



## The Russia-NATO mistrust: Ethnophobia and the double expansion to contain “the Russian Bear”



Andrei P. Tsygankov

*Department of International Relations and Political Science, San Francisco State University, USA*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Russian-Western mistrust persists due to historical and cultural developments with roots in the Cold War. The post-Cold War imbalance of power served to exacerbate the problem. The United States emerged as the world's superpower acting on perceived fears of Russia, whereas Russia's undermined capabilities dictated a defensive, rather than a hegemonic response. The paper analyzes the decision to expand NATO by excluding Russia from the process. It also asks why the process suddenly stopped in 2008. What changed the West's mind about the expansion was not a revised perception of Russia, but rather concern with its growing power and assertiveness as revealed by the Kremlin's use of force during the Caucasus' war.

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“NATO must not lose its original purpose: to contain the Russian bear.” (Safire, 2004)

### Introduction

The end of the Cold War has not solved the problem of mistrust between Russia and Western countries; the two sides' definitions of national interests have been largely incompatible. While Western governments have expected Russia to follow their lead insecurity policies, Russia has insisted on equal relationships and viewed the unwillingness of the West to accommodate the Kremlin as threatening or disrespectful to Russia's interests. The recent efforts to “reset” U.S.–Russian and NATO–Russian relations have yet to produce evidence of robust cooperation between the sides. For instance, NATO has declined Russia's invitations to jointly address the security vacuum in Eurasia by pooling resources with the Moscow-dominant Collective Security Treaty Organization. Progress on cooperation with the Missile Defense System is also quite limited, with NATO and Russia increasingly pursuing two separate tracks of developing their security infrastructures. Finally, Russia has demonstrated ambivalence over the Western military presence in Afghanistan. The Kremlin understands that Russia alone cannot secure the area, yet some of its statements reveal that it views the West's role as potentially destabilizing and undermining of Russia's geopolitical influence in the strategically-important region (Tsygankov, 2012).

This paper argues that Russian-Western mistrust persists due to historical and cultural developments with roots in the Cold War. The Constructivist theory of international relations assists us in understanding the two sides' relationship by pointing to the significance of “the other” in the process of forming self-identity (Campbell, 1992; Doty, 1996; Neumann, 1999; Hopf, 2002; Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004; Clunan, 2009; Pouliot, 2010). Although scholars have often explained the process vis-à-vis the West's concerns with preserving peace and stability in Europe, it is equally important to understand the uneasiness of the Western self about the intentions of the Russian other. Allies for only the brief period of the Second World War and enemies for almost half a century, the two sides could not overcome some of the old perceptions and stereotypes of viewing each other as a potentially dangerous nation. The United States insisted on reshaping the world according to the

American image by promoting neo-liberal economic policies and NATO-centered security institutions in Europe and Eurasia. Russia too acted from an ethnophobic perception of the West, which was strengthened by the Western inconsiderate policies. Acting on the old Soviet phobias over the Western nations' intentions, the Kremlin sought to balance the United States' "global hegemony" by integrating the former Soviet region under a tighter control from Moscow and establishing stronger ties with China, India, and the Islamic world. The country's National Security Concept of 1997 recommended that Russia maintained equal distance in relations to the "global European and Asian economic and political actors" and presented a positive program for the integration of CIS efforts in the security area (Shakleyina, 2002).

The post-Cold War imbalance of power served to exacerbate the problem. That the United States emerged as the world's only superpower removed some of the older constraints for acting on perceived fears of Russia. The West's promotion of its favored economic and security policies assumed that Russia would eventually accept them. The humiliated Russia refused to follow the West's lead, but was in no position to challenge the Western policies. The Soviet disintegration led to the emergence of a whole series of new conflicts in the Russian periphery. Russia lost one sixth of its territory, its economy shrank by some 50% and the state was divided by powerful oligarchs. Russia's undermined capabilities and the new context of growing disorder, corruption, and poverty that had resulted from the Soviet breakup and government's reforms dictated a defensive, rather than a hegemonic response.<sup>1</sup>

Both sides' international policies may be analyzed using the proposed framework of perceiving the other as a potential threat. For the purpose of this paper, I concentrate on the United States' decision to expand NATO by inviting Russia's neighbors to join the alliance while excluding Russia from the process. In addition to analyzing the double expansion of the Western alliance, I ask why the process suddenly stopped in 2008. I consider the end of the enlargement to be an important factor for theoretical reasons. If ethnophobia underlies the U.S. decision about eastward expansion of the alliance, then only a change in Russia's relative power is likely to stop the process. I argue that what changed the West's mind about the expansion was rather concern with Russia's growing power and assertiveness, as revealed by the Kremlin's use of force during the Caucasus' war.

The paper is organized in the following way. The next section explains the formation of ethnic prejudices, the political process of exploiting ethnophobia in foreign policy debates, and the relationships between ethnic stereotypes and power capabilities in forming state international decisions. The following section describes the perception of the Cold War and the role it has played in forming the U.S.–Russia stereotypes of each other. I then describe the process of NATO expansion and why it took place despite Russia's desire to become a security partner of the West. The final two sections analyze how the process was promoted by the concerted efforts of ethnopolitical entrepreneurs in the United States and how it was viewed in Russia. The conclusion summarizes the analysis and draws implications for scholarship.

