

Chapter Title: How We Got Here

Book Title: Beyond NATO

Book Subtitle: A New Security Architecture for Eastern Europe

Book Author(s): MICHAEL E. O'HANLON

Published by: Brookings Institution Press. (2017)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7864/j.ctt1vjqp72.5>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. Funding is provided by Knowledge Unlatched Select 2018: HSS Backlist.



*Brookings Institution Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Beyond NATO*

## CHAPTER 1

# How We Got Here

It is hard to believe, but a quarter century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the United States and Russia again became adversaries. They remain in such a state today. They may not be military enemies, but their respective military establishments now focus largely on each other in modernizing their weapons and devising force posture plans. Some Russians talk openly of already being at war with the United States; a former deputy supreme allied commander in Europe recently wrote a novel about a war pitting NATO against Russia that he intended as a clarion call about something that really could happen. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the United States, General Joseph Dunford, testified to Congress in the summer of 2015 that Russia could be America's most dangerous security worry in the world. Dunford subsequently placed Russia among his top concerns when devising his "4 + 1" threat framework—with Russia listed along with North Korea, Iran, China, and ISIS/Salafism/violent extremism as the priority concerns

of the Department of Defense. President Donald Trump's early aspirations to put the U.S.-Russia relationship on friendlier footing already appeared to be dashed by the spring of 2017. Russian attacks on Ukraine, a country whose sovereignty the United States as well as Russia and the United Kingdom pledged to help guarantee in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, have destabilized Europe.

Russian cyber transgressions against Estonia, and provocative military maneuvers near the territories or military assets of various NATO nations, have further underscored that direct military confrontation pitting the United States and allies against the Russian Federation is far from inconceivable. Indeed, Russian aircraft maneuvers near NATO territory or military assets produced up to a doubling in the frequency of NATO fighter "scrambles" designed to intercept the offending aircraft in 2016; serious problems persist today.<sup>1</sup> A Russian concept of "escalate to de-escalate"—purportedly an effective war-winning strategy for any future conflict against the West—has again raised the prominence of nuclear weapons, and veiled nuclear threats, in the Russia-NATO relationship.<sup>2</sup>

How did we get here? And what can we do about it? This short book begins with the first question, the main subject of this chapter, but focuses its main analytical thrust on the second question. Without claiming that the dramatic deterioration in the U.S.-Russian relationship has any single cause, or that any one change in policy can right it, I nonetheless propose a new security architecture for the currently independent states of eastern Europe—Finland and Sweden, Georgia and Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Cyprus and Serbia (and perhaps other currently neutral Balkan countries, as well). I believe this security construct could significantly defuse the acute crisis

and dangers in the U.S.-Russian relationship today. A negotiated agreement should be pursued between NATO nations, Russia, and the neutral countries after intensive consultations between NATO states and the neutral states. The goal would be to create a permanently nonaligned zone in eastern Europe while guaranteeing the full diplomatic and economic sovereignty and territorial security of these same countries.

Because the Trump administration, the intended electoral beneficiary of Russian meddling in the 2016 American presidential election, could be the lead player on proposing this new framework, it is especially important to explain why it would not be a concession to Russia or its strongman president. In fact, it would not be a gift to Russia at all.<sup>3</sup> The security architecture would place stringent demands on Russia to keep its hands off the neutral countries and insist it reach fair agreements on existing territorial disputes (otherwise, sanctions could not be lifted and the overall architecture could not be implemented). It would be explicitly understood, and stated, that any subsequent violation of these and other terms could end the entire accord and revive the possibility that some of the countries at issue would join NATO.

Those who might be quick to criticize my proposal should ask if they can really defend the status quo. As of today, NATO has promised Ukraine and Georgia future membership without offering any timetable to that membership or any interim protection—a perfect formula to stoke Russian meddling in those countries and, undoubtedly, an incentive to Moscow to perpetuate the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Current policy has failed by leaving NATO half pregnant with membership for Ukraine and Georgia, and Russia incensed over the situation. Whatever the merits of NATO expansion may have been to date—and, as later discussed, there were respectable arguments in its favor (even if not completely

convincing ones)—the project has run its course. Indeed, it has become counterproductive.

#### THE HEADY DAYS OF THE EARLY 1990s, AND ANTECEDENTS OF PROBLEMS TO COME

The warming in U.S.-Russia relations that culminated in very positive American relationships with Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the late 1980s and 1990s took some time to develop. From glasnost and perestroika, to the fall of the Berlin Wall, to the iconic image of Yeltsin facing down Soviet tanks in the summer of 1991 as the USSR collapsed, the process took more than half a decade. By the time Bill Clinton was elected president in the United States, however, it was possible to believe that U.S.-Russia relations after the Cold War could be headed to almost as happy a place as U.S.-Germany and U.S.-Japan relationships after World War II.

