

History

The Sources of Russia's Conduct (1992-1999)

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This paper uses the title of the famous publication “The Sources of Soviet Conduct”, published in 1947 by American diplomat George F. Kennan, who later became a well-known historian. The analysis and recommendations covered in this Article played an important role in the development of the US Strategy for the Cold War period. This analysis is still valid to some extent, although the current situation significantly differs from the Cold War period. While analyzing the sources of Russia's conduct nowadays, domestic, international as well as military and security factors need to be considered. It is noteworthy that, in the 1992-1999 timeframe, the foundations for political pluralism were being created in Russia. Important steps were made by Moscow in terms of joining European institutions and enhancing its relations with the Western countries. Formally, Russia appeared ready to go further in its cooperation with the West. However, at the end of the 20th century, due to the difficult economic and political situation in Russia, anti-Western attitudes were on the rise. The historical memory of a former superpower and the nationalist phenomenon came to the fore again. The conflict in Kosovo and NATO's continuing enlargement helped foster these anti-Western feelings. © 2023 Bull. Georg. Natl. Acad. Sci.

Russia, the West, Cold War, NATO

Russia's military intervention in Ukraine has ended the international order which was created after World War II and which has been swiftly degrading since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The World is facing a new reality – there is a huge crack in international law. This situation is a strong reminder of the Middle Ages when use of brutal force was the norm.

So far it seems that its quite difficult to analyze this “new normality” as now “nerves are exposed” and emotions prevail. A general attitude is the following: “Ukraine must win now! The time for

critical analysis will come later”. Meanwhile, unfortunately, the war is still raging. Moreover, it might enter a phase that will be much more dangerous for the World.

The war in Ukraine is the most serious challenge in the history of mankind after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Comparison of the Cuban events with the current situation gives quite a pessimistic picture. First, the crisis of 1962 lasted only a short time and it was resolved rather swiftly and without casualties. Secondly, unlike the current situation, it was not followed by large-scale war in the middle

of Europe. Finally, although it may sound strange, there was a much higher degree of trust between the American and Soviet leaders as compared to that which exists between Washington and Moscow at present. Needless to say, the nuclear capabilities of the opposing sides in the 1960s were much smaller than they are nowadays, which undermines current optimism as well. It is also very important that, in 1962, humanity was living with a still vivid memory of World War II. The political leaders of that time had been among the foremost players in that war. Their generation could feel the phantom pains of this terrible war. Nowadays, most people are generationally removed from World War II and know about it only from movies and computer and mobile phone games where destroying the rival is related to a feeling of pleasant excitement....

However, existing circumstances give some hope that the war in Ukraine will not grow into a nuclear catastrophe. The fact is that, during the 60 years following the Cuban Crisis, numerous agreements were signed in order to restrict and control nuclear weapons. Several treaties and mechanisms were also created that were intended to reduce the probability of a nuclear disaster.

What are the Sources of Russia's conduct? This is not the first time that this question has been asked over the last 100 years. One answer to this question became apparent after the end of World War II. The Soviet army, while freeing Eastern and Central Europe from Nazi occupation, proceeded to impose its own rule on these countries and the Soviet-occupied part of Germany. This development shocked Moscow's wartime allies: the USA and Great Britain. The unity of the "Big Three" was threatened and might have turned into a big confrontation.

At the time, there were intensive discussions in Washington and London as to what had offended Stalin and why was he denying the agreed-upon principles of the New World Order. According to those agreements, the European countries should define their own future, while the "Four policemen"

– USA, USSR, Great Britain and China – should secure justice and peace in the world, principles which had been reflected in the Charter of the newly established United Nations Organization in 1945.

So, what was the reason for Stalin's choice?

A substantial answer to these questions was provided in February 1946 by a young diplomat of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, George F. Kennan, who later became a well-known historian and public figure. His historic "Long Telegram" became one of the underpinnings of the USA's strategic vision and the so-called Truman Doctrine. A year later, George Kennan elaborated his ideas in the famous article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" [1].