### **Ethnocentrism, ethnophobia, and international relations**

As humans jointly meet and overcome external challenges, they assume a common identity and a common sense of their historical origins, accomplishments, and losses. As a result, they develop what scholars define as an ethnocentric perception of the world, in which values of the self tend to be viewed as superior to those of the other(s). Defined as the belief that one's own culture represents the natural and best way to do things (Van der Dennen, 1987, 1), ethnocentrism is rooted in certain historically reproduced institutional, societal, and discursive contexts. The power of ethnocentrism is therefore difficult to overcome. Even when human groups are not particularly successful in advancing their values in the world, they are not easily turned to accepting those values that have not been central to their own socialization. Instead, they are more likely to cling to those values that have been at the core of their group's existence.

Historically, ethnic prejudices take on different forms. Whereas traditional ethnocentrism is focused on culture, language, or religion, modern ethnocentrism is associated with loyalty to a nation and national political system. Modern conditions, with their exclusive boundaries and the centrality of state, produce a new form of human attachment by giving rise, in Max Weber's words, "to groups with joint memories which often have had a deeper impact than ties of merely cultural, linguistic, or ethnic community" (Weber, 1978, 903). Nevertheless, even while serving as the institutional fabric of modern societies (Deutsch, 1979; Gellner, 1983; Giddens, 1985; Smith, 1993; Haas, 1997), this nation-state-based ethnocentrism does not fully break with its original traditional roots. Modern nations have grown out of traditional communities by building upon their way of relating to those outside the home group. Indeed, the modern conditions of exclusive territoriality have served to reinforce the old self/other dichotomy and failed to come to terms with the self/other dialectic (Chakrabarty, 2000; Inayatullah and Blaney, 2004).

Externally, ethnocentrism may manifest itself in various forms of ethnic prejudices and hidden or openly expressed phobias. In the ethnocentric presentation of reality, the self-centrism and the other-phobia are therefore two sides of the same coin. Ethnocentrism and ethnophobias are fundamentally connected by constituting the inner and outer expressions of a group's values. When a human group grows in size and develops successfully, it has a tendency to assume that others will follow its lead. In this case, the self tends to suppress its phobias of the other by denying the other its cultural difference.

<sup>1</sup> The literature on Russia's relations with the West after the Cold War is rapidly growing. In addition to items listed in the previous footnote, see Trofimenko (1998), Black (2000), Cohen (2001), Goldgeier and McFaul (2003), Tsygankov (2004, 2006), Bowker (2007), Antonenko and Pinnick (2008), Thorun (2008), Belopolsky (2009), Mankoff (2009), De Haas (2010).

However, when the self's dominance is challenged, the power of ethnohistory reveals itself in openly expressed phobias toward those groups that are perceived as the source of challenge. In addition, inter-ethnic relations may suffer from memories of historic hostilities, conflicts, and humiliation. Experiences of mistreatment by large powers, imperial cores, or other social groups constitute historical traumas that further complicate the establishment of co-development patterns in international relations.

All of this helps in understanding why in modern foreign relations global cooperation is difficult and often takes the form of some groups uniting against others. The hierarchical nature of modernity encourages hegemonic and dependent practices, while discouraging those of reciprocal engagement. Those in a position of power tend to treat others as dependent subjects ("subalterns") and consumers of the already developed moral values. Those acting from weakness and dependence often also remain committed to their own exclusively defined ethnic vision, thereby reinforcing the hierarchical structure of the modern world. For example, many nations across the world are frequently reluctant to engage with Western values, dismissing them as inappropriate and reflecting the West's power ambitions.

Power and political ambitions play an especially important role in exacerbating ethnic prejudices. Without incorporating the dimension of politics and political contestation, the ethnohistory-inspired analysis is at risk of viewing a human system of perception as a constant, rather than an ever-evolving product of interacting ideas and practices. Human communities are never homogeneous, and the diversity of ideas and preferences within human groups make them susceptible to possible political manipulations. Ethnic tensions may emerge as a hostage of a power struggle among ethno-political entrepreneurs, rather than merely a historically and culturally embedded dislike of the other. Acting in a favorable environment, ethno-political entrepreneurs may be able to rally ethnonationalist feelings behind their claims and add pressures on the state to satisfy their objectives. In addition to the already developed sense of ethnocentrism, such a favorable environment may include the relative decline of the community's position in the world, the weakness of opposition to ethnonationalist ideas, and the ability of ethnic entrepreneurs to mobilize mass media to their cause.

The position of power dominance in the world encourages a nation to act on its ethnic prejudices by pursuing hegemony-type relations with the others. For example, the United States' sense of overwhelming power in the international system led to a hegemonic foreign policy after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. In 2006, some White House officials even insisted that the United States had become a world empire with power unparalleled to that of Rome (Suskind, 2004). However, the decline of power mobilizes the self's perception of victimization and dependence on the other, leading to a foreign policy of containing the other's international rise. The lacking power resources for assertive and hegemony-oriented international behavior therefore encourages a shift to a more defensive and containment-oriented policy. British–Russian relations in the 19th century serve as an example of how the rise of the other may become the enabling structural conditions of ethnophobia. As a historian described, British Russophobes "recognized and to some extent capitalized the natural competition between Great Britain and Russia which their mutual preeminence seemed to decree" (Gleason, 1950, 289). Another example may be the ethnocentric political culture of America as described by historians and political scientists (Lind, 1995; Madsen, 1998; Lieven, 2004), accompanied by the relative decline of the U.S. power in Eurasia. As China and Russia act as key players in the region, America's wounded ethnocentrism may prevent the United States from adopting policies of engagement toward the Eurasian nations.

