

# A Failed New World Order and Beyond: Russian View

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## A Failed New World Order and Beyond: Russian View

Fyodor Lukyanov

**Abstract:** Twenty-five years have passed since the Cold War, but no stable international order has been created. The idea about a Western-centric unipolar world has failed, and a multipolar system is yet to emerge, though it's hard to comment on how it may function properly.

Due to its size, geopolitical location, resource potential, great power tradition and aspirations Russia finds itself in the middle of the most important trends shaping the next world order. Global demand for a stable and balanced model is intertwined with Russia's quest for its new international identity. Thus, re-assessment of the past quarter of a century is needed both internationally and nationally to pave a way to the future.

Since early 2016, the word 'warfare' has been used in a more traditional sense with the 'hybrid' adjective no longer implied. The regular participants of major economic fora note that a new sentiment has been gaining momentum: the unacknowledged desire of the political elites to cut the Gordian knot and wipe the slate clean to write a more readable script.

After the confrontations of the 20th century, it was perceived as victory that the global order was shaped without an actual clash of arms, as compared to the times when the parties used to have it out on the battlefield. Twenty-five years have passed since then. Now it turns out that what we then perceived as a finale didn't really get things straight. Today we've reached a crucial point that is in many ways rather unique. Due to its size, geopolitical location, resource potential, tradition of being a great power and aspiration to restore its might and prestige, Russia finds itself in the middle of the most important trends which will shape the future world order.

### The dawning of a new era

The time is gone when everyone assumed that the end of the Cold War meant the onset of a new order. Or, that a new hierarchy had been established to be subsequently finalised as a system of institutions, some of them new, others adjusted to the changed environment.

The stabilisation was not to be, though throughout the first decade of the 'new era' (1991–2001, nominally from the break-up of the Soviet Union to the attacks of 9/11) the general outline of the unipolar world seemed to have been set.

The second decade (2001–2011, from incursion into Afghanistan to the civil war in Syria) was marked by a series of attempts to reinforce unipolarity which resulted in

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rapid erosion of existing perceptions and further exacerbation of the destructive processes.

We are now heading towards the middle of the third decade, witnessing the definitive collapse of the old system (the Cold War model that failed to adjust itself to the realities of the post-Cold War era) and what appears to be a new world order beginning to take shape.

Some of the important international processes that have not only defined the development of the world system in the 2010s—but have and will influence the world order, and Russia's current and future position, are as follows:

- The crisis of the European Union: the EU has largely lost its international influence, while it is forced to focus on its own internal dysfunctions and quest for profound transformation of the integration model. The surprising decision by the UK to leave the EU escalates this problem to its worst yet and leaves the EU in a long, painful adaptation to the new destructive trend;
- The actual collapse of the old alignment of forces and even composition of states in the Middle East and its turning for many years and maybe decades to come has pushed it into a zone of increased instability;
- The shift of international geopolitical and economic activity towards Asia. The changed role of China, and, consequently, entire geometry of the relations in the region;
- Increased international attention to Eurasia against the backdrop of its attempts (though independent from one another, but to a certain degree coordinated strategies of Russia and China) to obtain integrity and acquire international personality;
- The beginning of a new rearrangement of the global economic regulation system through the formation of mega-blocs;
- The United States (US) starting to revise their strategic approaches.

### **The decline of 'Wider Europe'**

The concept of Wider Europe was in many respects intended as the core of the much-expected world order that failed to take form when the Cold War was over, and the fate of this core is rather illustrative in terms of general processes. The result of the end of the Cold War, 'Wider Europe' was an ideological notion rather than a geographical one. More precisely, it implied rapidly overcoming the European geopolitical divide, creating a single space of security and sustainable development based on the model of the European Community/Union with NATO's dominating role in the sphere of security. Today both of these institutes that were to become a backbone of the 'new Europe' are in crisis.

Apart from failing to become a major and independent international player, the EU has witnessed the defeat of its policy in relation to the neighbouring states. The Eastern Partnership brought with it crisis in Ukraine, and paralysis of the Union over the Mediterranean by the Arab Spring and the subsequent developments. The strategic partnership with Russia ended up in a sanctions war.<sup>1</sup> This is how things stand now, at present in 2016.

