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Major Research Paper

The failure of the US-Russia reset policy

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Abstract

In light of the recent political events in Ukraine, the operation in Syria and the increased amount of emerging global issues, the topic of relations between Russia and the West has become much more relevant. This is aside from the reality that the relations have always been difficult and involved complications.

In order to understand the development of events in recent years, we need to consider events that have already taken place. This paper presents an analysis in the form of a case study in international relations related to US-Russia relations. The ‘Reset of the relations’ between the two states was established in 2009 and led to a few years of economic, military and cultural cooperation. However, the initiative ultimately came to an end. There are a number of reasons that may have led to the reset failure. My research will aim to provide an in depth understanding and analysis of three of the most prominent explanations. These include the following: the offensive realist argument, the presence of domestic manipulation and the misperceptions argument. The analysis will cover the contribution of each of the three causes of the reset policy failure and their implication for the future of US-Russia relations is described in the conclusion. No significant evidence was found to backup the first two presented arguments. Thus, this paper states that mutual misperception and the lack of understanding between the two countries was the main cause of reset failure and continues to impede successful US-Russia relations today. It describes fundamental problems in US-Russia relations and offers recommendations to overcome the mutual distrust by increasing communication between the two countries. The research concludes on how a certain policy between the states did not work because of mutual distrust of the parties to the agreement. Several solutions to the problem are discussed in the conclusion of the research.

Introduction

In light of the recent political events in Ukraine, the scrutiny of the relationship between Russia and the West has become extremely relevant. In order to understand the sequence of events it is important to consider those that have already taken place. After a major decline in relations in 2008, US and Russia agreed to renew bilateral cooperation based on “pragmatism regarding shared interests and a culture of increased communication,”¹. This decision to restore communication and cooperation was called the “reset” of relations. The main idea of reset was to leave all former disputes behind, to eliminate the Cold War sentiments and to build a solid base for a new and improved mutual partnership². Reset policy was officially introduced in March 2009 by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton³. Within four years, this policy launched a dialogue that addressed a broad range of issues, but ultimately the reset initiative came to an end. In this paper, I would like to consider the causes of the reset failure and to learn more about the relations between Russia and the US, and thereby the rest of the West.

To better understand the problem at hand, I will provide a context for the study, which will involve a description of the political culture and background of the policy. The attempts to “reset” relations were undertaken several times, but the latest effort took place in 2009. In this paper I will consider the latest attempt of the countries to reestablish good relations. I will be looking at the problem within a specific time period: from 2009 (the year “reset” was introduced) to 2013 when the Ukraine crisis began.

US-Russia relations began a gradual deterioration during the Iraq conflict in 2003. By 2008, with the end of George W. Bush’s presidency and the beginning of Russia’s war with

¹Rojansky and Collins 2010, p.2.

²Hornat 2013.

³Beitane 2013.

Georgia, Russia-US relations reached the lowest level in the post-Cold War period⁴. Moreover, a lot of new international issues had emerged during this time period, including but not limited to: Iran's nuclear program, growing terrorism in Afghanistan, NATO expansion to Eastern Europe, disputes over missile defense, and the global economic crisis – were at the heart of the growing tension between the two countries. All of these events, arguably, might have led to the outbreak of another Cold War. With an understanding of the importance of preserving peace, the Obama administration in the US and the Russian government decided to “reset” relations between their nations. Senior US officials emphasize that, from their point of view, the personal relationship between Obama and Medvedev was the key to the potential success of the reset. The two men were from the same generation, had similar styles, and their personalities were compatible.⁵ The American President encouraged Russia to pursue foreign policy goals that were of mutual interest for both the American and Russian people.

The theory of reset includes the following assumptions⁶:

- US and Russia share some common interests;
- There is a need to develop a multidimensional relationship: security, economic cooperation, and society-to-society contacts;
- Increased engagement is the means to produce win-win outcomes;
- Practice Dual Track Engagement, basically engaging Russian government & Russian society at the same time;
- Pursue reset with Russia without compromising relations with other countries;
- Avoid linkage of unrelated issues.

⁴Kaczmarek 2011, p. 7.

⁵ Stent 2014, p. 217.

⁶ McFaul 2012, p. 4.

To accomplish the goals for pursuing reset the following actions were required: increasing the interactions between top Officials, structuring government-to-government engagement, facilitating more society-to-society contact, and creating conditions for increased trade and investment⁷.

Literature review

The world order after the Cold War and the relations between states

The world has significantly changed since the end of the Cold War. During that period, there existed two superpowers who struggled against each other. Some researchers believe that after the collapse of the USSR, US remained the only global superpower. Such scholars argue that to maintain its power, the US should spread its influence to Eurasia, which in fact might be considered as hegemony over the whole world. They would further argue that the US should also focus on the post-Soviet space and Asia⁸. By contrast, others hold that over time all states will lose a part of their power as states are no longer the main actors in the international relations⁹. Today the world is represented by a large number of micro powers, such as smaller states, NGOs, and transnational corporations¹⁰. However, this paper is premised on the idea that given the new international relations climate after the Cold War, globalization, and other issues of the 21st century, states are necessary and they are required to cooperate. Problems such as climate change and terrorist threats can be solved only by means of mutual partnership between states. The US and Russia are both members of the UN Security Council and have to take a leading role in this process. However, these powerful states continue to follow the realist conception of international relations and give

⁷ Ibid, p.5.

⁸ Brzezinski 1997.

⁹ Barnett and Finnemore 2004; Slaughter 2008.

¹⁰ Naim 2013.

priority to their national interests¹¹. In these circumstances, it might be hard to arrange cooperation between states preoccupied with their own interest. This paper can shine light on the importance of “relations between states” and develop an understanding of the policies used to improve relations between countries and the causes of their failure.

US-Russia relations after the Cold War

In the post-Cold War, US relations with Russia were not officially hostile and, on a number of issues such as terrorism and proliferation, relations remained potentially convergent. Moreover, despite the fact that during the Cold War Russia was seen as the main enemy, after it Russia was viewed by the US as a potential partner. It was therefore the perfect time for the US to reorient Russia from a security threat to a security ally¹². However, there is a prominent opinion that the Russian side failed to see the importance of this moment. Many experts still believe that both the Russian government and the expert community were too skeptical about the prospects of real change in bilateral relations¹³. The real challenge for both sides to go forward was, and remains today, the ability to create a new group of stakeholders in the relationship who will continue to promote bilateral engagement consistently over the coming years¹⁴.

Previous reset of the relations attempts

Prior to the fourth reset implemented by the Obama and Medvedev administrations, several other attempts were undertaken by the officials of the two countries¹⁵. It is important to mention these experiences here and look at the claimed explanations of their failure. In 1992, the US and Russia had to start completely new relations after the collapse of the Soviet

¹¹ Mazower 2012.

¹² Goldgeier and McFaul Michael 2003; Pifer 2013.

¹³ Legvold 2009.

¹⁴ Stent 2014.

¹⁵ Stent 2014, p. 3.

Union. At this time, the relations focused on the most urgent issues of that day: nuclear weapons and economic assistance¹⁶. All in all, George H. W. Bush conducted a very cautious Russia policy, which for that very reason did not lead to any major improvements. However, the following two US Presidents made a greater effort to mend the relations with Russia. Clinton's foreign policy with Russia was considered to be a big success. He participated in denuclearizing Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan and bringing Russia to the G7. However, the NATO expansion eastward, due to the new memberships of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, had a damaging impact on the relations. The reset ultimately failed when the US became involved in the Kosovo war¹⁷. In 2000 the incoming Bush administration believed that economic and political weakness of Russia deprives it of the ability to influence the West¹⁸. The third attempt to restore relations happened during the George W. Bush administration when the Russian government supported the US after the attacks on 9/11. Although, with the US withdrawal from Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002 and invasion of Iraq in 2003 once again deteriorated relations between two countries¹⁹. The main problem of all three presented resets is that they were aiming at solving short-term urgent problems, and there was no objective to change the root issues in US-Russia relations.

This quick observation of previous three resets of the relations allows us to observe the importance of the fourth reset discussed in this paper. It was the first substantial effort of two parties to construct relations based on trust and mutual understanding.

“Reset” of US-Russia relations

¹⁶ Ibid, p.7.

¹⁷ Goldgeier 2009, p. 20.

¹⁸ Light 2008, p. 28.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 29.

There are several reasons why relations with Russia, whether positive or negative, are important to the US. Russian conduct can have a profound impact on America's vital national interests, such as nuclear weapons, non-proliferation system, the issue of China's emergence as an influential global power, and the terrorism in Afghanistan. Moreover, Russia is one of the world's leading energy producers, the top holder of natural gas reserves and finance and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Russia is also a member of major organizations such as the G8 and the G20 and is therefore identified as one of the major world economic powers²⁰. All these factors can serve as favorable justifications to reset relations and to consider the Russian Federation as a core strategic partner of the US. The reset policy basically started with the initial post-START nuclear arms reduction agreement, and it was only the first step in a broader program of actions. Thus, despite the fact that the national interests and goals of foreign policies of both countries differed, there existed a lot of space for cooperation²¹.

The best way to organize relations between Russia and the US was based on the notion of "strategic partnership". As two powerful states in the world stage, the two countries have a lot of common spheres of interest. At the same time US and Russia have to solve controversial issues by engaging in a frank and far-reaching strategic dialogue²².

"We need a relationship that connects us more actively and intimately on the other great challenges before us in the 21st century, from economic modernization to climate change and energy security. And we need a relationship that connects our societies, and especially our young people, in ways that can help shape a more hopeful future for both of us"²³.

The main question is, why, despite having many common security and economic goals, have all four "resets" failed? Researchers identify a lot of possible causes of "reset" failure, such as

²⁰ Saunders 2011; Mearsheimer 2014.

²¹ Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs 2011.

²² Legvold 2009.