Problems began to develop fairly early on, however. By 1994, adding insult to the injury of the Soviet Union's own demise, the Warsaw Treaty Organization had also collapsed; meanwhile, NATO was still going strong. East European countries were approaching Brussels about establishing new security arrangements, and then in January 1994, the NATO alliance created the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Its declared purpose was to facilitate military and political cooperation between NATO and former members of the defunct Warsaw Pact. However, it did not take long for many Russians, including key reformers like Anatoly Sobchak and Andrei Kokoshin, to begin to view PfP suspiciously as a pathway to NATO expansion for these countries.<sup>4</sup>

As the 1990s unfolded, officials in the Clinton administration felt pressure to reach out to countries like Poland,

but they also wanted to support Yeltsin and avoid creating excessive political problems for him at home. They were often told by the reformers around Yeltsin that NATO enlargement would create serious difficulties for the Yeltsin team from Russian nationalists and Communists, and damage the Kremlin's efforts to pursue a pro-Western foreign policy. Yeltsin himself coined the expression that NATO expansion might augur in "a cold peace."<sup>5</sup>

There were reasonable arguments being voiced in the United States to carry out NATO expansion just the same. Some came from diasporas of countries that had been incorporated into the communist world and Warsaw Pact largely against their will and that saw it as only fitting and proper that they be allowed, in effect, to rejoin the West once the Cold War was over. There were additional voices in favor of using NATO to help these former Warsaw Pact states strengthen their young democracies and civilian control of their militaries. And there were those with a long view of history who worried about a return to an aggressive Russia in the future, irrespective of what policies were followed by the West in the meantime. According to this view, Russia's temporary weakness presented an opportunity that should not be missed.<sup>6</sup> Already by February 1995, in fact, the Clinton administration had announced its national security strategy of "engagement and enlargement," in which it underscored that it had "initiated a process that will lead to NATO's expansion."<sup>7</sup>

Thus in the mid-1990s the Clinton administration pushed ahead with enlargement while also seeking to mitigate Moscow's negative reactions. That proved a difficult task. For many Russians, if NATO was still a military alliance and a mechanism for ensuring collective defense, it must be directed against some country—and the Russian Federation was the obvious target.

TABLE 1-1. *Member States of NATO*

	<b>Year joined</b>
Belgium	1949
Canada	1949
Denmark	1949
France	1949
Iceland	1949
Italy	1949
Luxembourg	1949
Netherlands	1949
Norway	1949
Portugal	1949
United Kingdom	1949
United States	1949
Greece	1952
Turkey	1952
Germany	1955
Spain	1982
Czech Republic	1999
Hungary	1999
Poland	1999
Bulgaria	2004
Estonia	2004
Latvia	2004
Lithuania	2004
Romania	2004
Slovakia	2004
Slovenia	2004
Albania	2009
Croatia	2009
Montenegro	2017

NATO Member Countries ([www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52044.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm)).

Yeltsin won reelection in 1996. From that point forward, the Clinton administration felt less need to hold back. Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic were soon put on paths to join NATO and became alliance members in 1999. At the same time, Washington and Moscow tried to keep their own relationship moving forward. Notably, in Paris on May 27, 1997, Yeltsin signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations. The Founding Act set out the basic political framework for Russia and the alliance to work together, but the forces pushing the two countries apart were rapidly becoming stronger than those holding them together. Subsequent events included the August 1998 Russian financial collapse, the Kosovo war in the spring of 1999, and Russia's renewed war in Chechnya in the summer of 1999.<sup>8</sup>

### KOSOVO

In 1999 NATO went to war for the first time in its history in response to Yugoslav military atrocities against ethnic Albanian civilians in Kosovo, which was still part of both Serbia and Yugoslavia.<sup>9</sup> The war came only two weeks after the alliance had admitted Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. NATO did not secure authority from the United Nations to intervene; NATO warplanes bombed Serbian forces in the field and, increasingly, Belgrade. NATO forces, with American troops in the lead, then moved into Kosovo to secure the territory.

NATO's intervention shook the Russian establishment.<sup>10</sup> As Vladimir Putin put it in his March 18, 2014, speech fifteen years later, no one in Russia could believe that NATO had attacked Yugoslavia: "It was hard to believe, even seeing it with my own eyes, that at the end of the twentieth century, one of Europe's capitals, Belgrade, was under missile attack



for several weeks, and then came the real [military] intervention.”<sup>11</sup> Moscow could do little about what happened, and Russian leaders took the intervention almost personally, given their longstanding ties to Serbia and their sense of close kinship with fellow Orthodox Christians there.<sup>12</sup>

NATO justified its operation, of course, as a response to human suffering at the hands of the very same Slobodan Milosevic who had torn apart Bosnia earlier in the decade. However, in Moscow, Russian officials interpreted the intervention as a means of expanding NATO's influence in the Balkans, not as an effort to deal with a humanitarian crisis.<sup>13</sup>