The attempts to stand up as equals with the US boiled down to negotiations on creating a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership under the US' auspices. The

future of this document remains unclear due to big controversies and significant resistance inside the EU. The US might prevail (for political reasons), but it could boost a feeling of helplessness among the population. The sense of a growing gap between people and the establishment is obvious and has ironic fallouts like the no-vote on Ukrainian association with the EU in the Netherlands. Each specific crisis, regardless of its cause, be it the euro-related issues or the migrant crisis, tends to turn into a structural crisis for the European institutions. Brexit fuelled uncertainty and dysfunction of the EU, which now for a long period will be consumed by internal problems and give up ambitions for further expansion. The Wider Europe project seems to have been replaced by a deep 'little Europe' syndrome.

NATO expanded more than twofold since the USSR ceased to be, but has failed to find a clear and well-defined mission. The Ukrainian crisis and the accession of Crimea to Russia made it appear that the model of the Cold War may well be brought back, which meant consolidating against a known enemy, the old familiar one. However, even at the height of the crisis in Ukraine, NATO was far from unanimous. The conflict in Syria, and especially the escalation of tensions following the downing of a Russian fighter jet by Turkey, poses the question point blank as to the solidarity inside the Alliance. In the times of the Cold War one could hardly imagine a situation when a member state takes serious military actions without consulting its allies. These days, a state may act rashly at its own peril and then turn for support to its allies, who may happen to have a different view of the situation. Brexit may have an impact on NATO, since the alliance remains the only Euro-Atlantic structure which includes all and the US are interested to strengthen NATO as their hand in Europe.

### **The rise of 'Greater Eurasia'**

The emergence of 'Greater Eurasia' is an important process. In East Asia, China has faced increasing pressure and resistance of the US and their allies. This is one of the reasons why Beijing has turned towards the west, to Eurasia, which is making a difference for the region. The Eurasian continent, including its western end, is becoming more integral and interconnected.

The fact that since 1991 Russia had not been included as an equal in the rearrangement processes both in Europe and globally, gave rise to a sense of inferiority and a desire to secure an independent place for itself. The decline of the EU combined with growth in China and Asia at large are gradually starting to influence Russia's identity and have enhanced its ambition to fit into the Asian trends. Admittedly, the process has been slow and ineffective, but nothing suggests that it is going to stop soon. Due to the fact that the influence in Ukraine was lost, the Eurasian integration project that initially was Eurasian in name only,<sup>2</sup> while in essence it was an attempt to create a second pole of the 'European world', has been gradually developing truly Eurasian features. The effect only deepens as China intensifies its activity in Eurasia.

At this moment it is hard to predict how the relations between Russia and China will evolve, given the changed situation. Russia's dramatic turn towards the PRC at the height of the Ukrainian crisis resulted in a brief spell of euphoria, which rapidly faded as the objective issues attributable to cultural and ideological differences became apparent.

Meanwhile, the expectations that competition between Russia and China cannot be avoided, primarily in Central Asia, do not appear so evident. Their interests and

possibilities in this part of Eurasia are quite compatible. China admittedly has much greater capabilities in the economic sphere. However, the more it invests in the region, the more it will be interested in preserving stability and security. No other state except Russia is ready and able to provide such services. Besides, China, who has faced increased tensions along its borders, will definitely appreciate a stable and constructive neighbour.

However, the adjustment of interests of Russia and China will be a long and painful process, and its rapidity will also depend on how the relations will develop between Beijing and Washington and how the competition will evolve. There has been increased evidence that the competition may be expected to grow. At the same time, the creation of a new geopolitical and geo-economic entity in Eurasia seems to be a long-term and indispensable trend, which will shape international politics decades from now.<sup>3</sup>

### **Russia: between global projects**

Basically, Russia is stuck between two projects. Such a position has its advantages, since each of the projects is only in the making, and it would be premature to take a definite approach to either of them. However, it is impossible to leave the question on one's own position unanswered for a long time—this is a fact that Russia's leadership understands pretty well, judging by the country's recently intensified effort in the international field.