Kennan's ideas were based on his analysis of the Soviet system. He concluded that an enemy icon was required for the survival of the USSR's repressive and inherently expansionist regime. It would otherwise be impossible to justify large scale terror against its own population with the ultimate goal of maintaining its unchallenged power. A close relationship and cooperation with the West was no longer of interest to Moscow. On the contrary, the aggravation of relations with the "Capitalist West" was an internal requirement of the Soviet regime. So, according to Kennan, compromise with the Kremlin would not be beneficial to the USA. The "containment" policy (to contain Soviet expansionism) became the basis for Washington's new strategic approach. This term "containment" became main strategy of the West during the 40 years of the Cold War.

Winston Churchill played a special role in establishing this new strategy. His speech in Fulton, Missouri in 1946 regarding Soviet expansionism and his coining of a new term "Iron Curtain" sounded like an alarm: "Beware, I say; time may be short. Do not let us take the course of allowing events to drift along until it is too late" [2].

Based on the initiative of President Harry S. Truman, a new doctrine was worked out in Washington: the Marshall Plan which included a

multi-billion dollar recovery plan for Europe. On April 4, 1949, NATO was created and an American security “umbrella” was offered to the Western European countries. It played a decisive role in containing the Soviet threat during the Cold War.

The ideas of George Kennan and Winston Churchill are, to some extent, still valid today. However, the current reality differs significantly from that of the last century and the early years after World War II.

Kennan saw the sources of Soviet expansionism mostly in its totalitarian regime and ideology, while Churchill – who was the representative of a Great Empire himself – very well understood Moscow’s aspiration to infinite expansion. London was historically more experienced than Washington in terms of relations with Russia.

Both aspects should be considered while reviewing the causes of modern Russia’s conduct in its domestic and its foreign policies. It should be emphasized that military-political, i.e. security issues, are of the highest priority for Moscow in its relations with the West.

In 1992, a bourgeois-democratic revolution effectively took place in Russia. It returned to an economic formation similar to that which had existed until 1917. As a result, the ideological principles of confrontation with the West that had existed during the Cold War period were removed. Private ownership and capitalist methods of production were strengthening in Russia in the 1990s. The foundations for political pluralism and liberal rights and freedoms were being created. In this regard, Russia achieved significant success during Boris Yeltsin’s presidency.

As for its foreign policy principles during the first term of Yeltsin’s presidency (1991-96), Russia abided by the declared Universal Values as expressed in the UN Charter. This approach was inherited from Mikhail Gorbachev’s “Perestroika” and it was based on the supremacy of international law and not Communist ideology. However, in its relations with the former Soviet republics, Moscow

applied the different principle of the “near abroad”, which meant “zone of special interests” or “zone of influence”.

Significant steps were made in military-political relations between the USA and Russia. They did not consider each other as strategic rivals any more. In 1992, for example, the two countries agreed on the CTR (Cooperative Threat Reduction) Program, also known as Nunn-Lugar program, for the purpose of securing and dismantling weapons of mass destruction and their related infrastructure in the former Soviet republics. In 1993 the USA and Russia signed the START II Treaty (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty). Next, the process of Russia’s membership into the “Group of Seven” was completed in 1997. Along with the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics, Russia actively participated in the new formats of cooperation with NATO (NACC, EAPC, PFP). Other important decisions were made by Moscow in terms of joining European institutions and enhancing relations with the Western countries.

Boris Yeltsin ended his speech before the U.S. Congress on June 17, 1992 with the following words “God bless America! God bless Russia!” These words are still remembered as a sign of friendship between these two major former opponents [3].

How strange these words sound today! Unfortunately, a few years later, phantoms of the recent past re-emerged in Russia. Catastrophic economic conditions facilitated their reincarnation. Reforms by President Yeltsin, especially the privatization process, was regarded by the population as plundering (прихватизация) and as making small elite groups enormously rich, which sadly, was not far from truth. In addition, Western companies were able to acquire significant assets in Russia’s economy: in finance, mining and trade, as well as in large energy and other enterprises. The feeling was growing that the West did not want Russia’s economic recovery but was only willing to enrich itself by profiteering from its huge natural

resources: "America fooled us! That's why they destroyed the Soviet Union!"