In June, at the end of the bombing campaign, Russian forces engaged in a tense standoff with NATO troops in Kosovo. This came as the Clinton administration tried to persuade Russia to take part in the Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR). Moscow had agreed to a similar arrangement a couple of years earlier in Bosnia; Russian troops were still serving there. But this case proved different. After the intervention which, as noted, occurred with NATO but not UN approval, Russia resisted the idea of its forces working for NATO. Moscow also demanded a decisionmaking role in KFOR, and U.S. military commanders were concerned that Russia might attempt to create a “Russian sector” in Kosovo.<sup>14</sup> While these various matters were being discussed in Moscow, Washington, Brussels, and elsewhere, Russian general Leonid Ivashov sent a Russian troop contingent from Bosnia to Kosovo, where it secured the main airport in Kosovo's capital of Pristina. However, Russian forces were isolated and soon running low on food, water, and fuel. New NATO member Hungary, along with NATO aspirants Bulgaria and Romania, refused access to their airspace for Russian planes seeking to conduct resupply runs. At the same point, supreme allied commander in Europe General Wesley Clark ordered the

NATO commander in Kosovo, British general Michael Jackson, to send in NATO forces to block the runways at the airport. Jackson refused, telling Clark, "Sir, I'm not starting World War III for you."<sup>15</sup> The British did seal off the roads leading to the airport, but they also provided the beleaguered Russian troops with food and water.<sup>16</sup> The result was not a direct conflict between Russia and NATO, thankfully. But it was another humiliation for Moscow.

During this same period Vladimir Putin was gaining greater power within Russia. Putin had been the head of the Federal Security Service; in 1999 he was promoted to chair the Russian Security Council and gained a key role in managing Russia's relationships with NATO and the United States. The Kosovo war then occurred and became a defining moment in Putin's career, one that influenced him deeply.<sup>17</sup> Within months, he was Russia's acting president.

#### OF COUNTERTERRORISM, COLOR REVOLUTIONS, AND NATO EXPANSION

For a period of time around the turn of the century and early in the 2000s, it seemed that counterterrorism might unite Moscow and Washington in common cause. After all, the two countries had been cooperating on nuclear security through various global nonproliferation efforts as well as the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program, so it seemed natural to think they could work together when a new threat presented itself.

In November 1999 Putin, then prime minister, wrote a *New York Times* op-ed asking the American public for support for Russia's second intervention in Chechnya, which had begun a few months before. He defined the fight as a struggle against terrorism that Americans should understand.

After September 11, 2001, the terrorist strikes on U.S. soil reinforced Putin's view that America and Russia should be united in purpose. Then-President Putin immediately reached out to President George W. Bush to express his sympathy and offer his assistance.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, shortly before the 9/11 attacks, Putin had called Bush to warn him about a terrorist threat that Russian intelligence had identified.<sup>19</sup> Putin expected Washington would see linkages between al Qaeda in Afghanistan and terrorists in Chechnya. He also believed he could help the United States.<sup>20</sup> He expected American sympathy and support for his wars against terrorism, especially in light of the terrible terrorist attacks against Russians that began around 1995 and continued into the first decade of the 2000s and beyond.<sup>21</sup>

That did not happen. Chechnya remained a major subject of contention between Russia and the United States. There was to be no coalition.<sup>22</sup> The United States saw Russia's situation as entirely different from its own. The al Qaeda threat justified a global war on terrorism; America and its allies were under direct and unprovoked assault. By contrast, the Chechnya situation, in Washington's eyes, was an internal conflict. The terrorist acts that emanated from the North Caucasus were directed only against Russian targets. Most Americans felt Russia had largely brought its problems upon itself because of the brutal way it fought the Chechnya campaigns.<sup>23</sup>

After the 9/11 attacks, Putin was befuddled by America. He even blamed himself for not having been sufficiently emphatic in his warnings and his efforts to fashion a unified front against the extremist threat.<sup>24</sup> As time went on, however, he blamed the United States more and more—for being overly assertive in Russia's backyard and the Middle East, yet at the same time inept in how it wielded power. Iraq and Afghanistan and Libya went badly, demonstrating Ameri-

can incompetence in his eyes. Yet Putin also ascribed almost super-human powers to Washington for its purported roles in the Rose, Orange, Tulip, and Maydan revolutions (in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004–05, Kyrgyzstan in 2005, and Ukraine again in 2013–14, respectively), as well as with the domestic opposition to his own attempt to regain the Russian presidency in 2012. There was apparent contradiction in these contrasting interpretations of America's supposed omnipotence mixed with sheer fecklessness, but there was probably a good deal of sincerity in both aspects of Putin's somewhat oxymoronic view of the United States.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, in December 2001, Washington announced it was pulling out of the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and would move ahead with creating a new missile defense system to counter threats from countries like Iraq or North Korea or Iran—the so-called rogue states or “axis of evil.” Putin's initial response was relatively muted, perhaps because the 9/11 attacks were still so recent and because both the Putin and Bush presidencies were still in their early, hopeful days. However, in ensuing months and years, many of the old Russian fears about Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, his “Star Wars” program, were gradually resurrected in Moscow. Putin and other Russian officials expressed growing opposition to the system. Putin came to believe, it would appear, that American missile defense was more about diminishing Russia's nuclear deterrent than about countering threats from small, extremist states.<sup>25</sup>