Russia has failed to hold together the rapidly coming apart post-Soviet space that Moscow has perceived as a natural and lawful sphere of its interests. Throughout the period following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the unquestioned priority was to preserve the dominance in its former territory, and much effort was put into achieving this goal. Yet, the disintegration continued.

And here we come to a paradox.

As the failure of Russia's strategy in the former Soviet Union became apparent, and the costs increased quite dramatically (the Ukrainian crisis), Moscow's competitors were becoming progressively less interested in the 'disputed assets'. The attempts to 'refine' almost any of the states in the post-Soviet space would be too costly for any bidder. Unfortunately, the decreased interest spells a considerably lower level of predictability rather than heralds a termination of rivalry and the onset of stabilisation. The countries in transition get stuck outside of serious development projects which leads to internal shocks, though all the while these countries continue to arouse the instincts of rivalry in their more powerful neighbours. The latter (primarily Russia and the EU) indeed follow a negative agenda to prevent the rivals from getting hold of the 'grey zone' states.

By comparison, China follows a different logic. It has made every effort to distance itself from any kind of politics, attending only to the projects that are in line with its strategy that has been shaped into the ideology of the 'New Silk Road'. Beijing's position is that it would not assume the responsibility for the states *en route*.

Due to certain peculiarities of its development in the post-Soviet period, to position itself in the international field, Russia has opted for the military muscle that has been restored to some extent, and which is more relevant for the preparedness to use it.

The operation in Syria that started in autumn 2015 meant entering a principally new phase of military force ambitions. Reliance on military force has been aggravated by the general increase of internal and interstate conflicts. Such a situation upsets the EU's basic assumption that military force as leverage is becoming a thing of the past and is being replaced by other ways of competition, primarily economic ones.

### **The US/Russia factor**

Meanwhile, the events of 2014–2016 have shown that, contrary to the expectations, the political motivation behind specific actions fully overrides the requirements of cost-effectiveness. The Turkey case may be a vivid example in this respect.

An important factor to influence Russia's perception of the prospects for global and national development is some sort of a state of strategic confusion in which the US apparently are at the moment. It is usually attributed to the specific features of President Barack Obama's temper as a politician and personality. However, in addition to the personal element, objective processes also need to be factored in.

Mr. Obama's presidency is also a transitional period (just as the entire global development is) from the US' claims of single-handed and unquestionable leadership to a world order that is more diversified in terms of both distribution of power and the instruments to exercise this power. At this point it is hard to say which direction will be the choice of the new president who is to be elected in 2016. The rising suspense of the presidential primaries suggests that the nation is disappointed with the ruling elite and wants a change. A strategic U-turn may hardly be expected this year, though its vectors are quite visible. There may be an attempt to go back to the approaches of the 1990s, to show that the US hegemony is the only option. However, it is equally likely that the US will opt for further selectivity, which would mean that the priorities will be identified more accurately and sparingly.

Judging by its recent actions Russia intends to use the moment of US reflection (as a manifestation of the country's desire to review the methods of its global policy) at least to some extent to fill the niches that are *de facto* being vacated by Washington. In particular, certain withdrawal of the US from the Middle East has offered a possibility for Russia to increase its influence in the region that has been central for global politics. In addition, for Moscow it is an opportunity to expand the agenda in its dialogue with the Western countries that has been totally dominated by Ukraine in the last two years, forcing Russia to stick to regional issues.

As Russia's policy becomes more active, the imbalance between the country's willingness to play a leading role on the global scale and the state of its economic base, of its share in the global economy, becomes increasingly evident. The risk of overstretching itself becomes more than just a risk. The intention to compensate for the lack of capabilities with the determination to use military force may be effective only to a certain extent.<sup>4</sup>

One of the factors behind further 'raising the bar' has been the not-unfounded perception that the enemies are vulnerable and dismayed, though the degree of their vulnerability and dismay is probably overestimated.

The relations between Russia and the Western states have entered a phase of a long crisis, that is further aggravated not only and not so much by a difference in values and policies, as by a mutual conviction that the counterpart is vulnerable and short-lived. Consequently, there is a risk of asymmetric confrontation. As it happened

before, the tragedies related to terrorist attacks are followed by an outburst of enthusiasm to stand together against a global threat.

