind Stalin’s decisions was particularly necessary. Those who had direct experience with the Soviet Union were in great demand and could jump to government positions in a short period of time. One of them was George Kennan who had worked at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and made his career from the National War College and then to the State Department’s internal think tank in a matter of months.

In the beginning of the Cold War, the American political establishment agreed that the best defense strategy against the Soviet Union was the policy of “containment.” In his “Long Telegram” in 1946, George Kennan explained this strategy: The Soviet Union was “a political force committed fanatically to the belief that with the U.S. there can be no permanent *modus vivendi*.” Therefore, the United States chose to follow the policy of “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”<sup>11</sup> Soon, in his famous article “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (“The X Article”), George Kennan gave a theoretical justification to the policy

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<sup>10</sup> David Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>11</sup> “The Long Telegram,” GSCE Modern World History Revision Site, [http://www.johndclare.net/cold\\_war7\\_Kennan.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/cold_war7_Kennan.htm) (accessed February 15, 2018).

of “containment” toward the Soviet Union as the only permissible form of relations between the states belonging to opposing social systems. He argued that Soviet leaders are “captives of ideology,” with whom one cannot cooperate on a usual basis. From his point of view, the only condition for the possible normalization of Soviet-American relations is the departure of Soviet foreign policy from “ideology.” Moreover, the policy of “deterrence” actually meant, as its goal, internal changes in Soviet society.<sup>12</sup> This way of thinking shaped American foreign policy for the next several decades.

The first institutions of Cold War Soviet Studies – Columbia University’s Russian Institute and Harvard’s Russian Research Center – were shaped by the wartime experience between academia and government. World War II brought social science into diplomacy: scholars joined government research teams, intelligence, and military projects. The professor-consultant was a fundamentally new role for university faculty and was a new enterprise unprecedented in academic life.

Both foundations and government funding of Cold War Soviet Studies were broad and provided scholars with a great deal of autonomy. The key institutions of Soviet Studies – Harvard’s Russian Research Center and Columbia’s Russian Institute – were supported by the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation respectively. Since 1947, the Ford Foundation contributed \$1 million per year to American universities to support area studies and became a major funding source for international studies in the United States. By 1960, the Ford Foundation and the State Department were each contributing upward of \$300,000 per year to support American-Soviet scholarly exchange programs.<sup>13</sup> The reason why foundations supported area

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<sup>12</sup> X, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25, no. 4 (1947): 566.

<sup>13</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 78.

studies was more than a means for studying enemies, but as an instrument of “spurring more cosmopolitan general education and promoting interdisciplinary research.”<sup>14</sup>

Soviet Studies was comprised of not only history, policy, and economics of the region, but also all aspects of life in the Soviet Union, including language, culture, and everyday practices of Soviet citizens. Focus on all elements of Soviet life, particularly on human behavior, required an interdisciplinary approach that combined social science with anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

Studying the enemy meant learning various issues: what motivated people to follow the regime, how power was diffused, how cultures interacted, how to measure economic growth. Alex Inkeles, in his book, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia*, analyzed “the structure and functioning” of Soviet media and showed “the extent to which the Soviet regime relied on persuasion.”<sup>15</sup> In the book, *Factory and Manager in the USSR*, economist Joseph Berliner demonstrated the centrality of material incentives in the Soviet economy through an explanation of the “effectiveness of bonuses paid to managers who had fulfilled their plan allotment.”<sup>16</sup> Sociologists Mark Field and Kent Geiger wrote articles on Soviet demography, family dynamics, and public health. In 1953, Merle Fainsod published his book, *How Russia Is Ruled*, which became the main source on the theory and practice of public administration in the Soviet Union.<sup>17</sup> A summary report to the Air Force and the book, *How the Soviet System Works* (1956), by the Harvard Refugee Interview

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<sup>14</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 78.

<sup>15</sup> Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

<sup>16</sup> Joseph S. Berliner, *Factory and Manager in the USSR* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957).

<sup>17</sup> Merle Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

Project identified splits in the Soviet Union that could be potentially used in warfare. All of these works were also crucial to understanding Soviet society.<sup>18</sup>

Sponsors funded projects that were far from immediate policy issues, such as Soviet literature, exchanges to libraries, and archives. In addition to the study of the Politburo, foundations funded special projects that studied everything from Pushkin to Bulgakov, all in order to get insights into Brezhnev.

The development of an interdisciplinary approach to science and knowing the Soviet Union went hand in hand. They both represented a tool for each other: scholars expected that the study of the Soviet Union would contribute to social scientific knowledge while policymakers used social science as an instrument for knowing the Communist enemy. As Engerman aptly puts it, “If the war against Germany and Japan was the physicists’ war, many academics saw the brewing conflict with the USSR as the social scientists’ war.”<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the “new social sciences” shaped the postwar period as much as “atomic physics had shaped the war itself.”<sup>20</sup>

Soviet Studies grew intensively in the 1950s and 1960s. By the mid-1960s, Soviet Studies was no longer confined to the Ivy League: numerous centers and institutes of Soviet Studies were opened in public universities in Berkeley, Bloomington, Ann Arbor, Urbana-Champaign, and Los Angeles. The number of Soviet area centers almost doubled between 1959 and 1964, from seventeen to thirty-three. With this trend, the number of graduate students who completed doctoral degrees in Soviet Studies grew rapidly.

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<sup>18</sup> Raymond Augustine Bauer et al., *How the Soviet System Works* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).

<sup>19</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Leighton, *Human Relations in a Changing World: Observations in the Use of the Social Sciences* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1949), 43-44.

A new contribution to Soviet Studies came to the conclusion of an American-Soviet cultural exchange agreement in early 1958, when twenty-two American graduate students were exchanged in the first academic year.<sup>21</sup> This agreement finally allowed American scholars and students to visit the object of their study.

In the first decade of the Cold War, the combination of wide interest and financial support from both government and foundations allowed Soviet Studies to grow broadly and deeply. The research works and insights of the first Soviet specialists not only helped to moderate America's Soviet policy during the Cold War but provided the government with specialists and supplied the next generation of experts with necessary data. Indeed, the successes of Soviet Studies resulted from unrepeatable historical circumstances, such as the intellectual mobilization during and after World War II, the willingness of both establishment and academia to cooperate with each other, and the emergence of new sources of funding.

However, by the late 1950s, Soviet Studies became a highly politicized field imbued with topical issues and a know-the-enemy d'être. It was the product of the Cold War "stamped by Cold War politics, political conformism, and government support"<sup>22</sup>. As Stephen Cohen notes, Sovietology became the "totalitarianism school" that focused "scholarly attention solely on the top of the political hierarchy to the exclusion of Soviet society and ruled out the possibility of any political, let alone social, change."<sup>23</sup>

With the increased scale of research in the 1970s and the expansion of a policy track within Soviet Studies, Sovietology became more crowded and dispersed than any of the other regional

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<sup>21</sup> Cyril Black and John M. Thompson, *American Teaching About Russia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Cohen, "Scholarly Missions: Sovietology as a Vocation" in Stephen Cohen, *Rethinking the Soviet Experience: Politics and History since 1917* (Oxford, 1985), 29-33.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Cohen, "Russian Studies Without Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 15, no. 1 (1999): 37-55.

specializations. Such a tendency caused the growing tensions in the field in the 1970s and 1980s and eventually created a significant gap between academic and policy worlds in Soviet Studies. This transformation undercut the primary goal of area studies as proposed in the 1940s: “to bring together the once-divided roles of social scientist and humanist, graduate advisor and government consultant.” Therefore, Sovietology was divided into two camps: academic and policy-oriented spheres. Those focused on the policy track received limited training: they were more concentrated on policy issues, receiving less practice in language and culture as well as spending less time in the regions they studied.<sup>24</sup>

By the late 1980s, an increasing number of experts who focused in the policy track of Soviet Studies entered the highest positions of the executive branch: Jack Matlock, a career Foreign Service officer (M.A., Columbia), who worked at the National Security Council and then served as ambassador in Moscow from 1987 to 1991; Condoleezza Rice (Ph.D., University of Denver) left Stanford University to join the National Security Council staff during 1989-1991; and Madeleine Albright (Ph.D., Columbia, where she studied with Zbigniew Brzezinski) was Bill Clinton’s Secretary of State in 1997.

However, unlike the Cold War era policymakers, like Zbigniew Brzezinski, Marshall Shulman, and Richard Pipes, as critics note, new post-Cold War politicians had less presence in Soviet Studies. Many of them conducted their research and did training on institutions that did not survive the Cold War: the Warsaw Pact, Soviet party organs, union-wide institutions, and others.<sup>25</sup> This new tendency in Soviet Studies that lacked a comprehensive and historic approach later generated significant consequences for American foreign policy in the post-Soviet world.

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<sup>24</sup> Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 336.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

*Russia in US foreign policy agenda in the 1990s*

With the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the interest in Russia did not completely fade, but the extent and the direction were changed. The goal of the Bush administration was the transition from the command economy to the free market. But in a sense, the United States behaved as if they knew the answers to questions about the development of the world after the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the Soviet socialist economy, Americans thought that Russia inevitably had to take the direction towards democracy and free market based on Western standards. And, thus, according to Francis Fukuyama, this was supposed to be the “end of history.”<sup>26</sup>

President George H.W. Bush’s ideological orientation on international affairs basically was the policy of noninterference toward Russia. According to James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, “For President Bush and his administration, the primary challenge was to manage a peaceful transition from the old order to the post-Cold War world order.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the Bush administration was more concerned with ensuring the non-emergence of a rival power to American hegemony in a post-Soviet world and was less focused on promoting democratic transition within post-Soviet countries.

Although the Bush administration welcomed Gorbachev’s reforms, they never engaged with policies that might foster the process of domestic change or promote it in a specific direction. For the Bush administration, reform was an internal matter to which the United States should only react, but not interfere. However, at the same time, the Bush administration was concerned about

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<sup>26</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy Toward Russia After the Cold War* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 9.

radical regime transformation in post-Soviet countries. The case of Yugoslavia in 1991 was a vivid example of the terrible consequences generated by a socio-political transition in multiethnic countries. In this sense, the Bush administration primarily focused its foreign policy agenda on avoiding the repetition of a Yugoslav scenario of civil war in the post-Soviet space.

One of the main tasks of the Bush team was the ultimate transfer of the nuclear warheads from the former Soviet Union. In particular, Secretary of State James Baker set to achieve the denuclearization of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine that was eventually achieved during the Clinton presidency.

In addressing issues of economic assistance to post-Soviet countries, the Bush administration remained true to its orientation to the idea of noninterference and played a limited role in Russia's transition to a free-market system. The primary focus was to ensure that Russia would avoid defaulting on its debt rather than to establish assistance for developing a viable market economy.<sup>28</sup>

In essence, the Bush administration's message to Russia and other post-Soviet countries was, "If you want acceptance into the West, you have to do X, Y, and Z. Get the nuclear situation under control. Commit to paying your debt."<sup>29</sup> In other words, the Bush administration was more concerned about what Russia could do for the United States, not what the United States could do for Russia.

Whereas Bush was a power balancer in international politics, his successor, Bill Clinton and key decision makers in his foreign policy team were Wilsonian liberals who believed that the active enlargement of market economies in the post-Soviet area could serve as a way to ensure the national security of the United States.<sup>30</sup> Clinton particularly believed that democratic regime

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<sup>28</sup> Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 25

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

transformation in Russia along with the establishment of free market economy would foster Russian integration into the Western community of democratic states which would automatically promote the national security of the United States.