The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan was perhaps not so hard for Moscow to stomach. Its eye-for-an-eye character probably made sense to Putin. And the next year, Moscow and NATO established a new NATO-Russia Council at the alliance's Rome summit. NATO leaders saw the creation of this council as yet one more piece of evidence that the West

was bending over backward to help Russia, to treat it with respect, and to assuage its worries about post-Cold War security in Europe. On top of that, Western economic help to Russia had been moderately generous since the Cold War had ended. Russia's economic travails continued, of course, but they were, from this viewpoint, the result of the inevitable pain of transforming a command economy into a free-market system combined with some bad behavior by Russian oligarchs who were exploiting their fellow citizens with robber-baron-like activities. The major NATO states were doing all they reasonably could to help, in economic and political and security spheres. At least, that was how the West saw it, and at times Putin did not seem to disagree.

Of course not all was well, and the good vibes would not last. That same NATO summit in May 2002 produced decisions leading to the second major round of alliance enlargement in March 2004, including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. From Moscow's perspective, the inclusion of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania in the group was particularly galling because they had been part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.<sup>26</sup> The three Baltic states, along with the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia, were also admitted to the European Union in May of that same year, and Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007.

Moreover, the 2003 U.S.-led intervention in Iraq convinced Putin even more that the United States was looking for pretexts to act hegemonically, throwing its military weight around the Mideast region and the world. Indeed, Putin, as well as Russian intelligence, apparently believed that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was bluffing about his possession of chemical and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD). They stated this bluntly to U.S. officials on numerous oc-

casions.<sup>27</sup> As the intervention quickly went south later in 2003, Putin's anger at alleged American imperiousness was increasingly combined with disdain for how ineffectually the United States seemed to be employing its power around the world.

When the terrible Beslan school terrorist attack in September 2004 took place in Russia, two years after the bloody Moscow Dubrovka Theater attack, Western reactions to Moscow's response furthered in Putin's mind the idea that a double standard was being applied against Russia.<sup>28</sup> The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004–05 was important in this regard, as well. Putin was always somewhat dismissive of Ukraine as a truly separate and sovereign entity capable of genuinely independent action. Thus, he believed the massive demonstrations in Ukraine known as the Orange Revolution could only have been orchestrated from the outside.<sup>29</sup> The Bush administration's Freedom Agenda and American neo-imperialism more generally were the most likely culprits.<sup>30</sup> Putin did not accept the sincerity of U.S. democracy-promotion efforts. He saw their roots in the Cold War and in Washington's unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of Russia's political system. And now they were affecting a fairly large country that was very close to home for Russia.

Then there was Georgia. The Kremlin was very concerned about U.S. support for the Georgian government of Mikheil Saakashvili as the Bush presidency progressed into its second term.<sup>31</sup> The strengthening relationship between Tbilisi and Washington raised worries about Georgia's eventual membership in NATO. Given Georgia's distance from Europe and the North Atlantic, it was increasingly hard for many Russians to view NATO's interest in Georgian membership as anything more than imperial overstretch, and at their own country's expense.<sup>32</sup>

### THINGS FALL APART

Thus the stage was set for a confluence of events in 2007 and 2008 that probably marked the decisive turning point in relations between Vladimir Putin and the West in particular, as Clifford Gaddy and Fiona Hill have persuasively argued. At the February 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin gave the following public remarks:

It turns out that NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders, and we continue to strictly fulfill the treaty obligations and do not react to these actions at all. I think it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernization of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended?<sup>33</sup>

There was no acknowledgment by Putin that the United States and major Western European NATO states demonstrated restraint by not moving combat power into permanent bases in the alliance's new eastern regions, or that American military energies at the time were clearly focused on Iraq and Afghanistan, not Europe.

