

NEMESIS: KEEPING RUSSIA AN ENEMY THROUGH COLD WAR PATHOLOGIES

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Introduction

There have been numerous articles on the authoritarian strengthening of power in Russia and Putin's backsliding from democracy throughout the 2000's. Russian positions and initiatives in Syria and Ukraine have been portrayed within media venues across the West as evidence of quasi-Soviet revanchism. In the midst of this there has been very little consideration of the impact of American positioning on the Russian perspective. This article examines that influence, whether it is the openly adversarial neoconservative foundation under George Bush or the Republican Party in general, the so-called 'reset' interaction under Barack Obama, or American foreign policy analysts and academics meant to be experts on Russia. What will be exposed is a fairly uninspired and non-innovative American policy that not only fails to consider Russian initiatives from Russia's own national security interests, but aims to contain Russia within a continued Cold War box that not only sours opportunities for collaboration but guarantees the absence of partnership in important global security areas. The idea that Russia's contemporary positions have not evolved beyond the residue of Cold War mentalities seems to be more a product of scholars and practitioners in the West rather than in the institutions of Russia itself. This piece examines the consequences of imagining Russia only as nemesis and whether the West is more responsible for this Cold War pathology than it is willing to admit.

Unlike many pundits which have considered Russia a superpower also-ran since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or even those who simply bristle at the idea of giving Russia

a major global platform on international issues today, the fact of the matter is that Russia does indeed still matter: it will remain a key United Nations member; a new entrant into the World Trade Organization; a formidable military power; and a significant player with countries that overall tend to be unfriendly or openly adversarial to the United States. America, however, seems either reluctant to accept this reality and thus cuts itself off from creating new dialogues with Russia. There seems to be an element of purposeful disdain in the way Russia is viewed, analyzed, and engaged. Russia most certainly is not blameless and at times only intensifies its bravado, apparently in a fairly petulant display meant to encourage American irritation. Perhaps most disappointing, it will be shown that two of the biggest culprits in this process will be none other than the two respective presidents, Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin.

This article highlights some fairly intriguing and balanced work being done on Russian national security positions and how American interests endemically conflict with those policies. Unfortunately, these works are not getting near enough attention. Instead there is a public American perspective that seems wholly committed to portraying all Russian initiatives in the harshest light. Whether that portrayal accurately reflects on-the-ground reality sometimes seems recklessly uneven. The raging and disjointed conflict in Eastern Ukraine will be highlighted as a critical case example, where an obvious line of thought has been pushed and trumpeted regardless of ambiguous facts and vetted counter-information. When taken in sum, all of these angles reveal what should be considered a 'Cold War pathology' that is actually emanating most vociferously from the American side rather than the Russian. A final section will

elaborate how this pathology, based on historical legacies, may carry stark political consequences far into the future, leaving what could be a major potential partner no choice but to be the enemy.

Flaming Punditry and Cold War Triumphalism: Pushing an Adversarial Agenda

There are numerous think tanks, both in the United States and Russia, which are deeply concerned about the state of Russian-American relations. Places like the Moscow Carnegie Centre or the Brookings Institute in Washington, DC are regular go-to places for the media when seeking expert opinion and analysis. However, these centers have had a decided slant in allocating blame for the poor bilateral relations to the Russians, with the explanations ranging from the fairly simple to the rather mystically esoteric.

“If America did not exist, Russia would have to invent it. In a sense it already has: first as a dream, then as a nightmare. No other country looms so large in the Russian psyche. To Kremlin ideologists, the very concept of Russia’s sovereignty depends on being free of America’s influence. Anti-Americanism has long been a staple of Vladimir Putin, but it has undergone an important shift. Gone are the days when the Kremlin craved recognition and lashed out at the West for not recognizing Russia as one of its own. Now it neither pretends nor aspires to be like the West. Instead, it wants to exorcise all traces of American influence.”

It is not difficult to find this Freudian popcorn political psychology today when it comes to ‘analyzing’ Russian positions. It portrays the United States as the victim of a global oedipal complex when it comes to Russia: first Putin desperately craves daddy’s attention only to then defiantly and recklessly reject him, petulantly trying to run away from home. It is important to remark how most countries around the world would actually find it dangerously myopic and unhealthy to base its own foreign policy on earning the ‘approval’ of another country. With ease the far more standard approach to foreign policy formulation is to determine a country’s own national interests within its local security dilemma and craft an independent and fierce

strategy that can best achieve its optimal goals.

That normal process, ironically, is often described in America as a ‘shift’ away from craving attention to exorcising American demons. In reality there is no shift: Russia has always been about Russia, as it expects America to be about America, France to be about France, Nigeria to be about Nigeria, so forth and so on. What Russia usually finds so irksome is that when it does what everyone else does in terms of exercising global power, it is judged as psychologically unstable or deficient. What the American media outlets and think tank personalities fail to recognize is how much of this judgment is coming not from explicitly observable behavior or direct quotes from Russian actors but is placed upon Russia by the so-called experts themselves as they push a decidedly one-sided interpretation.