As Lawrence Summers, a senior U.S. Treasury Department official throughout Clinton's administration had said, "The task of rebuilding the Russian economy is the greatest economic restructuring job since the Marshall Plan."<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the mission to replace communism with capitalism and democracy in Russia was a gigantic task of "nation-building" the likes of which had never taken place in history. The Clinton administration significantly raised aid funding, but even a billion dollars a year was a small amount of money in post-communist Russia with its large territory and numerous problems.<sup>32</sup> This meant that the Clinton administration had to make strategic choices about what to finance and how to finance. Strobe Talbott, the Deputy Secretary of State under President Clinton, aptly notes, "It seemed to me that the Bush people didn't have much of a plan for economic assistance. They just grabbed what they could off the shelf. My criticism of us is that we had a plan, but it didn't conform as much to reality as hindsight we wished it had. [Treasury officials Lawrence Summers and David Lipton] deserve a lot of credit for having quite a sophisticated analysis and strategy but reality didn't cooperate and the Russians didn't cooperate."<sup>33</sup>

Yet if Clinton accentuated the importance of the democratic transformation, in reality, Clinton made the decision "to stand by Yeltsin no matter what he did": be it the parliament taken in a tank battle the invasion of Chechnya by Russia. For the Clinton team, "Yeltsin the man was

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<sup>31</sup> Elaine Sciolino, "Clinton Adds Visit from Russian Official on Aid," *New York Times*, March 19, 1993, A5.

<sup>32</sup> Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Strobe Talbott, in Goldgeier, McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 124.

reform”, while his rivals were unacceptable and embodied the possible return to communism.<sup>34</sup> As Talbott later admits, Yeltsin afterward was increasingly understood as a flawed and limited regime transformer.

If Bush’s message to Russia was “transform yourself and then you can join the club”, Clinton’s message was “we will help you to transform the system so you can integrate with us”. The Clinton administration began the mission of political and economic transformation of Russia full of optimism, but initial plans did not justify themselves. As it turned out, the more the Clinton administration learned about the Russian regime, the more impracticable their mission seemed.<sup>35</sup>

The problem is that the US showed no interest in Russia itself, and they were not interested in the real state of affairs in the country. The Americans focused exclusively on the knowledge they could share with the Russians in order to facilitate and accelerate the transition. Issues such as Russian culture, history, and mindset were never taken into account. Virtually no one was ready to admit that Russia could choose a different direction. The expert community, with the support of the government and the media, was actively seeking confirmation of its correctness regarding the transition in accordance with the American scenario. Less attention was paid to what was really happening in Russia. Russian foreign policy was completely ignored and Russia was no more perceived as a significant actor.

As Stephen Cohen remarks, America knew “next to nothing about Russia, except that it had an economy... Some were certain that for their purpose there were no fundamental differences between Russia and Poland.”<sup>36</sup> The lack of historical knowledge and disregard of the unprecedented case by policymakers led to the making of plans that could not be implemented.

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<sup>34</sup> Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, 121.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 119.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, “Russian Studies Without Russia,” 38.

After the financial crisis of 1998 and the first years of Vladimir Putin's presidency, it became clear that the transition process was not proceeding in the way that it was expected by the American establishment. Experts on the issues of “democratic transition” were not intellectually prepared for the different scenarios of the effect of the reforms. Despite the fact that they studied Russian life, the American expert community did not understand the essence of what was happening in the country. As Thomas Graham notes, for almost a quarter of the century the problem has not been the decline of interest in Russia, but the lack of emphasis on Russia itself in Russian studies.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Current vision of Russia in the United States*

Experts emphasize the general decline of area studies in the United States over the last several decades.<sup>38</sup> This can be traced to the decline of a strong focus on languages, literature, and culture combined with the analysis of the history and politics of the region. Due to decreased government funding for Russia-related research, foreign language instruction at universities and cultural exchange programs with former Soviet states in the 1990s and the 2000s, the United States faced trouble developing a new generation of Russia specialists in the early 2010s.<sup>39</sup> According to the report prepared by the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, this decline generated three problems.<sup>40</sup> First, Sovietologists have lost the incentive to develop their skills and sustain their research potential. Today most of them analyze Moscow’s internal and external

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<sup>37</sup> “Think Tank Atlas: Russian Studies Abroad Report.”

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “The State of “Russian Studies” in the United States: An Assessment by the Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies,” *Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies*, July 2015, 4, <http://aseees.org/resources/reports-surveys> (accessed January 30, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

policies in comparison with journalists, trying to look at Russia through “the prism of stereotypes and clichés.” A second problem is the absence of young specialists. Stephen Hanson and Blair Ruble emphasize that specialists trained and hired in the Soviet era are approaching the retirement age.<sup>41</sup> In the 1990s and 2000s, students and young scholars would rather study other regions, such as Asia and the Middle East, as their area study of choice. As a result, today the government has an insufficient number of trained experts who specialize on Russia. And this leads to the third problem – the impact of the misperception and miscalculation of Russia on decision-makers. Nowadays, it is difficult to find senior government officials specializing in Russia who are experienced in working in the area, except for a few figures, such as Fiona Hill, current senior director for Russia and Eurasia on the National Security Council, Celeste Wallander, a former senior director for Russia and Eurasia on the National Security Council, and Victoria Nuland, a former Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs during the Obama administration.

Thus, the lack of consistent expertise on Russia during the post-Soviet era resulted in the miscalculation of Russia’s foreign policy actions. As Daniel Satinsky, President of the Board of Directors of the US-Russia Chamber of Commerce of New England, pointed out during the discussion on the state of Russian Studies in the United States, Russia’s foreign policy “shouldn’t be a surprise for those who carefully followed Russia’s concerns over the threat of global terrorism and the implications of the Arab Spring, as well as disturbances in the post-Soviet space. In reality, Russia’s policy was straightforward, consistent and explicit.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen E. Hanson and Blair A. Ruble, “Rebuilding “Russian Studies,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 3 (2005): 49-57.

<sup>42</sup> Pavel Koshkin and Ksenia Zubacheva, “What happened to the ‘golden age’ of Russian Studies in America?,” *Russia Direct*, May 12, 2016, <http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/what-happened-golden-age-russian-studies-america> (accessed February 3, 2018).

Robert Legvold, an American political scientist specializing in Russia and former Soviet states, believes that the US government and the public need specialists who can help overcome the stereotypes-driven perception of Russia. In order to achieve that, experts need to focus more on Russian history and literature since this approach will contribute to understanding the scale of historic transformations in Russia and the changes in Russians' mentality and emotions.<sup>43</sup>

In the United States, Russia is viewed as the country which was defeated in the Cold War. Thus, in the eyes of Americans, following this vision, Russians feel resentful by the loss of the Soviet Union. Russia's actions in Ukraine, in this sense, mean retaliation and balancing against the United States as a way to prove Russia's power and importance.<sup>44</sup> However, from the Russian perspective, the Soviet Union did not lose the Cold War – the Soviet Union collapsed because of its internal economic and political inefficiency, not as a result of external forces. Russian foreign policy expert Fyodor Lukyanov also points out why Russia is not willing to restore the Soviet Union and why Russians think that they did not lose the Cold War: “The Kremlin's goal is not to restore the country that fell apart in December 1991, because it considers some of the former Soviet territories unnecessary. Rather, it wants to replay the final phase of the Cold War. People in Russia – first small groups and then the majority of society – believe that the Soviet Union did not lose the Cold War, but pulled out before it was over. They believe that the Soviet leadership did this because they naively accepted the idea of universal human values, whereas a growing number of conspiracy theorists argue that the country was betrayed.”<sup>45</sup> Even more, after the breakup of the

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<sup>43</sup> Pavel Koshkin, “Four different visions for the future of “Russian Studies” in America,” *Russia Direct*, February 16, 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/debates/four-different-visions-future-russian-studies-america> (accessed February 3, 2018).

<sup>44</sup> Max Fisher, “America has a simple ideology”: how one of Russia's top US experts tries to explain America,” *Vox*, May 4, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/5/4/8535963/russia-putin-america> (accessed February 17, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Lukyanov, “Perestroika 2014.”

Soviet Union, Russia tried to make itself a friend to the United States, but America has instead surrounded Russia with NATO members and repeatedly tried to weaken, control, or even destroy Russia, according to Russian popular discourse. Thus, Russians view their country as insecure against the powerful United States. In this sense, Russian actions perceived as “aggressive” are actually defensive.<sup>46</sup>

Vladimir Lukin, a prominent Russian diplomat and former ambassador to the US, once noted Russian vision and how Americans misunderstand it: “America has a simple ideology – that there is only one truth in the world, that truth is held by God, and God created the United States to be an embodiment of that truth. So the Americans strive to bring this truth to the rest of the world and to make it happy. Only after that will everything be well. This ideology has a strong influence on their policy. A wise traditionalist and a geopolitical expert, Kissinger had good reason to call such politicians “Trotskyites” for advocating a world revolution, albeit in their own way, but always in the front and in shining armor. This is a tempting ideology and has been processed by different countries at different times, not only the United States.”<sup>47</sup>

This narrative of aggressive America is consistent to those in the Kremlin as well as the majority of Russian people. According to this view, American policies are in numerous ways motivated by a hatred of Russia and desire to destroy it. Following this, it becomes obvious that in the mind of Russian people Russia is not a defeated country; it is a new country that was formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And in response to the American hegemonic power, Russia has had no choice but to react to US aggression with defensive actions. The rhetoric that Russia is

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<sup>46</sup> Fisher, “America has a simple ideology.”

<sup>47</sup> Vladimir Lukin, “Vladimir Lukin: I Am a Bit Wary of a “Popular Foreign Policy,” interview by Yegor von Schubert. *Russia in Global Affairs*, March 15, 2015, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Vladimir-Lukin-I-Am-a-Bit-Wary-of-a-Popular-Foreign-Policy-17363> (accessed February 11, 2018).

under constant threat from the aggressive United States is more than government propaganda; it is the accepted worldview.

“The contemporary vilification of Russia may be less about the rationalization of US interests and policies and more about the affirmation of an American identity,” once stated David S. Foglesong, Associate Professor of History at Rutgers University. In his book *The American Mission and the “Evil Empire:” The Crusade for a “Free Russia” since 1881*, Foglesong explores the American representation of Russia over 130 years and identifies three of the most prevailing notions of Russia in America: first, a messianic faith that America could inspire overnight transformation from autocracy to democracy; second, a notion that despite historic differences, Russia and America are very much akin, so that Russia, more than any other country, is America’s “dark double;” third, an extreme antipathy to “evil” leaders who Americans blame for thwarting what they believe to be the natural triumph of the American mission. As a result, these expectations and views continue to influence the way American journalists and politicians perceive and see Russia. Foglesong’s hope is that “by seeing how these attitudes have distorted American views of Russia for more than a century, we may begin to be able to escape their grip.”<sup>48</sup>

Foglesong argues that the US political elite today condemns and underrate the Russian establishment in order to gain favor with particular domestic groups. He remarks that the American media regularly presents the image of Russia as a prison, with President Putin as its warden.<sup>49</sup> This current image of Russia as a prison, as Foglesong notes, resembles pictures of Russia that were

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<sup>48</sup> David S. Foglesong, *The American Mission and the ‘Evil Empire’: The Crusade for a ‘Free Russia’ since 1881* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Sarah D. Klump, “The American Mission and the “Evil Empire:” The Crusade for a “Free Russia” since 1881,” *Wilson Center*, July 7, 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-american-mission-and-the-evil-empire-the-crusade-for-free-russia-1881> (accessed February 15, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Klump, “The American Mission and the “Evil Empire.”

developed in the late XIX century by George Kennan “The Elder,” who described in his book *Siberia and the Exile System* a vast territory beyond the Ural Mountains as a place of exile of the best people of Russia. This was the period when Russia started to be considered as America’s “dark double.” As Foglesong posits, “Russia was especially suited for this role of dark double because its people were believed to be – at least potentially – very much like Americans; they were white, nominally Christian, and had shared the frontier experience of expanding across a continent.” Thus, according to Foglesong, these similarities between Russia and America supported the point that Russians could be converted, in both political and religious sense, by the American mission.<sup>50</sup>

In contemporary American narratives of Russia, along with the messianic perception of the American mission toward Russia, there is also a predominant stereotype of “good Russian people vs. bad Russian government.” In other words, Americans separate the Russian political establishment from the Russian people. However, the public polls in Russia show a high level of the approval of President Putin’s activities as the President of Russia. For example, 83 percent of Russians approved Putin’s presidency in 2017 in comparison with 63 percent in 2013. Unlike President Putin, only 42 percent of Russians approved of the activities of the Russian government in 2017.<sup>51</sup>

In the 1990s, Russia seemed to have ceased to play the role of “constituting the Other” for the United States, nevertheless, the issue of “Russian intervention” in the presidential election in

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<sup>50</sup> Klump, “The American Mission and the “Evil Empire.”

