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## “Nothing but humiliation for Russia”: Moscow and NATO’s Eastern Enlargement, 1993-1996

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Few issues in Russia’s troublesome relationship with the West have been more polarizing, have drawn greater ire from all sides, and at the same time have been so intractable as the issue of NATO’s enlargement to the East. Russian President Vladimir Putin memorably accused the West of breaking promises, and even of an outright betrayal in his now famous 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference. Putin’s foray into history reflects a broader narrative about the causes of malaise in Russia’s relations with the West. As the narrative goes, the United States moved quickly in the early 1990s to pocket post-Cold War gains by extending NATO into Eastern Europe. In doing so, Washington took advantage of Russia’s temporary weakness and the mindless indulgence of certain Russian officials like Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev who is seen at best as a naive simpleton, and more often a willing conduit for Western interests. The danger of Russia’s acquiescence to these interests was aptly demonstrated in the Bosnian crisis, where NATO ultimately resorted to military action to punish the Serbs, overriding Moscow’s objections. This became a timely reminder that the world was a jungle, where the mightiest had the power of persuasion and no one listened to the counsel of the weak.<sup>1</sup> The narrative has not been universally embraced by the Russian policy community, though it has undoubtedly become the mainstream, especially since the 2013-14 Ukrainian crisis.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Sergei Karaganov, “Europe: A Defeat at the Hands of Victory?,” *Russia in Global Affairs* No. 1 (2015); Igor Ivanov, *Evropeiskii Vektor Vneshnei Politiki Sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow: Eksmo, 2017); Aleksandr Lukin, *Povorot k Azii: Rossiiskaya Vneshnyaya Politika na Rubezhe Vekov i Ee Aktivizatsiya na Vostochnom Napravlenii* (Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2014), pp. 35-37, 173-183; Andrei Kokoshin, “Strategicheskaya Stabil’nost v Usloviyakh Kriticheskogo Obostreniya Mezhdunarodnoi Obstanovki,” *Polis. Politicheskie Issledovaniya*, No. 2 (2018), pp. 7-20; Vladimir Lukin & Sergei Oznobishchev, “Rossiya v Mire XXI Stoletiya: Sversheniya i Nadezhdy,” *Polis. Political Studies*, No. 6 (2018), pp. 180-188; Sergei Rogov, “Rossiya i SShA na Poroge XXI Veka,” in A.V. Torkunov (ed.), *Sovremennye Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniya i Mirovaya Politika* (Moscow: MGIMO, 2004), pp. 541-560. English language studies that draw on and amplify these narratives include, e.g. J.L. Black, *Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, while recognizing Washington’s mistakes, Sergei Kortunov blames the worsening of Moscow’s relations with the West primarily Russia’s own political elites, and the Soviet legacies, e.g. Sergei Kortunov, *Natsional’naya Identichnost: Postizhenie Smysla* (Moscow: Aspekt Press, 2009), esp. pp. 518-560. Similarly, Tat’yana Parkhalina argues that it is not NATO’s enlargement that threatens Russia but Russia’s own myth-making in relation to NATO. Tat’yana Parkhalina, “Rossiya i NATO: Problema Vospriyatiya,” in *Aktual’nye Problemy Evropy*, No. 2 (2000), pp. 105-125. Elsewhere, she blames both sides for the crisis in relations. See Tat’yana Parkhalina, “Otnosheniya Rossiya - NATO: Problemy i Perspektivy,” *Aktual’nye Problemy Evropy*, No. 4 (2004), pp. 114-134. See also Igor Klyamkin (ed.), *Rossiya i Zapad: Vneshnyaya Politika Kremlya Glazami Liberalov* (Moscow: Liberal’naya Missiya, 2009). Some authors, while recognizing the harmful impact of NATO’s enlargement on Russia’s national interests, nevertheless argue in favour of close cooperation, e.g. Aleksei Arbatov, “Rasshirenie NATO i natsional’nye interesy Rossii,” *Politiya* No. 2 (2006), pp. 94-103.

At a near polar opposite sits the mainstream Western narrative.<sup>3</sup> The argument here is that Washington was reluctant to enlarge NATO, even though there were good reasons for doing so, not least the prospect of bolstering democracy in Central and Eastern Europe lest - following Yugoslavia's bloody example - it returned to nationalism and despotism of the 1930s. Ultimately, Clinton gave in to pleas from CEE, whose leaders eyed Russia with suspicion and wanted to join the West. But there was never an intention to create dividing lines in Europe or to fence Russia off; by contrast, the idea was to engage with Russia, which is why the Partnership for Peace was rolled out. However, resurgence of Russian nationalism and xenophobia derailed these aspirations for Europe whole and free. Imperialistic impulses, represented in particular by the military and the security establishments, bubbled through to the surface, undermining reformers (including brave but helpless Kozyrev), and pushing Russia towards a more confrontational relationship with the West. It was, in other words, Moscow's own fault that it ended up shut out from Europe. But in any case, NATO's timely enlargement was a good idea because once hostility returned, CEE found itself safely anchored to the Western security system, helping deter Russia's presumed aggressive intentions. As for Bosnia, well, someone had to stop the Serbs' genocidal war. It was in everyone's interest that NATO stepped in to put an end to the bloodshed.

The mainstream take in the West, therefore, blames the Russians themselves for their problems with NATO, and celebrates NATO's enlargement as contributing to peace, security and prosperity of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>4</sup> The key arguments deployed in this connection are that Moscow does not - and must not - have a veto over its neighbours decision-making; that anyone can join any alliances they like; that NATO does not threaten Russia but that it does address legitimate security concerns of Moscow's former European satellites, especially in light of Putin's neo-imperialist policies, highlighted in the wars against Georgia and Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea, sponsorship of frozen conflicts along Russia's periphery, and assumed hostile intentions vis-a-vis the Baltics. Given the unarguable unattractiveness of Putin's regime, it is tempting to portray NATO enlargement as a priori benevolent, and Moscow's contemporaneous concerns as baseless or even paranoid.<sup>5</sup> However, a growing number of

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<sup>3</sup> When I say the "mainstream," I am of course acutely aware of the contrarian narrative, which includes such prominent figures as George Kennan who memorably called NATO enlargement "the most fateful error of American foreign policy in the entire post-cold-war era." See George Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *NYT*, February 5, 1997, p. A23.

<sup>4</sup> For a good overview of the state of the field, see the Special Issue of *International Politics*, "Legacies of NATO Enlargement: International Relations, Domestic Politics, and Alliance Management," Vol. 57, Issue 3 (June 2020). The mainstream, however, is fuzzy; there is plenty of scope for contrarian views. E.g. Andrey A. Sushentsov and William C. Wohlforth, "The tragedy of US-Russian relations: NATO centrality and the revisionists' spiral," in *International Politics* Vol. 57, Issue 3 (June 2020), pp. 427-450; William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia* (New York: Columbia UP, 2018), pp. 116-117.

<sup>5</sup> Early studies of NATO enlargement include James G. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 1999) and Ronald Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door* (New York: Columbia, 2004). Goldgeier highlights the central role of "policy entrepreneurs" like Antony Lake and Richard Holbrooke in pushing through the enlargement agenda. Asmus (himself a key figure in the early US debate on enlargement) draws attention to lobbying by CEE countries. See also James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2005), pp. 183-210, which centres mainly on the American side of the story.

historians are coming to question this interpretation by pointing to shared US responsibility for derailing the Russian-American post-Cold War partnership, such as it was.<sup>6</sup>

Whereas historians have begun to reassess US policy making in the run-up to the first round of NATO post-Cold War enlargement (Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary joined the alliance in 1999), Russia's foreign policy during the same period is yet to be subjected to an in-depth, archives-based analysis.<sup>7</sup> This is what this article attempts to do. That - and the growing memoirs literature by former decision-makers - permit a reassessment of Moscow's response to NATO enlargement. This article argues that a proper understanding of this response requires engagement with the legitimacy narrative of the Russian political elites. NATO enlargement was seen as perfectly acceptable, as long as it was inclusive of Russia, which would thus gain in status as America's key partner and ally. Once it became apparent that Russia would not be able to join NATO, the narrative changed to active opposition to enlargement, as President Boris Yeltsin and his foreign policy team sought domestic legitimacy from being perceived (domestically and internationally) as defenders of Russia's "national interests" against Western encroachment. The change in narratives was gradual, because they co-existed (and indeed continue to co-exist side-by-side), both affording a degree of legitimacy.

The article argues that the Clinton administration underestimated their own centrality as the "recognizer" on the shaping of legitimacy narratives in Russia, thus undermining the partnership narrative, and contributing to the adversarial narrative. Blindsided by his domestic political struggles, Clinton missed the opportunity to bring Russia into NATO, and develop a more productive relationship with Russia in the Balkans, and so legitimize a particular kind of integrationist narrative that would resonate with Russian elites across the political spectrum. Clinton became personally much invested in Yeltsin's success. Had he been less infatuated with the Russian President and more interested in engaging with other political forces, he would have been in a better position to impact the evolution of Russia's foreign policy in a more promising direction.

The article highlights the fluid nature of so called "national interests," which are defined and redefined in ways that afford the greatest legitimation to the political elites. The following account of the ups and downs of Moscow's complex relationship with NATO in the initial post-

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<sup>6</sup> See also Joshua Shiffrin's contribution to this volume, and, earlier: Joshua R. Shiffrin, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2018) and Joshua R. Shiffrin, "Deal or no deal? The end of the Cold War and the US offer to limit NATO expansion," *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 7-44. Mary Sarotte has written extensively on Bush's and Clinton's policy on the question of NATO enlargement. See especially Mary Sarotte, "How to Enlarge NATO: The Debate inside the Clinton Administration, 1993-95," *International Security*, 44(1), pp. 7-41; also, earlier, Mary Sarotte, "A Broken promise: What the West really told Moscow about NATO expansion," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 93, no. 5, September/October 2014, pp. 90-97; Mary Sarotte, "Perpetuating US Preeminence: the 1990 deals to 'Bribe the Soviets out' and move NATO in," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010), pp. 110-137.

<sup>7</sup> One notable exception is Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton (eds.), "NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard," *National Security Archive Briefing Book*, No. 621 (March 16, 2018), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-03-16/nato-expansion-what-yeltsin-heard>.

Cold War period underscores this fluidity but also points to missed opportunities for Russia's integration with the West.

Legitimacy is a notoriously slippery concept, so centering discussion on the legitimacy narrative of the Russian political elites begs the question of what it actually refers to.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this article, the legitimacy narrative is one that speaks both to the legality and morality of an elite's domestic and global position, whether this position has already been attained, or is merely aspired to. Legitimacy thus described has overlapping internal and external dimensions. Domestic legitimation is theoretically attainable through the ballot box, at least in democracies (in practice, in the messy legal framework that Russia had in the early 1990s, such a legalistic interpretation of legitimacy falls flat). But whatever one makes of the domestic legitimation of the Russian political elites, such legitimation could not propel it to a desired place in the global hierarchy. The latter required external recognition. When I speak of a legitimacy narrative in this article in relation to Russia, I thus refer to collective self-perception of members of the elite about Russia's place in the world and their own place in Russia. Since a collective self-perception is by its very nature opaque and self-contradictory, the content of the legitimacy narrative - which includes such tired concepts as "national interests" - is also changeable and contradictory, and subject to constant reshaping by internal and external actors. The article shows how this process worked in relation to Russia's reaction to NATO's enlargement to the East.

### **Russia in chaos**

Russia of the early 1990s was a basket case. Its economy was in deep recession. Efforts to launch it onto the path to a bright capitalist future through so-called "shock therapy" (large-scale privatization and release of price controls) helped fuel hyperinflation and unemployment. Social welfare failed. The quality of life plummeted. Russian President Boris Yeltsin faced a deeply hostile Parliament - then called the Supreme Soviet - that pushed back against what many of his detractors regarded as an inhumane, if not criminal, economic reform. The elites were deeply divided over their domestic legitimacy (this division in due course led to a brutal stand-off between Yeltsin and the parliament, which ended with the parliament's capitulation). But regardless of internal disagreements between Yeltsin and the parliament, the political elite as a whole (which not just included senior politicians but a broader range of players, such as diplomats and policy experts or, to use a recent term, the "policy blob") aspired to a position of international prominence that would resonate with their views of Russia's rightful place in the global order. But exactly what that place was, and what Russia's role would be was as yet unclear to Yeltsin and his supporters and detractors within the elite.

As Russia struggled to find its ground, Western sympathies were of course with Yeltsin and his very young team of reformers - people like the youthful Deputy Prime Minister Boris Fedorov who, in his mid-thirties, was held up as a model of a brilliant technocrat steering Russia's path to

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<sup>8</sup> Vast literature exists on domestic and international aspects of "legitimacy." In my discussion, I especially benefited from the work of Ian Clark, e.g. his *Legitimacy in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), although my use of the term is very different from his.

glory through fiscal tightening; people like Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev who, in his early forties, took the lead on bringing Russia into the West. The Russian parliamentarians, by contrast, were less likable: there was something nationalistic-communistic, and generally anti-Western, in their demeanor. From early on, then, Western policy makers began to identify themselves with particular political forces in Russia, thus helping legitimize Yeltsin and his team and de-legitimizing Yeltsin's opponents. This would have important consequences for Russia's power struggle.

The political struggle between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet intensified in early 1993. Yeltsin himself, in meetings with Western leaders, was now dropping dark hints about having to take "extreme measures" against his political opponents, prompting Russia hands in London, Berlin, and Washington to engage in scenario planning: would Yeltsin crack down? Would he be ousted by the Parliament? And what would happen to Russia's radical reformist agenda and undisguised pro-Western orientation in the coming months? Eyeing uneasily the trajectory of a country he knew well, former British Ambassador in Russia Rodric Braithwaite urged the Americans to satisfy the Russians' craving for acceptance in the West. This was not an easy thing to do. "We [meaning the West] have not always been as assiduous as we might have been about consulting them before we act, or taking their interests into account, partly because in their weakened state they are easier to ignore." But, Braithwaite warned in a missive to the US National Security Adviser Antony Lake, "this has played into the hands of the Russian nationalists who accuse Kozyrev of selling out Russian national interests to the former enemies of the Soviet Union."<sup>9</sup>

What Braithwaite so expertly drew attention to was that very process of domestic legitimation through external recognition. The Soviet Union was in its time universally recognized as a superpower, and that recognition instilled the Soviet leadership with political legitimacy even in the absence of domestic legitimation through elections. Until Mikhail Gorbachev came along, the Soviets were legitimized through their adversarial relationship with the West. Presently that adversarial relationship was replaced with the idea of a partnership between Russia and the West but would that partnership carry enough weight to satisfy the Russian elites' pretensions to global importance? The proof was in the pudding, and the baker was in Washington.