However, given the overall level of mistrust between the countries, we may hardly expect them to unite against terrorism or form any sort of a coalition. A certain level of cooperation may be possible, most likely in the technical sphere. The agreement between Russia and the US on joint action to achieve a ceasefire in Syria and kick off the process of political settlement was an unexpected example of a constructive approach. Unfortunately, apart from this fact, the relations are what they are.

In the case of asymmetric confrontation, where each of the parties both realises its own vulnerability and sees the chink in the opponent's armour, the two countries will try to make full use of their own strengths. Russia's strength is its rather combat-capable army. In a situation where there are efficient military capabilities and, most importantly, the willingness to use them, there is a temptation to make them your instrument of choice.

### **Mega-blocs and mega-problems**

At the same time, in a new world the regulatory and legal dictates will probably play an even greater role than military force. The prototype of such type of government is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, an association under the aegis of the US. Though the TPP has very little influence on Russia's economy, due to the fact that it hardly has any connection to the Asia-Pacific region, it is rather important as a prototype. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that is being formed following this model will influence Russia's economy to a greater degree. If successful, the TTIP will unite North America and the EU. Then the EU—still our largest partner—will be part of an area governed by these rules that are laid without Russia's participation.<sup>5</sup>

The fragmentation of the world into economic mega-blocs that is currently underway is drawing a line under the time of universally applied economic rules symbolised by the World Trade Organization (WTO). Ironically enough, Russia, who has joined the WTO after 18 years of negotiations after it had bargained quite favourable terms for itself, has, in point of fact, come after the feast. Now it will have to adapt to a new system of global economic governance.

The fragmentation of the economic space and its division into blocs raises the question on the relations between groups of states that are united by common but still not universal rules. In a world like that, measures of mutual restriction that we are used to calling 'sanctions' may become a standard practice in the relations between the states or blocs, where—if only for the purpose of achieving this balance *ad hoc*—the countries will have to regulate the activities of each other with such methods. It looks like we might as well start to get accustomed to the fact that they will be applied and become standard practice.

The major challenges that Russia now faces are not limited to diversifying its economy (the need to do so appears evident). They also include understanding what is essentially power and strength. If we go down the road of absolutising the kind of power that is currently Russia's strength, it will lead us to serious problems. But to formulate a blueprint for the future, Russia has to reassess and overcome the experience of the past 25 years, which still defines political thinking in this country.

### Disintegration as a reference point

Among the many popular statements made by Vladimir Putin over the past 16 years, one in particular is widely cited. In 2005, he said that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.<sup>6</sup> This remark is often used as proof of Putin's alleged plans to revive the bygone superpower.

However, a closer look at his remarks shows that Putin was talking about the catastrophic socioeconomic crack-up and a severe crisis of statehood in Russia that followed hard on the Soviet Union's self-dissolution.

A quarter of a century has passed since then. But those events still remain a major milestone for the Russian elite, and for Russian society that is largely influenced by the former. An event that determines a generation's sentiment and outlook is not a fact of history but an element of present-day politics.

This factor underlies the current disagreements between Russia and the West, which have reached a state of 'hybrid confrontation'. What happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s is also seen in the West as a watershed, but in a different sense. Its interpretation is clear enough; the world got rid of the fear of nuclear war, nations shook off the yoke of communist oppression, and freedom triumphed. In Russia, views range from nostalgia for the lost superpower and social justice to condemnation of the totalitarian past. All these diverse opinions can be found not only in society but also in government policies. And as more time passes, assessments of the Soviet Union and its break-up become increasingly contrasting.

This contrast is especially noticeable in international politics where the main disagreement concerns the outcome of the Cold War. For the West it seems to be fairly obvious, as in January 1992, a month after the official dissolution of the Soviet Union, US President George H. W. Bush announced in his State of the Union address: 'By the grace of God, America won the Cold War... For the Cold War didn't "end"—it was won.'<sup>7</sup>

He was speaking about the end of 'imperial communism' and this was consonant with the views professed by the new Russian leadership headed by Boris Yeltsin. When he was fighting Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev for power, Yeltsin's rhetoric was very much similar to that used by anti-communist and anti-Soviet movements in Eastern Europe.