<sup>51</sup> “Indicators,” *Levada Center*, <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/> (accessed February 20, 2018).

2016 shows that the accumulated images of the “Russian threat” can be still easily updated in American political discourse.<sup>52</sup>

Many American political scientists starting from Francis Fukuyama ending with Fareed Zakaria consider the ideological competition between the Soviet Union and the US as an impetus for the development and maintenance of liberal democracy. With the disappearance of the rival state, liberal democracy entered the period of crisis. But in Russia, politicians, and citizens still compare their own policies and problems with the United States. Comparison with the United States remains the most important point of substantiation of any new law or political decision, from the law on “foreign agents” to the annexation of Crimea. But this comparison is used not only by politicians; it remains a part of people’s everyday life.<sup>53</sup>

In order to explain what is behind Russia’s actions and behavior, American historian Stephen Kotkin identifies three driving factors that shaped Russia’s role in the world: first, the sense of having a special mission; second, Russia’s unique geography; and, third, Russia’s perennial quest for a strong state.<sup>54</sup> According to Kotkin, Russia’s reluctance to join international organizations is explained by its sense of a special mission. It provides Russians and their leaders with pride, but also with “resentment toward the West for supposedly underappreciating Russia’s uniqueness and importance.”<sup>55</sup>

Having unique geography, with no natural borders, except the Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Ocean, Russia has felt constantly vulnerable and has often “displayed a kind of defensive

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<sup>52</sup> Ivan Kurilla, *Zaklyatye druzya. Istoriya mneniy, fantaziy, kontaktov, vzaimo(ne)ponimaniya Rossii I SShA (Chto takoe Rossiya?)* (Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2017), 332.

<sup>53</sup> Kurilla, *Zaklyatye druzya*, 333.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics. Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern,” *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2016-04-18/russias-perpetual-geopolitics> (accessed January 30, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

aggressiveness.” As Kotkin writes, “Whatever the original causes behind early Russian expansionism – much of which was unplanned – many in the country’s political class came to believe over time that only further expansion could secure the earlier acquisitions. Russian security has thus traditionally been partly predicated on moving outward, in the name of preempting external attack.”<sup>56</sup>

And, finally, Russia’s constant pursuing of a strong and powerful state “willing and able to act aggressively in its own interests” has been seen to Russian leaders as the only guarantor of Russia’s security. Today, even smaller neighboring countries are viewed “less as potential friends than as potential beachheads for enemies” and can be used as weapons of the Western powers intent on destabilizing Russia. Thus, Russia’s foreign policy orientation is “as much a condition as a choice.” The concept of a strong state also implies the domestic order; however, the efforts to create a strong state have led to “subverted institutions and a personalized rule,” according to Kotkin. He refers to Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky that once noted, “The state grew fat, but the people grew lean.”<sup>57</sup>

Some scholars believe that misperception between Russia and the US has been due to divergent fundamental values and state interests, as each country has defined them. For Russia, the highest value is the state. In the case of the United States, it is individual liberty, private property, and human rights. Similarly, in their book *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations*, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O’Loughlin emphasize the US and Russia’s identity narratives.<sup>58</sup> During and after the Cold War, America has retained an identity narrative

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<sup>56</sup> Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics.”

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> O’Loughlin, Ben, Alister Miskimmon, and Laura Roselle, *Forging the World: Strategic Narratives and International Relations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

that highlights US hegemony and a commitment to liberty, democracy, and human rights. On the contrary, the Russian identity, which basically was connected to the Soviet identity, has to create itself anew after the demise of the Soviet Union. The political elite has struggled to develop a new identity. Under President Putin, Russian nationalism, or as Russians say, the sense of patriotism, became the new identity narrative: “We don’t have and there can’t be any other unifying idea, apart from patriotism.”<sup>59</sup> According to Kotkin, Russia today is “not a revolutionary power threatening to overthrow the international order.” The Kremlin operates within a great-power paradigm with the supremacy of hard power and in which maneuver is prioritized over morality.<sup>60</sup>

Meanwhile, the major challenge that America seems to be reluctant to consider Russia as a country with its own legitimate interests. Currently, this is especially exacerbated by media since any attempts to understand Russia’s motives and points of view is not “acceptable to discuss” in the mainstream media and those who call for a better understanding of Russia are labeled as “dupes of Russian propaganda.” This prevents the objective understanding of Russia in America today.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> “Putin Declares Patriotism Russia’s Only National Idea,” *The Moscow Times*, February 4, 2016. <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/putin-declares-patriotism-russias-only-national-idea-51705> (accessed January 30, 2018).

<sup>60</sup> Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics.”

<sup>61</sup> “What happened to the ‘golden age’ of Russian Studies in America?”

## CHAPTER III

RUSSIA'S OFFICIAL DISCOURSE AND NARRATIVES: PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORLD  
ORDER AND POST-SOVIET SPACE

In order to understand Russia's behavior in the post-Soviet space and the direction of Russian policy in the region, it is necessary first to assess Russian narratives of the international environment and Russia's role in it and its national interests within the existing order. This chapter examines Russian views of the current world order and its narratives of the post-Soviet space expressed in official documents and statements by the Russian political establishment.

*Russian Perception of the World Order*

In his speech at the Valdai International Discussion Club's annual meeting in 2014, President Vladimir Putin argued that the U.S.-led unipolar world system threatened Russian interests, and he urged the construction of a new world order that will be based on global consensus. Putin explained, "Instead of establishing a new balance of power, essential for maintaining order and stability, they took steps that threw the system into sharp and deep imbalance. The Cold War ended, but it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting existing rules or creating new rules and standards. This created the impression that the so-called 'victors' in the Cold War had decided to pressure events and reshape the world to suit their own needs and interests."<sup>62</sup> Soon after that speech the documents that outline the major national security concerns and the course of Russia's foreign policy were updated and reiterated to reflect the views of Putin at Valdai. President Putin signed a new military

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<sup>62</sup> "Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club," *President of Russia*, October 24, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860> (accessed February 1, 2018).

doctrine in December 2014, and the new National Security Concept and the new Foreign Policy Concept were adopted in December 2015 and November 2016 respectively.

The National Security Concept (NSC) of 31 December 2015 outlines the world order as ‘polycentric’ and declares Russia to be one of the ‘centers of influence’ that is increasingly involved in the resolution of major international problems and military conflicts and in ensuring strategic stability.<sup>63</sup> The concept of a polycentric world order was first mentioned in Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept of 2000 that articulated a narrative of a multipolar world and the dangers of a unipolar system. From the Russian perspective, a US-led unipolar system is viewed as the world ruled by one power that implants democracy and human rights around the world and interferes in the domestic politics of sovereign states. Moreover, the unipolar world order, through restricting the sovereignty of nation-states and establishing supranational unions, such as NATO, IMF, World Bank, WTO, Hague Tribunal, Kyoto Protocol, aims to redistribute resources in favor of those actors who provide the highest economic efficiency. This brings advantages to only several powers and Russia is merely seen as a ‘keeper’ of oil and gas pipelines for those actors.<sup>64</sup> Starting from 2012, the Kremlin shifted its discourse towards prioritizing the ideas of patriotism, morality, and traditional values in contrast to globalization. The new official discourse also included the idea of Russia’s exceptionalism: Russia as a different and unique civilization and morally superior from the West.

President Putin declared Russia’s new concept of Russian foreign policy in his 2007 Munich speech: “The unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today’s world

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<sup>63</sup> Security Council of Russia, *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*, 31 December 2015. <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/docs/document133/> (accessed December 12, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Miloserdov, *Vospominaniya i razmishleniya o budushem*, (Moscow: Voskhod, 2010), 246.

[...] The US has overstepped its borders in every way. We must build a new world order to ensure security and prosperity for all.”<sup>65</sup> From this point of view, the new world order was supposed to be a new form of global governance in which Russia would be one of the centers of the new multipolar world.

In order to understand the underlying logic of the Russian perception of the world order, one needs to examine the conditions under which that perception was confirmed. This brings us to the question of the international environment in which Russia has found itself over the past two decades.

The post-Cold War world was characterized by a US-led international order with American global military dominance and the dissemination of democracy and its core values around the globe and, on top of that, the increasing presence of NATO troops on Russia’s borders. From 1993 to 2006, US military expenditures increased from \$488 billion to \$610 billion and its share of overall world military spending rose above 40 percent.<sup>66</sup> Along with the increase in military expenditures, there was also a shift in US foreign policy doctrine towards the spread of democratic values around the world and the right to interfere in the internal affairs of foreign states.<sup>67</sup> After the breakup of the Soviet Union, NATO – that was initially created to provide collective security against the Soviet Union – started to significantly expand eastward. Former Soviet allies, such as Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary joined the alliance in 1999; Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania became NATO member-states in 2004; Croatia and

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<sup>65</sup> Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, *President of Russia*, 10 February 2007. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (accessed December 2, 2017).

<sup>66</sup> SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2015, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (accessed January 30, 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Keith Darden, “Russian Revanche: External Threats & Regime Reactions,” *Daedalus* 146, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 131.

Albania joined in 2009; and Montenegro in 2017. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, NATO explicitly stated that Georgia and Ukraine “will become members.”<sup>68</sup> In his speeches, President Vladimir Putin repeatedly accused NATO of taking advantage of Russian weakness after the end of the Cold War to expand the alliance eastward, in violation of promises allegedly made by Western leaders in the early 1990s. These so-called “top level assurances” had been made by the US and West German leaders during the German reunification process that NATO would not be expanded eastward and that a “non-aligned buffer zone between NATO’s eastern border and Russia” would be ensured.<sup>69</sup> In her article, Kristina Spohr explores whether the West really made promises to Soviet leaders in the winter of 1990 to not expand NATO eastward. Using declassified materials, she concludes that “no legally binding pledges of any sort were made to Soviet leaders by any Western policymaker either in the winter of 1990 or at any later point to foreclose NATO membership for Eastern European countries.”<sup>70</sup> However, this fact does not deny that during the unification negotiations major US and West German political actors – particularly James Baker, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and Helmut Kohl – did make comments to Soviet leaders that they might have been perceived as assurances to not expand NATO in Eastern Europe. Such statements perhaps tended to correspond with Soviet wishful thinking. In any event, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin never asked that the Baltic states – during the period of reclaiming their independence in 1991 – sign away the prospect of joining NATO at some point. The alliance and its future was simply not a great concern at that point either to Soviet or to Russian leaders and not

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<sup>68</sup> Angela Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 167.

<sup>69</sup> Michael MccGwire and Michael Clarke, “NATO expansion: ‘a policy error of historic importance’,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (November 2008): 1285.

