

This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

The origins of the Ukraine crisis and the need for collective security between Russia and the West

Reference:

Sauer Tom.- The origins of the Ukraine crisis and the need for collective security between Russia and the West
Global Policy - ISSN 1758-5880 - 8:1(2017), p. 82-91
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12374>
To cite this reference: <http://hdl.handle.net/10067/1355960151162165141>

The Origins of the Ukraine Crisis and the Need for Collective Security between Russia and the West (Tom Sauer, Universiteit Antwerpen) *published in Global Policy (2016)*

The invasion and occupation of the Crimea by Russia and its support for the rebels in Eastern Ukraine question the viability of the global political order. The occupation is a major transgression of the basic rules by one of the main players in global politics.

Many experts, however, believe that not only Putin is to be blamed, but that the West is also responsible for the crisis (Mearsheimer, 2014; Walt, 2015; Sakwa, 2016). Putin reacted to (in his eyes) illegitimate actions by the West, including NATO enlargement towards the borders of Russia. The puzzle that this article raises is why the West – first NATO, but later on the EU – was not aware that its Ukraine policy was very risky and could have been regarded as an offensive act by Russia, which on its turn could have triggered a reaction. The dominant explanation for this blindness is that the West acted by looking to the world through liberal glasses (Mearsheimer, 2014). The West believed that over time all states outside the EU would become democratic and peaceful. The problem with this explanation is that it may explain why the EU and NATO expanded to the East, but it fails to explain why the West did not incorporate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. For this reason, the liberal theory falls short of explaining Europe's policy on Ukraine.

This article wants to contribute to filling this gap in the literature and to describe and explain how it comes that the West has failed to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture in a way that satisfied Russia. It posits that the crisis in Ukraine is only a symptom, whose origins can be understood by the failure to establish a collective security organization that included Russia after the Cold War. It is not abnormal that the relationship glided back towards a classic balance of power relation with spheres of influences.

First, in the remainder of this article two constellations between major powers are described. Second, the dynamics amongst these different types of relationships is explained, including the role of perceptions and communication. Third, this theoretical framework will be applied to the relationship between Russia and the West after the Cold War leading up to the crisis in Ukraine.

Two types of global power relationships

Global policy is more shaped by large than small nations. That is at least what realists argue (Waltz, 1979, pp.72-73). If large nations do not go along well, a large part of the world may feel the consequences.

Focusing on relations between large nations, one can make a distinction between two types: balance of power, and collective security. These are ideal-types. The reality corresponds more to a continuum.

A first type of grand power constellation can be categorized as a pure balance of power relationship. Defensive realists assume that states - including large states - do not behave in an expansionist way; they are satisfied once they have a sufficient amount of power. Once they feel secure, they do not strive to have more power. Security triumphs over power. The result is a relatively stable balance of power between the major states (Waltz, 1979, Chapter 6). The bipolar system during the Cold War can be regarded as an example.

To be able to feel secure in a balance of power system large nations – at least those that are landlocked - prefer to have friendly neighbors. Spheres of influences help them to protect their country from being attacked. Spheres of influences can be formalized in the form of alliances, or can be informal. On its turn, the major goal of members of an alliance, or a collective defense organization, is to support each other militarily in the event of external attack. According to the theory of alliances, this should deter potential enemies to attack in the first place, and therefore yield stability and security. Even in informal spheres of influences any potential danger will be regarded as a matter of the highest concern, and may yield even an aggressive reaction and war.

A structural problem of alliances, however, is that they are constantly looking for external enemies that may jeopardize their territory. This process may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Mistrust may create more mistrust, tensions, conflicts, and war. In short, a mismanaged balance of power system may end up in war.

Second, if a balance of power system is softened by agreed rules about security amongst the major large nations, we speak of collective security (Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991; Kupchan and Kupchan, 1995). Collective security organizations aim to enhance security by establishing rules that aim to prevent and manage conflicts amongst its member states. These rules commit them to predictable patterns of behaviour that will positively influence the threat perception.

A crucial condition in this regard is that all major powers feel equal and treat each other as equal. The latter, however, does not mean that they have to share the same values and beliefs, including with respect to the type of domestic political system.

A historical example of a collective security system is the Concert of Europe (1815-1854), when the five major states in Europe agreed on basic rules with respect to external (and even internal) security. Another example of a collective security organization is the United Nations that unfortunately was to a large extent paralyzed as long as there were two alliances around. Again, alliances are difficult to reconcile with collective security systems because alliances are looking for external enemies, which stands in opposition to the idea of collective security.

While collective security is generally more stable than a balance of power, collective security organizations are not completely immune to tensions and conflicts amongst large nations either, and if mismanaged they may end up in an ordinary balance of power relationship,

and eventually war. However, the main advantage of a collective security system is that it will not crumble as easily as a pure balance of power system in case of deviance.

Misperceptions and miscommunication

How state behavior and shifts in balances of power are perceived by other states is most of the times as important as the behavior itself. When the intentions are benign, but the actions are perceived as malign, the effect of the action may have the opposite effect as intended. A lot of factors determine the quality of perceptions between two or more actors: the nature of the political system (democratic versus authoritarian) and more in particular the degree of trust and openness, the degree of empathy, knowledge about each other, grooved thinking, and bureaucratic politics (Jervis, 1976). Per definition, many of these factors are less present in a collective security organization than in a pure balance of power system.