The West could probably have done more to support Russia economically and otherwise. International Financial Institutions and leading Western countries were allocating billions to support Russia's evolution. Those funds exceeded the support provided to all other former Soviet republics. According to U.S. State Department data, the USA allocated \$2.5 billion to Russia during 1991-99. This amount exceeded the total sum allocated to: Ukraine (\$917 million.), Georgia (\$568 million), Belorussia (\$265 million), Armenia (\$650 million), Azerbaijan (\$144 million), Estonia (\$42 million), Lietuva (\$48 million), Latvia (\$138 million) and Moldova (\$303 million) [4].

This funding, though well-intentioned, might not seem colossal from our current perspective, but much of the money provided to Russia for reforms immediately found its way into personal accounts: unprecedented corruption was flourishing in Russia!

Russia's "Defeat in the Cold War", as proclaimed throughout the West, was for Russia an enormous moral humiliation. Overnight, Russia lost the territories that it had controlled for as long as 300 years in Europe, Asia and the South Caucasus. Namely, Russia's borders in Europe returned to its 17th century borders and in South Caucasus and Central Asia to the borders that had existed at the beginning of the 19th century.

It was felt in the Kremlin that the World's second superpower had been subjected to humiliating conditions similar to those forced on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Later this "Versailles syndrome" facilitated the revival of revanchism and German Nazis coming into power. This question was asked frequently during the 1990s: Is it possible that something similar will occur in Russia?

The independence of the Ukraine was an especially painful loss for Russia as it was considered as the splitting of a single nation, notwith-

standing the fact that Ukraine had been a separate republic for 70 years within the USSR. Apart from the identity problem, this territorial loss was a huge geopolitical change for Moscow. Without Ukraine's vast territories and its population of 45 million, Russia was losing its strategic weight. Comments by Zbigniew Brzezinski that Russia without Ukraine was losing imperial status and becoming regional player, had a deep impact in the Russian society [5].

The 1990s were thus imprinted on the Russian collective consciousness as an era of humiliation and of huge territorial losses.

It is almost universally accepted in 21st century Russia that Washington fooled Moscow in the 1990s. No one, however, has yet answered this question: What did the USA owe a Russia which had been threatening the West for over 70 years? And, how would Russia have supported the USA if the Soviet Union had won the Cold War?

As for Russia's "loss" of the Ukraine and the other Soviet republics, this phenomenon was viewed completely differently by the newly independent states. Their obtaining statehood was celebrated as a great historical success. Thus, while in imperial thinking, the loss of these territories was a tragedy, this outcome was celebrated as a great victory for freedom by those former Socialist republics. Usually, large empires have difficulties differentiating "mine" and "yours".

In August of 1998, a heavy financial crisis stormed Russia, which resulted in the massive devaluation of the ruble, defaulting on domestic debt, and declaring a moratorium on the repayment of foreign debt. The crisis had a severe impact on the population, the financial system, and the economy at large. The political turmoil that followed this collapse resulted in Boris Yeltsin's firing of the young Prime Minister, Sergey Kiriyenko. He was replaced by Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov.

To some degree, Primakov managed to stabilize the economic and political situation. Nevertheless,

the crisis was presented by nationalists and communists as a failure of the liberal economic system “imposed by the West”.

Another significant source of Russia’s conduct during the 1990s was related to the international order.

The collapse of the USSR destroyed the power balance established during the Cold War. A huge strategic vacuum was created in the World system, which Brzezinski compared to a big “black hole”. This vacuum was filled by the USA. As a result, mankind basically lived in a unipolar World during the 1990s. This factor deepened the discontent among the majority of Russia’s political elite. “Washington does not ask us anything regarding international relations!” – this feeling was morphing from discontent into protest.

