Towards strategic dissonance: Russia as ‘a Europe apart’

Moving on together? The West and Russia after the Cold War

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Western officials and observers believed that Russia would return to the ‘Western family of nations’ after decades of Soviet era isolation. Fuelled by an optimistic sense that the end of the Cold War represented the triumph of the Western way and the ‘end of history’ through the failure and defeat of the major systemic alternative, there was widespread hope not just of bringing an end to East–West confrontation, but of forging a ‘strategic partnership’ with Russia, and integrating it into the West on the basis on one hand of shared common interests and challenges, and, on the other, common values. Indeed, there has been a prolonged sense of inevitability about Russia rejoining the West, even during the periodic crises and disputes that were often seen as temporary, transient hitches along the route to eventual partnership. Indeed, as one experienced Western observer has noted, Western discussions of globalisation never began to reflect on how Russia might fit into an Asian-driven twenty-first century, instead only focusing on Russia, an old and declining power that needed Western assistance to mitigate its decline, and thus as either being part of Europe or being isolated.

Over time, however, this mood has evolved. First, it has gone from optimism about Russia’s voluntary return and desire to establish meaningful cooperation and ‘strategic partnership’, to increased frustration with, and criticism of, perceived Russian intransigent opposition to Western policies and Moscow’s increasingly obvious departure not just from shared values but from a shared view of international developments. As a result, the optimism has evolved more towards hope that Russia had been sufficiently weakened by developments such as the 2008 financial crisis that it would be
oblige**d** to drop its objections to Western policies and come over to the West and seek partnership. These assumptions have lain at the heart of the ongoing belief, even expectation, that Moscow would simply drop its opposition to the West over high-profile issues such as Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the US-led ballistic missile defence programme and how to handle the conflict in Syria, and intensified the sense of frustration at Moscow’s intransigence when it did not.

Even from the early 1990s, however, there have been cracks in the foundations of the relationship that mean that many of these Western assumptions are based on misapprehension. For much of the post-Soviet era, and increasingly obviously since the mid-2000s, the Russian leadership has interpreted both Russia’s own position and international developments in another, rather different light. Senior Russian officials argued that Russia had emerged as one of the victors from the Cold War, peacefully delivering Russia and Eastern and Central Europe from totalitarianism – and thus deserved an equal voice in European decision-making as its due reward. As the Russian state began to recover after the collapse of the USSR, Moscow became more assertive in its attempts both to emphasise this point and promote Russia not only as a ubiquitous power in regional systems across the world, but as an indispensable partner in international affairs, one whose interests and voice had to be taken into account, even if it disagreed with the West.

Dmitri Medvedev, then Russian president, illustrated this gap in 2008 when he stated that Russia had ‘come in from the cold’ from a century of (self) isolation, and actively returning to global politics and economics. But he also pointed to what Moscow saw as selective and politicised approaches to a common history, and added that ‘it is highly symptomatic that the current differences with Russia are interpreted by many in the West as a need simply to bring Russia’s policies closer in line with those of the West. But we do not want to be embraced in this way’. If senior officials continue to stress the point that Russia shares much with Europe, this stance has only become more emphatic: despite the financial crisis and other events such as the major changes in the US energy situation which many see as weakening Russia, Vladimir Putin has repeatedly emphasised his commitment to Russia’s independent, sovereign development with ‘traditional Russian values’.5

One of the results of this discrepancy between ‘common Europes’ is that the West’s relationship with Russia has been beset by tension,
misinterpretation and a dissonance in relations. Moving on from the Cold War has proved difficult, with officials on both sides accusing the other of adhering to the thinking and practice of the Cold War era, even suggesting that relations are worse than during the Cold War. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, for instance, suggested that the West was more tolerant towards the USSR than it is to today’s much freer Russia, and that ‘at the heart of the crisis in confidence in our relations with the US and the West in general lay a “conflict of expectations”. There was a lack of common understanding about what the end of the Cold War meant.’