Beside the type of global power relationship, the theory of perceptions and misperceptions may help explain the behaviour of Russia and the West in the post-Cold War period. A 2015 report of the UK House of Lords pointed out: 'We [also] observe that there has been a strong element of "sleep-walking" into the current crisis, with [EU] Member States being taken by surprise by events in Ukraine. Over the last decade, the EU has been slow to reappraise its policies in response to significant changes in Russia. A loss of collective analytical capacity has weakened Member States' ability to read the political shifts in Russia and to offer an authoritative response. This lack of understanding and capacity was clearly evident during the Ukraine crisis, but even before that the EU had not taken into account the exceptional nature of Ukraine and its unique position in the shared neighbourhood' (House of Lords, 2015, p.6). This statement can be extended to the period since the implosion of the USSR. Already since the end of the Cold War did Russia not feel respected by the West, and the West apparently never fully understood this (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2009-2010; Pouliot, 2010). That on its turn has to do with a lack of knowledge of each other: Putin does not know the West; and the West does not know Putin.

Both blocs communicate also differently. As Fiona Hill points out: 'In Western views, the Russians should adopt a different discourse when conducting foreign policy. As a result, we completely miss the core message that Putin is trying to transmit. This frustrates Putin and causes him to think that he has to deliver the message again; but even more forcefully – or even forcibly, by backing up his words with military action' (Hill, 2016, p.142).

How peace is settled determines the post-war period

To explain dynamics amongst the two types of constellations – balance of power and collective security - power shifts between large nations have to be analyzed, as realists argue (Waltz, 1979, chapters 7-9). Collective security systems have the capacity to absorb changes in the balance of power. The system that is most vulnerable to power shifts is the classic

balance of power constellation. Power shifts in such a basic constellation may lead to (world) wars. War between major power therefore results from a fundamental shift in the balance of power that either lead to expansionist behavior by the upcoming state, as is predicted by the theory of Offensive Realism, or by a preventive war by the state that is losing power in line with what Defensive realists claim. The underlying assumption of Offensive Realism is that large nations always want to have more power, and that they are prepared to expand to the detriment of other - most of the time smaller, but sometimes also large - states (Mearsheimer, 2001). Examples are the rise of Germany at the end of the 19th century as well as in the interbellum, twice leading to a world war. After 1945, interstate wars have become rare in global politics, despite changes in the balance of power. Some observers believe that today's Russia belongs to the category of expansionist states (Kroenig, 2016).

Wars between major powers - let alone world wars - are humanitarian disasters. After such a war, the international system is reset. These are the moments when new rules are agreed upon amongst the major powers and new collective security systems may see the daylight (Ikenberry, 2001). These moments can be regarded as major turning-points in history. More in particular, the way a large nation is treated after having lost a war determines the type of configuration the world (or region) tumbles, which on its turn determines whether the period thereafter is characterized by stability or war. Losers of wars tend to take revenge, except if they are integrated in a collective security system. Winners of wars may also take revenge. Most of the time, however, winners aim for stability and order. The best way to reach that goal is to create a collective security system.

Looking to the past 200 years, four major turning-points in history can be distinguished: the Congress of Vienna (1815); the end of the First World War; the end of the Second World War; and the end of the Cold War. The large nations in the post-Napoleonic Europe decided to include France that had lost the war into the European security architecture. This "Concert of Europe" yielded stability and peace for decades, at least until the war in the Crimea in 1854, and one could argue even longer. . The Concert Européen was more than a kind of balance of power system: it can also be regarded as a collective security regime. In contrast, after WWI the international community failed to integrate Germany. The Treaty of Versailles was in Germany perceived as 'Das Diktat'. The exclusion of Weimar Germany led to the rise of Nazism and German expansionism, which to a substantial extent explains the origins of the Second World War. At the same time, the first global collective security organization was established in the form of the League of Nations, at least on paper. In practice, the League failed due to the absence of major powers. Their absence can on its turn be explained by a lack of institutional power given to the large powers within the League of Nations.

After WW II global politics was managed better. Having learned lessons from the previous negative experiences, large nations were treated as a special category (but equally amongst each other) in the UN, the newly established collective security organization. The five victors were given a permanent seat and veto power in the UN Security Council. This realist element

made the system work, or at least work better than the League of Nations. Furthermore, the two major powers that had lost the war - Germany and Japan - were integrated in the international community, at least in the Western part of the world. Unfortunately, the UN became paralyzed by a balance of power system in the form of the bipolar Cold War configuration with two alliances standing opposite each other. Within the Western world, though, a security community – an improved version of collective security - was created that still exists today.

In the remainder of this article, we will describe how the end of the Cold War was mismanaged, leading to disappointments, misperceptions, miscommunication, and miscalculations, creating a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy and a downward-spiral to the existing balance of power of today. The methodology that will be used is process-tracing. The major events that have led to the Ukraine crisis, and how they were perceived, will be described. At each stage, we will try to assess on which point on the continuum between balance of power and collective security - as defined above - the relationship stood, and was perceived as such. The claim that this article makes is that not only Russia but also the West mismanaged the transition period, resulting in a continuation of a balance of power system that finally ended up in war in Ukraine.

Missed opportunity in the post-Cold War period: unfulfilled expectations by - and Western neglect of - Russia

At the end of the Cold War, the world was divided, with two alliances opposing each other. Not many had predicted that the Cold War would come to an end in 1989. It was certainly not pre-cooked by the leaders in the Kremlin. Soviet President Gorbachev wanted to change the economic and political system of the USSR in a gradual way. In contrast, the USSR and the Warsaw Pact imploded in 1991. Russia was left behind with a fundamentally different domestic political situation: a Communist Party that shrunk to small proportions and a state-based economy that was radically transformed by believers in shock therapy capitalism. The result was a superpower that fell apart, both geographically and economically. With a GNP as small as Portugal in the beginning of the 1990s, Russia was regarded as “a developing country with nuclear weapons”. The country was also hit by a financial crisis in 1998. The Russian political leadership was neither very strong. The image that remains of President Yeltsin is that of a populist that liked to drink a glass of vodka. Overall, the Russian foreign policy establishment and politicians felt humiliated because they had lost the Cold War, although they did not like to admit that. Compare that to the triumph of the West after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The capitalist economic system proved to be stronger than the state-based economic system of the USSR, at least for the time being. The Western values of freedom and liberty prevailed. In the summer of 1990 President Bush, Sr heralded the New World Order.

