



Introduction by  
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For two centuries Russia's dealings with the West have been marked by a deep mutual suspicion. It is not possible to understand Russia's foreign policy today without grasping this background.

In the 19th century Britain's dealings with Russia were constantly undermined by the fear that Russia, as it expanded eastward, was bound at some stage to collide aggressively with British rule in India. The nightmare of massive Russian armies disgorging from the Himalayas or Afghanistan onto the plains of India haunted successive Viceroy's of India and therefore successive British governments at home. The nightmare never happened but it was sufficiently real as a possibility to dominate British thinking about Tsarist Russia. In 1907 Sir Edward Grey brought this era to an end by negotiating the Anglo-Russian entente. Like its French counterpart this was not a treaty of alliance, but simply a series of arrangements defining the interest of the two powers in areas where those interests might have contradicted each other with dangerous consequences. Seven years later in 1914 Britain found herself fighting in the First World War with Russia as her ally, but this friendship hardly went deep and was in any case shattered by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The doctrine which inspired the Bolsheviks was repulsive not only to the British but to the whole of Western Europe as its governments struggled to handle the aftermath of the Great War. The British and French were so persuaded of the danger of Lenin's doctrines that they intervened by force in the Russian civil war. The defeat of the White armies in that war, despite Western support, left a deep mark on the first generation of Communist leadership in the Soviet Union. Marxist doctrine taught that the bourgeois powers were bound to oppose and try to suppress communism wherever it appeared and this belief was confirmed by the ill-fated and half-hearted Western interventions in Russia's internal struggles. Stalin, brutally establishing himself as the

survivor of that first generation, drew a simple conclusion which dominated Russian policy in the years immediately after the Second World War. Russia, he concluded, must look after her own security and that could only be assured by physical control of her neighbours in Eastern Europe. At the conferences in Teheran and Yalta Stalin brushed aside Western concern for the protection of democracy in Poland and Czechoslovakia. In his eyes Russian security required Russian willingness and ability to suppress, with force if necessary, any attempt by East European countries to establish themselves as allies of the West, or even as neutrals with western inclinations. This ruthless policy led to the military interventions to suppress risings in Berlin (1953), Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968).

Stalin's death was followed by the gradual dismantling of his policy. Gradual because successors, in particular Khrushchev and Brezhnev, were determined to maintain the strength and determination of the Soviet Union while making the first moves towards peaceful co-existence with the West. Despite these moves the Cold War continued and indeed reached its most dangerous point with the Cuban missile crisis in 1962.

In the late 1980s, rather suddenly and to the surprise of almost everyone the whole Soviet apparatus began to collapse. The Soviet campaign in Afghanistan revealed the ineptitude of the leadership at the time and paved the way for the arrival in power of Mikhail Gorbachev and a completely different policy.

That policy reached its climax in 1989. I became British Foreign Secretary at that time and remember vividly the amazement with which we witnessed (and welcomed) the demolition of Stalin's policy. The high point came when the Soviet Union accepted, even welcomed, the unification of Germany in 1990. Gorbachev, and Yeltsin after him, followed the logic of their own analysis. This led to the decay and collapse of the Soviet Union itself and of the whole concept of the Communist

Party as its authoritative guide. Not only was permission given for the absorption of East Germany by the West but the new united Germany became a full member of NATO without any of the obstacles or reservations which we had expected from Moscow.

One of the main reasons why Margaret Thatcher doubted the wisdom of German unification was her fear Gorbachev was making concessions which might bring about his downfall and which in any case he would find it impossible to sustain. Gorbachev himself in his conversations with me and others spoke with huge self confidence. He was always trying to show that his control over Russian opinion was unquestioned. As it turned out, there was some truth in Margaret Thatcher's fears, though they became reality later than she had expected. Gorbachev's hold over the Russian people wavered and then failed.

In the end it was not German unification that turned the Russian people against Gorbachev; nor was it the dismantling of the apparatus of the Soviet police state. As the Soviet system unwound, particularly under President Yeltsin, this process was accompanied by the onset of corruption and in particular the auction of what had been State assets. These were snatched and flamboyantly displayed by the new race of oligarchs who commanded none of the respect which the Russian people expect to give their rulers. The cruelties of Stalin's

regime were eventually replaced not by a new liberalism but by the triumph of greed. The resentment which this provoked opened the door for the political success of Vladimir Putin in asserting his dominance over Russia with which we have to deal today.

Putin has confronted and despoiled the oligarchs, using his personal prestige to establish a new oligarchy based on the Kremlin towards which power has gradually concentrated. At the same time he has changed the face which Russia turns towards the outside world. He has attempted to recapture the self confidence which had been characteristic of the Soviet Union. In particular he has tried to reassert Russian influence over those components of the former Soviet Union which Yeltsin had allowed to slip away.

Putin does not aim at the formal resurrection of the Soviet Union. He is not requiring that the hammer and sickle should flutter over Kiev or Minsk or the former Soviet states of Central Asia. His aim is more subtle, namely to maintain an informal influence over the policies of these countries to ensure that at no time they act in a way which is hostile to Russia or over-friendly to the West. Hence his anger against the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. Hence his successful manoeuvre to oust President Yushchenko of Ukraine. Ukraine and Georgia are now most unlikely to be able to follow the example of the three Baltic States and join NATO.

By this policy Putin seeks to reverse the humiliation which, in his view, the policies of Gorbachev and Yeltsin inflicted on the Russian people. As a massive land empire the Russians are more vulnerable to Imperial nostalgia than were the British during the dismantling of the British Empire. A closer parallel is with France and with the wound which the French suffered from the loss of Algeria which they had consistently, though unrealistically, maintained as an integral part of the French Republic.

Until recently, the response

of the West to Putin's policy has been disorderly and misguided. In particular the larger European states have been misled into exaggerating the weakness which they feel as a result of dependence on Russian energy. It is now clear that Russia needs the European market just as much as the Europeans need Russian oil and gas. This is one subject on which there is an overwhelmingly strong case for a united common European policy. Former US President George W Bush's policy was equally incoherent. Sometimes he seemed to treat Russia as a half-enemy, for example when failing to reassure her about his proposals for stationing missiles in Poland and Czechoslovakia. Sometimes he treated the Russians as half-friends, for example when enlisting them as allies in his crusade against terrorism. The more moderate policy of President Obama is already more coherent, as witnessed by the arms control agreement which he recently negotiated with President Medvedev.

The Europeans should, like the Americans, now "reset" their policy towards Russia. This should not be hostile or destructive. The time has passed when we can profitably pile up debating points against the Russians. They are neither our enemies nor our allies. Our policy towards them should be long-term, evidence-based and above all united. It should no longer be possible for the Russians to play off one European country against another. We should understand how the recent history of Russia affects all her attitudes towards the West.

On my first visit to Moscow as Foreign Secretary I was invited to dine with the Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and his wife alone with my wife in their flat in Moscow. This was a congenial and happy occasion from which I learnt a lot. Madame Shevardnadze was introduced as the daughter of a General and she carried herself as such. She told us one story which left a mark. When she was a young girl her father was arrested on Stalin's orders, taken away and shot. Several years later Stalin died. She and her sister, though recognising fully his guilt for their father's death, nevertheless wept bitterly at the loss of the man who had won the Great Patriotic War for Russia.

We need to grasp the meaning of this paradox if we are to understand the nation with which we deal today.

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Welsh Guards in Red Square to mark Victory Day, 2010