But unlike them Russians could not blame anybody else for the previous period, to draw a line between now and before. Yet the majority of the Russian population perceived the end of the previous system not as liberation from dictatorship (the repressive Soviet model and ideology were dismantled during the last party general secretary's tenure) but rather as the collapse of the habitual statehood and status in the global hierarchy. Subsequent events showed that Russia had little reason to see itself as a victor and was never viewed as such by its international partners. A 'revolutionary' Russia could evoke empathy or pity, but it was not regarded as an important partner in building 'a new world order' proclaimed by President George H. W. Bush.

### Not so new world order

The very phrase 'a new world order' was introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev at the dawn of his *perestroika* policy in 1986 to describe what the world should be like after the end of the Cold War.<sup>8</sup> Reform-minded members of the Soviet Government were looking for ways to break the Cold War gridlock, imagining some sort of 'a joint



venture' between the two opponents as a solution. In other words, they saw 'a new world order' as some agreement on mutually acceptable rules of global governance, as a compromise worked out through equal rapprochement.

However, equality was soon called into question as mounting internal problems in the Soviet Union forced its leaders to put more emphasis on foreign policy as a means of tackling them. And yet, the most prominent initiatives of that time such as the end of the arms race with the US, consent to the reunification of Germany, and the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe envisaged a mutual partnership for building a non-confrontational 'new world order'.

The West did not challenge this officially, but its actual understanding of whether a common 'order' with Russia could be possible was different. In 1990, shortly after the Charter of Paris was signed, British-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf wrote in his book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe*, 'If there is a common European house or home to aim for, it is ... not Gorbachev's but one to the West of his and his successors' crumbling empire. ... Europe ends at the Soviet border, wherever that may be.' Dahrendorf defined Europe as a political community where 'small and medium-sized countries try to determine their destiny together. A superpower has no place in their midst, even if it is not an economic and perhaps no longer a political giant.'<sup>9</sup>

The disintegration of the Soviet Union annihilated the paradigm Gorbachev sought to construct. 'A new world order' no longer meant joint construction but the proliferation of Western principles, which had triumphed in the 40-year-long confrontation, to the rest of the world.

The collapse of the communist bloc and the Soviet Union created the impression of 'victory by fall'. And not because the West was stronger militarily, but because its socio-political model had proved historically correct. Logically, it would be not only bad but utterly wrong for those who are on the 'right side of history' to make any compromises. So, in the 1990s an ambitious experiment was launched to bring a considerable part of the world over to the 'right side of history'.

It started out in Europe, where transformations were mainly peaceful, except for the Balkans. But they also set a precedent of solving problems with 'exceptions' involving the use of force and regime change. This practice was later spread to the Middle East, which became the second phase of the 'great transformation' process.

While the West was 'digesting' the results of the Cold War, Russia was struggling to survive at both the national and individual levels. The initial feeling of victory among members of the new elite and intellectuals, most of whom abhorred communism, was wearing off. On the one hand, the problems created by the collapse of the previous system and the need to build a new one appeared to be far greater than expected; on the other hand, hopes for equal dialogue with the West failed to come true, making it even harder for Russia to admit the dramatic decline of its international standing. Russian diplomats who worked in the 1990s recall with bitterness that all their efforts to pursue an independent foreign policy were smashed by the dependence of the state budget on regular loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) where the US had the final say.

But even in those circumstances differences in the interpretation of events on the international arena became increasingly pronounced. As Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard observed quite rightly, the West 'had mistaken Russia's failure to block the creation of the post-Cold War order as assent. They mistook weakness for conversion.'<sup>10</sup> Since 1994, long before Vladimir Putin appeared on the political

stage, Boris Yeltsin repeatedly expressed deep dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. But the West viewed this as an echo of the waning imperial mentality or as an act intended for the domestic audience.