There was at least a tacit recognition in Washington that the Russians' sensibilities had to be pampered to, though how to do it or, indeed, whether it was to be anything more than a superficial face-saving exercise, was another matter. Already in February 1993 there had been some vague discussion about bringing the Russians to the "top table" at G7, albeit on the understanding that it would not entail Moscow's equal participation in economic discussions. There was some understanding of the need to involve the Russians in the peace-keeping effort in former Yugoslavia, if only in a supporting role under NATO's command. But there was also a stark reality. Russia was weak. It was badly in need of Western economic aid. "We are friends and partners, Bill," Yeltsin told Clinton during their first summit meeting in Vancouver in April

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



1993.<sup>10</sup> Both knew this to be a platitude that masked the awesome gulf between American and Russian power.

### **'A stroke of genius'**

Shortly after Clinton's return from Vancouver, he pondered the fate of Central and Eastern Europe. The immediate trigger was meetings he had held with Presidents Lech Walesa of Poland and Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic who had come to Washington for the opening of the Holocaust museum. Walesa, a former trade union activist, and a self-proclaimed "leader of the revolution in Poland," warned Clinton of the danger of resurgent Russia: "Poland cannot be left defenseless; we need to have the protection of U.S. muscle."<sup>11</sup> Havel was more diplomatic, alluding merely to a "vacuum" in Central Europe left in the wake of the collapse of Communism. He harped instead on the civilizational theme, reminding the President that the Czechs sought membership in NATO and the European Union because they were "Europeans who embrace European values." "And the issue is not that we are faced with imminent threats," he explained. "Rather, we are in the process of undergoing an image transformation - a reshaping of our identity."<sup>12</sup>

"Tony, why can't we do this," Clinton reportedly asked Lake after his discussions with Walesa and Havel.<sup>13</sup> "This" referred to the idea of extending the alliance eastwards, something few, if any, of American allies were yet ready to contemplate. The British position, for instance, was that it was "important not to send wrong signals to Russia and Ukraine who are sensitive on this."<sup>14</sup> NATO General Secretary Manfred Woerner told the Poles in January 1993 that there were no plans for enlargement "because of the difficulty of providing extended security guarantees and the risk of cutting across the work of the CSCE."<sup>15</sup> But the American position was beginning to shift. That summer Lake launched a policy review process to look at Washington's options in Eastern Europe. Enlargement was explicitly on the agenda: "In light of

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<sup>10</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, April 4, 1993, Clinton Presidential Library (CPL): 2015-0782-M. The number refers to a specific FOIA request. Some of these were requested by the author; many were not. Attribution in these cases is problematic since CPL does not list the names of the requesters. It is clear, however, that Mary Sarotte did some of the heavy lifting. See, in particular, Svetlana Savranskaya and Mary Sarotte, "The Clinton-Yeltsin Relationship in Their Own Words," *National Security Archive Briefing Book* No. 640 (October 2, 2018), <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2018-10-02/clinton-yeltsin-relationship-their-own-words>.

<sup>11</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Lech Walesa, April 21, 1993, CPL: 2009-0223-M.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion the relative importance of "civilizational," as opposed to security themes in Poland's approach to Western institutions, see, e.g. Joanna A. Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut: Analyzing Poland's Policy toward Russia, 1989-2009* (London: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 64. See also Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird: The Elusive Fate of Russian Democracy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Asmus, *Opening Nato's Door*, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum from Christopher Prentice (FCO) to J.S. Wall (10 Downing Street), February 26, 1993, TNA: PREM 19/4347.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

the potentially difficult and dangerous challenges that still lie before many CEE states, should we begin to plan now for eventual incorporation into NATO of some or all of them?"<sup>16</sup>

These musings over the future of NATO came at a particularly difficult time for the alliance that was suffering from an identity crisis now that the enemy in the east fractured and lay prostrate. Enlargement offered a bold new vision at a time when NATO itself seemed adrift. It could give the alliance a sense of purpose and a direction. It could help project American leadership across Europe, which of course bolstered Clinton's domestic standing. And it was a response to legitimate concerns from the Eastern Europeans who warned about the dangers of political instability in a volatile region. But there was an elephant in the room: Boris Yeltsin. Even if the White House concluded that NATO enlargement was desirable, there was a lot of uncertainty about Moscow's potential reaction. Given how invested Clinton had become in Yeltsin's success, he did not want to do anything that would put the Russian President on his back foot or inflame nationalist passions in the Russian Parliament.

Perhaps if Yeltsin maintained a staunch opposition to enlargement, Clinton would have shown even greater circumspection. Instead, the Russian President was sending mixed signals. In August 1993 he took a break from his deepening political troubles at home and toured Eastern Europe, stopping off in Warsaw, Prague, and Bratislava. His brief stay in Warsaw went down in history for Yeltsin's public agreement (committed to a joint Russian-Polish statement) to Poland's membership in NATO. "The time when Polish leaders travelled to Moscow for advice or, on the contrary, Moscow leaders went to Warsaw to give advice on what to do is gone," he said in a press conference on August 25.<sup>17</sup> Just how Walesa managed to extract this statement is a matter of speculation.<sup>18</sup> Kozyrev recalls that the Pole simply got Yeltsin drunk; that the original formulation in "ragged handwriting," which the heavily inebriated Russian President had handed to him after the dinner, went even further, actually committing Russia to advocate for Poland's NATO membership. It was only after Kozyrev and Defense Minister Pavel Grachev intervened with Yeltsin that the offending statement was watered down.<sup>19</sup> On the following day, in Prague, Yeltsin doubled down on this take, declaring publicly that the Czechs had the right to decide for themselves what organizations they could belong to.<sup>20</sup> The Poles and the Czechs seized the day. Walesa, in particular, declared that the time had come to admit Poland to NATO, seeing that Yeltsin was evidently in favour.

Russian Foreign Ministry officials, and the military brass, were shocked by Yeltsin's remarkable announcement. Deputy Foreign Minister Georgii Mamedov was in London with his American

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<sup>16</sup> Presidential Review Directive NSC-36, July 5, 1993, CPL: 2010-0190-M.

<sup>17</sup> "Russian and Polish Presidents Hold News Conference," TASS, August 25, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Joanna A. Gorska, *Dealing with a Juggernaut*, p. 80. Strobe Talbott, however, notes in his memoirs that the Polish at the time informed the Americans that Yeltsin was sober when he made his pronouncement, and that there was a quid pro quo entailing Poland's non-interference in any Russian-Ukrainian dispute. Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand: a Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House, 2002), pp. 95-96. Mary Sarotte, based on the contemporaneous US record, also highlights the quid pro quo argument: Sarotte, "How to Enlarge NATO," pp. 14-16.

<sup>19</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird*, p. 215.

<sup>20</sup> "Yeltsin Would Not Bar Czech Republic from NATO," *CTK National News Wire*, August 26, 1993.



counterpart Strobe Talbott when the wires brought the news from Warsaw. “In the eight years I dealt with Yuri [Georgii],” Talbott recalled, “I rarely found him at a loss for words, but at this moment he was thunderstruck. He said he’d have to get back to me with clarification once he determined what had really transpired in Warsaw, and what it meant.”<sup>21</sup> Talbott himself attributed Yeltsin’s behavior to his “liberal instincts.”

But no sooner had Yeltsin returned to Moscow that he began to backtrack on his brave pronouncements. On September 3, Mamedov informed US Ambassador Thomas Pickering that the President (in reality, the Foreign Ministry) was preparing a letter for Clinton and other Western leaders that would recognize that Moscow’s former clients had the right to choose which alliance to join but that at the same time “NATO should also not seek to isolate Russia from the former Warsaw Pact members.”<sup>22</sup> What this amounted to was a softer version of the infamous Brezhnev doctrine: Central and Eastern Europe could join whatever alliance they wanted to join except for the one alliance they actually wanted to join. As such, it was an unsustainable position but Yeltsin still went ahead with his letter, which was sent out to Washington, London, Paris and Berlin on September 15.<sup>23</sup>

Yeltsin’s backtracking notwithstanding, there was now an opportunity to push NATO enlargement by holding the Russian President to his apparent promise not to obstruct the process. “Yeltsin has once again taken a bold step that changes the political dynamic in Europe,” argued Undersecretary of State Lynn Davis in a long memorandum for Warren Christopher. “We should seize the opportunity.” The now famous memorandum spelled out the stages of enlargement. At some point (by 2005 in Davis’s estimation), even Russia could perhaps qualify to join. If it didn’t - because it turned authoritarian and aggressive in the meantime - that was no big deal, because at least the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would have been safely brought onboard. The purpose of the exercise, argued Davis, was in “containing and co-opting Russian power,” in ensuring democratic stability in Central and Eastern Europe, defending NATO’s credibility, and projecting American leadership.<sup>24</sup> This in itself said much about the prevailing US narrative, since neither NATO’s credibility nor American leadership required Russia’s integration with the West.

Although it was the NSC (and particularly National Security Adviser Antony Lake) who most pushed for enlargement, Christopher and the State were gradually coming around.<sup>25</sup> “The alliance must thrust eastward,” Christopher proclaimed on September 17. Like the Undersecretary, he did not seem to rule out Russia’s eventual membership. “It will be important

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<sup>21</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 96.

<sup>22</sup> From the US Secretary of State to \*\*\*\* [sic], September 3, 1993. CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>23</sup> The text of the letter is in Savranskaya and Blanton, “NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard,” <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390818-Document-04-Retranslation-of-Yeltsin-letter-on>. See also “British-German summit, 25 November. Background,” undated (1993), TNA: PREM 19/4167.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum from Lynn Davis to Warren Christopher, September 7, 1993, in Savranskaya and Blanton (eds), “NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard,” <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/dc.html?doc=4390816-Document-02-Strategy-for-NATO-s-Expansion-and>.

<sup>25</sup> For a detailed account of deliberations at the State Department and the NSC in October 1993 see James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, pp. 36-40.

to make Russia relatively comfortable,” he explained to the Italian Prime Minister. “The way to do it is to talk to them early, and enable them to be a part of the process. That does not mean they should join now, but we should establish criteria they could hope to meet.”<sup>26</sup> The solution that Washington eventually rolled out, reflecting a compromise between the advocates and opponents of enlargement, was called the Partnership for Peace: it would be open to Russia but also other countries, including those of Central and Eastern Europe, and serve to prepare the ground for some of these partners’ eventual application for membership. The Partnership for Peace also squared the circle for the cautious planners in the Pentagon who did not share the enthusiasm about rapid enlargement, preferring instead to focus on arms control talks with Russia and Ukraine’s denuclearization.<sup>27</sup> The whos and the whens were yet fuzzy, to give Russia time to internalize the inevitable enlargement.

The problem with such an internalization was the expectation that a gradual enlargement made it more acceptable to Moscow because it would see such prospective enlargement as non-threatening. In reality, insofar as the discussion of enlargement assigned Russia to the role of a late-comer to the West, if not left it on the outside altogether, it contributed to the strengthening of the adversarial narrative, and so made Russia’s integration less, not more, likely.

In the meantime, Yeltsin had other things to worry about. In late September 1993, his tug-of-war with the Supreme Soviet - simmering for months - finally blew up. On September 21, he proclaimed the Parliament disbanded (an act that he had no constitutional powers for). The Parliament reacted by impeaching Yeltsin and appointing Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi the acting President. After several days of a stand-off between the two sides (marked by sporadic urban warfare), Yeltsin gained the upper hand. On October 4, the Russian army moved in to suppress resistance by shelling the Parliament building, the so-called “White House.” Yeltsin’s detractors surrendered. The President, whose “liberal instincts” had definitely been seriously compromised, presently proclaimed victory for democracy, and announced new elections that would take place in December 1993.<sup>28</sup>

These brutalities put the Americans - and the West more generally - in a tight spot. On the one hand, calling in tanks to resolve a dispute with the Parliament did not come across as particularly democratic. But on the other hand, it was difficult to sympathize with Yeltsin’s parliamentary opposition, who were almost invariably described in the West as hardliners, rebels, nationalists, and opponents of reform. They were also suspected of anti-Western sentiments. One of the leaders of the opposition, the ethnic Chechen lawmaker Ruslan Khasbulatov, had bitterly criticized Yeltsin for selling out Russia’s national interests.<sup>29</sup> The other - the burly, mustachioed Aleksandr Rutskoi was not just a combat veteran of the Soviet war in

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<sup>26</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Carlo Ciampi, September 17, 1993, CPL: 2015-0755-M.

<sup>27</sup> For the evolution of the Partnership for Peace see especially James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 24-29. Another detailed account is Mary Sarotte’s “How to Enlarge NATO.”

<sup>28</sup> For a nuanced overview of these events, see Michael McFaul, *Russia’s Unfinished Revolution* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 161-204. See also James M. Goldgeier & Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy Towards Russia After the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: Brookings, 2003), pp. 127-130.

<sup>29</sup> “Khasbulatov Claims Bigger Role in Foreign Policy, TASS, July 19, 1993.

Afghanistan but, indeed, a general; therefore - a probable reactionary.<sup>30</sup> “A psychotic surrounded by fanatics,” Strobe Talbott called him, citing Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.<sup>31</sup> The sentiment was summed up by the former CIA director Robert Gates in an interview with ABC’s Chris Wallace: “Most of these people are old Communists... President Yeltsin has taken an extra- constitutional step, but it is a step he is prepared to put to a democratic test.”<sup>32</sup>

The problem for US decision makers was their tendency to personify policies. In 1993 Bill Clinton identified himself with Yeltsin because the alternative was “the Communists.” In reality, though, both Yeltsin and his detractors were given to opportunism, and their political views shifted, and with that - their views of what constituted Russia’s “national interests.” Khasbulatov, for example, was a fire-breathing democrat of deeply anti-Communist convictions before he and Yeltsin parted ways in 1992. His “nationalism” was really only a function of his power struggle with Yeltsin. By supporting Yeltsin against Khasbulatov and Rutskoi, Clinton took sides in this power struggle, and thus made it possible for the latter to project their disagreements with Yeltsin onto Russia’s foreign policy.

Arriving in Moscow just days after the crackdown, Warren Christopher was prompt to reassure Yeltsin of America’s continued support. “President Clinton,” Christopher told Yeltsin on meeting him at Brezhnev’s favourite hunting lodge at Zavidovo, “was extremely interested in President Yeltsin’s superb handling of the crisis and admired the restraint which the President had practiced...” After this auspicious prelude, the Secretary of State unveiled the Partnership for Peace. It was, he said, a consequence of Clinton’s commitment not to “ignore or exclude Russia from full participation in the future security of Europe.” Therefore, “there would be no effort to exclude anyone and there would be no step taken at this time to push anyone ahead of others.” Yeltsin missed out on the crucial reservation - “at this time” - and excitedly called the partnership for peace “a brilliant idea” and “a stroke of genius.”<sup>33</sup>

Yeltsin clearly misunderstood what was being proposed, and Christopher certainly did not go out of his way to disabuse the Russian President of his erroneous understanding that the Partnership for Peace would not in fact preclude eventual NATO membership for Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>34</sup> But it did not take long before he realized that enlargement was still on the agenda. The Russian President responded by hard-selling the idea of Russia’s membership in

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<sup>30</sup> For Rutskoi’s take on these events (where he accuses the United States of collusion with Yeltsin), see Aleksandr Rutskoi, *Lefortovskie Protokoly* (Moscow: Paleya, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> “Showdown in Russia,” *ABC News Nightline*, September 21, 1993.

