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Why a Normal Relationship with Russia is so Hard:

Russophobia in Clinton-era American foreign
policy discourse and the decision to expand
NATO

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“Russia is authoritarian at heart and expansionist by habit.” *William Safire, 1994*

Introduction

A culture of Russophobia permeates American foreign policy decision making at the highest levels. Post-Cold War Russia-US relations have faced myriad obstacles, the bulk of which are well documented in both the international relations and foreign policy analysis bodies of literature. Since Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea, the relationship between Russia and the United States has more commonly been explained through a geopolitical lens, privileging realist notions of power politics, strategy and great gamesmanship. This perspective may contribute to an understanding of Russia-US relations, but it is, on its own, unsatisfactory. Borrowing from the constructivist school of thought in international relations, this paper privileges the influence of ideas on policy outcomes; the ideas held by decision makers, and the culture that shapes and perpetuates these ideas, are every bit as crucial to understanding foreign policy choices as any systemic imperatives that might present themselves.

Focused on the impact of ideas on foreign policy, this paper argues that a key, and largely understudied, influence on Russia-US relations in the post-Cold War era has been the culture of anti-Russian sentiment that has permeated Washington foreign policy circles, and is visible at the highest levels of elite decision making. Negative attitudes about Russia have outlived the Cold War itself and a culture of Russophobia is pervasive in American foreign policy decision making, as evidenced by the reflections of key foreign policy actors within the executive branches of the three post-Cold War presidential administrations, as well as the American-led push to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While this Russophobia is not universal, its presence is deeply influential, prompting Andrei Tsygankov to identify this prevailing and aggressive anti-Russianism as “the Lobby,” noting its profound influence in Washington (Tsygankov 2009).

This paper conceptualizes and engages with the concept of Russophobia in American foreign policy making, and reveals its subtle presence among key foreign policy actors within the Clinton administration (1993-2001), which is when the decision to expand NATO took root. The paper suggests that this Russophobia is visible among those responsible for the American decision to drive the process of NATO enlargement into the former Soviet Union, despite the constructive tone of engagement with Russian political reform that seemed to be present. The decision to expand NATO has arguably had the most significant impact upon Russia-US relations in the post-Cold War period. While it is true that the Clinton years mark a high point in the post-Cold War relationship with Russia, a culture of anti-Russian sentiment was still present among members of his administration. To conceptualize this anti-Russian sentiment, the paper draws upon both the English language Russophobia literature (though limited) and rests upon the body of international relations scholarship that privileges the study of discourse and culture as essential tools of foreign policy analysis. Ultimately, the paper reveals that a culture of

Russophobia was present during the American decision to advocate the expansion of NATO into East-Central Europe.

Discourse, Culture and Foreign Policy Analysis

Before Russophobia can be conceptualized and demonstrated, a brief discussion of the paper's assumptions, method, and contribution must first be undertaken. An overarching goal of this paper is to enhance an understanding of the Russia-US relationship by looking outside the mainstream analysis. Leading Western scholarship emphasizes structural causes of power balancing and mistrust, or points to Vladimir Putin's "imperialist" and undemocratic tendencies as a cause for the rocky relationship. This paper does not challenge those explanations directly, but rather argues that they are not comprehensive. Elements of both Russian and American foreign policy making are deserving of focus if we are to truly understand why forging a "normal" relationship between Moscow and Washington is so hard. Much ink has been spilled on the subject of "what's wrong with Russia" and inadequate attention has been paid to the influences on American foreign policy toward Russia that defy simplistic structural explanations or realist conceptions of the 'national interest.' The paper departs from the more commonplace Western scholarship on the subject of Russia-US relations, which privileges a narrowly realist perspective on the great power relationship and instead underscores the importance of ideas, and the individuals who hold them, in the making of foreign policy. In so doing, it resists a generic conception of the 'national interest' as a guide to predicting rational foreign policy outcomes and instead views national interest as a fluid concept - the constructed result of a shared cultural and historical narrative that is interpreted by individual actors themselves and finds consequence in foreign policy decisions.

The paper does not dispute that foreign policy decisions are the result of perceptions of the national interest, but notes that the 'national interest' should be conceptualized as a social construction. Therefore the paper finds its home within the wealth of IR scholarship that privileges the impact that socio-cultural values and identity can have upon foreign and security policy making.¹ This paper builds on Waever and Hansen's discourse-as-foreign-policy-analysis approach, as well as Vincent Pouliot's scholarship on the reciprocal connection between ideas and practice.² Leaders shape, and are influenced by, social constructions of the national interest, which are "based upon their own interpretation of history and perception of events."³

Jutta Weldes notes that, before taking action, decision makers "engage in a process of interpretation in order to understand both what situation the state faces and how they should respond to it. This process of shared interpretation, in turn, presupposes a language shared, at least, by those state officials

¹ See David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

² Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*.

³ See Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1976).

involved in determining state action and by the audience for whom state action must be legitimate.”⁴ Jonathan Gilmore shares this view of the national interest, claiming it is a “social construct, one in which state policymakers have an instrumental role” in fostering.⁵ Ole Waever and Lene Hansen also stress the value of understanding national interest as a “relational concept” noting that “structures of meaning can explain and elucidate foreign policies.”⁶ Therefore, the social context in which history is interpreted and meaning is ascribed influences a discourse that finds consequence in foreign policy outcomes. Waever and Hansen note that an analysis of discourse can inform our understanding of foreign policy: “discourse matters to policy... and can be utilized analytically.”⁷

Discourse analysis as a tool of foreign policy analysis does not propose to get at the hidden motives of actors, but instead looks at public texts as a signifier that these ideas are present in the public discourse.⁸ As Waever and Hansen note, it is not the domain of discourse analysis to explain what individual decision makers actually believe (this can never really be known for certain), but rather to ascertain what beliefs appear to be shared across a population. This paper makes the argument that anti-Russian attitudes are shared among the American foreign policy elite, notably in the executive branch of the Clinton administration, and that understanding these patterns helps to explain American foreign policy decisions concerning Russia. We can glean much from the public discourse of foreign policy makers about their attitudes toward Russia; many appear to possess a predisposition toward Russia that is visible in decision making and policy outcomes. As Pouliot notes, the more something is practiced, the more it shapes ideas.⁹ It is evident, through a look at the impact of Russophobia on the decision to expand NATO, that the more anti-Russian attitudes take hold and influence policy outcomes the more these actions later become a justification for their preservation.

It must be acknowledged that discourse analysis has its limitations. Waever notes that we can never truly know for sure that actors mean what they say. It is admittedly difficult to tell the difference between rhetoric and genuinely held beliefs; however, this does not negate the value of understanding the discourse because overall policy cannot ever fully diverge from the discursive structures that exist alongside it.¹⁰ It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that these discursive structures are helpful to those who wish to understand the domestic explanations for foreign policy decisions. Waever aptly notes, “although not every single decision fits the pattern to be expected from the structures used in the analysis, there is sufficient pressure from the structures that policies do turn with a certain, specific margin onto the tracks to be expected.”¹¹ At some point we must consider the words of actors at face

⁴ Jutta Weldes, “Constructing National Interests,” *European Journal of International Relations* 2:3 (1996): 276-277.

⁵ Jonathan Gilmore, “The uncertain merger of values and interests in UK foreign policy,” *International Affairs* 90:3 (2014): 542.

⁶ Lene Hansen and O. Waever eds., *European Integration and National Identity: The Challenge of the Nordic States* (London: Routledge 2002), p. 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹ Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*.

¹⁰ O. Waever, “Identity, communities and foreign policy,” in Lene Hansen and O. Waever eds., *European Integration and National Identity*, p., 29.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

value in order to derive meaning from them within the context of the social discourses they operate within because “subjects, objects and concepts cannot be seen as existing independent of discourse.”¹²

The paper considers various forms of discourse in its search for anti-Russian attitudes and their impact upon foreign policy outcomes. The next section defines and conceptualizes Russophobia in the American political context and its presence is later revealed to have influenced the decision to expand NATO. What connects these - Russophobia and the decision to expand NATO – is evidence of a pattern of Russophobic discourse within the foreign policy community. This pattern is revealed in the public statements, speeches, personal reflections, and published autobiographies of the central and active agents of foreign policy making in the Clinton Administration. The United States Constitution assigns important foreign policy responsibilities to the Executive Branch; the presidential prerogative when it comes to conducting foreign policy is well documented.¹³ Within the Clinton White House, those individuals responsible for foreign policy both by virtue of office held as well as ability to influence foreign policy decisions are considered. Select office holders include but are not limited to the President Clinton himself, Vice President Al Gore, the Secretaries of State and Defence and relevant deputies, and National Security Advisors. A review of the public reflections of these officeholders reveals that the discourse of Russia-as-threat is influential in the American foreign policy calculus. But before this can be illustrated, a conceptualization of this influential culture of anti-Russianism will be elaborated.

Conceptualizing Russophobia

As Time magazine’s person of the year in 2007, Vladimir Putin took the opportunity to publicly address the negative views of Russia that exist in the West, accusing “some” Americans of perpetuating false view of Russians as “a little bit savage still or they just climbed down from the trees, you know, and probably need to have their hair brushed or their beards trimmed. And have the dirt washed out of their beards and hair. That’s the civilizing mission to be accomplished.”¹⁴ Though Putin’s characterization may be somewhat extreme, Russophobia is well documented in Russia, with politicians and analysts giving voice to this phenomenon and its influences on policy makers. However, much less has been written on Russophobia in English, and for Western audiences. But if we ever hope to truly understand the many facets of the Russia-US relationship, we must consider the ways in which attitudes toward Russia may be influencing American decision making.

¹² Ibid., pp. 28-29.

¹³ The US Constitution designates foreign policy making powers to both the president and congress, although the president is often the primary initiator of foreign policy. Congress possesses powers of oversight that may restrict executive foreign policy initiatives; these include the power to pass resolutions, to issue directives and to withhold or deny funding. See U.S. Constitution, Art 2 and Art 2. Available at: <http://www.usconstitution.net/const.pdf>. See also Gerhard Casper, “Constitutional Constraints on the Conduct of Foreign and Defense Policy: A non-Judicial Model,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 43:3 (Spring 1976): 463-498; J. William Fulbright, “American Foreign Policy in the 20th Century under an 18th Century Constitution,” *Cornell Law Quarterly* 47:1 (Fall 1961): 1-13.

¹⁴ Vladimir Putin, “Time Person of the Year: Putin Q+A” *Time Magazine* 2007. Available at: http://content.time.com/time/specials/2007/personoftheyear/article/0,28804,1690753_1690757_1695787-6,00.html. Accessed March 11, 2016.

Western characterizations of Putin are that he is an evil dictator, abusing democracy, human rights and the rule of law, bent upon re-drawing Europe's map, asserting Russia's influence and balancing against American power at every turn. This characterization of Russia's president is reflected in a 2009 Economist article in which Putin was said to be looking for a war with the West, having "tantrums" over controversial disagreements in the Middle East and Georgia, "stumbling" into disputes with the West, and driven by "paranoia" and "encirclement."¹⁵ While some of these criticisms of Putin may not be entirely unreasonable, there is more to such critiques of Putin than simply policy disagreement. An inherent mistrust of Russia and of Russians themselves, has colored western, and especially American, views about post-Soviet Russia dating back to the Yeltsin presidency.

DW Benn, writing about the misunderstanding of Russia in the West, notes the presence of these ideas in the centuries old words of Lord Palmerston himself, who once described a Russian colleague as "'civil and courteous' but with 'all the cunning of a half-educated savage.'"¹⁶ According to Benn, a special disdain for the Russian people permeates the discourse about Russia, and is easily hidden in the above criticisms about contemporary Russian politics and foreign policy.¹⁷ George Kennan once famously wrote that the political personality of the Soviet Union was one that could not tolerate rivals, and was too "insensitive," "fierce" and "jealous" to share power. The Soviets were absorbed with securing absolute power consistent with an ideology that instructs them to believe that the outside world is hostile and must be resisted.¹⁸ One does not have to look very hard to find these same sentiments about contemporary Russian leaders.