### **The Cold War trauma and the debate on NATO**

To both the United States and Russia, the Cold War constituted a trauma that complicated their cooperation in the new world. Neither side had benefited psychologically from the Cold War's political and military order. If anything, both the Americans and the Russians were losers, because in the process of their confrontation, they developed what Gary Hart called "the one-dimensional Cold War understanding of security – military protection from and deterrence of ... missile attack" as opposed to a more complex definition of insecurity in a complex world (Hart, 2004, 54; Lebow and Stein, 1994). However, in power terms one side emerged in a position of dominance, whereas the other was severely weakened. The trauma of inter-ethnic relations was therefore exacerbated by the imbalance of power.

In Russia, the dominant perception was that the Cold War was mainly about sovereignty and independence from foreign pressures. Russians formulated the narrative of independence centuries ago, as they successfully withstood external invasions from Napoleon to Hitler. The defeat of the Nazi regime was important to the Soviets because it legitimized their claims to continue with the tradition of freedom as independence. The West's unwillingness to recognize the importance of this legitimizing myth in the role of communist ideology has served as a key reason for the Cold War (Stack, 2007). In this narrative, NATO epitomized the outside threat to Russia's independence. This explains why Soviet statesmen, such as Nikita Khrushchev and Mikhail Gorbachev, proposed the mutual disbandment of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as the way to establishing new security foundations. Russia's post-Soviet leaders too insisted that, as a military alliance to contain Russia, NATO became obsolete in the post-Cold War era.

In the United States, however, many have interpreted the end of the Cold War as a victory of the Western freedom narrative. Celebrating the Soviet Union's "grand failure" – as Zbigniew Brzezinski (1989) put it – the American discourse assumed that from now on there would be little resistance to freedom's worldwide progression. When Francis Fukuyama offered his bold summary of these optimistic feelings and asserted in a famous passage that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War ... but the end of history as such," (Fukuyama, 1989, 4) he meant to convey the disappearance of an alternative to the familiar idea of freedom, or "the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human

government.”. It was in this context that George Bush proclaimed in his 1992 State of the Union message that the United States had “won” the Cold War, which only legitimized to the highest level the already powerful policy discourse. The Clinton administration then drew the analogy between Russia and the defeat of Germany and Japan in the World War II. “We were the victor nation, they were the defeated nation, and therefore they should be supplicant and subordinate to the United States,” wrote one observer (Cohen, 2007).

The U.S./NATO debate reflected the victorious mood in Washington. Influential observers and politicians identified important areas for US–Russia security cooperation that included issues of terrorism, instability in Afghanistan and Central Asia, the rise of China, and the proliferation of conventional weapons in Eurasia and the Middle East (Allison and Kokoshin, 2002; Hart, 2007). They further cautioned against the enlargement of NATO at the expense of Russia’s security interests, and advocated new political and military arrangements with Russia as a member.<sup>2</sup> Still, those favoring the mode of co-development or equal cooperation in US–Russia relations lost the policy debate to advocates of expanding the alliance. The latter argued their case on two grounds. To supporters of the United States’ domination in the world, the alliance was an indispensable tool for defending national interests in Europe. Such views resonated well with beliefs by conservatives, like *The Washington Post* columnist George Will and the former assistant secretary of defense Peter Rodman, that expansionism was “in the Russian DNA”, and “the only potential great power security problem in Central Europe is the lengthening shadow of Russian strength” (George Will and Peter Rodman as cited in Lieven, 2004: 161). Finally, liberals argued for the expansion of NATO as a community of democracies – the process that would have developed hand in hand with isolating Russia and its “autocratic” institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Russia reacted to the hegemonic narrative and policies of the United States with apprehension. Many in Russia viewed the Cold War as a necessary response to the West’s pressures and expansionist policies that had begun long before the 20th century. The fact that Russia had been weakened by the Cold War struggle didn’t mean that the Russians had no interests or a vision to defend. They had hoped for acknowledgment that the end of the Cold War was a product of mutually beneficial negotiations that would pave a way to a new era of international cooperation (English, 2000; Wohlforth, 2003). In Russia’s perception, the fact that Gorbachev lost control of reforms at home should have been treated as separate from his foreign policy accomplishments, and not as something that validates the American hegemonic narrative (Tsygankov, 2004). Even pro-Western analysts and politicians viewed the expansion of NATO as a process that deprives Russia of its own voice in the new world order.

## NATO expansion

In January 1994 in response to several security crises in Balkans and pressures from the former East European states, the United States made the decision to expand the NATO alliance by inviting the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary to apply for membership (Goldgeier, 1999; Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003). By then it had become clear that NATO, rather than the Russia-desired OSCE, was turning into the cornerstone of European security. It was also clear that, despite Russia’s original hopes, it was not about to be considered for membership in the organization. Alongside its limited economic assistance (Rutland, 1999; Wedel, 1998; Reddaway and Gliński, 2001), the Clinton administration was simultaneously pursuing policies of containing Russia in a security context.