²³ Burns 2010.

the fact that Moscow and Washington had different interpretations of the “reset policy”. The policy was never clear defined and from the very beginning, the two states had different aims²⁴. Many others argue that the reset policy was bound to fail from the very beginning because the West and Russia have always considered each other as enemies. This assumption refers to the Cold War legacy, the period of history which strengthened the geopolitical and geostrategic differences between the two states. There are also subjective explanations of the reset failure. For example, there is an opinion that the domestic policy of the Russian Federation served as one of the key factors in the reset failure²⁵. Russia lacked significant range of power-political instruments in comparison to the US, such as an extensive infrastructure of alliances, partnerships, and institutional prerogatives. As a result, reset failure is more a Russian problem, not an American one. Others argue that reset failed because the two states have different understandings of values related to democracy and freedom. The US finds such events as the Pussy Riot case, Magnitsky Act and implementation of anti-gay propaganda law to be incompatible with democratic values. Another opinion holds that these actions are all linked to Putin and that it his personality that impedes positive US-Russia relations. The opinion claims that for the purpose of gaining domestic popular support the Russian leader intentionally created an Anti-Western sentiment within the country. This view also holds that Putin seeks the restoration of a past imperial Russia and thus hitting the reset button only meant that Russia would try to “wage war” by other means.²⁶ On the other hand, a majority of Russian researchers see NATO's expansion to the East as the main problem in US-Russia relations. Putin was especially against US missile defense system deployed in Eastern Europe²⁷. There is an opinion that countries should give Ukraine a status of buffer zone between Russia and the West, thus make it independent from

²⁴ De Vasconcelo and Zaborowski 2009, p. 187.

²⁵ Nexon 2014.

²⁶ Rubin 2014.

²⁷ Cimbala 2010, p. 76.

both US and Russian influence²⁸. Finally, there is the view that holds that there is asymmetry in the two countries' economic power and military strength and distance between their views of international realities, strengthened by the Cold War legacy²⁹. Due to these obstacles, it is likely that US-Russia relations will always remain complicated.

The majority of previous research has focused on a general observation of reset policy while listing the possible causes of failure. My study aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of why failure occurred. I will explore some of the most cited causes in detail and try to learn more about them. Through my analysis of US-Russia relations and reset failure, my study will also contribute to the topic of the relations between states in international relations broadly.

Research question

Through conducting literature review, the following causes of the “reset” of relations failure were revealed as the most cited ones: the offensive realist argument and the domestic ideological manipulation argument. My research will attempt to answer the following question: how might these factors have contributed to the failure of reset policy? I wanted to explore these causes in depth and learn how both have contributed to the failure of the reset. As the results will show, none of the presented explanations for these two arguments are based on sufficient or solid evidence.

Therefore, after analyzing the two arguments stated above, a third possible explanation was found through the research. While the intentions of both people and states are difficult to understand, scholars and politicians are inclined to assume motives that correspond to their already constructed views of the world and international politics. Thus,

²⁸ Mearsheimer 2014.

²⁹ Stent 2014, p.172.

the third presented explanation is related to the problem of misperceptions between the states. I will be arguing that the mutual misperceptions and lack of understanding between the two countries was the main factor that led to the reset failure and continues to impede successful US-Russia relations today.

In order to achieve the goal of the paper and to prove my hypothesis, I will take up the following tasks: define the notion of reset, observe and present potential explanations, study a few particular explanations, and finally examine and learn more about their contribution to the failure of reset policy.

Methodology

I will pursue a qualitative research method, which involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world. Qualitative researchers aim to explore phenomena in their natural settings and to understand them in terms of the meanings that people bring to them³⁰. Often the work of qualitative researchers can be called unscientific or subjective. When analysing the international politics of the two countries in this case study, it is hard and almost impossible to find an objective justification to their actions. Researcher's conclusions in qualitative cases are based on assumptions and can go one or the other way depending on the events being emphasized. The issues of perception are at the center of qualitative research³¹. However, by using multiple empirical materials, this qualitative research will help to consider the 'reset policy' from different angles and present explanations of the "reset" failure as faithfully as possible³². Naturalistic qualitative researchers make "the assumption of multiple constructed realities"³³. Thus, in this paper I will not be looking at experimentally examined or measured causes of the policy, but instead I will seek answers to the questions

³⁰ Norman and Lincoln 2011, p. 3.

³¹ Bradley 1993, p. 432.

³² Norman and Lincoln 2011, p. 8.

³³ Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 294.

that stress how social experience is created and analyze processes rather than causal relationships between variables³⁴. Unlike positivist research, the goal here is not to abstract a few concepts and to determine a causal relationship, but instead the objective is to understand the social world of those being studied. The social context is crucial in naturalistic research. I want to learn more about what has happened and try to contribute to the “reset” failure explanation.

The best way to explore this topic is by examining a case study of international policy implemented by the two states. This study can lead to a comprehensive understanding of international relations and of the difficulties that the two states might have with each other. In this paper, I will use an explanatory case study, as I am seeking to answer and explain the presumed causal links in real life interventions that are too complex for an experimental study. Indeed, it is very hard to actually measure through an experiment the causes of “reset” failure between US and Russia due to the complexity of the issue and the presence of great number of actors. So, the best way to approach this analysis will be to learn more about the most cited causes and to do in-depth studies of them. I believe that doing a case study is the best approach because I can study how the foreign policy between the two major states failed and subsequently try to apply the knowledge to a larger number of cases, as a way to generalize the results.

Within the case study I will use triangulation by referring to multiple sources of evidence. The research will include analysis of data in both English and Russian languages. I will use documentation and archival records as my sources to collect accurate data on US-Russia reset failure. Documentary information is relevant to almost every case study topic and includes the following types of documents: news articles appearing in mass media and

³⁴ Norman and Lincoln 2011, p. 10.

formal studies or evaluations of the same “case” that you are studying³⁵. As for archival records, they will include previously collected survey data by Western and Russian agencies. All these documents are available through Internet searches. Thus, in order to evaluate the stated explanations of the failure, I will conduct a content analysis of the following documents:

- Speeches by US government, Russian government, US and Russian officials,
- US and Russian government websites,
- News coverage from both US and Russian media,
- Other relevant sources: e.g. scholarly articles etc.

The analysis of government speeches and websites is extremely important for this study as it will provide a better understanding of the position of officials in both states. By officials, I mean the Presidents of US and Russia, Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Secretary of State, Ambassadors in both countries and other relevant authorities between the time period of 2009 to 2013.

Further sources will be examined in order to allow us to gain insight in this specific research problem. There are a variety of academic literature devoted to US-Russia relations, including journals’ databases and textbooks. Thus, the majority of the citations are qualitative secondary sources. Peer reviewed articles of Western and Russian authors will be analyzed as well as newspaper articles and other online resources. Due to the lack of objectivity and presence of bias in the news coverage of each country, it is important to look into media materials issued both in US and Russia. Finally, I will examine the possible suggestions to overcome the future policy failures.

³⁵ Yin 2009, p. 102.

Structure

The research consists of three semantic parts associated with the three “reset” failure explanations discussed above. The “offensive realism argument” states that competition between powerful states is inevitable, and that this rivalry led to the failure of the reset policy. The “domestic manipulation argument” emphasizes the role of Vladimir Putin and blames him as an individual and his decision to return to power for the third term, along with his anti-Western ideological policy after his 2011 election for causing the reset failure. The last argument I present discusses the “misperception argument”. This argument examines the idea of the communication problem between the two states. Governments and leaders tend to misperceive each other’s actions, or see a threat in one’s actions where there is none. This argument holds that already existing misperceptions on both sides might have predicted the reset failure from its very conception.

In conclusion I will define the contribution of each of the three described factors to the reset policy failure and their implication for the future of US-Russia relations. I will argue that this is a problematic situation and question what actions might be taken to overcome these tense political relations in the future. I believe that the proposed MRP outline is the best way to explore the topic of the failure of “reset”. It will allow us to learn more about the factors that influenced the “reset” failure and get a deeper understanding of the relations between Russia and the West, and international relations in general.

1. Offensive realism argument

One of the explanations of the reset of the US-Russia relations’ failure might be found in the theory of offensive realism presented by John Mearsheimer. As two powerful states, the US and Russia will always compete with each other in trying to maintain and expand their

influence over certain territories and aspects of international politics. It is due to this fact that the reset policy was set to fail from the very beginning.

The world has significantly changed since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War, there existed two superpowers who struggled against each other. Today a lot of theorists claim that there is a new global order. Some of them believe that current states are sacrificing a part of their sovereignty to transnational bodies to fight against global threats as well as to create new supranational forms valid for all national states³⁶. There is also the opinion that power itself is decaying, and that the world has less to do with competition between megaplayers and with the rise of micropowers and their challenge to megaplayers³⁷. However, Mearsheimer argues that competition between powerful states is inevitable. The author describes a theory of offensive realism where the great powers strive to gain power over their rivals in the hopes of becoming hegemons.³⁸ The great powers will always be looking for opportunities to increase their share of world power, and if a favorable situation arises, they will move to undermine the stable world order³⁹. Mearsheimer suggests that the structure of the international system, which is anarchic, largely determines how states think and act towards each other, and thus realism has dominated the international political discourse⁴⁰. From his point of view, it is very hard to understand other states' intentions and one country can never fully trust the other. States tend to think and act offensively in regard to each other⁴¹. Security dilemma is one of the key concepts of realism, which supposes that the measures taken by one state to increase its security usually decreases the security of other

³⁶ Slaughter 2005, p. 203.

³⁷ Naim 2013 p.13.

³⁸ Mearsheimer 2001, p. 40.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 50.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 58.

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 32.

countries. Thus for example, by increasing military potential, one country automatically threatens others⁴².

It seems that states like US and the Russian Federation still build their foreign policy on the basis of the realist conception of international relations. They are not ready to give up a part of their national sovereignty for the sake of global cooperation. If we follow the events throughout US-Russia relations from the 2009 until 2013, we can find several pieces of evidence that backup Mearsheimer's point of view.

According to the realist argument, we can say that the following events led to the "reset" of relations failure: NATO expansion eastward and the American attempts to build strong partnerships with former USSR states traditionally considered as falling within a Russian sphere of influence⁴³. Furthermore, the US' implementation of democracy in the Middle East has also been a source of concern. I would like to consider these events from the realist lenses and establish whether the realist logic explains the cause of the reset failure.