Andrei Tsygankov accurately identifies anti-Russianism, or Russophobia, in American decision making, defined as "a fear of Russia's political system on the grounds that it is incompatible with the interests and values of the West in general and the United States in particular. This fear finds expression in various forms of criticism of Russia that are unbalanced and distorted. No matter which independent actions Moscow may pursue, they are sure to be perceived... as reflecting Russia's expansionist interests, not as a legitimate pursuit of national interests."¹⁹ Russophobia transcends ideological and partisan lines, as both neo-conservative and liberal minded groups demonize Russia in fairly equal measure. These attitudes are more than simply a cultural animosity toward Russians; rather, they reflect "a very real fear of Russia's political influence" that finds expression in a distorted critique of Russia and its politics.²⁰ This animosity results in a persistent need to contain Russia's influence, even in times of relative peace and cooperation between the two nations. This is evidenced by the impulse to expand NATO just a few short years after the end of the Cold War and before the reversal of early expectations for Russia's democratic consolidation. This will be discussed later in the paper.

¹⁵ Putin's War on the West,' *The Economist*, February 14, 2015), p.9.

¹⁶ DW Benn, 'On re-examining western attitudes to Russia,' *International Affairs* 90:6 (2014), p. 1320.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs* (1949).

¹⁹ Andrei Tsygankov "Blaming Moscow: The Power of the Anti-Russia Lobby," *Global Dialogue* 11 (Winter/Spring 2009), p. 66.

²⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russophobia: Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p. xvi.

For Tsygankov, Russia is viewed as an expansionist state that refuses to abide by “acceptable rules of international behavior,” owing either to its political culture or its questionable leadership; either way, it must be “contained or fundamentally transformed.”²¹ Russophobia is informed by a misinterpretation of Russia’s history, one in which Russia has been forced to respond to the actions of the West, rather than represent some sort of ingrained need to conquer and dominate.²² Russia is viewed as an autocratic empire that perpetually oppresses nationalities, denies its citizens basic rights, “concentrates economic and military resources in the hands of the state,” and doggedly pursues its inherent and illegitimate expansionist national interests.²³ This last point bears re-stating: Russia is not accorded the courtesy of being seen to possess legitimate national interests, owing to the above assumptions about its nature and motivations. Tsygankov notes that, “even during the 1990s, when Russia looked more like a failing state than one capable of projecting power, some members of the American political class were worried about the future revival of the Eurasian giant as a revisionist power.”²⁴ He attributes the rampant triumphalism in the US at the end of the Cold War to this fear of Russia, noting it reached its zenith in the mid-1990s.²⁵ In fact, it was actually the Clinton administration that “entrenched the rhetoric of victorious thinking by drawing the analogy between Russia and the defeat of Germany and Japan in World War II.”²⁶ This triumphalism implied something inherently superior, and therefore inferior, about the US and Russia, respectively.

Tsygankov is quick to label American Russophobia as a political phenomenon rather than a cultural phenomenon, leaving open the possibility for its willful reversal.²⁷ While it may be the case that Russophobia’s presence in American foreign policy making may not be a *fait accompli*, its presence in the American discourse may reflect more of a cultural presence of anti-Russianism that is self-reinforcing. In fact, Tsygankov himself notes that public opinion followed elite opinion and policy,²⁸ which testifies to its presence in the popular discourse. Tsygankov claims that the infusion of Russophobia into elite and popular attitudes about Russia is the result of a willful construction of an anti-Russian lobby in order to advance a particular foreign policy agenda. “The Lobby,” is a deliberate cabal of anti-Russian military hawks, or those who presume American geopolitical hegemony can best be achieved by the military defeat of Russia, as well as those who assertively presume the hegemony of so-called liberal values of democracy, rule of law and human rights.²⁹ This Lobby allegedly dates back to the early 20th Century, its views solidified by the Cold War, to which members of Congress and policy makers in the White House have been sympathetic.³⁰ While Tsygankov acknowledges that some of the Lobby’s success could be attributed to the absence of a *pro*-Russia lobby in the US,³¹ his attention is

²¹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

²² Ibid., p. 11.

²³ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 40-42.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

³¹ Ibid., p. 44.

trained on the Lobby's political goal of fostering anti-Russian sentiment in the West in support of a "global power struggle" against a potential "resurgent" Russia, rife with what Zbigniew Brzezinski once labeled "neo-colonial thinkers."³²

Tsygankov seeks to explain the construction and persistence of an anti-Russian lobby that is *purposefully* distorting Russia's role in the world, its history and its interests to advance an anti-Russia agenda; however, this is not the precise case made herein. Tsygankov's premise is not fundamentally rejected here, but it is not fully embraced either. There does seem to be a culture of anti-Russianism present in Washington that has influenced foreign policy elites, but it may not necessarily be the result of an *intentional* drive to keep Russia down. What this paper shares with Tsygankov is the conviction that Russophobia exists, has a significant influence on American foreign policy concerning Russia, and therefore must be better identified and understood. The goal here is not to reveal malevolence toward Russia, but rather to name this Russophobia, discuss its genesis, and connect it with foreign policy outcomes in the hope of illuminating what remains a significant impediment to a more constructive Russia-US relationship.

In his writing on Russophobia, Anatol Lieven suggests that anti-Russianism is derived in part from the myth of America's own exceptionalism. This mythology sees the US standing taller than other nations, able to make objective observations about other states' motives, and thereby construct appropriate policy in response. Lieven warns of the dangers of such assumptions, because they render US policy makers "incapable of understanding the opposition of other nations" to its own policies.³³ Lieven takes on NATO expansion directly, noting that, among the many reasons Russia opposes it, is the US' failure to appreciate what it means for Russia. US policy makers have been genuinely puzzled by Russia's failure to perceive its enlargement as benign, which is due in part to the American rhetoric that exists alongside the policy decision itself. It is not only the physical expansion of NATO that is problematic, but the corresponding failure to bother understanding Russia's interests. This unwillingness to understand Russia, combined with the embrace of longstanding and outworn stereotypes about Russia, assumptions about the pattern of history in Russia, as well as a Cold War "hangover" of sorts, which cannot shake the image of Russia-as-threat, all contribute to define Russophobia and the discourse within which American foreign policy is made.

Lieven speculates that the intellectual basis for this Russophobia may stem from 19th Century British propaganda regarding Russian expansionism and its inherent wickedness. Lieven notes that this demonization of other peoples, sometimes taking on a racist tone, has long been present within Western, and American, foreign policy making.³⁴ Moreover, there is a tendency to assume that what was once assumed about a nation and its peoples shall forever be true about them, even in the absence of supporting evidence. This sort of historical determinism denies a nuanced appreciation for cultural evolution and very much denies the potential for American leaders to view post-Soviet Russia's disappointing struggles with democracy for what they are. Instead, they have been viewed against the

³² Ibid., pp.. 67, 71.

³³ Anatol Lieven, "Against Russophobia," *World Policy Journal* 17:4 (Winter 2000-2001), p. 25.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 26.

backdrop of Russia's Tsarist and Communist experiences and are therefore "wicked."³⁵ This is evidenced by Henry Kissinger's 2000 remark that Russian imperialism has continued for centuries, characterized by subjugation of its neighbours and "overawing those not under its direct control" and in Zbigniew Brzezinski's assigning of blame for Stalinist-era policies to present day Russians.³⁶ For Lieven, to view past conduct as less a product of history and more a product of culture or "national DNA" of sorts, comes perilously close to racism. There is a certain essentialism in the American discourse on Russia that equates these acts with "Russianness." Perhaps, as Tsygankov suggests, demonizing Russia continued to help justify US strategy toward the USSR in the Cold War. For Lieven, this legitimized the military buildup, the containment, the worldview and actions that stemmed from the need to balance Soviet power.³⁷ Yet, as Lieven importantly notes, even those who demonize Russia for its past seem to have little problem embracing Communist China,³⁸ so perhaps it is not communism in Russia's past the Western leaders fear, but rather something cultural, something innately "Russian."

Lieven concurs about the self-reinforcing nature of Russophobia, noting the US' "need for enemies"³⁹ as an instrumental component of its own narrative of exceptionalism. Perhaps the result of viewing Russia as the enemy for so long is the reason it has become one. Russophobia has enabled the judging of Russia "by utterly different standards than those applied to other countries."⁴⁰ Tsygankov and Lieven are correct to suggest a linkage between Russophobia and America's own mythologies about its place in the world. America's destiny is to be a cultural hegemon atop the global hierarchy of nations. The perception of American superiority seems to require an "other" to assume a position of inferiority. Russia has long represented a new cultural frontier and a divergent history, one that was assumed to be far less "exceptional" than the American experience. Challenges to the presumption of American hegemony have often been met with not simply disagreement, but a de-legitimizing of the very existence of the 'other.' Russia is not immune from ideas of exceptionalism and the two nations have perpetuated a soft rivalry that possesses "nationalist phobias"⁴¹ that can be mutually reinforcing.

Gertan Dijkink acknowledges that this "gross distinction between East and West as opposite cultures" is part of the US discourse on Russia.⁴² For Dijkink, this does not have to be addressed directly, or be part of a public discussion, because it has become "naturalized," or considered to be common sense. He notes that experience and discourse create an imaginative geography of the outside world, which contributes to the construction of visions of the world.⁴³ Dijkink notes that, after all, "American foreign policy aims to perpetuate, serve and affirm the American way of life,"⁴⁴ thus helping to explain why Russia's alternative to "the American way," presents a challenge. Georg Lofflman confirms the impact of

³⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 30.

⁴¹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russophobia: Anti-Russian Lobby and American Foreign Policy*.

⁴² Gertan Dijkink: *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain*, (New York: Routledge 1996), 2.

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

mythology on discourse and the influence on foreign policy outcomes.⁴⁵ Myths shape identity, become themselves part of identity, and influence action. It is reasonable to suggest that American exceptionalism influences Russophobia. If the US is unique, its values superior, and therefore its preeminence in the international system assumed, and if Russia fundamentally challenges these values – America’s very identity – in some way, then fear of what Russia represents may be a consequence. Putin himself famously warned Americans in 2013 of the dangers of seeing themselves as exceptional.⁴⁶

Richard Sakwa notes the difficult time US leaders have had accepting Russia as an equal.⁴⁷ Russia did not see itself as a defeated power after the Cold War and conducted itself as such, a view in opposition to the prevailing Washington narrative. Sakwa notes that Russia as a democratic state was no less revisionist than Russia as a communist state and that this was threatening to the existing world order that presumed the hegemony of western liberal ideas.⁴⁸ Even though Russian foreign policy was actually fairly unthreatening, and could even be characterized as collaborative for many years, it was not universally viewed this way because of the geopolitical threat it was perceived to represent.⁴⁹ Sakwa also claims that some of the anti-Russianism has a strong basis in history, as Russia has never really been considered to be a part of Europe. Its very presence has motivated European integration; post WWII European identity was constructed on the basis of Russian exclusion, a reality that was confirmed by decades of the Cold War. That the fear of Russia and the exclusionary attitude toward Russia persist, driven largely by the United States and the derivative suspicion of Russia from the Cold War period, is problematic but not surprising.⁵⁰

Russophobia in Western discourse has been written about, by Russians themselves – poets and writers – for nearly two centuries.⁵¹ Some have suggested that Russian fears of American Russophobia fuel a siege mentality present within Moscow since the end of the Cold War. Russophobia has had an impact; it has influenced the manner in which Russia approaches its own relations with the West. Valentina Feklyunina confirms that the assumption of American Russophobia by Russians themselves has shaped Russia’s self perception, and more importantly it has shaped Russia’s expectations for how foreign nations will engage with them.⁵² Russian leaders anticipate anti-Russianism in their dealings with the West, which shapes and perpetuate an “us vs. them” discourse among Russian decision makers that may be reinforcing the narrative of fear in Washington.

⁴⁵ Georg Löffmann, “Leading from Behind: American Exceptionalism and President Obama’s post-American Vision of Hegemony,” *Geopolitics* 20:2 (2015): 308-332.

