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JONATHAN HASLAM

HUBRIS

The Origins of Russia's War Against Ukraine



An Apollo Book

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For Karina and Timothy, as always

"So, what was the collapse of the Soviet Union? It was the collapse of historic Russia under the name of the Soviet Union."

Vladimir Putin, 12 December 2021

"When it rains on the post-war Soviet part of the Novodevichii cemetery, it seems as if tears are pouring down the bronze or marble faces of the monuments – the scientists, the officers, the members of the party, the managers, the intelligence officers, the builders, the writers, the actors and all those who constructed and defended the Soviet Union commemorate a country that disappeared in shame, condemned and misunderstood."

Dmitry Ryurikov,
Yeltsin's national security adviser

"The belief that it was the world's sole superpower led America into one diplomatic misjudgement after another over the next three decades [from 1991]."

Sir Rodric Braithwaite, Britain's ambassador to the
Soviet Union and Russia (1988–92)

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NATO Europe 1994


Norway
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Italy
Turkey
Greece



Expanded NATO Europe 2022


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Lithuania
Denmark
Poland
Germany
Czech Republic
Slovakia
Hungary
Romania
Slovenia
Croatia
Bulgaria
Italy
Montenegro
N. Macedonia
Albania
Turkey
Greece



Russia-Ukraine, indicating Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea


R U S S I A
N E
Luhansk
Donetsk
Zaporizhia
Kherson
Crimea

Preface

You might have thought that a book about the origins of Putin's war against Ukraine is all about *them*. But, certainly in the first instance, paradoxical though it may appear, it is also about *us*. And *us* means the United States and its allies in Western Europe.

How could this be so? The Cold War ended abruptly, and the Soviet Union collapsed in on itself. The foundations of Russia's communist empire had long been unsound. And it had weathered badly. Undoubtedly pressure from the West made its continuation increasingly difficult. But we did not bring the empire down. It fell of its own accord, at our feet. And how we responded was bound to make a great deal of difference to what rose up in its place.

The situation was complicated by the fact that the states of Eastern Europe liberated from the Nazis were reconstructed in the Soviet image after the Second World War. They were now unsurprisingly not content to wait and see what would emerge, given over forty years' subjugation to Soviet rule. Russia had always been an empire, in fact if not in name; it had no experience of democracy in our meaning of the term; and not since 1928 had Russia experienced even minimally a market economy as we would understand it.

Eastern Europe, which the Germans hastily renamed Central Europe in a diplomatic gesture of respect, did not hold the

initiative, however. That lay with others, above all the country that remained the sole Superpower: the United States. But potentially also it lay with what had now become the European Union, an aspirant entity dominated by the Germans and the French. Germany reunited was distracted, however. It was preoccupied with economic and social reconstruction, so it was not in a position to create a new security architecture that would find a place for Russia. France on its own lacked heft. Britain invariably deferred to the United States. And the United States was afraid that if Western Europe reconstructed the continent along its own lines, the Americans would sooner or later be shut out.

To avert this alarming scenario, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had to be given new purpose. The former members of the Warsaw Pact – excluding Russia – were already looking for military integration with the West; something seen as more reassuring than being merely distant appendages of the European Union. An additional issue was whether former republics of the Soviet Union, which were determined to go their own way, would remain aligned with Russia, and, if so, at what cost to themselves. Ukraine, the most important of these, promptly decided on undiluted sovereignty, but also on non-alignment between Russia and the West. The problem was that neither Russia nor the United States was prepared to see this happen.

Part I

1

Pax Americana

"I think the world is counting on us today as it has in the past… And they look to America not just to engage, but to lead… We do believe there are no limits on what is possible or what can be achieved… The United States can, must, and will lead in this new century."

– Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 8 September 2010.[1]

Signs that war is imminent are unmistakeable; impossible to conceal from prying eyes. Viewed from above on 23 February 2022, beneath tell-tale clouds of smoke Russians could be seen hurriedly burning classified papers in the courtyard of their embassy in Kyiv as they prepared for evacuation. A massive cyber-attack hit Ukrainian government communications systems. At 5.30 a.m. on the following day a pre-recorded announcement from Russia's President stated that a special military operation was under way to topple the government of Volodomyr Zelensky in Ukraine.[2] The assessment of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was that he intended a speedy, two-day Blitzkrieg.[3] Later, reporting from similar sources indicated that Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) had penetrated the Ukrainian

state apparatus, which Putin believed ready to launch a coup d'état as Russian troops entered Kyiv.[4]

In Washington DC the assessment was not very different. A year later, Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland recalled that "virtually every analyst as they watched Putin get ready for this battle—and you'll remember that President Biden, Secretary Blinken, Secretary Austin began warning that Putin had this plan as far back as November of 2021. Most people predicted that if Putin invaded, he would have control of Ukraine, he would have control of Kyiv, he'd have control of the government within a matter of weeks."[5]

The briefings relied upon by the Kremlin and picked up by the Americans, however, turned out to be utterly misleading; indeed, wildly optimistic for the Russians. Women in Ukraine did not turn out to welcome their "liberators" with colourful bouquets, as some notoriously greeted the Germans in June 1941. At least one Russian-speaking grandmother in the countryside of eastern Ukraine, who had accumulated an arsenal of her own, took to shooting down Russian drones instead of ducks.[6] Meanwhile, complacent Russian military planning in northern Ukraine resulted in 40 miles of slow-moving vehicles in a queue on the main route to Kyiv. The bleak prospect of a rout then resulted in a vengeful campaign of unflinching ferocity and primeval savagery on the part of the Russians, recalling what had been inflicted on the Soviet Union by Nazis.

The halcyon days of optimism after the Cold War were long gone. Yet few, if any, seriously anticipated a war in our lifetime between two sovereign states, even on the margins of Europe. To understand why this happened and to focus purely on Vladimir Putin and his psychology is not enough, tempting as it is, even though from the outset the Russian media identified their president alone as the sole instigator of the war. His ill-tempered presence loomed over a bizarre meeting of the country's Security Council that was broadcast from the Kremlin on Russian television. Putin was seen publicly berating those officials who had evidently urged caution and wanted to avert a perilous war.

Putin as Consequence as well as Cause

One man is not an army, however. Biography, though essential, takes us only so far. There is certainly more to all of this than merely the sinister person of Putin, however powerful he had made himself. Radosław (Radek) Sikorski, Poland's former foreign minister (2007–14), can scarcely be accused of being pro-Russian. He wrote, well after Russia invaded Ukraine, that:

> Putin did not become today's Putin immediately, although the potential for violence was always there. He started as prime minister with a program of Russia's modernization with which we could live with and support. For some years he was on a convergence course with the West and was willing to spend political capital for the sake of economic integration with the European Union. After Chancellor Merkel [of Germany] told him that Poland had a veto power over Russia's association agreement with the EU, he tried to fix our relationship… But then, in 2011, when his return to the Kremlin was greeted with mass protests in Moscow and St Petersburg, he concluded that the West was trying to do to him what the West had done to Kadafi [Gaddafi]. He decided to create an alternative and rival pole of integration, the Euro-Asiatic Union, and he correctly concluded that it would not be a serious organization without Ukraine.[7]

In other words, Putin's stance was never completely rigid, even if his character was unwavering. There is much we still have to learn of his upbringing in postwar Leningrad. All we do know is that until he fixed upon a career in the KGB and was apprised of the need to succeed academically, he showed more aptitude and interest in developing his skills in martial arts than in his studies. But he was nonetheless ready to compromise when needs must. He read law at Leningrad University in spite of the urgings of his sole patron, a Judo instructor, because he was advised that this was the best route into the security services. After the collapse of

the Soviet Union, he also rapidly adjusted to the reality of capitalism red in tooth and claw. But more of this later.