This protest was explicitly produced by dramatic regional military conflicts within the former Yugoslavia which were addressed by NATO with USA leadership. NATO countries understood well that the full involvement of Russia in the settlement of the Bosnia-Herzegovina conflict was important for the future of a new security system for Europe. At first, Moscow responded constructively to NATO’s proposals and made practical efforts in Bosnia regarding military-political cooperation with the Alliance. This was reinforced by the UN Security Council mandate, which was a matter of principle for Russia. However, when in the spring of 1999 NATO started bombing Belgrade and Serbian forces in Kosovo, a cascade of protesting statements was made in Moscow. Furthermore, on his way to Washington for talks, Prime Minister Primakov learned of this development. Dramatically, he turned his airplane around over the Atlantic Ocean and returned to Moscow. This striking decision was considered as a “big turning point” in Moscow’s relations with the West.

Tensions arose between Russian and NATO forces at the Pristina International Airport, which Russian troops occupied ahead of a NATO

deployment. The tense stand-off was resolved peacefully.

In principal, it was unacceptable for Moscow that NATO’s military campaign in Kosovo was not agreed to by the UN Security Council. According to the Kremlin, this action was in gross violation of the International law and the World order established after World War II.

NATO’s main argument for using force was that the former Yugoslav leader, Slobodan Milosevic, refused all options for the peaceful settlement of the conflict and continued his brutal ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo. Possible spillover of the military conflict created a new real threat of destabilization throughout Europe.

Historically Serbia was considered as an ally in Russia, which even further deepened Russia’s antagonistic feelings. Nationalist-chauvinist forces consolidated their positions in the Russian politics. They blamed President Yeltsin for conducting a capitulatory policy towards the West.

Opposition to NATO’s military intervention emerged even in the West. According to some, the military campaign in Kosovo approved by President Bill Clinton’s administration was his blatant attempt to shift attention from the Monica Lewinsky scandal and his impeachment. It is, however, difficult to say to what extent this incident impacted the decision the White House made regarding Kosovo. Nevertheless, it is a fact that “Kosovo Syndrome” significantly changed the political map of Europe and partially became a reason for the Russian invasion of Georgia in August, 2008. Hence, those, who think that President Clinton’s affair with Ms. Lewinski caused military campaign in Kosovo, should be asked: What would the world be like if President Clinton had not met Ms. Lewinsky?

Expanding Washington’s influence over not only in Eastern Europe but also in the former Soviet republics took place swiftly and even naturally. This was another irritating factor for Moscow, although it was not able to propose any attractive or

positive alternatives to its neighbors in response. In resisting any increasing Western orientation of these former Soviet republics, the Kremlin was quite aggressive. Specific examples are the violent conflicts in the Abkhazian and Tskhinvali Regions of Georgia and Moscow's support of local separatist forces. Paradoxically, Moscow blamed Washington in fanning these conflicts as it was "rudely meddling" in Russia's neighborhood.

However, in reality, President Clinton's administration (especially during his first term, 1993-1997) used the approach of "Russia foremost" with regard to the former Soviet republics. This strategy emphasized the importance of democratic and economic reforms in Russia, which would thus expedite Russia's acceptance of and peaceful collaboration or even integration with the West. Ultimately, this policy should also have been beneficial for the independent development of the former Soviet republics. So, the "Russia foremost" approach should have benefited everyone.

Hence, Moscow's claims regarding Washington's "expansionist policy" towards the former Soviet republics were quite exaggerated. However, this feeling nonetheless strengthened and became one of the major irritants between Washington and Moscow.

Since the middle 1990s, NATO's enlargement was considered by Russia as a highly dangerous challenge to its security. However, on May 27, 1997, NATO and Russia signed the Founding Act of Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security, which fixed the principles of strategic partnership between Moscow and the Alliance. With this Act, NATO highlighted its privileged attitude towards Russia.

Nevertheless, this special offer did not satisfy the ambitions of Moscow fully. It preferred a legally binding agreement to the declared "list of good wishes". Moscow was demanding guarantees that the Alliance would not expand.

At the same time, meanwhile, NATO was advocating the principle of freedom for European

countries to choose their own ways to ensure security. Moscow instead stressed the principle of Undivided Security: no country should build its security at the expense of any other state.

In the wider context, Russia claimed that there could be no formula for European and International Security without considering Russia's interests.

There was an overwhelming support in the West to the idea of NATO's enlargement and only few voices against. George Kennan was one of them. In his article "A Fateful Error" published on 7 February 1997 he argued: "Bluntly stated... expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking..." [6].