⁴⁶ Vladimir Putin, “A Plea for Caution From Russia,” *New York Times*, September 11, 2013. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html>. Accessed March 11th, 2016.

⁴⁷ Richard Sakwa, “The Cold Peace: Making Sense of Russia’s Relationship with the West,” in Roger E. Kanet and Maria R. Freire, eds., *Russia and European Security* (Dordrecht: True Republic of Letters Publishing, 2012), 21.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵¹ Valentina Feklyunina, “Constructing Russophobia” in Ray Taras, *Russia’s Identity in International Relations: Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 92.

Russophobia ought not be confused with criticism of Russia. Heikki Luostarinen cautions that Finland, for example, no longer exhibits Russophobia, but that it remains free to offer social and political criticism.⁵³ Russophobia is more than a disagreement or even competing values; in fact, during the Cold War, Russophobia took on what Luostarinen identifies as racist tones reflected in movies about the evils of the Soviet empire.⁵⁴ The USSR was often cast not simply as the enemy, but as an evil villain, which justified its complete evisceration and for which no action taken toward this goal could be considered illegitimate. This demonization of the enemy may have parallels with the post 9/11 discourse about terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS). During the Cold War, hostilities with the Soviet Union gave way to “fear, moral disgust and ignorance,” which were coupled with a lack of knowledge about the Soviet Union. Luostarinen explains that this enemy imaging involves the belief, by a cultural or political group and even a nation state itself, that one’s very security and fundamental values are purposefully and meaningfully threatened by the other.⁵⁵ This enemy becomes essential to identity construction and may even serve some collective psychological need to perceive a threat for which a harsh response is justified. Externalizing a common threat can be essential to legitimizing a collective identity and historical experience.⁵⁶ This “us vs. them” narrative can feed a powerful nationalism, which can provide a context for behaviors that might otherwise be difficult to legitimize. This enemy construction can become ingrained as mythology among members of a society. The “enemy image may strengthen integration within a given group and moderate internal conflicts; it may help to bring the rank and file behind the group leaders; it may be used (scapegoat) to explain any injustices within the group.”⁵⁷

Luostarinen is careful to note that the construction of an enemy image does not mean that the so-called enemy itself is not guilty of actions that contribute to its demonization. The construction of an enemy image of Russia stems largely from the very real fact that, for centuries, Russia has stood for much of what Western values opposed: “autocracy, national repression, and conservatism” and later “radicalism and social revolution.”⁵⁸ Fear of Russian aggression has been in place since the 16th Century, blossoming alongside the growth of Russian power.⁵⁹ But this fear was coupled with the racist view of Russians as an inferior, inherently violent race that could not be trusted, thereby necessitating the conclusion that peaceful coexistence could not be countenanced; mistrust of the Russian leadership transformed into a cultural loathing of Russians themselves.⁶⁰ John Gleason describes as deep seated fear or dislike of Russia, which is the result of misunderstanding of Russian history and culture, rooted in “competitive imperial ambitions.”⁶¹ Gleason notes that it may be a natural inclination to fear that which we know the

⁵³ Heikki Luostarinen, “Finnish Russophobia: The Story of an Enemy Image,” *Journal of Peace Research* 26:2 (1989): 123-137.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁶¹ John Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain*, (Octagon Books, 1971), page1.

least,⁶² which could help to explain the presence of Russophobia in earlier periods when connection with cultures across the globe was a rare occurrence. It does far less to explain the persistence of Russophobia in a time in which, notwithstanding the warnings of Samuel Huntington and others for whom cultural difference is a basis for conflict,⁶³ contemporary access to a diversity of cultures can prompt cultural awareness, acceptance, and even fusion. This does not appear to be the case with American views of Russia, which remain imbued with an air of repugnance in which even minor differences take on elevated significance.

This lingering hostility toward Russia – Russophobia - has fostered an environment in which cooperation is difficult and missed opportunities abound. As a consequence of the perpetual misinterpretation of Russia, US leaders miss key opportunities for finding compatibility with Russia, particularly in key matters of security such as fighting terrorism, dealing with weapons proliferation, illegal drugs, energy security and working together to address instability in strategic and volatile regions⁶⁴ and informs the pursuit of a foreign policy agenda that needlessly antagonizes Russia in an already uncertain international system. Moreover, the expansion of NATO eastward is evidence for some that the US continues to fight the Cold War and has perpetuated in response an extant anti-Americanism in Russia that will continue to make it difficult for the US to pursue its interests.

Russophobia in the Clinton Administration (1993-2001) and the Decision to Expand NATO

The decision to expand NATO was taken during the Clinton administration and was endorsed by key members of the president's staff. This section will consider those key policy makers in the Clinton administration with an instrumental role in constructing, and operationalizing, the discourse about Russia as well as figuring out what to do with NATO in the absence of its primary *raison d'être*. It must be acknowledged that attitudes toward Russia were considerably more optimistic in the Clinton years than they were under any other post-Cold War presidential administration, but this is largely due to the open-ended nature of Russia's new democracy at that time and the hope that democratic reform could rise from the ashes of the Soviet Union. By the end of Clinton's second term, the grand expectations for democracy in Russia had faded.

Initially, Clinton and Vice President Al Gore were among the most vocally supportive of President Boris Yeltsin's commitment to democratize a newly independent Russia. Clinton administration officials seemed genuinely committed to enabling Russian democracy, and focused much energy on how the United States could best support the changes they wanted to see take root in Russia. This early optimism explains why NATO expansion was not explicitly anti-Russian in nature; however, it may also explain why American leaders struggled to articulate a clear rationale for enlargement. The

⁶² Ibid., p. 6.

⁶³ See for example, Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, (NY: Touchstone, 1996); Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism and Reshaping the World* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1995); and, Robert Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic* (February 1994).

⁶⁴ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russophobia*, p. 18.

administration was not overtly anti-Russian, but nonetheless sought a “hedge” against a potentially resurgent Russia, particularly in response to east European concerns about Russia’s political future.

Despite this early optimism, traces of anti-Russian sentiment can be found among key members of the Clinton administration. It is difficult to separate the enlargement decision from persistent concerns about what Russia could become, skepticism about its leadership, and an at times condescending view of Russian officials and their motives. Reservations about Russia were held by a number of influential decision makers who also happened to be tasked with forging a new, post-Cold War Russia policy, as well as an agenda for European security whose bellwether was the expansion of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe.

This paper maintains that, while anti-Russian sentiment may be less obvious under the Clinton administration than in subsequent administrations (which the author is concurrently investigating), it remains that an anti-Russian discourse was indeed present and likely had an influence upon decision makers. Even though the Soviet Union had collapsed, Russia had undergone a major political transformation, and its president had a fairly good working relationship with Washington, there remained a sense that post-Soviet Russia was an unknown quantity; concern about Russia’s future was palpable in Washington and in the absence of a clear path forward, old ideas and assumptions about Russia continued to influence the discourse. What follows is a survey of reflections about Russia from key foreign policy makers in the Clinton administration, either during or after their time in office. It becomes clear that, despite efforts to engage Russian leaders and maintain a positive relationship with Russia, these individuals contributed to a general discourse about Russia that reflects elements of the Russophobia discussed above. While the Clinton administration was not aggressively anti-Russian, a culture of negativity did exist, which undoubtedly influenced the decision to expand NATO. This analysis will proceed from the top down, beginning with president Clinton himself, vice president Al Gore, his State and Defence department secretaries, and national security advisors.

President Bill Clinton (1993-2001)

Upon taking office in 1993, Clinton’s plan was to focus on domestic affairs and delegate foreign policy to his national security team, an agenda crystallized by his now famous remark that “foreign policy is not what I came here to do.” However, world events quickly upended these best laid plans; in a few short years Clinton was thrust into the role of exercising American power in an uncertain world, particularly when it came to navigating relations with Russia, itself reeling from the collapse of the Soviet Union, a domestic power struggle, and an unconsolidated – and often precarious – democracy. Clinton’s attention was quickly drawn to supporting Yeltsin’s ostensible quest to build a lasting democracy in Russia, and to build with European nations, old and new, a continental security framework. Newly independent nations in Central and Eastern Europe sought assurances from the West as they faced an uncertain future and an uncertain Russia.

Clinton became personally engaged on the Russia-file, forging a relationship with Yeltsin and influencing the course of his administration’s ambitions for European security, notably the enlargement of NATO.

Not all members of his administration favored NATO enlargement initially, due to concerns about Russia. Some worried that enlarging NATO was unnecessary and could raise security concerns for Russia. Given its domestic political instability, NATO expansion could give rise to nationalist sentiment, empower Yeltsin's political opposition, and could contribute to de-stabilizing an already precarious political situation in Russia. In fact, according to James Goldgeier, the plan for the expansion of NATO was never really discussed among top advisors in the early stages; rather the movement forward on NATO expansion came only after the President began announcing that it would happen: "The when, who, how and even why came only over time and not always through a formal decision making process."⁶⁵

Clinton made the decision to expand NATO in April 1993 after a series of meetings with Central and East European leaders including Czech President Vaclav Havel and Polish President Lech Walesa. For Clinton, these leaders possessed a sort of moral authority that years of fighting to "throw off the Soviet yoke" had afforded them.⁶⁶ From this point on, the operating assumption among many top Clinton advisors on the subject of NATO was not whether, but when NATO would expand.⁶⁷ Clinton told Yeltsin in a 1994 meeting that he was sympathetic to the former Soviet nations that wanted into NATO because "the issue is about psychological security" and he noted, "they're afraid of being left in a gray area or in a purgatory."⁶⁸ Clinton's certainty about enlargement enabled advocates to interpret his assurances of expansion as a license to begin work on the details of scope and pace. Critical of the process, Goldgeier explains that once the decision to expand was made, the process kept rolling, even without a clear understanding of its logistics. This criticism bears out in the many first-hand accounts of top advisors on the subject of enlargement policy. It was not clear what expansion would look like, just that Clinton felt it would be essential as a way to "integrate and unify Europe."⁶⁹

To be clear, this was not a key agenda item for European NATO members; this was an American-driven initiative and was a significant policy decision to mobilize without a high level understanding of just what the end goal was or the appropriate process for achieving it. Perhaps it was little surprise that the Russians were as confused as they were about the meaning of enlargement and why this continued to be a thorn in the Russia-US relationship throughout Clinton's presidency, and beyond. One interpretation of the decision to expand NATO could be that it was a knee-jerk reaction to the unprecedented events of the early 1990s, rooted in the fears of the past. Perhaps it is best understood as a response to a latent sense of apprehension or mistrust over what was transpiring in Russia. Clinton himself noted, "he had picked up a bad feeling on the trip to Russia... and ominous sixth sense. I had it, and Hillary had it, too."⁷⁰

⁶⁵ James Goldgeier, "NATO Expansion: The Anatomy of a decision," in Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, eds., *Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), p. 332.

⁶⁶ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 20.

⁶⁷ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003).

⁶⁸ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 136.

⁶⁹ Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 276.

⁷⁰ Taylor Branch, *The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History in the White House* (Simon and Schuster, 2010) pp. 108-109.