Russia is not supposed to aspire to be a copy of the West nor should it be allowing particular American influence over its policies. This is not said as anti-Americanism but rather as simple logic: America would never strive to copy another country and it most certainly would not allow another country to force-influence its foreign policy. So why should Russia? It is this very simple and straightforward question that seems to never be asked by what are otherwise august media institutions and impressive political think tanks in the West. Sometimes this tendency can reach near farcical levels. When Alexei Pushkov, the chairman of the Russian Parliament’s Foreign-relations Committee, received so much media attention here when he spoke about ridding Russia of dependence on America and even fining cinemas that showed too many foreign films, Western experts needed to recognize the absurd for absurdity. But they did not. Failure to do so is perplexing given Western analysis always laments the strengthening of Putin’s own presidential power system and decries how little power sits within the legislative or judiciary branches of Russian government. Thus, it is nonsensical to highlight parliamentarians as having real impact. But this happens often in America with no sense of diplomatic irony.

There also tends to be a failure to focus Russian analysis through the looking glass of reciprocity. What this means is that current

American thinking emphasizes how untrustworthy Moscow decision-makers are while completely ignoring the same Russian criticism lobbed back at Washington. President Putin openly and publicly discusses his lack of trust in American power and in the specific policy decisions emanating from the White House. It is this skepticism that supposedly forces his own lack of desire to engage the United States. There are simply too few voices at present in the West trying to analyze this mindset as a legitimate position. As far as can be determined, the only reason this is not analyzed more seriously is because the competing alternative – that Putin is untrustworthy and Moscow is the cause of all communication breakdown – is simply accepted as a *de facto* axiom.

In short, if the United States does not trust Russia, it is because of how Russia behaves on the global stage and its untrustworthy history. If Russia does not trust the United States, that is simply Russian posturing and a case of political transference, wanting to blame its own self-made problems on someone else so that it can avoid any accountability. The problem is how readily this is unquestioningly accepted and how few so-called Russian experts are willing to step forward and shine a light on such intellectual superficiality.

Perhaps one of the worst examples of this is the over-reliance on ‘insider knowledge’ without actually vetting the source’s objectivity. The recent exit of Alexander Sytnik as a senior fellow from the Russian Institute for Strategic Research is a prime example. Upon his exit early in 2015, Reshetnikov unleashed a torrent of information that, while interesting, really does not amount to more than just gossip and hearsay. Worse, American media and political analysts adopted it almost wholly as fact rather than as a possibly compromised source motivated to talk badly about Russia:

“The Russian analyst’s scathing remarks about the country’s leadership and about the community of government experts *confirm* that the concept of Russian supremacy has a strong hold on the Russian leadership. These supremacist views are not limited to the post-Soviet space, where ‘only ethnic Russians are capable of creating statehood.’ The West is also seen as decadent and somewhat spiritually inferior to

the Russians. The spread of such views in Russia, especially among the country’s leaders, precludes easy and quick solutions to the Ukrainian crisis, but rather suggests a relatively lengthy period of tensions between Russia and the West, even if Russian strongman Vladimir Putin were, for some reason, to step down.” (*Italics mine*)

The tendency is to use personal opinion as confirmation of fact when it should be recognized as biased material. The only confirmation is the affirming of preconceived ideas and a particular agenda that undermines any new attitudinal environment between Russia and the United States. As a consequence, it is easy to find ‘research’ proclaiming Russian goals that have never been publicly disclosed or addressing Putin objectives that have never been formally issued. This is not to say that Russia is incapable of having ulterior motives or secret agendas. Truly every country to one degree or another has them. The criticism here is the propensity in the Russian analytical sphere to assume such agendas and then cherry picking information to affirm the assumption. In pure methodological terms, selection bias is rife within the community that analyzes Russia, leaving those analyses decidedly weak.

This bias is only more pronounced when you leave academically-oriented think tanks/news monitors behind and observe within the corridors of American power. Traditionally, the focus has been on a decidedly anti-Russian fervor coming from the Republican Party. However, this analysis would argue that except for a very brief and ultimately dashed Obama ‘reset’, Russian-American relations within Washington, DC has always been dominated in both parties by a remarkably typical Republican mindset. That mindset sets a fairly stark characterization: Russia is an aggressive and untrustworthy dictatorship that is an innate contradiction to American values. As such it will inevitably always be a threat to U.S. interests and global security. By all indicators, Russia is a threat not just to itself and its immediate neighbors but to the entire world, masking its own domestic failings and instabilities with an aggressive foreign policy that will never acquiesce to a more peaceful and cooperative global community. Indeed, in an American political world that likes to specialize in ambiguous statements and plausible deniability, it is

rather remarkable how freely the American Congress seems to deride Russia:

– John Boehner: “It is increasingly evident that Russia is intent on expanding its boundaries and power through hostile acts.”

– Ted Poe: “The Russian bear is coming out of its cave because it got its feelings hurt because of the fall of the Soviet Union, and now it is trying to regain its territories.”

– Chris Smith: accused a “repressive Russian regime” of “coddling dictators” around the globe from Central Asia to Syria to Cuba and Venezuela.

– Trent Franks: After the conclusion of an arms deal between Russia and Venezuela, President Putin was called a “thugocrat” engaged in “dangerous alliances.”

Keep in mind all of the above statements were uttered before the 2014 crisis in Ukraine even broke out. So before the U.S. Congress received what is has subsequently considered undeniable and irrefutable proof of Russian aggression in Ukraine, it was already quite prepared to view Russia solely as a corrupt kleptocracy willfully abusing human rights, powered by an irrational and paranoid hatred of the United States as the sole driver of its foreign policy.