Numerous disputes over NATO's enlargement and its perilous effects for relations with Russia miss one important detail. The alliance's expansion was immediately followed by its first combat engagement ever in Yugoslavia in 1999. It was the turning point in Russia's perception of 'the new order'. Bombing raids in a European capital to force the 'wrong' regime to capitulate appalled many Russians, even many advocates of liberal views. Western arguments that NATO was a purely defensive alliance and Russia had no reason to worry no longer sounded convincing.

By that time, socioeconomic reforms, which most Russians associated with Western influence, had stalled. The country defaulted on its foreign debt and was on the brink of disintegration, a new war in the Caucasus had begun, and the West's discontent with failed reforms in Russia gave rise to a sweeping media campaign exposing Russian kleptocracy.

It is important to recall the initial period in the development of the new Russia because it paved the way for what would be happening later during the Putin era. The ruck march of Russian paratroopers to Pristina in June 1999 (precisely two months before Putin was appointed prime minister and successor) became an epigraph to his rule. The march had no strategic value but showed the degree of Russia's frustration with its inability to influence the situation and became a prototype for sharp geopolitical moves the Kremlin came to be associated with many years after.

### **Whose revisionism is worst?**

Today the West views Russia as a revisionist power which questions the post-Cold War order in Europe and the world. Meanwhile Moscow believes that there was no real order properly established at the end of the 20th century, but just an attempt (largely unsuccessful) to impose US hegemony. The 'unipolar moment' lasted in reality for only about two decades as Charles Krauthammer, who coined the term, actually predicted in 1990.<sup>11</sup> Yet that period saw the gradual deconstruction of the previous order based on the balance of power, respect for sovereignty, non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs, and the use of force only following UN authorisation. In the Kremlin's opinion, a revisionist policy was carried out by the West which was confident of its own right (as a moral and political victor) to change the world as it saw fit.

According to this logic, Russia's military operation in Syria is not a destructive interference but an attempt to keep the legitimate government as the only force that can guarantee the restoration of order and fight terrorists. By contrast, the West's actions to change regimes in the Middle East and support revolutions there are irresponsible steps undermining stability. The current horrible state of affairs in the region more than a decade after the first major American interference is proof of it. The *status quo* preservation approach has one exception—Crimea, but Russia keeps emphasising that borders were changed after the removal of the legitimate president of Ukraine and amid the resultant vacuum of power.<sup>12</sup>

Russia's view on international relations (with the exception of the early Soviet period) has always been based on the realist school of thought: states act on the international arena by certain laws, regardless of their own political system. But at the 'end of history' the West advocated a liberal approach which established a close

interconnection between the internal system of government in a state and its foreign policy. Hence the idea of advancing democracy as a guarantee of peace, stability and security for the West. Its most vivid manifestation is ‘transformational diplomacy’, proposed in 2006 by Condoleezza Rice. It conditioned interstate relations on the change of the system of government in countries that did not match the American understanding of democracy. In the case of the EU the name was ‘transformative power’. So if the West sees Russia as a country trying to revise the international order, Russia is afraid of Western zeal to revise those who don’t stick to Western imposed standards.

The clash of worldviews results in fundamentally different narratives and the loss of trust to an even greater extent than during the Cold War. The concept of ‘soft power’ can illustrate how far such differences can go. This is a key notion for evaluating post-Cold War changes in the world. Renowned American diplomat and scholar Joseph Nye Jr introduced this term immediately after the end of the global ideological confrontation in 1990.<sup>13</sup> At that time it was believed that life itself had proved the senselessness of building up stockpiles of tanks and bombs that could blow up the planet many times over. Instead, non-military methods, primarily cultural and ideological, helped secure the victory.

Non-military methods of influence have always existed. But Nye’s concept contained an important nuance. He named it a political instrument formally, legitimised cultural and ideological influence as a means of pursuing a national policy in the interests of a concrete country. The term ‘power’ is the key to the classical understanding of international relations as interaction based on the use of power. In other words, power has begun to be used on a much larger scale.

Joseph Nye wrote about the US in the first place, meaning that other countries could (and should) use the same methods of competition, but the US has *a fortiori* the biggest ‘soft power’ potential as it allowed it to win the Cold War. The general belief at that time was that the triumph of ‘soft power’ ushered in a new era where the traditional power would only be used to deal with a handful of rogue (or pariah) states, while respectable powers would interact with each other in a completely different manner.