As the Cold War came without much bloodshed to an end, one could have expected that the relationship between Russia and the West be built on the basis of a more peaceful nature.

Many Western pundits and politicians hoped that Russia would be integrated in the main Euro-Atlantic security organizations. Russia on its turn hoped that NATO would transform itself from being a military alliance into a predominantly political organization. Even better - in the eyes of Moscow - would have been the abolition of NATO and its replacement by a pan-European collective security organization. Obviously realists predicted the end of NATO too, as alliances are per definition temporarily, as was shown again by the demise of the Warsaw Pact (Mearsheimer, 1990).

Contrary to what is sometimes said, it is not that the USSR or Russia was not interested in joining the Western security organizations. Even Gorbachev tested the idea of NATO membership a couple of times in a prudent manner, for instance during the German reunification talks with US Secretary of State James Baker in May 1990 (Sarotte, 2014). Also President Yeltsin, for instance in September 1993, made clear that Russia had an interest in joining NATO (Goldgeier, 1998, p.88). Even President Putin in its first term was potentially interested in 'a broader participation' in NATO (Charlton, 2000; Lyne, 2015, p.5). Admittedly, Russia never formally asked to become a NATO member because it knew the answer in advance. Although Russia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program, it was never invited to become a regular NATO member.

The idea of integrating Russia in the existing Euro-Atlantic security organizations on an equal footing was not taken serious in the West. For the West it seemed business as usual: the existence of NATO was not called into question when Germany was unified and brought under the auspices of the EU and NATO (Zelikow and Rice, 1998, p.277). In the Western foreign-policy establishments the idea of collective security was seen as an academic and long-term exercise at best.

The best way for integrating Russia into the Western security organizations would probably have been the establishment of a new collective security organization, possibly in the form of an upgraded Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). That scenario was dismissed in the West by those who could not imagine a future without the Atlantic Alliance. US President Bush, Sr 'warned President Mitterrand [already in April 1990] that no other organization could "replace NATO as the guarantor of Western security and stability". He continued: "Indeed, it is difficult to visualize how a European collective security arrangement including Eastern Europe, and perhaps even the Soviet Union, would have the capability to deter threats to Western Europe"' (Sarotte, 2014). The CSCE was regarded as weak in 1991, and NATO's Secretary-General Manfred Wörner wanted to keep it that way: 'With 38 members today and no doubt over 40 tomorrow, with the option of a veto imposed by just one member, and without an executive, the CSCE for the foreseeable future will remain burdened with structural weaknesses which will limit its effectiveness' (Wörner, 1991, p.5). The CSCE that had helped strengthening the idea of human rights and liberty in Eastern Europe and the USSR - that was upgraded to the *Organization* for Security and Cooperation

in Europe (OSCE) in December 1994 - always remained in the shadow of NATO (Mosser, 2015).

In short, the end of the Cold War was a missed opportunity. Instead of creating a new regional security system based on the principles of collective security, the West did not abolish NATO and refused to invite Russia into the main security organization that was left.

NATO Expansion and the Balkan wars

To make matters worse from a Russian point of view, NATO that was in search of a new identity acted in a way that was disliked by Russia, more in particular the war against the Bosnian Serbs (1994-1995), NATO expansion, and the war against Serbia (1999). With the USSR and the Warsaw Pact gone, NATO found new enemies (Klare, 1995), more in particular authoritarian regimes outside NATO territory that were responsible for gross human rights violations. For NATO, the adagio was acting 'out of area or [being] out of business'. The first time ever that NATO used violence was against the Serbs in Bosnia in 1994, and one year later against Serbia itself. Because of the historical ties between Serbia and Russia, this led to the first major frictions between NATO and Russia.

The move by the West that hurt the Russia-NATO relationship even more was inviting some Eastern European states to become members of NATO and later on the EU. These former Warsaw Pact member states were begging for membership in the Western institutions, both for economic and security reasons. From a liberal point of view, they had the right to be admitted. Within the same logic, it is however hard to explain why Russia was excluded. From a realist perspective it is easy to understand why a regional power like Russia was not admitted.

The first time that NATO expansion was mentioned was in 1990, before the implosion of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact. From the beginning, Moscow warned that NATO expansion would create new lines of division. Russia regarded NATO extension as an expansion of NATO's and US sphere of influence. That message was certainly heard by Western decision-makers, but apparently not fully understood. Former SACEUR General Galvin warned already in the mid-1990s: 'We won the Cold War, but we're losing the peace after the Cold War. There is no doubt in my mind about it. We do not think about the Russians enough, about whom they are and what they're doing. *We don't think much about the way they think of us...* We should consider folding NATO in a bigger organization... We need a whole new organization that bring the Russians on board' (Gardner, 2014). Also George Kennan and Paul Nitze, two foreign policy giants of the Cold War categorized by Hall Gardner as "alternative realists", opposed NATO expansion (Kennan, 1997; Nitze, 1998; Gardner, 2013, p.41). Their arguments were echoed by Western academics of whom most of them would define themselves as realists (Mandelbaum, 1995; Kamp, 1995; Brown, 1995; Kupchan and Kupchan, 1995).