US relations with former Soviet states

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US has fostered former USSR states' ties with the West in part to end the dependence of these states on Russia for trade, security, and other matters. The US has also played a role in engaging in different programs (mostly in Georgia and Ukraine) to support these countries' independence from Russia.

There are several reasons why holding influence in Ukraine is important for Russia. First of all, it is located between Europe and Asia, and is one of largest countries of post-soviet space located in Europe. In economic terms, Ukraine is also significant to Russian economy as it serves as the key transit route of gas to Europe. There is a Russian fleet base on

⁴² Ibid, p. 36.

⁴³ Budjeryn 2015.

the Black sea located in Crimea (the former Ukrainian territory) which allows Russia to project power in and around the Black Sea and serves as an important symbol of Russian power⁴⁴. In addition, there is a huge cultural tie between the two countries, which includes a common history, ability to understand language and etc. At the same time, Ukraine and other former Soviet Eastern European states have geostrategic significance in defense and power and are therefore of great importance to the US for its influence in Europe.

In 2008, US and Ukraine implemented the US-Ukraine Charter of Strategic Partnership. The document declared a strategic partnership between the two states and emphasized their shared democratic values. The US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Commission was created in 2009 with the objective to implement the Charter. It provided a mechanism for cooperation and consultation on several issues of mutual interest. For example, it covered areas of defense and security, energy security, trade and investment⁴⁵. It is important to point out that these US actions might have already made the Russian government suspicious.

In August 2008, Moscow demonstrated in its conflict with Georgia that it is willing to use a wide variety of tools, including military force, to impose its will over former Soviet states⁴⁶. Thus, prior to the reset of relations (2009) it is worth considering the war between South Ossetia and Georgia in 2008, which clearly reflects the realist logic behind the relations of Russia and the West. This war was significant because despite its appearance on the outside, it was really just a proxy war between the US and Russia. Georgian forces launched an assault on South Ossetia on the opening day of the Olympic Games in Beijing. The invasion involved a midnight bombardment of Tskhinvali with GRAD missiles and the deaths of several civilians. A large Russian force of up to 200 tanks moved across the border

⁴⁴ Schwartz 2014.

⁴⁵ Espinas 2010, p.55.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.57.

12 hours after the Georgian assault⁴⁷. The actions of both Georgia and Russia were highly criticized by the international community and raised a lot of questions. In December 2008, the Council of the European Union took the decision to establish an Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia⁴⁸.

The realist argument here is that due to Russia's alleged humiliation which started in the 1990s initiated by the collapse of Soviet Union, Putin wanted to change Russia and restore its prestige and image as a great power, which requires the maintenance and strengthening Russia's geopolitical influence. Thus, despite the official Moscow position of "self-defense", realists might argue that the aim of the Russian intervention was to increase its influence in the region. Moscow was seriously concerned with Georgia's intention to accede NATO and its developing relations with the US. Russia also had a growing concern over the Georgian military build-up since Saakashvili became President. US had provided military aid and training to Georgia. The latter officially admitted to having 200 American military instructors training its army⁴⁹. When the attack on Tskhinvali took place, there were over 100 US military advisers on the ground, and other American officials were involved in different levels within the Georgian administration⁵⁰. However, the extension of military actions beyond South Ossetia's territory led to the weakening of Georgia's economy and damaging of its military potential. Moreover, Russia immediately recognized South Ossetia as an independent state. After the conflict in Georgia, US-Russian relations continued to deteriorate.

NATO expansion eastward

⁴⁷Black 2015, p.135.

⁴⁸ Henderson and Green 2010, p.129.

⁴⁹ Filippov 2009. p.1830.

⁵⁰ Bowker 2011, p. 205.

Since the collapse of the USSR, former soviet republics have traditionally been considered as falling within the Russian sphere of influence. When NATO approaches that sphere, Russia feels threatened because it does not want to lose its control over the region. However, such approaches take place because as a great power, the US is trying to gain more power and become the sole hegemon.

During the NATO summit that took place in Bucharest in 2008, member states discussed the possibility of Georgia and Ukraine entering the organization. US representatives supported the accession of these countries, but France and Germany were against such actions fearing the reaction from Russia. In the end, the formal membership process was not started, however, the alliance issued a promising statement that “these countries will become members of NATO”⁵¹.

After the Bucharest summit, president Putin held the press conference during which he stressed his doubts concerning the development of trustful NATO-Russian relations. From his point of view, the main obstacles for these relations are, firstly, NATO expansion in the post-soviet countries which is accompanied by the creation of military infrastructure there, and, secondly, the perspective of the presence of the US missile defense system in Europe.

Moreover, Putin emphasized that that further expansion of the organization can be considered only as a potential threat to the national security of his country⁵². Putin’s comments were not heard. On August 20, 2008, Poland and US signed an agreement to deploy missile defense interceptors in Central Europe. On November 5, Medvedev announced plans to install Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, partially in response to US missile defense emplacements to be set in Poland or Czech Republic. The organization continued the process of expansion, welcoming in 2009 such countries as Albania and Croatia.

⁵¹ NATO *Bucharest Summit Declaration* 2008.

⁵² RBC, *Putin: NATO approaching Russian borders is a direct threat* 2008.

All in all, The West broke its promise not to expand NATO eastward, given in exchange for the Soviet approval of German unification⁵³. As a result, many realists believe that NATO's failed promise led to the reset failure and the current crisis. Every new expansion of the organization towards former USSR republics deteriorates relations between US and Russia. The Russian government has on many occasions expressed its concern on the subject several times and warned NATO and the US not to interfere in Russia's sphere of interest.

US expansion of democracy

The US expansion of democracy across the world presents another piece of evidence for the realists' argument. President Obama's speech to the UN General Assembly in September 2010 addressed the idea of democracy promotion. He asserted that "those who defend [universal] values for their people have been our closest friends and allies, while those who have denied those rights—whether terrorist groups or tyrannical governments—have chosen to be our adversaries."⁵⁴ The framework that the US President set in his speech already appears realist, as he divides the world into US allies and adversaries.

A war in Libya started with the popular uprisings of 2011. To protect the citizens of the country, an international coalition led by NATO settled a "no fly" zone above Libya and launched an operation against the authoritative leader Gaddafi⁵⁵. The operation officially ended with the death of the dictator and the establishment of a transitory government. Although NATO and its allies were acting on the permission of the UN Security Council (Resolution 1973), many people argue that the real intentions of NATO were different from the ones declared. By overstepping the UN mandate of protection, the coalition might have

⁵³ Budjeryn 2015.

⁵⁴ Singh 2011, p. 3.

⁵⁵ Robins-Early 2015.

aimed for regime change in Libya. Russia was among those who blamed the coalition for “mission creep.” The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov noted: "The UN has not authorized regime change."⁵⁶ Around 20 thousand bombs were dropped and 200 missiles used by NATO during the Libya operation⁵⁷. Targeting the houses of Gaddafi loyalists by NATO led to more than 70 civilian deaths including several women and children casualties⁵⁸. Evidently, NATO overlapped the UN mandate and acted aggressively to achieve individual objectives⁵⁹.

Mission creep in Libya suggests that the US was perusing other goals above the responsibility to protect obligation. Some researchers argue that the main goal was to establish a pro-western regime in the Middle East and to thereby enhance US influence over the region. Others believe that oil resources were at stake during the conflict. In this sense, the coalition mission in Libya might have had clear realists' reasons.

Libyan territory is rich in hydrocarbon, it also belongs to the top ten countries by the amount of world oil reserves. Libya holds 1 billion barrels oil according to the 2006 BP statistical review of World Energy, which is more than double of the estimated reserves of Qatar. In addition, it enjoys significant exploitable reserves of natural gas. Both of these commodities are, it goes without saying, highly sought after⁶⁰. Thus, the underlying objective in this argument, is to take possession of Libya's oil reserves, destabilize the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and to eventually privatize the country's oil industry, namely to transfer the control and ownership of Libya's oil wealth to foreign hands⁶¹. As Russian President Putin mentioned in his article:

⁵⁶ Pidd 2011.

⁵⁷ Pugliese 2012.

⁵⁸ Fernandes 2013.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Fermor 2012, p. 339.

⁶¹ Chossudovsky 2011.

“It appears that with the Arab Spring countries, as with Iraq, Russian companies are losing their decades-long positions in local commercial markets and are being deprived of large commercial contracts. The niches thus vacated are being filled by the economic operatives of the states that had a hand in the change of the ruling regime”⁶².

Another example is when China and Russia put a veto on the Syria resolution in UN Security Council. We can consider this situation in two different ways. Tradition of “non-admission of intervention” method in politics of China and Russia could be a cause for this action. But it could also be the fact that Russia did not want the US to gain power over the Middle East and the establishment of another pro-Western regime (given that it is a territory with vast amount of oil resources). Russia has traditionally had a common language with Middle Eastern countries and their leaders mostly due to economic and cultural reasons. We can argue that by not letting the US to achieve its mission there, Russia signaled its willingness to keep the regime that is “convenient” for it.

Analysis of the argument

Despite the fact that the realist argument may seem credible at face value, it contains several contradictions that render the argument weak and inapplicable in this case study. The first contradiction in the realist argument is related to the 2008 Georgia war. Some argue that the real intention of the Russian intervention was to take control from the Georgian government. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov called such accusations of Russia trying to overthrow the government of Georgia as “absolute nonsense”. He noted that as soon as the security of the region was restored, the Russian president announced the end of its military operation.⁶³ Indeed, on August 12, Russian troops left the region. Moreover, the International commission admitted that Russia had the right for self–defense in

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Gorlova 2012.

the South Ossetia conflict. However, it is clearly seen that Russian troops went further to the Georgian territory than it was needed to stop the conflict.