Western policy certainly played a role in Putin's balance of mind and that of the inner circle around him. After all, he succeeded to the presidency of Russia back in 2000. It took him more than a decade, until 2014, to seize Crimea, and even then only in retaliation for his loss of Kyiv. And, despite doing so, the balance of power on the continent still failed to move in his direction. Putin did not finally seek to conquer Ukraine proper and topple its government until 2022. So if it were merely a matter of personal ambition, why the delay? As we have seen from the battles fought in the course of this war, it is not as though most of Russia's armed forces were in a much better condition in 2022 than they had been two decades before; morale was a good deal worse, and the Ukrainians could not believe the primitive state of Russian tanks.

The decision to resort to war is not usually taken lightly, even where the chance of success is within reach. So what exactly occurred in the years between that brought Putin to this point? What problem did he imagine that he was trying to solve? And how is it that in so doing Putin has largely carried his collaborators with him – at least those that did not flee to neighbouring states, succumb to an obscure poison, fall out of high-rise windows or die in an adventitious plane crash – even in the face of calamitous setbacks that, to say the least, call into question his judgement and that of those he has relied upon most?

The United States certainly knew that Putin identified the West as a threat. After the annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine on 20 February 2014, the National Intelligence Officer for Russia under President Barack Obama, Eugene Rumer, suggested that:

> Russia's actions in Ukraine were entirely logical, perhaps even inevitable, as an extension of Russian threat perceptions. Seen from Moscow, the rapid changes in Ukrainian

> politics – the collapse of the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych and the coming to power of a political coalition advocating Ukraine's pro-European and Euro-Atlantic orientation, including eventual membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – carried with them profound political consequences… they signalled the emergence of new threats right at its doorstep, threats that no Russian leader is likely to tolerate without a wholesale change in the country's ideology and understanding of its national security.[8]

So we are at once transported into the psychology of "threat perceptions". How real were they? Was Putin the only figure who took this view? The fact that Russia's main enemy, the United States, persistently sustained and enhanced its presence in post-Cold War Europe is not something that should be dismissed out of hand. In Moscow it very quickly became an obsessive fixation.

The best reputed National Intelligence Officer for Russia under President Reagan was Fritz Ermarth. He commented: "Putin, Putinism, and the behavior of the Putin regime are very much a product of, as a backlash to, Russian developments in the late 80s and the 90s…"[9] Ermarth always deserved to be taken seriously. Putin's rise to power is to be understood not as some whimsical act of fate but as a product of Russian conditions, which most certainly did not evolve in an international vacuum. They were intimately bound up with, and largely dependent upon relations with the West. Russia was weak and internally divided following the collapse of the Soviet Union. These events occurred well before Putin acquired a leading role in his country's foreign policy, when the country was still in turmoil after the empire unravelled.

On 24 February 2022 Putin asked why Russia had been so consistently disdained by the West for more than two decades. It was, he had no doubt, all about power and the balance of power. "The answer is clear;" Putin said, "everything is understandable and obvious. The Soviet Union at the end of the eighties in the

last century became weak and then completely collapsed." As a consequence Russia suffered "a paralysis of power". "It cost us when for some time we lost confidence in ourselves and that was it—the balance of power in the world was broken."[10] No country is more conscious of the critical importance of power than when that power has abruptly been swept away. For Putin, and he was not alone in this, loss of power fast became a fixation. And this has so often been the very point at which a state is potentially at its most menacing to immediate neighbours.

On Putin's view, it was not just the fact of the Soviet Union's sudden collapse that caused so much damage, but also the reaction to it from its former adversaries. What exacerbated defeat was the unconstrained outburst of triumphalism that the United States found so hard to resist. The élite in Washington abjured the spirit of Lord Castlereagh who made peace in 1815 by including defeated France within the new Concert of Europe; the advice of the Liberal economist Keynes to prop up Germany economically after its sudden, unexpected collapse in 1918, instead of imposing draconian reparations; or the enlightened attitude that could be summed up in Winston Churchill's wise words after the next great conflict in 1945: "In victory, magnanimity".

Matters were made worse by the fact that Russia had never been a "normal" state. It had always been an empire of some kind. The word Tsar, after all, means Caesar. Losing an entire empire at one fell swoop is a devastating blow to the self-esteem of any proud metropolis. This resonates with the Spanish, the Portuguese or the Dutch, as the rulers of the known world in earlier times. In the early 1960s France under President Charles de Gaulle grudgingly let go of an overseas empire and became a country obsessed with national prestige where even the survival of its language had to be defended to the last against the "cultural imperialism" of the Anglo-Saxons. Margaret Thatcher's war to defend and recover the Falkland Islands/Las Malvinas after Argentina's invasion in the early 1980s resonated through the home counties of England with the evocative spirit of post-imperial revenge.

Why should we expect Russia to be so different? US Secretary of Defense and former director of CIA Robert Gates, an experienced Kremlinologist, long accustomed to Russian ways, certainly understood. He put his regret on record: "The arrogance, after the collapse, of American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians in telling the Russians how to conduct their domestic and international affairs (not to mention the internal psychological impact of their precipitous fall from superpower status) had led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness."[11]

The Russian people were utterly baffled at the lightning speed with which their apparently mighty country – a cradle to the grave welfare state, however threadbare – completely disintegrated around them, to be reconstituted into an array of independent states desperate to be free of Russian control. Its trauma was made all the worse because it was a contiguous land empire. In Putin's words, "millions of Russians [who] went to sleep in one country… woke up abroad".[12] The sum total was estimated at 25 million. It left Russia's ruling class shaken as liberated nations and their sponsors in the West popped open the champagne. The Americans and their allies at long last witnessed what had always been intended to happen through four long decades of sustained sacrifice.

The objective had originally been defined in NSC-58/1, a memorandum written by George Kennan, the architect of US containment of the Soviet Union, in December 1949 when heading the all-powerful Policy Planning Staff at the US State Department. It finally bore fruit almost exactly four decades later when the Berlin Wall collapsed. The division of Germany that had scarred Europe since 1945 had finally ended, paving the way to German reunification. President George Bush ('41)* was blunt: "The Soviet

* Hereafter I have followed the current American practice of distinguishing between George Bush senior ('41) and George Bush junior ('43) by the dated sequence of US presidents.