Nevertheless, despite warnings from the US State Department for deteriorating relations with Russia, President Clinton declared in 1994 that the question was no longer "whether" but "when" NATO would expand. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were formally invited in 1997 to join NATO, which happened two years later. To compensate, NATO tried to mask the tensions with Russia with the signing of the NATO-Russian Founding Act (1997). The latter included the promise by NATO not to station nuclear weapons nor foreign troops on a permanent basis in the former Warsaw Pact countries. Earlier, President Clinton had promised President Yeltsin that *eventually* also a *democratic* Russia could become part of NATO (in line with the neoconservative and neoliberal argumentation à la Fukuyama) and stated that in the meantime NATO expansion would not threaten Russia's interests (Goldgeier, 1998, p.97). The latter clearly showed a lack of understanding of how Russia perceived the situation.

To understand Russia's reaction to NATO expansion better it is crucial to go back to what had been promised to President Gorbachev at the time of German reunification. Gorbachev was promised that Germany would be reunified *without* expanding NATO. As there is a lot of myth-making around this episode, it is useful to have a closer look to what exactly has been said by whom. US Secretary of State James Baker and German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, respectively on 9 and 10 February 1990, pointed out that German reunification would not lead to NATO expansion. James Baker, when speaking to Gorbachev in Moscow, stated: 'We understand that it is important not only for the USSR but also for other European countries to have guarantees that - if the US maintains her military presence in Germany within the NATO framework - there will be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction of military presence one inch to the east' (Zelikow and Rice, 1998, p.182). Similarly, Genscher told his Soviet colleague Shevardnadze: 'We are aware that NATO membership raises complicated questions. For us, however, one thing is certain: NATO will not expand to the East' (Kluschmann, Schepp and Wiegrefe, 2009; Welsh, 2014). Ten days earlier, Genscher had already made the same point in a speech in Tutzing: 'it is for NATO to declare unequivocally: irrespective of whatever happens within the Warsaw Pact, there will be no expansion of NATO's territory to the East, *that is, closer to the borders of the Soviet Union*. Such security guarantees are important for the Soviet Union...' (Rühle, 2014a, p.3). Two days after that speech, Genscher repeats the same message at a press conference with James Baker in Washington DC: 'What I said is there is no intention [by NATO] to extend to the East' (Zelikow and Rice, 1998, p.176). Michael Rühle, an advocate of NATO expansion at that time, later on admits that the German reunification 'was achieved through countless personal conversations in which Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders were assured that the West would not take advantage of the Soviet Union's weakness and willingness to withdraw militarily from Central and Eastern Europe' (Rühle, 2014b, p.236). It was on the basis of these promises that Gorbachev agreed with the German reunification. As the historian Mary Elise Sarotte explains: 'After hearing these repeated assurances, Gorbachev gave West Germany what Kohl later called "the green light" to begin creating an economic and

monetary union between East and West Germany – the first step of reunification’ (Sarotte, 2014).

The argument that these promises by the West had only to do with East Germany and not with Eastern Europe (Kramer, 2009; Rühle, 2014b, p.236) is not correct. NATO expansion towards Eastern Europe was already raised by Hungary in February 1990 and by an internal State Department note a few weeks later (Sarotte, 2010, p.118). Genscher pointed out to British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd on the 6th of February 1990: 'that when I talked about not wanting to extend NATO, *that applied to other states besides the GDR*. The West could do a lot to alleviate the current developments for the USSR. The declaration that NATO has no intention to expand its territory eastwards would be particularly important. NATO does not intend to expand its territory to the East. *Such a statement must not just refer to East Germany but rather be of a general nature. For example, the Soviet Union needs the security of knowing that Hungary, if it has a change in government, will not become part of the Western Alliance*' (Sarotte, 2010, p.117).

The argument that these promises were done orally and therefore are not legally binding is not convincing either. It is correct that these guarantees were not repeated in the reunification agreement of 12 September 1990. Oral agreements, however, are agreements too. Russian foreign policy expert Sergey Karaganov explains why the USSR did not emphasize that point again during the negotiations: 'We did not demand written guarantees because in an euphoric atmosphere of that time it would have seemed almost indecent, like two girlfriends giving written promise not to seduce each other's husbands' (Garfinkle, 1997, p.106).

Lastly, the argument that it was up to the Eastern European states to decide about their own future is correct. The choice, though, was framed between NATO membership and the status-quo. The choice could have been framed differently: between NATO, the status-quo, or the creation of new organization based on collective security, including Russia over time. That last option was never offered by the West.

The third and last move that deteriorated the relations with Russia in the 1990's was NATO's bombing campaign against the Serbs *without* the authorization of the UN Security Council in 1999, leading to Kosovo's autonomy and independence later on. The war started two weeks after the first wave of NATO expansion. For Putin, who at that time was head of the KGB, Kosovo was a turning point (Hill and Gaddy, 2015). In his view, the West by acting unilaterally openly denied Russia's legitimate interests. The latter was at odds with the principles of collective security.

Changing expectations by Russia

It is therefore not surprising that Russia felt betrayed and that Russia as a result of these Western actions started to change its expectations about its role in the future organization of European security. Sergey Karaganov believes that the West pursued a policy in the 1990s