A year later, Putin made almost identical remarks to the press on the sidelines of the April 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania. On this occasion, building on his remarks in Munich, Putin returned to what he saw as the fundamental questions posed by NATO's continued existence and seemingly inexorable expansion, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin stated:

It is obvious that today there is no Soviet Union, no eastern bloc and no Warsaw Pact. So NATO exists to confront whom? We hear that it exists in order to solve today's problems and challenges. Which ones? What are the problems and challenges? . . . I think that many here in this room would agree with me that, in itself, the existence of the NATO bloc is not an effective answer to today's challenges and threats. But we recognize that it is nonetheless a factor in today's international life, a factor in international security, and that is why we cooperate with the bloc. With regard to expansion, I heard today that this expansion is not against Russia. You know, I have a great interest in and love for European history, including German history. Bismarck was an important German and European political leader. He said that in such matters what is important is not the intention but the capability. . . . We have withdrawn our troops deployed in eastern Europe, and withdrawn almost all large and heavy weapons from the European part of Russia. And what happened? A base in Romania, where we are now, one in Bulgaria, an American missile defense area in Poland and the Czech Republic. That all means moving military infrastructure to our borders.<sup>34</sup>

In February 2008, the United States and several European states recognized Kosovo against Russia's wishes. That reopened old wounds from 1999 and conjured up the immediate possibility of Kosovo, heretofore a province of Serbia, becoming a NATO member someday. Putin declared this "a harmful and dangerous precedent" and immediately raised the implications of Kosovo's independence for Georgia's secessionist republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>35</sup>



NATO's Bucharest summit in April then promised Georgia and Ukraine eventual membership. The fact that NATO leaders chose not to take the technical step of offering Kiev and Tbilisi formal Membership Action Plans was little solace.

In June 2008 Dmitry Medvedev, just inaugurated as Russian president, gave his first major foreign policy speech abroad. In his speech, he proposed the creation of a new European security arrangement and treaty, an idea that was quickly rejected by the United States and its allies.<sup>36</sup> Even though it was vague, and even though in later revisions it acknowledged NATO's continued right to exist, Medvedev's vision may have come too close to condemning the NATO alliance to obsolescence—or at least to a constrained future role—for the West to accept it.<sup>37</sup>

By August 2008 Russia had gone to war with Georgia. Russia's incursion was justified as a response to President Saakashvili's decision to launch his own attack against separatists in South Ossetia. Georgian shelling killed Russian peacekeepers in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, provoking a full-scale Russian military invasion. But in a broader sense, it was the result of pressures that had been building in Russian minds for many years.<sup>38</sup>

The year 2009 marked the arrival of a new American president and Mr. Obama's "reset" policy with Russia.<sup>39</sup> The approach seemed to address Putin's main demand that Russia be treated with respect and pragmatism on major issues of mutual interest, but it did not succeed. The first year and a half of the Obama presidency produced a New START Treaty, a new architecture for European missile defense, further cooperation on Iran and North Korea sanctions, and the opening of the Northern Distribution Network into Afghanistan—providing NATO with multiple new logistics

options that involved Russian territory or other former Soviet republics. However, things soon deteriorated. In Moscow's eyes, the perceived offenses included America's unsuccessful handling of aspects of the Arab Spring, such as the NATO Libya intervention which quickly exceeded the scope of the UN Security Council resolution approving it, to the unsteady American handlings of unrest in Syria and Egypt, to the Sergei Magnitsky Act targeting Russian officials who had been complicit in the death of a Russian human rights lawyer.<sup>40</sup> That tragedy and other Russian crackdowns on dissent at home led to more critical American words concerning Russian internal politics.

A vicious cycle had developed. Putin and his inner circle, probably never true democrats at heart, were critiqued by Washington for their suppression, including through occasional violence, of internal dissent. These critiques enraged Putin, who then saw America's hand in any Russian political activity that did not support him (such as party-building and other democracy-promotion activities), and he clamped down even more forcefully. To maintain Russian public support for his short-circuiting of proper democratic practices, he pointed to a supposedly hostile and devious West that was purportedly inciting Russians to turn against each other. The combination of disinformation and coercion worked, at least at home. In recent years—according to what Russians tell pollsters (whether they feel free in expressing their true views or not is another matter)—Putin's internal popularity has typically been 80 to 90 percent.<sup>41</sup>

In a 2017 interview with the *National Interest*, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov pointed to a speech that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave in December 2012 in Ireland in which she expressed the hope that the United States could slow Moscow's efforts to "re-Sovietize the former

Soviet space.” One might have thought all could agree that re-Sovietization was not in anyone’s interest. Yet Lavrov argued that such words revealed malevolent and expansionist American intent that was manifest even before the crises of Crimea and Ukraine.<sup>42</sup>

On September 11, 2013, on the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Putin again wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times*. Putin was extremely critical of America’s style of world leadership. He argued: “It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States. Is it in America’s long-term interest? I doubt it. Millions around the world increasingly see America not as a model of democracy but as relying solely on brute force, cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’”<sup>43</sup>

The Ukraine crisis of 2013–14 was the nail in the coffin. The precipitating events were not about NATO membership, but Ukraine’s general westward movement and consideration of closer ties to the European Union. Yet they were in a broader context in which eventual NATO membership for Ukraine was clearly on the table, admittedly making it hard to disentangle the relative importance of the various factors in Putin’s mind. One thing the Russian strongman did clearly believe is that the various color revolutions as well as this latest, the Maydan uprising, were not indigenous or legitimate. Of course, he was bound not to like them; they had the aggregate effect of replacing pro-Moscow politicians with pro-Western regimes. Worse, Putin saw the hand of the West behind all of them. He blamed Western involvement with new political parties and nongovernmental organizations and other new actors in these young countries for what transpired. Not only was it against his own

interests; he saw these developments as bad for the countries themselves.