Union did not simply lose the cold war; the Western democracies won it."[13] Not without reason the more reflective Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, under President Clinton, lamented: "America crows that it won the Cold War".[14]

Stephen Hadley became Special Advisor to President Bush ('43) for National Security Affairs on 26 January 2005. He never laid claim to be a Russia specialist. Yet Hadley, too, came to see clearly the fundamental nature of the problem, even if it did not attenuate his recommendations when in office:

> This humiliation narrative, this fall from power, this lack of respect, it's in Putin's perceptions, but it's also in the perceptions of the Russian people. And when people many times overstate how much Russian foreign policy is Putin's policy, and how much is he reflecting actually the impulses, the anxieties, the frustrations, the sense of loss of respect, of humiliation of the Russian people, I think you have to see Putin as someone who is, yes, shaping public opinion in Russia, but also reflecting public opinion in Russia. And to simply say the problem with US-Russian relations is just about Putin is a very inadequate explanation.[15]

Hadley had it right, at least in retrospect, though not at the time. Voices from Moscow have consistently confirmed as much. "With the end of the Cold War", *Nezavisimaya gazeta* recently pointed out, "the West decided that the former approach to international relations through the prism of geopolitical interests was over. The world must be constructed by asserting universal values important for all: human rights, the struggle with climate change, freedom of trade and the universal extension of the appropriate institutions." This has not worked, however. "The fundamental mistake is based on the impression that the West in its role as victor of the Cold War would decide not only the rules of the game but as victor of the self-same game; if one cannot for some reason win by the rules."[16]

"Forgive and forget" does not generally happen for generations unless an entirely new and greater common threat has suddenly emerged to blot out the past. It would be well to remember this unpleasant truth about the relations between states.

The collapse of the Soviet Union as a Superpower marked a stunning victory for liberalism globally, an unintended and unanticipated gift to the capitalist order. But it also brought its own problems. In Russia the black market became *the* market, never entirely disconnected from organized crime even if across the rest of the world it inaugurated an era of extraordinary opportunity for those with access to ready capital. For the first time since 1914 the world market was restored and the USA was the country in the best position to benefit from it. Was it not inevitable that the Americans, the Soviet Union's main rivals who had invested so much treasure and shed so much blood in the destruction of communism, would seek to dominate at every turn in the aftermath? Perhaps. But was it also inevitable that the United States would seek to move bag and baggage into the Soviet sphere of influence and, indeed, onto former Soviet soil in what became known as "the near abroad", when Russia had packed up and was on the point of leaving? Those Americans who were engaged in this enterprise knew exactly what they were doing. The US government was made keenly aware at every stage of the negative impact on Russia of NATO expansion to the East. Indeed, it acted consistently against the best specialist advice within and outside government, most notably in the teeth of strong opposition from the hitherto mighty Pentagon.

Attitudes towards Russia were mostly dismissive, enough to appal Clinton's second Secretary of Defense, mathematical physicist Bill Perry, a veteran of the Cold War since the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. When those in the administration repeatedly heard that the Russians objected to US policy, Perry reports that the dismissive response was: "What could they do about it?"[17] It had evidently not occurred to those who derided Russia as of no account what trouble the former enemy, wounded but still

alive, could cause; what humiliation would do to those managing Russian foreign policy, nostalgic for past prestige, who had to answer to an elected legislature voted into place by a massively disillusioned, bewildered and disgruntled populace.

It might be said that most victorious states would have behaved in the same way as the United States did. Machiavelli implies as much in *The Prince*, on the assumption that most men "are not good".[18] In the American case, however, it was a little more complicated. And this leads us down into the rabbit warren of US domestic politics in the 1990s, following the decisions of one insecure and distracted president preoccupied with gaining a second term – Bill Clinton – through to an even more indecisive president, George Bush ('43), frightened of making bad judgements and answering to dominant and more experienced neo-conservative elders arguably possessed of no greater wisdom. It is here in Washington DC that reasons of state meet and dissolve in the face of opinion expressed through Congress; so much so that any notion of a foreign policy freely conducted by the executive as a rational response to external conditions – much beloved of conventionally minded political scientists wedded to "rational actor theory" – is to say the least an idealization of grim realities.

For these reasons the war in Ukraine has to be seen in the context of the tension that re-emerged between Russia and the West with the assertion of US global hegemony and the failure to design a post-Cold War security architecture in Europe. It helps explain an intriguing and sobering paradox: why, once Russia finally invaded Ukraine in 2022, and in spite of well publicized atrocities by Russian forces, equal to those committed in Syria and the remnants of Yugoslavia, almost to a man Putin's administration, including all but one of his entire diplomatic corps, fell in lock step behind him despite deep personal misgivings about the resort to war. And it was almost certainly not just from fear for personal safety, though that was and is real enough, because even under Stalin at his most brutal in the late 1930s, diplomats and intelligence officers defected to the West, even when they

were terrified for their own survival and that of their families back home. Only former generals and retired colonels spoke out in condemnation, led by rabid nationalist Leonid Ivashov, driven into early retirement by Putin back in 2001 at the age of 57.

When war broke out, a credible witness at the very centre of events, Andrei Kortunov, General Director of the semi-official Council for International Affairs, acknowledged that many of his colleagues in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at Smolenka were, like him, "totally astonished, shocked and stunned".[19] However shaken, the Ministry none the less supported the war in the firm belief that the West had long ago turned its back on Russia at the time of its greatest vulnerability, in order to expand into the countries of the former Soviet Union, its "near abroad".

We have, therefore, to explain how it came about that interminable difficulties in East-West relations underpinned Putin's war, however hard this is to comprehend. What, then, were the turning points down this road to perdition?

The sudden and unexpected declaration of former President Clinton that it was, indeed, he who from the outset had initiated the expansion of NATO to the East is of considerable significance; particularly given the additional claim that the war against Ukraine showed just how farsighted he had been. This assumes of course that NATO's eastern enlargement had played no role in what Russia had become and what it did in 2022, which, of course, Clinton had necessarily to deny.

"Lately," Clinton asserted on 10 April 2022, "NATO expansion has been criticized in some quarters for provoking Russia and even laying the groundwork for Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The expansion certainly was a consequential decision, one that I continue to believe was correct."[20] Former Secretary of State Warren Christopher comfortably took the same view: "the historical record ought to give Clinton a lot of credit for NATO expansion. It would not have happened without him, and it would not have happened nearly as rapidly without his pushing it."[21] "I think", added Deputy Secretary of State Talbott, "that perhaps

– not entirely objectively – that having our cake and eating it too with regard to NATO enlargement and the NATO-Russian partnership was one of the important accomplishments of the Clinton presidency."[22] But gluttony invariably has unpleasant consequences, as we all know; if not immediately, then not long thereafter, which was surely true in this particular instance.