The second contradiction related to the fact that there was some cooperation between NATO and Russia prior to the Ukrainian crisis. Relations started after the end of the Cold War, when Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (1991) and the Partnership for Peace programme (1994)⁶⁴. Cooperation was temporary suspended during the war in Georgia (2008), but was successfully restored after the reset launch. There were key areas of cooperation between NATO and Russia prior to April 2014, such as support for ISAF and the Afghan Armed Forces, the cooperative airspace initiative, cooperation in the area of missile defense/ballistic missile defense, arms control, and scientific cooperation. So where is the discrepancy? As the Special Advisor in NATO's Public Diplomacy Division noted, the mandate of NATO established in 1949 to provide freedom and security to its members though political and military means continued to be relevant in 2015⁶⁵. As a result, many Russian politicians ask themselves this question: if the Cold War is over why does NATO still exist? Is Russia the main threat to NATO members' security? Is the existence of the Russian threat the reason why NATO continues to exist? The real answer may be, no, it is not likely that NATO continues to exist for those reasons. But NATO definitely remains a military organization, and as we see in a lot of cases, it overlaps its mandate of providing security to its members with other goals. Neither Kosovo nor Libya or Syria presented direct threats to the US or its allies. Thus, the real motivation behind those operations may have been the willingness or desire to expand Western democratic values, and thereby increase American influence throughout the world, which ultimately actually led to crisis and chaos in the states listed above. However, the very existence of NATO does not prove the realist argument, as an analysis reveals that there are other and more likely reasons for NATO's

⁶⁴ NATO 2015.

⁶⁵ Hart 2015.

continued existence beyond expanding its influence and the threat of Russia. The other shortcoming of the realist explanation of reset failure is that NATO was not really expanding during the years of reset. The only states that were admitted to the alliance after 2009 were Albania and Croatia. In 2009, NATO expansion was cut off the section of major threats from the “Strategy of National Security of Russian Federation until 2020”⁶⁶. However it is important to look beyond the mere membership expansion. Even if NATO temporarily suspended its membership growth eastward during the years of reset, the willingness or funding for democracy and the promotion of US values continued. This “soft” expression of US power and spread of influence was considered to be a threat for Russia. The inability of the leaders to understand the logic behind each other actions led to the failure of reset of relations and contributed to further crisis. Russian officials have expressed a few times their negative sentiments about the idea of Georgia and Ukraine membership in NATO. This point of view was clearly demonstrated during the war in South Ossetia in 2008.⁶⁷

Moreover, while Mearsheimer argues that competition between powerful states is inevitable, there are states which present the opposite. Some of them, such as the US and the UK have trustworthy relationship. Churchill in 1946 during his Fulton speech called for "a special relationship between the British Commonwealth and Empire and the United States", who can "work together at the common task as friends and partners"⁶⁸. Since then, the relations between US and UK have been considered to be “special”. It can be argued that this unique and close relationship is possible because Britain’s influence on the US comes from more than just a close personal relationship. This relationship derives from a 60 years of history in investing in a “special relationship” between the US and the UK; one that has seen

⁶⁶ Strategia natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii do 2020 goda [Strategy of National Security of Russian Federation until 2020] 2009.

⁶⁷ Mearsheimer 2014, p.4.

⁶⁸ Shipman 2009.

the Americans supporting the war in the Falklands, and the British backing risky American ventures in Grenada and Panama⁶⁹.

In 2007, during an interview with BBC, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Miliband called the relations with the US as the most important bilateral relation that the UK had. He justified this claim using several reasons. The first is that the US is the most rich and powerful country in the world. However, what he found more important was the presence of common UK and US democratic values⁷⁰. UK and US share the same language and similar culture. Due to this fact, it might be easier to build trust between the two countries. Moreover, the intentions of the states are clear to each other; there is no communication problem between them. In this sense, culture and religion are really important as they act as a point of connection. The West is more influenced by Catholicism and is more familiar with the concept of promoting and pushing its values, whether for Orthodox Russia, this idea might seem bizarre. UK is one of US' main European trading partners, lagging behind only after Germany⁷¹. On the other hand, the relations between UK and US will be an exception to the realists' concepts rather than a rule. First of all, UK and US do not have conflicting interests on certain issues. Moreover, it's "comfortable" for the US to have a stable partner in Europe. "Why did Blair risk so much to side with Bush? The answer is simple: because he believes that Britain's interests in the world are best secured by a close relationship with the United States"⁷². "It also emanates from the sheer power of the UK – its large and well-trained military, its strong economy, its seat on the Security Council, and the global reach of its activities (largely a hangover from its empire). Above all, Britain

⁶⁹Welsh 2004, P. 167.

⁷⁰ Shesternina 2007.

⁷¹United States Census Bureau 2016.

⁷² Welsh 2004, P. 167.

matters to the United States because of its place in Europe and its ability to influence the direction of the ongoing project of European integration”⁷³.

In speeches of both US and Russian leaders we can follow the realist rhetoric. US President Barak Obama confirmed the importance of national interests by saying: “We will do everything that we can to protect our people and the timeless values that we stand for”⁷⁴. That means that the US government would use even military force if someone or something threatened its national interest. Similarly, Vladimir Putin during a recent speech to UN General Assembly condemned US actions in Iraq, Libya and Syria by stating the following: “you at least realize now what you’ve done? But I’m afraid that this question will remain unanswered, because they have never abandoned their policy, which is based on arrogance, exceptionalism and impunity.”⁷⁵ All this leaves the impression that the US will never change its democracy pushing behavior, while Russia is never going to trust the US, and neither is likely to understand the logic of the others actions. In response to NATO and EU expansion eastward and their active cooperation with Ukraine and Baltic states, Russia is trying to keep its strong presence in Eastern Europe. Moreover, Russia considers NATO’s actions to be hostile, and sees it as a threat to its own sovereignty. Due to the tense relations, both parties to the conflict are strengthening their military resources (security dilemma). By Crimea annexation the Russian government planned to protect itself from the risk of losing its naval base in Sevastopol, as well as to destabilize Ukraine until it stopped its efforts to engage with the West⁷⁶. From Mearsheimer’s point of view, “NATO must admit Georgia and Ukraine to contain Russia before it dominates its neighbors and threatens Western Europe”⁷⁷. According to Mearsheimer’s realist argument, the inability of the two parties to understand each other

⁷³ Welsh 2004, p. 169.

⁷⁴ Obama 2014.

⁷⁵ President of Russia, *70th session of the UN General Assembly* 2015.

⁷⁶ Mearsheimer 2014, p.1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.6.

and the ongoing competition between the US and Russia led to the reset policy failure and to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine. “The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of the larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit and integrate it to the West”⁷⁸.

All in all, offensive realism holds that states should (and do) assume the worst of others’ intentions. It asserts that this worst-case assumption of others’ intentions is absolutely necessary because states are inherently aggressive⁷⁹. However, we can see that states tend to assume the worst about others’ intentions only when (they believe) they are already in a complicated relationship⁸⁰. Analysis of the pattern of US-Britain relations vs US-Russia relations clearly proves this point. Thus, the worst-case assumption of others’ intention is a conditional outcome rather than an absolute outcome and it does not lead to conflict but is actually driven by conflict. Perhaps even more interesting is that taking the worst-case assumption of others’ intentions as a product of social construction may eventually lead us to adopt a social evolutionary approach toward the problem of uncertainty over others’ intentions and fear in international politics.

Thus, if we look at the situation of US relations with Eastern Europe from the other side, we can see that there is no clear evidence for the US offensive intentions. The motives behind the US cooperation with former Soviet states might be different from the way Russia perceives it. US actions might not be a result of offensive realist desires but rather a promotion or acceptance of allowing countries to choose their own way. During his trip to Kiev in July 2009, Vice President Joseph Biden stated, “We stand by the principle that

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Shiping 2008, p. 453.

⁸⁰ Jervis 1976, p. 64-65.

sovereign states have a right to make their own decisions, to chart their own foreign policy, to choose their own alliances.⁸¹»

Thus, operating with good motives, US actions are perceived as threats to the national security of Russia. Some of the Eastern European states revealed their clear desire to be a part of the West and part of NATO. That includes both Ukraine and Georgia, who repeatedly expressed their desire for closer ties with the US. Only after the request of the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to help Georgians the US promised to "help [you] to heal this nation's wounds, to rebuild this economy, and to ensure Georgia's democracy, independence, and further integration with the West."⁸²

Moreover, US democratic initiatives are strongly supported by Eastern European NATO members that actively participate in programs devoted to the further spread of this democratic tendency in other countries in the region. In this case, US actions can be considered to be more of a collective initiative, rather than a solely aggressive one. The US policy community has encouraged, supported, and made use of the experiences of new democracies. Some of these countries, such as Poland, Lithuania, and Slovakia, took actions in the neighbors' democratization process right after their own democratic transitions. The majority of them started the process of democratization support in other countries in the region during their own initial phase of democratic development. Indeed, many Eastern European countries stated democracy promotion as a priority after joining NATO and especially the EU. A great number of these countries' governments cooperated in order to continue the democratization process in the post-communist region, stating that it is a key priority for regional international organizations. The post-soviet members supported the idea

⁸¹ Biden 2009.

⁸² The White House 2008.

of further expansion of the EU and NATO in the region and the augmentation of cooperation among these countries⁸³.

The dilemma of interpretation embodies several difficulties. First, countries can experience psychological biases, not taking into account the fact that others may suspect bad intentions in the country's claims of security search. That seems to be the case with the US and Russia. Russian pre-existed biases can influence the government and provoke a negative and even aggressive reaction to the American efforts of 'giving the people a right to choose'. This incorrect interpretation of one state's security measures is then replicated by the other, and this can lead to a tense relationship between these countries based on the feeling of potential threat⁸⁴.

2. Domestic manipulation argument

There is another explanation that can be found for the failure of US-Russia reset of relations. The second explanation states that it is President Putin and his personal techniques of ruling the government that ruined the reset between Russia and the US.

In some cases, domestic manipulation is used by state leaders to reach their individual goals, or to gain a solid public support. Creating the image of an external threat by the government may be particularly useful for revolutionary regimes, for example France in 1792, Russia in 1918 or Iran in 1980⁸⁵. Moreover, transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime in a country increases the level of manipulation by political leaders. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia is still in a transition period both economically and politically, and this makes it prone to manipulation by the government. It may include

⁸³ Petrova 2011, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Kydd 1997, p. 377.