During the conflict in Kosovo, on March 12, 1999, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland became NATO members. A new historical era started for these former Soviet satellites – Eastern European countries. The Kremlin did not hide its deep discontent through public statements. It could not do more at that stage...

Despite these emerging difficulties, Moscow was trying in general to maintain cooperation with the West. On November 19, 1999 at the OSCE Summit in Istanbul, Russia, along with 29 other states, signed important documents including the adopted CFE (Conventional Armed Forces in Europe) Treaty, which reflected the geopolitical changes since the end of the Cold War. Within the framework of this Treaty, Russia committed to withdrawing its military bases from Georgia and Moldova. Long and difficult negotiations were needed to implement and complete Russia's specific obligations in Georgia.

On December 31, 1999, President Boris Yeltsin handed over the Kremlin's reins to Vladimir Putin

who was subsequently elected as President of Russia on March 26 of the following year.

The end of the 20th century thus ushered in the beginning of a new era in the modern history of Russia.

Conclusions

Summing up Russia's conduct during the 1990s, it can be concluded that having abandoned the ideological standards of the Cold War period, Moscow made important steps in joining European institutions and enhancing its cooperation with the

West, while maintaining its independence in matters of defense, security and foreign policy. Formally, Russia was ready to go further in its cooperation with the West.

But, towards the end of the 20th century, due to the difficult economic and political situation in Russia, anti-Western attitudes were on the rise. The historical memory of a former superpower and the nationalist phenomenon once again came to the fore. The conflict in Kosovo and NATO enlargement helped foster these anti-Western feelings.

ისტორია

რუსეთის ქცევის წყაროები (1992-1999)

ზ. აბაშიძე

ივანე ჯავახიშვილის სახ. თბილისის სახელმწიფო უნივერსიტეტი, სოციალურ და პოლიტიკურ მეცნიერებათა ფაკულტეტი, თბილისი, საქართველო

(წარმოდგენილია აკადემიის წევრის რ. მეტრეველის მიერ)

1947 წელს გამოქვეყნდა ამერიკელი დიპლომატის, შემდგომში ცნობილი მეცნიერის ჯორჯ კენანის სტატია „საბჭოთა ქცევის წყაროები“, რომელშიც ავტორმა გააანალიზა მეორე მსოფლიო ომის დასრულების შემდეგ აღმოსავლეთ ევროპაში საბჭოთა ექსპანსიონიზმის მიზეზები და ამოცანები. აღნიშნულ პუბლიკაციაში გაკეთებული დასკვნები და რეკომენდაციები გათვალისწინებულ იქნა „ცივი ომის“ პერიოდში აშშ-ის სტრატეგიის შემუშავებისას, რომელსაც საფუძვლად დაედო ე.წ. შეკავების პოლიტიკა. ჯორჯ კენანის მოსაზრებები დღეისათვისაც გარკვეულწილად აქტუალურია, თუმცა ამჟამინდელი რუსეთი და ზოგადად საერთაშორისო ვითარება მნიშვნელოვნად განსხვავდება „ცივი ომის“ ეპოქისაგან. 1992-1999 წლებში რუსეთმა გადადგა მნიშვნელოვანი ნაბიჯები პოლიტიკური პლურალიზმის საფუძვლების შექმნისა და ლიბერალური ეკონომიკური რეფორმების გატარების თვალსაზრისით. თუმცა, მეოცე საუკუნის ბოლოს მძიმე ეკონომიკურმა და პოლიტიკურმა ვითარებამ გააძლიერა რევანშისტული

ძალები და ანტიდასავლური ტენდენციები. ამ განწყობებზე სერიოზული გავლენა იქონია 1999 წელს კოსოვოს კონფლიქტმა და ნატოს გაფართოებამ. ნაშრომის მიზანია აღნიშნულ პერიოდში რუსეთის „ქცევის“ როგორც შიდა პოლიტიკური, ასევე საგარეო და სამხედრო-პოლიტიკური ფაქტორების ანალიზი, რაც საყურადღებოა დღევანდელი გართულებული საერთაშორისო ვითარების გათვალისწინებით.

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