Condoleezza Rice served as Special Advisor to the President on National Security and later Secretary of State to President Bush ('43). Confronted with the disaster of Putin's war on Ukraine, she indecently hastened to acquit herself and, indeed, it seems, everyone else in Washington DC, of being even remotely at fault in the handling of post-Soviet Russia. At the Aspen security forum, where the like-minded gather for mutual reassurance, in July 2022 Rice confidently dismissed all doubt, asserting that "everyone from the Clinton administration to the Bush administration, to the Obama administration, to the Trump administration did everything possible to try to integrate Russia into the international system".[23]

Really? Distance certainly lends enchantment. The dispassionate observer might be forgiven for thinking that perhaps Rice protests too much. The expansion of NATO, the most important innovation of US foreign policy in those years, scarcely enhanced Russia's integration into the international system; indeed, the Russians vehemently objected to it, repeatedly and for one very simple reason. It left Russia firmly out in the cold, against every assurance, assurances that were repeated time and again. Amid the embarrassing chorus of self-serving justification there was only one glaring exception: former Foreign Minister of France Roland Dumas, who did not hesitate to remind us that back in the days of German reunification: "The West had promised that NATO would not extend to Russia's doorstep."[24]

It is thus not as though Clinton and Rice were never warned. Because no war of this kind ever appeared likely on their watch, they blithely assumed such an outcome was never possible; and not for want of repeated misgivings expressed by

European statesmen. Had not that same complete lack of imagination as to the threat posed by al-Qaeda exposed the United States to 9/11? French President Jacques Chirac reminded the Americans more than once that, although Russia had swallowed much without striking out, there could well be adverse consequences down the road: "the future is very long", he cautioned. No one could plausibly claim that the Russia policy of these administrations met with universal acclaim or easy acceptance even within the United States or among its closest allies; and certainly not among those best acquainted with the Soviet Union as an adversary, whether in or out of government. America's best known and most authoritative Russianist was George Kennan, the originator of containment, the strategy to block Soviet expansion across the postwar world; he later held a Chair at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. At the beginning of 1997, by which time it was already too late, having lobbied incessantly those he knew in government to no avail, Kennan went public with the argument that "expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era". He predicted that "Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking." Kennan added "It is, of course, unfortunate that Russia should be confronted with such a challenge at a time when its executive power is in a state of high uncertainty and near-paralysis."[25]

Although invariably Olympian in his judgements, Kennan was by no means unique in his objections. The dramatic, public advice against "a policy error of historic proportions" was repeated on 26 June in the strongest terms by means of an open letter addressed to Clinton by fifty former senators, ambassadors and civil servants. Prominent among them were former Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the hard-nosed Sam Nunn, former

ambassadors to Moscow Arthur Hartman and Jack Matlock, who advised Reagan, former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Eisenhower's notoriously Machiavellian national security adviser Bob Bowie, and Reagan's trusted arms control negotiator and the author of NSC/68, the blueprint for the militarization of the Cold War with the creation of NATO in 1950, that wily survivor Paul Nitze.[26] Even as hard-headed an analyst such as Tony Lake, the Special Advisor to the President for National Security under Clinton, acknowledged Russia's "psychological trauma".[27] The former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, invariably a Pole at heart, was unperturbed and stood apart from the rest: utterly dismissive of what he contemptuously derided as "misguided psychotherapeutic theories regarding how to deal with the Russians".[28] Yet even he argued for a far more limited expansion of NATO than actually occurred.

Moscow Reassured by Word of Mouth Alone

The fact that while the Soviet Union was still visibly crumbling the Russians were promised authoritatively that NATO would not expand to the East has been repeatedly denied; and these promises have been cloaked and muffled in a veritable fog of evasion, half-truths and equivocation.[29] Russia subsequently published an embarrassingly long laundry list of the empty assurances given at various times by the great and the good.[30] On 2 February 1990 German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher outlined German plans for reunification to Gorbachev, letting him know that "NATO would not extend its territorial coverage to the area of the GDR [East Germany] nor anywhere else in Eastern Europe". Taking the lead, a week later, on 9 February 1990, Secretary of State Jim Baker told Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze that, following German reunification, there would be "iron-clad guarantees that NATO's jurisdiction or forces would not move eastward". Mikhail Gorbachev was assured later in the afternoon

that "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east" if Germany reunified.[31] On the following day Chancellor Kohl told Gorbachev: "We consider that NATO must not expand its sphere of action. We need to find a reasonable way of regulating this. I fully understand the Soviet Union's security interests…" On 6 March John Major, Britain's Prime Minister, was more explicit: he "does not foresee conditions currently or in the future under which the East European countries could be in NATO". Only President Mitterrand of France, inveterately suspicious by nature, disrupted the earnest chorus of reassurances. After a conversation with Gorbachev on 6 May, he noted that he could foresee former members of the Warsaw Pact signing up with NATO. But he warned that this would "reinforce a sense of isolation, encirclement even, in the Soviet Union. I am certain that such a direction would not be right for Europe."[32]

With understandings in place, on 23 August 1990 German reunification was settled between the interested powers. The Soviet government – now on its last legs – had tried to insert a clause precluding a united Germany's membership of NATO but Gorbachev, by now worn to the bone, gave up the idea as unrealistic. None the less the Russians remained nervous at the likely long-term consequences of reunification. Lt General Brent Scowcroft was Special Assistant for National Security to President Bush ('41). He acknowledged that even membership of NATO by a reunited Germany was "the Soviet Union's worst nightmare"[33]; let alone further expansion of NATO to the East. Of course, nothing "iron-clad" was ever formulated on paper, let alone by treaty.

The multiple reassurances were, however, never forgotten by the Russians. Every new accession to NATO came as a needling reminder of what had been so sincerely promised and so casually tossed away. Russia felt it had been stood up at the altar with not even a ring to prove it had been there. Inevitably trust was severely undermined and this gap between word and deed inevitably undercut the US-Russian relationship. Seven years later the fact that previous undertakings had been broken

was raised by Moscow when negotiating the establishment of a NATO-Russia Council with the Americans. Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, who had been head of foreign intelligence in 1990, not surprisingly insisted that any new agreement between the two parties be legally binding, unlike the previous undertakings on NATO expansion.[34] Moscow's persistent demands on this point took fully into account the fact that US administrations had shown that they did not feel bound by commitments entered into by their predecessors when they were not in writing, let alone those not ratified by the Senate.