In the meantime, the alliance kept marching to the East, incorporating more and more states in the eastern and central part of Europe. At the Madrid summit in the summer of 1997, the United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright specifically promised to extend the invitation to the Baltic States which had been a part of the Soviet Union before 1991. Despite the tense post-Madrid atmosphere of Russia–West relations and the recent clash over Yugoslavia, the U.S. soon supported extending NATO membership to Romania, Bulgaria and the three Baltic states, former members of the Soviet bloc. In March 2002 Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage endorsed the idea during the alliance’s summit in Bucharest, and the process was completed in 2004.

The alliance’s expansion stopped only after the Bucharest summit in April 2008. Although Washington was eager to begin the third wave of NATO enlargement by extending a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for former Soviet states such as Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan at the summit, France and Germany acted to block the process.<sup>4</sup> Even afterward, with Russia and Georgia moving into the summer of 2008, alliance officials continued to make their case for the alliance’s expansion and met with potential aspirants. For example, on June 20, NATO’s general secretary met with Georgia’s president Mikheil Saakashvili to discuss the planned conclusion of the MAP for the country, and scheduled a traveling session of the North Atlantic Council

<sup>2</sup> During different stages of the alliance’s expansion, critical voices included George Kennan, Jack Matlock, Thomas Graham, and Colin Power, among others. In 1997 critics of NATO expansion that included a group of 550 prominent foreign policy experts published a letter to the U.S. President arguing that “Russia does not now pose a threat to its Western neighbors and the nations of Central and Eastern Europe are not in danger” (*Arms Control Today*, 1997). McGwire (1998) and Goldgeier (1999) discussed the political struggle over the issue under President Bill Clinton’s administration.

<sup>3</sup> Analysts Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier argued that “NATO must become larger and more global by admitting any democratic state that is willing and able to contribute to the fulfillment of the alliance’s new responsibilities” (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006; Goldgeier, 2006). The idea of revitalizing democratic community by creating a global League of Democracies – albeit not a global NATO – while excluding Russia has been also endorsed by the Republican Senator John McCain (2008).

<sup>4</sup> During the summit Condoleezza Rice and George Bush, supported by Poland and the Czech Republic, argued for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia and Ukraine against opposition from France and Germany (Dempsey, 2008).

to be held in Georgia in September. Less than a month before the Russia–Georgia war in August, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice traveled to Europe. She found no time to visit Moscow, but on July 9, Rice went to Tbilisi to demonstrate support for Georgia's territorial integrity and the MAP.

Despite a variety of explanations by scholars and policy makers, the United States' insistence on expanding NATO remains puzzling. At least four theories suggest themselves for understanding why NATO went to two successful rounds of enlargement but stopped at the third one. This section reviewed these commonly known theories of the alliance expansion and argues that these theories are not sufficient and the issue merits further exploration.

According to the first explanation, the United States wanted to expand the Atlantic alliance to respond to the emergent security vacuum in post-Cold War Europe. The stated intention was to address practical security issues that required urgent attention, such as growing instability in the Balkans. This explanation is hardly sufficient as it ignores the Russian side of the process of expanding NATO. Official statements by U.S. policy makers sought to clarify that the new NATO was not the old one and did not aim to contain or isolate Russia. Yet without viewing Russia as a potential threat to the West, it is difficult to understand why Western countries ignored the Kremlin's desire to become a part of the European security system. Russia of the early 1990s demonstrated its commitment to Western values and strategic partnership with the West by insisting that such a partnership constituted "a historic opportunity to facilitate the formation of a democratic, open Russian state and the transformation of an unstable, post-confrontational world into a stable and democratic one" (Kozyrev, 1994, 59).

Another explanation makes sense of NATO expansion in terms of the United States' desire to "perpetuate unilateral hegemony" and "lengthen America's grip on Europe" (Haas, 2001; Waltz, 2001). However, the explanation also ignores the Russian side and is less helpful in understanding why the United States chose to exercise power in a unilateral, rather than multilateral and diplomatically sensitive way. Power preponderance is merely an objective condition, but foreign policy objectives may also result from America exercising soft power and relying on the image of a benevolent stabilizer and honest power-broker in world affairs (Nye, 2004; Ikenberry, 2005; Walt, 2006; Lieven and Hulsman, 2006). Relative to U.S. power, Russia was hardly in a position to demand for a greater role in the world, but Russia could assume important responsibilities for maintaining peace and stability in the Eurasian region. What seems to be missing in case of the power explanation of the U.S. failure to seize the opportunity of cooperation with Moscow is analysis of political and cultural attitudes held by American officials and its political class about Russia.

The third explanation of the U.S. decision to expand NATO places the emphasis on American domestic politics and lobbies acting on behalf of various constituencies in Washington and Eastern Europe (see especially Goldgeier, 1999; Goldgeier and McFaul, 2003). This explanation is helpful if it is not pursued at the expense of understanding historical and cultural attitudes held by various domestic groups. While advocating political objectives, these groups do not operate in an ideational vacuum, but instead act on historically formed perceptions of the nation's identity and its international environment. In the case of NATO expansion, a number of influential groups in the United States operated from the Russia-threat perspective and held explicitly anti-Russian views. For interpreters of foreign policy, ignoring the politics of identity may come at the cost of misunderstanding the policy's sources and future direction. The role of domestic groups and coalitions is not only to promote particular economic and political objectives, but also to put forward a particular image of national identity.