<sup>70</sup> Kristina Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-setting? The “NATO Enlargement Question” in the Triangular Bonn – Washington – Moscow Diplomacy of 1990-1991,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 40, 49.

to the Baltic countries themselves.<sup>71</sup> In the early 1990s, the European Union and NATO were considered as the “institutional West” and as organizations whose membership would provide economic prosperity and social stability. However, by the late 1990s, as Russia’s “near-abroad” rhetoric increased and hostility toward the West began to grow, the Baltic states turned to NATO for security. Thus, by referring to so-called “promises” made by Western leaders, Russian officials demonstrated not an interest in ascertaining what really happened in 1990 but an attempt to use history to legitimize their current political positions.<sup>72</sup>

Keith Darden, an Associate Professor at American University’s School of International Service, helpfully argues that the current Russian regime is partially the result of the post-Cold War international environment or, to put it precisely, of the era of unprecedented American power in which post-Soviet Russia was shaped. But just because a country is powerful does not necessarily mean that it is threatening. However, Darden makes the point that most countries would think powerful states are threatening. And this is the reason why after the breakup of the Soviet Union, and particularly following the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, Russia has been perceiving American power and influence around the world as a “multifaceted Western threat.” In response to the US military buildup and NATO expansion, Russia increased its defense budget and transformed its military. Internally, Russia also increased the repression of dissent: the Kremlin issued restrictive laws towards civil society and NGOs, foreign aid and assistance, the media, and the control of strategic economic assets. The government has justified these restrictive laws as a need to resist against a Western threat.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, “each new crisis in external

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<sup>71</sup> Spohr, “Precluded or Precedent-setting?” 40, 49.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>73</sup> “Putin podpisał zakon ob NKO, vpolnyayuschich funktsii inostrannogo agenta,” *RIA Novosti*, July 21, 2012, <https://ria.ru/politics/20120721/705224525.html> (accessed February 4, 2018).

relations was met with a serial closing of Russia's doors to the international liberal order."<sup>74</sup>

*Russia's perception of threat*

"If the perception of threat derives from a combination of capability and intent," one would find the idea of American power not threatening in the post-Cold War period.<sup>75</sup> However, Russia inherited the Soviet vision of the world in terms of the balance of power categories and perceived NATO expansion, US active support of democracy in other countries, such as "color revolutions," as threatening. From the Russian government's perspective, the past twenty-five years have been an increasing expansion of the threat coming from a predominance of US power: Yugoslavia and Iraq; the color revolutions in the post-Soviet countries; the war in South Ossetia; the Arab spring in the Middle East; and finally the Euromaidan in Ukraine in 2014.<sup>76</sup> Each crisis urged and increased Russia's official narrative about the threat of a powerful and interventionist United States. By 2017, the predominant Russian view – expressed in official statements and the federal media – sees the United States as the dominating military power that interferes and imposes its values in the affairs of sovereign states as well as the leading force of the military alliance that has approached the borders of Russia and poses a threat to the national security of the country.

Sergey Karaganov, a Russian political scientist who heads the Council on Foreign and

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<sup>74</sup> Darden writes that "not all countries would, or could, respond to US power by balancing it or by introducing greater authoritarian controls. Germany and other NATO members responded by reducing their military spending and accepting diminished readiness to respond to external threats. They embraced American power and saw it as providing rather than undermining their own security. But Russia's Soviet past left it with a different set of priors, with which actions such as the NATO airstrikes on Yugoslavia resonated like a turning fork. The Russian elite has a long history of perceiving internal opposition as agents of a foreign power." See Keith Darden, "Russian Revanche: External Threats & Regime Reactions," 129.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> Lukyanov, "Perestroika 2014."

Defense Policy and a geopolitical strategist for President Putin, claims that the security issue is the main driving reason that forces Russia to play one of the leading roles in the world arena: “Our whole history is a struggle for survival. Sometimes we drove it in an active mode expanding our borders. Sovereignty and defense are our national ideas. This manifested itself in Ukraine when Western alliances, including NATO, began expanding on the territory for which Russia and Ukraine were paid millions of lives. If NATO included Ukraine in its ranks, this would be an absolute military challenge to the war, because 2500 kilometers of the border with Ukraine would have been unprotected. Luckily Russia acted the way it did and prevented the inevitable big war in Europe.”<sup>77</sup> While the West posits Russia as the power that suffered a defeat in the Cold War and seeks to subordinate the post-Soviet space, the majority of Russians claim that the West by its policy in the post-Soviet space drove Russia “into a corner” and thus Russia was forced to react.

The majority of Russians believe that they live in a state surrounded by enemies. According to the Levada Center, an independent Russian public opinion pollster, 66 percent of Russians believe that Russia has enemies as opposed to the 2014 polls in which 84 percent of respondents agreed on this. 56 percent of Russians named the United States as the main enemy of Russia while 29 percent of respondents called Ukraine, and 14 percent – the European Union.<sup>78</sup> Surprisingly, NATO was not perceived as one of the main threats. The reason for this is the majority of Russians perceive NATO to be an American organization. The perception of the US as an enemy, on the one hand, has remained from the Soviet era. On the other hand, this perception was, to a large

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<sup>77</sup> Sergei Karaganov, “U nas bazovye tsennosti suverenitet i bezopasnost,” *Russian International Affairs Council*, November 17, 2017, [http://russiancouncil.ru/analytiks-and-comments/comments/u-nas-bazovye-tsennosti-suverenitet-i-bezopasnost/?sphrase\\_id=3388487](http://russiancouncil.ru/analytiks-and-comments/comments/u-nas-bazovye-tsennosti-suverenitet-i-bezopasnost/?sphrase_id=3388487) (accessed December 12, 2017).

<sup>78</sup> “Vragi Rossii,” *Levada Center*, January 10, 2018, <https://www.levada.ru/2018/01/10/vragi-rossii/> (accessed February 17, 2018).

extent, caused by American military campaigns around the world. According to the vice-president of the Center for Political Technologies Alexei Makarkin, the perception of the US as an enemy increases Russians' self-esteem: "If the world power is considered as an enemy, it means that your own country is powerful and significant. It means that Russia is on the same level with the United States. The enemy in the form of, for example, Estonia or Lithuania, deprives any prestige because you put your country with them on the same level. Having an enemy like the US is in its own way prestigious."<sup>79</sup>

The Russian perception of having enemies has numerous causes, notes Alexei Makarkin. He explains that such perception dominated during the Soviet period and continues to this day. It is also associated with a sense of instability caused by a number of events, such as the war in Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya, and the Arab Spring. This is connected with fears that something like this can happen in Russia. In addition, Makarkin gives another important factor – the sense of so-called self-righteousness and conviction that Russians are right about everything, they have never been aggressors and never started wars first. And if from the Western point of view, Russians were doing something wrong or illegal, they (i.e. Russians) were still right. Therefore, those who do not agree with the Russian point of view, either do not understand them or they are enemies. Russians are convinced that the West understands their position and they are determined to harm them.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Russians believe that they are surrounded by enemies.

Russia's National Security Concept of 2015 defines threats to national security as "the set of conditions and factors creating a direct or indirect possibility of harm to national interests." The document indicates the further expansion of NATO and the creation of US biological laboratories

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<sup>79</sup> Jiri Just, "Kogo Rossiyane Boyatsya Bolshe Vsego," *INOSMI*, January 16, 2018, <https://inosmi.ru/social/20180116/241205166.html> (accessed February 24, 2018).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

in the territories of Russia's neighboring states as a threat to national security.<sup>81</sup> In the previous documents, NATO and the United States were not defined as threats. The critical shift in Russian perceptions of the threat came with the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 when the alliance showed that they could and would intervene in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state without United Nations approval.<sup>82</sup> Soon after that, Russia's National Security Concept issued in 1999 identified international influence in Russia's internal politics as a threat to national security.<sup>83</sup> An expansion of the state control within society was expressed as strategically necessary to prevent external forces from undermining Russia's internal security. In 2012, the State Duma passed a "foreign agents" law according to which NGOs that receive foreign funding should register as "foreign agents." In December 2017, in response to the US decision to register the Russian television channel *Russia Today* as a "foreign agent," the State Duma passed a law that allows foreign media outlets in Russia to be listed as "foreign agents." Under this law, the Ministry of Justice determines the list of media sources that will be registered as "foreign agents."

With the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Russian security doctrines disclosed another turn in Russian perceptions of the US interference in internal affairs. The "color revolutions" were perceived with harsh criticism by the Russian political establishment. Russia accused the West of inciting tensions and anti-Russian sentiments in the post-Soviet area. In particular, US and EU support for "anti-constitutional coup d'état in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society [...]"

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<sup>81</sup> President of Russia, *Ukaz o Strategii Natsionalnoi Bezopasnosti*, December 31, 2015, Ukaz 683, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/40391> (accessed December 30, 2017); As President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov repeatedly stated, despite the vision of NATO as a threat Russia is ready to continue and develop relations with NATO on condition that Russia's interests are going to be taken into account.

<sup>82</sup> Darden, "Russian Revanche," 129.

<sup>83</sup> President of Russia, *Kontseptsiya natsionalnoi bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, December 15, 1999, Moscow.

and the deliberate shaping in the Ukrainian population of an image of Russia as an enemy.” By May 2014, the Russian security doctrine identified color revolutions as a form of hybrid warfare used by the United States as the primary external threat.<sup>84</sup>

In his speech at the Valdai Club annual meeting in October 2017, President Putin again accused the United States of interfering in the affairs of sovereign states: “Unfortunately, after dividing up the geopolitical heritage of the Soviet Union, our Western partners became convinced of the justness of their cause and declared themselves the victors of the Cold War and started openly interfering in the affairs of sovereign states, and exporting democracy just like the Soviet leadership had tried to export the socialist revolution to the rest of the world in its time.”<sup>85</sup>

Interestingly, in their speeches, both President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized the United States, not the West in general. The reason for this attitude is most likely that Europe seems to be a victim, as the Soviets would say, of “American hegemonism.” From the Russian point of view, the EU, unlike Russia, finds in itself neither political nor economic courage to withstand the American power. The Russian political elite as well as the majority of Russians associate NATO with the United States and perceive the alliance as a US instrument of power projection.

In January 2018, the Federal Security Service published a presidential decree on state border policy. The document declares that Russia’s neighboring states are posing a threat; however, the document does not indicate which countries. The document also stresses that Russia

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<sup>84</sup> Dmitry Gorenburg, “Countering Color Revolutions: Russia’s New Security Strategy and its implications for U.S. Policy,” *Russian Military Reform*, September 15, 2014, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/countering-color-revolutions-russia%E2%80%99s-new-security-strategy-and-its-implications-us-policy> (accessed December 18, 2017); and Charles K. Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right,” *Military Review*, January/February 2016, 30-38.

<sup>85</sup> “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” *President of Russia*, 10 October 2017, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882> (accessed January 18, 2018).

has no territorial claims to other countries and that the leading world powers are trying to force Russia out of the zone that Moscow considers an object of its strategic interests. Among other risks the document mentions a host of other problems: the presence of military and socio-political tensions near the borders of Russia; conditions likely to destabilize the socio-political situation in the border area of the Russian Federation on the basis of the unresolved socio-economic problems; and finally, religious and ethnic contradictions and separatist manifestations among the population of the border area of the Russian Federation.<sup>86</sup>

President Putin repeatedly stated that the rapprochement between Ukraine and NATO poses a threat to Russia's security: "Nowadays, NATO is a mere instrument of foreign policy for the US. It has no allies, it has only vassals. Once a country becomes a NATO member, it is hard to resist the pressure of the US, a major country, and NATO leader. And all of a sudden any weapon system can be placed in this country – an anti-ballistic missile system, new military bases and if need be new offensive systems."<sup>87</sup> Putin believes that the expansion of NATO is actually aimed at deterring Russia which the alliance sees as the main threat.<sup>88</sup>

### *Russia as a Great Power*

Russia has been consistently characterizing itself as a great power.<sup>89</sup> In particular, both the

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<sup>86</sup> Federal Security Service, *Osnovy gosudarstvennoi pograničnoi politiki Rossiyskoi Federatsii*, January 2018, [http://www.fsb.ru/files/PDF/Osnovy\\_proekt.pdf](http://www.fsb.ru/files/PDF/Osnovy_proekt.pdf) (accessed January 31, 2018).

<sup>87</sup> "Putin asked Bill Clinton to consider option Russia might join NATO," *ITAR TASS*, 3 June 2017, <http://tass.com/politics/949712> (accessed February 2, 2017).

<sup>88</sup> "Putin zayavil o postoyannykh popytkakh destabilizirovat' Rossiyu izvne," *Interfax*, 16 February 2017, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/550195> (accessed February 2, 2017).