Indeed, it was in recognition of such concerns that at a meeting in Brussels in May 1990 NATO's Secretary General, the former German Defence Minister Manfred Wörner, had announced the "main objective in the next decade", which "will be the construction of a new European security structure encompassing the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The Soviet Union will play a significant role in the construction of this system. If you take into account the Soviet Union's current dilemma, having in effect no allies any longer, then one can understand their reasonable desire not to be pushed out of Europe."[35] The image of integration was beguiling, and the European partners in NATO seemed to be reliable guarantors. In March 1991, for example, Genscher reminded Baker that "At the 2+4 negotiations [between West and East Germany plus the Soviet Union, the United States, France and Britain] the Soviet Union was given to understand that there is no intention of NATO expanding to the East."[36] In conversation with the German permanent representative to NATO, Hans von Ploetz, a month later, Wörner explained the situation in Russia. The fear in Moscow was that even acceptance of NATO's continuation over the long term would strengthen Gorbachev's opponents. And Wörner, in talks with the Russians, had "already made clear that NATO was not seeking a change in the balance of power or enlargement of the military boundaries to the East".[37]

In May a Franco-German conference of ambassadors reviewed

the situation. Klaus Blech, Germany's ambassador to Moscow, pointed to "the development of a new security problem" that was not so much objective as it was rooted in the Russian "state of mind": the belief that matters had been allowed to slide over the past two years. "For the future it is important for the west that the Soviet Union does not turn back on its way to Europe", he insisted. The danger that it would lurch into isolation was real. "The outlook is for a truly nationalistic greater Russia with the collapse of the Soviet Union." [38]

Meanwhile the states of Eastern Europe were undergoing an identity crisis. Looking to the distant past provided few guidelines, in that the problem of national minorities had plagued the region. These were not homogenous nation states from 1919.[39] Far from it, the existence of German minority populations, for example, had presented Adolf Hitler with ready opportunities to pursue a strategy of divide and conquer. In 1939–40 and later in 1945 Stalin had redistributed territory in the region to Russian, Byelorussian and Ukrainian advantage, no doubt calculating that maintenance of the new order would rest on Moscow's enforcement.

One clear sign of Russian insecurity was a clumsy proposal echoing the Rapallo Pact of 16 April 1922 put forward by Foreign Minister Alexander Bessmertnykh, an Americanist by training and now a deeply resentful nationalist. He made a pass at the Germans, suggesting the creation of a firmly rooted alignment – "*Kernlinie*" – between the two countries without which, he claimed, Europe could have no future, but with it, the two could become "a significant factor in world politics".[40] Such seductive suggestions were, of course, precisely why Germany's allies were so insistent on it remaining at the centre of NATO and why Germany was so committed to that reassurance. But the approach was not as odd as it might seem at first sight. The Germans never assumed that the Americans would remain in Europe. When he visited St Petersburg in 1991, Chancellor Kohl met the young Vladimir Putin at the Mayor's office, then heading its department for foreign relations. Putin asked for his perspective on the

future of relations between Germany and Russia. Kohl said that in twenty to thirty years China and India would be strong and the United States would be going its own way.[41]

Nothing, however, could have been further from White House thinking. And its consequences for the future of Russia were momentous. Himself a thorough-going realist, Secretary of State Baker's counsellor Robert Zoellick recalls that none of those managing US foreign policy ever had any intention of working with the Russians. The Secretary was instead, as Machiavelli would have expected, intent on drawing maximum short-term advantage: "in Baker's terms, kind of gather what you could, put it in your basket while you can".[42] Which was, of course, exactly the opposite of what Baker had led the Russians to believe he would do. Indeed, on 9 February 1990 he had purposefully assured Gorbachev that "neither the President nor I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place".[43] The deception continued for over a decade. And Gorbachev, desperately clutching at straws, was trusting enough to believe that the Americans were sincere.

Under Bush, the West Divided

Not that NATO was of one mind. What emerges from declassified archives and direct testimony is that, from the outset, the allies were divided as to what should be the best future course of action. Germany struck out in one direction, the US administration in another. The resourceful and ever-confident German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had no doubt that a solution to the security issues could be found "with a bit of European imagination". He took the view that the former satellite states of the Soviet Union would very soon become members of the European Economic Community. Russia was not likely to object. The situation with respect to NATO, however, even as to "the little East European countries", was entirely another matter.

Their membership "would severely irritate Moscow, which was in no one's interest". Instead, he had assured the Czech Foreign Minister, Jiři Dienstbier, that the Soviet Union would be integrated "as an equal partner in a European security structure" (*Friedensordnung*) while the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would join pan-European institutions ("also not NATO") for their security. The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which harked back to the Helsinki declaration in 1975, seemed a convenient vessel for that purpose. It would become an organization in its own right. "It is very important for Moscow", Genscher continued, "that a satisfactorily integrated security policy is found for Poland and for the Czechoslovakian Socialist Republic outside NATO, otherwise there would be too great a fear that republics leaving the Soviet Union would also want to join NATO. The USSR would never accept this."[44]

On this matter Germany and France were agreed, initially at least. The Americans, however, felt slighted at this vision of an exclusive post-Cold War European order that threatened to shut them out. But early American attempts to hijack the process were not appreciated. At a routine NATO meeting, the former French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas vividly recalls, President Bush ('41) confidently suggested that he deliver a speech about the future of the alliance: the transformation of NATO into a more universal body for defence against the sum of all dangers to the world. The French President bristled at anything even remotely suggesting that NATO take on commitments "out of area". He could barely contain his fury. "If you wish to change it [NATO], we would need an additional meeting", Mitterrand said, "a big conference with it up for discussion. But we do not want to give our agreement today, just like that, off the cuff [*à la sauvette*]… Are you out to recreate the Holy Alliance?"[45] He added: "If you wish to modify the Treaty, let us summon a peace conference, if you like; we're ready. But today, given how things are, it is something that hasn't been discussed; it looks too much like reviving the Cold War. Out of respect for the President of the United States, we won't

vote against; we will abstain."[46] With that, the French effectively kicked the ball firmly into touch.

It is telling that no such conference ever took place. Instead Bush, undaunted, eventually confronted Mitterrand in person over what divided them. The airing of French objections at the US attempt to bolster NATO led everyone to suspect that they would have preferred the Americans to leave Europe altogether, Bush suggested. After all, France under General Charles De Gaulle had abandoned the integrated military structure of NATO in 1966 precisely to escape American control over its defence planning. President Lyndon Johnson had promptly moved NATO bag and baggage out of Paris and deposited it outside Brussels, also leaving France at the tail end of intelligence sharing.

For his part Mitterrand did not hold back from attacking Bush: "Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, I haven't understood the reasons why you're trying to give NATO a new content. At the time that the threat of war is receding, it seems you want NATO's mission to expand. Why is this? You never discussed it with us. What does the US want more [of] than it had before?" Taken aback and tongue tied, Bush lapsed into a stunned silence. Baker's hastily scrambled, inarticulate improvisation to cover for the president scarcely rang true.[47]

Behind it all lurked the undeniable fact that the ultimate aim of rolling back the Russians from their postwar occupation of Central and Eastern Europe had finally been achieved. The "Defense Planning Guidance" drafted by Under Secretary for Policy Paul Wolfowitz and issued under Secretary Dick Cheney's hawkish and watchful eye at the Pentagon found it deeply reassuring that "for the foreseeable future the continued fragmentation of the former Soviet state and its conventional armed forces have altered so fundamentally the character of the residual threat as to eliminate the capacity to wage global conventional war or even to threaten East/Central Europe without several months of warnings."[48]

The anomaly, however, was that the Americans were

determined to remain in Europe come what may, even where no apparent need could be found. Once the daunting threat from Soviet military power collapsed, the rationale for NATO as a standing alliance, an historical anomaly by any standard, was hard to sustain. It was the resolute determination of the United States to hold fast regardless that requires explanation, as much as the adverse Russian reaction to it.