While much hope was initially placed on the so-called Obama ‘reset’ in American relations with Russia in 2008, the reality is that enthusiasm quickly faded and subsequently placed the Democratic Party as squarely adversarial in its attitude toward Russia as the Republicans. Indeed, in today’s environment of divided government, having a problem with Russia seems to be one of the few happy consensus points in Washington. The problem, of course, is how that consensus is built more upon partisan posturing: each side trying to one-up the other in order to earn foreign policy merit points. There are some voices that decry a picture being painted about Russia that combines inaccuracy with heightened rhetoric while purposely ignoring mitigating contexts and less negative observations. However, those voices are extremely rare and at the moment easily drowned out by the drumbeat of American derision.

This is why there is a decided chicken-and-egg quality when trying to unravel Russian-American relations. The general pes-

simism and pejorative characterizations that come from the U.S. Congress clearly have a negative influence on Putin’s strident bravado and dismissive arrogance toward America. This dilemma, however, is never an actual problem for American politicians: the Russian corrupt and violent chicken always comes before the calm and diplomatic American egg. Of course this makes Russia feel just as convinced about the American oppressive and interfering egg coming well before the Russian self-defense chicken. Russia refuses to accept sole blame for all of the bombastic rhetoric. In this particular case reality better supports the Russian side: it is more accurate to describe Putin’s contemporary hostility toward America as one far more deeply-rooted in frustration with American positions than in sinister strategy to overtake the world. But instead, America characterizes Putin as having an unstable mania obsessed with Russia remaining a great *Derzhava* (powerful state) and not recognizing his own culpability in creating a future political cataclysm.

This perfectly matches what Stephen Cohen astutely characterized several years back as ‘Cold War Triumphalism.’ In basic terms, since Russia lost the Cold War it was and should be treated as a *de facto* defeated nation. This triumphalism has arguably never left American decision-making power given that the advent of this attitude began with President Bill Clinton and has lasted through three presidencies (two Democrat, one Republican), totaling six terms and 24 years. In other words, the American attitudinal perspective toward Russia has witnessed a literal generation passing where the United States has felt justified in selective cooperation, one-way bargaining, uneven playing fields and reluctance on its own part to bury the ghosts of the past because said ghosts give it a decided political advantage.

The failure of America to move past the triumphalism of Cold War victory has produced a decidedly negative impact on Russian-American relations that precludes a new era from developing. It is as if Russia is being criticized that it simply does not know its place or will not accept its role, both of which of course are decided by America and are not open to negotiation. This is why prominent thinkers and players like John McCain, Charles Krauthammer, Ariel

Cohen, Hillary Clinton, George Will, Alexander Motyl, and Fiona Hill are quick to damn 'Russian provocations' as moving the country to a de facto 'fascist' state. In reality no such explicit initiatives can be found supporting such radical accusations. More calm analyses find Russia simply not accepting being told what to do on the world stage.

This is especially true when one considers that Russia feels, with some validation, that it has been incredibly non-confrontational with the U.S. on many contentious issues since the end of the Cold War that were not necessarily aligned with its own national interests. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find Russian political players quite adamant that the U.S. 'owes' it for accepting moves that could have easily exploded into formal conflict after the Cold War.

In a sense, the debate is one of degree: there is no doubt Russia has accepted that the end of the Cold War signaled a decided shift in the balance of power. It did not, however, allow that change to mean Russia was now permanently relegated to the status of nation-state also-ran. And quite frankly, too many voices in American institutions of power, both governmentally and academically, have taken that relegation as an unquestioned reality. As long as the two nations continue to engage each other with this attitudinal chasm, then the relationship will continue to be dogged by vast differences of opinion and massively divergent interpretations. Unfortunately, as will be seen next, the highest office in the land for both countries has not been a beacon in which to effect positive change on this note.

Posturing Presidents: Obama, Putin, and the Failure to Get Real

There is no stronger example of the schizophrenic nature of American foreign policy toward Russia than comparing statements written in the formal National Security Strategy (NSS) of President Obama with actual testimony given by the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. In 2010 the NSS asserted that the U.S. would endeavor to "build a stable, substantive, multi-dimensional relationship with Russia, based on mutual interests." What's more, the NSS called Russia a 21st century center of influence in the

world and a country with whom America should build bilateral cooperation on a host of issues, including forging global nonproliferation; confronting violent extremism; fostering new trade and development arrangements; promoting the rule of law, accountability in government and universal values in Russia; and in cooperating as a partner in Europe and Asia.

Now take into account Director James Clapper while appearing before Congress in 2013 to discuss global threats. He described Russian foreign policy as a nexus of organized crime, state policy, and business interests (let it be noted that all three of these descriptors were said pejoratively). Clapper went on to warn that both China and Russia represented the most persistent intelligence threats to the United States and that Russia could even face social discontent (read: political disorder and revolution) because of a sluggish economy, the constraint of political pluralism, and pervasive corruption.

At first blush these two accounts seem to offer a completely incompatible attitude toward Russia. Reading deeper between the lines of the NSS reveals key words, however, that always trigger contempt from Russian actors in the Kremlin. The ideal of 'promoting rule of law, government accountability and universal values' is not an olive branch offering Russia the chance to team up with America. This ideal is not being promoted with Russia but in Russia. To follow that goal up with being a 'cooperative partner' in Europe and Asia has also always signaled to Russian ears an American skepticism about Russia's ability to be a 'non-meddler'. In other words, the NSS comes across to Russians not as a mechanism to promote deeper co-equal ties between the two countries but rather as a snobbish slap across the face about how the United States needs to engage Russia to stop it from getting in its own and others' way.