In his first major speech as NATO Secretary General, for instance, Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that, of all NATO’s partnerships, the NATO–Russia relationship was the most ‘burdened by misperceptions, mistrust and diverging political agendas’. Despite the effort that went into ‘resets’ or ‘reloads’ of Russia’s relations with the West, this has remained the case.

Both sides have numerous complaints about the other. Western observers criticise Moscow for being an unreliable partner – whether regarding energy supplies or Moscow’s failure to fulfil treaty obligations to which it has subscribed.

The Russian authorities accuse the West of being unreliable and pursuing ambiguous policies – the most obvious example being the assertion by senior Russian officials, including Vladimir Putin, that NATO consistently says one thing yet does another. As discussed in the introduction, this accusation goes right back to the belief in Moscow that senior Western officials had given Soviet leaders a promise that NATO would not enlarge beyond reunified Germany. Such accusations have since been compounded by other examples of ‘saying one thing and doing another’: Moscow presents NATO’s air campaign in Libya as bending the truth. Putin raised the two issues together in April 2014, stating that ‘we were promised … that after Germany’s unification, NATO would not spread eastward’. He continued by noting that the reset did not fail because of Crimea, but much earlier, in Libya: Medvedev upheld the (UN) resolution about a ban of flights of the Libyan government air force as an act of humanitarian assistance. But in Moscow’s view, the actual result was an air campaign, the overthrow of Gaddafi and his murder, and the murder of the US ambassador and the collapse of Libya – in effect mission creep towards regime change without appropriate international mandate. ‘This is where distrust comes from’, he stated. He again raised the issue in a long interview with Bild newspaper in January 2016.
These problems have created a complex sense of strategic dissonance between the West and Russia, as the relationship is stuck between a series of longer-term Cold War era problems and new, post-Cold War problems, with each compounding the other. Although cooperative projects have been established, therefore, talk of ‘strategic partnership’ faded in the mid 2000s and an increasing sense of dissonance, even competition, has emerged, as illustrated and emphasised by the war in Ukraine. This is reflected in the official documents of both sides, and by the gaps between the official rhetoric and reality. Adding to this are divergences in what appears to be common language, creating confusion about the intentions and actions of the other, and limiting the possibility for developing practical cooperation.

This chapter first sketches out an overview of the relationship, the creation of official partnership and practical cooperation, and the emergence of political tension. Important cooperation has taken place, and many new mechanisms for dialogue have been created, and met with increasing frequency, but this did not result in the improvement in relations that optimists hoped for. This background is important because the public policy and media discussion about Russia suffers from short-termism and a lack of a sense of context and history: many of the problems in the West’s relationship with Russia are presented as ‘new’, though they have long and deep roots.

The second part of the chapter explores conceptual differences that lie at the core of the dissonance. Although there are numerous questions and interests that appear to be ‘common’, they are not ‘shared’ in terms of how they are defined or in how the sides seek to respond to them. This distinction has served to undermine attempts to develop cooperative relations, and increased friction between the two sides. This, too, warrants exploration given the perennial hope in the West that Russia will simply drop its opposition to Western policies – whether over missile defence or Syria – and ‘join the West’.

Moving on from the Cold War?

For much of the period since the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR, Russia’s place in the changing landscape of the Euro-Atlantic area has been the main question of Russia’s overall relationship with the West. It might be summed up as whether Russia would have a ‘seat at the table’ of Euro-Atlantic politics, in
a position to be an active actor in international developments, or be ‘on its menu’, a passive object of decisions taken by others.