By this time, Putin could invoke the failed Arab Spring movements in the Middle East to reinforce his argument. The West, Putin argued in a March 2014 speech, tried to impose a set of “standards, which were in no way suitable for either the way of life, or the traditions, or the cultures of these peoples. As a result, instead of democracy and freedom—there was chaos and the outbreak of violence, a series of revolutions. The ‘Arab Spring’ was replaced by the ‘Arab Winter.’”<sup>44</sup> This speech helped justify, for Putin, Russian aggression against Ukraine in Crimea and in the Donbas region, in cyberspace (including with an attack on the electricity grid), and beyond. The West, of course, saw these actions as entirely illegitimate, a threat to basic international order, and proof of Putin’s autocratic and strongman ways.<sup>45</sup> Although they did not embark on a major transfer of lethal weaponry, several NATO countries, including the United States, did assist the Ukrainian military in various ways in response to Russia’s aggression, further hardening battle lines.<sup>46</sup>

The reset was dead. By the end of the Obama years, so were 10,000 Ukrainians, who perished in civil war, as well as 300 passengers on a Malaysian jet shot down by a Russian anti-aircraft missile.

The breakdown in relations extended to the Middle East, too. While the West blamed Putin for bloody, brutal Russian tactics in Syria from 2015 onward that primarily killed moderate insurgents (rather than the purported ISIS targets), Putin saw that war as another demonstration of the West’s naiveté about power politics and under-appreciation for the importance of political stability in troubled countries.<sup>47</sup>

In short, a quarter century after the end of the Cold War, NATO and Russia had again effectively become adversaries.

### ECONOMIC AND MILITARY POWER

Two more dimensions of the equation need to be overlaid with this brief review of security events and crises: trends in economics and trends in the related matter of military spending and defense modernization.

During Yeltsin's time in power, Russia's economic power and the standard of living of its people deteriorated precipitously. Western observers often forget how much Gorbachev and Yeltsin, seen as reformers and democrats in much of NATO, are generally associated with the decline of the state by Russian citizens.

Putin changed that. He presided over a stabilization of the Russian economy. To be sure, the economy remained unhealthy in many ways, and it remained dwarfed by NATO's aggregate wealth. But at least it ceased its free fall in the 2000s, benefiting from, among other things, the rise in many commodity prices on global markets. As Gaddy and Hill have emphasized, Russia's capacities for action changed dramatically in the summer of 2006, when Moscow finally paid off the last of its international debt to the so-called Paris Club of major creditor nations. Putin had also paid off Russia's debt to the International Monetary Fund by then. Russia was effectively unchained from its financial shackles to foreign countries and international financial institutions. The United States and the West could no longer exert pressure over Russia using debt and the prospect of new loans in the way they had since the Cold War ended.<sup>48</sup>

The global financial crisis and great recession of 2008 and onward caused less damage to Russia than to some Western states, and perhaps, therefore, taught Putin and fellow Russians another strategic lesson: there was value to a degree of autarky and independence. When sanctions were

TABLE 1-2. *Population and Gross Domestic Product for Key Countries*

Country	Population (millions)	GDP (US\$ billions, 2016)
<b>NATO</b>		
Albania	3.0	12.1
Belgium	11.4	470.0
Bulgaria	7.1	50.4
Canada	35.4	1,530.0
Croatia	4.3	49.9
Czech Republic	10.7	194.0
Denmark	5.6	303.0
Estonia	1.3	23.5
France	66.8	2,490.0
Germany	80.7	3,490.0
Greece	10.8	196.0
Hungary	9.9	117.0
Iceland	0.4	19.4
Italy	62.0	1,850.0
Latvia	2.0	27.9
Lithuania	2.8	42.8
Luxembourg	0.6	61.0
Montenegro	0.6	4.2
Netherlands	17.0	770.0
Norway	5.3	376.0
Poland	38.5	467.0
Portugal	10.8	206.0
Romania	21.6	187.0
Slovakia	5.5	90.3
Slovenia	2.0	44.1
Spain	48.6	1,250.0
Turkey	80.3	736.0
United Kingdom	64.4	2,650.0
United States	324.0	18,600.0
<i>Total</i>	933.4	36,307.6

*(continued)*

TABLE 1-2. (continued)