Clinton was worried about the long-term prospects of the former Soviet space, especially Russia. He noted, “democracy can make it there, but you can begin to feel why patterns of history repeat themselves.” Clinton further noted that, “it was hard for Russia to get through the shock of establishing markets and openly functioning government, away from evaluating herself by military threats and dominion over surrounding countries.”⁷¹ Clinton expressed concern, perhaps justified, about certain Russian elites – Yeltsin’s opposition – who were itching to return the country to its previous course. As such, Clinton’s Russia policy became highly personalized; the focus shifted early on to the need to support Yeltsin personally, as he was perceived to be the best, albeit flawed, steward of democracy in Russia. This influence of the personal on policy decisions is a well documented feature of the Clinton White House.⁷² For good or for ill this influenced Clinton’s relationship Yeltsin, about whom he famously said, “I get the feeling he’s up to his ass in alligators....we’ve got to try to keep Yeltsin going.”⁷³ The hope was placed on Yeltsin, but not on other Russian leaders. The expectation was that democracy was going to have to be delivered from the top down, and with the US’ help, because others leaders could not be trusted with taking Russia into a new and modern democracy. Clinton’s expressed commitment to working with Yeltsin on democratic reform is not evidence of pro-Russian sentiment, but was instead done with American, and even re-election, interests in mind. “Letting Russia be Russia” was never an option. Democracy promotion, which NATO enlargement was said to support, became a re-election selling point for president Clinton,⁷⁴ and even Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien recognized that the NATO expansion agenda was accelerated for domestic political purposes.⁷⁵

Of course there are multiple explanations for the American decision to expand NATO, but one of them was a persistent sense of foreboding, noted by Clinton above, that Russian reform may slip backward, that darker forces within Russia may prevail. Helping to enable democracy by supporting Yeltsin was an important way to accomplish the American goal of consolidating the post-Cold War settlement. As George MacLean explains, “the Russian bear had been declawed” and that Americans generally didn’t care about Russia, other than to prevent its resurgence.⁷⁶ Clinton seemed dedicated to the principle of democracy promotion and came to value his personal relationship with Yeltsin as a means for accomplishing this.

Former National Security Advisor Sandy Berger recalled that Clinton, in a 1994 visit to Moscow, spoke about Russia’s future positively, paraphrasing his words this way: “the question is not whether Russia is great; the question is how Russia defines its greatness. Does Russia define its greatness by the amount of territory it controls, or does Russia define its greatness by the opportunities it’s creating for its people

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² See for example Albright, *Madam Secretary*; and Talbot, *The Russia Hand*.

⁷³ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand: A Memoir of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Random House 2003), p. 38.

⁷⁴ Charles-Phillippe David, “‘Foreign Policy is Not What I Came Here to Do’ Dissecting Clinton’s Foreign Policy Making: A First Cut,” Occasional Paper 1, Centre for United States Studies of the Raoul Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies. Available at: http://www.ieim.uqam.ca/IMG/pdf/foreign_policy_firstcut.pdf. Accessed May 3, 2016.

⁷⁵ “Oops, A Blunt Canadian on NATO,” *New York Times* July 11, 1997. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/11/world/oops-a-blunt-canadian-on-nato.html>. Accessed May 3, 2016.

⁷⁶ George MacLean, *Clinton’s Foreign Policy in Russia: From Deterrence and Isolation to Democratization and Engagement* (Ashgate, 2006), p. 5.

to have better lives?”⁷⁷ The Clinton administration was committed to what Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot called a “strategic alliance with Russian reform,” in a 1993 memo to the president. Talbot’s goal was “not just to prevent the worst, but also to nurture the best that might happen in the former Soviet Union.”⁷⁸ Walter Slocombe confirms this impulse, noting that supporting Yeltsin in his quest for reform in Russia was Clinton’s highest priority.⁷⁹ Clinton was concerned that Yeltsin needed his help and wanted to be on the right side of history in his support for Russia. But Clinton remained cautious about Russia, noting the potential dangers of the instability that had taken up the space of the Cold War, “the end of the Cold War does not mean the end of danger in the world. Even as we restructure our defenses, we must prepare for new threats.”⁸⁰ Clinton noted that, in addition to nuclear weapons agreements Russia must,

...do more than make the transition from state socialism to free markets. Constitutional democracy must take root firmly there as well. The popular movement for Russian democracy has been held together more by anti-communism than by a clear or common understanding of how to build a democratic society. Democracy remains an abstract and theoretical notion; there is an enormous deficit of knowledge in the former Soviet Union about the texture and dynamics of a free society.⁸¹

Clinton, more than any other post-Cold War US president had a unique window of opportunity to strike the right tone in a new relationship with Russia. He is appropriately credited within mainstream analysis with extending a friendly hand to Yeltsin and to Russia. He is widely credited with the NATO-Russia partnership in 1997, and also with negotiating a NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Agreement with Russia.⁸² Clinton met with Yeltsin some 18 times throughout his presidency and advocated for Russian membership in the G8. However, while the optics of this outreach may have contributed to winning him these accolades, and a second term, this “friendly hand” was not always perceived as such by Russian leaders. Russian leaders were expected to acquiesce to enlargement; Russia’s concerns largely fell upon deaf ears. The pace of expansion may have been cautious from the American perspective, but from the Russian perspective, expansion never should have happened at all. The US may have reached out a hand in friendship, but in the other hand lay a shield – a hedge against a resurgent Russia. NATO enlargement

⁷⁷ Russell Riley, “Sandy Berger’s Washington,” *The Atlantic*, December 15, 2015. Available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/12/sandy-bergers-washington/418812/>. Accessed May 3, 2016.

⁷⁸ Walter B. Slocombe, “A Crisis of Opportunity: The Clinton Administration and Russia,” in Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds., *In uncertain times: American foreign policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11* (Cornell University Press, 2011), p. 81.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bill Clinton, “A Strategy for Foreign Policy: Assistance to Russia.” Speech to the Foreign Policy Association (New York: April 1, 1992).

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² The Partnership for Peace, launched in 1994, was a program of bilateral cooperation between NATO and non-member, Euro-Atlantic area nations, many of which were former Soviet and Soviet bloc countries. Chiefly to encourage stability, the PfP’s purpose was to create unique security relationships between NATO and each of the now 22 partner countries. Seen by some as a launching point for NATO entry, the PfP encouraged democratic reform, and was eagerly welcomed by Central and East European nations who sought coordination with the Alliance in a host of areas, including defence planning, civil-military relations, joint military exercises, and emergency preparedness, etc.

went full steam ahead from the moment in 1993 when Clinton decided to make it a priority. While Clinton himself may have exhibited a positive hope for democratic change in Russia, some members of his administration did not always exhibit the same degree of optimism, especially in later years when the “who lost Russia” narrative began to gain traction.

Vice President Al Gore (1993-2001)

History will remember Al Gore as probably the most influential vice president in history up until that time, referred to by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright as the president’s “full partner in policy discussions.”⁸³ President Clinton relied upon him, notably for his foreign policy knowledge and especially when it came to relations with Russia. Yet, while Gore was known for his positivity about engaging Russia, he, like Clinton, exhibited reservations about Russia and elements of its history.

Clinton had a notoriously difficult time making decisions⁸⁴ and was prone to making grand statements without consulting with his advisors. According to some accounts this rings true when it came to NATO expansion. Vice president Gore would often “reign in” the president and was welcomed to this role by Secretary of State Warren Christopher.⁸⁵ According to former White House aide Peter Boyer, Gore attended white house meetings with foreign leaders, was a member of the National Security Council and also lunched with Clinton on a weekly basis and met weekly with Christopher to discuss foreign policy matters.⁸⁶

Perhaps the most high profile recognition of Gore’s foreign policy competence was his appointment to the head the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, a high level Russia-US working group tasked with managing some of the most difficult issues facing the two countries including energy, the environment and space. Charles-Phillippe David notes that Gore was Clinton’s “closest adviser” and “sometimes filled the traditional operational roles of the president, the secretary of state, and the national security adviser.”⁸⁷ Like Clinton, Gore was a fierce advocate for promoting democratic nation building in Russia. Perhaps Gore’s efforts to do so help to explain his reflections on Russia’s past, which were decidedly dark. Like many American critiques of communism, rather than characterizing it as a failed experiment, Gore labeled it as an “an *evil* (emphasis added) ideology that is enslaving and doesn’t work.”⁸⁸ Moreover, his choice of adjectives to describe Liberal Democratic Party of Russia leader and frequent presidential candidate Vladimir Zhirinovskiy⁸⁹ in 1993 are similar: “he is “reprehensible and anathema to

⁸³ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 180. See also Michael A. Genovese, Todd L. Belt, and William W. Lammers. *Presidency and Domestic Policy: Comparing Leadership Styles, FDR to Obama* (Routledge, 2015).

⁸⁴ Paul Kengor, “The Foreign Policy Role of Vice President Al Gore,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (1997): 20.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁷ Charles-Phillippe David, “Foreign Policy is Not What I Came Here to Do’ Dissecting Clinton’s Foreign Policy Making: A First Cut,” *Occasional Paper 1, Centre for United States Studies of the Raoul Dandurand Chair of Strategic and Diplomatic Studies*. Available at: http://www.ieim.ugam.ca/IMG/pdf/foreign_policy_firstcut.pdf. Accessed May 3, 2016

⁸⁸ Paul Kengor, “The Foreign Policy Role of Vice President Al Gore,” p, 16.

⁸⁹ Zhirinovskiy was a presidential candidate in the years 1991, 1996, 2000, 2008 and 2012.

all freedom-loving peoples.”⁹⁰ As Kengor notes, in an administration not known for its assertiveness, Gore emerged as one of the White House’s leading hawks, at least when it came to a relentless pursuit of democracy in Russia.⁹¹ In fact, Gore delivered a powerful speech in 1994 about the place of Central and Eastern Europe in American strategic thinking. He stated assertively that, “we did not spend years supporting Solidarity just to lose democracy in Poland. We did not celebrate the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia just to see that birth of freedom die from neglect...the new NATO must address the concerns of those nations that lie between Russia and Western Europe, for the security of these states and for the security of America...especially after Russia’s recent elections, those states are naturally concerned about whether they will again be rendered pieces of a buffer zone, prizes to be argued over by others.”⁹² Ultimately, while Gore was at first glance the least anti-Russian member of the administration in the sense that he praised Yeltsin’s efforts and encouraged democratic reform, he contributed to, and seemed to be influenced by, a culture of suspicion and mistrust about Russia that made itself felt in his above remarks.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher (1993-1997)

Warren Christopher ran the State Department in Clinton’s first term and was an able and experienced diplomat. He and others have acknowledged though that he was happy to include other members of Clinton’s team in the decision making process and was not known for taking the lead on the NATO enlargement file. Christopher favored the preservation and enhancement of NATO but displayed less exuberance about the promise of democracy in Russia than Clinton and Gore did. In fact, Christopher appointed Richard Holbrooke – an early architect of expansion, with Anthony Lake - to the role of Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs in September 1994, at which time Holbrooke became the administration’s NATO expansion policy “enforcer.”⁹³

In a 1993 speech to the University of Indiana on US policy toward the former Soviet states, Christopher noted the need for caution because Russian politicians were still experiencing the legacy of empire, struggling to shed a desire to dominate all Russia’s ethnic peoples; Christopher noted that this legacy of empire and domination was visible in Russia’s handling of Chechnya.⁹⁴ Christopher also urged Russia to “avoid any attempt to reconstitute the USSR.”⁹⁵ For Christopher, “helping consolidate democracy in Russia is not a matter of charity but a security concern of the highest order. It is no less important to our

⁹⁰ Paul Kengor, p. 27.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁹² “Forging a New Partnership for Peace and Prosperity,” Department of State Dispatch, January 10, 1994, vol. 5, pp. 13-16 cited by Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 54.

⁹³ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 11 and 73.

⁹⁴ National Security Council, Speechwriting Office, and Robert Boorstin, “Secretary W. Christopher - Trade Relations, 12/16/93,” *Clinton Digital Library*, <http://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/10062>. Date Accessed: April 21, 2016.