The debate was well captured by the Russian observer Vladimir Baranovsky, who framed the question as whether Russia was ‘a part of Europe’, or ‘apart from Europe’. He pointed to the ongoing existential ambivalence of both Russia and Europe towards each other and the difficulties of establishing a relationship that would meet the hopes and requirements of the other: while Moscow expected the West to welcome the new Russia as an equal partner in the European theatre and elsewhere, since there were clearly common interests, the West’s Cold War logic had been replaced by a policy of preventing Russia from becoming disengaged without letting it in.11

The institutional frameworks of Russia’s relationship with the Euro-Atlantic community have evolved significantly since 1992, and numerous formal arrangements have been established. Russia, a member of the OSCE, joined the Council of Europe in 1996 and then became a member of the G8 in 1997. Formal relationships have also developed with the two main international organisations in the Euro-Atlantic area, the European Union and NATO.

Russia’s relations with the EU have developed from the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994 to the shaping of the Four Common Spaces at the EU–Russia St Petersburg summit in 2003 to address a wide range of common interests on the basis of common values,12 and the establishment of biannual summits and numerous mechanisms for cooperation such as the Permanent Partnership Councils (PPCs). These PPCs meet as often as deemed necessary at the ministerial level, and are the main mechanism for the functioning of the relationship across numerous areas of cooperation, including foreign policy, justice and home affairs, energy, transport, agriculture and culture. In 2005, the EU and Russia agreed Road Maps, which laid out specific objectives and sought to put the Common Spaces into effect.13

Perhaps most surprising, however, is the structural transformation in Russia’s relationship with NATO. In 1997, the NATO–Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security was signed, establishing the Permanent Joint Council (PJC). This created a formal bilateral relationship and prepared a road map for cooperation to establish lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area. At the 2002 Rome summit, the NATO–Russia Council (NRC) was established to replace the PJC – an important development, since it included Russia as an equal partner with the NATO
members, as opposed to the ‘NATO+1’ format of the PJC. The purpose of the NRC is to

promote continuous political dialogue on security issues with a view to the early identification of emerging problems, the determination of common approaches, the development of practical cooperation and the conduct of joint operations where necessary. Work under the [NRC] focuses on all areas of mutual interest identified in the Founding Act. ... since its establishment, the NRC has evolved into a productive mechanism for consultation, consensus building, cooperation and joint decision and joint action.¹⁴

This brief sketch of the basic structural elements of the relationship is important for two reasons. First, it reminds us of the considerable extent of the evolution of the relationship since the end of the Cold War. This is too often forgotten. These numerous mechanisms, such as the PPCs and NRC, which include Russian officials, provide for exchanges and meetings from the working level all the way up to summit levels, and mean that Russia has numerous seats at the Euro-Atlantic table, as well as its relationships with individual states.

On this basis, second, important cooperation has taken place. Again, it is worth emphasising what are perhaps the most surprising elements of this cooperation between the former adversaries – those in the political and security domain – because these are too often forgotten. Russian military forces, for instance, cooperated with those of the West in peacekeeping as part of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) peace enforcement force in Bosnia-Herzegovina for one year from December 1995, for instance, and joined NATO’s Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, NATO and Russia drew up a lengthy list of cooperative projects. This included a counter-terrorism plan in 2004, and a range of cooperative exercises in civil defence and emergency management, theatre missile defence, nuclear materials management and submarine search and rescue. Thanks to the experience of the latter, Russian lives were saved when a UK-led NATO team raised the Russian submersible AS28 off the coast of Kamchatka in 2005.¹⁵

All told, therefore, a basis for relations was established in the decade after the end of the Cold War. Indeed, neither the format such as the PPC and NRC, which include Russian officials, nor the agenda and practical cooperation achieved, bilaterally or with the EU and NATO, could have been expected, even by optimists, in the 1990s, and would have still seemed unlikely in the early 2000s.
Cooperation, albeit in specific areas and at a more technical level, has tended to survive the periodic political crises that beset the relationship, even in politically contentious areas. It has provided the foundations on which, despite the crisis occasioned in Russia’s relations with the West, and particularly with NATO, by the Russo-Georgia War in 2008, relations could be resumed, the agenda honed and cooperation continued. NATO and Russia completed, for instance, a joint review of twenty-first-century common security challenges, which comprised cooperation in Afghanistan (including counter-narcotics), non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, counter-piracy, counter-terrorism and disaster response. Official statements suggest that ‘important progress has been made since then’, and exercises such as the (submarine rescue) exercise Bold Monarch in 2012, and in other areas such as counter-piracy operations and military medical projects, continued.