like the victors of the First World War in Versailles: 'Of particular annoyance to Russia's political class were systematic deceits and hypocrisy, broken promises, and declarations that the very idea of the existence of spheres of control and influence in world politics was outdated and no longer corresponded to modern realities and concepts. The West never missed a chance to expand its own ostensibly non-existent sphere of influence' (Karaganov, 2014). Also Alexei Arbatov blames the unilateral attitude of the US: 'The US suddenly saw itself as "the only superpower in the world." ... The US treated Russia as if it were a loser country' (Arbatov, 2014). Alexander Lukin, another Russian observer, agrees: 'The post-Soviet consensus between the West and Russia was based on at least a Russian understanding that both sides would move towards closer cooperation, respect each other's interests and make mutually acceptable compromises. Yet, only Russia followed this understanding in practical terms' (Lukin, 2016, p.98). While the latter is probably exaggerated, there was the additional problem of the asymmetrical power relationship between the West and Russia in the 1990's, that led to more compromises by Russia than by the West. As a US observer explains: 'US leaders thought that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, they had created a new framework of relations with Russia, and that the new Russia, under President Boris Yeltsin, had agreed to that framework. Putin sees it differently. Russians never agreed to accept the role the West assigned them in the new framework – that status of a large but second-rank European country' (Hill, 2016, p.143). As a former KGB officer in Eastern Germany at the end of the 1980's, Putin felt personally humiliated. When he became president in the year 2000, Putin did everything he could to restore Russia's power in the world. In contrast to what sometimes is insinuated, Putin did not immediately change gears with respect to Russia's policy vis-à-vis the West. Vladimir Putin hoped to improve the relationship too (Freedman, 2001; Lyne, 2015, p.2-4). Russia's emphatic reaction to 9/11 is a testimony of this.

Instead of trying to improve the relationship, however, the Bush administration apparently could not care less. President Bush announced two months after 9/11 that the US would unilaterally abrogate the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty. That bilateral treaty, signed and ratified in 1972, aimed to keep the number of ABM systems limited in order not to undermine their respective nuclear deterrents. The Treaty was an important factor of strategic stability during and after the Cold War. By abolishing the ABM treaty and by developing and constructing strategic missile defence systems in California and in Alaska, rhetorically meant against "rogue states" like North Korea and Iran, the Russian deterrent was undermined. That was at least Russia's perception (Sauer, 2011). President Bush furthermore convinced NATO to install US missile defence systems on European territory. These theatre missile defence systems (including radar systems), near the border with Russia, were regarded as an even bigger threat by Moscow. The lack of a cap on the number of interceptors combined with the possibility to link these interceptors with strategic sensors on radar and satellites made the Russians feel afraid, and even according to Western experts logically so (Postol, 2000; Lewis and Postol, 2008). This blocked further progress in arms control. Largely because of missile defence Russia suspended the CFE treaty (on

conventional weapons) and refused to let START II (on strategic nuclear weapons) enter into force.

Putin also felt humiliated by the US when it invaded Iraq in 2003 without a UN Security Council resolution (Stent, 2014). It was perceived by Putin as further evidence that the relationship could not be defined in terms of collective security. Furthermore, Putin could not prevent a second – even larger - round of NATO expansion in 2004: Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the three Baltic states joined both NATO and the EU. The Westernization of the Baltic States in particular was sensitive as they had belonged to the USSR, be it against their will. Germany, France and the UK were hesitant to take the Baltic States on board precisely because they were afraid of the reaction of Russia. The US pushed nevertheless the expansion through. As a partial compensation, Russia became member of the G-8, and the Russia-NATO Council was established in 2002.

Also the EU disrespected Russia, or that was at least the feeling in Moscow. Already in the first draft of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in March 2003, no distinction was made between Russia and many smaller states in the Mediterranean (Arbatova and Dynkin, 2016, p.84).

From 2003 onwards, the project to integrate Russia in the West became more difficult as Russia itself more or less gave up on the idea. Mistrust dominated even more than before. Russia basically turned inward and lost hope to become part of a European collective security organization.

Mistrust by a disillusioned Russia and autism by the West

Another turning-point in Russia's attitude towards the West were the coloured revolutions that took place in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, respectively in 2003, 2004 and 2005 (Lyne, 2015, p.7-8). These events were interpreted by the Kremlin as being organized or at least supported by the West (Mearsheimer, 2014). Moscow feared that such events could also happen in Russia. To save the regime, a more nationalist and anti-Western card was played by Moscow. The latter fitted with growing nationalist demands from within Russian society that had become richer in the meantime. Pressure to follow a more independent path from the West was growing.

2007 is the year in which Putin's patience publicly ran out. As Hill and Gaddy (2015) remark: 'Putin believed that he had been rebuffed or deceived at every turn by the West'. At the Munich security conference, he lashed out against the West: 'And what happened to the assurances our western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today? No one even remembers them. But I will allow myself to remind this audience what was said. I would like to quote the speech of NATO Secretary General Mr Wörner in Brussels on 17 May 1990. He said at the time that: "The fact that we are ready not to place a NATO army outside of German territory gives the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee". Where are these guarantees?' (Putin, 2007).

Tellingly, the Russian cyberattack against Estonia was one of the first clear indications that Russia was willing to react. Balancing was again part of the game. However, the West apparently still did not understand the message. The West - and especially the US - wanted to take NATO expansion one round further. This time Georgia and Ukraine were on the list. For historical, economic and identity reasons, Georgia and especially Ukraine were red lines for Russia. They clearly belonged to the Russian sphere of influence. Even the Western architects of the post-Cold War security architecture were aware how sensitive the Ukrainian case was (Asmus, Kugler, and Larrabee, 1995).

Two months before the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov warned US Ambassador William Burns pointedly of 'fears that the issue *could potentially split Ukraine in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene*'. Burns sent a cable to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice which title was 'Nyet means nyet: Russia's NATO enlargement red lines' (Binney, 2014). Despite warnings on the future of Ukraine by President Putin who was present, the 2008 NATO Summit decided to invite Croatia and Albania to become member, and opened the door for eventual membership for Georgia and Ukraine. The statement – pushed through by President Bush himself at the Summit - read: 'These countries *will* become members of NATO' (NATO, 2008). By doing so the West - and more in particular NATO - clearly transgressed Russia's red line.