⁹⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “A Plan for Europe: How to Expand NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 74:1 (January/February 1995).

well-being than the need to contain a hostile Soviet Union was at an earlier day.”⁹⁶ However, a diplomatic and a dutiful servant of the president, Christopher was supportive of US efforts to assist Russia in transforming its political system noting,

Our policy towards Russia has been and will continue to be based on a clear-eyed understanding of the facts on the ground. As President Clinton has stressed, we reject the superficial caricature of Russia that suggests it is predestined to aggression, predisposed to dictatorship, or predetermined to economic failure. At the same time, we are under no illusion that success is assured. The plain truth is that Russia has a choice. It can define itself in terms of its past or in terms of a better future.⁹⁷

Despite the assertion that old assumptions should not be assigned to Russia, Christopher displayed caution when it came to dealing with Russia. Later reflecting on his time in office he noted, “in my first major speech as Secretary of State, I observed that Russia’s struggle to transform itself would be hard and that success was by no means assured. That remains my judgment today.”⁹⁸ He went on to note that Russia has not yet overcome the ruinous legacy of seven decades of communism- a legacy visible in crime, corruption, and poverty. Recent events reflect troubling signs of Russian reform under strain.”⁹⁹ It is not difficult to trace a mistrust of Russia, based largely upon its Soviet legacy, in Christopher’s remarks. In fact, on his first meeting with Yeltsin in Vancouver in 1993 Christopher registers genuine surprise that the Russian leader was wearing a tailored suit, his hair in place, looking stylish and charismatic.¹⁰⁰ He comments as well on Yeltsin’s leadership and diplomatic style, noting his attempt to “bulldoze” Clinton with an aggressive persona, until he realized he could not dominate a president who was “equally well prepared.”¹⁰¹ There is a slightly derogatory tone to Christopher’s remarks about the Russian president. On Yeltsin’s fiery response to Clinton’s 1994 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) address calling for European unity and advocating the Partnership for Peace (pFP) program, Christopher describes Yeltsin’s reaction as a “belligerent, theatrical tirade” in which he famously warned of a cold peace descending upon Europe.¹⁰² Other descriptors Christopher uses for Russian leaders, notably Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov, in communicating his displeasure with the US commitment to NATO expansion, were “launching an attack” “bluster and filibuster” “vociferous display(s).”¹⁰³ Throughout his characterization of these “displays” of Russian opposition to the US’ NATO expansion agenda, Christopher implies that the Russian responses were undiplomatic, erratic and that he (Christopher) patiently had to “lower the volume.” There is a failure to assign any legitimacy to Russian concerns about NATO’s presence in close proximity to its borders, no acknowledgement of the Russian Security vulnerability in its sphere of interests (an entitlement his successor later denies Russia). Instead, Russian leaders are characterized as thuggish, and moments of

⁹⁶ Warren Christopher, *In the Stream of History: Shaping Foreign Policy for a New Era* (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 48.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime* (New York: Scribner, 2001), p. 278.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 282.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

poise and polish are uncharacteristically surprising. In tandem with positive statements about Russian democracy, these statements may seem benign upon first blush, but it is posited here that they are in no way benign; rather, they reflect precisely the anti-Russian sentiment described above.

Secretary Of State Madeleine Albright (1997-2001)

Madeleine Albright was carefully chosen to replace Christopher in the State Department after the plan to expand NATO was already in motion. She had previously enjoyed close proximity to foreign policy making in her role as UN Ambassador. Albright was well known inside and outside the Administration as a “hawk,” and as a Secretary unafraid to recommend the use of force, or the promise of it, to advance US interests. By her own account, and as a childhood immigrant from Czechoslovakia, Albright claimed to know too well the brutality of the Soviet regime and was sympathetic to Central and Eastern European nations who sought a hedge against an uncertain Russian future.¹⁰⁴ Albright once commented to Strobe Talbot that she could feel the case for Central Europe’s admission into NATO “in my bones and in my genes.”¹⁰⁵ She feared, “there was a danger that old fault lines would reopen throughout the region, tempting demagogues, inflaming fears, and prompting efforts to achieve security by force.”¹⁰⁶ Albright favored bringing newly independent European democracies into NATO because “if they were denied NATO protection, they would be in political limbo and... (this could) result in unpredictable alliances.”¹⁰⁷ This was a concern to Albright even as UN Ambassador; she travelled to the Caucasus in 1994 to “show American support for the sovereignty of the newly freed nations and caution Russia against unwarranted meddling or treating the area as a ‘sphere of interest.’”¹⁰⁸ It seems the United States was entitled to a sphere of interest but Russia was denied this great power entitlement.

Albright’s fears of a return to communism in Russia may well be rooted in her family’s flight from Czechoslovakia following the 1948 coup, but it is also well known that Albright had a famous, and decidedly anti-Russian mentor in her PhD supervisor from Columbia, Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski is a well known anti-Russian activist¹⁰⁹ and in fact both Albright and Brzezinski’s son (an American diplomat), as well as former Assistant Secretary of State for Europe Richard Holbrooke, signed an Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union and NATO in 2004, condemning then President Vladimir Putin for weakening Russia’s democratic institutions and taking Russia closer to becoming an authoritarian regime. The letter accused Russia of a return toward empire and militarism, as evidenced by threatening its neighbours, threatening European energy security, and a refusal to comply with Russia’s treaty obligations. They accused Putin of rebuilding “the instruments of state power” and the

¹⁰⁴ Albright references her childhood experience, and her sympathy for extending NATO’s security guarantee into the former Soviet space throughout her memoir entitled, *Madam Secretary: A Memoir* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 223.

¹⁰⁶ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 167.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 252.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁹ David Rothkopf, *Running the world: The inside story of the National Security Council and the architects of American power* (Public Affairs, 2009), p. 17.

growing of state security services and called upon European leaders to act.¹¹⁰ Andrei Tsygankov identifies Albright as a member of the anti-Russian Lobby in Washington, which has had a significant influence on shaping American policy and perception about Russia. Tsygankov claims this Lobby's goal is to depict Russia as inherently imperialist and untrustworthy.¹¹¹

Returning to evidence of Russophobia in her tenure in the State Department, Albright devotes a significant portion of her memoir to relations with Russia, registering countless observations about its leaders, fears about its potential return to empire, and the need to ensure the security of Europe given the instability that an uncertain Russia generates. Albright, like Clinton, Gore and others within the administration says all the right things about the need to support Yeltsin and to support democracy in Russia; however, this support for Russia is given on American terms. There is little patience for Russia to work out its political path on its own terms; instead, American interests drive the nature of its support for the country. Like Christopher, Albright speaks about Russian leaders, and any resistance to American objectives, with disdain and impatience. Russian petulance is a common theme in her memoir, which is punctuated with skeptical observations. On a 1997 meeting with Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov on letting UNSCOM¹¹² return to Iraq, Albright speaks of the diplomatic work she and Primakov were engaged in, noting, "I complimented Primakov while probing for hooks beneath the bait....did Moscow make any secret promises? 'This is not a Russian trap,' Primakov assured me, which made me suspect it was."¹¹³ On a 1997 trip to Russia, Primakov asked Albright if she shared similar views on Russia as her mentor (Brzezinski) and asked her if, like him, she was "anti-Russian." Albright replied that she had her own views, but that she would be every bit as zealous in defending American interests as Primakov would be defending Russia's.¹¹⁴ Albright reportedly described Mr. Primakov to colleagues as "he is what he was," implying that his years of experience as a Soviet era bureaucrat were formative.¹¹⁵ Albright was notoriously assertive in her approach to dealing with Russia, which fit with the expectations that she would, in her role as Secretary, commit to driving, within the National Security Council, a more active role for the United States in European affairs.¹¹⁶ According to Strobe Talbot, she informed Yeltsin on the occasion of their first meeting that she had "plenty of first-hand experience with the Cold War, strong views about how to defend her country's interests...tempered with a high degree of pragmatism."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ *An Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union and NATO*, October 6, 2004. Available at: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1237222/posts>. Date accessed: May 4, 2016.

¹¹¹ Andrei Tsygankov, "Blaming Moscow," p. 36.

¹¹² Created in 1991, UNSCOM was the United Nations Special Commission tasked with ensuring Iraqi compliance with UN directives on the production and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the wake of the Gulf War.

¹¹³ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 280.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹¹⁵ Jane Perlez, "Head to Head, Albright and Russia's Prime Minister to do see eye to eye," *New York Times*, January 26, 1999. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/01/26/world/head-to-head-albright-and-russia-s-prime-minister-do-not-see-eye-to-eye.html>. Accessed May 4, 2016.

¹¹⁶ Mark White, *The Presidency of Bill Clinton: The Legacy of a New Domestic and Foreign Policy* (I.B. Tauris, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 235.

On the subject of the NATO-Russia charter,¹¹⁸ of which Albright was a key negotiator, she takes a somewhat condescending approach toward Russia's resistance to expansion, all the while framing her understanding for European nations who wanted to join NATO in the following way: "the Communist authorities kept you from the truth and still you spoke the truth. They fed you a vacuous culture and still you gave us works of art...they tried to smother your allegiances, your faith, and your initiative, and still you taught the world the meaning of solidarity and civil society."¹¹⁹ Rather than frame enlargement in terms of what NATO could become, there was a lot of looking backward at what these nations had experienced, always with the implication that the past was never very far behind. From her own recollections, Albright often found herself having to explain to the Russians just what was in their security interests, and that NATO, and a renewed European security framework, was something they should welcome. It is little wonder that Russian officials resented the American effort to explain Russian security interests to Russians; this approach reflected an arrogance, a paternalism, that Russians grew to resent – a resentment that crystallized under Putin's presidency with his unwillingness to indulge further Western criticism of Russia's domestic affairs. This paternalism can be detected in Albright's reflections about the NATO-Russia charter negotiations: "part of our strategy was to convince the Russians that enlargement would go forward with or without their agreement. We hoped Kremlin leaders would realize that they had as much to gain from a charter as we did. We didn't know, however, if Yeltsin realized that or saw more benefit in venting outrage at American "arrogance."¹²⁰ Albright added that, during a leadership summit between Yeltsin and Clinton in 1997, president Clinton was forced to take on the added role of "chaperone" with Yeltsin to observe how much he drank at dinner and to be a good role model for Yeltsin.¹²¹

In a similar vein, Albright addresses the disagreement with Russia over what to do with Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic during the 1998-1999 Kosovo Crisis and blames the Russians for enabling him; she dismisses Russian concerns about Serbian sovereignty and asserts that any protests over the illegality of what the Americans were proposing in Kosovo was simply a reflection of Russian weakness, rather than legitimate concern for international law and sovereignty. She writes, "throughout this dialogue, the Russians were frustrated by the weak hand they had to play. Their military options were few, their dependence on the West was growing, their domestic politics were toxic, and their putative client in Belgrade was a ruthless dictator." She then adds that, "Yeltsin knew that to stop the bombing he had to make a deal with us, but he did not like what we were offering. So the Russians approached our negotiations with pained ambivalence; their position would lurch toward ours, then settle in

¹¹⁸ Formally the 1997 *Founding Act of Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security Between NATO and Russia*, the charter reflected a political commitment to mutual trust and cooperation between Russia and NATO. The Act created the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, which was to be a mechanism for regular and emergency consultation and decision making at multiple levels to be chaired by the Secretary General of NATO. Russia established a permanent mission to NATO to consult in areas such as security, conflict prevention, joint operations, information sharing, policy planning, arms control and proliferation issues, terrorism, etc. The Permanent Joint Council was suspended by NATO in 2014 after Russia invaded the Crimea, although lines of communication remained open at the ambassadorial level and above.

¹¹⁹ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 261.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

concrete for days or weeks, before lurching forward again.”¹²² She summarizes the Kosovo crisis by crediting western leaders with the handling of Milosevic and the Russians only with getting out of the way, noting, “thanks to the determination of President Clinton, Prime Minister Blair, Secretary General Solana and other NATO leaders, coupled with pragmatism at key moments from Yeltsin and Ivanov, we proved Milosevic wrong.”¹²³ On Milosevic, Albright accuses the Russians of being “behind the curve,”¹²⁴ and interpreting Russian positions as worryingly motivated by weakness: “for decades we had worried about the threat posed by a strong Russia; now we worried about the dangers posed by Russia’s weakness...Russia’s economic problems could depress prospects for growth from the Baltics and central Europe to the Caucasus and central Asia, and the spectacle of Russia imploding might tarnish the image of democracy worldwide. Poverty and degradation were not what people had signed up for when the Iron Curtain lifted.”¹²⁵

Concerns persisted about a return to the past. In her prepared testimony to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the subject of NATO expansion in 1993, Albright explained, “Mr. Chairman, if you don't see smoke, that is no reason to stop paying for fire insurance.” In the same testimony Albright warns that not to expand NATO would render the Alliance “stuck in the past,” and that the “worst elements in Russia would be encouraged.” However she did take care to suggest that “Russia's willingness to work with NATO is an opportunity to be seized, not a reason to hide the silverware.”¹²⁶

Interestingly, despite these positive remarks about working with Russia, and the desire to use NATO enlargement as a way to support democratic ideals, which were said to also benefit Russia, it was not long before the positive momentum the Clinton administration enjoyed was questioned. When Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, administration officials quickly learned that they were dealing with a different sort of leader. It is hardly surprising that Putin’s assertive demeanor and pragmatic articulation of a Russia-first agenda gave American officials pause. But it did not take long for caution to give way to critical parallels with the Soviet period. Albright writes of Putin’s ascension to the presidency, “beneath Putin’s nationalism....democratic instincts were hard to detect.” She was critical of Putin’s heavy handed leadership style, something which she acknowledges Russians were ready for; she ponders, “the question was whether the new President had in mind the kind of ‘order’ that would allow Russia to function as a successful democracy or the kind that translated into autocracy.”¹²⁷ She had “qualms about aspects of Putin’s leadership,” noting it would need to be made clear to him that “the West would welcome Russia only if it retained its commitment to democracy, respected its neighbors’ independence, and met global standards of weapons proliferation.”¹²⁸ Albright also reflects on Putin personally by recalling a concert during a Clinton/Putin summit meeting in Russia at which President Clinton enjoyed the music, but “Putin meanwhile sat rigid and stony-faced. This reminded me, unfairly,

¹²² Ibid., p. 414.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 427.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 501.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 437.