<sup>89</sup> Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy note that Putin highlighted "derzhavnost' – the belief that Russia is destined always to be a great power (derzhava) exerting its influence abroad "as one of the values within the "Russian idea" in his 1999 "Millennium Message," see Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013), 38–39, 238. Further, Mankoff identifies the great-power identity as a dominant feature of Russia's

current National Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Concept emphasize Russia's status as one of the leading world powers whose sovereignty must be respected and whose foreign policy depends on its national interests. The vision of Russia as a great power involves Russia's desire to participate in deciding international disputes, to have an influence in its region, to cooperate with the leading countries on an equal basis, and to have its autonomy and sovereignty respected. As Dmitry Trenin, the Director of Moscow Carnegie Center, notes, Russia grievances against the West falls in two narratives: that the West fails to recognize Russia's contribution towards ending the Cold War, and that the West does not acknowledge Russia's Great Power status.<sup>90</sup>

According to the experts from the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy, Russian foreign policy is still in the process of its self-identification which includes a return to traditional values, the main principles of foreign policy, and politics in general. By the main principles of foreign policy, they imply the unconditional provision of sovereignty and security of Russia and its status of the great power. Russia's great power status, they write, derive from "the reforms of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great and the victories of the XVIII and XIX centuries." The attempt to abandon those principles in the late 1980s and in the 1990s led to nothing but loss and rejection by the majority of the Russian people, according to them.<sup>91</sup>

The idea of multipolarity, which was stated as one of five key principles of Russian foreign policy by then-President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008, implies the presence of several leading powers, one of which is Russia. Russia also seeks to be one of the major participants in resolving

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foreign policy since 1990, see Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 12.

<sup>90</sup> Dmitry Trenin, *Should We Fear Russia?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016).

<sup>91</sup> "Strategiya dlya Rossii. Rossiyskaya Vneshnyaya Politika: Konets 2010-kh – nachalo 2000-kh godov," *Council on Foreign and Defense Policy*, 2017, [http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8B\\_23%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%8F\\_sm.pdf](http://svop.ru/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B7%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%8B_23%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%8F_sm.pdf) (accessed February 12, 2018).

international conflicts. In September 2015, Russia launched airstrikes in Syria, marking the beginning of a significant military intervention. This was its first use of military force outside the former Soviet Union since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. By providing direct air support for Syria's military operations in 2015, Russia helped Bashar al-Assad maintain his regime, reinforced its military presence, and participated in negotiations in support of a ceasefire. In resolving the situation in the East of Ukraine, Russia has preferred discussions in the Normandy Format along with Germany, France, and Ukraine, which may be desirable since it emphasizes the importance of Russia's role and excludes the United States. Russia is also a member of the BRICS association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa; as well as other regional forums that underline Russia's autonomy and international role.

Elena Chebankova, a British political scientist specializing in the political process in modern Russia, distinguishes three notions central to contemporary discourse in Russia. First, the idea of state sovereignty, she assures, viewed as the capacity for political development free from external influence, has become the principal unifying factor in Russia. Second, the idea of national reconciliation in Russia, or the idea that contemporary Russia is a direct heir to the Soviet Union and that most achievements in the post-Soviet period stem from Soviet times, including matters of culture and even the "collective unconscious." And, finally, Russian discourse frequently emphasizes the importance of a multipolar world and the state's entitlement to independent development, a contrast to the Euro-Atlantic universalist approach of globalist democratization.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Elena Chebankova, "Ideas, Ideology & Intellectuals in Search of Russia's Political Future," *Daedalus* 146, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 80-82.

*Post-Soviet space*

The Russian political establishment has consistently expressed Russia's interest in maintaining close relations with and influence within Russia's neighboring countries. Indeed, in the hierarchy of Russian foreign policy, post-Soviet space, or, as Russians used to say in the 1990s, the "near abroad," remains a key foreign policy priority.<sup>93</sup> This is evident in the 2013 and 2016 Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Foreign Policy Concept Papers. In both versions, the post-Soviet space occupies the first place in the list of "Regional Priorities," demonstrating its highest priority in the Kremlin's agenda.<sup>94</sup> However, the scope of Russia's policy in the area is not well defined and remains vague. The Concept puts in the first place the development of "bilateral and multicultural cooperation with member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Republic of Abkhazia, and the Republic of South Ossetia" and the further strengthening of "integration structures within the CIS involving Russia."<sup>95</sup> Specifically, Russia advocates the development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) – a security alliance of the post-Soviet countries – and its "conversion into a universal international organization capable of confronting regional challenges and military-political and military-strategic threats."<sup>96</sup> In terms of economic integration, the Conception sees the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which was established in 2014 under the auspices of Russia and includes, at this point, Armenia, Belarus,

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<sup>93</sup> It is necessary to clarify that the "near abroad" in Russia means countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the Baltic states. The concept of the post-Soviet space and the "near abroad" is discussed in Chapter III.

<sup>94</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, February 12, 2013, paragraph 42; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016, paragraph 49.

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, paragraph 52.

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, as a form of integration within the Eurasian space. The Concept advocates for “the consolidation of the Union for the continued integration, stable development, cooperation and enhanced competitiveness of the economies of the Union’s members within the global economy.”<sup>97</sup> In other words, this integration process involves political, economic, and military components in the form of unions of states or international organizations that serve as a tool of maintaining Russia’s pre-eminence and influence in the post-Soviet space.

In his speeches, Putin consistently describes Russia’s relations with former Soviet countries as a “brotherly relationship” with “fraternal peoples.” In particular, the vision of Russians and Ukrainians as “one people” still prevails in Russia. The phrase “brotherly relationship” actually referred to the Soviet “friendship of the peoples” rhetoric, the approach that was adopted to strengthen the unity of multiethnic republics of the Soviet Union in which all peoples were equal, but the Russian nation was “first among equals.”<sup>98</sup> The phrase first appeared in a *Pravda* front-page editorial in 1936: “All the peoples [of the USSR], participants in the great socialist construction project, can take pride in the results of their work. All of them from the smallest to the largest are equal Soviet patriots. But the first among equals is the Russian people, the Russian workers, the Russian toilers, whose role in the entire Great Proletarian Revolution, from the first victory to today’s brilliant period of its development, has been exclusively great.”<sup>99</sup>

Though all ethnic groups in Russia were equal, the Russian language and people were the “first among equals.” The Russian language was promoted as the greatest of all the languages of

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<sup>97</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, November 30, 2016, paragraph 51.

<sup>98</sup> Masha Gessen, *The Future is History: How Totalitarianism Reclaimed Russia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2017), 77.

<sup>99</sup> Peredovaia, “RSFSR,” *Pravda* 31 (February 1, 1936), cited in Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1929-1939* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 452.

the Soviet Union and was used as the main one all over the USSR. All Soviet citizens, however, were aware of their ethnicity, which in the case of suspicious ethnic groups – in particular, Jewish, Germans, Poles – meant official discrimination or persecution. In some cases, these ethnic groups became the targets of popular ethnic hostility.<sup>100</sup> The Soviet Union had once proclaimed itself to be the “world’s first multiethnic anti-imperial state”, but its practices were imperial.<sup>101</sup>

As an American-Russian journalist Masha Gessen points out, “Twelve years after the end of the USSR, Russia still perceived its former subjects as part of itself. Unlike clearly distinct foreign countries, former Soviet republics were referred to as the ‘near abroad’ (Helsinki and Vienna are closer to Moscow than Kiev and Tbilisi, but the designation referred to psychic and political rather than physical distance).”<sup>102</sup> In this sense, Russian perception of former Soviet space as part of itself still prevailing in Russian society is psychic in nature and most likely will continue to retain for a long time.

The psychic perception is connected to and closely interacts with the political perception of the near abroad as part of Russia. RAND Corporation experts offer the mapping of Russia’s desired influence, with Russia, Belarus, Central Asia, and Ukraine at the center and diminishing influence in the Caucasus, the Baltic states, and then the Western Balkans and countries of the former Warsaw Pact.<sup>103</sup>

As the experts note, the desire for regional influence runs deeper than strategic concerns about maintaining buffer zones from foreign invasion. Russian and Western experts refer to a

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<sup>100</sup> See Terry Martin, “The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing,” *Journal of Modern History* 70, no. 4: 813-861.

<sup>101</sup> Gessen, *The Future is History*, 79.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, 238.

<sup>103</sup> Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, “Russian Views of the International Order,” RAND Corporation, 2017, 11.

longstanding “imperial” identity, tracing back from Russia’s expansion in the XVI through XIX centuries and the record of the Soviet Union.<sup>104</sup> Igor Zevelev, former director of the MacArthur Foundation’s Russia office, writes that Russian identity comprises the “‘Little Russians’ (Ukrainians), the ‘White Russians’ (Belorussians), and the ‘Great Russians’ (ethnic Russians).”<sup>105</sup> Russian identity is also composed of the other post-Soviet states, including countries in Central Asia, based on their shared past and use of the Russian language.<sup>106</sup> Russia’s cultural connection and leadership over its region are currently defined as *Russkiy Mir*, or Russian World, meaning support for Russia’s “compatriots.”<sup>107</sup>

From the Russian perspective, as Dmitry Trenin writes, “the new states are not yet quite states. Interestingly, Moscow’s political relations with them are still managed by the Kremlin chief of staff, rather than the foreign minister. For many in the new states, the CIS is a holdover from the imperial era, a club in which they are less equal than the former hegemon.”<sup>108</sup> Following this point, a survey held by RAND Corporation shows the types of Russia’s influence in the former Soviet countries. They reveal that post-Soviet states do not make any significant foreign and security decisions without consulting Russia; Moscow requires that when it “picks up the phone,”

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<sup>104</sup> Radin and Reach, “Russian Views of the International Order.” In his book, Trenin describes Russia as “post-imperium,” highlighting the Russian and Soviet history of imperial control and the loss of the empire in the 1990s. See Dmitry Trenin, introduction to *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011). Ronald Suny writes, “From its beginning, then, Russian identity was bound up with the supranational world of belief, the political world loosely defined by the ruling dynasty, and was contrasted to ‘others’ at the periphery.” See Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Empire Strikes Out: Imperial Russia, “National” Identity, and Theories of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 20.

<sup>105</sup> Igor Zevelev, *NATO’s Enlargement and Russian Perceptions of Eurasian Political Frontiers*, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George Marshall European Center for Security Studies, undated, 17, <https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/98-00/zevelev.pdf> (accessed January 19, 2018).

<sup>106</sup> Radin and Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, 12.

<sup>107</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 4, 19.

<sup>108</sup> Trenin, *Post-Imperium*, 80.

leaders follow through on Russia's requests. Major organizations in the region, including the CSTO, CIS, and numerous Russian nongovernmental organizations, have direct links to and are backed by the Kremlin.<sup>109</sup>

Over the past two decades, Russia has been consistent in its narratives about the international order as well as Russia's role in it. Russian leaders and experts see the current international order as led by the United States and perceive it as a threat to Russian national interests and security. Russia identifies itself as a great power (along with the US and China) in the growing multipolar international system and, hence, wants the international community, particularly the United States, to respect its autonomy and sovereignty, cooperate on an equal basis, and take into account Russian interests.

Misunderstandings between the United States and Russia that accumulated after the end of the Cold War lie in the lack of a common vision of security in the territory between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community. Russia – which identifies itself as the direct heir of the Soviet Union – comes from the Westphalian model in which each nation-state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory. While Russia recognizes the fact that its neighboring countries are independent, Russia considers itself as the historically superior power in the post-Soviet space. This is a matter highly important to Russia's national identity.

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<sup>109</sup> Radin and Reach, "Russian Views of the International Order."