⁸⁵ Levy 1988, p. 669.

intentionally increasing nationalism in the society, exaggerating external threats or terrorist dangers, or even participating in military engagements⁸⁶.

Nationalism created the sense of a common interest in the nation, a belief of national interests as the highest value, and an intense commitment to the well-being of the state. Such myths and doctrines can be used by elites to advance their own political view of national interest or their own political interests. Thus, there is a tendency for some individuals to seek their identity advancement and fulfillment through the state⁸⁷. Political elites can actively manipulate public opinion for their own purposes. The tendency of people in a wide range of circumstances to support assertive national policies which appear to enhance the power and prestige of the state may lead decision-makers, under certain conditions, to embark on aggressive foreign policies and sometimes even war as means of increasing and maintaining their domestic support⁸⁸.

As already discussed, reset started in 2009 when Dmitry Medvedev was in power. He was considered to be more liberal, more democratic, and open to the West compared to other Russian leaders by many foreign experts. As former ambassador of the US to Russia Michael McFaul noted, Medvedev and Obama were actively working together on issues of mutual benefit, such as sanctions against Iran, a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) treaty, cooperation on Afghanistan, and the membership of Russia in the World Trade Organization (WTO). All this work served the interests of both Russia and the US. However, after Presidential elections in 2012, Putin came to his third term in office and this cooperation slowed down and eventually stopped⁸⁹. Thus, some people tend to argue that Putin's desire to

⁸⁶ Treisman 2011, p. 595.

⁸⁷ Levy 1988, p. 665.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 666.

⁸⁹ McFaul 2014, p.9.

achieve his personal goals through the government and the more ideological regime implemented after his election in 2012 led to the reset failure.

In this reset failure explanation, Putin's personality is a crucial factor to understand the problems in US-Russia relations. He is a former KGB agent, so his actions are unpredictable. Putin is really good at working with people; therefore he can arguably manipulate their thoughts and feelings. It may be really hard to trust this kind of leader, because you never know what to expect. "By taking over the mass media and seizing the political opposition's source of funds, Vladimir Putin and his KGB cohort have brought back one-party rule to Russia."⁹⁰

Moreover, the political system in Russia involves operating through informal networks. We never really know by who and how a decision is going to be made⁹¹. With the collapse of the USSR, a former soviet state was completely destroyed while a new one has not been built properly. That is why the institutional gap in the Russian government is substituted by an image of the strong leader and information propaganda.

Parliamentary elections in 2011

In September 2011 at the "Edinaya Rossiya" party congress, former President Dmitriy Medvedev announced that Putin would be a candidate for presidency from the party on the upcoming elections of 2012⁹². On the eve of the Presidential elections, Hilary Clinton claimed: "So when he announced in the fall of 2011 that he would be changing positions with Medvedev, I knew that he would be more difficult to deal with⁹³".

During his first two terms of presidency, Putin enjoyed public support due to the good economic performance of the country. However, as global recession threatened to damage the

⁹⁰ Safire 2003.

⁹¹ Marten 2015, p. 200.

⁹² Vesti 2011.

⁹³ Krayeweski 2014.

Russian economy during his third term, the popularity of Putin as a candidate decreased⁹⁴. Widespread demonstrations occurred throughout the whole country after Parliamentary elections in December 2011. Protestors accused “Edinaya Rossiya” of fraud during the elections, thus challenging Putin’s authority and legitimacy⁹⁵. As a result, the unstable economic and political situation made it hard for Putin to maintain high ratings.

To alleviate this issue, Putin needed to have an idea to unite the Russian people and to gain popular support. One of the options was to create an image of the West as a common threat to Russia as a whole. Taking into consideration the presence of the Cold War legacy in Russian and American societies, this was not a hard goal to achieve. Those protests were seen as US-inspired and coordinated; hence from then onwards, the West seemed to become Putin’s personal enemy⁹⁶.

The manifestations after the Duma elections of 2011 and the decision of the American ambassador Michael McFaul at that time to meet with the representatives of the opposition provided Putin’s government an advantage in the promotion of the culture of fear in the Russian society and to use the potential risk of Western agents’ activities harming national security to push their own agenda. Specifically, the meeting between protestors and a newly appointed US Ambassador to Russia helped to ingrain this idea in people’s mind⁹⁷. The establishment of a link between the US and chaos was important in the process of heightening the risk and encouraging the public to feel threat and fear. This is in line with the argument that risks with extremely low probability will create intense fear simply because they are less known, as compared to risks that are likely to happen more often.⁹⁸ Because the population easily remembered the Cold War period, the fear campaign was a success.

⁹⁴ Plekhanov 2013, p. 150.

⁹⁵ Asia News Monitor 2012.

⁹⁶ Marten 2015, p. 195.

⁹⁷ Kudenko 2012.

⁹⁸ Sunstein and Zeckhauser 2008, p.6.

“Putin’s need for a new enemy to help him address his domestic challenges compelled him to reject the reset”⁹⁹ At the same time there is a consolidation tendency in the extreme right-wing spectrum (for example, Kurginyan’s Anti-Orange Committee, Isborsk Club, Florian Geyer). All of them were extremely anti-Western and of course further damaged “reset”.

Presidential elections in 2012

After Putin came to power in 2012, there was a shift to a more populist position in the government. The main aim of the government was to get support from the masses of the nation. This included speaking to the public in a clear way and implied simplifications as well as emotional colouring¹⁰⁰. After winning the elections, Putin appears to the crowd with emotions and tears saying “thank you”¹⁰¹. Putin’s strength and powerful image has been a successful substitute for the weak institutional system and problems that the system in Russia generates. The new Government became more ideological. The President started his policy based on nationalism, conservatism, and adherence to Orthodoxy and its values. All this fits with the tradition of promoting a policy of Russian exceptionalism.

Upon taking office, Putin immediately implemented several laws which were very negatively met in the West and further worsened relations between the US and Russia and confirmed the failure of reset policy. With President Putin’s support, a new law concerning political demonstrations was signed which established onerous fines for participants of illegal protests and for those who violated the law during these demonstrations. Another law that was implemented influenced the opposition by drastically reducing its foreign funding sources: Russian NGOs with such funding were called “foreign agents”, and faced fines. At

⁹⁹ Stoner and McFaul 2015, p. 173.

¹⁰⁰ Lassila 2016, p.122.

¹⁰¹ CNN. 2012. *Vladimir Putin, We won an open, honest fight*. [Video file]

the same time the presidential term was extended from four to six years in accordance with a law passed by the Russian Parliament¹⁰².

Most of the contradictions of Russia and the West at this point were related to human rights situation in Russia. Several anti-gay laws were implemented promoting traditional family values and Orthodox standards. The Pussy Riot performance at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in February 2012 caused heated debates in the West. The members of the group were arrested for hooliganism and sentenced for two years in prison. In 2013, Russia provided asylum to the former CIA employee Edward Snowden. All these events strengthened the opposition to Russia in the West. Putin encouraged a new image of the country that was a Conservative Russia with an Orthodox Christian society opposing the Western liberal world. He tightened the liaison between the Orthodox Church and the government. By highlighting peculiarities of the Russian nation, Putin increased nationalist feelings in the Russian society as well as his own popular support. As a result of several vague laws that allowed government agencies to block sites raising suspicion in publishing “extremist” material or content harmful to children, several major opposition sites were blacklisted in 2013¹⁰³.

In the foreign policy realm, Putin took a firm position regarding several issues. In the year of 2012, China and Russia vetoed the Resolution on Syria, which was negatively met by the Western society. The decision faced strong criticism from the US Foreign Secretary William Hague. "More than 2,000 people have died since Russia and China vetoed the last draft resolution in October 2011," Hague stated after the vote. "How many more need to die before Russia and China allow the UN Security Council to act¹⁰⁴?" Unwillingness to vote for

¹⁰² Luhn 2015.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, Chulov, Batty and Pearse 2012.

the resolution further impeded US-Russia relations, especially given the fact that more the liberal Medvedev did not veto the Libya resolution back in 2010.

Putin also emphasized the importance of developing relations with Asia, shifting priority away from the West. The APEC summit was held in Vladivostok in 2012¹⁰⁵. It was suggested that Russia's planned a \$100 billion trade expansion eastward based on energy and agriculture¹⁰⁶. The newly elected president also emphasized the importance of BRICS for Russian foreign policy, as well as working on increasing its influence in international politics¹⁰⁷.

All in all, Putin's turn to a more ideological policy and manipulations with Russian nationalist idea helped the President to gain popular support while also worsening relations with the US. There is no specific date when "reset" can be considered to be failed, but Putin's return to power and his new policy for the sake of individual gain were incompatible with Western goals and values.

Analysis of the argument

Medvedev was never a fully independent leader. He always had the support of Putin and the "Edinaya Rossiya" party at his back. According to Levada independent analytical center, more than 50% of respondents said that Medvedev was in general continuing Putin's policies¹⁰⁸. Thus, the protest movements which emerged were mostly directed against the party of Medvedev and Putin, "Edinaya Rossiya", not the newly elected President. Although some protests took place, it did not lead to, nor was it likely to change the regime.

¹⁰⁵ Kuchins 2014, p. 130.

¹⁰⁶ Zagorodnov 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Putin 2012.

¹⁰⁸ Levada-center 2011.

The ideas promoted by Putin's new government go together with the ideas of such philosophers as Ilyin and Solovyov often cited by the Russian President¹⁰⁹. In their research these authors described the tradition of liberal conservatism, which implies the presence of a strong state, however not an authoritative one and not one that controls every aspect of life. But this view holds that the state should be powerful, unified and free from the influence of foreign powers¹¹⁰. Thus, strict domestic policy and firm word on international stage do not define a leader as an authoritative but rather as a liberal conservative one.