<sup>33</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Warren Christopher and Boris Yeltsin, 22 October 1993, CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>34</sup> Talbott papers over the confusion. Kozyrev, in his memoir, blames Christopher for failing to properly deliver Clinton’s message. See Talbott, *The Russia Hand* and Kozyrev, *Firebird*, pp. 217-221. For a more detailed discussion, see James G. Goldgeier, “Bill and Boris: A Window Into a Most Important Post-Cold War Relationship,” *Texas National Security Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 4 (August 2018). Goldgeier notes that, never mind Yeltsin, most observers outside the Clinton Administration understood that PfP would replace enlargement. James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, p. 45.

the alliance. This he did in a conversation with NATO Secretary General Manfred Woerner (who had reneged on his own previous promises not to enlarge, having become “an enthusiastic backer of expansion.”)<sup>35</sup> Yeltsin also raised the issue directly with Bill Clinton after the latter turned up in Moscow in the wake of the January NATO summit that endorsed the Partnership for Peace. “Russia has to be the first country to join NATO,” Yeltsin told Clinton. “Then the others from Central and Eastern Europe can come in. There should be a kind of cartel of the US, Russia, and the Europeans to help to ensure and improve world security.”<sup>36</sup>

Yeltsin’s reference to a “cartel” betrayed a sense of continuity with earlier Soviet thinking about the nature of Moscow’s relationship with Washington. On many previous occasions, Soviet leaders hinted, or indeed explicitly referred, to the idea of a global order co-managed by the United States and the USSR. No ideological disagreements were allowed to tarnish this conception, which was rooted in age-old thinking about the division of the world into spheres of influence. Brezhnev, Henry Kissinger recalled, once summed up the idea thus: “Look, I want to talk to you privately - nobody else, no notes... Look, you will be our partners, you and we are going to run the world.”<sup>37</sup> Brezhnev, at least, was a leader of a superpower. Yeltsin’s credentials were much less promising and yet he, too, sought to convince Clinton that “the two of us have a unique potential as partners” and that “without cooperation between the two of us, it is hard to envisage continuation of a peaceful and stable world.”<sup>38</sup>

Kozyrev put the question in even starker terms in remarks at the Foreign Ministry collegium, an internal meeting of senior Russian diplomats. “The most important thing,” the Foreign Minister argued, “is the partnership with the US. Furthermore, one has to be [America’s] primary partner; otherwise, nothing will remain from [our] great power status.”<sup>39</sup> The idea here was a little different from what Brezhnev had in mind in his day. It entailed Russia’s implicit subordination to American leadership in exchange for being recognized as second-in-command. What neither Brezhnev in his time, nor Yeltsin, nor Kozyrev realized was that America did not need Russia’s help in running the world, neither during the Cold War, nor, especially, in its aftermath.

Kozyrev once gave the following justification for seeking a close partnership with the United States: “When a cake is being divvied up, you have to be at the table and try to take a bigger piece for yourself. If you stand to the side, it superficially appears like a very proud position. But the goal is to eat the cake.”<sup>40</sup> The problem with this take is that it assumed that there was only

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<sup>35</sup> On Yeltsin’s comments to Woerner, see Telcon, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, December 22, 1993. CPL: 2015-0782-M. On Woerner’s earlier assurance re NATO’s non-enlargement, see, e.g. Savranskaya and Blanton (eds.), “NATO Expansion: What Yeltsin Heard”, document 1. On Woerner’s enthusiastic backing of expansion, “Woerner on Expanding NATO membership,” Memorandum, from the State Department to the NSC, September 3, 1993, US Department of State FOIA reading room (hereafter, State FOIA): M-2017-12017.

<sup>36</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, January 13, 1993. CPL: 2016-0117-M.

<sup>37</sup> Conversation between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, May 11, 1973, in Douglas E. Selva and Melissa J. Taylor (eds.), *Foreign Relations of the United States, Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974, Vol. XV* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2011), p. 451.

<sup>38</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, January 13, 1993. CPL: 2016-0117-M.

<sup>39</sup> Anatolii Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody: Vneshnepoliticheskie Ocherki* (Moscow: Ves’ Mir, 2016), p. 296.

<sup>40</sup> Cited in Leonid Mlechin, *MID: Ministry Inostrannykh Del* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2003), p. 554.

one cake to be eaten - the American cake. Kozyrev's critics perhaps rightly suggested that there were other cakes to be had in the world; that the world of cakes was not zero-sum.

Yeltsin himself demonstrated this when, just as he peddled the bright prospect of a Russo-American partnership, he also carefully courted American allies, especially Helmut Kohl of Germany who in 1993 was offered nothing short of a "Russia-German axis" (and reportedly "responded positively").<sup>41</sup> The idea had been popular with the Russian political elites. As Lukin summed it up, "built into the European civilization, rather than opposing it, that [Russian-German] partnership can become Europe's blessing instead of its curse. It can become a security pillar for the entire continent."<sup>42</sup> These aspirations, once again, followed Brezhnev's policy of balancing an attempted condominium with the United States with active engagement with the Germans, both to weaken Germany's trans-Atlantic ties and to leverage Russia's influence in Europe through a close relationship with Berlin. Neither Brezhnev nor Yeltsin were particularly successful at building their "axis," however.

Meanwhile, the Central and East Europeans were very worried by the possibility of some Russian-American, or, even worse, Russian-German agreement on spheres of influence. There was widespread apprehension in Warsaw, Prague, Budapest, and across the region, that their interests may be traded away in some grand bargain, as had already happened on a few occasions during that tumultuous century. Touring the region in January 1994, then-US Ambassador to the United Nations Madeleine Albright found the key political players frustrated about their relegation to the "waiting rooms" of Western institutions and apprehensive about the prospect of another Yalta or Munich behind their backs. Although superficially supportive of the need to avoid new dividing lines in Europe, Albright reported, "they want themselves in NATO and the Russians out."<sup>43</sup>

There was thus a gulf of perception between the Russians and the Central and East Europeans about Russia's place in Europe and in the world. The Russians not just wanted to see Russia a part of the West - politically and institutionally - but had a conception of exactly where they wanted to be seated: right next to the US. Moscow's former clients, by contrast, did not want to see Russia as a part of any such arrangements, and rightly so (from their perspective), because Russia's gains in status would decrease their own standing in the West while eroding any security advantage vis-a-vis Russia that they would have by joining NATO. Both Russia and CEE saw membership in Western institutions as contributing to their internal legitimacy narratives, but whereas Russia not just wanted membership but a place of prominence reflective of its considerable ambitions, CEE countries (suspicious of these ambitions) wanted to keep Russia out altogether. The Clinton Administration tried to play to both sides but this was hardly a sustainable policy since the two visions were basically irreconcilable.

### **'Going to the bad'**

On December 12, 1993, Russia held its first post-crackdown parliamentary elections and a referendum on the new Constitution. The result was a political earthquake. The party that came first in the elections for the new Duma was the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, which was

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 329. Adamishin had access to the record of Yeltsin's conversation with Kohl.

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Lukin, "Our Security Predicament," *Foreign Policy*, No. 88 (Autumn 1992), p. 72.

<sup>43</sup> Report from Madeleine Albright for the President et al, January 26, 1994, CPL: 2015-0755-M.

infamously neither liberal nor democratic, but by all appearances fascist.<sup>44</sup> The party's founder Vladimir Zhirinovskii had long been in the public eye, having run in the 1991 presidential elections (he came in third). Shortly before his stunning parliamentary victory, Zhirinovskii published a book-length manifesto, titled suggestively "The Last Dash to the South." An incoherent mumbo-jumbo of fascist, racist, nationalist, and imperialist snippets, the book justified Russian expansion towards the Indian Ocean as a means towards reclaiming Russia's centrality in global politics. "Some of us were already standing on our knees," raved Zhirinovskii. "We are insulted, humiliated."<sup>45</sup> Nearly 23 percent of Russians apparently agreed.

"At last Russia is acknowledged and accepted in Europe," Yeltsin declared in the Moscow airport on December 9, en route to Brussels.<sup>46</sup> The result of the elections merely three days later raised serious questions about what kind of Russia was pleading for acceptance into Western institutions. Zhirinovskii was a colourful illustration of Russia's possible future trajectory. As the Polish Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski later explained, "the problem as we saw it [at the time] was the instability coming from Russia, not the Russian government."<sup>47</sup> But although Zhirinovskii was not yet *in* the government, one could not be blamed for thinking that the country was already well on its way to a reinvented empire. Moscow's presumed support for separatist movements in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria, ongoing quarrels between Russia and Ukraine over nuclear weapons, Crimea and the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet, Yeltsin's apparent feet-dragging in withdrawing military forces from the Baltic States all seemed like ill omens to Russia's edgy neighbours that were only too keen to use their apprehensions as a currency in bargaining with the West.

"Every second Russian thought like Zhirinovskii," Lech Walesa told Clinton in early January 1994, outrageously exaggerating. Therefore, he pressed, NATO had to move quickly to offer membership to the Eastern Europeans or it would be too late. "Poland had learned that opportunities should be acted upon at once, lest they vanish for many years."<sup>48</sup> Clinton appeared reluctant to engage in this kind of talk about Russia. The ostensible idea was not to draw dividing lines. And yet lines were already being drawn, and the Partnership for Peace aimed at doing just that, and not accidentally but by design. This was already evident in a memorandum on NATO enlargement that Tony Lake prepared for Clinton before the latter's blitz-tour of Europe in January 1994. "There will be 'differentiation in practice,'" he wrote, "without formally drawing new dividing lines in Europe." He added: "In private conversations with Polish, Czech and Hungarian officials, we make no secret of our hope that they will be the most active participants." Several days later Strobe Talbott privately acknowledged that the PFP offered "a hedge against Russian intentions turning sour."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For an interesting discussion of whether Vladimir Zhirinovskii's views qualify as fascist see Andreas Umland, "Zhirinovskii as a Fascist: Palingenic Ultra-Nationalism and the Emergence of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia in 1992-93," *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2010), pp. 189-215.

<sup>45</sup> Vladimir Zhirinovskii, *Poslednii Brosok na Yug* (Moscow: LDPR, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> "Yeltsin Leaves for Brussels, Says Russia is Accepted in Europe," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, December 9, 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Author's interview with Andrzej Olechowski, June 17, 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Lech Walesa, January 12, 1994, CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>49</sup> UK Embassy in Washington to the FCO, January 11, 1994. TNA: PREM 19/5113/2. Clinton, in the meantime, dutifully highlighted the notion that no dividing lines were to be drawn in his own conversations with the CEE leaders in January 1994. See Mary Sarotte, "How to Enlarge NATO," p. 22.



Talbott himself had been deeply disturbed by the turn of events in Russia - not just by Zhirinovskii's apparent success but also by the setback suffered by Yeltsin's team of neoliberal reformers, including Deputy Prime Ministers Yegor Gaidar and Boris Fedorov who resigned their posts in January 1994. Kozyrev had not resigned but he had become much more "nationalistic." "Basically, Kozyrev seems to have concluded," Talbott wrote to Warren Christopher in January 1994, "that both his own interests and Russia's require a tougher, more nationalistic line - one that could translate into policies that will require a stern response from us and that will certainly make it harder for us to carry out our strategy of fostering Russia's integration into the West."<sup>50</sup> Kozyrev (who actually won a Duma seat) pragmatically noted in his diary: "From now on compromise will be the name of the game."<sup>51</sup> In internal Foreign Ministry meetings, Kozyrev now did something he rarely tried before: he criticized the "christopherite idiocy" of U.S. foreign policy, and those charged with implementing it, "the little Western thugs."<sup>52</sup>

Anatolii Adamishin, the Deputy Foreign Minister who worked closely with Kozyrev during this period, noted that his youthful boss had gradually come around to understand that Moscow's national interests did not automatically coincide with Washington's. Kozyrev grumbled: "When we agree with the West, they consider us a democratic country. When we stand for our own interests, i.e. behave like everyone else, we are being accused of returning to the past."<sup>53</sup> What Kozyrev seems to have begun to understand was that, with the anti-American narrative in ascendance, he could bolster his own political legitimacy by defending the rediscovered "national interests," even though until then he had seen engagement with the West as Russia's key national interest. This does not mean that Kozyrev was a wheeler-dealer - not at all. Simply, national interests could and did change depending on the role they played in the evolving legitimacy narrative.

As Kozyrev reinvented himself, another key player augmented his relative influence on policy: Evgenii Primakov. Primakov, a former *Pravda* correspondent in the Middle East and an academician, was now the head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the successor of the First Department of the KGB. On November 25, the SVR released a rare public report on NATO enlargement, which argued that as long as the character of the alliance remained unchanged, its expansion in Russia's direction would require a "fundamental rethink" of Russia's defense policies, revive the Russians' "fortress mentality," and ultimately undermine reform.<sup>54</sup> Primakov recalled having "absolutely reliable information" about NATO's strategic military plans, which, he said, included the use of atomic weapons. He claimed, too, that already the he had information of that the Partnership for Peace was just a "school" for preparing some applicants ("but, naturally, not Russia") for NATO membership.<sup>55</sup> When Kozyrev pressed Yeltsin about why he allowed the publication of this report, even though it disagreed with the ostensible official position that NATO was not a threat to Russia, the Russian President responded that it was just "a contribution to public debate." "For the first time," Kozyrev recalled, "I felt that Yeltsin was not being straight with me... I had the feeling that although he had reiterated his administration's

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<sup>50</sup> Memorandum from Strobe Talbott to Warren Christopher, undated (January 1994), CPL: 2014-0905-M.

<sup>51</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird*, p. 250.

<sup>52</sup> Anatolii Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody*, p. 334.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 417.

<sup>54</sup> "Perspektivy rasshireniya NATO i interesy Rossii: doklad sluzhby vneshnei razvedki," *Izvestiya*, November 26, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Evgenii Primakov, *Vstrechi na Perekrestkakh* (Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf, 2018), p. 207.

policy toward NATO, from then on, I would have to pursue that policy on my own, without his backing.”<sup>56</sup>

The publication of the SVR report was notable because it triggered public speculation of differences between the Foreign Ministry and intelligence. It was of course a shot across the bow for Kozyrev who later argued that Primakov and others did not seem to worry about the counterproductive effects of presenting NATO as a threat but that they wanted to “restore the legitimacy and authority of the security and military institutions.”<sup>57</sup> Primakov’s refrain was that he was merely doing his job: informing the President and the public of the potential dangers to Russia’s national security, and that he did so on behalf of the reformers’ camp, since NATO enlargement “supplied the anti-Western forces [in Russia] with the argument for purposeful attempts to discredit the government policy.”<sup>58</sup> Both Kozyrev and Primakov were right of course, which is perhaps why Yeltsin had trouble making up his mind.