Clapper's comments in some ways garner even more derision from Moscow. Not so much the complaints about centralized power and corruption. Russia has been hearing these criticisms since Yeltsin first came down off the tanks after the August coup in 1991. Russia has always been rather dismissive of these arguments. Rather, Clapper's comments about the possibility of social discontent and unrest, placing that possibility at the feet of the Russian

government because of repression and incompetence, always comes off as a red flag to the bull of Russian conspiracy theorists: they are quick to see American interference in any and all things that go wrong in Russia. And even if the more rational voices in Russian political power dismiss conspiracy theories, there is still the obvious interpretation that while America might not try to personally foment unrest, Clapper's comments make it seem like instability would be welcomed.

The U.S. government at times can play too fast and loose with semantics: as long as America does not actively try to create discord it thinks it cannot possibly be seen as a source of such discord. Very few actors around the globe agree with that interpretation, especially Russians. To this day Russians point to Georgia, to Ukraine, to the countries of the Arab Spring, to Syria, and believe the build-up to the unrest was either directly orchestrated by the United States or at least subtly fostered by America. To Russians there is no difference between 'actively pursuing' and 'subtly managing' while to Americans they are complete polar opposites. This is what allows Russia to take statements about bilateral cooperation and substantive partnership and see nothing but animosity, mistrust, and manipulation.

Indeed, it is surprising there is not more analysis comparing the U.S. National Security Strategy with the subsequent Russian foreign policy concept that came out in 2013 on the heels of Clapper's testimony. It affirms the Putin criticism that U.S.-Russia relations will always remain complicated because of fundamental cultural differences. What might be these cultural differences? Namely, that American identity is based on individual wants, racism, genocidal and other extreme forms of violence and thus will always conflict with Russian identity, which is based on 'loftier ambitions, more of a spiritual kind.' This was only compounded on September 11th of the same year, when Putin published a letter to the New York Times:

– The UN could collapse and international law would suffer if nations take military action without UN approval.

– Such action in Syria would only result in a total destabilization of the area and a widening of conflict and terrorism.

– Russia is protecting, therefore, international law rather than the Assad regime.

– Many in the world are beginning to see the United States as relying solely on brute force and that such U.S. reliance has proven ineffective and pointless.

– President Obama's statement that the United States should act when possible to uphold international norms was 'extremely dangerous,' arguing that all countries are equal already under international law.

This amounts to nothing more than posturing presidencies and tit-for-tat foreign policy, where each side envisions the other as the chief global antagonist while promoting themselves as the cowboy in the white hat standing up for the less powerful in the world. But it is important to note that Russia's tit, as it were, came after America's tat.

Rightly or wrongly, Russia is convinced that America has a global agenda that pushes not only itself as a single unilateral superpower but also pays special attention to keeping Russia on the sidelines, politically and militarily marginalized. What this de facto means for U.S.-Russia relations is that the highest office in both countries cannot actually be counted upon to inspire new and better interaction and engagement. Rather, the administrations of the two presidents seem rather intent and eager to only make things worse. Given the aforementioned section showing how media outlets and academic think tanks also tend to not improve the situation, this leaves very little room for analysts to carve some balance and fairness into the debate. Despite this problem, some are indeed attempting to carve that space and deserve greater attention.

Finding New Perspectives: Hope for the Future or Balance Betrayed?

Bo Petersson has done work trying to bridge the gap between recognizing Russia's tendency to aspire to great power status while also simultaneously worrying about new 'times of troubles' for the country. One of the unique contributions in his work is not falling to the Western tendency to over-emphasize the history of backwardness that is legendary in Russian literature and make sweeping grand gestures about

contemporary political reality. Petersson rightly points out the tension that exists in Russia between the dream of being powerful with the realism of having problems regarding 'true' independence and financial self-sufficiency. Works like this show that there is much more time spent in Russia addressing rational concerns of statehood and political/economic development than many Western experts tend to give the country credit for. Indeed, when one examines this minimal literature what is most remarkable is just how 'normal' Russian decision-making seems to be on an every-day political level.

Fyodor Lukyanov, one of the most astute observers on the Russian political psyche, has done work dissecting the delicate aspect of Russia being unable to consider a global environment where it is not a major player while also experiencing self-conscious political hand-wringing:

"Over the twenty years of reforms, we have achieved at least one fundamental result: we have tried all possible models for the country's strategic development and become disappointed with each of them: first the Soviet model, which proved to be unviable and bankrupt; then a pro-Western liberal model, which brought about bitter disillusionment about the very idea of democracy. Finally, an 'Asian' model of authoritarian modernization, on which we pinned considerable hope. Many Russians, even those who share liberal ideas, believed that there would emerge a strong and resolute leader who would restrict democracy but, at the same time, would ensure a breakthrough with an iron hand. However, such aspirations, even if they do exist in the Russian leadership, inevitably bog down in the quagmire of corrupt bureaucracy."

Most remarkable here is again the normalcy and rationality of the decision-making process: the West always exposes a perspective that makes Russian attempts at democracy insincere at best and insipid at worst. Lukyanov provides the evidence of how Russian political development has eagerly engaged different phases since the end of the Cold War and the problem was not with a lack of sincere effort but ultimately with a deep disappointment with what the models themselves were providing. That type of political introspection is hardly ever afforded today in Russian analysis in the West. There is

a balance in this analysis that does not run away from Russian culpability but also does not allow for rendering Russia as some sort of demon caricature.