Russia reacted by provoking and invading parts of Georgia in 2008. The West on its turn did not react, which was noticed by Putin (Speck, 2014). One year later, Gazprom cut off all supplies to Ukraine, again without much reaction by the West. In hindsight, this episode can be regarded as a prelude to the Ukraine crisis. Aviel Roshwald, history professor at Georgetown University, predicted already in 2008, six years before the crisis: 'To let Ukraine join NATO would almost *inevitably trigger a Moscow-orchestrated secession from Ukraine of the ethnically Russian Crimean peninsula*, home to the Russian navy's Black Sea base' (Roshwald, 2008). It is remarkable that the foreign policy establishment in Washington DC and Brussels missed similar observations. Harvard professor Stephen Walt's judgment is harsh: 'The failure of US diplomats to anticipate Putin's heavy-handed response [in Ukraine] was an act of remarkable diplomatic incompetence' (Walt, 2015). A similar remark can be made with respect to the Eurocrats in Brussels.

With President Medvedev and President Obama in power, a short and relatively shallow honeymoon period arrived. One of the first decisions by President Obama was the offer to push the "reset button" with Russia, while Medvedev himself had earlier on - in a speech in Berlin on 5 June 2008 - proposed a new European Security Treaty based on the principles of collective security (Medvedev, 2008). The latter, tellingly, did not yield much enthusiasm in the West.

. In the end, the "reset" made matters worse as it increased again Russia's expectations (Liik, 2015, p.2).

The Ukraine crisis

In parallel with the economy, Putin's popularity began to fall in 2008 and hit a low in the period 2011-2012, leading to large-scale street protests in Moscow. The protesters wanted political change and not another term by Vladimir Putin. President Putin reacted with repression. According to Michael McFaul, who was the American ambassador in Moscow from 2011 to 2014, Putin also reacted by playing the nationalist card culminating in taking back the Crimea (McFaul, 2014). The West, however, helped Putin by providing the ideal pretext (Allison, 2014).

Ukraine is by far the largest neighbouring country on Russia's Western borders, through which Napoleon and Hitler have tried to conquer Russia twice in the past two hundred years. Ukraine and more in particular the Crimea also included Sebastopol, a port that was leased by Russia. Ukraine and Russia had also substantial economic relations. Ukraine was a former member state of the USSR and the Crimea was handed over to Ukraine by President Khrushchev in 1954. For all these reasons it is no surprise that Russian strategists wanted to keep Ukraine as a kind of buffer state. Russia abhorred the idea that Ukraine and Georgia would become member of NATO, or the EU for that matter as the EU was more and more regarded in Moscow as an organization that is closely related to NATO.

Given that Ukraine belonged to the Russian sphere of influence, at least in the eyes of Moscow, the West should have behaved carefully vis-à-vis Ukraine and Russia. That is at least one could expect from a defensive realist – let alone liberal - point of view. That, however, did not happen. To the surprise of many, the EU started up Trade and Association talks with Ukraine without having an agreement with Russia. That was a recipe for disaster. After first having conceived the Eastern Partnership Program in 2008-2009, the EU made economic overtures towards Ukraine in the form of offering a Trade and Association Agreement in 2013. Interestingly, several articles in the Association Agreement also contained security issues, which - together with the promises at the NATO Bucharest Summit in 2008 - may indeed have drawn Ukraine into the Atlantic Alliance over time (Sakwa, 2015, p.569).

Russia felt disrespected again, this time by the EU (Schmidt-Felzmann, 2016). As Gardner states: 'If the EU had begun to negotiate an accord with Russia first and then with Ukraine later (...), then the present crisis might not have grown to such disastrous proportions' (Gardner, 2014, p.10). But that did not happen due to pressure from Poland and the Baltic States. Others explain this neglect by the EU by pointing to its postmodern, liberal self-image: 'the EU also failed to grasp that what they saw as a benevolent power could be viewed by others as a threat' (Krastev and Leonard, 2014, p.3). Richard Sakwa follows the same line: 'The substantive claim to normative superiority undermined the EU's ability to engage with others in Europe on the basis of sovereign equality' (Sakwa, 2015, p.557). Liik (p.3) quotes an unnamed Brussels official saying: 'Russia never said it wanted a sphere of

influence in Ukraine! Had they said so, we would have approached the issue differently'. This quote shows that there was clearly a lack of understanding of Russia in the EU.

In reaction to the EU effort, Russia built an Eurasian regional order. In the autumn of 2013, President Yanukovich even promised to bring Ukraine into the Russian-led customs union. Crucially, the EU blocked that prospect, something that President Putin did not appreciate (Allison, 2014, pp.1256-1257). A promise of EU membership was never explicitly given to Ukraine, but it was never excluded either. When Ukrainian president Yanukovich chose a last minute deal with Russia instead of the EU, large parts of the Ukrainian population (especially in the Western parts of Ukraine) were deeply disappointed. They had hoped that the strengthened relationship with the EU would end a sustained period of bad governance and corruption, and one day would open the door for EU membership. These expectations were suddenly crushed, and led to the popular uproar on Maidan and the flight of Yanukovich to Russia. The rest of the story is known. The 'coup', which in the eyes of Moscow was supported by the West, led on its turn to the occupation of the Crimea by Russia, and later on to unrest in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. The world was shocked, especially after an airliner was shot down, most likely by pro-Russian rebels in the East of Ukraine. Headlines in the Western media talked about "a new Cold War".

Back to the future

It is abundantly clear that the current regional security architecture in Europe is in need of fundamental adaptation. As two Russian experts observe: 'In none of the post-bipolar-era crises - NATO's operation against Yugoslavia in 1999, the 2008 Georgia conflict and the current Ukrainian crisis - have the current security organizations designed to resolve such conflicts been able to perform their duties effectively' (Arbatova and Dynkin, 2016, p.77). Both Russia and the West should therefore fundamentally rethink their policies vis-à-vis each other. They should first of all learn the mistakes from this crisis, as analysed above.