Moreover, we should ask ourselves whether the regime in Russia actually was unstable and needed actions from Putin to strengthen it. One reason for Putin's victory was that there was no viable opposition figure or party that could seriously challenge either him or "Edinaya Rossiya"¹¹¹. While existing parties have not been adequate vehicles to channel public preference or opposition sentiments, new parties have not been able to gain representation. Old parties have weak social basis and inability to represent modern population of Russia.¹¹² There is also a deep distrust of Western liberalism in Russia, which is a huge problem that the Russian opposition must deal with if it wants to succeed. Even liberal parties in Russia do not have trust in Western liberals. Therefore it is not only a problem of the system that Russian liberal parties are not gaining support but rather it is a problem with the parties themselves. On the Duma elections of 2011, the main Russian liberal party "Yabloko" did not even pass the 7% barrier¹¹³. "Russian liberalism was defeated because it had tried to ignore, firstly, some important aspects of Russia's national and historic

¹⁰⁹ Galeotti 2014, p. 17.

¹¹⁰ Ryzhkov 2014.

¹¹¹ DeBardeleben 2013, p. 7.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 9.

¹¹³ RBC 2011.

development, and secondly, the vital interests of an overwhelming majority of Russian people. Moreover, it was terrified of telling the truth”¹¹⁴.

People accuse Putin of being a hard line nationalist; however, hard line anti-Western nationalists (such as Dugin, Prokhanov) do not trust the government and the leader. Extreme right-wing publicists comment unfavorably on today’s situation in Russia¹¹⁵. Some radical nationalists still hold out hope that Putin will intervene and change the situation in Eastern Ukraine by invading Russian-speaking parts of it and restoring the Eurasian empire. "If not, he will be done."¹¹⁶

Thus, despite the economic situation and demonstrations, the regime in Russia remained stable. There was no need to implement additional measures of fear and threat policies against the West for the sake of maintaining popular support. There were some major moves to the East during this time, however, and therefore Russian policies did not have to be deliberately anti-Western to succeed. We must also highlight that despite Putin’s turn of policy eastward, there were some movements towards the West as well. Putin’s actions in the first years of his third presidential term reveal that he still cared about the perceptions of Russia by the West. First, he freed the Russian billionaire Mikhail Khodorkovsky who spent ten years in captivity due to charges of money laundering and corruption. Second, Putin released the Pussy Riot punk rock group arrested for singing anti-president song in Christ the Savior Cathedral in Moscow. Finally, the image of a new, modern Russia was strengthened by hosting the Sochi Olympics in 2014¹¹⁷.

Moreover, if we look more specifically to when Eurosianism increased, it was after the implementation of sanctions, when other options were not offered and Russia had to turn

¹¹⁴ Khodorkovsky 2004.

¹¹⁵ Sonne 2014, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p.4.

¹¹⁷ Stoner and McFaul 2015, p. 179.

to Asia for counterbalance¹¹⁸. So, it shows that Putin's pivot to the East may not necessarily have been a readily made decision, but one that was pursued given limited options.

According to the presented argument, Putin and the pro-Putin government used anti-Western and nationalist rhetoric to increase his personal power, and the influence of his closest networks in the country. However, if we look more into the speeches made by President Putin and Foreign Affairs Minister Sergey Lavrov, we won't see this anti-Western language but rather the presentation of a willingness to cooperate as equal partners with Western countries. Russian leaders were calling the West "zapadniye partneri" (translation: Western partners)¹¹⁹. It is important to note that most of the presented examples took place after Russia and China vetoed the UN resolution. It does not make sense for the government to use this type of language while conducting massive long planned anti-Western propaganda. Thus, in this sense the argument presented earlier does not look feasible.

In the speeches of Lavrov and Putin we can also observe a tendency towards frustration. Some people argue that the operation of the international coalition in Libya became a crucial issue where Putin decided to come back. NATO's actions frustrated him and he realised that this organisation cannot be trusted. So, Putin decided to reassert his power. This argument reveals that Russia's behavior is reactionary, rather than a path for pushing its own agenda. Through speeches we can observe both outrage and frustration with Western actions. In February 2012 Putin published an article "Russia and the changing world" devoted to the actual issues of world politics and the international role of Russia. The president emphasized the problem of NATO expansion and missile defense system in Europe: "I could have ignored the subject had not they been playing their games in the immediate proximity of Russia's borders, undermining our security and upsetting global stability". Putin highlights his grievance with the increased number of international conflicts

¹¹⁸ Fattibene 2015, p.7.

¹¹⁹ NATO.RF 2012; Embassy of Russian Federation in United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation 2012; Naviny.by 2012; Putin 2012.

under the pretext of humanitarian intervention, which he argues undermine the principle of national sovereignty: “A number of countries did away with the Libyan regime by using air power in the name of humanitarian support. The revolting slaughter of Muammar Gaddafi – not just medieval but primeval – was the manifestation of these actions”.

The President showed frustration with the ongoing interference of the US in the domestic deals of other countries. He argued that these military methods showed their ineffectiveness¹²⁰. During a speech in December 2013, he was indeed very emotional when expressing his feelings:

“Afghanistan is reeling, and no one can say what will happen after international forces withdraw? Libya is divided into tribes and clans. In Iraq the civil war continues, with dozens killed each day. In the United States, many draw an analogy between Iraq and Syria, and ask why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes”¹²¹.

When Euromaidan in Ukraine started in 2013, the Russian Government was accused of using Maidan to raise nationalists’ sentiments and public support in the country. However, again we can follow the outrage among politicians’ sentiments that counter this narrative.

When on a press conference Putin was asked about Maidan, he responded:

“Did you read, what’s written there? No. And here colleagues, a woman or a man, raised the banner "Ukraine", I want to ask, did you read the paper? No. No one is reading anything anyway! Do you know how to read? Look what it says: there is no money to open the markets and introduce European trade rules and technical regulations. Hence, it is necessary to close the industry, agriculture will not develop. I have already said, it is absolutely clear move towards becoming agricultural appendage of eurozone, but is the choice of someone. Well, sure, it’s their choice¹²².

¹²⁰ Putin 2013.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² President of Russia, *News conference of Vladimir Putin* 2013.

Lavrov in his turn claimed: "That doesn't fit into the framework of normal human analysis. I have no doubt that provocateurs are behind it. The fact that our Western partners seem to have lost their sense of reality makes me very sad."¹²³

The language and rhetoric we analyzed above shows that the Russian actions and policy were a reflection of what happened before rather than a promotion of a new authoritative approach. The whole explanation is based on an assessment of the intentions of the government, an intention that is always hidden. We can only propose certain assumptions on this or that topic, but it is hard to call this information objective. Even if we are looking at the speeches of Russian and US officials, we cannot be certain of their motives. All in all, this explanation does not look feasible to me. As we saw in the previous argument, the assumptions from both sides are made, but we do not see enough evidence for this explanation to become a major cause of reset failure.

3. US-Russia Misperception argument

After the analysis of the offensive realism and domestic manipulation arguments, no clear evidence was found. The explanation that came up through the examination of these two arguments related to the idea of mutual US-Russia misperceptions. Thus, the last explanation of the “reset” policy failure to be considered in this paper is linked to the way Russia and the West, or specifically Russia and US, perceive each other. Misperception involves the failure to understand who the other actors are and to define their intentions.

Taking into consideration the complicated history of relations between Russia and the US (Cold War and the other three failed “resets”), it is clear that the rhetoric of mistrust still exists between the two countries. As a result, there is a tendency of being concerned with each other based on mutual mistrust. This section of the paper will explore the opinion that

¹²³ The Voice of Russia 2016.

the failure of US-Russia reset policy is related to both states' misperceptions of each other, leading to conflict. To fully understand the argument, we must first discuss the theory of perceptions and misperceptions.

Actors tend to perceive what they expect to perceive¹²⁴. Perception is also influenced by the context of a given event. Thus, different circumstances lead to different perceptions based on expectations, the background story and current context¹²⁵. If the relations between countries are already damaged, it is more likely that they will perceive each other's actions as a threat and features of potential conflict. Fresh perspective is sometimes useful but is usually not achieved because there is a tendency to assimilate new data into pre-existing images; "the more ambiguous the information, the more confident the actor is of the validity of his image, and the greater his commitment to the established view."¹²⁶

There are other important aspects of perception theory that we need to mention. Group dynamics can have positive and negative effects on perceiving a given situation and making decisions. If the members of the group work in such a way as to critique one another's decisions and produce constructive thinking, positive results may be reached. However if the group consists of many like-minded individuals, each member will reinforce another's decision. Through this reinforcement, groups become more and more confident about their beliefs and decision-making and thus less likely to consider any alternatives or to believe that their choices may in fact be wrong. Such a scenario can become more drastic if the group is particularly isolated from other members of society. When looking at states, the willingness to keep state's reputation and the global role of a state might also influence the state's decision making.

¹²⁴ Heuer 1999, p. 8.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 9.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

In addition, cognitive biases play a crucial role in creating misperceptions. In order to avoid decision-making based on poor information, there must be an active attempt to obtain any available information on a given subject and to use this information to determine the pros and cons of different courses of action.¹²⁷ Western analysts may sometimes pick up information about Russia that fits to their own view of the country. In the face of new information that leads to different conclusions, people do not always take the time to go back to square one and reassess all the information they've collected, but rather their perception bias leads them to select one perception and to accept only evidence that further concretizes that view, while rejecting all others. This is referred to as the selective bias, or selective perception, in processing received information.¹²⁸ This means that only evidence that confirms and strengthens the already decided position is accepted and any evidence that says otherwise is ignored or somehow refuted.¹²⁹ The failure to ensure the accuracy of information and sources may also have been caused by an assumption that Russia was more hostile towards the West than it actually was.¹³⁰ Individuals are cognitively biased and often assume that all negative moves others make are specifically against them.¹³¹ This way of information gathering, with various forms of misperceptions, is used for framing in the media and for political agendas.