With pro-Westerners increasingly sidelined, or turned into hardliners, Russia was already going off the rails, or so it seemed. One issue of domestic policy, in particular, raised eyebrows in Washington - the new Duma’s decision to declare amnesty for people who were behind bars on political charges, including those being investigated for the 1991 attempted coup, and Rutskoi and Khasbulatov who had languished in the Lefortovo prison since Yeltsin’s crackdown the previous October. The move was supported by both the Communists and the “Liberal Democrats,” whose leader Zhirinovskii even went to the gates of Lefortovo to welcome those being released. (Khasbulatov took the back door out but Rutskoi emerged in full military regalia, sporting a fresh beard and the “Hero of the Soviet Union” star pinned to his chest). Yeltsin had bitterly opposed the amnesty, and his supporters in the Duma decried it as a step towards civil war.<sup>59</sup> “Some deputies are threatening [us] with a civil war,” Zhirinovskii thundered. “On behalf of the LDPR faction [in the Duma], I want to calm you down: there won’t be a war but quiet, peace, and calm. Everything will be fine!”<sup>60</sup>

The re-emergence of the imprisoned opposition went perhaps a little too far for the jittery Russia watchers in Washington, coming as it did on top of all the other worrisome developments. This was not without irony, since the Americans found themselves opposed, in a bizarre fashion, to the release of imprisoned political opposition. In any case, as Talbott “confidentially” explained to John Major’s foreign policy aide Roderic Lyne, “when Rutskoi and Khasbulatov were released, he [Talbott] had set in hand an exercise within the State Department - though he was most anxious that it should not leak out - that US policy towards Russia was being ‘reviewed.’”<sup>61</sup> Facing a generally hostile crowd in Moscow, with Yeltsin, ever the drunkard, seemingly weakened by latest developments, the Americans were at a loss as to whom they should bet on but thought that Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, for all his flaws, was worth courting and

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<sup>56</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird*, p. 247.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> “Perspektivy rasshireniya NATO i interesy Rossii: doklad sluzhby vneshnei razvedki,” *Izvestiya*, November 26, 1993, p. 4. See also Leonid Mlechin, *Primakov* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 2007), p. 367.

<sup>59</sup> Christopher Boian, “Yeltsin sacks counterintelligence chief, seeks to contain amnesty fallout,” *Agence France Press - English*, February 28, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> Transcript of the Duma proceedings, February 23, 1994, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/3233/>.

<sup>61</sup> “Prime Minister’s visit to Washington: Russia,” March 2, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5113/1.

perhaps even inviting to Washington. "Asked whether this still held with Rusk free, Talbot said yet, by a fingernail."<sup>62</sup>

Tony Lake, by contrast, was already inclined to take what the British described as a "rather fundamentalist view of Russia." "Some in the Administration," Lyne wrote, "argued that it was now a mistake to think in terms of forging a genuine partnership with Russia... He was not prepared to make allowances for the domestic audience, but thought the Russians should be told to change their line if they wanted partnership."<sup>63</sup> Pressed by the British to allow Russia into political G7 - an organization of the world's most advanced industrial nations - Lake was decidedly sour, though he admitted that Clinton might buy the idea. "He [Lake] is inclined to take a fairly hard line. He feels that the country is already going to the bad, and that we should not encourage the Russians to think that they can interference in various questions in a negative way because we have given them the status of 'partner.'"<sup>64</sup> Similar views gained substantial currency in the US Congress, with Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Lee H. Hamilton observing that "relations with Russia were seen increasingly as rivalry rather than partnership."<sup>65</sup>

If things continued down that road, Lake and others argued, the US had to be prepared to "respond." "One question which would quickly arise would be NATO's relationship with the Visegrad countries."<sup>66</sup> It was telling, though perhaps not surprising, that even as US policy makers pondered the prospect, however remote still, of extending NATO membership to the Visegrad Four (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), it was in the context of a deteriorating relationship with Russia and, indeed, in direct response to what was interpreted in Washington as Russia's nationalistic resurgence. But by embracing enlargement without finding an appropriate role for Russia, the same policy makers overlooked the possibility that it might actually contribute to the latter's nationalistic resurgence or, indeed, externally legitimize it. This is exactly what happened.

## **Bosnia**

Debates around NATO enlargement were partly overshadowed in 1993-94 by the unfolding humanitarian catastrophe in the Balkans. Yugoslavia imploded in 1991, as inter-ethnic fighting erupted after Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed their independence from Belgrade. In 1992 the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina succumbed to chaos, its three main ethnic groups - the Bosnian Muslims, the Serbs, and the Croats - vying for control while resorting to indiscriminate violence against civilians and ethnic cleansing of the kind Europe had not seen since the Second World War. Although fighting persisted between all three main ethnic groups, with all three implicated in the perpetuation of atrocities, the Bosnian Serbs, in particular, drew the ire of the international community, especially when in May 1992 they imposed a blockade on the

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<sup>62</sup> "Prime Minister's breakfast with senior Americans: Russia," February 28, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5113/1.

<sup>63</sup> "Prime Minister's visit to Washington: Russia," March 2, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5113/1.

<sup>64</sup> Roderic Lyne to Prime Minister, February 27, 1994. TNA: PREM 19/5113/2. Lake claimed in subsequent interviews that he still held out the prospect of Russia's membership in NATO, and of NATO turning into a "CSCE with teeth that included Russia." But these recollections are plainly at odds with his considerably more negative view of the prospect in 1994. See James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, p. 49.

<sup>65</sup> "Note of a meeting between the Prime Minister and a Group of US Congressmen, led by Speaker Tom Foley," February 28, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5113/1.

<sup>66</sup> Roderic Lyne to Prime Minister, February 27, 1994. TNA: PREM 19/5113/2.

republican capital, Sarajevo.<sup>67</sup> The city was shelled for years on end from the surrounding hills, and subjected to sniper fire, resulting in countless civilian deaths, in defiance of UN forces that were at hand to provide some semblance of protection.

The Bush Administration tried to steer clear of the conflict in the Balkans, leaving it up to the Europeans to sort out their problems.<sup>68</sup> Clinton was also unenthusiastic at first, worrying that committing ground troops could lead to another Vietnam. But since doing nothing in the face of an unfolding humanitarian tragedy also seemed like a non-starter, Clinton's team came up with a solution: lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims (which would allow them to better defend themselves against the Serbs) while also carrying out selective airstrikes against Serb positions. The idea was called "lift-and-strike," and in May 1993 it was given to Warren Christopher to sell it to reluctant Europeans, especially the British and the French, as "the only coherent and workable strategy."<sup>69</sup> Christopher encountered a sour reaction. He was reminded, not unreasonably, that his proposals would only lead to worsening hostilities, exposing European peacekeepers on the ground to Bosnian Serb retaliation.<sup>70</sup>

By the summer of 1993, Clinton came around to recognizing that the US would need to exercise better "leadership" than shown so far with Christopher's lift-and-strike approach. The idea now was to insert the US more decisively into the negotiations process, then underway in Geneva, so as to bring about a peaceful solution that had proven so difficult to achieve. Interestingly, NATO was a huge consideration in the policy shift. Tony Lake explained this to the British when he turned up in London in July 1993. The Bosnian meltdown would make for a "bleak background" for the forthcoming NATO summit, and lead to trans-Atlantic recriminations. "It boiled down to a simple question of US credibility in the world," Lake told British officials. What mattered, he said, was the US public opinion. If the situation in Bosnia continued to deteriorate and the US - and NATO - did nothing, "their [US public's] perceptions of NATO and the US-European relations... could suffer serious damage."<sup>71</sup>

Meanwhile, Russia occupied a very uncomfortable position in the Balkan drama. As Yugoslavia unravelled, Moscow at first tried to steer close to assumed Western position, recognized Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina and, in May 1992, voted in the UN Security Council to impose economic sanctions on Belgrade. Even Russia's own UN representative Yulii Vorontsov thought that his country's conformity went too far. "We follow the West one-sidedly and primitively," he grumbled. "We can walk shoulder-to-shoulder with them but... 'in an embroidered Russian shirt."<sup>72</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Anatolii Adamishin later recalled that at

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<sup>67</sup> For an in-depth account of the siege of Sarajevo, see Robert J. Donia, *Sarajevo: a Biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey A. Engel, *When the world seemed new : George H.W. Bush and the end of the Cold War* (Boston; New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), p. 475.

<sup>69</sup> "Summary of conclusions for Meeting of NSC principals committee," May 6, 1993, CPL: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/36614>.

<sup>70</sup> For a good overview, see George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019). For differences between US and European policy through the spring of 1993, see David Owen (ed.), *Bosnia-Herzegovina: the Vance-Owen Peace Plan* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

<sup>71</sup> "Former Yugoslavia: change in US policy," July 1993. TNA: PREM 19/4513. It is interesting that the historiography portrays NATO's increasing involvement in Bosnia as a consequence of EU and UN failure, not as an effort to defend NATO's credibility. E.g. William Hill, *No Place for Russia*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>72</sup> Anatolii Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody*, p. 358.

the time the sanctions decision was made, not a single Yugoslavia expert in the ministry favoured the idea but “they were afraid; no one spoke up against.”<sup>73</sup> Kozyrev argued for the need to avoid Russia’s moral and political isolation on Yugoslavia, a position that put him on the spot back at home. The Supreme Soviet held special hearings on Yugoslavia, where Kozyrev had to defend his policy against accusations of betrayal.<sup>74</sup> Kozyrev’s parliamentary critics appealed to sentiments of pan-Slavic solidarity that emerged with renewed vigour after the end of the Cold War. This domestic backlash prompted Russia’s drift in Belgrade’s direction by 1993. Yeltsin was thus adamantly opposed to the logic behind Clinton’s “lift-and-strike” agenda. “There is too much bloodshed,” he told Clinton. “We need another political attempt.”<sup>75</sup> But Yeltsin’s efforts were frustrated: not just by the Parliamentary opposition that viewed any pressure on the Serbs as selling out to the West, but also by the Bosnian Serbs who torpedoed a negotiated settlement, also known as the “Vance/Owen Peace Plan,” embarrassing the Russians.

The Russian President was also under mounting pressure to comply with Clinton’s take on Bosnia. This became especially clear in the run-up to the UN Security Council resolutions 819 and 820, which established a safe area around Srebrenica (later overrun by the Bosnian Serbs), and imposed extensive economic sanctions on Belgrade. The Russians were dragging their feet: first, because they thought that the proposed resolutions unfairly targeted the Serbs at the expense of other culprits; second - and more importantly - that the sanctions resolution in particular deeply and one-sidedly hurt Russia’s commercial interests in the Balkans. Strobe Talbott had to lean on the Russian Ambassador in Washington Vladimir Lukin, linking Russia’s position on Bosnia with the prospect for US economic support. Warren Christopher personally called up Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Georgii Mamedov, warning him against the use of the veto on Bosnia because “this can make it more difficult for the American administration to find support in the Congress on the question of providing Russia with aid.”<sup>76</sup>

These measures had their needed effect. Upon reading Lukin’s cable, Kozyrev instructed the Russian representative in the UN to support the sanctions package (the instructions were eventually rescinded to “abstain.”) Deputy Foreign Minister Anatolii Adamishin noted in his diaries at the time: “If we say that the main thing for us is to be with them [the Americans], we are allowing ourselves to be dragged into a trap. Now, anything we do independently causes a cry: you are not with us! But even you [the West] are not with one another on occasion. We behave ourselves as if we must deserve the entry into a civilized society with our good behavior. But this is a fairytale without an end. We cannot get anything by kowtowing to the Americans...”<sup>77</sup> Adamishin, himself a liberal, was worried that Kozyrev, by neglecting Russia’s “honour,” would allow the extremists in the parliament to take up that banner and attack Yeltsin

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>74</sup> For Kozyrev’s account, see Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird*, p. 121.

. For records of the discussions in the Supreme Soviet see Ye. Yu. Gus’kova (ed.), *Yugoslavskii Krizis i Rossiya*, Vol. 2 (Moscow: Slavyanskaya Letopis, 1993), pp. 83-110. See also Ye. Yu. Gus’kova, *Istoriya Yugoslavskogo Krizisa* (Moscow: A. Solov’yev, 2001), pp. 517-518. For a critical view of pan-Slavinism in the Supreme Soviet, see Sergei Romanenko, “‘Chto v imeni tebe moem?’ Nezavisimaya Rossiya i raspad Yugoslavii,” *Migracijske i etničke teme* 21 (2005), 4: 339–364. See also Jim Headley, “Sarajevo, February 1994: The First Russia-NATO Crisis of the Post-Cold War Era,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Apr., 2003), pp. 209-227.

<sup>75</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, April 3, 1993, CPL: 2015-0782-M

<sup>76</sup> Anatolii Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody*, pp. 373-374.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 374-375.

with it.<sup>78</sup> He was right in this sense but the alternative - openly resisting US policy and risking a break - also seemed unappealing.

Following the derailment of peace negotiations, Strobe Talbott flew to Moscow to secure Russia's cooperation with the "lift-and-strike" agenda. He encountered a cool reaction. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev cited from the Russian military intelligence reports - "no doubt straight from Belgrade," Talbott recalled, that showed "rough parity" between the Serbs and the Muslims.<sup>79</sup> "Grachev spoke with the confidence of a man who not only knew he was right but also knew he had popular and parliamentary opinion behind him."<sup>80</sup> Kozyrev seemed more sympathetic but warned that lifting the arms embargo or resorting to military strikes would only lead to a surge of violence. Talbott fell back on the argument that it was only in Russia's interest to join ranks with the US in threatening military strikes on the Serbs. Kozyrev cut him off in exasperation: "You know... it's bad enough having you people tell us what you're going to do whether we like it or not. Don't add insult to injury by telling us that it's in our interest to obey your orders."<sup>81</sup> Talbott's assistant Victoria Nuland reportedly told Talbott after the meeting: "That's what happens when you try to get the Russians to eat their spinach... The more you tell them it's good for them, the more they gag."<sup>82</sup>

There was something infantilizing in this sort of approach to the Russians. As then-Russian Ambassador in Washington Vladimir Lukin explained to this author, "this is where the problem of the elder brother arose, the problem of 'we are telling you.' The problem, when, speaking to [us,] they'd say: 'you must do this, you must do that... The forces of interpersonal and interstate egotism prevailed."<sup>83</sup> Yet the fact that Clinton's enthusiasm for "lift-and-strike" was being pushed back against in London and Paris suggests that Moscow's reluctance to eat spinach was not all that unusual. Indeed, even the co-author of the failed peace plan, David Owen, decried what he called "fierce [American] pressure" on the United Nations General Secretary to request NATO strikes against the Serbs: "President Clinton appears to want to be regarded as having taken the decisive and firm military action that delivers a settlement. If his intentions are honourable, they are wrong. If driven by US political pressures, they are very dangerous."<sup>84</sup> Never mind Boris Yeltsin, even Prime Minister John Major told Bill Clinton that his government would fall if the arms embargo were lifted. "I never understood why they would not vote to lift the arms embargo," Clinton mused. "I thought that was just crazy."<sup>85</sup>

But the war dragged on, the pressure growing on Clinton to do something about Bosnia. One particularly atrocious development helped break the policy logjam. On February 5, 1994 a 120mm mortar shell landed in a crowded market in Sarajevo, killing 68 people and injuring nearly 200. The Muslims and the Serbs were quick to blame one another for the massacre.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Memorandum, from US Embassy, Moscow to Secretary of State, May 8, 1993, State FOIA: [M-2017-11839](#)

<sup>80</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 75.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Vladimir Lukin, August 13, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Lord Owen to the Secretary of State, July 31, 1993. TNA: PREM 19/4513.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Alija Izetbegovic, September 8, 1993, CPL: 2011-0964-M.