## CHAPTER IV

## RUSSIAN EXPERT COMMUNITY DEBATES ON POST-SOVIET SPACE

A quarter of a century has passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet the character of Russia's policy in the post-Soviet space remains vague. There is no declared agreement on what is legitimate in relations between Russia and other former Soviet states on the limits of exercising their sovereignty.<sup>110</sup> For Russia, the post-Soviet space, also known as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and the Baltic states or 'near abroad,' is a region of vital interests that has been repeatedly emphasized by the Russian political elite, and the interaction with the CIS is Russia's foreign policy priority.

The post-Soviet 'space' continues to remain as a politically indefinite area, with questions over whether this region exists as an established region.<sup>111</sup> This question is fundamental for the entire study concerning post-Soviet issues. It is not clear how to define this area of the world since the very inclusion of the prefix 'post' implies the past, already non-existent unit at the present time. Besides, the area has already broken up into smaller regions: "West" or New Eastern Europe, with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova; South Caucasus; Central Asia; and a Russia standing alone.

The USSR disappeared several decades ago, but Russian academia and policymakers continue to refer to it by using such terms as "post-Soviet," "post-Socialist," "former Soviet republics," or the term widely used in the 1990s, "near abroad" as opposed to "far abroad." These terms defined the area of the former Soviet republics within the foreign political orbit of Russia. In particular, Dmitry Trenin notes that the term 'near abroad' did not imply "temporary nature" of

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<sup>110</sup> James Nixey and Richard Sakwa, "The Russia Question: Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia," *Chatham House*, December 8, 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/russia-question-sovereignty-and-legitimacy-post-soviet-eurasia> (accessed February 16, 2018).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

the newly established states' independence as the West perceived it to be, it implied "the change of attitude to them as truly sovereign states but not as outlying republics of the once single country."<sup>112</sup>

To this day, the post-Soviet 'space' has still not established its own, conceptual identity, most often hiding behind the prefix 'post.'<sup>113</sup> In Russia, the notion *postsovetskoye prostranstvo* (i.e. post-Soviet space) is actively used as the reference to this space from the past. Though the post-Soviet space as a political unit does not exist anymore, the notion of post-Soviet space endures and remains psychological in nature: it exists in the minds of politicians and the public, but not in reality. In other words, one can say that the post-Soviet space represents not a political unit, but a geographic and cultural concept. The term 'post-Soviet space' has become simply a convenient definition of the region with fifteen former Soviet republics as well as those states that have been established over the past twenty-five years.

In this chapter, I use the definition of 'post-Soviet space' mainly because this notion is actively used in the official documents and statements of the Russian political leadership as well as in the research of Russia foreign policy analysts whose work I am researching here. This chapter focuses on current debates prevailing in the Russian expert community regarding Russia's policy in post-Soviet space. Though the Russian leaders and foreign policy experts' views are mostly consistent in general, the expert community has distinctive ideas from the political establishment

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<sup>112</sup> Dmitry Trenin, "Russia and CIS Countries: the Relations Getting Mature," *Russian International Affairs Council*, March 2, 2012, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-and-cis-countries-the-relations-getting-mature/> (accessed February 16, 2018).

<sup>113</sup> Maria Lagutina, "The Evolution of the "Post-Soviet Space" Concept in Russian Foreign Policy: From the Post-Soviet Space to the Eurasian Space," in Vasile Rotaru and Miruna Troncota's *Russia and the Former Soviet Space: Instrumentalizing Security, Legitimizing Intervention* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 1-2.

regarding particular issues. Drawing from existing work on Russian foreign policy expertise, I identified three major interests that underlie Russian thinking, policy, and behavior nowadays:

- The crisis over Ukraine and the concept of the “Russian World.”
- NATO enlargement.
- Eurasian integration and promoting regional economic and security cooperation through new regional organizations under Russian leadership, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

#### *Ukraine and the concept of the Russian World*

Although Ukraine gained its independence and sovereignty after the demise of the Soviet Union, Russia had been continuing to consider Ukraine as part of itself and certainly not foreign to Russia. As Dmitry Trenin notes, “In fact, Ukraine was seen by many as part of the core of historical Russia, and its independence, as a transitory state.”<sup>114</sup> Indeed, delineated in 1997, borders between Russia and Ukraine were seen by the majority of Russians as a formality. According to the Levada Center polls held in 2001, 65 percent of Russians refused to consider Ukraine as a foreign country. By October 2013, this attitude had not changed significantly – 61% of Russians still refused to see Ukraine as a foreign country.<sup>115</sup>

Addressing the Russian audience and arguing with such attitudes, the second president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma titled his book *Ukraine Is Not Russia*, on the cover of which “not” was

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<sup>114</sup> Dmitry Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine. A New Stage in the Russian State Project,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, December 27, 2017, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/To-Understand-Ukraine-19268> (accessed January 15, 2018).

<sup>115</sup> “Rossiyane ob Ukraine,” *Levada Center*, November 11, 2011, <https://www.levada.ru/2013/11/12/rossiyane-ob-ukraine/> (accessed February 22, 2018).

highlighted in red.<sup>116</sup> Highlighting the differences between Ukrainian and Russian national characters, different views on the cultural and historical past, Kuchma sets out to explain why Ukraine cannot be Russia.<sup>117</sup> The book was met with harsh criticism both in Russia and Ukraine. In his review, Russian political scientist Sergey Markedonov noted that Ukrainian politicians are “guided, first of all, by what distinguishes and divides us [Russians and Ukrainians]. They do everything to make these differences as much as possible.”<sup>118</sup> Though his note was discerning, the Russian political establishment did not take seriously the moods prevailing among the Ukrainian elite.

The first major failure of Russian policy in Ukraine came with the “Orange Revolution” in 2004-2005. Moscow saw in the revolution the result of external interference with “far-reaching geopolitical goals.” From the Kremlin point of view, the “Orange Revolution” was an attempt to displace Russia from its key position in the post-Soviet space and to “test” the scenario of a similar “street” coup in Moscow.<sup>119</sup> In Russia, the Orange Revolution was presented as an event that was largely initiated and actively manipulated by the West. Quickly, however, the contradictions which soon began among the “orange” activists blunted the fears of the spread of color revolutions in Russia.<sup>120</sup>

Kremlin’s other anxiety was followed by Kyiv’s request to provide Ukraine with a plan for preparing for NATO membership in 2008 that was backed by the United States. President Vladimir Putin took the unprecedented step of traveling to Bucharest for the NATO summit in order to

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<sup>116</sup> Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine.”

<sup>117</sup> Leonid Kuchma, *Ukraina – ne Rossiya* (Moscow: Vremia, 2003).

<sup>118</sup> Aleksandr Goryanin, “Neprochitannoye poslanie Leonida Kuchmy,” *Otechestvennyye zapiski*, 34, no. 1 (2007), [http://www.strana-oz.ru/2007/1/neprochitannoe-poslanie-leonida-kuchmy#\\_ftn2](http://www.strana-oz.ru/2007/1/neprochitannoe-poslanie-leonida-kuchmy#_ftn2) (accessed February 20, 2018).

<sup>119</sup> Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine.”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

convince the alliance of the potential danger of turmoil in Ukraine and the split of the country if Kyiv moved towards the NATO alliance. As Trenin notes, Moscow drew a “red line,” warning NATO and Kyiv of the danger of a conflict with Russia in case Ukraine decided to join the alliance. The following war in South Ossetia in 2008 confirmed the seriousness of Moscow’s intentions and, as a result, the talks about Ukraine and Georgia’s possible accession into NATO were “put on hold.”

The Euromaidan – a wave of mass demonstrations in Ukraine which began in November 2013 with very large protests demanding closer European integration – was very negatively perceived by the Russian elite and society. The events in Ukraine have been presented again as “a dress rehearsal of what is planned to be done in Russia,” as a coup supported and organized by the United States in order to destabilize Russia.<sup>121</sup> Russian society, which was tired of social and political instability caused by the radical transformation in the 1990s, perceived the possibility of repeating those events as something especially negative.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine is considered as a “fratricidal” conflict which Russia could not prevent. According to Russian expert Fyodor Lukyanov, the incapacity of the Ukrainian elites, along with the Western policy to expand its zone of influence and to prevent the rapprochement of Ukraine and Russia, are at the heart of this conflict. However, he notes that Russian policy is also responsible for the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. For almost twenty-five years, there was no long-term policy towards Ukraine. When it came to Russian interests in Ukraine, Russia would “buy” the Kyiv elite with profitable long-term contracts and discounts in the price of natural gas for Ukraine. The belief in the “brotherhood” of the two nations, which supposedly had to inevitably

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<sup>121</sup> Nikolai Zhulin, “Pochemu nam vazhna Ukraina?” *Echo of Moscow*, June 15, 2015, <https://echo.msk.ru/blog/rodina1993/1566522-echo/> (accessed February 12, 2018).

become one nation, remained in the minds of the Russian political elite. But the price of that “return” had never been taken into account by the Kremlin. The result is a war in Ukraine and its further “degradation towards either an ultranationalist dictatorship or, more likely, further disintegration.”<sup>122</sup>

Dmitry Trenin also sees the main reason for the Russian failure in Ukraine to be a product of its ignoring the fact, which is unpleasant for many Russians, that the Ukrainian elite is imbued with the spirit of “nativism” – a dream of an independent Ukrainian political project, different and separate from the Russian one. He argues that, in practice, such a project cannot be realized even within the framework of the economic rapprochement between Ukraine and Russia, not to mention the full-scale integration of the two countries. It is also clear that the great attraction of Russia, the Russian language, and Russian culture makes it difficult to establish a Ukrainian-speaking political nation. The Ukrainian political project can only be successful in the isolation of Ukraine from Russia to a maximum extent.<sup>123</sup>

In Russia, Ukrainian nationalism has been perceived as a deeply negative phenomenon. The vision of Russians and Ukrainians as “one people” still prevails in Russian society. This was also repeatedly stated by President Putin: “The development of the Slavic world was complicated. Russia’s development was also difficult. It was formed by many Slavic tribes – 16 or 32. Eventually, ancient Rus emerged, and Kyiv became part of it and the center of it. In this sense, our historical, spiritual and other roots entitle me to say that basically, we are one and the same people. But, of course, you may not agree with me. One more thing is clear. Being close to Russia’s western border, Ukraine developed accordingly and has many wonderful unique features in its

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<sup>122</sup> “Strategiya dlya Rossii.”

<sup>123</sup> Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine.”

language and culture – in everything. They are all cherished in Russia and considered to be part of our own culture.”<sup>124</sup> Thus, historical roots suggest that Ukrainians and Russians are “one people” and, therefore, the Ukrainian nationalists, who encroach on the unity of the “brotherly people,” appear to be enemies not only of Russians but also of Ukrainians.<sup>125</sup>

The problem, however, is that the Ukrainian elite leaned toward the side of the Ukrainian nationalists long before the Euromaidan. The Ukrainian elite has been positioning itself as “real” Ukrainians, not “Malorossians” (Little Russians) – younger brothers of the Russians – and this vision particularly has become prevalent among Ukrainian people after Russia’s actions in the Euromaidan, Crimea, and Donbass. However, the Russian establishment has not fully realized it yet. The Kremlin still focuses on what unifies all East Slavic people, on common faith and common history, and gives little attention to their differences.<sup>126</sup>

The focus on common historical and cultural roots is at the heart of the concept of the “Russian World,” the cultural and historical idea of the international community united by its involvement in Russia and adherence to the Russian language and culture. Marlene Laurrelle describes the idea of the “Russian World” as a “geopolitical imagination, a fuzzy mental atlas on which different regions of the world and their different links to Russia can be articulated in a fluid way.”<sup>127</sup> The Russian World is not based on Russian ethnicity but encompasses the Soviet legacy and the Russian-speaking communities inside and outside the country’s borders in which Russian

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<sup>124</sup> “Excerpts from Russian President Vladimir Putin’s Annual News Conference,” *Embassy of the Russian Federation in Washington D.C.*, December 14, 2017, <http://www.russianembassy.org/article/excerpts-from-russian-president-vladimir-putin%E2%80%99s-annual-news-conference> (accessed February 13, 2018).