On 8 March 1990, with German reunification on the horizon, Mitterrand was invited to lunch at the White House. Brent Scowcroft, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, was "looking for some kind of initiative that they [the Americans] could launch to justify their role in the new Europe. They are worried at the prospect of their military presence becoming unjustifiable."[49] He was certainly not alone. The United States permanent representative to NATO, Robert Hunter, a veteran of Washington DC, once pointed out that allowing the US to leave would have been a disaster for American interests. "In fact, we'd gotten to the point where we couldn't withdraw from Europe without doing fundamental damage to ourselves. Economically, as much as anything. On the economic side, during the Cold War, the strategic glue helped us over economic problems. Since the end of the Cold War, economic glue has helped us over strategic problems, because we have a three trillion dollar annual relationship, we can't damage that."[50] This was also how Britain's Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd saw matters. The veteran *Washington Post* journalist Michael Dobbs took the view that "Supporters see NATO enlargement as critical to preserving the institution that has guaranteed an American presence in Europe for the past half-century."[51] Note his choice of terms: not guaranteed the peace, but guaranteed a US "presence".

All was not lost, however. Scowcroft had a solution in mind: "We need to create a political framework that would enable us to justify our military presence despite the absence of an enemy."[52] And what would become of NATO? As of 1993 Clinton's incoming Secretary of State Warren Christopher worried about the alliance

"decaying", given that the very reason for its existence had disappeared.[53] This was also very much the preoccupation of Tony Lake, Scowcroft's feline successor at the White House, who talked Clinton into unveiling an ambitious international agenda that dwarfed his predecessor's idea of an out-of-area adjunct to the alliance. Deputy Under Secretary for Defense Walter Slocombe took one determined step further. The end of the Soviet Union did not pose "the familiar problem of averting or containing or reversing a threatening development, but of how to make use of an opportunity".[54]

For their part, at that moment the Russians had no time to fret much about the external world. They had an overwhelming array of tasks to undertake at home, and in foreign trade they tended to wait for their former partners to come to them. Russia made a great mistake in not re-engaging with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as equals, at the very least to renew pre-existing trade arrangements, now that the Warsaw Pact had dissolved and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) along with it. A vacuum enveloped relations with Eastern Europe at a seminal moment in Russia's economic and political regeneration that was entirely to its disadvantage.[55]

Moreover, Russia seriously underestimated the massive reputational damage inflicted by Gorbachev's bloody attempted coup in Lithuania in January 1991, which had the immediate effect of driving the Balts, and not only them, in the direction of NATO.[56] In Czechoslovakia Václav Havel, the heroic dissident of Charter 77, the anti-communist resistance in Czechoslovakia, was now president of his country. He complained to the Germans that the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact left Czechoslovakia in a vacuum without being a part of NATO. This baffled the Germans, given that the threat had disappeared. Berlin was thus completely unreceptive. Officials at the Auswärtige Amt were insistent that the Czechs should understand the "damaging" impact of their complaint on "conservative political and military circles in Moscow" and that "without the involvement of the Soviet Union security

in Europe can only be confrontational and not co-operative".[57] Germany thus fully understood the state of mind in Moscow. But was anyone listening?

Entirely in character, Havel ignored the German plea to move carefully on Russia. Instead he continued to insist that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe "do not feel themselves to be part of Russia's sphere of interest, of its 'near abroad', and they are upset by certain sounds which have of late been heard in relation to Russia's foreign policy to the effect that there should be more specific relations between our countries and Russia, and so forth".[58] Invited to a high level meeting at NATO in the autumn Havel drew the obvious conclusion that his hosts were not ready for: "We would like some sort of institutionalisation of relations with NATO and would accept some form of associate membership." At which point Secretary Baker, caught off guard, stepped in awkwardly to blurt out that he was "not sure it [NATO] will go so far".[59] Havel therefore had to await a change of administration in Washington DC before his project could be realized. He had as yet little or no public support for this. At that time only 36 per cent of the Czechoslovakian population backed the idea of joining NATO, and even after entry the number did not rise above 56 per cent.[60]

Moreover, it is not as if leading Russians failed to discharge a warning shot across the bows of NATO. On 14 December 1992 at a meeting of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Russia's frustrated young Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, startled the assembled company with a satirical rendition of policy were the communist and ultra-nationalist opposition to come to power:

> First: while fully maintaining the policy of entry into Europe, we clearly recognize that our traditions in many respects, if not fundamentally, lie in Asia, and this sets limits to our rapprochement with Western Europe. We see, along with some degree of evolution, essentially unchanged strategies

> on the part of NATO and the WEU [West European Union], which are drawing up plans to reinforce their military presence in the Baltic and other regions on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and to interfere in Bosnia and the internal affairs of Yugoslavia. Clearly sanctions against the SRY [Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia] were dictated by this policy. We demand that they be lifted, and if this does not happen, we reserve our right to take the unilateral measures necessary to defend our interests, especially since they cause us economic damage. In its present struggle the Government of Serbia can count on the support of Russia as a Great Power.
>
> Second: the lands of the former Soviet Union cannot be seen as a space for the complete application of CSCE norms. Essentially, this is a post-imperial space, in which Russia has to defend its interests, using all available means, both military and economic. We shall strongly insist that the former republics of the USSR join without delay the new Federation or Confederation, and there will be tough negotiations about this.
>
> Third: all those who think that they can disregard these distinctive features and interests, or that Russia will undergo the fate of the Soviet Union, should not forget that we are talking of a state capable of standing up for itself and its friends. We are of course, ready to play a constructive part in the work of the CSCE Council, although we shall be very cautious in our approach to ideas leading to interference in internal affairs.[61]

A stunned silence descended. Everyone stared at their shoelaces; no one quite knew what to say. But in the end Kozyrev was easily dismissed as a lightweight, a diplomatic *ingénu*, at a mere forty years of age barely halfway upstairs. His ruse did not go down well. It simply left a bad taste in the mouth. The text was not even published in the Russian press. It could, however, easily

have been penned by Putin on assuming power nearly a decade later. Predictably the warning, like the many others to come, went unheeded.

The Clinton Administration

That such omens were casually dismissed most certainly had nothing to do with the intelligence of those targeted. There were other reasons. Clinton had absolutely no sense of direction in foreign policy. He had little more at his disposal than parting words from Bush ('41) that he should seize the initiative and prevent the United States from drifting into self-imposed isolation. The US mission, Bush declared, was to further the cause of democracy across the globe. "The advance of democratic ideals reflects a hard-nosed sense of our own American self-interest", he had insisted. "Strategically, abandonment of the worldwide democratic revolution could be disastrous for American security."[62] This was to be the mantra of the next two decades.

Clinton's drift in foreign policy was not allowed to continue indefinitely. "In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union", notes Eric Edelman, then Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, "… there was this search for… the animating principle of US foreign policy."[63] Predictably, after nearly a year in office, Clinton echoed his successful predecessor and embraced "the concept of enlarging the world's free community of market democracies as a major organizing principle of American foreign policy". Specifically, the ultimate objective was a "common European-Atlantic system" at the end of "an evolutionary process that potentially embraces Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Europe".[64] Of course no Europeans, East or West, were invited to offer a considered opinion on their fate, or to clarify the part they were destined to play in this grandiose vision of American hegemony.