Vladimir Shlapentokh, world-renown for numerous works across the entire spectrum of Russian Studies, has shown how even during the worst examples of Russian anti-Americanism there were still some positive changes in Russian attitudes toward America. Shlapentokh cannot be considered a shill for the Russian government. His work always points out governmental hypocrisy and contradiction. What's important to note, however, is that this work also firmly places phenomena taking place in Russia as fairly standard with developing and post-democratic transitioning states and that is a fairly important: too many present-day commentators seem to treat Russian reality as some sort of exemplary outlier, as it were, signaling a unique degradation of democratization and modernity. Such work testifies to the fact that Russia falls squarely within the normal range when it comes to problems in the post-democratization process. More importantly, Russia has just as much divergence in public opinion and stratification in political power as other countries. None of this is meant to make Russia out to be a patron saint of statehood excellence. Rather, these efforts simply allow a sense of normalcy when viewing Russian problems. As soon as such normalcy can be more accepted, then the opportunity for greater collaboration between Russia and others will become more plausible.

Samuel Charap's work on the so-called American 'reset' brought to light how often frantic assumptions seem to be made about Russia regardless of whether or not they correspond to reality. Indeed, his is one of the first voices to explicitly throw down the gauntlet and say many of the problems in US-Russia relations tend to be completely manufactured by exaggerating the lack of 'deliverables.'

"Without deliverables, both sides would turn their attention to the yawning gap between Washington's expectations about Russia's post-Soviet political development and Russian realities that have not conformed to those expectations. Many key U.S. partners have far worse human-rights records and not even the modicum of democratic procedure that exists in Rus-

sia today – Saudi Arabia and Ghana being just two examples.”

Charap rightly reveals how the American emphasis on bolstering sovereignty in Russia’s ‘near abroad’ devolves into strange games of paranoia, where any Russian influence in its own immediate region is seen as a duel to the death needing to be countermanded. In addition, U.S. policy makers need to do a much better job fighting the Washington myth that any engagement with Russia de facto signals an American acquiescence to democratic deficiencies in the Kremlin. The reality is that Russia is not as fully democratic or stable as the United States, but it is also not a one-party dictatorship and political contestation does indeed take place across the Russian Federation. Charap wisely advises that Washington must stop framing the choice as one between total capitulation and all-out confrontation.

Finally, there has been some outstanding interview work done in scholarly venues with Russian political players, like when Johan Kharabi interviewed Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Ryabkov in 2010. Ryabkov started quite simply: Russia firmly believes that every action taken by the government of any state is largely determined by its understanding of the country’s national interests. Ironically, this basic point may be one of the most contentious problems in U.S.-Russia relations today: the insistence by Russia that it is largely copying the example given by the United States. The reality is that many countries, not just Russia, find American actions abroad very much an affirmation of exceptional behavior: that what America does others cannot do because only America supposedly knows what is truly best for the global community. That attitude has riled the feathers of many, but it has been Russia most eagerly calling America out. This is at the heart of Ryabkov’s commentary embedded within an affirmation of globalization:

“I believe we correctly assessed, on the threshold of the century, future world trends – the formation of a new polycentric international system that is replacing the previous bipolar one and is, to a major extent, the product of globalization...while preparing for that, we have correctly defined the fundamental principles of foreign policy for the new Russia as: a multi-

vector approach, network diplomacy, openness, and rejection of confrontation...It was Washington’s initiative that created the G20 format, which is used to coordinate efforts in overcoming the crisis and offers a mechanism of collective leadership of major world countries represented in geographic and civilizational respects.”

Rejecting that exceptionalism continues to rile relations between the two countries, as many American actors seem to be perplexed at Russia’s unwillingness to accept a minor role on the world stage and bequeath center stage to America alone. Dimitri Simes was one of the first to also connect this behavior to ‘Cold War triumphalism’ on the part of America. Simes pointed out how the triumphalists had failed to recognize, and continue to fail today, that no one is ever eager to accept any dominant power claiming exceptional prerogatives. It is this kind of analytical balance, recognizing Russian recalcitrance within a context of subtle American provocation, which is unjustly underemphasized in the West compared to more strident pieces that are not nearly as deep and offering arguments not nearly as profound.

The previous works have been around for nearly a decade in some cases. Thus, the opportunity to evolve American analysis on Russia has always been present but ultimately missed. This only makes other analyses that offer up platitudes about Russian mysticism seeking great power or the Russian bear needing to bare its claws or the innate inability of Russia to ever embrace democracy more troubling. Even fine scholars and commentators like Katz, Ratti, and Gelb have all produced work in the last two years that continue this trend and thus have further concretized a vision of U.S.-Russia relations that seems doomed to animus. The crisis in Eastern Ukraine is the critical case study to show how much that animus is pushed.

To Live and Die in Donetsk: Eastern Ukraine as Nexus of U.S-Russian Analytical Malaise

Let us look at Ukrainian affairs over the past two years: Yanukovych was a thug; but he was a thug popularly elected in his own country; but he was elected via means that were

clearly not free or fair and rife with corruption; but despite 'official American protest' about these corrupt elections, they still went through without any major global interference. The main consequence of this acquiescence was a reign of corrupt negligence full of largesse, abuse, and misrule. Which despite official American protest again, this rule also went on uninterrupted until the Ukrainian people forced his removal.