<sup>86</sup> Steven L. Burg, Paul S. Shoup, *The War in Bosnia-Herzegovina: Ethnic Conflict and International Intervention* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), pp. 166-167. A November 2006 Appeals Chamber of the



The Western media generally sided with the Muslims against the Serbs, broadcasting images of carnage with appropriate commentary. "Bosnia is abandoned," Bosnian Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic told audiences on CNN. It has had to fight "the virus of fascism" all alone. "Well, this is the result. And now, it is coming to your doorstep."<sup>87</sup> Galvanized by the massacre, NATO issued an ultimatum: either heavy weapons were to be pulled back from Sarajevo, or there would be air strikes against whoever failed to remove them (by assumption, the Serbs).

The ultimatum prompted an outrage in Moscow. Vladimir Zhirinovskii had just come back from a tour of former Yugoslavia. While there, he had proclaimed solidarity with the Serbs, declared that Muslims in Bosnia did not exist, and promised to retaliate against NATO encroachment with a "secret laser weapon which zaps its victims' brains."<sup>88</sup> At the Duma on February 9, he launched into a tirade: "I warn all Western states: if you begin this war, you will begin the third world war, and we'll find a way to respond... We will not leave a stone standing in these states. Remember this! (Shouts from the chamber)."<sup>89</sup> Zhirinovskii's antics were not unexpected but the frustration with NATO's threats was clearly shared much more widely than just the far-right. Kozyrev went on record arguing that NATO had no authority to bomb, except if the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali requested such airstrikes.<sup>90</sup> (The Americans privately resolved to "clarify with Boutros-Ghali the consequences for US/UN relations if he withholds authority.")<sup>91</sup>

Meanwhile, Clinton did not even call Yeltsin until February 11 (two days after the NATO ultimatum), a delay caused by unexplained "technical problems," which the Americans and the Russians blamed on one another.<sup>92</sup> When Clinton finally did make the call, Yeltsin "said menacingly that the two of them had better stay in close touch on urgent matters that might even involve nuclear weapons." Clinton, Talbott recalled, "adopted his most soothing manner" but there was no hiding the reality of growing estrangement between "Bill" and "Boris," nor the widening gulf between what NATO had to accomplish to maintain its own credibility and Moscow's need to be seen as the protector of the Serbs and a self-respecting great power.<sup>93</sup>

The Russians launched an 11th hour diplomatic offensive to resolve the problem peacefully. Russia's pointman for the Balkans Vitalii Churkin flew to Belgrade to put pressure on the Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic who, in his turn, was expected to pressure the Bosnian Serbs to

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia concluded, upon consideration of conflicting UN reports and testimony, that the "Trial Chamber's finding that the mortar shell came from SRK positions was not one that no reasonable trier of fact could have made." <https://www.icty.org/en/press/stanislaw-galic-sentenced-life-imprisonment-appeals-chamber-crimes-committed-during-siege>. For the full judgment and the dissenting opinions, see <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/galic/acjug/en/gal-acjud061130.pdf>. See also K.V. Nikiforov, *Mezhdru Kremlem i Respublikoi Serbskoi* (Moscow: Institut Slavyanovedeniya RAN, 1999), pp. 33-35.

<sup>87</sup> "Markale Shelling, Sarajevo," *CNN*, February 5, 1994,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YswcyeGGe5U>

<sup>88</sup> "Zhirinovskii: Russia Should Quit UN If NATO Bombs in Bosnia," *The Associated Press*, January 28, 1994; "Russia to test 'laser' superweapon in Bosnia: Zhirinovskii," *Agence France Press - English*, February 1, 1994. Also Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, chp. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Transcript of the Duma proceedings, February 9, 1994, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/3243/>

<sup>90</sup> "Kozyrev: Russia Watchful About Aerial Operations in Bosnia," *TASS*, February 12, 1994.

<sup>91</sup> "Summary of conclusions for meeting of NSC principals committee," February 18, 1994, CPL: [2010-0533-M](#)

<sup>92</sup> "Yeltsin, Clinton Talk About Bosnia," *Associated Press Worldstream*, February 11, 1994.

<sup>93</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 122.

remove their heavy weaponry from around Sarajevo. Yeltsin penned a personal letter to Radovan Karadzic, the former psychiatrist turned president of the unrecognized Republika Srpska, urging him to accept the terms of the ultimatum, which the latter did, subject to the Russian peacekeepers being moved into Sarajevo to patrol the confrontation lines (400 hundred Russians soon arrived on site). Under Russian pressure, the Bosnian Serbs also agreed to open up the Tuzla airport, which was crucial for the delivery of humanitarian aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>94</sup>

On the whole, Yeltsin's diplomatic intervention proved to be a remarkable short-term success. Russia showed itself to be an indispensable player in the Balkans, with real leverage over the recalcitrant Serbs. They had peacekeepers on the ground who, the British commander in Sarajevo Michael Rose concluded, proved to be "militarily useless, unresponsive to his control, and politically suspect."<sup>95</sup> Still, there they were, if anything as a reminder of Moscow's status. Even Belgrade - for all the unwelcome pressure - appeared grateful for the timely intervention, their Ambassador Milan Roćen telling the Russians that "only due to our diplomacy was it possible to prevent a dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Balkans... The Serbs and the Montenegrans will never forget this support."<sup>96</sup> "The Russian government," the British Foreign Office concluded in a postmortem, "saw the NATO decision of 9 February both as side-lining them and undermining the UN's impartiality. Subsequent events have helped restore wounded Russian pride."<sup>97</sup>

Yeltsin sought to build on this success, telling Clinton during their telephone conversation on February 20 that he wanted to organize a great power conference in Moscow to resolve the Yugoslav problem once and for all (Clinton successfully wormed his way out of any such commitment).<sup>98</sup> Developing these ideas in a conversation with US Ambassador Tom Pickering on February 24, Yeltsin's foreign policy aide Dmitrii Ryurikov promised that Russia would work with "its clients" - the Serbs - if the Americans did the same with the Muslims. "The personal involvement of the most influential countries could provide political, moral and material resources to aid in resolution of the conflict," Ryurikov said, adding that perhaps the proposed peace summit would be "a way to work the G7 into a G8."<sup>99</sup> That latter reference captures the essence of what Yeltsin was hoping to do: to use the leverage that he thought he still had with the Serbs in order to improve Russia's international standing and gain acceptance into Western institutions: if not NATO, then at least the G7.

The theme of Russo-American partnership in Bosnia loomed large when a delegation of Russian parliamentarians, headed by the new speaker Ivan Rybkin, turned up in Washington in March 1994. As Rybkin told US Defense Secretary William Perry, "In the end, we spontaneously came to correct coordinated action in Bosnia. But we would like to come to such coordinated action intentionally, as a result of consultations and mutual discussions. This is important for the

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<sup>94</sup> Ye. Yu. Gus'kova, *Istoriya Jugoslavskogo Krizisa* (Moscow: A. Solov'yev, 2001), p. 385.

<sup>95</sup> Memorandum from Roderic Lyne to R.J. Sawers, "Prime Minister's Visit to Croatia and Bosnia," March 21, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5051.

<sup>96</sup> Conversation between Ivan Rybkin and the FRY Ambassador in Moscow Milan Roćen, February 23, 1994. GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 1, list 42.

<sup>97</sup> Memorandum from C.R.V. Stagg (FCO) to Roderic Lyne (10 Downing Street), February 24, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5113/2.

<sup>98</sup> Telcon, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, February 20, 1994, CPL: 2015-0782-M.

<sup>99</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Tom Pickering and Dmitrii Ryurikov, February 24, 1994, State FOIA: F-2017-13804.

prestige [avtoriteta] of our two countries.” What Rybkin really meant was that such coordination was important for Russia’s prestige. Former Russian Ambassador in Washington (and now a Duma deputy) Vladimir Lukin added his own note of complaint: “It really would have been better to consult ahead of time. We have the same aim: to stop the bloodshed on the basis of realities as they are. Straying too far from realities in the direction of ideological conceptions will not lead to the necessary positive result. Let’s cooperate.”<sup>100</sup>

Rybkin and Lukin represented different political forces (Rybkin was an agrarian, backed by the Communists, whereas Lukin had been with the liberal reformers), yet both were urging to use Bosnia as a staging ground for Russian-American cooperation, which shows that the idea of a cooperative relationship with the US carried appeal across Russia’s political spectrum; of course, the opposite idea - that of confronting the US - also had a wide and widening appeal.

Although Russia’s helpfulness was of course appreciated in Washington to the extent that it helped Clinton’s agenda, it did not translate into increased willingness to take Yeltsin’s views into account or, indeed, consult with him. On February 28, NATO warplanes shot down four Serb aircraft that were bombing munition factories in Bosnia. Significantly, this was the first NATO combat action in its history. Since the action was in enforcement of the No Fly Zone over Bosnia, to which Moscow had previously agreed, the Russians scarcely batted an eyelid. On March 18, in Washington, Clinton presided over a diplomatic breakthrough - the creation of a Croatian-Muslim federation in Bosnia Herzegovina that aligned two of the three main protagonists of the conflict. The Russians with their new diplomatic assertiveness were left on the sidelines.

But perhaps the most telling marker of the changed realities on the ground was NATO’s April 10 airstrike against Serb positions near the town of Gorazde, which was then being besieged by the Bosnian Serb forces. There was no consultation with Moscow, which Clinton tried to make up for by calling Yeltsin on the same day (the next day in Russia) to tell him, a bit lamely, that he “thought the UN notified everybody.” Yeltsin complained with some bitterness about the need “to improve our process of preliminary consultations, which does not seem to be working very well.”<sup>101</sup> On April 13, the Duma summoned Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to explain how it happened that Russia was ignored and sidelined. Passions raged. “What happened there [in Bosnia], is a slap in the face for the prestige of our country!,” argued Sergey Zenkin, a 33-year old MP from the town of Kineshma, east of Moscow. Another young deputy, former journalist Alexander Nevzorov accused the UN and NATO of “taking part in a civil war on one of the warring sides,... having thus signed up, in essence, for the ranks of vulgar criminals and international terrorists.” There was a motion to recommend to the government to stay clear of the Partnership for Peace (it failed by a narrow margin).<sup>102</sup>

Foreign Minister Kozyrev came under increasing pressure - not just from the Duma but even from Yeltsin’s circle of advisers. The President’s newly appointed national security aide Yuri Baturin and one of his speech-writers Konstantin Nikiforov (who was also an expert on the Balkans) attempted to steer Yeltsin towards a policy that would take into account “Russia’s national interests” in the former Yugoslavia, which did not always overlap (even if they did not necessarily conflict) with those of other Western powers. Baturin and Nikiforov sent Yeltsin a

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<sup>100</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Ivan Rybkin et al & William Perry et al, March 8, 1994, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 5, list 130.

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, April 10, 1994, CPL: 2015-0782-M.

<sup>102</sup> Transcript of the Duma proceedings, April 13, 1994 <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/3215/>

memorandum, arguing that “Russia’s full-fledged return to the Balkans, from where it is being increasingly pushed out, will confirm its great power status. Otherwise, by abandoning the Serbs to their fate, Russia is losing face; its international prestige is declining.”<sup>103</sup> Yeltsin was evidently impressed with the message, and in July 1994 sent the duo to Belgrade on a secret mission to feel the ground for what Nikiforov called an “alternative” Balkan settlement.

The idea did not go down well with Kozyrev who was still trying to find a place for Russia in the Western-led peace effort. In the summer of 1994 the focal point of this effort was yet another peace plan for Bosnia, put together by the so-called Contact Group (which included the US, UK, France, Russia, and eventually Germany and Italy). The Contact Group, Talbott recalled, existed “for the sole purpose of including Russia in a kind of steering committee otherwise made up of key NATO allies.” The idea was “to keep Russia... inside the tent, on the reservation [sic] or, in Chris’s [Warren Christopher’s] phrase, sullen but not obstructionist.”<sup>104</sup> Clinton was optimistic that Moscow would play a positive role in the Contact Group. “Securing a settlement in Bosnia could be a big deal for Yeltsin,” he told Tony Blair in June 1994. “It was one international issue on which the Russians could play a constructive rather than imperialist role. It gave them the opportunity to act like a great power, and please their domestic constituency by appearing to protect Serbian interests.”<sup>105</sup>

This optimism took it for granted that Moscow’s perception of its “national interests” would coincide with Washington’s perception of these interests. But would there be any real US willingness to take Russia’s views on board in case interests diverged? It turned out that there was very little such willingness. Alexander Zotov, Russia’s representative to the Contact Group, later aired complaints about “a patronising American attitude towards the Russians, namely that they are welcome to take part e.g. in the Contact Group only for as long as they agree to follow the current American agenda.”<sup>106</sup> Clinton was unable to grasp this Russian counter-narrative (promoted by Baturin, Nikiforov, and many others), which held that by joining a broader Western effort to reach a settlement, Moscow would simply allow itself to be instrumentalized for America’s purposes. Slobodan Milosevic, in his own correspondence with Yeltsin, also pressed this point.<sup>107</sup>

The question was whether Russia’s adherence to the collective decisions of the Contact Group (where it held no right of veto, unlike in the UN Security Council) would qualify as “acting like a great power” or whether putting a distance between itself and the other would be a better example of true statesmanship. The bottom line was this: could Russia’s aspirations for greatness be better satisfied if it worked with the West or apart from (if not, indeed, against) the West? Kozyrev still preferred the former, largely because working *with* the West sustained the implied promise of Russia’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, including (as the Foreign Minister kept hoping), NATO. But even Kozyrev’s views were beginning to shift, and his political position continued to weaken at home, which was in itself partly a reaction to how little Russia’s views counted for on the international stage, and how it was still being kept at arm’s length, docile for the moment, but confined to the “reservation.”