¹²⁶ US Department of State, *Prepared Testimony to the Senate Arms Services Committee on the Subject of NATO Expansion*, April 23, 1997 <http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/statements/970423.html>. Accessed: May 2, 2016.

¹²⁷ Albright, *Madam Secretary*, p. 440.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 441.

of Lenin's complaint: I can't listen to music too often. It affects your nerves, and makes you want to say stupid naïve things."¹²⁹ It is not lost on this author the ease with which parallels to Lenin are made. Perhaps this fits with Albright's more recent characterization of Putin as "a smart, but truly evil man."¹³⁰ Again, the use of the word evil in the discourse about Russia and its leaders harkens back to the Cold War and to the characterization of the enemy. Russia, like the USSR before it, is not seen simply as a nation with which the US disagrees, but as evil, which requires a different sort of mobilization to vanquish. Ultimately, Albright's views of Russia are mixed; at times she reflects optimism about US efforts to support Russia and to accommodate some of their concerns around NATO enlargement, but yet her reflections of this work are infused with a negative impatience about irascible Russian leaders and their ill-informed demands, which seems to perpetuate an extant and inherent mistrust of the Russian leadership. It is hardly difficult to connect these sentiments with sympathy for the concerns of Central and East European nations clamoring to get into NATO.

Secretary of Defence William Perry (1994-1997)

The Department of Defence was generally less enthusiastic about early expansion of NATO, but advocated that preventive defence could be achieved through the Partnership for Peace program.¹³¹ But, rather than see the PfP as a springboard for new member entry into NATO, Secretary Perry viewed it as a mechanism to enable new partners to develop bilateral relations with NATO,¹³² without extending to new partners a role in NATO decisions. With respect to the Russia-as-threat perspective, Perry did exhibit some of this thinking, visible in his reflections about whether or not the end of the Cold War had truly been accepted in both Russia and the United States. He notes that, "Cold War tensions and enmity were showing unmistakable signs of exhaustion," which is a less than ringing endorsement for embracing the new relationship with Russia. He also notes, "in an odd logic, some in the United States believed that the end of the Cold War erased any threat from Russia and that consequently arms control treaties were pointless."¹³³ Continuing to reflect on the issue of arms control, in the context of his exchange with LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy during Perry's October 1996 testimony to the Russian Duma on the subject of ratification of START II, Perry notes,

When I think of the history of arms control in our time, I have considered the deeper significance of Zhirinovskiy's comment to me about his almost primal attack in the Duma on ratification of START II. His attack reflected some very old patterns of human behaviour to include extreme nationalism and tendencies toward isolation. He said "It's just politics." In other words, "politics-as-usual." This comment, traditionally represented a rueful but wise humour, has a more sobering significance in the nuclear era- a triumph of ancient predispositions over reason.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Damien Sharkov, "'Putin is a smart but truly evil man,' says Albright," *Newsweek*, April 20, 2016. Available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/putin-smart-truly-evil-man-says-madeleine-albright-450332>. Accessed May 4, 2016.

¹³¹ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 40-41.

¹³² Ibid., p. 41.

¹³³ William Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (California: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 111.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

The implication here seems to be that Russian attitudes and culture are irreparably victims of history and cannot easily be changed. For Perry, the most important issue in the aftermath of Yeltsin's 1993 election was dealing with Russia's nuclear arsenal. For this reason, Perry resisted NATO expansion, for fear that it would enflame insecurities there and fuel the voices of opposition calling for a more robust Russia on the world stage.¹³⁵ For this reason, Perry disagreed with Gore and others who sought quick expansion and figured they could easily manage the fallout with Russia.¹³⁶ Perry felt that maintaining a good relationship with Russia was a security priority for the United States and he worried that NATO expansion would obstruct this goal. In fact, he was so concerned about this that he considered resigning, but did not want his resignation to be viewed as opposition to NATO expansion exclusively.¹³⁷ He was not opposed to NATO expansion down the road – in fact, he referred to expansion as an important “hedge against pessimistic outcomes”¹³⁸ - he was simply concerned that it could set back the arms control agenda he favoured. This aligned with his advocacy of preventive defence, which stresses diplomacy and conflict prevention over the Cold War objectives of containment and deterrence, which NATO expansion could be considered to reflect.

It is important to note, however, that this approach does not rule out the Russia-as-threat scenario; in fact, it underscores it. Perhaps understandably, given his institutional affiliation, Perry articulated, in conjunction with his Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Security Policy, Ashton Carter, a strategy for addressing A-list threats facing the United States, among which they identified a potentially unstable and aggressive Russia with “loose nukes”.¹³⁹ In their book *Preventive Defence: A New Security Strategy for America*, Perry and Carter draw parallels between Germany between WWI and WWII and post-Soviet Russia noting, “earlier in this century, European statesmen had spurned a former enemy, the Weimar Republic of Germany, and allowed it to fall prey to its worst tendencies. The result was the rise of Adolf Hitler and WWII. The parallels to Boris Yeltsin's Russia were alarming. A crisis for democratic Russia akin to the demise of Weimar Germany could loom in the near future.”¹⁴⁰ They warn, “Like Russia's influence on the world, America's influence on Russia can be strongly positive or strongly negative. At the end of the cold war, the U.S. government understood the Weimar analogy and has since attempted to assist Russian economic and political reform broadly.”¹⁴¹ Perry seemed to be of a similar mind to other members of the administration, like Strobe Talbot, who felt that if Russia continued to reform, respected its neighbours' independence, cooperated with the West, it would be included in some way in an expanded NATO, but if it did not do these things, NATO would be there to protect its neighbours from a resurgent Russia.¹⁴² Interestingly, Perry seemed to share the view, prevalent within the administration, that Russia could very well be expected to revert back to a version of its former self, which was all the more reason it was important for the United States to integrate Russia, constructively,

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Strobe Talbot, “Why NATO Should Grow.”

¹³⁹ Richard Samuels, *Encyclopedia of UN National Security Strategy* (Sage Publications, 2005).

¹⁴⁰ Ashton Carter and William James Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Brookings Institution Press, 2000)p, 33-34.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁴² Strobe Talbot, “Why NATO Should Grow.”

into the international order. Perry was among the loudest advocates for this, noting that NATO expansion should only be done alongside consultation with Russian political and military leaders.¹⁴³

Secretary of Defence William Cohen (1997-2001)

Republican William Cohen became Defense Secretary at a time when NATO expansion and the PfP were well underway. Under Cohen, Defense remained concerned about a resurgent Russia, in response to the president's multiple inquiries about why the US could not push more fervently for more significant reductions in its nuclear arsenal on "account of the dramatic changes in the former Soviet Union. The Defense Department was reluctant to cut back on the number of strategic weapons available for the conduct of World War III given the danger of what was sometimes called a 'recidivist Russia.'"¹⁴⁴ Cohen noted in 1997 that, even though the Russia-US relationship had improved, largely as a result of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program,¹⁴⁵ he still had reservations owing to the uncertain nature of Russia's political system.¹⁴⁶

National Security Advisor Anthony Lake (1993-1997)

By most accounts, Anthony Lake was among the more active and vocal advocates for fast track expansion.¹⁴⁷ Lake, a former Carter administration official, managed to infuse his own foreign policy convictions into Clinton era foreign policy making, visible even during Clinton's election campaign.¹⁴⁸ According to Charles-Philippe David, Clinton's reluctance to engage on foreign matters changed quickly when Lake began playing a more assertive role. Lake "finally put a stop to this chaotic foreign policy-making process some time in the summer of 1995. He abandoned his low profile and increasingly took a more public role, a stance that his successor Berger would assume to an even greater extent."¹⁴⁹ Though not initially a major player, the National Security Council became used towards the second half of his presidency and "by the time Clinton left office, the NSC employed more than a hundred 'substantive professionals' involved in policy-making."¹⁵⁰

¹⁴³ Walter Slocombe, "A Crisis of Opportunity."

¹⁴⁴ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 376.

¹⁴⁵ Also known as the Nunn-Lugar Act, this bi-partisan legislation set in motion a series of initiatives, driven by United States senators Richard Lugar and Sam Nunn, to assist Russia in the securing and dismantling of Soviet-era WMD in the former Soviet states.

¹⁴⁶ Linda Kozaryn, "Cohen Talks Terrorism, Quality of Life, Total Force," *American Forces Press Service*, January 25, 1997. US Department of Defense. Available at: <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=42908>. Accessed May 5, 2016.

¹⁴⁷ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 39; Andrei Tsygankov, *Russophobia*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁸ Leonie Murray, *Clinton, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Intervention: Rise and Fall of a Policy* (Routledge, 2007).

¹⁴⁹ Charles-Philippe David, "'Foreign Policy is Not What I Came Here to Do.'"

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul note that, “among the top policy makers in Clinton’s first term, Anthony Lake was most suspicious of the Russian president, and especially doubtful of his democratic proclivities.”¹⁵¹ They also note that Lake had far less confidence in Yeltsin than President Clinton had.¹⁵² Coit D. Blacker, formerly the National Security Council’s senior director for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia Affairs (1995-96) concurred that Lake’s view on Russia was “pretty dark.”¹⁵³ He aspired to show more sympathetic members of the administration that the Russians were little more than “thugs,” communists who “changed their suits from red to blue.”¹⁵⁴

On the subject of NATO expansion, Lake was clear in his advocacy for early expansion. This was consistent with his Wilsonian belief that “the US had a moral and ethical duty to spread democracy.”¹⁵⁵ Lake found himself up against members of the administration, like Strobe Talbot, who expressed concern that a fast-track expansion would antagonize Russia and could even have an impact upon the 1993 and 1996 elections and on Russian political reform. Nonetheless, Lake was insistent and managed to overcome the reluctance within the State Department. Goldgeier and McFaul note that, “by summer 1994, the NSC and State Department positions had largely converged. Even Talbot, now in his new position as deputy secretary of state, moved from the anti-expansionist to the pro-expansionist camp, giving the White House another powerful ally.”¹⁵⁶

In a 1996 speech to the US-Russia Business Council Lake noted, “few issues on the American foreign policy agenda are as crucial or as challenging as relations with Russia.”¹⁵⁷ He spoke of an American “mission” to safeguard the community of democracies and free markets, but took care to note that this is a challenge in Russia: “a stable, democratic, market-oriented Russia will be far *less* (emphasis added) likely to threaten American security.”¹⁵⁸ Lake was relentlessly critical of the Russian use of force in Chechnya, referencing it as spilling the blood of “innocents.” He called on America not to “let the vision of Russia’s future blur our view of its current problems” and to be “patient” with Russia.¹⁵⁹