America doesn't stand on the geopolitical high ground, either, if it wishes to critically assess Russia hosting/harboring Yanukovych. Cozying up at one time or another with questionable leaders because they happen to look favorably upon your own global positions and foreign policy interests? Hello (place any number of developing corrupt nations from Latin America, Africa, Middle East, and South Asia here). American commentators need to stop crowing about this being an example of 'Russian exceptionalism.' There is a humiliating irony being dangerously missed when they speak of such things. The only other country in the world with a richer, deeper, and more pronounced sense of exceptionalism is the United States. And the Russians know it. To the Kremlin, America 'criticizing' Russia for exceptionalism is like the Great White telling the Bull Shark not to be so aggressive in the water.

Russia's actions within, around, and about Ukraine are no doubt self-serving, in pursuit of its own priorities, and with only a modicum of consideration, at best, as to what is in the long-term interests of Ukraine. More pertinently, it will no doubt couch those actions with declarations of constitutionality, stability, and normalization. And in doing so Russia in its own mind will be acting just as the United States has countless times in countless arenas over countless years. This is the true nature of real foreign policy power to Moscow: to do as you please while getting everyone else to drag their feet and ultimately do nothing. Such old-school realist power has not left the global stage despite all the good intentions to create greater adherence to international law and build actual foundations for global governance. The problem is not that Russia accepts this reality but that America seems affronted that Russia does.

March 16, 2014 marked the day when the people of Crimea went to the voting booths to

decide whether they would be part of Ukraine or part of Russia. While Western journalists as a whole tend to be a conscientious lot, simply pursuing an interesting story and often putting themselves in harm's way in order to get it, the Cold War pathology that remains between the United States and Russia has a tendency to put a grimy film over more than just political actors. It often affects the way in which stories are told, the lens through which 'impartial observers' focus their attention. Unfortunately, this happens usually at a subconscious level, resulting in news stories meant to be 'fair, free, and impartial' that instead have a decidedly biased perspective snaking its way from reporter to reader.

Look no further than the first reporting on referendum day from the highly respected and august news organization, Reuters. It reported how thousands of Russian troops had taken control of the Black Sea peninsula and Crimea's pro-Russian leaders had sought to ensure the vote was tilted in Moscow's favor. That, along with an ethnic Russian majority, was why a comfortable 'yes' vote to leave Ukraine was expected. These were actually two very different perspectives conflated into a single position. On the one hand, readers were given the distinct understanding that the referendum was basically rigged, commandeered by Crimean leaders, who were nothing but sycophants to the Kremlin. But Reuters also accurately mentioned that Crimea is majority ethnic Russian, which indicates a free and fair referendum could have produced the very result reporters were already declaring as disingenuous. So which was it? Was Crimea being manipulated by local leaders and the Russian military or was its majority Russian population voting its free will? By writing the piece so that the suspicious manipulation theory was conflated with the demographically true statistic, readers were left confused into thinking the referendum itself was illegitimate no matter what.

The Reuters piece explained the protests began when Yanukovich turned his back on a trade deal with the European Union and opted for a credit and cheap oil deal worth billions of dollars with Ukraine's former Soviet overlord, Russia. It is perplexing how the above transaction is only portrayed in Western media as Yanukovich simply being in the back pocket of

Moscow. Why did the West see favoring a credit, oil, and gas deal worth 'billions of dollars' for Ukraine now over a possible trade engagement with the European Union later as being akin to a Faustian bargain made with a 'Soviet overlord?' What impact did this tone have on uninformed readers who did not know that the Russian credit deal basically meant Russia forgave a massive amount of owed oil and gas debt by Ukraine?

Finally, the piece reported that the 1992 constitution foresaw giving the region effective independence within Ukraine. That 1992 constitution, however, was the Ukrainian Constitution and not the Russian one. It does indeed grant the Crimean region effective independence within Ukraine and the right to determine its own path and relations with others. Ukraine wrote those words in the immediate glowing aftermath of Soviet dissolution, when, quite frankly, most in the West felt the true political and economic prosperity path shone brightest for Ukraine and not Russia. Many seem to have forgotten this but any simple source search back to the time period will reveal massive Western enthusiasm for Ukraine's prospects while being skeptical of Russia's size, infrastructure and historical legacy. So yes, it was quite true that the constitution recklessly gave Crimea the opportunity to pursue the very path it was now pursuing. But this flawed constitution was written by Ukrainians, not Russians. This is a reality not revealed to readers. The problem, once again, is a pervasive subconscious Cold War pathology that predetermines how readers around the world learn about the situation in Crimea and therefore how they see Russia's role there.

The issue at hand seems to be that too many powerful decision-makers in the West felt a bit bamboozled and outplayed. They felt, rightly or wrongly, as if they ended up with proverbial diplomatic egg on their faces and they did not like it. Even worse, it seemed they could not stand the possibility that this game of chicken ended with only one round (Crimea) and there would be no opportunity to regain the upper hand with future rounds. Thus, this situation cannot be just about Crimea. Russia must not be satisfied with this as the end game. There simply must be another chess piece to be moved. Because...well...just because: because Russians aren't supposed to be

diplomatically agile and astute. And they most certainly cannot be strategically deft and subtle. At least, not when they are compared to their counterparts in the West, who think Russians are rash; Russians are emotional; Russians are capricious; Russians are sneaky; and quite frankly, Russians are a bit daft. All of these things they can be because all of these things suit the players at the other end of the chess board. This is the danger of Cold War pathology: it starts to warp observation so that it caters to the desired opinion outcome.