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<sup>103</sup> K.V. Nikiforov, *Mezhdru Kremlem i Respublikoi Serbskoi*, p. 42.

<sup>104</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 123.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum from Philippa Leslie-Jones to R.J. Sawers, “Prime Minister’s Talks with President Clinton at Chequers,” June 6, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/5114.

<sup>106</sup> Cable from the British Embassy in Moscow to the FCO, June 5, 1995, TNA: PREM 19/5393.

<sup>107</sup> K.V. Nikiforov, *Mezhdru Kremlem i Respublikoi Serbskoi*, p. 43.

Like the narrative(s) of NATO's enlargement to the East, the Bosnian narrative(s) had the potential of narrowing the gap between Russia and the West but the opportunity was largely squandered. Both sides undoubtedly share the blame, though perhaps the Russians less so, given how desperate they were at this point to be taken into account. As Lukin - who from 1994 headed the Duma's International Committee - recounted to this author, "our approach was: let's cooperate, let's find a solution to the questions, which would suit you and us, and which would be legitimately framed. And what was the answer? We [the US] don't give a damn. We'll do what we want!... It all ended with Russia's humiliation." In retrospect, Lukin blamed people like Richard Holbrooke, the key US negotiator on Bosnia, whose position was "to squeeze everything from this dead cat, Russia, for America's policy, and for his own ambitions."<sup>108</sup>

Meanwhile, the Bosnian Serbs rejected the Contact Group's plan, prolonging the agony of the war. It took more than a year of diplomacy to work out a solution. That solution - the Dayton Accords - left Russia, with its Balkan alternatives, completely out of the loop, with Holbrooke effectively running the show.<sup>109</sup> Moscow's Balkan diplomacy fell far short of what Yeltsin expected when he tried to make Bosnia a showcase of Russian-American cooperation. The reasons for this failure were obvious: NATO's willingness to flex its military muscle despite repeated and so all the more pitiful protests from Moscow. Caught in the cross-currents - on the one hand, a militant, assertive Duma, on the other, a more assertive NATO - Yeltsin played to both sides but such a balancing act was impossible to sustain in the long term.

### **The Cold Peace**

On December 11, 1994, Russian military forces crossed the border into Chechnya to crush a separatist rebellion and restore Moscow's control over a province that survived in precarious autonomy ever since the Soviet collapse three years earlier. The Russian leadership accused the separatists of plunging the place into lawlessness and criminality and, indeed, even by Russia's dismal standards, the self-proclaimed republic, led by a former Soviet general-turned ineffective authoritarian President Dzhokhar Dudayev, was a proverbial basket case, its dilapidated, trashed, potholed capital, Grozny, offering a "foretaste of the end of modernity," in the words of one contemporary observer.<sup>110</sup> But the Chechens were well-armed, and, in December 1994, they turned their weapons on the ill-prepared Russian military machine. As the Russian army descended on Grozny, it encountered fierce resistance. Only in March 1995 did the last insurgents finally retreat from the ghostly ruins of what remained of Grozny. The war continued, by and by turning into a quagmire like the Russians had not seen since Afghanistan.

As the fighting dragged on, news agencies beamed images of death and destruction back to the living rooms of ordinary people, eroding whatever remained of Yeltsin's domestic popularity. Meanwhile, the international media brought Chechnya's plight out to the wider world. Yeltsin the Western darling had become a war president, incompetently leading a deeply unpopular and increasingly atrocious campaign to bring Chechnya back into the Motherland's fold. Those in the West who worried months earlier that Russia was going "to the bad" and cautiously engaged in scenario planning to cope with Moscow's resurgent imperialism could congratulate themselves on considerable foresight.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Vladimir Lukin, August 13, 2020.

<sup>109</sup> George Packer, *Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the American Century*.

<sup>110</sup> Anatol Lieven, *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 40.

A week before the Chechen campaign, Yeltsin turned up in Budapest for a summit of 52 countries that made up the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The summit, also attended by Clinton, came just in the wake of a North Atlantic Council ministerial that announced plans to examine how NATO would expand.<sup>111</sup> Upset by this development, Kozyrev had refused to pledge Russia to the Partnership for Peace. Now in Budapest, he sat stone-faced next to gloomy, irate Yeltsin, who lashed out against plans for NATO enlargement. "Europe," he said, "not having overcome the legacies of the Cold War, risks descending into a Cold Peace."<sup>112</sup> Yeltsin's chilling rhetoric - some of it apparently added to the speech at the last moment - stoked fears of Russia's imperialist resurgence.<sup>113</sup> Clinton seemed cautiously optimistic about what he would later call "a near-death experience."<sup>114</sup> "He has at least to respond to the element which wants Russia to reassert itself," Clinton concluded after the session. "On specific issues, Yeltsin is pretty good, but he sometimes scares people."<sup>115</sup> Helmut Kohl meanwhile found the whole experience "depressing," adding: "The Russians are suffering in that they are no longer a major world power."<sup>116</sup>

It wouldn't be fair to say that Yeltsin's performance in Budapest was something wholly unexpected. Like the brooding storm over Chechnya, Moscow's resentment over NATO has been building up for months. The Russians made a sustained effort in 1994 to win acceptance into Western institutions - not just NATO but G7 - only to find that doors were closed. Kozyrev's entreaties to be admitted to NATO read almost like desperate cries for help, as if his own political survival depended on it (and, in a sense, it did). "Why did NATO not want Russia," Kozyrev asked in a conversation with German counterpart Klaus Kinkel in May 1994. "Were there hidden reproaches? Suspensions? Perhaps even enmity? If so, then the offer of a partnership for peace did not mean that Russia was actually wanted as a partner."<sup>117</sup>

Similar outbursts coloured Yeltsin's meetings with Kohl, also in May. The Russian President who, the Germans took note, "had drunk far too much," made "most emotional" appeals to Kohl to have Russia admitted to G7, only to be rebuffed.<sup>118</sup> Later in May, British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd found Yeltsin "unhappy," complaining that Russia was being "kept at arms' lengths by Western institutions."<sup>119</sup> This growing frustration with being shunned by the West - shared widely across Russia's political elite - was perhaps best summed up by Vyacheslav Nikonov, a Duma deputy best known for being the grandson of the infamous Mr. No of Soviet diplomacy Vyacheslav Molotov: "Russia had hoped to be included among the civilised nations of

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<sup>111</sup> "Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council Final Communiqué," December 1, 1994, <https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/1994/p94-116e.htm>.

<sup>112</sup> Boris Yeltsin's remarks at the CSCE meeting in Budapest (audio), December 5, 1994, Yeltsin Centre Archive: <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/audio/9035/>.

<sup>113</sup> On the genesis of Yeltsin's speech, see also Andrei Kozyrev, *Firebird*, p. 283. For the background on the US side, see James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 189-194.

<sup>114</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 154.

<sup>115</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl, December 5, 1994, State FOIA: M-2017-11531.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Cable, US Embassy in Bonn to Secretary of State, May 26, 1994, CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>118</sup> Cable, US Embassy in Bonn to Secretary of State, May 13, 1994, CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>119</sup> A brief for Prime Minister, undated (May-June 1994), TNA: PREM 19/5114.



the West, but was allowed to join only those organisations which had shown their ineffectiveness.”<sup>120</sup>

These Russian pleas coincided with determined gear shifting in NATO enlargement planning. There was push on both sides of the Atlantic. In Europe, the Germans were pulling out the stops, with the German Minister of Defense Volker R  he pushing especially hard for enlargement, much more so than Helmut Kohl himself.<sup>121</sup> He was also very upfront about what he did not want to see: “Russia cannot be integrated,” he announced on September 9, 1994, “neither into the European Union nor into NATO.” The British were a little more agnostic on this point, though as R  he’s British counterpart Malcolm Rifkind concluded in January 1995, “whatever conciliatory language we use, the reality is that [Russia’s membership] will always be impossible. Membership of NATO would transform the Alliance into a loose political club thus destroying its unique character.”<sup>122</sup> Or, as he later put it, “I had no doubts in my own mind that Russia could never become a full member of NATO without destroying the whole purpose of NATO.”<sup>123</sup>

It was the Americans who were at this point sending mixed signals, particularly in conversations with the Russians. Clinton himself put it in the following terms to Yeltsin over a private lunch on September 27, 1994: “Boris, on NATO, I want to make sure you’ve noted that I’ve never said we shouldn’t consider Russia for membership or a special relationship with NATO.”<sup>124</sup> Talbott described this as part of Clinton’s “blue-sky” vision: a day would come, he thought, when Europe would be united, democratic, and free, and it would include Russia, but “it would be a different Russia, a different NATO, and a different Europe.”<sup>125</sup> This sort of rhetoric both appeased but also seemingly confused Yeltsin who continued to believe or at least pretended to believe that enlargement was not on the agenda, and that when it did happen, Russia would be at the forefront of the process.

But if the Russians were being given mixed signals, policy was finally shaping up within the Clinton Administration, which until then had drifted uneasily between ringing endorsement of enlargement by people like Tony Lake and the recently appointed Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, and the weary Pentagon. Holbrooke played a most decisive role in bringing the Pentagon around, bullying the military into embracing what he declared was now Clinton’s policy.<sup>126</sup>

Meanwhile, in October 1994 enlargement was discussed by the National Security Council at some length (not all were in favour of enlargement; at least one staffer, Richard Schifter, submitted a dissenting opinion, suggesting that Zhirinovskii et al were already a spent force and that enlargement would only allow them to regain strength at Yeltsin’s expense). But Tony Lake would not be dissuaded by such wavering and on October 13 he sent Clinton an NSC paper, stipulating NATO enlargement in the “medium term,” which would include major Central and Eastern European countries and, going beyond that, not close off the door to the Baltic States or

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<sup>120</sup> Cable, UK Embassy in Moscow to the FCO, June 20, 1994, TNA: PREM 19/4919.

<sup>121</sup> On R  he’s position, see also James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>122</sup> Memorandum from the Secretary of State for Defense (Malcolm Rifkind) to the Prime Minister, January 5, 1995, TNA: PREM 19/5227/1.

<sup>123</sup> Author’s interview with Malcolm Rifkind, June 29, 2020.

<sup>124</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> See James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, pp. 73-76.

Ukraine so as not to confine them to “a gray zone or a Russian sphere of influence.”<sup>127</sup> “Looks good,” the President scribbled on the memo.<sup>128</sup>

With regard to the claim (which of course Lake himself heartily endorsed) that NATO enlargement was necessary as a kind of an “insurance policy” or a “strategic hedge” against Russian imperialist resurgence, Lake’s memorandum contained the following formulation: “‘Insurance policy’/‘strategic hedge’ rationale (i.e. neo-containment of Russia) will be kept in the background only, rarely articulated. On contrary, possibility of membership in the long term for a democratic Russia should not be ruled out explicitly, as the President and Yeltsin agreed.”<sup>129</sup> By October 1994, then, even as the US Ambassador in Moscow worked to assure the Russians that “the process of NATO development [sic] must in no way touch on Russia’s interests,” decisions were being made in Washington and to a lesser extent in the West European capitals that would pave way to enlargement - not (as Warren Christopher vaguely promised Yeltsin not quite a year earlier) as a “longer term eventuality” but, already, “in the medium term.”<sup>130</sup>

Calls for enlargement became even more audible in Washington after the Democrats’ defeat in the mid-term elections in November 1994. The Congress was now controlled by the Republicans who had become vocal supporters of rapid enlargement.<sup>131</sup> This change in the political climate impressed the Russian parliamentarians who attended a session of the North Atlantic Assembly that convened in Washington that November. “The general tenor of the discussions changed in a direction unfavorable to us,” the parliamentarians reported, adding that “there were euphoric sentiments in Washington in favour of the most rapid enlargement of the bloc.” The initiative here belonged to the US delegation (with some support from Germany and Canada), and the general sentiment had anti-Russian connotations. “The course towards most rapid enlargement of NATO was accompanied by a clearly identifiable policy of containing Russia, and the imposition of further constraints on our freedom of actions on the international stage.”<sup>132</sup>

So it was not entirely surprising that the Russians, from Yeltsin down, played up the theme of being deceived and mistreated by their American partners. Yeltsin’s aide Dmitrii Ryurikov dug into Talbott with force when the two met on December 15 (Talbott was in Moscow together with Vice President Al Gore who had come for a meeting of the inter-governmental Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission). Based on Christopher’s assurances in 1993, Ryurikov said, as well as the subsequent launch of the Partnership for Peace, “many in Russia had determined that the process of NATO expansion had been ‘stopped.’” Since then, he continued, the Russians had learned that the White House was not just “rushing the pace” of enlargement but aiming to use it as a “hedge against bad developments in Russia.” “This really upset Yeltsin,” Ryurikov

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<sup>127</sup> Memorandum, Anthony Lake to Bill Clinton, October 13, 1994. CPL: 2015-0755-M.

<sup>128</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the debate in the NSC, see Mary Sarotte, “How to Enlarge,” pp. 31-32.

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum, Anthony Lake to Bill Clinton, October 13, 1994. CPL: 2015-0755-M.

<sup>130</sup> Memorandum, Anthony Lake to Bill Clinton, October 13, 1994. CPL: 2015-0755-M. For Christopher’s promise, see Memorandum of Conversation, Warren Christopher and Boris Yeltsin, 22 October 1993, CPL: 2017-0771-M. For a record of Thomas Pickering’s conversation with Ivan Rybkin, October 6, 1994, see GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 1, listy 186-188.

<sup>131</sup> See also Mary Sarotte, “How to Enlarge,” p. 35.

<sup>132</sup> Report on a visit by a Duma delegation to the 40th session of the North Atlantic Assembly, undated (November 1994), GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 11, listy 133-139.

said.<sup>133</sup> Yet he also bent over backwards to emphasize that Yeltsin's performance in Budapest was a "bump in the road, not the start of 'cold peace.'" The aim, Ryurikov concluded, was to "end up with a European security structure that includes Russia... Russia must be part of the decision-making process - not because Moscow has a veto - it doesn't - but because Russia's participation is in the best interest of all Europeans."<sup>134</sup>

To help clear the air, Yeltsin received Gore on the following day in the hospital, where the Russian President was recuperating after a minor operation. Gore reassured him that there would be no NATO enlargement in 1995, only a study of the conception of future enlargement, which would be "gradual." Yeltsin pressed for "gradual" to mean 10 or even 15 years but got nowhere.<sup>135</sup> "If this [enlargement] does occur," Russian Duma speaker Ivan Rybkin told Gore during his separate meeting with the Vice President, "would it not be better to begin the process of NATO enlargement from the Urals?" On the following day, Rybkin clarified what he had in mind in a conversation with a French delegation. "When anyone talks about NATO enlargement," he said, "we propose to begin this enlargement from the Urals. Or we can talk about our participation in this organization on the French model. You are a member of the political organization but do not participate in the military structures."<sup>136</sup> That last idea was not random.