The problem had less to do with this grand design inspired by

Jefferson's Empire of Liberty – a bold declaration of policy not yet operational – than with who exactly was to decide upon the details of its construction, and how others were to be convinced of the need for it. Meanwhile, following their self-imposed retreat to their 1921 borders, the Russians had ceased to be an immediate, credible, conventional military threat to the security of Western Europe, even though their thermonuclear arsenal still matched that of the United States. And mutual annihilation was never a credible option. The plain fact was that as soon as Russian armed forces had moved out of Germany, any sense of urgency about reassuring Moscow of NATO's benign intentions quickly evaporated.

During the election campaign Clinton had eagerly seized the opportunity to lambast Bush for not intervening in the crumbling state of Yugoslavia to forestall "ethnic cleansing" (a euphemism for genocide). A vicious war of secession had broken out, pitting Serbs against Croats and Bosnians. Yet the President had won office largely because the Democrats focused on domestic problems, not those of other countries—and he therefore gave little priority to Russia's rehabilitation. The Clinton strategy was brilliantly encapsulated in 1992 by the Democrats' witty strategist James Carville with a catchy quip that he hung on a board in the campaign headquarters at Little Rock. It resonated like no other throughout the campaign: "The economy, stupid." This, insisted Leon Panetta, chief of staff from June 1994, was "more than a campaign statement. It reflected what the president wanted to focus on… He really cared about domestic issues."[65] After the inauguration the board may have gone, but its sentiments still prevailed.

The US economy had, after all, just emerged from recession, and President Yeltsin "was clearly anxious… that the US might take its eye off Russia due to its economic challenges… at home", as Clinton's adviser Tony Lake noted.[66] The massive military build-up by President Reagan in the 1980s designed to intimidate the Soviet Union had sacrificed good housekeeping in public finances to excess borrowing for an avaricious defence budget. The options

now of cutting defence and assisting Russia were entirely complementary. The American population, however, looked to enjoy the benefits of victory in the Cold War: a peace dividend to reward them for their sacrifices in the form of excessive taxes and high public debt. In that event, how much would be available to help Russia? And what might happen if in the end they decided not to do so? Indeed, was foreign policy a priority?

The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Slocombe, was certainly right in his judgement of the impact made by the end of the Cold War and the advent of the Clinton presidency: "As a consequence of this massive change in the world, Bill Clinton expected to be the first [US] president since Herbert Hoover who would not need to be preoccupied with foreign and security problems."[67] Joan Baggett, the Assistant to the President for Political Affairs, a no-nonsense activist who hailed from rural Alabama and had forged close ties with industrial trades unions, made a revealing comment that reached the press: "Presidents do get a foreign policy bug. We'll just have to make sure he [Clinton] doesn't succumb to it."[68] Soon after the inauguration, in February 1993, for the *New York Times* Thomas Friedman reliably reported the following:

> During a meeting of the President's top economic advisers last week, the Deputy Budget Director, Alice M. Rivlin, was describing areas of the country that would be affected by the withdrawal of a Federal timber subsidy when she found herself being corrected by President Clinton over which trees were found where.
>
> A short time later, Mr. Clinton's top foreign policy advisers were gathered in the Roosevelt Room poring over a map of Bosnia, in a nearly four-hour session intended to establish the Administration's policy for the Balkans, its first major foreign-policy initiative. The President did not correct anyone about details on Bosnia. He did not attend.[69]

The compass thus pointed towards a foreign policy drifting along on cruise control.

Moreover, Russia had effectively all but disappeared over the horizon. Its dire condition did not prompt the delivery of timely economic assistance on anywhere near the scale commensurate with the immense size of the former Soviet Union and its problems; if anything the opposite was the case. Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, summoned to Warsaw to help the Polish transition to capitalism on the strength of his experience with Bolivian debt relief, recalls the startling contrast between the Bush administration's eagerness to forgive post-Communist Poland what it owed and its stubborn resistance even to consider the idea for the former Soviet Union. The "grand bargain" worked out by Sachs and his Harvard colleagues based on the Polish model was discarded. And whereas one could plausibly argue that at least in dealing with Poland one was turning the pumpkin back into the coach it had once been, with respect to Russia, where no one alive had direct experience of living under capitalism, the task was much greater: that of turning a pumpkin into a coach for the first time.[70]

Deputy finance ministers from the leading economies (G-7) had arrived in Moscow on the eve of the Soviet collapse at the invitation of Gorbachev's leading economic reformer, Yegor Gaidar, in November 1991. But Bush showed little interest, as he was facing new elections. Deputy Secretary of State Larry Eagleburger told Sachs bluntly in March 1992 that an economic plan to freeze Russia's debt or anything else to help the Russians was just not going to happen. To make matters worse, in Russia itself the reformists took Sachs's advice only *à la carte*. They eliminated controls over prices but carried on subsidizing production and printing more money to pay for it: a recipe for runaway inflation. They also failed to deregulate energy or foreign trade—which opened up enormous possibilities for corrupt personal enrichment, from which those in the right place at the right time (like Putin in St Petersburg) could benefit.

Persuaded to stay on in Moscow after Clinton won the

presidential election in the United States, Sachs found the attitude of the new administration no different. Those who advised on Russia, like Strobe Talbott, had no understanding at all of economics; and those at the top of the Department of the Treasury, such as Larry Summers, knew next to nothing of Russia. The atmosphere was one of drift. Alarmed by rising opposition in the Duma, Yeltsin then called a halt to the policy of "shock therapy". It had resulted in massive short-term inflation when prices were allowed to find their market level while the Central Bank pumped out money to keep production afloat.[71]

How was the Clinton White House seen by Russia's pro-Western Foreign Minister? The best that could be said was that America's attitude appeared to be one of benign indifference. It was, Kozyrev recalled, "a friendly but self-centred administration".[72] Clinton was seen as weak, unable to deliver what Russia so desperately needed. The rhetoric on aid to Russia was never matched by deeds.[73] An early indication of his lack of interest in Russia was that when Clinton received an enthusiastic invitation from President Yeltsin to visit Moscow, to the dismay of the Russians he had to be pressed into it, and did not make the trip until he had been in office an entire year, in January 1994.[74] At a summit held nowhere near troubled Europe but in mellow Vancouver, Clinton committed merely $1.6 billion to Russia while simultaneously pressing Yeltsin to accept stronger economic sanctions against Yugoslavia, when he knew full well that their cost to the Russian economy ran "into the billions".[75] This kind of chronically inconsistent thinking was a tell-tale sign that neither Clinton nor his closest advisers ever kept their eyes on the Russian problem when the time was still ripe. The President was also, at a personal level, far too easily distracted.