Even the original Maidan revolution that preceded events in Eastern Ukraine has been impacted by this affliction. Consider: most revolutions in the 21st century have been positioned as protests against corrupt regimes and thus have largely escaped the microscope of political analysis until much later. Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the first Ukraine (the 'Orange' one), Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, all of these protest movements were first and foremost lauded for their ability to overcome entrenched regimes that seemed more interested in personal enrichment and cronyism than functional governance. As it turned out, none of the 'revolutionary' movements created great governing regimes themselves, with a few even ending up victims of additional revolutions later on. The Maidan revolution is quite different from this trend in that there was a geopolitically powerful neighbor right next door to the revolution that happened to have great interest in how things evolved.

In the aforementioned revolutions there was either no nearby strong power deeply interested in how affairs on the ground played out or the strongest power was the United States from a great distance just hoping an autocratic regime would fall. In the Maidan revolution this was not the case: Russia was very much interested in the long-term geostrategic consequences of regime change and it was the blindness endemic to Cold War pathology that let Western academia miss the important consequences of that interest. There was an intellectual presumptuousness that afflicted Western scholars and diplomats alike to believe any toppling of a crony-like regime could only be applauded by all players. To this day there is not much Western media/academic coverage

analyzing or considering the legitimate Russian interests/investments in long-term Ukrainian political affairs. Those responsible for leading the Maidan revolution were equally blind: while they are quick to lay blame on Russia now, it is obvious that they were completely caught unaware and off-guard that anyone on the global stage would have words or actions for their behavior other than simple congratulatory phone calls. Obviously, this has proven to be a rather large and serious mistake that began in Maidan Square and bled, literally, all the way into Eastern Ukraine.

It should be recalled that when the prospect of violence breaking out in eastern Ukraine was a major media issue in the West the protests and indignation was voiced primarily under the context of expecting that violence to come from Russian military forces. It was the assumption that the only way authorities in Kiev would take to arms and resort to violence was if the Russians made it inevitable with their own attacks. Just as the authorities in Kiev misplayed their hand after the Maidan revolution, they badly analyzed the situation on the ground in eastern Ukraine. In several media interviews I gave in the United States following the referendum in Crimea, I warned that the greatest possible danger in Ukraine would be civil groups in major eastern Ukrainian cities looking to Crimea as a model to emulate and the Crimean referendum as a precedent to follow. The reason this was the greatest danger was because the relatively dull and boring aftermath in Crimea could instigate local opposition groups in eastern Ukraine to follow suit. After all, why shouldn't these regions have the same advantages and privileges that the people in Crimea just apparently earned with no violence or damage done to them?

This potential copycat effect was not only obvious, the consequence was equally so: authorities in Kiev would have to act, otherwise they would basically be saying to the eastern half of its country that it would be perfectly acceptable to self-disintegrate. The challenge in those media interviews was for the authorities in Kiev, not Moscow: could they outmaneuver opposition forces in eastern Ukraine without resorting to violence and bloodshed? Failing to do so could end up an open invitation for the Russian military to actually come protect

the lives of ethnic Russians. This is the great missed irony of eastern Ukraine: no one in the West took the Russian entreaties seriously when it was said the lives of ethnic Russians needed to be protected in Crimea. How ironic, then, if it turned out that Russian forces would end up needing to invade eastern Ukraine because ethnic Russians were in fact being killed by Ukrainian forces.

People have indeed died in eastern Ukraine. They continue to die in eastern Ukraine. They die largely because of one side's forces. But those forces are not Russian. And here in the West there is still basically silence. Apparently, the killing of people in eastern Ukraine is only disturbing to the West if it happens at the hands of the Russian military rather than at the hands of Ukrainian forces. What is sadly disappointing is to see so many experts and analysts that were lined up to condemn conflict erupting in eastern Ukraine when it was assumed to be Russian-initiated now see those same actors basically turn the other cheek and turn their media cameras away from the bloodshed and slaughter of these very same people simply because the flag doing the killing is yellow and blue instead of white, blue, and red. It is doubtful that the people of eastern Ukraine feel that it is an atrocity to die by a Russian bullet but an acceptable loss to die by a Ukrainian one. Unfortunately, it seems that certain governmental and media groups in the West have made that very conclusion. To live and die in Donetsk, therefore, is but a consequence of Cold War pathology run amok.

Conflicts are never clean. War has always been this way and it is unlikely that war will be something different any time soon. But Ukraine has been a rather frustrating event, at least for those who feel that Russia and the United States line up better as allies and not adversaries. The new leadership in Ukraine has not been able to stop the unrest or make people excited about the country's future. The European Union has been even less impressive and quite frankly has arguably caused more chaos and instability than calm and tranquility. The United States has not been able to come up with something innovative or progressive that might create a new road to stop the violence. Faced by these extended cases of political impotence, the players seem to have fallen back on the tried-and-true tactic

of conjuring a bogeyman. Clearly, that bogeyman is Russia. Alas, it is also somewhat lame because this tactic is not about stopping war but rather assigning blame. It is not about creating new pathways to peace and cooperation but treading down old paths well-worn with miscommunication and purposeful animosity.