<sup>125</sup> Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine.”

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Marlene Laurrelle, *The “Russian World.” Russia’s Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Global Interests, 2015), 1.

language and culture represent a “cultural export.”<sup>128</sup> But despite the prevailing cultural basis, the concept is also applied to justify Russia’s “post-colonial” policies in the so-called “near abroad” and to cover up interference in the internal affairs of other states. In particular, President Putin justified the annexation of Crimea in 2014 not only as the return of Russia’s historical territory that was “illegitimately” added to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic for bureaucratic reasons in 1954 but as the reunification of the “Russian World.” Indeed, by 2014, 65 percent of the whole population of Crimea were ethnic Russians.

The concept of the Russian World is not new, but its modern emergence dates to the early twenty-first century as a response to the impact of globalization on the development and culture of Russia. Many Russian thinkers view globalization in a negative light, expressing their concern over Russia’s loss of power and threat to its cultural values. However, the main idea was not in favor of the international isolation of Russia, but in the need for a type of mini-globalization within the Russian community. In this respect, the idea of integration within the CIS began to be emphasized since the early 2000s and was repeatedly stated as Russia’s foreign policy priority. According to the concept of the Russian World, Russia should find a way of interaction with the outside world that will allow it to preserve traditional values and will also provide economic benefit from the processes of globalization. In the concept of the Eurasian Union, which became the backbone of the foreign policy agenda of Vladimir Putin's presidential program in 2011, Ukraine took up an important place as a part of the Eurasian integration project. The success of the integration largely depended on the economic and political orientation of Kyiv. Without Ukraine, this would be just limited integration composed of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus as the main actors.

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<sup>128</sup> Laruelle, *The “Russian World,”* 23.

Thus, Russia justifies its actions in Ukraine, to a large extent, by the idea of the Russian world. Russia as the older brother comes to help its little brother to prevent it from choosing a wrong way, from the loss of belonging to the Russian world.

Dmitry Trenin explains Ukraine's distancing from Russia as a consequence of the process of the formation of the Ukrainian nation as an independent and separate unit and not the result of internal conspiracy or intrigues of external forces. This process did not necessarily have to take the form of violent actions, but in any case, it would lead to the isolation of Ukraine from Russia.<sup>129</sup>

Despite the fact that the Ukrainian issue has been taking one of the main places in Russia's foreign policy agenda, the conflict has reached its point in which Moscow finds it necessary to abstract itself from the conflict as much as possible. Fyodor Lukyanov writes that Ukraine will most likely continue to degrade and he finds it important to limit the negative and distracting influence of the Ukrainian factor on Russian politics. The program minimum, that aimed to stop the further expansion of Western alliances to Ukraine and to other countries that Russia considers vitally important in terms of its security, has been completed. In the coming years, Lukyanov emphasizes that it is important to "comply with the Minsk agreements and to abstract from Ukraine as much as possible." According to the Russian expert, the problem of Donbass currently seems unsolvable. For Russia, it is better to have a semi-independent, but formally Ukrainian territory assisted by Russia. In other words, the conflict should remain as a "frozen" conflict.<sup>130</sup>

Ukraine for many years will remain an issue perplexing Russia's constructive relations with Europe, a "source of 'black swans' – unpredictable challenges and provocations."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Trenin, "To Understand Ukraine."

<sup>130</sup> "Strategiya dlya Rossii."

<sup>131</sup> Sergei Karaganov, "Russian Foreign Policy Finding New Bearings," *Russian International Affairs Council*, June 8, 2016, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and->

Lukyanov concludes that distraction of Russia and partly other European countries from a more productive policy, apparently, was “one of the motives of the efforts of the forces that contributed to the fueling of the crisis.”<sup>132</sup>

The conflict in Ukraine demonstrated that Russia needs to closely observe, study and try to understand Ukraine as well as other neighboring countries. Talking about brotherhood and unity, Russia “paid a great price for ignoring the real Ukraine.”<sup>133</sup>

### *NATO enlargement*

The main threats to Russia’s security are formulated in the latest version of Russia’s Military Doctrine of December 2014. According to the doctrine, NATO enlargement is the most serious military danger that Russia faces. For many years, Russian leaders viewed the possibility of expanding NATO at the expense of the former Soviet republics as a threat.<sup>134</sup> To some extent, Russia’s concerns about the plans of Ukraine and Georgia to join the alliance led to Russia’s involvement in the conflicts in both countries. Although this remains the main concern for the Russian leadership, in recent years it has also begun to pay special attention to the expansion of NATO’s military infrastructure in the countries of the alliance located at the borders of the Russian Federation. From the Russian point of view, NATO is attempting to penetrate into the central regions of Eurasia to balance against Russia. After the demise of the Soviet Union, there was no document or a peace treaty that would regulate the situation in Europe. As a result, the region saw

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comments/comments/rossiyskaya-vneshnyaya-politika-novyy-etap/ (accessed February 28, 2018).

<sup>132</sup> “Strategiya dlya Rossii.”

<sup>133</sup> Trenin, “To Understand Ukraine.”

<sup>134</sup> President of Russia, *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, December 26, 2014, <https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2015/08/Russia-s-2014-Military-Doctrine.pdf> (accessed December 30, 2017).

the emergence of a political vacuum tending to destabilization. Europe has not become a space of indivisible security and cooperation because the West desires to extend the zone of influence and control over the territories that Moscow considers as a vital zone of its national interests as well as the West's unwillingness to take into account Russia's interests and concerns.<sup>135</sup>

In his speech to the Russian parliament on March 18, 2014, President Putin legitimized the annexation of Crimea, stressing at the same time what humiliation Russia suffered because of the West's unwillingness to keep its promises not to expand NATO beyond the borders of reunited Germany. For more than twenty years, the story of the alleged "broken promise" has become an integral part of Russia's post-Soviet self-identity. Constantly remembering the past is still the most convenient way of distracting attention from the present.

Due to its geostrategic importance for Russia's security, the Baltic region was, is and will remain in the forefront of Russian foreign policy in the foreseeable future. For the Baltic States and Poland, Russia is part of the "black legend" of the national myth.<sup>136</sup> The anti-Russian element in East European politics gradually declined after the end of the Cold War. However, the Georgian, and then the Ukrainian crises gave it a qualitatively new character. The autocratic nature of Russia, thus, gives rise to an expansionist and aggressive foreign policy. The Russian threat (after Ukraine) has become a powerful factor in the consolidation of the Alliance.

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<sup>135</sup> "Strategiya dlya Rossii."

<sup>136</sup> Ivan Timofeev, "The Euro-Atlantic Security Formula: Stable Deterrence and Its Alternatives," *Russian International Affairs Council*, August 23, 2017, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/the-euro-atlantic-security-formula-stable-deterrence-and-its-alternatives/> (accessed January 16, 2018).

Despite the presence of some encouraging trends in the cooperation of NATO and the CIS member states, the uncertainty about the new structure of European security inevitably becomes a problem that causes additional fears and suspicions of Russian decision-makers.<sup>137</sup>

### *Eurasian integration*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia recognized the new states within the borders of the Union republics despite the fact that about 25 million ethnic Russians inhabited the territories of newly established states. The issues of Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, Sevastopol, and the Black Sea Navy were not fully resolved. The Russian political establishment refrained from making claims on Ukraine in order to avoid a conflict with the state still possessing that part of the Soviet nuclear arsenal.

In the 1990s, the newly established Russian Federation mainly focused on resolving domestic issues and fostering relations with the West. It was crucial for Russia to be recognized as the legitimate successor to the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire, to preserve the seat in the UN Security Council and to maintain control over the USSR's nuclear capability.<sup>138</sup>

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) created after the dissolution of the USSR, according to Dmitry Trenin, from the very beginning “did not become a platform for the re-integration of newly independent states with the former mother country.” Instead, it became the tool of joint withdrawal from the imperial state, and a factor in the creation of new states and the

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<sup>137</sup> Vladimir Lukin, “Trudnosti nashei bezopasnosti,” *Council on Foreign and Defense Policy*, September 19, 2017, <http://svop.ru/main/24754/> (accessed January 16, 2018).

<sup>138</sup> Dmitry Trenin, “Russia and CIS countries: the relations getting mature,” *Russian Council of International Affairs*, March 2, 2012, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-and-cis-countries-the-relations-getting-mature/> (accessed February 2, 2018).

strengthening of their independence. The format of the CIS that was based on the equal cooperation and that was agreed by Russia, in fact, helped the new states become independent.<sup>139</sup>

The military alliance – the Collective Security Treaty Organization – established in May 1992 by six CIS member states (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan)<sup>140</sup> represents one of the tools of integration in the CIS. The CSTO was created to protect the territorial and economic space of the treaty member-states from any external military and political aggressors, terrorists, and large-scale natural disasters. Moscow considers CSTO as an important tool for ensuring national and regional security and for strengthening relations with the CIS countries. However, due to the organization's goal, the possibilities of the CSTO as an instrument of Russian foreign policy are limited. Russia has been facing constantly growing competition from other states, and international organizations that have their own interests in the region (i.e. the US, NATO, and China).

For a long time, Russia did not have a specific strategy towards the CIS countries, and the majority of official statements about Russian policy towards the post-Soviet space were mostly declarative. However, in the second decade of the 2000s, Russia began to pursue a more pragmatic policy towards its neighboring countries, promoting the expansion of Russian capital and projecting political influence in the region that was to a large extent motivated by the goal of the internal development of Russia itself. As Dmitry Trenin points out, “the imperial idea was replaced by the concept of Russia as a great power.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, while the imperial approach of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union was concerned with the support of the outlying regions

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<sup>139</sup> Trenin, “Russia and CIS countries.”

<sup>140</sup> Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus joined the Organization in 1993.

<sup>141</sup> Trenin, “Russia and CIS countries.”

rather than itself, a great power focuses on strengthening its own status and needs.<sup>142</sup> In his book, *Post-Imperium: the Eurasian history*, Trenin examines the Eurasian integration project from the perspective of Russia's interest. According to him, for post-imperial Russia, the role of the "donor" for its former areas is no longer reasonable.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, Russia's Eurasian strategy is based on pragmatic solutions.<sup>144</sup>

Russia's turn to the East was repeatedly proclaimed in the early 2000s: one of the first official statements regarding Russia's Eurasian domain priority manifested itself in Putin's speech at the APEC Business Summit in Shanghai in which the president pinpointed Russia as a "Eurasian country."<sup>145</sup> From then on, Putin's statements and official foreign policy documents assert Russia as a Eurasian country. However, Russia's turn to the Eurasian direction started only in 2011-2012 with the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) that will be discussed further.

As a number of Russian experts from the Valdai Discussion Club note, over the past few years, the geostrategic orientation of the Russian ruling elite has significantly changed. Over the past 300 years, despite the continued territorial expansion to the East, Russia's elite considered Russia to be the periphery of Europe. In Europe, in turn, such an aspiration was favorably met and often led to economic and political concessions to Russia, including the failed effect to teach the

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<sup>142</sup> Trenin, "Russia and CIS countries."

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Sergei Karaganov, "Nezakonchennaya istoriya. Retsenziya na knigu Trenin D.V. Post-Imperium: evraziyskaya istoriya," *Russia in Global Affairs*, February 21, 2012, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/book/Nezakonchennaya-istoriya-15474> (accessed February 14, 2018).