Finally, there is the explanation of NATO enlargement from the organizational theory perspective, which emphasizes inertia and the difficulties with accepting change that are common for all large bureaucracies. NATO then expanded on its own, in the absence of a strong leadership to compensate for the organization's bureaucratic deficiencies. This explanation is insufficient because it downplays the United States' leadership behind the process of expansion (Rauchhaus, 2001, 175), as well as the cultural and ethnocentric stereotypes on which all the actors advocating the process operated. In addition to bureaucratic inertia, one also should consider the importance of historical and cultural inertia.

In sum, the existing conventional theories are only partially helpful in understanding the process of NATO expansion. What we need is a framework that integrates insights from various theories of international and domestic conditions. The approach adopted in the paper retains the commitment to viewing the world as a social interaction, not a natural necessity, and it takes from constructivism the appreciation for studying local systems of perceiving the outside world. From realism, it takes the attention to power and the structure of the international system. While realism is agnostic about domestic and cultural factors, constructivism is imperfect in its own way. Its focus on social interactions does not pay sufficient attention to factors outside of the cultural sphere. I therefore take seriously material factors of power, but do so within the framework of a socially interactive approach which helps to establish a meaningful context in which policy makers act. I further integrate factors of domestic politics, lobbies, and perceptions of individual leaders for the purpose of specifying the overall causal process behind the expansion of NATO.

### **American phobias of Russia<sup>5</sup>**

The historically developed perception of Russia, as fundamentally threatening to the United States' values and interests, strengthened domestic groups in American politics that worked to preserve the "Russia-threat" image after the end of the Cold War.

The anti-Russian lobby (henceforth the Lobby) in America emerged in the early 20th century and got consolidated during the Cold War. During that time powerful elites with mutually exclusive visions were formed on both sides of the Atlantic. In

<sup>5</sup> For further development of the argument in this section, see Tsygankov (2009a).

the United States, the Lobby represented a loose coalition of several influential groups, but the most important group included advocates of American hegemony, who fought the Cold War not to contain the Soviet enemy, but to destroy it by all means available. At least some of them were fully aware that their real target was Russia, not the communist regime. An important part of this group also formed the core of the Committee of Present Danger and “Team B” that had produced a highly inflated assessment of the Soviet threat in the mid-1970s. The second group included organizations that had been created after World War II with an agenda of protecting freedom and human rights in the world. Over time, however, the initial agenda of such agencies as Freedom House and Human Right Watch had been partly transformed into a tool for fighting the Soviets. The third group consisted of Eastern European nationalists, or those who fled from the Soviet system and the Warsaw Pact and now dreamed of destroying the Soviet Union as the ultimate way to gain independence for their people.

The Lobby has viewed Russia’s foreign policy as reflecting the nation’s imperialist instincts, not a legitimate protection of national interests, and viewed NATO enlargement as the key tool for containing the Kremlin’s expansionism. For example, Brzezinski (1994) – former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter and a Polish emigre – spoke on the Lobby’s behalf when he wrote about Russia’s still potent imperialist instincts. Although post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s represented a sorry state of affairs – an impoverished population, an economy in shambles, and leaders desperate for Western advice and assistance – the Lobby was worried about Russia’s revival. As NATO was expanding to the East, it was Russia that was accused of “imperialist intentions” in the former Soviet region. Brzezinski then proceeded to argue for the United States’ control over the entire Eurasian continent because it has most of the world’s resources and because “all the historical pretenders to global power originated in Eurasia.” (Brzezinski, 1997). This had to be accomplished by strengthening the independence of non-Russian states, fostering ties with China and working to decentralize the Russian state. Preempting possible objections from supporters of partnership with Russia, the analyst made it clear that “If a choice must be made between a larger Europe-Atlantic system and a better relationship with Russia, the former must rank higher.” (Brzezinski, 1997).

Despite the absence of public support for their anti-Russian agenda, the Lobby has managed to achieve some impressive results in influencing the foreign policy-making process in the United States. The Lobby has worked to feed the media the image of Russia as a country with an increasingly consolidated, dangerous regime. The Lobby has also achieved a greater level of ideological cohesion among diverse groups by pushing a tough stand against Russia in joint conferences and public letters (An Open Letter, 2004). Organizations such as the Project for a New American Century, the Committee for Peace in the Caucasus, Freedom House and the Center for Security Policy advocate different aspects of US hegemony, yet Russia is invariably presented by them as a leading threat. Finally, the Lobby has succeeded in persuading leading members of the American political class to advocate the Russia-threat approach. Some influential members of Congress and policy makers in the White House have been sympathetic to the Lobby’s agenda and prone to the use of the Russophobic rhetoric.<sup>6</sup> When top officials were divided over important issues, the Lobby gained leverage and influenced key decisions, including the expansion of NATO.

The two waves of NATO expansion reveal the role played by the Lobby. Although U.S. decisions were primarily shaped by a desire to preserve influence over European affairs, these decisions were also assisted by activities of anti-Russian political entrepreneurs.

For initiating the process, the first wave of expansion was especially important. At this stage, Brzezinski played a key role by mobilizing his impressive policy experience and connections within the establishment to convince President Clinton of the need to push forward with NATO expansion against opposition from Russia, as well as many in the American establishment. In alliance with National Security Advisor Tony Lake, he worked to satisfy the strong preferences of Eastern European governments and build a network of support for the expansion (Goldgeier, 1999, 45–76). Conservative columnists, such as the *New York Times*’ William Safire assisted Brzezinski by trumpeting the rationale of NATO enlargement. Safire pursued the “window of opportunity” argument to override existing opposition. We must extend the alliance membership for Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the Baltic States and ultimately Ukraine, he argued, because “Russia is authoritarian at heart and expansionist by habit.” (Safire, 1994). We must do it now, “while Russia is weak and preoccupied with its own revival, and not later, when such a move would be an insufferable provocation to a superpower.” (Safire, 1994).