The idea of taking De Gaulle's road was at the time fairly wide-spread in Russia's strategic policy circles.<sup>137</sup> There is no evidence that it was ever seriously contemplated by the US policy makers. Oddly, Henry Kissinger publically broached the idea of extending French-style membership to new members but he only meant Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. He certainly did not advocate or ever foresee a place for Russia in NATO.<sup>138</sup> Kissinger was an influential voice outside the Administration. He contributed to the bipartisan consensus in favour of enlargement at Russia's expense. And if the Russians complained? So what! "We resisted blackmail when Russia was strong. Does it make sense to permit Moscow to blackmail us now with its domestic weakness?"<sup>139</sup>

Meanwhile, the administration drowned the problem of Russia's participation in generalities.<sup>140</sup> In a later conversation with the Belgians the Vice President explained what he really thought of Moscow's probing: "Russian membership," he said, "is a theoretical possibility and there is little sense for us to say that, for all time, we rule out even the theoretical possibility of Russia joining NATO. To do this is not the same as investing it with any likelihood. The Russians have no such

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<sup>133</sup> Talbott vehemently denied the "strategic hedge" charge, although the allegation was true. (In fact, those very words were being used in the internal policy discussion).

<sup>134</sup> Cable, US Embassy in Moscow to the Secretary of State, December 16, 1994, State FOIA: F-2017-13804.

<sup>135</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, p. 144.

<sup>136</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Ivan Rybkin and Philippe Séguin, December 15, 1994, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 1, listy 275-282.

<sup>137</sup> Author's discussion with Vladimir Pechatnov.

<sup>138</sup> Henry Kissinger, "Not This Partnership," *The Washington Post*, November 24, 1993.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Ivan Rybkin and Al Gore, December 14, 1994, GARF: fond 1001, opis 3, delo 1, listy 267-273.

expectations, but the theoretical possibility helps them deal with what Gorbachev called the 'enemy image.'"<sup>141</sup>

The Russians, as the evidence unequivocally shows, did have such expectations: not just the self-proclaimed Euro-Atlanticists like Kozyrev but even the agrarian-communists like Rybkin, and above all Yeltsin himself clamoured for Russia's admission to NATO for much longer than what appears reasonable in retrospect. As so often in the past, being perceived and, indeed, perceiving themselves as America's partners, imbued the Russian political elites with a sense of legitimacy. But, as so often in the past, legitimacy could also be derived from acting, and being seen to act, like a great power. Being recognized by the West as a potential enemy, rather than a partner, thus also entailed political legitimation. Ideally, the Russians would have liked to have their cake and eat it, too, i.e. to be accepted as equal partners in Western institutions while retaining freedom of maneuver in what Moscow regarded as its immediate sphere of influence. That dynamic was already visible in 1993-94 in Yugoslavia, and it became particularly clear when Yeltsin ordered the invasion of Chechnya.

The mismatch between the Russian elites' perceptions of themselves and the American policy-makers' perceptions of Russia were highlighted in a note Strobe Talbott sent to Warren Christopher shortly after Gore's visit with Yeltsin. During that meeting Gore compared the complexity of the Russia-NATO relationship to a docking of spacecraft in outer space: it took great skill to maneuver them into position. Yeltsin loved the analogy but Talbott didn't, criticizing it in a later note to Warren Christopher that only one of the spacecraft had to move. "It's Russia that must move toward us, toward our way of doing things." True, this sounded like American exceptionalism. "Well, tough," Talbott wrote. "That's us; that's the US. We are exceptional." Meanwhile, "Russia is either coming our way, or it's not, in which case it's going to founder, as the USSR did." Talbott likened America to a lighthouse that was showing the way to "the rickety, leaky, oversized, cannon-laden Good Ship Russia, with its stinking bilge, its erratic, autocratic captain, and its semi-mutinous crew."<sup>142</sup>

Only, Talbott got it wrong. This wasn't the way Yeltsin was sailing.

A week before the Chechen adventure, the Russian President received a letter from Dmitrii Volkogonov, a Soviet general turned anti-Soviet historian and a Duma deputy (from Yegor Gaidar's reformist "Russia's Choice" faction). Volkogonov touched on what would have been obvious to any contemporary observer - the dramatic decline in the public confidence in the government. This distrust was caused by objective factors, Volkogonov explained: economic difficulties, "social, ethnic, and spiritual problems." He continued: "The public can forgive [the government] anything but its *weakness*. The great majority of the population today are the waiverers. At the decisive moment (a social spasm, if it is caused by the irreconcilable opposition [or] elections) they will 'flock' to whoever appears *strong*." Volkogonov called for pre-empting such loss of authority by taking "decisive, brave steps" to restore public confidence. This would include not a tough crackdown on crime at home but protection of Russians abroad,

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<sup>141</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton et al and Jean-Luc Dehaene et al, February 11, 1995, CPL: 2015-0755-M.

<sup>142</sup> Cited in Mary Sarotte, "How to enlarge NATO," pp. 36-37; Ronald Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 111-112.

and perhaps even moves towards future restoration of a truncated “democratic confederation” that would bring together 2-3 republics of the former USSR.<sup>143</sup>

This emphasis on “strength” and on “decisive, brave measures” from one of Russia’s leading public intellectuals of the time is, if anything, a good indication of the general sentiment among the political elites. Yeltsin’s move on Chechnya, and his shrill tone in Budapest, were not unusual in this sense: they were an effort to re-establish his credentials as a statesman, credentials tarnished by Russia’s domestic tribulations and its growing irrelevance on the international stage. It was an effort to show “strength” to the Russian public before the wavering populace flocked to some other prophet. Unfortunately for Yeltsin, the little victorious war that was supposed to restore his standing turned into a quagmire. Meanwhile, on December 21, 1994, Clinton held a meeting at the White House to confirm the move towards enlargement, regardless of Russian views.<sup>144</sup>

### **Kozyrev’s ouster**

Yeltsin’s pushback against NATO enlargement intensified in the early months of 1995 even as the bloodbath in Chechnya led to new tensions in Russia’s relationship with the West. At the same time, Moscow was beginning to revive old ties in the non-Western world that had been neglected in the heyday of Bill-Borisity. The key new area of engagement was China. Sino-Russian relations reached their nadir just as the USSR collapsed (Yeltsin in his revolutionary democrat phase saw the Chinese Communists for an enemy). But there were already upticks in the relationship by 1992 (when Yeltsin visited China). Chinese leader Jiang Zemin reciprocated in September 1994, bringing Sino-Russian relations to the level of “cooperative partnership.” Jiang had been careful to tell the Russians that there was no scope for returning to the days of the Sino-Soviet alliance and warned against thoughtless copying of the Chinese example of economic reforms but he and other Chinese leaders also played up Russia’s “greatness” in the way that Clinton rarely did.<sup>145</sup> During a September 1995 meeting with Evgenii Primakov (who then headed Russia’s foreign intelligence service), Jiang highlighted commonalities in how both Russia and China had to deal with “external forces” stoking the fires of separatism in their two countries.<sup>146</sup>

As the Chinese Ambassador in Russia Li Fenglin put it, “China want[ed] to see Russia strong. We must remain together, although we are being put under great pressure.”<sup>147</sup> This was of course pure self-interest on the part of the Chinese. In the 1970s, Beijing worked tirelessly to form a united front with the West to weaken the USSR but the shift in the global currents awakened the Chinese leaders to the importance of a stronger Russia that would keep its distance from the West. That trend, already evident in the early 1990s, became even more pronounced when the Sino-American relationship nosedived with the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995-96.

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<sup>143</sup> Letter from Dmitrii Volkogonov to Boris Yeltsin, December 3, 1994, Yeltsin Centre Archive: <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/paperwork/12616/>.

<sup>144</sup> Mary Sarotte, “How to enlarge NATO,” p. 35

<sup>145</sup> E.g. Memorandum of Conversation, Ivan Rybkin and Jiang Zemin, May 16, 1994, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 1, listy 125-131. For an account of Jiang Zemin’s Sept. 1994 visit to Moscow see Zhong Zhicheng, *Weile Shijie Geng Meihao* (Beijing: Shijie Zhishi Chubanshe, 2006), pp. 54-60. .

<sup>146</sup> Evgenii Primakov, *Vstrechi na Perekrestkakh*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>147</sup> Conversation between Yegor Stroyev and Li Fenglin, August 11, 1998, GARF: fond 10100, opis 10, delo 135, list 148.

Some of the former Soviet allies and clients, evidently encouraged by the resurfacing of anti-Western rhetoric in the political mainstream, sought to rebuild ties. The Iraqis looked to Moscow to help do away with the sanctions regime. (Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz was reassured in June 1995 that Russia would “facilitate” Iraq’s aspirations. Iraq “must see light at the end of the tunnel,” Duma Speaker Ivan Rybkin told him.<sup>148</sup> This was the same Rybkin that sought Russia’s membership in NATO on the French model - and at the very same time! In 1994 the Russians attempted to insert themselves more forcefully into negotiations surrounding North Korea’s nuclear programme by providing Pyongyang with light water reactors (they discovered, to probable chagrin, that the Clinton Administration had no intention of giving Russia a place at the table).<sup>149</sup>

The Iranians meanwhile were looking for understanding in Moscow in spite of certain frictions over Russia’s actions in Chechnya. “At one point,” Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi noted in October 1994, just weeks before Budapest, “Tehran got the impression that Russia ‘forgot’ about its neighbors and fully reoriented itself to the West. [Now] the situation is gradually improving.”<sup>150</sup> “US intervention in any region of the world always has ulterior motives,” another senior Iranian diplomat lectured the Russians in March 1995. “If Russia becomes weaker, the US will be able to do more bad things. The closer the countries of our region cooperate, the more difficult it will be for the US to reach its aims.”<sup>151</sup> Russia’s gradual rapprochement with Iran was underpinned by political factors - in part in recognition of Tehran’s crucial role in the peaceful settlement of the civil war in Tajikistan, where Russia also had high stakes - but also by the prospect of trade in high-tech technologies.<sup>152</sup> In January 1995, just weeks after Budapest, Moscow signed a \$800 million agreement with Iran to complete one unit of the Bushehr nuclear facility, triggering grave alarm in the White House.<sup>153</sup> Clinton put Yeltsin under considerable pressure to renege on selling nuclear technologies to Iran, with mixed results.<sup>154</sup>

Slobodan Milosevic never tired of reminding the Russians of the “humiliation” that they had subjected themselves to by following in the Americans’ lead in the Bosnian conflict.<sup>155</sup> And even the leaders of Slovakia, a country that was itself in line to get into NATO reassured Moscow in

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<sup>148</sup> Conversation between Ivan Rybkin and Tariq Aziz, June 6, 1995, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 12, listy 79-80.

<sup>149</sup> For Yeltsin’s offer, see Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, September 27, 1994. CPL: 2015-0782-M.

<sup>150</sup> Memcon, Vladimir Lukin and Deputy Foreign Minister of Iran Mahmoud Vaezi, October 13, 1994, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 1, list 219.

<sup>151</sup> Report on a Russian parliamentary delegation’s visit to Iran, undated (March 1995), GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 15, listy 36-45.

<sup>152</sup> On Tehran’s role in the Tajikistan talks see e.g. Evgenii Primakov, *Vstrechi na Perekrestkakh*, pp. 170-173.

<sup>153</sup> Robert J. Einhorn and Gary Samore, “Ending Russia’s Assistance to Iran’s Nuclear Bomb,” *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Summer 2002), 51-70.

<sup>154</sup> Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*, ch. 6. Also, James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose*, pp. 176-181.

<sup>155</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Ivan Rybkin and Slobodan Milosevic, August 10, 1995, GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 12, listy 95-101.



February 1995 that “Russia must maintain its position of a great power as a counterbalance to US interests.”<sup>156</sup>

The legitimacy narrative that anchored Russia firmly in the West was thus already being challenged and in many cases superseded by an alternative narrative, centred on the notion that Russia was neither a part of the West, nor even needed to join it; that Russia’s national interests often did not coincide with those of the United States, and that these interests needed to be defended with greater assertiveness than what had been the case until then. The same leaders could and often did entertain both sets of views. The question was: which of these two narratives were ultimately more viable, and it is in this context that external recognition became even more important. Russia’s own ontological security as a part of the West depended in large part on whether it was being recognized as such. If it wasn’t - that, too, was legitimating, because it helped the Russian political elites find their ground in an uncertain world, if not as friends, then at least as adversaries of the West.

The renewed emphasis on sabotaging NATO enlargement appeared in Yeltsin’s state of the union address on February 16, 1995 where he repeated that although Russia did not have a “veto” on enlargement, it “had the right to expect the recognition of its legitimate security interests.” That meant, in particular, “shifting the accents from hasty NATO enlargement to developing a partnership with Russia’s active participation.”<sup>157</sup>

Not quite a month later, Yeltsin paid a visit to the Russian Foreign Ministry, unexpectedly subjecting Kozyrev to a dressing-down.<sup>158</sup> According to one of Yeltsin’s aides, the Russian President “laid into FM Kozyrev and his staff... for conducting an uncoordinated NATO policy, which was at odds with Yeltsin’s own thinking.” Yeltsin reportedly complained that Kozyrev was trying to negotiate on the conditions on expansion, whereas “the Russian policy should remain focused on ‘whether’ Moscow could accept such expansion in the first place.”<sup>159</sup> Kozyrev recounted the outburst in his memoirs. “Who authorized that?,” Yeltsin demanded to know. “I did not. ... I want everybody here to remember that Russia - the President of Russia - is against NATO, against its enlargement, and we are not going to negotiate any terms or conditions of our agreement since we just don’t agree.”<sup>160</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Kozyrev peddled back against enlargement as hard as he could. During the talks with the visiting head of the North Atlantic Parliamentary Assembly Karsten Voigt, the Foreign Minister adopted “the most hardline position” among all officials Voigt met with, and these included hardline Duma deputies. In a meeting with Warren Christopher on March 22-23, Kozyrev declared that “even the prospect of a discussion of enlargement this spring at the NATO Ministerial (without any decision) gives him heartburn.” In his memorandum for the US President, Christopher observed how he was “struck that he [Kozyrev] is preoccupied with the domestic ‘political’ consequences rather than strategic arguments on the merits of various

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<sup>156</sup> Report on a Russian parliamentary delegation’s visit to Slovakia, undated (February 1995), GARF: fond 10100, opis 3, delo 15, listy 24-29.

<sup>157</sup> Boris Yeltsin’s Statement to the Federal Assembly, February 16, 1995, Yeltsin Centre Archives: <https://yeltsin.ru/archive/paperwork/12591/>.

<sup>158</sup> Georgy Bovt, Natalia Kalashnikova, “Poverty of Diplomacy and Diplomacy of Poverty,” *Russian Press Digest*, March 15, 1995.