But the result was different. Firstly, everyone agreed that ‘soft’ cultural and political influence was a political instrument. Therefore, it can be used to achieve certain goals and must be viewed accordingly—and countered. Secondly, everyone must learn to use his own ‘soft power’ in response. Thirdly, if the soft power potential appears insufficient, other available methods must be employed, including traditional power.

The so-called ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space show what happens when ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ forms of influence come into play together. The US, where the term ‘soft power’ was coined, considers support for democratisation in backward countries a legitimate way to accelerate this process. The authorities of the affected countries view it as a projection of power (albeit applied in an unusual form) in the interests of that state and either try to block it or respond with whatever power they themselves have, such as restrictions, repressions or even use of ‘hard’, military, power.

For the West, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a moment of triumph; for Russia, it was a serious strength test which after a brief period of euphoria and initial chaos began to be viewed as a historical defeat. Attempts to fit into the new global world turned Russia into the largest exporter of raw materials, capital earned for this

raw material, and brain, as economist Leonid Grigoryev has so aptly observed.<sup>14</sup> Transition did not bring it to its destination. After years of turmoil and respite, Russia still needs a modern national identity to find. It has neither fully integrated into the global world nor built its own viable model of development. This explains constant references to the ‘major geopolitical catastrophe’. It has not been properly assessed simply because the subsequent experience was quite controversial and generally unsuccessful. It appears that there is no better example to follow than the Soviet Union.

Its disintegration caused by various internal reasons is viewed in Russia through the lens of the past 25 years—the wars in Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya, and developments in post-Soviet countries instigated to a large extent by the Western factor. The Russian leadership projects this external influence to the past (the collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of purposeful external influence) and a possible future (numerous statements at various levels that the US’ goal is to change regime in Russia and dismember the country). This deep-rooted view is based on the conviction that the West wants to make everyone do things its way, by persuasion and example or by force. Only a state built by Western templates and devoid of ambitions can hope for acceptance and integration.

### **Everything but substance**

Most indicative in this respect was the model of Russia’s integration with the European Union proposed in the mid-2000s by the then European Commission President Romano Prodi: ‘Everything but institutions’.<sup>15</sup> In simple terms, this would have meant that Russia would adopt all EU rules and regulations but would not be able to influence their development.

There is one important point in Putin’s speech about the ‘major geopolitical catastrophe’: ‘Many thought or seemed to think at the time that our young democracy was not a continuation of Russian statehood, but its ultimate collapse, the prolonged agony of the Soviet system. But they were mistaken.’<sup>16</sup> The feeling that the Russian State and the world in general are fragile, is a result of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and rapid collapse of statehood. Hence anything that can cause the loss of stability is perceived as a threat.

For centuries, the Russian State was built on the idea of defence—expanding the space around the core to avoid being caught off guard in the event of invasion. A country of plains has seen devastation more than once, and expanding ‘buffer zones’ was the only guarantee of its survival. Over the last 25 years after Cold War, NATO, of which Russia is not and will never be a member, has more than doubled its membership, mainly by absorbing countries that previously formed the zone of Russia’s security. Assurances that it was a peaceful alliance were accompanied by armed actions against other states, never undertaken before. This was happening at a time when Russia’s own defence capability had deteriorated dramatically in the initial 15 years of its existence. In this sense, one might assess Russia’s attitude as being paranoid; however, there are objective reasons for it which are hard to deny.

No ‘new world order’ has been built, Western dominance in the world is seriously challenged, and this strongly encourages Russia to prove that the collapse of 25 years ago was not a legitimate result. The deep crisis in the EU and problems caused by the US’ global dominance prompt Russia to revise the declared results of the Cold War.

Today's Russia is the antipode of the Soviet Union during *perestroika*. Mikhail Gorbachev's foreign policy idealism and enthusiasm based on the premise of openness have given way to gloomy realism and disappointment with the outside world during Vladimir Putin's rule. The pendulum first swung to one side and now has almost reached the opposite point. Russia is on the threshold of the next cycle when it will finally realise what it needs for development in a new era and what place it can take in a world which is only beginning to emerge.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes

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