Conclusion – The Lost Generation of the Post-Cold War

In some ways the United States has played a very strange self-injurious game since 1991 when it comes to Russia. It expected that the former rival accepted a new stage after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in which there were no more fundamental ideological battles and that DEMOCRACY in big capital letters was the clear and undisputed victor. As the greatest champion of democracy this of course inferred that such acceptance also automatically declared the U.S. the world's only superpower - the hegemon with no rivals. In some ways, the intellectual community has been even more influenced by this perception.

The academic celebration in the West over the end of the Cold War and the 'end of history' was quietly and unassumingly accompanied by an almost unconscious de-emphasis in prestigious American graduate schools. Russia was pushed aside because, after all, it had not simply lost the Cold War: its destiny was surely to become a quasi-democracy, a political also-ran, and an economic swamp that would be de facto unimportant on the global stage. The fact that Russia faced a demographic crisis in the first half of the 1990's that actually watched its overall population shrink and the academic communities in the United States shook their collective heads and felt justified in thinking that if democracy was not in fact the end of history, it was at least the end of needing to focus on Russia. And so by 1997, when many Generation X'ers would naturally be advancing through various PhD programs, selecting dissertation committees, and deciding on meaningful theses, they were subtly but decisively given a strong piece of advice: leave Russia behind.

Now keep in mind this was well-intentioned advice. By 1997-1998 Russia seemed to

most in the West as a place to perhaps investigate the problems of crime and corruption or flawed democratic transition. The not-so-subtle hint was simple yet powerful at elite graduate schools: if you truly want a job in academia and want to be able to do 'important' work, Russia is yesterday's news. If you want to be on the cutting edge, look to the Middle East and hop on the Islamist bandwagon, where the real action (and job demand) is going to be. Of course, the seismic event on September 11, 2001, just a short three years later, seemed to scream to the now advanced Generation X PhD students that their mentors were near-prophets. This is what has led directly to what can be called the Lost Generation of Russian expertise and why the Cold War pathogen is so pronounced today.

Barely any new thinking has emerged from Generation X when it comes to studying and understanding the Russian Federation. One is hard-pressed to find a quote from anyone under 45 not dependent on a 'Soviet or even Tsarist assumption' for explaining Russian behavior. Is it merely coincidence that almost every single Russian foreign policy maneuver today is characterized more often than not as some sort of revanchist attempt to resurrect (symbolically or literally) the power and glory of the Soviet Union? Is it merely odd happenstance that Putin is evaluated only in terms of Soviet dictatorship and not even from the perspective of Machiavellian *realpolitik*? Whether it be the missile defense 'shield' in Poland and the Czech Republic or Iran or Syria or the bombings near the Sochi Olympics or finally Maidan and Eastern Ukraine, what one sees are Russian 'analyses' that basically could have been cut from the New York Times in 1964 and just had the geography altered. No imagination, no innovation, nothing new whatsoever. Too many in the West have become intellectual dullards about Russia.

Russia is not perfect. Russia is not blameless. No country is. But when reputable news sources and so-called experts with decades of experience all seem to cater to the same storyboard and that storyboard seems a bit far-fetched if not actually fantastical, and no one bothers to ever question the storyboard, then it is time to signal the call for a new generation of leaders and experts who are willing to examine not just from old prejudices but from a more

neutral and less emotional foreign policy reality. In that crucible no one is absolved but no one is also unfairly prejudged. Right now the future of Russian-American relations depends

on the emergence of these new voices, willing and committed to do battle against a Cold War pathology that has become intellectually crippling to both sides and to the future.

Заклятый враг: взгляд на Россию как на врага сквозь дефектную призму холодной войны

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***Аннотация:** В настоящей статье автор рассматривает неоконсервативный внешнеполитический курс Джорджа Буша-младшего, носящий открыто агрессивный характер, в качестве основы внешней политики Барака Обамы, которая, в соответствии с распространенным мнением, больше основана на дипломатии «вовлечения». Автор делает вывод о том, что американская внешняя политика отталкивается от устаревших и не отвечающих современным реалиям принципов, в результате чего США не могут рассматривать российские инициативы с точки зрения ее собственных взглядов на проблематику безопасности и проводят курс на сдерживание России ввиду сохранения мышления периода холодной войны, что, в свою очередь, не только значительно ограничивает возможности для сотрудничества, но и препятствует развитию партнерских отношений в вопросах глобальной безопасности. В статье анализируются последствия позиционирования России исключительно в качестве главного противника Соединенных Штатов Америки.*

***Ключевые слова:** США, новая холодная война, внешняя политика США, Путин, Обама. Ключевые слова:* регион, регионализация, глобализация, мировая политика.

NEMESIS: Keeping Russia an Enemy through Cold War Pathologies

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***Abstract:** This article examines the openly adversarial neoconservative foundation under George Bush to the supposedly more 'engaged' diplomatic interaction under Barack Obama. What will be exposed is a fairly uninspired and non-innovative American policy that not only fails to consider Russian initiatives from Russia's own national security perspectives, but aims to contain it within a continued Cold War box that not only sours opportunities for collaboration but guarantees the absence of partnership in areas of global security. This piece examines the consequences of imagining Russia only as nemesis.*

***Key Words:** Russia, New Cold War, U.S. Foreign Policy, Putin, Obama.*