<b>Country</b>	<b>Population (millions)</b>	<b>GDP (US\$ billions, 2016)</b>
<b>RUSSIA</b>		
Russia	142.4	1,270.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>142.4</i>	<i>1,270.0</i>
<b>NEUTRAL AND CSTO</b>		
Armenia	3.1	10.8
Azerbaijan	9.9	35.7
Belarus	9.6	48.1
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3.9	16.5
Cyprus	1.2	19.9
Finland	5.5	239.0
Georgia	4.9	14.5
Kosovo*	1.8	6.6
Macedonia	2.1	10.5
Moldova	3.5	6.7
Serbia	7.1	37.8
Sweden	9.9	517.0
Ukraine	44.2	87.2
<i>Total</i>	<i>106.7</i>	<i>919.3</i>
<b>OTHER NEUTRAL</b>		
Austria	8.7	387.0
Ireland	4.9	308.0
Malta	0.4	10.5
Switzerland	8.2	662.0
<i>Total</i>	<i>22.2</i>	<i>1,367.5</i>

\*Kosovo's independence is not yet fully established.

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2017* (New York: Routledge Press, 2017), pp. 42, 45, 90, 91, 93, 96, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 108, 110, 116, 120, 123, 125, 127, 131, 135, 137, 139, 142, 144, 149, 152, 154, 156, 158, 161, 164, 166, 170, 199, 200, 203, 205, 209, 210.

*The World Fact Book*, "Kosovo," Central Intelligence Agency, March 14, 2017 ([www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html)).

applied by the West after the Crimea and Donbas operations in Ukraine, Putin may not have welcomed the punishment, but he, perhaps, saw a silver lining in helping ensure that Russia would be reminded to take care of itself and not depend on the outside world for its economic viability.

Russia's economic recovery also permitted a reassertion of military power. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's armed forces had been the target of a series of largely ineffectual reform programs. They were also far less well resourced than NATO's forces. However, in late 2008, after the difficult war with Georgia, Russia launched a much more serious set of reforms under Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov.<sup>49</sup> The general improvement in Russia's economy and desires for a reassertion of national power led to an expansion in available resources to fund the country's armed forces and implement those reforms.

The modernization agenda had several components. A central goal was to create higher-performance, more mobile, and better-equipped units. The military was shrunk by about a third, and officer ranks were reduced by half. As with the U.S. military in this time period, the main unit of ground combat capability was reduced from the division to the brigade, and remaining brigades were more fully staffed and manned. Most tanks were eliminated as well, though some 2,000 remained out of an initial force ten times that size. Military education was revamped; pay was improved; professionalism was emphasized.<sup>50</sup>

In late 2010 then-Prime Minister Putin announced a dramatic weapons procurement plan to go along with this earlier set of reforms in personnel, force structure, and readiness. Ambitiously, some \$700 billion was projected for weapons modernization over a ten-year time frame. This plan included a wide range of equipment. For example, in the naval realm it



TABLE 1-3. *Defense Spending and Active Force Size for Key Countries*

Country	GDP on defense (percent)	Defense budget (US\$ millions, 2016)	Active force size
<b>NATO</b>			
Albania	0.95	115	8,000
Belgium	0.83	3,900	29,600
Bulgaria	1.35	678	31,300
Canada	0.86	13,200	63,000
Croatia	1.18	588	15,550
Czech Republic	1.02	1,970	21,950
Denmark	1.17	3,550	16,600
Estonia	2.14	503	6,400
France	1.90	47,200	202,950
Germany	1.10	38,300	176,800
Greece	2.37	4,640	142,950
Hungary	0.85	996	26,500
Iceland	0.16	31	250
Italy	1.21	22,300	174,500
Latvia	1.47	411	5,310
Lithuania	1.50	642	17,030
Luxembourg	0.36	220	900
Montenegro	1.63	69	1,950
Netherlands	1.19	9,190	35,410
Norway	1.59	5,970	24,950
Poland	1.94	9,080	99,300
Portugal	1.06	2,180	29,600
Romania	1.49	2,780	70,500
Slovakia	1.09	983	15,850
Slovenia	1.02	450	7,250
Spain	0.98	12,200	123,200
Turkey	1.19	8,760	355,200
United Kingdom	1.98	52,500	152,350
United States	3.25	604,000	1,347,300
<i>Average/Total/Total</i>	<i>1.34</i>	<i>847,300</i>	<i>3,200,500</i>

TABLE 1-3. (continued)

Country	GDP on defense (percent)	Defense budget (US\$ millions, 2016)	Active force size
<b>RUSSIA</b>			
Russia	3.67	46,600	831,000
<i>Average/Total/Total</i>	3.67	46,600	831,000
<b>NEUTRAL AND CSTO</b>			
Armenia	3.96	428	44,800
Azerbaijan	4.03	1,440	66,950
Belarus	1.06	509	48,000
Bosnia-Herzegovina	1.16	191	10,500
Cyprus	1.79	356	12,000
Finland	1.37	3,280	22,200
Georgia	1.98	287	20,650
Kosovo*	NA	NA	NA
Macedonia	1.02	107	8,000
Moldova	0.44	29	5,150
Serbia	1.34	507	28,150
Sweden	1.13	5,830	29,750
Ukraine	2.49	2,170	204,000
<i>Average/Total/Total</i>	1.80	15,100	502,100
<b>OTHER NEUTRAL</b>			
Austria	0.53	2,070	21,350
Ireland	0.32	1,000	9,100
Malta	0.55	58	1,950
Switzerland	0.71	4,720	20,950
<i>Average/Total/Total</i>	0.53	7,800	53,350

\*Kosovo's independence is not yet fully established.