If push comes to shove the relationship between the West and Russia is more important than the relationship between the West and Ukraine. The West needs Russia to resolve conflicts in the Middle East (as the successful negotiations with Iran show), to manage global threats like nuclear proliferation, terrorism, and global warming. A better relationship between Russia and the West will also be advantageous to Ukraine, while the opposite is not automatically true. Ukraine can have a trade relationship with both the West and Russia. However, it would be better that Ukraine does not become member of NATO, at least as long as no solution has been worked out with Russia. A neutral Ukraine is also recommended by realists like Mearsheimer, Kissinger and Brzezinski (Mearsheimer, 2014; Kissinger, 2014; Brzezinski, 2014).

In the short-term politicians and officials on both sides should meet more regularly both in formal groupings (like the NATO-Russia Council) and informal networks. One of the first points on the agenda should be to try to prevent incidents (in the air and on sea) that could

escalate. Confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) could be taken to enhance trust. The same applies to arms control initiatives in the conventional, nuclear, or ballistic missile defense realm.

In the longer term, the best way to reassure Russia is to include the country in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, and this time on an equal basis; not to exclude it. If Russia and the West want to supersede a balance of power relationship, they have to create a proper collective security organization.

Conclusion

The Cold War was lost by Russia. The West apparently never fully understood what that meant for Russia. In contrast to what one could have expected on the basis of the history over the last 200 years, Russia was not fully integrated into the West. This can be partly explained by the fact that the need was felt less than in previous cases because the Cold War ended without much bloodshed.

The West was too prudent – too realist – in contrast to what Mearsheimer claims (2014). As previous cases have shown, historic transition periods need an institutional back-up. The West even provoked Russia by expanding both the EU and NATO without setting limits to that extension. It also installed missile defence systems near the Russian borders. It fought wars without the consent of Russia.

On different occasions, Russia acquiesced and took constructive steps vis-à-vis the West (e.g. after 9/11). There were, however, limits to Russia's patience and limits to the incursions to its legitimate national interests that it could accept. More in particular, touching the status of Georgia and Ukraine were red lines for Moscow. As the Financial Times concluded: 'It is a tale of ... Western underestimations of just how far Mr Putin was prepared to go to defend what he presents as Russia's fundamental interests; and above all, of two sides talking past each other, locked into entirely different narratives' (Buckley, 2015). Tellingly, the EU bureaucracy and the foreign policy community of the 28 states failed to predict the crisis. There was clearly a lack of understanding and empathy on behalf of the West. It failed to notice that Ukraine was regarded as a buffer zone for Russia. Also Stephen Walt points out that: 'The Ukraine crisis did not begin with a bold Russian move or even a series of illegitimate Russian demands; it began when the United States and European Union tried to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and into the West's sphere of influence'...'Russia is not an ambitious rising power...; it is an aging, depopulating, and declining great power trying to cling to whatever influence it still possesses and preserve a modest sphere of influence near its borders, so that stronger states - and especially the United States - cannot take advantage of its growing vulnerabilities...It is lingering fear, rather than relentless ambition, that underpins Russia's response in Ukraine' (Walt, 2015).

To conclude, this crisis has not much to do with Russian imperialism, let alone Western imperialism. It has to do with a lack of strategic long-term thinking and acting by the 'winner' of the Cold War. The absence of a liberal blueprint for fully integrating Russia into a regional collective security organization is the underlying cause of this crisis. The Ukraine crisis is only a symptom.