Decision-makers are not willing to open their minds to new information that may lead to alternative views, particularly because they have already made premature decisions.¹³² Another relevant cause of cognitive bias is the issue of anchoring: the natural starting point, which is then adjusted, based on the new pieces of information received.¹³³ Anchoring is important to acknowledge because it reveals that any variation of ideas are always in some

¹²⁷ Herek 1987, p. 204.

¹²⁸ Ibid, p. 205.

¹²⁹ Pfifner 2004, p. 36.

¹³⁰ Jervis1968, p. 475.

¹³¹ Ibid, p. 476.

¹³² Ibid, p.459.

¹³³ Heuer 1999, p. 150.

proximity of the original proposition. Thus, if the initial anchor identified Russia as a hostile country, this view of hostility may rise or fall in small degrees, but it will always remain hostile nonetheless.

Misperception among states is a complicated issue that might be considered from the following perspectives¹³⁴.

‘Misperceptions of others’ is a tendency for states to misperceive the actions and intentions of other actors, for a number of reasons.¹³⁵ There are different types of misperceptions that can states fall for. First, decision-makers tend to fit incoming information into their existing theories and images. Thus, actors tend to perceive different situation the way they expect¹³⁶. Second, decision-makers might be too close to new information and are likely to have errors by always referring to the established view¹³⁷. This means that evidence provided to decision-makers is almost always ambiguous and therefore has several interpretations¹³⁸.

‘Misperception of yourself’ might include overestimating of the state’s own capabilities and perhaps perceiving themselves as “heroes”. However, other actors with different goals and views might not necessarily perceive the state that way. Actors often do not realize that actions intended to project a given image may not have the desired effect because the actions themselves do not turn out as planned¹³⁹. Thus, a particular move made by a state, even if it is done with sincere intentions, may be viewed as hostile by other actors.

¹³⁴ Robinson 2015.

¹³⁵ Jervis 1968, p. 454.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p.455.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 459.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.460.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p. 474.

‘Misperception of how other people perceive you’ describes the misunderstanding where just because you consider yourself in a one manner, you have a hard time understanding why not all other actors perceive you the same way¹⁴⁰.

As we can see, there are several ways in which states can regard each other and themselves, and these can form different types of misperceptions between countries. Given their different cultural, political, and historical backgrounds, Russia and US just cannot understand each other’s point of view. During reset, there was a need to solve some urgent security issues. However, when a solution to them was found and there came a time to start deeper communication, the misperception problem started. Russia wanted the US to see it as strong state and an equal partner, but when this desire was not achieved, it created even more misperceptions. According to this explanation “reset” was not a policy aiming to solve communication problems between the two countries, but rather a policy for cooperating on urgent issues of concern to both states. Thus, this policy was not meant to be successful from the very beginning since it did not take into account the existing misperceptions, and how they would be heightened through efforts at cooperation.

Cold War legacy

Despite the fact that the Cold War ended some time ago, its legacy plays a huge role in the American and Russian perceptions of each other. Deep distrust and suspicion, which governed US-Russia relations in the 20th century, still remains relevant among the citizens and governments of both countries. They both follow preprogrammed biases and stereotypes about each other from time to time¹⁴¹. According to the public opinion poll in Russia in 2008, 2009, and 2011, despite the “reset” of relations, the US remains the second main enemy of

¹⁴⁰ Jervis 1976, p. 354.

¹⁴¹ Bayulgen and Arbati 2013, p. 523.

Russia” after Chechen gunmen¹⁴². According to a 2013 poll, 59% of Americans had a negative view of Russia, 23% had a favorable opinion, and 18% were uncertain¹⁴³. According to a survey by Pew Research Center, negative attitudes towards Russia in the US rose from 43% to 72% from 2013 to 2014. There is deep distrust of each other as partners; every little hint of threat makes it hard for the US and Russia to keep good relations. The Soviet collapse meant the victory and supremacy of Western democratic values in international politics, however, it did not mean the same for the Russian people. Thus, the Cold War might be over, but it continues to influence many aspects of the countries’ perceptions of each other and makes every mutual policy unstable. “The United States and Russia remain on automatic Cold War pilot”¹⁴⁴.

The Misperception of others¹⁴⁵

Since 2004 when the US officially announced the deployment of a BMD system in Europe, Russia constantly demonstrated its discontent and concern with the program¹⁴⁶. US claimed that it is feeling threatened by Iran’s nuclear program, and therefore had to do something more specific to defend themselves. However, Russia believes that the threat of a nuclear Iran does not exist and therefore does not understand why the US is willing to spend millions on defense against a nonexistent threat. As a result, Moscow is led to assume that in fact the shield is built against Russia¹⁴⁷. Its development was stopped in 2009 when Obama took a milder but in general the same position as Bush: “Russia has always been paranoid about this, but George Bush was right. This was not a threat to them. And this program will not be a threat to them.”¹⁴⁸ After a 2010 Ballistic BDM Report was issued and some

¹⁴² Levada-center 2012.

¹⁴³ BBC World Service Poll 2009.

¹⁴⁴ Stent 2014, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Since NATO is predominantly headed by the US, the two actors will be used interchangeably in this paper.

¹⁴⁶ NATO, *How Putin uses missile defence in Europe to distract Russian voters*, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Robinson 2015.

¹⁴⁸ Schieffer, *Interview with Obama* 2009.

amendments were made for the BDM system in Europe, the Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) systems deployment to Poland were cancelled, alongside the X-band radar in the Czech Republic¹⁴⁹.

It is a common known fact that Russia perceives NATO missile program in Europe as a threat. In October 2011, Moscow demanded legally binding guarantees from the US that the system would not threaten the Russian deterrent. However, the US side argued that congressionally approved and legally binding guarantees were impossible¹⁵⁰.

At the November 2011 Valdai Club meeting, Putin said that “we believe that the establishment of a missile defense system presents a danger to Russia. Don’t threaten us”. Thus, Russia believed that the missile defense was neither a safeguard against Iran nor North Korea. However, it misperceived the situation and assumed that if missile defense in Europe is not directed against Iran, then it must have been implemented against someone else, that is, against the Russian Federation. Russia did not assume the possibility that the Americans truly did believe that Iran was a threat in a nuclear sense, perhaps based on the American’s own misperceptions of Iran’s capabilities. When in March 2014 a reporter noticed that NATO claimed that the European NATO missile shield was built as a defense against Iran and not Russia, President Putin laughed in the journalist’ face¹⁵¹. On the other hand, NATO could not understand how Russia can see a threat in its actions and this misunderstanding created even more distrust.

Moreover, NATO expansion Eastward was always seen as a major threat to Russian security. However, NATO has been unable to see/understand this Russian claim. During a press conference on October 16th 2014 Admiral John Kirby was asked about NATO goals

¹⁴⁹ Khoo and Steff 2014, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰ Stolyarov 2011.

¹⁵¹ Elite NOW Agenda, 2014. *President Putin laughs in the face of a journalist- Questioned on Missile Defense Shield*. [Video file]

and its relations to Russia. “Can’t even see, how Russia can perceive it as a threat, moving of NATO closer to its border. NATO is defensive alliance and no one says that an expansion is a threatening move”¹⁵². Indeed, the blaming game between the two continues: Did NATO move closer to Russian borders or did Russia move closer to the West?

Aiming to achieve a low level of potential aggression (for example, rapid deployment of forces) and strengthening the defense system, NATO signed the Readiness Action Plan in 2014. The first six headquarters called NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) appeared in Central and Eastern Europe. Subsequently two more units in Hungary and Slovakia were established¹⁵³.

As discussed in the first section of the paper, from the American point of view, Eastern European countries should be able to choose their own way. They are not using the interest of some Eastern European countries to join NATO and pursue Western path as a means to hide their own power play. Despite this justification by the West, Russia continues to view any NATO expansions as a threat since it sees NATO as an organization existing purely to deter Russia.

All this creates a problem of miscommunication and deep misunderstanding among the two sides. Russia cannot believe that the US can act so irrational and thinks that these actions are attempts to wind Russia around its finger. That is how frustration has emerged and can be seen in various speeches by Russian officials. Meanwhile, the US wonders why Russia is frustrated when the Americans know that they are not aiming to threaten Russia. At the end, both countries do not understand each other’s points of view. Thus, all these misperceptions and miscommunications have led to a deterioration of relations and reset failure.

¹⁵² RT America, 2014. *Blame game: NATO expanded to Russia, or Russia moved towards NATO?*[Video file]

¹⁵³ NATO, *Readiness Action Plan*, 2016.

The Misperceptions of self

Russia has always wanted to be perceived as an equal partner and a great power in its relations with the West. It claimed the right to independent foreign policy based on its own interests and goals and not to follow decisions already made by someone else.

“Russia is perceived with respect and considered it only when it is strong and stands firmly on its feet. Security in the world can only be achieved together with Russia, rather than trying to "push" it, weaken its geopolitical position, prejudice the defense capability. In general, relations with the US, we would be willing to go really far, to make a qualitative breakthrough, but on condition that the Americans actually be guided by the principles of equal and mutually respectful partnership.”¹⁵⁴

A primary problem is the way that the US and Russia see the balance of power between them. Despite the loss of USSR territory, the Warsaw Pact alliance, and the presence of economic and political issues, Moscow still wants to be considered as a great power with equal status and influence as the US¹⁵⁵. There is a deep distrust for NATO and the US because of their unwillingness to seriously consider Russian interests when making decisions. In 2002 Putin mentioned: “Russia was never so strong as it wants to be, and never so weak as it is thought to be”¹⁵⁶. However, the US views Russia from a completely different perspective. Russia is perceived as a corrupt state with deep political problems and a resource-based economy. Washington wants Russia to play by the liberal internationalist rules laid out by the US and its Western allies, urging Moscow to join the world system created under US leadership after World War II. Russia, however, cannot agree to the idea of forever remaining a junior partner and abiding by American rules made without Russian consent or contribution.

¹⁵⁴ Putin 2012.

¹⁵⁵ Marten 2014.

¹⁵⁶ Heisbourg 2015, p. 31.