Lake’s views about Russia are reflected in his 2000 book, *6 Nightmares: Real Threats in a Dangerous World and How America Can Meet Them*. He wrote, “The Cold War is over. The Soviet Union is gone. Communism and Fascism are dead or discredited. But human nature, and thus the basic nature of relations among states, remains unchanged. Power still matters, and diplomacy disconnected from

¹⁵¹ James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul. *Power and Purpose: US Policy Toward Russia After the Cold War*. (Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 120-121.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ National Security Council, Speechwriting Office, and Antony Blinken, “Lake - Russia Speech - Drafts 4/1/96,” *Clinton Digital Library*. Available at: <http://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/9447>. Accessed April 21, 2016.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

power usually fails.”¹⁶⁰ The implication here seems to be that Russia is a natural foe. Lake asserts that, “while a return to Communism in Russia seems improbable, nationalist sentiment is likely to grow... a future of growing Russian nationalism could be dangerous in the extreme.”¹⁶¹ Lake acknowledges the challenging nature of reform in Russia, including the struggle to transform its economy, a struggle he identified as dangerous and which could lead to a rise in nationalism due to the “diminishment of whatever faith Russians have in themselves.”¹⁶² He feared,

Hopelessness breeds a psychological reaction- a tendency to lash out, to scapegoat, to pin blame on the United States and all others of Russia’s ills. Around every corner, Russians see a plot to kick them where they are hurting and keep them down, be it NATO enlargement, our efforts in Kosovo, or the terms of IMF loans. These suspicions get in the way of cooperation and other international issues. They provoke Russian grandstanding not only diplomatically but in bizarre and even dangerous ways... a cash-starved, proud, and insecure state has relied increasingly on the tool it can count on to bolster its international security and standing: its massive nuclear arsenal.¹⁶³

Of Russians, Lake noted, “fledging democratic institutions in countries such as Russia can all too easily be corrupted. Voters might be tempted by a return to authoritarianism in order to break free from the suffocating tentacles of criminal gangs.”¹⁶⁴ On the Russia-US relationship Lake asserted, “China and Russia are not our partners. It is disingenuous to pretend they are.”¹⁶⁵ Lake warned that anti-Americanism may be emerging in Russia as a result of its long history of patriotism, and that this could be dangerous.¹⁶⁶ On the subject of economic cooperation with countries like China and Russia Lake warns that, “America needs strong partners to purchase our products and promote our prosperity... but we don’t want the profits reaped by strong economies to be used to fortify military forces that could someday be used against us- in particular by emerging powers like Russia or China.”¹⁶⁷ Lake was a supporter of engaging Russia and hoping for the best with respect to reform, but he possessed, like other members of the administration, a certain sense of foreboding about the Russian experiment and focused his attention on the ways in which Russia’s past continued to influence its present. A tone of suspicion and being prepared for a recidivist Russia is visible in his approach to Russia.

National Security Advisor Sandy Berger (1997-2001)

¹⁶⁰ Anthony Lake, *6 Nightmares: Real Threats in a Dangerous World and How America Can Meet Them*, (Little Brown, 2000), p. 179.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190.

Samuel (Sandy) Berger inherited the role of National Security Advisor from Lake in 1997 just months after Albright took up her post in the State Department; both personnel changes were the result of Clinton's decision to shake up his national security team. Berger had been Lake's deputy and when he was promoted in 1997 he was actively engaged in advancing Clinton administration policy with Albright and Cohen.¹⁶⁸ Berger was committed to enlarging NATO, but remained cautious about its approach, all the while advocating the NATO-Russia Charter and the Permanent Joint Council, which would establish a high level strategic decision making mechanism between NATO and Moscow, giving Russia a voice in, but not a veto over, NATO decisions.

Though relations between the National Security Advisor and the Secretary of State have traditionally been tense, and they remained such according to Albright,¹⁶⁹ Berger and Albright seemed to share well aligned views on the issue of engaging Yeltsin, and Russians, to encourage positive momentum toward democratic reform. In a 2005 interview, Berger noted, "People sometimes criticize Clinton for being too close to Yeltsin. Yeltsin was the embodiment of democracy in Russia, particularly up to 1996. He was challenged from the left and from the right, and that train was very wobbly." He, like other members of the Clinton administration, were committed to Yeltsin personally, because they feared that he was really the only viable political leader in Russia at that time who could push the kind of political reform that would be advantageous to US interests. Nonetheless, working with Yeltsin was a challenge many in the administration acknowledged, which Berger reflected on in 2005: "Yeltsin was able to see that there was a different greatness that Russia could regain by modernizing, not by trying to maintain the Baltics, although he continued to fight us."¹⁷⁰ At a White House briefing prior to Clinton's September 1998 trip to Russia amid intense political and economic turmoil there, Berger noted in a press briefing that, "No one wants a weak Russia beset by crisis. America has a strong interest in preventing Russia from backsliding....we can best do that not by backing away, but by trying to help Russians find Russian solutions ... consistent with their choice of democracy."¹⁷¹ Berger once warned that, "the only way to lose Russia is to give it up for lost."¹⁷²

Notwithstanding the engagement with Russia that Berger advocated, alongside Talbot and Albright, he did also register amusement at President Yeltsin's behavior at summit meetings. In 1994, a particularly exuberant Yeltsin, satisfied with a successful meeting with Clinton, and who was prone to charismatic displays, was described by Berger as being in a state of "high jabberwocky."¹⁷³ It is unclear the intention of such a comparison, however Berger's reference to a silly poem about a wild, nonsensical beast, is an interesting, and arguably unfortunate descriptor for a sitting Russian president. The implication is that

¹⁶⁸ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary*, pp. 348-349.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Miller Center, "Interview with Samuel R. Berger, University of Virginia, March 24-25, 2005. Available at: <http://millercenter.org/oralhistory/interview/samuel-r-berger>. Accessed May 9, 2016.

¹⁷¹ "Press Briefing by National Security Advisor Sandy Berger, Deputy National Security Advisor Jim Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of Treasury Larry Summers, Ambassador at Large for the Newly Independent States Steve Sestanovich," August 28, 1998. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=48300>. Accessed May 9, 2016.

¹⁷² Anthony Lake, *6 Nightmares*, p. 188.

¹⁷³ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 136.

Yeltsin was not taken seriously by Berger – and even by other members of the administration who frequently joked about Yeltsin in a similar manner.

Despite his public fall from grace upon leaving the Clinton administration due to allegations he removed highly classified intelligence documents from the National Archives, Berger remained a trusted commentator on US foreign affairs. When asked in the wake of Russia's 2014 invasion about Russia's leadership, Berger's comments reflected his earlier concerns about Russian reform being a "wobbly train" when he remarked about meeting Putin. He recalled, "I looked into his eyes a saw a pair of steely eyes looking back at me. I didn't see any soul. I think he's always been someone with a bit of a chip on his shoulder and who has seen the world as 'Us vs. Them' with a very Russia centric view of the world."¹⁷⁴

Deputy Secretary of State and Russia Advisor Strobe Talbott (1994-2001)

Content to "leave Russia to the experts," Clinton appointed his old Oxford roommate and Russia specialist, Strobe Talbot, to a series of high profile advisory positions culminating in the role of Deputy Secretary of State. This was said to signal a personal commitment by Clinton to privilege the emergence of a newly independent Russia on the world stage.¹⁷⁵ Talbot was initially reluctant about enlarging NATO quickly, but once the president announced his intention to proceed with it, Talbot became one of the most active and vocal proponents of the enlargement agenda, including the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the NATO-Russia Charter.¹⁷⁶ Talbot's preference was for a slow process of expansion, to encourage democratic reform, with the need to nurture a special relationship with Russia along the way to ease any potential insecurities the Russians may have. Talbot was sensitive to how the Russians would perceive enlargement, and he expressed concerns that expanding too quickly could be seen in Russia, by Yeltsin's opponents, as confirmation that Russia had something to fear from the United States; this could set back or reverse the prospects for reform.

Talbot's early advice to Clinton was to seek "a strategic alliance with Russian reform," aiming "not just to prevent the worst, but also to nurture the best that might happen in the former Soviet Union."¹⁷⁷ Both Talbot and Clinton saw Yeltsin, as the best— perhaps the only— hope for reform.¹⁷⁸ According to Maurizio Massari, the basic principles of the US policy of engagement toward Russia throughout Clinton's presidency were "laid down principally by a single individual, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe

¹⁷⁴ "Former Clinton National Security Advisor Sandy Berger on Russia and Vladimir Putin," The Aspen Institute, Interview, March 26, 2014. Available at: <http://www.aspeninstitute.org/video/former-clinton-national-security-adviser-sandy-berger-russia-vladimir-putin>. Accessed May 9, 2016.

¹⁷⁵ US State Department, Office of the Historian <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1993-2000/clinton-yeltsin>. accessed April 21 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, eds., *Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy: Insights and Evidence* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003).

¹⁷⁷ Walter B. Slocombe, "A Crisis of Opportunity: The Clinton Administration and Russia," in Melvyn P. Leffler and Jeffrey W. Legro, eds., *In uncertain times: American foreign policy after the Berlin Wall and 9/11* (Cornell University Press, 2011),p. 8.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Talbot,” enabled by his personal ability to “steer the course of Clinton's policy towards Russia.”¹⁷⁹ Talbot was an idealist but also a realist. He advocated expansion as a carrot for democratic reform in newly independent nations. But he also made it clear that, “NATO was ready as a hedge if things turned sour in Russia.”¹⁸⁰ Goldgeier recalls Talbot’s view: “among the contingencies for which NATO must be prepared is that Russia will abandon democracy and return to the threatening patterns of international behavior that have sometimes characterized its history.”¹⁸¹ After all, Talbot cautioned that, even under Yeltsin, “Russia’s interests, along with its identity and destiny, were a matter of tumultuous internal struggle” and that “the hedgehog was beset by foxes,” reflecting the idea that Yeltsin’s views were, worryingly, not the norm in Russian politics.¹⁸² He then notes that they worked with Yeltsin because he “never permitted an irreparable breach or a return to confrontation and conquest as the basis of Russia’s relations with the outside world.” For Talbot, it seems, a recidivist Russia was always a heartbeat away, waiting to eclipse Russia’s meager efforts at democracy building. Perhaps emblematic of this concern is Talbot’s reference to the Strategic Stability Group, an informal diplomatic backchannel of lower levels to get the work done that the presidents agreed upon, as “a kind of early-warning mechanism for scanning the horizon.”¹⁸³ This is an interesting choice of words, with fairly obvious Cold War undertones – or overtones.

On NATO enlargement, Talbot reflects on the key rationale for expanding into East-Central Europe, highlighting its democracy and institution building potential by incentivizing candidate countries to prioritize democratic reform. While Talbot seems of similar mind to Clinton on the issue of supporting democracy and therefore Yeltsin, he does acknowledge the very real fact that expansion is also about Russia. He writes,

Among the contingencies for which NATO must be prepared is that Russia will abandon democracy and return to the threatening patterns of international behavior that have sometimes characterized its history, particularly during the Soviet period. Uncertainty about Russia’s future is inescapably among the factors to be taken into account in shaping decisions about European security.¹⁸⁴

Talbot both warns of Russian recidivism, but then discusses the ways that an expanded NATO could be good for Russia. He acknowledges that, “hedging against the possibility of resurgent Russian aggression is not the only, or even the main, reason for NATO’s taking in new members.”¹⁸⁵ He notes that Russia, like its neighbours has suffered the consequences of instability in the region, and that it, too, could benefit from a stronger European security framework under NATO’s auspices. He writes, “fear of a new

¹⁷⁹ Maurizio Massari, "US Foreign Policy Decision-Making during the Clinton Administration." *The International Spectator* 35:4 (2000): 91-105.

¹⁸⁰ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The US Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), p. 94.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁸⁴ Strobe Talbot, “Why NATO Should Grow” *New York Review of Books*, August 10, 1995. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/08/10/why-nato-should-grow/> Accessed May 2, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

wave of Russian imperialism unquestionably—and, in view of the region’s geography and history, naturally—is a main reason why Central Europeans are eager to join NATO. But it is not their only motive, and it should not be seen as the driving force behind NATO enlargement.”¹⁸⁶ Like Albright, Talbot engages in an attempt to instruct Russia about its own security interests, but does so with perhaps a different motivation, warning Americans and Europeans not to make Russia the enemy and not to view NATO expansion exclusively through the Russia-as-threat lens.