In the words of Kozyrev, Yeltsin "knew well that Russia needed substantial assistance from the West for a successful transformation [of the economy]". It depended on Clinton. Here Yeltsin had serious doubts as the American president was seen as a "foreign policy lightweight" focused on the domestic front and unable

to deliver what Russia needed.[76] Kozyrev explains: "Yeltsin… denounced the IMF's demand that Russia freeze fuel prices and wages, arguing that such a move, besides being a political death knell, would trigger a general price rise. Because even meeting milder demands, as a condition for receiving assistance, estimated at $24 billion, couldn't be achieved without serious assistance in place to do so, a vicious circle was promptly created, effectively blocking any large-scale material aid. The highly publicized 'helping hand' of the United States and its allies in the interest of strengthening democracy in Russia degenerated into little more than empty and humiliating talk, and gave the opposition in parliament and the executive bureaucracy an opportunity to gloat over the clumsy failures of the 'hapless schoolboys' who were trying to negotiate aid from the West."[77]

No doubt this partly explains why Talbott later dismissed Kozyrev a little uncharitably as "one of God's original whiners".[78]

No Marshall Plan for Russia

When countries are overwhelmingly defeated by the United States – as were Nazi Germany and imperial Japan – the consolation prize of full-scale aid and economic rehabilitation at least in part compensates for the humiliating impact of defeat, in return for the requirement to restructure society in superficial imitation of the American model. But the Cold War was not the kind of war that resulted in the rubble that modern airpower and artillery leave in their wake: blood-soaked corpses and hungry children pulling on the heart strings of the world. The poorest among the elderly in Russia suffered silently in private where even the World Salvation Army could not reach them. It was in this sense an invisible defeat with invisible consequences; certainly one unseen on television by the American public. But it was no less traumatic for Russia.

It was without question true that the very idea of large-scale

economic and financial assistance – in the words of the incoming Secretary of State, the ultra-cautious lawyer Warren Christopher – "obviously cut against the priority of eliminating the [federal budget] deficit…".[79] He felt that it was for the Russians to do more to encourage inward investment (as though, entirely new to capitalism, they knew how). There was no lobby for a Marshall Plan aid programme inside government. And it was not just the administration's fault. Congress, which would have to vote the funds, was still congenitally anti-Russian, and now isolationist as well; fixated, of course, on the public benefits of peace for its constituents.

Amid the chaos of the White House, which Panetta began putting to rights on his arrival in June 1994, entirely inexperienced and ambitious young aides such as George Stephanopoulos (another Rhodes scholar at Oxford) epitomized the new spirit of the times in their casual indifference to foreign policy priorities. He also very much objected to assisting Russia on the grounds that it would be both politically controversial and fiscally damaging.[80] "Did anybody want to sacrifice moving ahead on our economic agenda for foreign policy?", Stephanopoulos asked rhetorically: "No."[81]

Matters were not helped by the fact that the United States, on its own account and through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (IBRD), did embark on several simultaneous aid programmes to put the Russian economy on the path to the free market. So did the EU, through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), but these programmes lacked coherence without an expert coordinating hand at the wheel and sustained commitment to a successful outcome in the face of unanticipated obstacles emerging from an alien culture. The Americans would have labelled such a person a "Tsar". Larry Summers, later Secretary of the Treasury, was unlikely under Clinton to enhance a promising political career by focusing too much on Russia. Beyond the beltway, college economists who studied the country lacked standing because their line

of work was in the tradition of political economy, unsupported by high status mathematical theory. Orthodox free market economists succeeded in getting themselves appointed as advisers on privatization, often to the irritation of some Russian counterparts who believed that they knew their own economy and its immediate needs much better. And some of those most familiar with the problem were found to have mishandled funds allocated by the United States for aid to Russia.[82] It began to look all too like an American show, but an off-Broadway production with no great backing.

For all the attention they received, Russians saw themselves as victims rather than beneficiaries, even when in receipt of significant international attention and financial assistance. During the 1990s large amounts of aid money were inevitably diverted from laudable objectives through rampant crime and corruption, from which local officials such as Putin – then in St Petersburg – greatly benefited. The legal system was like a grim caricature from Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*, the banking system dangerously fragile. It was hard for the government to know what production and distribution actually were because of under-reporting to evade swingeing taxes by multiple collectors, who pocketed the proceeds for themselves. And even when aid did reach the right destination, no one liked to see themselves as recipients of charity, though the population enthusiastically welcomed its return to Russian life.

Assistance was especially needed to dismantle the massive, ageing military-industrial infrastructure and replace it with inward investment, most evident in the Leningrad region and in Ukraine's Russian-speaking Donetsk basin. But it was not to be found; certainly not in the quantity needed. And when the Russians inevitably expanded arms exports as a way of giving a new lease of life to a sector deprived of high domestic demand and to relieve the burden of foreign debt of the entire former Soviet Union, which was now carried solely by Russia, they were systematically blocked *by* the United States either because they

clashed with US foreign policy goals – as in the case of its sanctions against fundamentalist Iran and the containment of Serbia – or because they created new competition for existing US arms sales to the Third World.

And one blockage to the massive riches of the American market through most favoured nation status – the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the Trade Act of 1974 – remained in place indefinitely, held hostage by a self-serving Congress for favourable deals furthering US agricultural exports to the Russian market. This amendment was kept in place despite the two-decade long disappearance of the problem it was supposed to solve: Soviet government discrimination against Jewish migration to Israel. Nothing was more symbolic of Americocentrism than this. In conversation with the US ambassador Putin "was scathing on Jackson-Vanik. 'You've been teasing us on this for years.' It was 'indecent' to keep prolonging the process or levering Jackson-Vanik to settle agricultural trade issues. Even Soviet era refuseniks, he said, were insulted by the continuing of the policy."[83] Not until December 2012 was the amendment removed, when finally Russian entry into the World Trade Organization threatened to place the United States in breach of its obligations. If one thing was clear, it was that Russia was obviously not a priority for jobbing congressmen unless some kind of reward, electoral or financial, was in sight.

Unsurprisingly, resentment at the treatment received in these years has remained visceral in Russia to this day. Even moderate newspapers look back at this decade with deep resentment: "Russia went through the 'daring nineties' with Michel Camdessus, then managing director of the IMF, as the piper; the tune's unforgettable context was the burial of the Soviet Union."[84] Anders Åslund, a tough-minded Swedish economist working alongside Sachs, recalled that "the West didn't lift a finger for Russia". The G-7 countries did little and handed the problem over to the World Bank and the IMF. John Odling-Smee, overseeing Russia at the IMF, complained that the G-7 expected his organization to observe its rules on lending but then bend them when the

Yeltsin government met political trouble.[85] The IMF was, as it still is, largely funded and directed by the United States. Ultimately it effectively threw in the towel. Britain's Prime Minister John Major was certainly not alone in thinking more could have been done. He even expressed the generous wish – to the horror of his officials – that Russia join the European Community.[86] As the main player, the United States of course took the blame for failure.

So the world had at one and the same time a new US president with a fine-sounding "grand strategy" in foreign policy but little time or inclination to give much attention to the detail of its implementation, let alone attend to the long-term impact on relations with Russia; except, that is, where it intersected with the demands of various domestic lobbies. Having conceived the design, a busy president thus delegated detailed implementation to others. And he stuck resolutely to the path he had mapped out.