On the other hand, NATO perceives itself as a defensive political alliance, aiming to protect and defend, but not expand: “NATO’s essential purpose is to safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means”¹⁵⁷. However, Russia does not see it as a defensive alliance and it is clear why. NATO was created as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union and Warsaw pact. Thus, it is not clear why the latter stopped existing a long time ago, while NATO is not only existing, but also expanding its borders¹⁵⁸. Moreover, the very logic of NATO’s organization as a collective security organization is to seek an expansion since collective security is strengthened the more states you have on your side.

The Misperception of the way others perceive you

When the US supported popular uprisings against autocratic Middle Eastern regimes, Russia expressed its deep concern about this tendency. This highlighted the ideological gap between the US and Russia¹⁵⁹. In Russian history, a state was completely ruined several times and needed revival from the ground: the October revolution in 1917 and the Dissolution of USSR in December 1991. Thus, for the Russian state, it is very important to save the “state” and government institutions, because there is an understanding that it is still better to work on change within the current government than to destroy existing structures and to build a completely new one. Thus, while the US was working on the Syria UN resolution, Russia was calling for a dialogue between the government and protestors¹⁶⁰.

The US and NATO perceive themselves as “good guys”. If we look at the speeches made by American presidents for the past several years we see a tendency to emphasize the uniqueness of the American democracy promotion actions. “For generations, the United States of America has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and as an

¹⁵⁷ NATO, *Home page 2016*.

¹⁵⁸ Putin, *Plenary session of the 19th St Petersburg International Economic Forum 2015*.

¹⁵⁹ Stent 2014, p. 247.

¹⁶⁰ Stent 2014, p. 250.

advocate for human freedom... And let us look to the future with confidence and hope not only for our own country, but for all those yearning for freedom around the world.¹⁶¹”

Obama also highlights the leading role of the US and NATO in the world:

“America is not the world’s policeman. Terrible things happen across the globe, and it is beyond our means to right every wrong. But when, with modest effort and risk, we can stop children from being gassed to death, and thereby make our own children safer over the long run, I believe we should act. That’s what makes America different. That’s what makes us exceptional. With humility, but with resolve, let us never lose sight of that essential truth”¹⁶².

However, this view does not necessarily mean that other states, including Russia, have the same image of the US. If you follow NATO interventions (Kosovo, Iraq, Libya), you can see that the consequences of the interventions were really similar: chaos, disorder, and regime collapse. Thus, as a rational actor, one might think that these operations were pursued on purpose, perhaps for some American or Western interest. Thus, Russia believes that the purpose of all these operations is to create chaos. They would argue that if there are so many examples of these types of international intervention not working, why should it work this time? “Why their government would want to repeat recent mistakes?”¹⁶³”

In his article in the New York Times Putin states that these “humanitarian interventions” have become a common course of action for the US and he is not sure whether the US led coalitions in the Middle East meet the long-term interests of the US. This is because, after all, in the minds of millions of people the US is perceived not as a model for democracy but as a player who relies solely on force and the organisation of coalitions to achieve its own objectives “Who is not with us - is against us.”¹⁶⁴ Russia assumes that NATO is a rational actor and creates chaos intentionally, but this assumption is not necessarily true.

¹⁶¹ Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Syria* 2013.

¹⁶² Obama, *Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya* 2011.

¹⁶³ Putin 2013.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

The US and NATO see themselves as rescuers of the world's security and democracy and do not understand why others might not have the same perception of them.

In addition, Russia perceives some of the closest CIS countries as one nation with Russia. This fact is explained by the presence of a common culture, language and history. However, the US considers this sentiment to be an imperialist move towards restoring Russia's full influence over the former USSR territories and spreading anti-Western feelings over these countries. Thus, the US often sees Russia as a revisionist power.¹⁶⁵ Revisionist Russia is problematic because it will be an unpredictable power that no longer respects international law and has a neo-imperial Eurasian project in mind¹⁶⁶. Putin is seen as an authoritarian leader who is willing to build the Eurasian bloc¹⁶⁷. The only thing that slows down this process is insufficient development of the Russian economy.

Some researchers talk about the Russian humiliation complex, which was discussed in the second section of the paper¹⁶⁸. Putin wants to change Russia and restore the prestige of Russia and its image as a great power. The absence of cultural affinity and failure to understand each other's cultures does not allow the West to look at the situation with Russian eyes, thus, they can only judge by action. Thus, if we consider the argument about Russia's imperialist moves, we can see that some clear actions took place (Annexation of Crimea) that made the US and the West think that their perception of Russia is true.

There are certain misperceptions between states; however, there is also a high probability of real threat existence too. Some of the misperceived threats might actually be real ones which then turns this explanation into a realist one.

¹⁶⁵ Back 2009, p. 496.

¹⁶⁶ Heisbourg 2015, p. 34.

¹⁶⁷ Mead 2014, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ Wilson 2014, p.11.

As already discussed in the above section, reset started when Obama's administration announced a plan to suspend development of BMD in Poland and Czech Republic¹⁶⁹. This might show that in fact the US understands Russian sentiments about the project. Obama's moves on the missile shield could also have been an attempt on the part of the US to win Moscow's backing for new sanctions against Iran. It could have also been the result of a willingness to increase cooperation with Russia in general in the framework of reset policy.

Russia believed that the missile defense system in Europe was not directed against Iran but against Russia. On the one hand, this could be a misperception, but from the other hand, when the program was launched President Obama said: "As long as the threat from Iran persists, we will go forward with a missile defense system that is cost-effective and proven. If the Iranian threat is eliminated, we will have a stronger basis for security, and the driving force for missile defense construction in Europe will be removed." Thus, it was made clear that once the Iranian nuclear threat is diminished, the missile shield in Europe will cease to exist. However, in Russia's view, the American claims of the threat of Iran were simply a cover-up.

In the summer of 2015, a deal was reached with Iran to significantly limit Tehran's nuclear ability¹⁷⁰. Thus, the major threat coming from Iran in the US' point of view should have been eliminated. Russia reminded the US of its plans to drop the missile defense shield in Europe upon the resolution of the Iranian nuclear issue. A spokesman for the US embassy in Moscow claimed that "As long as Iran goes on developing and deploying ballistic missiles, the US together with its allies and partners will be working to ensure protection from this threat, including through deploying the NATO missile shield system"¹⁷¹. Moscow was not surprised with this decision and believed that the US was simply continuing to artificially

¹⁶⁹ Spiegel Online 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Gordon and Sanger 2015.

¹⁷¹ Baczyńska 2015.

come up with reasons to keep the European missile shield. These actions might also prove NATO's real intentions.

Conclusion

The paper started from the analysis of two possible explanations of the US-Russia reset policy failure. Both of the discussed explanations contributed to the reset failure to some degree. However, by analysing and evaluating the presented explanations, I can say that none of them looked persuasive enough for me to become a major cause of the reset policy failure. Each of them might sound firm while looking from one perspective, however, they fall short when looking from another angle.

At first glance the offensive realism argument sounded very strong. Existence of the NATO block since the Cold War period, Russian aggressive actions in the post-soviet space contributes to this argument. Both politicians and scholars assumed certain motives for both states. However, these motives might not necessarily coincide with the real intentions. The actions might be triggered by something else rather than power play.

Many Western researchers argue that if it was not authoritative Putin in power in Russia, things might have been different. However, this argument is not necessarily true. First of all, there is no other alternative leader in modern Russia, one that could gain support among the broader population since opposition is too disorganised. Moreover, there is no trust for western liberal parties in Russia. It is unrealistic to say that the change in power led to the failure of the successful policy of several years. Thus, Russian citizens are asking themselves: if not Putin, then who could take the President's position? In this argument as well we can clearly see the different perspectives of the two nations on the issue. American scholars will argue that Putin's authoritative regime and absence of Western democracy in Russia impedes its successful development and cooperation with other countries. US

politicians might invest money to democracy development in the Post-Soviet states or Middle East region following their best motives. However, this action will be perceived as an extremely hostile one by Russia.

Thus, while trying to find strong evidence for these explanations of the reset failure I faced the repetitive problem of misperception. People as well as the states might misperceive the information based on personal or structural biases due to backgrounds, environments and other subjective factors. Thus, from my point of view, the main problem in the failure of US-Russia relations is the absence of trust as a consequence of the misperception of each other's intentions.

Through the analysis of US-Russia 'reset policy' failure we saw how the misperceptions between the two countries might influence their ability to communicate and build successful cooperation. Thus, it would be logical to pose a question: what can be done to avoid these misperceptions in the future of US-Russia relations and in other cases.

Decision-makers should be aware that they do not make "unbiased" interpretations of each new bit of incoming information, but rather are inevitably influenced by the theories they expect to be verified. What appears to be self-evidence to them often seems so only because of their pre-existing beliefs¹⁷². Thus, both the US and Russia should not assume that their assumptions of the intentions of others are necessarily right and should instead be open to the idea that there is an alternative view of the situation. This vision might be completely different due to the different cultural, historical background and geopolitical goals. Enhancing cultural dialogue between countries, building confidence in each other and transparency in the relations is the key to the relations' improvement. The decision-maker

¹⁷² Jervis 1968, p. 462.

should have “devil’s advocates around”, in order to enable examination of every incident and problem from different angles¹⁷³.

Another safeguard for decision-makers is to make their assumptions, beliefs, and the predictions that follow from them as explicit as possible¹⁷⁴. By communicating motives both verbally and through actions, states can reduce the tensions that exist between them.

Considering this fact, we might say that reset was a failing policy from the very beginning, because it was aimed at resolving current issues in the relations and not the fundamental basis of bilateral relations. In this example of a case study on US –Russia reset, we can see how the policy implemented by the two states did not work. This example, however, also shows that there is much room for common understanding, given the two states’ cultural and historical backgrounds, and that this is an area where trust between them should be created.

However, there remains the dilemma of whether gains of implementing safeguards from misperceptions will outweigh the costs of doing so¹⁷⁵. Therefore, certain questions still remain at stake: do the US and Russia need a new reset of the relations? Could they ever rely on each other and become real partners? Or should they just focus on the resolving “burning” issues of international politics?

¹⁷³ Ibid, p. 464.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 463.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 465.

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