On the subject of Putin, Talbot’s reaction largely mirrors other members of the administration. In his discussions with Clinton about the Russian president, Talbot recalls Clinton’s reservations about not having been able to “break the code on this new guy.” Talbot explains that his read of Putin was such that he would be unreceptive to Clinton’s charm and that the right tone for a meeting with Putin would be “one of reciprocal wariness.” Clinton would have to resist “his natural temptation to get too chummy.”¹⁸⁷ Years before, Talbot had advised Clinton on how to handle the personalities of the Russian president; about Yeltsin, he passed Clinton a note during an intense summit meeting that read, “you’re getting the post-Cold War version of the Khrushchev Vienna treatment.” Talbot also recalls Yeltsin’s “clenched fist” reaction to statements he disagreed with as “menacing.”¹⁸⁸

Ultimately, Talbot demonstrates a sincere commitment to a positive working relationship with Russia but he was, perhaps unavoidably given his training, affected by Cold War era biases. These biases managed to affect the discourse about Russia among policy makers and perhaps it is no surprise that they make themselves felt in policy decisions that involved, even if in a small way, hedging against a recidivist Russia that could revert to its historical tendencies of empire and domination.

Discussion: Why Clinton Era Russophobia Matters

Sergo Mikoyan attributes the tensions in Russia-US relations, in part, to the presence of “American Russophobes” who suffer from an “enemy-deprivation syndrome” and are simply unable to imagine a world in which Russia assumes the role of predictable, reliable partner.¹⁸⁹ The above review of Clinton administration views about Russia, its leaders, and about the decision to expand NATO reveals that this connection does appear to exist. This is an important connection because the period under study in this paper saw the mobilization of a major transformation of the Alliance, the effects of which are still being felt today in Russia-US relations. The arguments offered to explain NATO expansion both to new members and to Russia were poorly articulated, which lends some credibility to the idea that uncertainty, rather than concrete security concerns, fueled this policy decision, as well as its scope and pace. Perhaps a strong explanation for this is found in the aforementioned inability of Washington decision makers reasonably to consider a world in which Russia – and Russians –were no longer a threat. Mikoyan argues, “it is easier for the US to view the new Russia as having inherited its predecessor’s

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Strobe Talbot, *The Russia Hand*, p. 390.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁸⁹ Sergo Mikoyan, “Russia, the US and Regional Conflict in Eurasia,” *Survival* 40:3 (Autumn 1998): 112.

imperial aspirations than to adjust to the changes that have occurred” in Russia.¹⁹⁰ He cites Charles Kupchan’s criticism of the same phenomenon: “an anachronistic Russophobia is triumphing over a more sober assessment of Russia’s intentions and capabilities,” and “cold warriors are unwilling to let go of the past.”¹⁹¹

Western analysis focused its attention on the unpredictability of events in Russia in the 1990s and much attention was focused on the anti-democratic impulses present in Russian politics and society.¹⁹² But rather than focus on those who would defend democratic progress (which, admittedly, became difficult to do after Yeltsin’s re-election in 1996), much hand wringing took place about “who Lost Russia,” and just how comprehensive this loss was. Mikoyan correctly identifies these concerns as a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts: an expectation of failure in Russia was confirmed, as well as the sense in Russia that American leaders expected them to fail.¹⁹³ Mikoyan traces this expectation of failure to Russophobia, which he describes as the idea that post-Soviet Russia was the most recent inheritor of the imperialism that has defined Russia’s historical experience: “Russophobes, however, either do not comprehend, or willfully ignore, that they promote such tendencies by their own anti-Russian statements, policy proposals and actions.”¹⁹⁴

This paper has sought to illustrate the presence of these views within the Clinton administration, and to connect them with this administration’s decision to expand NATO. This decision was driven by a number of factors, but among them is an historic mistrust of Russia which was affected by a misinterpretation of the end of the Cold War as “the victory of the Western freedom narrative” or the “end of history.” Tsygankov aptly notes that the Cold War “constituted a trauma that complicated cooperation in the new world.”¹⁹⁵ Mikoyan observes that the mistrust of Russia in the United States, in addition to being owed to an inherent Russophobia, also helped to ground the Alliance, which was undergoing an “existential crisis” after the Cold War, and enabled it to find justification for its political decision to extend its security umbrella eastward.¹⁹⁶ The United States’ preponderance of power in the international system at the end of the Cold War encouraged it to “act on its ethnic prejudices by pursuing hegemony-type relations with the others” which were motivated by “openly expressed phobias”¹⁹⁷ toward Russia.

The Clinton administration’s support for Russian democratic reform under Yeltsin could be viewed as a vehicle for consolidating the triumph of western liberal hegemony. As long as the Russian leadership was not standing in the way of this goal, relations worked relatively well. But when Russia resisted this

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Andrei Tsygankov, “The Russia-NATO Mistrust,” p. 181.

¹⁹⁶ Sergo Mikoyan, “Russia, the US and Regional Conflict in Eurasia,” p. 127.

¹⁹⁷ Andrei Tsygankov, “The Russia-NATO Mistrust,” p. 181.

agenda – through its opposition to NATO enlargement or NATO’s agenda in Kosovo - anti-Russianism was easily resurrected, which then made NATO expansion easier to legitimize.¹⁹⁸

Though multiple assurances were given to Russian leaders that enlargement was not inherently anti-Russian (witness the PfP program and efforts to engage Russia through the NATO-Russia Founding Act), Russian leaders were unconvinced. Insistence on moving forward with expansion, without a clear policy rationale, and unconvincing assurances that European security was not threatened by Russia – at least not if it could demonstrate a democratic trajectory – were part of, and shaped, a culture of Russophobia that was not lost on Russian leadership. Sergei Rogozin, Russian ambassador to NATO, once noted, “no matter what Russia may be – imperial, communist, or democratic- they see us with the same eyes as they did in previous centuries.”¹⁹⁹ It is reasonable to suggest that the perception of American Russophobia within the Russian leadership also influenced how Russia responded to the expansion of NATO. This single and complicated policy decision has contributed to a deteriorating post Cold War relationship between Russia and the United States. Russophobia is partly responsible for the current state of Russia-US relations. As Richard Sakwa wisely notes, “Russia, treated as the enemy, in the end became one.”²⁰⁰ He suggests that both neo-cons and liberal internationalists in Washington assumed that Russia had an “inherent predisposition towards despotism and imperialism.”²⁰¹

Because of concerns that Russia possessed inherently imperialist tendencies, this seemed to justify the expansion of NATO into countries that feared its intentions. Under the George W. Bush administration, these fears seemed to be enough to legitimize a case for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO.²⁰² This, in concert with the assumption that Russian values were simply incompatible with Western (read civilized) values, meant that Russia could not be managed but instead needed to be contained. Therefore, Russia’s opposition to NATO membership in these nations just confirmed its ambition to destroy western values. Therefore, NATO must grow. Valentina Feklyunina calls this demonizing of Russia’s motives a rationale for a securitized response: if Russia presents an “existential threat” to the security of Europe, this requires a securitized response.²⁰³ NATO expansion was the operationalization of this securitized response, long before Putin and long before there was a credible reason to believe that Russia may actually be a threat to its neighbours. For this reason, it is scarcely a surprise that today NATO is considered “anti-Russian in membership, character and purpose” not just in Putin’s eyes, but in the eyes of most Russians.²⁰⁴ Tsygankov notes that, over time, Russia has been conceptualized as a “well-consolidated and increasingly dangerous regime, and it has succeeded in persuading members of the American political class to advocate the Russia-threat approach,” which has rendered some

¹⁹⁸ Sergo Mikoyan, “Russophobia: A Protracted Political Ailment,” *International Affairs: A Russian Journal of World Politics, Diplomacy and International Relations* 52:5 (October 2006), pp. 34-35.

¹⁹⁹ Rogozin quoted by Andrei Tsygankov in “The Russia-NATO Mistrust,” p. 187.

²⁰⁰ Richard Sakwa, “The Death of Europe,” *International Affairs* 91:3 (2015), p. 566.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Andrei Tsygankov, “Blaming Moscow,” p. 68.

²⁰³ Valentina Feklyunina, “Constructing Russophobia,” p. 93.

²⁰⁴ Clifford Gaddy and Michael O’Hanlon, “Toward a Reaganov Russia: Russian Security Policy after Putin,” *The Washington Quarterly* 38:2 (2015), p. 210.

Washington decision makers warm to the use, or at least the acceptance, of Russophobic language.²⁰⁵ He critically observes that, “when NATO expands to Russia’s front and back doorsteps, it is “fighting terrorism” and “protecting new states;” when Moscow protests, it is engaging in “cold war thinking.”²⁰⁶

On the appropriate post-Cold War role for NATO, James Goldgeier recalls the words of Thomas Hobbes: “alliances typically disintegrate after the threat against which they were created has disappeared.”²⁰⁷ NATO’s enlargement only confirmed the Russian belief that the US and its western allies, despite their assurances to the contrary, did not believe the threat had vanished. Not only did NATO not disband, it grew in both size and mandate, stewarded by key officials of the Clinton era.

Conclusion

The decision to enlarge NATO was essentially a vote of no-confidence in the post Cold War Russian experiment. This paper has drawn a connection between this decision and a culture of Russophobia among Clinton administration officials. This is not to say that an overt anti-Russia narrative drove the decision to enlarge NATO; instead, a subtle mistrust of Russia and Russians was present at important levels. A discourse of Russophobia can be observed in the reflections of Clinton administration officials who at the same time valued the goal of democratic reform in Russia and who felt that Yeltsin was a leader they could engage to bring this about. The paper reveals that, despite the positive attitude about reform that many espoused, negative ideas about Russia remained. Understanding the presence of this anti-Russian discourse is essential to understanding Russia-US relations, which have been tested by a failure to think creatively about a new relationship with Russia.

Though this paper focuses on the Clinton presidency, further research reveals that this Russophobia discourse in American foreign policy making is a bi-partisan phenomenon. Even though the Clinton administration arguably had a comparatively positive relationship with Russia, its impact upon the future relationship was influential; decisions taken in the early 1990s set the tone for what followed. American leaders - then and now - operate within a political environment fraught with an inability to accept Russia’s differences from the United States as non-threatening. As Richard Sakwa notes, there has been a widespread inability to think about what a normal relationship with Russia should look like, absent Cold War baggage.²⁰⁸

Ultimately, and somewhat tragically, the enlargement of NATO, though not designed *overtly* to hedge against a recidivist Russia, came to dominate Russian strategic thinking, perhaps even culminating in its 2014 incursion into Crimea, as John Mearsheimer so famously and controversially suggested.²⁰⁹ NATO enlargement was a self-reinforcing action that made an enemy out of a post-Soviet Russia that initially

²⁰⁵ Andrei Tsygankov, *Russophobia*, p. 161.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁰⁷ James Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 3.

²⁰⁸ Richard Sakwa, “New Cold War or Twenty Years’ Crisis? Russia and International Politics. *International Affairs* (2008) 2: 241-267.

²⁰⁹ John J Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs* (Sept/Oct 2014).

presented little challenge to European security. In the end, this may well have served to reanimate the Atlantic Alliance. As David Benn rightly observes, NATO expansion may make more sense today than at any time since the end of the Cold War, given the perception of the Russian threat.²¹⁰

NATO has continued to expand, and an emboldened Russophobia dominates the American foreign policy discourse today more strongly than it did during the Clinton era. But it is worth remembering that, at the time that NATO chose to do most of its expanding, there was no tangible threat from Russia. Nonetheless, American attitudes about Russia were imbued with negativity, which arguably did a disservice to both Russia and America; it has colored the relationship with Russia in confrontational hues and this has obstructed crafting a relationship that makes sense for both countries.

²¹⁰ D.W Benn, "On re-examining western attitudes to Russia," *International Affairs* 90:6 (2014) p. 1320.

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