Elaborating on the “authoritarian at heart and expansionist by habit” point, Richard Pipes – another emigre from Poland – provided the perspective of an academic and historian. Writing in *Foreign Affairs*, he reminded its readers about Russia’s “heavy burden of history” and failure to make “a clean break with its Soviet past.” (Pipes, 1997, 67). Pipes insisted that the problem extended even beyond the Soviet era, as Russians “have to overcome not only the communist legacy but also that of the czars and their partner, the Orthodox Church, which for centuries collaborated in instilling in their subjects disrespect for law, submission to strong and willful authority, and hostility to the West.” (Pipes, 1997, 70). He then reiterated Brzezinski’s points about Russia’s tendencies to use its resources and military in an imperialist fashion and concluded by cautioning against viewing the country as a potential ally. Russia may still be back as an enemy, the historian wrote, “if those who guide its destiny, exploiting the political inexperience and deep-seated prejudices of its people, once again aspire to a glory to which they are not yet entitled.” (Pipes, 1997, 78).

The Lobby also played an important role in justifying and pushing for the second wave of NATO expansion. The Lobby was assisted by a divide in the White House, with President George W. Bush and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice hoping to convince Russia to become a junior partner, and Vice-President Dick Cheney viewing Russia’s policies as

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the bipartisan Council of Foreign Relations report *Russia’s Wrong Direction* (2006) as well as multiple statements by Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) on Russia’s new “imperialism.”

incompatible with U.S. interests. An experienced Cold Warrior, Cheney was comfortable thinking about Russia as a potential threat and advocating what in practice would have amounted to a new strategy of isolating Russia. It was also helpful to the Lobby that another prominent member of Bush administration, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, believed that the alliance's expansion was partly justified by the need to deter a threatening Russia that "recently suggested it might turn its nuclear arsenal on Ukraine or incite civil disorder in Georgia if either takes steps to join NATO." (Rumsfeld, 2008). Postponement of MAPs for the new alliance aspirants, he continued, would amount to appeasement, serving as a "green light to Russia to continue the tired rhetoric of the Cold War." (Rumsfeld, 2008).

The power-based arguments were substantiated by culturally essentialist ones that presented Russia as incompatible with the civilization of European and Western origins (See, for example, Socor, 2008; Kaminiski, 2008). The argument found support among existing and potential members of the alliance in Eastern Europe. A former president of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel announced that the EU and NATO should have an identical frontier in the east that "starts with the border between Russia and the Baltic states and follows the Russo-Belarusian and Russo-Ukrainian border down to the Black Sea" which "is absolutely obvious from the map, and it has more or less a historical and cultural basis, too." (RFE/RL, 2008b). In Georgia and Ukraine members of the political class also tended to view their pro-NATO choice in terms of their "democratic" opposition to "anti-Western" civilizational values of Russia (Torbakov, 2004).

Finally, liberal members of the Lobby, while not necessarily sharing beliefs in the geopolitical and cultural preponderance of the United States and other Western nations, provided their own rationale for expanding NATO. To them, the expansion was mainly about democracy and Western-style political freedoms. As *The Washington Post* wrote, "since NATO was created to defend the West against the Soviet Union, its greatest accomplishment may have been its role in consolidating democracy in Romania and nine other former East Bloc states." (NATO European Mission, 2008). Because of this, and because of "Moscow's ambition to destroy those countries' [Ukraine and Georgia's] freedom and independence" the United States should continue to press with the alliance's expansion without fearing to offend Russia (NATO European Mission, 2008).

The American anti-Russian groups worked directly with potential new NATO members in Eastern Europe and sought to mobilize support for the alliance's expansion at home. From the Lobby's perspective, it was a two-way street: the United States was providing Eastern European governments with security guarantees against Russia in exchange for obtaining their full political support of America's foreign policy. Not infrequently, people who promoted NATO expansion were the same individuals who advocated the expansion of U.S. military hegemony across the world.

A case in point is the U.S. intervention in Iraq. Members of the hegemonic lobby, such as Bruce Jackson, successfully lobbied Eastern European countries to support U.S. policy in Iraq. A former military intelligence officer who worked under Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney in the Reagan and Bush Senior administrations, Jackson was also Vice-President for the world's biggest weapons-making company Lockheed Martin (Right Web Profiles, 2004). Under the Bush Junior administration, he emerged as president of both the Project on Transitional Democracies and the U.S. Committee on NATO. Especially active in promoting NATO expansion before the Iraq invasion, Jackson was now mobilizing the so-called Vilnius Ten countries to rebuke France's position in February 2003. He helped to draft the declaration on their behalf, which stated, "The newest members of the European community agree that we must confront the tyranny of Saddam Hussein and that the United Nations must now act." (Right Web Profiles, 2007). He then convinced governing elites of the Vilnius Ten countries to sign the declaration – often against support from their own societies – linking it to winning the U.S. Senate's approval of their membership into NATO (Right Web Profiles, 2007), and using U.S. economic leverage in assembling pro-Iraq coalition (Newnham, 2008). Soon after the Iraq war, Jackson was back arguing the virtues of admitting Georgia and Ukraine to the alliance, supported in this by the governments of Poland and Czech Republic (Dempsey, 2008).