<sup>159</sup> Cable, US Embassy in Moscow to the Secretary of State, March 21, 1995, CPL: 2017-0771-M.

<sup>160</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *The Firebird*, pp. 299-300.

approaches. Everything seems focused on lining up voting bloc for Russia's parliamentary and Presidential elections."<sup>161</sup>

At a Copenhagen meeting of the Trilateral Commission in April, Kozyrev reportedly "pleaded" that NATO enlargement be stopped in its tracks, "because this would spell an end to him - Kozyrev. He said that he would then be writing his memoirs in the Gulag, and that stones were already falling on his - Kozyrev's - head."<sup>162</sup>

But it was Yeltsin who made the final plea when Clinton visited him in Moscow in May 1995, during the fiftieth anniversary of the VE Day. Declaring that NATO enlargement entailed "nothing but humiliation for Russia," he asked to postpone any discussion of enlargement plans until at least year 2000. At one point he even offered unilateral security guarantees to Central and Eastern Europe to address their fears of Russia. Facing Clinton's refusal, Yeltsin pleaded to at least not talk about enlargement while Russia was in the midst of its election season (the Duma elections would take place later that year, and the Presidential - in 1996). The US President insisted that there would be no slow-down but he did not expect any real decisions on enlargement until half-way through the year in 1996. Yeltsin, after trying to push the envelope a little more, seemed finally to resign himself that enlargement was inevitable. He even briefly appeared willing to sign off on a joint statement that would mention NATO enlargement (but was talked out of it at the last moment by his aide Dmitrii Ryurikov).<sup>163</sup> Most importantly from Clinton's perspective, Yeltsin promised that Kozyrev would sign off on the Partnership for Peace later that May.

But even then Yeltsin did not give up hope to somehow stop enlargement. In the weeks after Clinton's departure, he reportedly approved a set of "theses" prepared by the deputy head of the Europe Institute Sergei Karaganov, which contained "a strategy for delaying and possibly derailing NATO enlargement, including by sowing divisions within the Alliance and appealing to opponents in public and parliaments."<sup>164</sup> In conversations with US diplomats in Moscow Karaganov argued that enlargement would "destroy US-Russian ability to work together on a variety of security issues, including START II and CFE [Conventional Forces Europe]."<sup>165</sup> Ryurikov, who privately swore at Kozyrev, calling him "an agent of American influence," now set up a group at the Kremlin that was charged to take the matter of NATO enlargement out of the Foreign Ministry's hands.<sup>166</sup>

Meanwhile, on May 24, 1995, Yeltsin called together a rare session of Russia's National Security Council, where "the military-security group," headed by Primakov, attempted one again to derail plans to sign the Partnership for Peace. Kozyrev - who was present for the occasion - recalls an urge to denounce the "neo-Soviet policy" and then to resign. He argued instead that

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<sup>161</sup> Memorandum for the President from Warren Christopher, March 23, 1995, FOIA State: M-2017-11920.

<sup>162</sup> Alexei Pushkov, "Kozyrev Loses Credibility Both at Home and Abroad," *Moscow News (Russia)*, May 5, 1995.

<sup>163</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin, May 10, 1995, CPL: 2015-0782-M.

<sup>164</sup> Memorandum from Anthony Lake to Bill Clinton, July 17, 1995. CPL: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101137>.

<sup>165</sup> Cable, US Embassy to the Secretary of State, May 19, 1995, State FOIA: M-2017-12619.

<sup>166</sup> Memorandum, Anthony Lake to Bill Clinton, July 17, 1995. CPL: <https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/101137>. On Ryurikov's relations with Kozyrev, see Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody*, p. 417.

the policy of cooperating with NATO was not his - it was Yeltsin's - and obliquely noted that it was the Russian President himself who promised Clinton that Russia would join the PfP, so the failure to sign would be tantamount to breaking a promise. The public announcement of the meeting stated that Russia would be prepared to join the PfP, subject to certain "conditions."<sup>167</sup> On May 26, Yeltsin penned a letter to Clinton, which promised once again Russia's accession to the PfP because "we are people of our word."<sup>168</sup>

There were no surprises: on May 31, Russia acceded to the Partnership for Peace but the step, in Kozyrev's later recollection, "sounded like a founding act of controlled hostility, rather than cooperation."<sup>169</sup> By then, NATO's discussion of enlargement - which, Yeltsin once incorrectly surmised, was put on the back-burner by the Partnership for Peace - was in full swing, and Russia's belated accession to the Partnership was little better than a consolation prize, after all the other prizes had already been handed out. Whether Russia would have been better off outside Partnership for Peace is a difficult question. In retrospect, proponents of a tougher approach lamented Kozyrev's agreement to join even in the face of enlargement, in particular because this agreement was later used as evidence by the proponents of enlargement that Russia would not pose an obstacle.<sup>170</sup> Karaganov, for example, argued that the push-back tactic was working: "we could've succeeded but Kozyrev deflated [slit]." Interestingly, the same Karaganov had earlier argued for Russia's membership in NATO.<sup>171</sup> Indeed, often the same people who had envisioned Russia as a key partner of the West could and did shift their view of the West, when the much-wanted partnership in NATO proved out of reach. "Pro-Western" or "anti-Western" were never solid categories. What mattered was whether being pro-Western or anti-Western yielded more political capital in the elite legitimacy discourse.

## Conclusion

This article began by depicting two broadly antagonistic historiographical views of NATO-Russian relations. It is possible to bridge the gap, or at least to bring the positions a little closer, and historians (benefiting from the inevitable cooling of emotions with the passage of years) have already begun to do just that. This article contributes to this worthwhile effort. Several points stand out. By and large, there never was any appetite among the key policy makers in Washington or indeed London and Berlin for including Russia in NATO. The reason for this was the fear that a country like Russia, if it ever became a member of NATO, would paralyse the alliance. Moscow would not be willing or capable of subordinating itself to a US-led security organization. In this sense, all the discussions about not creating new dividing lines in Europe were at best naive wishful thinking, and at worst - deliberate obfuscation, an effort to temper Russia's resentment at being thus deliberately excluded from the most important European security organization.

On the other hand, even if one accepts the reality of Russia's deliberate exclusion from NATO, despite, one might add, Moscow's repeated pleas for inclusion, does this give the Russians any ground to complain? Concerns about NATO's paralysis in case of Russia's entry were not unfounded, so including Russia risked derailing a highly successful military alliance that served

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<sup>167</sup> "Russian Security Council: Partnership with NATO linked to its Expansion," *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, May 25, 1995.

<sup>168</sup> Letter from Boris Yeltsin to Bill Clinton, May 26, 1995, State FOIA: M-2017-11655.

<sup>169</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, *The Firebird*, p. 302.

<sup>170</sup> On this point, see in particular James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, pp. 108-151.

<sup>171</sup> Note from Sergei Karaganov to the author, August 23, 2020.

Western European and American security interests by maintaining the trans-Atlantic link. Seen from this angle, one might reasonably ask why the West was expected to sacrifice its interests to satisfy Russia's demands for inclusion, or indeed endanger the long-term goal of preserving democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Russia had lost the Cold War and had no special claim to greatness. One is bound to wonder whether, if Russia had won the Cold War, they would be nearly as generous as Clinton was in seeking to include the United States in the revamped structures of the all-powerful Warsaw Pact. Probably not.

Different countries had different reasons for wanting to join NATO. Central and Eastern Europe embraced the alliance for two reasons. One was security. The Russians complained about these references to a potential threat from the East. Russia was a democracy. It, too, abandoned Communism and sought to return to the West, so, the argument went, it could not, or should not have been perceived as a threat. This is unconvincing. First, the memory of Moscow's meddling, including the invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the imposition of the martial law on Poland, was still fresh in the minds of many Eastern Europeans, so it is difficult to blame them for russophobia, even if one recognizes that sometimes they overstated their fears to make a more persuasive case for NATO membership. Second, domestic rhetoric in Russia, which on occasion held out the prospect of the restoration of the Russian Empire or, in Zhirinovskii's take, its extension to the Indian Ocean, did not help Moscow's image. One may today dismiss Zhirinovskii as an inconsequential clown but his party's astounding victory in the December 1993 elections did not inspire confidence in Russia's democratic future. Furthermore, Russia's military and security establishments were not a figment of hostile imagination; these were real forces that continued to regard NATO as an enemy, and remained profoundly skeptical of the prospects for Russo-American cooperation.

But there was more than "security" to Eastern Europe's NATO aspirations. The alliance was a status symbol, and a way of asserting one's identity as a part of the West, especially at a time when CEE membership in the European Union still seemed out of reach. Here, Moscow and its former Eastern European satellites had much in common, though the latter's hope to keep the Russians out of NATO betrayed a view that some Europeans were more European than others. Moscow's persistent and increasingly desperate push for NATO membership in 1993-94 should be understood mainly in terms of its search for recognition as an important player in the West, recognition that had purchase with the Russian political elites, irrespective of their particular political persuasions. Indeed, Yeltsin and Kozyrev sought more than just a place at the table - they wanted a place for Russia at the head of the table, right next to America's. The idea - expressed both in private musings and in talks with the US diplomats - was that Russia, by virtue of its greatness, would serve as America's most important partner in global politics.

But the Russians were just kidding themselves. No one in Washington dreamt of giving Moscow so much face. There was an expressed willingness to accommodate Russia's "legitimate interests," but the American definition of Russia's "legitimate interests" was nothing like the Russian. Furthermore, all the places near the head of the table were already occupied. The British - themselves in a search of a role in the uncertainty of the early 1990s - sought to maintain and bolster their own special relationship with the US. There were the French and the Germans, too. Yeltsin's claims to greatness were out of sync with the reality of his, and Russia's, unenviable position as impoverished supplicants of the West.

Yeltsin's effort to win US recognition of his country's importance must be understood in the context of Russia's domestic politics. Anatolii Adamishin was right to argue that in Russia, every

foreign policy move “is appraised, first and foremost, from the perspective of how it strengthens or weakens this or that domestic group.”<sup>172</sup> Yeltsin and Kozyrev saw membership in Western institutions and partnership with the US as external recognition that contributed to their domestic political legitimacy. This was especially important given the fact that the Russian leaders - like the Soviet leaders before them - suffered from a deficit of internal legitimacy. Yeltsin, true, was an elected President but in a very poorly institutionalized democracy. Moreover, he badly undermined his own democratic mandate when he unleashed tanks against the Supreme Soviet in October 1993.

But external legitimation had peculiar qualities. It is all too obvious that the Russian policy makers craved American recognition but not so obvious as who or what. Being recognized as a “friend” and a “partner” of the West was one but not the only method of legitimation; being recognized as an adversary was another. The narrative of a resurgent Russia standing up for its interests, and its allies’ interests, in the face of American resistance also had an important domestic purchase. In their days, Soviet leaders like Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev pursued both forms of legitimation. Yeltsin, after going perhaps a little too far in the direction of a partnership, peddled back furiously when he delivered his Cold Peace speech in Budapest in December 1994; henceforth, he tried to do both. His approach to cooperation with the West was inherited by Vladimir Putin, and has not substantially changed despite the Ukrainian and Syrian crises.

The problem with seeking legitimacy from an adversarial relationship with the West is that such a relationship could leave Russia entrapped in detrimental partnerships with unreliable clients. This was already manifestly obvious in the Bosnian crisis, when Moscow felt the need to defend the indefensible, like genocidal policies pursued by the Bosnian Serbs. There were other practical downsides to an anti-Western policy, including scaring countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and of Russia’s immediate neighborhood, and so undercutting Moscow’s own long-term influence in the region. This was an important factor underpinning NATO’s enlargement to the East. In other words, one can of course lament Russia’s exclusion from Europe as a deliberate act of policy but it is hard to deny that such exclusion was partly justifiable in view of Russia’s own policies, and indeed it has contributed to the legitimacy narrative of the Russian elites.

The changing fortunes of Russia’s relations with the West are sometimes linked to a changeover in the Russian Foreign Ministry. While Andrei Kozyrev - a Westernizer - was in charge, the relationship generally followed a positive trajectory (or, in the eyes of Kozyrev’s critics, the trajectory of further betrayal of Russia’s national interests), whereas when Evgenii Primakov took over, Russia turned more hostile or (depending on one’s point of view), began to act in accordance with its national interests, and relations nosedived. This is a fairly simplistic take. For a start, there were ups and downs under Kozyrev and under Primakov. Neither was particularly pro-Western or anti-Western, and both - like Yeltsin - had to keep an eye on the domestic scene and finetune their policies in ways that would appease and appeal to the elites back at home.

But more importantly, national interests were never immutable. Their content changed with the shift in the legitimacy narratives. Russia as America’s leading international partner had different national interests from Russia as America’s principal opponent in Europe. Both narratives were

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<sup>172</sup> Anatolii Adamishin, *V Raznye Gody*, p. 290.

equally viable but both required American recognition. Russia, the cliché goes, was never America's to lose. It was, though, always America's to recognize, and depending on what it was being recognized as, its own national interests could change and, in fact, did change.

Was there, or was there not a chance of Russia's integration with the West, and if there was, was it squandered? Tackling counterfactuals is a tricky business. Nevertheless, when reassessing the early 1990s, one issue looms especially large: the legacies of Cold War thinking evident in the assumption that Russia will never - or should never - join NATO because it was too big, unwieldy, and imperialistic. Realism dictated caution - maybe rightly. But it is interesting in retrospect to see three things: first, just how desperately Yeltsin sought NATO membership; second, Moscow's willingness to contemplate alternative scenarios, including, for instance, the French option; third, Yeltsin's genuine interest in strengthening pan-European security structures, i.e. the OSCE. Engaging with Russia in this way carried risks for NATO because it entailed the possibility of a certain weakening of the Western security system for Russia's benefit, and perhaps even empowering Russia in ways that it did not yet (or ever) deserve. Was the risk worth taking?

In a famous essay published in the spring of 1992 - when independent Russia was making its very first steps on the global stage - Alexander Wendt spoke about certain "practices that create and instantiate one structure of identities and interests rather than another."<sup>173</sup> Russia's identity and its national interests (these were of course related concepts) were highly malleable, and existed as two contradictory legitimacy narratives that the emergent elites could draw upon. The narrative of Russia's integration with the West was never abandoned entirely: it continued (and continues) to exist in the shadow of another narrative that sees an autocratic Russia in opposition to the West. As Anthony Lake suspected earlier than most, Russia had really gone to the bad, though in ways that Lake probably did not foresee. Both sides contributed to this parting of ways: the Russians by seeking legitimation through an adversarial relationship with the United States; the Americans - by not offering enough leeway for legitimation through a genuine and inclusive partnership. It is hard to blame the White House: they were the realists. But by being too realistic and not sufficiently idealistic at a time when they *could* have made a difference, they helped make Russia's imperialist resurgence a self-fulfilling prophecy.

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<sup>173</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 395-425.

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