References

- Allison, R. (2014) 'Russian "deniable" Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules', *International Affairs*, 90 (6), pp.1255-1297.
- Arbatov, A. (2014) 'Collapse of the World Order?', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 23 September.
- Arbatova N. and Dynkin A. (2016) 'World Order after Ukraine', *Survival*, 58 (1), February-March, pp.71-90.
- Asmus, R., Kugler, R., Larrabee S. (1995) 'NATO Expansion: The Next Steps', *Survival*, 37 (1).
- Benedicte, K. (2012) 'Russia Should be Rewarded with NATO Membership', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 May.
- Binney, W. and others (2014) 'Germany's Merkel Needs to Ask Tough Questions at NATO Summit', *NATO Watch*, 3 September.
- Brzezinski, Z. (2014) 'Russia Needs to be Offered a "Finland Option" for Ukraine', *The Financial Times*, 22 February.
- Brown, M. (1995) 'The Flawed Logic of NATO Expansion', *Survival*, 37 (1), pp.34-52.
- Buckley, N. and others (2015) 'How the West Lost Putin', *The Financial Times*, 3 February.
- Charlton, A. (2000) 'Putin says Russia, if Treated as an Equal, Might Eventually Join NATO', *Associated Press*, 24 March.
- Deudney, D. and Ikenberry, J. (2009-2010) 'The Unravelling of the Cold War Settlement', *Survival*, 51 (6), pp.39-62.
- Freedman, L. (2001) 'The Transformation of NATO', *The Financial Times*, 6 August.
- Gardner, H. (2013) *NATO Expansion and US Strategy in Asia*. New York: Palgrave.
- Gardner, H. (2014) 'From Berlin to Ukraine/Russia', *NATO Watch Comment*, 9 November.
- Garfinkle, A. (1997) 'NATO Enlargement, What's the Rush?', *National Interest* 46.
- Goldgeier, J. (1998) 'NATO Expansion: The Anatomy of a Decision', *The Washington Quarterly*, 21 (1), Winter, pp.85-102.
- Hill, F. and Gaddy, C. (2015) 'The American Education of Vladimir Putin', *Defense One*, 16 February.
- Hill, F. (2016) 'Putin: The One-Man Show the West Doesn't Understand', *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 72 (3), pp.140-144.
- House of Lords EU Committee (2015) *The EU and Russia: Before and Beyond the Crisis in Ukraine*. 6th report of Session 2014-2015, February, London.
- Ikenberry, J. (2001) *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jervis, R. (1976) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Kamp, K.H. (1995) 'The Folly of Rapid NATO Expansion', *Foreign Policy* 98.
- Karaganov, S. (2014) 'Europe and Russia: Preventing a New Cold War', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 7 June.
- Kennan, G. (1997) 'A Fateful Error', *New York Times*, 5 February.
- Kissinger, H. (2014) 'How the Ukrainian Crisis Ends', *Washington Post*, 5 March.
- Klare, M. (1995) *Rogue States and Nuclear Outlaws*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Krastev I. and Leonard, M. (2014) 'The New European Disorder', *ECFR Essay*, 117, November.
- Kroenig, M. (2016) 'The Renewed Russian Nuclear Threat and NATO Nuclear Deterrence Posture', *Atlantic Council Issue Brief*, February.
- Klussmann, U., Schepp, M., and Wiegrefe K. (2009) 'NATO's Eastward Expansion: Did the West Break its Promise to Moscow?' *Der Spiegel Online International*, 26 November.
- Kramer, M. (2009) 'The Myth of a No-NATO Enlargement Pledge to Russia', *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring.
- Kupchan, C. and Kupchan, C. (1991) 'Concerts, Collective Security, and the Future of Europe', *International Security*, 16 (1), pp.114-161.
- Kupchan, C. and Kupchan, C. (1995) 'The Promise of Collective Security', *International Security*, 20 (1), pp.52-61.
- Kupchan, C. (2010) 'NATO's Final Frontier: Why Russia Should Join the Alliance', *Foreign Affairs*, 89 (3), May-June, pp.100-112.
- Lewis, G. and Postol, T. (2008) 'The European Missile Defense Folly', *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May/June, pp.32-39.
- Liik, K. (2015) 'How to Talk with Russia', *ECFR Policy Memo*, December.
- Lukin, A. (2016) 'Russia in a Post-Bipolar World', *Survival*, 58 (1), February-March, pp.91-112.
- Lyne, R. (2015) 'Russia's Changed Outlook in the West: From Convergence to Confrontation', in Keir Giles (and others), *The Russian Challenge*. London: Chatham House/RIIA, June 2015.
- Mandelbaum, M. (1995) 'Preserving the New Peace. The Case Against NATO Expansion', *Foreign Affairs*, 74 (3), May/June, pp.9-13.
- McFaul, M. (2014) 'Moscow's Choice', *Foreign Affairs*, 93 (6), November/December, pp.167-171.
- Mearsheimer, J. (1990) 'Back to the Future', *International Security*, 15 (1), pp.5-56.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2001) *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company.
- Mearsheimer, J. (2014) 'Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault', *Foreign Affairs*, 93 (5), pp.77-89.
- Medvedev, D. (2008) Speech at meeting with German political, parliamentary and civic leaders, 5 June.
- Mosser, M. (2015) 'Embracing "Embedded Security": the OSCE's Understated but Significant Role in the European Security Architecture', *European Security*, 24 (4), pp.579-599.
- NATO (2008) Bucharest Summit Declaration, 3 April.
- Nitze, P. (1998) Letter to Senator Moynihan, *Congressional Record* 144, pt 5, 21-30 April.
- Postol, T. (2000) 'The Target is Russia', *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 56 (2),

March/April, pp.31-46.

Pouliot, V. (2010) *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Putin, V. (2007) 'Remarks at 43d Munich Conference on Security Policy', *Washington Post*, 12 February.

Roshwald, A. (2008) 'NATO, the West and Russia: from Peril to Progress', *OpenDemocracy*, 23 September.

Rühle, M. (2014a) 'NATO Enlargement and Russia: Die-Hard Myths and Real Dilemmas', *NATO NDC Research Report*, 15 May.

Rühle, M. (2014b) 'NATO Enlargement and Russia: Discerning Fact From Fiction', *American Foreign Policy Interests* 36 (4), pp.283-287.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10803920.2013.836015>

Sakwa, R. (2015) 'The Death of Europe ? Continental Fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs*, 91 (3), pp.553-579.

Sakwa, R. (2016) *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B.Tauris.

Sarotte, M.E. (2010) 'Perpetuating US Pre-eminence: The 1990 Deals to "Bribe the Soviets Out" and Move NATO in', *International Security*, 35 (1), pp.110-137.

Sarotte, M.E. (2014) 'A Broken Promise ?', *Foreign Affairs*, 93 (5), September/October, pp.90-97.

Sauer, T. (2011) *Eliminating Nuclear Weapons. The Role of Missile Defense*. London: Hurst & Co.

Schmidt-Felzmann, A. (2016) 'The Breakdown of the EU's Strategic Partnership with Russia: From Strategic Patience towards a Strategic Failure', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 29 (1), pp.99-127

Speck, U. (2014) 'Russia's New Challenge to Europe', *Carnegie Europe*, 17 April.

Stent, A. (2014) *The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Walt, S. (2015) 'Why Arming Kiev is a Really, Really Bad Idea', *Foreign Policy*, 9 February.

Waltz, K. (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. New York: Random House.

Welsh, S. (2014) 'Putin Lays Out Strategic Impact of Crimea Annexation', *Executive Intelligence Review*, 28 March.

Wörner, M. (1991) Speech to the North Atlantic Assembly, Madrid, 21 October.

Zelikow, P. and Rice C. (1998)(2e ed) *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.