It is equally revealing to observe the Lobby behind push for the third wave of NATO expansion. For example, Jackson and others were able to enlist the support of high-profile politicians in the United States and successfully lobbied for testimonies in House of Representative that made their case for ignoring Russia's concerns about NATO enlargement. For example, all witnesses in the hearing "NATO Enlargement and the Bucharest Summit," organized by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on March 4, 2008, supported continued expansion of the alliance and endorsed MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia (NATO Enlargement, 2008). A prominent voice of support was also the influential Republican Senator Richard Lugar, who initiated a bill in the U.S. Senate in favor of Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO, arguing that it "will enable Europe, the USA, and NATO to expand the zone of freedom and security." (Volodin et al., 2007). The bill provided \$10 million in assistance in the fiscal year 2008 for Georgia's membership preparations. On March 6, a similar bill was passed by the House of Representatives (Volodin et al., 2007). Lugar also met the Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko before the NATO summit in Bucharest (Dempsey, 2008), but Lugar publicly questioned the idea of inviting Russia's president Putin to the summit arguing that it would intimidate Georgia and Ukraine (Butler, 2008).

Even more prominent was the role played by Senator John McCain (R-AZ), who became a leading voice in advocating for Georgia's membership in NATO against Russia's objections. Along with other anti-Russian lobbyists and sympathetic politicians, McCain saw the alliance's purpose as to contain Russia and promote American domination in the Eurasian region with its vast resources and geopolitical importance. It was also financially lucrative: over the recent years, Sen. John McCain's advisor Randy Scheunemann and his partner Mike Mitchell were paid more than \$2 million by Georgia, Latvia, Romania and Macedonia for advocating their membership in NATO. In exchange, Saakashvili expected the West not to oppose Tbilisi's use of force against its secessionist territories (Tsygankov, 2009b). The concerted push for admitting Georgia and Ukraine to NATO was strong in the United States, and, if it was not for France and Germany's opposition to the process and Russia's decision to go to war with Georgia in August 2008, the third wave of the alliance's expansion would have likely taken place.

## The reaction from Russia

Many in Russia saw the expansion as a most serious foreign policy challenge, and made their opposition to the process explicit. The expansion was incomprehensible in the light of Russia's historical commitments, its new relationships with the Western countries, and the West's own promises not to expand the alliance (Sarotte, 2010, 120–121). Russians felt deceived, as the expansion followed Mikhail Gorbachev's military withdrawals from Eastern Europe, Russia's restriction of some profitable arms sales in order to comply with Western rules, and a general commitment to develop a strategic partnership with the West (Trofimenko, 1998; Black, 2000; Tsygankov, 2006; Clunan, 2009; Mankoff, 2009). Overwhelmingly, the Russian foreign policy community perceived the expansion as a violation of the norm of reciprocity and the very spirit of the post-Cold War transformation. Eventually, even Russia's liberally-minded foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev had announced their disappointment with the decision, viewing it as a "continuation, though by inertia, of a policy aimed at containment of Russia" (Kozyrev, 1995, 13). The general public, too, expressed concerns, and those concerns only increased over time. As former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry put it, Russian reaction to NATO expansion "ranged from being unhappy to being very unhappy ... This is a very widely and very deeply held view in Russia" (As cited in MacFarlane, 1999, 242).

The new foreign minister Yevgeni Primakov recognized that the expansion of the alliance became inevitable and that Russia had to shift from the mode of resistance to that of adaptation. Although he was highly critical of the Western decision, he recognized the reality for what it was – "the expansion of NATO is not a military problem; it is psychological one" (As cited in Mlechin, 2001, 620). To narrow the gap of perception, Russia worked on establishing closer ties with the alliance and negotiated the "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between Russia and NATO" signed in May 1997. The agreement gave Russia the opportunity to join NATO in establishing a special body, the Permanent Joint Council, to consult about decision-making and joint action. NATO reaffirmed in writing its commitment not to deploy nuclear weapons or substantial new forces on the territory of new member states. However, the Founding Act did not give Russia the veto power it sought, and the subsequent intervention in the Balkans demonstrated it all too painfully (Headley, 2008).

As the alliance kept expanding, Russia's position vis-à-vis the process was changing from defensive to openly assertive. In the early 2000s, Russia was eager to engage the United States, and president Vladimir Putin chose not to overplay his opposition to NATO expansion. Rather than insisting on the alliance not admitting new members, he moved to organize security relations with Western countries on the common basis of counter-terrorism. After initial support for Serbia, Putin opted to minimize involvement in the affairs of the post-Kosovo Balkans and even withdrew Russia's peacekeeping mission from Bosnia and Kosovo in August 2003. However, in 2004 Russia's foreign policy begun to shift away from the West – partly in response to continued expansion of the Western alliance. The Kremlin began to apply economic and political pressures to those in the former Soviet region, who wanted to gain membership in NATO. In June 2006, Russia's Foreign Minister said that Ukraine or Georgia joining NATO could lead to a colossal shift in global geopolitics (RIA Novosti, 2006). The Kremlin was determined to stop the alliance's expansion, and subsequent developments provided ample reasons to view Russia as a power that is angry and frustrated by what it perceives as unfair treatment by the United States and NATO.