<sup>145</sup> "Prezident Rossii vstretilsya s uchastnikami Delovogo sammita organizatsii Aziatsko-tikhookeanskogo ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva," *President of Russia*, October 19, 2001, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/40560> (accessed February 12, 2018).

late Soviet and early Russia elite how to build a new country according to the proposed rules from the West.<sup>146</sup>

According to these writers, Russia started to change its attitude towards Europe because of “post-European” values and the Brussels (as well as Berlin) “democratic messianism” that began to intensify since the late 2000s in parallel with the growing problems within the EU. But the key reason of the decrease in the desire of the Russian elites to become a European country, as the authors note, was the expansion of Western alliances on the territory that Russia considered vital in terms of ensuring its security “for which the peoples of the Russian Empire and the USSR laid millions of lives.” This policy led to the failure of the project to create a stable system of European security, a common European home and European unity.<sup>147</sup>

Thus, from a pro-European one, Russia has started to identify itself as a central Eurasian, or a northern Eurasian power. In Russian modern geopolitical thinking, Eurasia includes both the post-Soviet space and new segments of the region outside the former Soviet boundaries.<sup>148</sup> In comparison with Slavophiles, Soviet, and Russian Eurasianists, the new Russian self-identification as a “Eurasian nation” means liberation (emancipation) from moral and political dependence on the West. At the same time this concept is not anti-European; instead, it tries to be more inclusive and implies that the countries that did not share a Soviet identity in their past, but which are

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<sup>146</sup> Valdai Discussion Club, *K Velikomu okeanu – 5: ot povorota na Vostok k Bolshoi Evrazii* (Moscow: Valdai, 2017), 6-7. <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/17048/> (accessed February 11, 2018).

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid*, 6-7.

<sup>148</sup> Mikhail Molchanov, “Eurasian Regionalisms and Russian Foreign Policy.” Paper presented at the UACES Convention Exchanging Ideas on Europe 2012, Passau, Germany, September 3-5, 2012. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2735260](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2735260) (accessed February 10, 2018).

interested in economic relations with the region, are welcome in the process of the Eurasian integration.<sup>149</sup>

Russia's turn to the East has a strongly marked economic character and its primary task is the internal development of Russia itself through attracting investors and opening the market to Asian states. Based on this idea as well as relying on the first results of its economic and political turn to the East, Russia went further and proposed the formation of a new community – the partnership of Greater Eurasia – that was officially supported by the leadership of both Russia and China. First of all, this partnership represents a joint economic zone that will include countries that are willing to cooperate with the region. On the other hand, the partnership is aimed at an economic, political, cultural revival of backward Eurasian countries or, in other words, the goal is to transform Eurasia into the center of the world economy and politics. It is supposed to include both the countries of Eastern, Southeast and South Asia, the center of Eurasia, and the growing extent of the countries of the European subcontinent and their organization insofar as they are willing to cooperate. Experts emphasize that the Greater Eurasia project is nothing more than an attempt to find new sources of Russia's economic growth. Russia sees its economic development in potential access to Asian markets and increasing trade with the EEU countries, as well as in attracting investments in infrastructure projects in Siberia and the Far East.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the fact that such structures as the CIS and CSTO were created after the demise of the USSR, many of them lacked, and continue to lack the great scale of integration component. At this point, the EEU is the most important and active tool of Eurasian integration. The project of

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<sup>149</sup> Maria Lagutina in *Russia and the Former Soviet Space: Instrumentalizing Security, Legitimizing Intervention*, 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> Valdai Discussion Club, *Preobrazovanie Evraziiskogo prostranstva: Obschie perspektivy v predstavlenii analiticheskikh centrov Kitaya, Rossii i Kazakhstana* (Moscow: Valdai, 2017), 13. <http://ru.valdaiclub.com/files/16539/> (accessed February 13, 2018).

setting up the EEU has displayed one of the most significant integrational initiatives by Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Besides, the development of integration processes as the most important direction of Russian foreign policy has been highlighted in the past two Russia's Foreign Policy Concepts.

As Russian experts believe, the EEU plays an important role in Russia's desire to expand the domestic market and, in particular, in its striving to ensure socio-economic and political stability in the post-Soviet space. Russia initiated the creation of the EEU based on the conviction (which became even more entrenched after 2008) that globalization is gradually becoming obsolete. Thus, the Russian establishment accelerated its project of the creation of a more or less powerful regional development center in Eurasia.<sup>151</sup>

Though the idea of the Eurasian integration project was suggested in 1994 by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev,<sup>152</sup> Russia is considered to be the most interested force within the EEU. According to the most widespread version of Russia's incentives, the interest of Russia in the creation and the development of the EEU is based on its strategic interests of expanding the economic and political space around its borders to secure the status of a superpower and to gain economic dominance in the region. Scholars and analysts have described the EEU initiative as an "essentially political project" aimed at regional integration. However, this version does not have a broad analytical evidence base in terms of economic effects for the Russian

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<sup>151</sup> Valdai Discussion Club, *Preobrazovanie Evraziiskogo prostranstva*, 17.

<sup>152</sup> According to Maria Lagutina, "Kazakhstan sought Russia's greater involvement in Central Asia, partly to balance concerns about the rise of China. Although Kazakhstan was at first unsuccessful at getting Russia to launch a new initiative, other factors – including Russia's difficulty in joining the WTO and the 2008 financial crisis – led Russia to take a more positive view of building institutions that would compete with and offer an alternative to the West. By 2007, Russia agreed to develop a Customs Union with Kazakhstan and Belarus, which was eventually launched in 2010" in *Russia and the Former Soviet Space: Instrumentalizing Security, Legitimizing Intervention*, 3.

economy. The research in this area is filled with analytical materials on the impact of the EEU for all members of the organization in which Russia is primarily given the role of a donor. By tacit consent, it is considered that the impact of the unified economic zone within the EEU on the Russian economy is either positive or not significant for the scale of its economy in comparison with its partners. At the same time, the core and the determining economic force of the EEU is the Russian economy and, therefore, the state of Russia's economy directly affects the main macroeconomic parameters of member-states as well as ensures the course of integration.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, the experts believe that in the period of the economic crisis and Western sanctions, the integration format of the EEU enabled the Russian economy (as well as its partners within the EEU) to reduce the level of economic losses through the growth of Russian exports (mainly due to the price factor and the openness of borders in 2014-2016). Cooperation within the EEU and the creation of common markets on a sectoral basis ensure the growth of product quality.<sup>154</sup> Among the arguments in favor of the positive impact of the EEU for the Russian economy is the prospect of the access to the migration resources of partner states and, what is more important, the creation of unified rules for the regulation of migration flows, which simultaneously contributes to the goal of economic and security development.

Thus, Russia's ideal foreign policy and economic position in the future is economically developing Eurasian power that plays a central role in Eurasia through the economic and military-political integration with Asian and European countries.<sup>155</sup> Russia sees itself as a guarantor of peace and stability in Eurasia and as a country that has constructive and friendly relations with its

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<sup>153</sup> Aza Migranyan, "Rossiya v EAES k 2025 godu," *Russian International Affairs Council*, June 14, 2017, [http://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-v-eaes-k-2025-godu/?sphrase\\_id=2281051](http://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/rossiya-v-eaes-k-2025-godu/?sphrase_id=2281051) (accessed February 11, 2018).

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Karaganov, "Russian Foreign Policy Finding New Bearings."

main neighbors in the west, east, and southeast. Economically, but mentally, Russia should be not the eastern periphery of Europe, but the northern part of big Eurasia.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> “Strategiya dlya Rossii.”

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This study addressed the issue of trends and discourses that are predominant among the Russian political elite and foreign policy experts dealing with the post-Soviet space. It also analyzed Russian perceptions and narratives of the US-led world order, with attention to both Russia's role and to Russia's mission in the post-Soviet space in order to better understand Russia's future direction in the region. Drawing primarily from the Russian political elite's statements, popular discourses in Russia, and the expert community analysis, this research shared what is the original Russian perceptions of the world order, threats, and its narratives of post-Soviet space. It also identified debates that currently dominate in the Russian society and the expert community regarding Russia's policy in the region.

The research revealed that there is a problem of incomplete perception of contemporary Russia in the United States. In comparison with the Cold War era, when the US was greatly involved in studying the Soviet Union, today the American expertise lacks a precise vision of non-Soviet Russia and the factors that drive Russia in the region. This is mainly due to the lack of consistent study of Russia in the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s. As a result, the United States relies mostly on familiar approaches and narratives that were used in regards to the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Misunderstandings between the U.S. and Russia stem from divergent fundamental values and state interests, as defined by both countries. The American vision originates from liberal values while the Russian vision proceeds from prioritizing the state, sovereignty, and the sense of patriotism. On top of that, Russia is represented as a "neo-Soviet autocracy" ruled by Vladimir Putin. There is also a predominant stereotype of "good Russian people vs. bad Russian

government” in the U.S. In other words, the American establishment separates the Russian political elite from the Russian people; however, Russian public polls show a high level of the approval of President Putin activities. Moreover, there are different versions of the end of the Cold War between Russia and the United States. Therefore, both countries incline to fundamentally misunderstand each other. This incomplete perception of the Russian perspective prevents the U.S. from making precise conclusions and obtaining objective understanding of contemporary Russia. Now that Russia is again a challenge, the American establishment does not exactly know how to properly and effectively react and respond to Russia’s actions in the region.

Over the past two decades, Russia has been consistent in its narratives about the world order and its role in it. The Kremlin repeatedly stated the dangers of a U.S.-led unipolar system and the need for the multipolar world order. From the Russian perspective, the past twenty-five years have witnessed an increasing expansion of the threat coming from a predominance of US power. The perception of threat arose as a result of a number of events in the post-Cold War era, such as the war in Yugoslavia, Iraq, “color revolutions,” the Arab Spring, and the increasing presence of NATO troops on Russia’s borders. The majority of Russians, tired of the social instability and transformations taken place in the 1990s, fear that something like that can happen in Russia again.

To some extent, Russia inherited the Soviet vision of the world in terms of the language of strength and balance of power. Thus, it perceived NATO expansion, US active support of democracy in other countries, especially the “color revolutions” in the post-Soviet area, as threatening. This is a natural reaction for the country that has been expanding its borders and creating buffer zones in neighboring territories for the past 500 years in order to ensure its own security. In the minds of Russians, NATO represents the military alliance aimed against the Soviet

Union. But the Soviet Union collapsed and there is no Cold War anymore, so why does NATO still exist and, even more, why is it expanding? Hence, Russians conclude that NATO is against Russia. Therefore, when NATO began expanding eastward to act at its own discretion in the zones that Russia *historically* regards as part of itself, or at least its zones of influence, Russia resisted the expansion *from the outside* and had to react. But from the Russian point of view, their reactions are always defensive, not offensive. The security issue is the main driving reason that forces Russia to be involved militarily.

Moscow sees the world in terms of the Westphalian model in which a nation-state has exclusive sovereignty over its territory and whose sovereignty must be respected. While Russia claims so, its actions in former Soviet countries show the opposite. It is because the majority of the Russian population still perceive former Soviet states, particularly Ukraine and Belarus, as part of one whole unit, “one people.” Russian perception of post-Soviet space as part of itself still prevailing in Russian society is psychic in nature and it is imbued with the concept of the Russian World. These issues were evident on multiple levels of analysis, such as the state, Russian expert community, and popular moods in Russia.

Russia does not consider itself as a European country anymore; instead, it started to recognize itself as a Eurasian power, a significant part of Greater Eurasia. The idea of Greater Eurasia represents the replacement of the imperial idea by the concept of Russia as a great power which focuses on its own needs and status. It has a strongly marked economic character and its primary task is the internal development of Russia. Russia began to pursue a more pragmatic policy towards its neighboring countries, promoting the expansion of Russian capital in the region through regional institutions, such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Moscow understands that without a strong economy, Russia cannot be a leading

world power, and thus, it stands for openness and international cooperation. But this cooperation is only possible if Russian national interests are taken into account and respected.

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Master of Arts in International Relations, School of International Relations, Saint Petersburg State University, Saint Petersburg, Russia. Thesis: *Assessments and Recommendations of the American Think Tanks on the Shaping U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Russia in the President Obama's Second Term*. Research Advisor: Dr. Valery Konyshev. July 2016.

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## ACADEMIC AWARDS

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Fulbright Foreign Student Program, U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, May 2016.

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Eastern Partnership Scholarship (semester abroad, University of Hamburg, Germany), German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), October 2015.

## PRESENTATIONS

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