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2017* (New York: Routledge Press, 2017), pp. 42, 45, 90, 91, 93, 96, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 108, 110, 116, 120, 123, 125, 127, 131, 135, 137, 139, 142, 144, 149, 152, 154, 156, 158, 161, 164, 166, 170, 199, 200, 203, 205, 209, 210.

*The World Fact Book*, "Kosovo," Central Intelligence Agency ([www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html](http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kv.html)).

included Yasen-class nuclear attack submarines, Lada-class and Kilo-class diesel attack subs, several classes of frigates and corvettes, Borey-class ballistic missile submarines, and two Mistral-class amphibious vessels from France.<sup>51</sup> Fighter aircraft deliveries began to average about two dozen a year, including MiG-29SMT, Su-34, and Su-35S jets.<sup>52</sup>

By 2014 annual military spending levels had reached the range of \$80 billion, almost double the 2008 figure. The imposition of sanctions against Russia in the course of the Ukraine crisis, followed by the plummeting of global oil prices, changed this plan. But much of its thrust survived. And much of it had been accomplished by 2014, when the Russian military began to truly swing back into action.

### CONCLUSION

By 2013, as the crisis in Ukraine began to unfold, Putin's worldview and his view of America had become quite dark. The stage was thus set for the Maydan revolution in Ukraine, and for the sense in Putin's mind that the West orchestrated that revolution to further weaken Moscow. The narrative was strengthened when, having helped negotiate a graceful departure for President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, the West seemed to quickly abandon the plan once his ouster could be achieved more quickly. The conditions were in place for the unleashing of "little green men," and much more.

As Putin concluded in his March 18, 2014, speech, after invading and just before annexing Crimea: "Russia strived to engage in dialogue with our colleagues in the West. We constantly propose[d] cooperation on every critical question, [we] want[ed] to strengthen the level of trust, [we] want[ed] our relations to be equal, open and honest. But we did not see reciprocal steps [from the West]." Limited by lack of direct contacts

TABLE 1-4. *Soviet versus Russian Military Indicators a Quarter Century after the Cold War*

	<b>Soviet military 1989</b>	<b>Russian military 2014</b>
Annual estimated budget (2014 \$)	\$225 billion	\$82 billion
Active military personnel	4,250,000	845,000
Reserve personnel	5,560,000	2,000,000
Active-duty army strength	1,600,000	285,000
ICBMs	1,450	356
Bombers	630	220
Fighter aircraft	7,000	1,240
Submarines	368	64
Principal surface combatants	264	33

*Sources:* International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1989-1990* (Oxford, England, 1989), pp. 32-37, and *The Military Balance 2014* (Oxfordshire, England, 2014), pp. 180-86.

with the United States and driven by his threat perceptions, Putin believed he had been rebuffed or deceived at every turn by the West. His worldview, and that of many other Russians, may not be persuasive to most Western observers, but it does appear to be largely sincere.

Meanwhile, negative Western views of Russia and Putin have spiked considerably. Russia's aggressions against Ukraine in 2014, which continue to this day, were followed by its support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in 2015. Russia's military assertiveness went from relatively limited and short in Georgia in 2008 to quick and decisive in Crimea in early 2014

to sustained and deadly in the Donbas region thereafter—to absolutely brutal in Syria, where its support for the inhumane tactics of Assad's forces have deprived its intervention of any legitimacy whatsoever in Western eyes.

And of course Russian meddling in the American elections of 2016 added insult to injury. Putin saw it, perhaps, as repaying the favor that U.S. democracy-promotion efforts had done him several years earlier. But Americans rejected this comparison. Even Republicans who might have supported a Trump victory could not accept Russian meddling through hacking and disinformation, or view it as somehow simply giving the United States its just deserts.

The advent of the Trump administration in Washington, thus, comes at a crucial moment in history. The odds of Mr. Trump being able to engineer an improvement in relations seem rather low unless he can fundamentally recast relations between the West and Russia that twenty-eight years of post-Cold War history have done so much to undermine.

In the remaining chapters, I explore how a substantial change in U.S.-Russia and NATO-Russia relations might be attempted through the creation of a new security architecture. First, in chapter 2, I review briefly the basic state of national security and national security politics in the key neutral states that are the focal point of the proposal. In chapter 3, I make the case for a new security paradigm or structure for the neutral states of eastern Europe, and in chapter 4, I sketch out the main contours and characteristics of such a plan.