Following the summit of NATO in Bucharest, Russia, again, made its opposition to NATO expansion known, and this time the Kremlin succeeded in preventing the process from going forward. Russia reiterated that it would do everything in its power to prevent expansion of the alliance and the extension of its membership to Georgia (RFE/RL, 2008a). As the West had recognized the independence of Kosovo, the Kremlin planned to exploit the issue of secessionism. While NATO and U.S. officials did not conceal their support for Tbilisi and rarely criticized Georgia's actions in public, Russia was increasing its economic and military assistance for the secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Allison, 2008; Cornell and Starr, 2009; Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist, 2009). Russia also sent signals that it was prepared to work to develop separatist attitudes in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> The message for Georgia and Ukraine was that their membership in the alliance may come only at the expense of territorial integrity.<sup>8</sup> Russia's decision to go to war with Georgia over South Ossetia and the Kremlin's subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence fulfilled Russia's promises and ended the debate on the third wave of NATO expansion.

## Conclusion

This paper highlighted the role of ethnic prejudices and stereotypes in foreign policy formation. The U.S. decision to expand NATO to the east has served as an example of the hypothesized ethnophobia toward Russia reinforced by U.S. hegemonic military capabilities. American officials sought to convince the Kremlin of their non-threatening intentions, but in practice did little to address Russia's concerns. While insisting that they did not view Russia as a threat, the Western nations concluded two rounds of NATO expansion and since the second half of the 2000s began pushing for Georgia and Ukraine to join the alliance. In 2009, NATO even developed secret contingency plans to protect the Baltic States against Russia as a potential threat (Daalder, 2009). Until the mid-2008, U.S. decision-makers such as Bill Clinton, Madeline Albright, George W. Bush and Condoleeza Rice thought of Russia as a potentially dangerous yet insufficiently strong power to prevent the alliance

<sup>7</sup> For example, Moscow Mayor and a leader of the pro-Kremlin Unified Russia party Yury Luzhkov claimed Sevastopol was legally a part of Russia, and he urged Moscow not to extend its treaty of friendship, cooperation, and partnership with Ukraine (Yasmann, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> In the aftermath of the Bucharest summit, some Russian analysts had already argued that if membership in NATO was most important to Georgia, then Tbilisi was likely to obtain it at the cost of its territorial integrity (Tsygankov, 2008).



enlargement from taking place. Although U.S. officials avoided using Russophobic rhetoric in public, the ethnopolitical entrepreneurs who lobbied for NATO expansion argued that it was essential to contain Russia, rather than merely improve security in Europe or enhance the United States' power. The enlargement of the Western alliance stopped only when Russia acted to disprove the perception of its weakness and inability to project power by using force in the Caucasus. The isolated Russia was eager to demonstrate its relevance even at the cost of new tensions with the West. Predictably, the Kremlin's behavior served to reinforce the old phobias of Russia in the Western media (English and Svyatets, 2010).

In Russia, the impact of the decision to expand NATO remains far reaching. Despite some notable accomplishments, such as establishment of Russia-NATO Council and growing cooperation in Afghanistan, the Kremlin remains highly ambivalent regarding the West's military intentions. For example, in December 2011, then Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin suggested that the Western alliance remains driven by fear of Russia. "No matter what Russia may be – imperial, communist or democratic – they see us with the same eyes as they did in the previous centuries," Rogozin said (*Interfax* December 2011). He further proposed blocking the alliance supply routes to Afghanistan if the West refused to alleviate Russia's concerns over deployment of U.S. ballistic missile defenses in Europe (Cullison, 2011). Rogozin's perception is far from marginal. A number of important issues between Russia and NATO remained unresolved. The Kremlin remained critical of the U.S. proposal to develop the Missile Defense System jointly with the Europeans but separately from Russia. The Western nations remained rhetorically supportive of the former Soviet states' bid for NATO membership, whereas Russia maintained its right to protect its interests in Georgia and elsewhere in the former Soviet region. At the end of 2010, Moscow shelved its initiative to negotiate a new security treaty with European nations after not getting any support from NATO officials and the United States. The Kremlin also criticized the West's handling of the Middle Eastern crisis by going after the regime change in Libya and Syria. The overall problem is that the two sides do not have an overarching strategic vision they could share.

The argument that ethnic perceptions shape security interactions among states implies that ethnohistory remains a powerful, if neglected, condition of modern international relations. Historical memories of various hostile interactions, such as the Cold War between Russia and the West, contribute to creating context for decisions, making it more difficult to establish cooperation and co-development in the world. Such memories continue their life in politics by giving ammunition to those interested in perpetuating the image of the other as a threat to the self. Politicians and intellectuals with ethno-nationalist mindsets work to activate and strengthen existing phobias by accentuating the self's cultural and geographic distinctness from the other. Not only do Russia and Western nations continue to act on phobias of each other, but in a world that is increasingly multicultural and multipolar Russia and the West tend to activate previously dormant fears of Islam, China, and others. Although increased intergroup contacts help to reduce biases and cure some stereotypes (Wright et al., 1997: 73–90; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006: 751–783; Paluck and Green, 2009: 339–367), ethnic and cultural differences across the globe persist. Scholars will therefore do well to pay more attention to theorizing the pervasive influence ethno-history and ethnic stereotypes in foreign policy. Denying the power of ethnophobia is not likely to help to overcome it.

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