Cooperation stands out in two notable areas of common concern. The first is in relation to Afghanistan, where NATO (and the USA) and Russia agreed to cooperate on the transit of NATO equipment to and from Afghanistan via Russia, counter-narcotics operations and helicopter maintenance. Even during the Ukraine crisis and after the USA imposed sanctions on Russia, elements of this cooperation endured, for instance, the contract signed in 2011 between Rosoboronexport and the US Department of Defence for Russian Mi17V5 helicopters for Afghanistan.

The second relates to counter-terrorism cooperation. This led to the development of the Stand-off Detection of Explosives and Suicide Bombers (STANDEX) project, launched in 2009, and the Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI) that provides for the airspace monitoring and the sharing of information to allow for the early detection of suspicious activities in the air. These projects have resulted in exercises, such as Vigilant Skies in September 2013, and the development of a device for bomb detection in crowds as part of a transport infrastructure protection scheme.

Such cooperation stands alongside wider efforts to repair the relationship between Russia and the West, particularly the attempts to ‘reset’ Russia’s relations with European capitals (such as the Poland–Russia relationship), and the US–Russia ‘reset’ of 2009. This latter effort led to the signature and ratification of a new START treaty in 2011 and support for Russian entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2012.
From frustration to bitterness: a chronology of compounding dissonance

If an increase in mechanisms for interaction and the frequency with which meetings take place has altered the relationship’s structural nature since the early 1990s and resulted in some cooperation, it has not translated into a closer, warmer relationship, let alone the ‘strategic partnership’ for which many had hoped. Indeed, frustration and bitterness has increased on both sides. This is partly because of the early optimistic mood on both sides, and the resulting lengthy agenda for possible cooperation stretched well ahead of what was realistically feasible. Furthermore, if the senior leadership on both sides attempted to forge a relationship, not all on both sides were convinced of the desirability of such a partnership.

A sense of stagnation pervades the EU–Russia relationship. Although Road Maps were developed for the EU–Russia relationship, important technical roadblocks were not satisfactorily dealt with, hindering progress, and many, if not the majority, of the points of projected cooperation anticipated as a result of the Rome declaration between NATO and Russia remained unfulfilled. Of course, there were many reasons for the lack of progress in fulfilling the set agenda – both sides, for instance, had other international and domestic priorities to which to attend. Nevertheless, the inability to establish substantial cooperation served to generate frustration on both sides.

More important, though, was the emergence of increased political tension between the West, particularly the EU and NATO and some of their member states, and Russia. Indeed, with hindsight, the period from 2002 to 2004 represents a watershed in Russia’s relations with the West. If the NRC and PPCs were established in these years, setting out an agenda for cooperation to achieve ‘strategic partnership’, at the same time an increasingly systematic dissonance between Russia and the West became more obvious.

Of course, there had been friction during the 1990s, particularly regarding NATO enlargement, and disagreements over the Kosovo War of 1998–1999. But at the same time, there were efforts to establish a cooperative relationship as described above, and these were underpinned by assertions of common values. Yet from 2002 and 2003 a chronology of dissonance became increasingly intense, as mutual recriminations became harsher and interpretations of events more visibly incongruous. The list of disagreements over both international issues and Russia’s internal development warrants brief
elucidation to pick out some of the main features and the recurring problems. It became increasingly clear both that values were not shared as Moscow sought to develop ‘sovereign democracy’, and that understandings of international affairs differed.¹⁸

In some ways, the two-year period at the end of Putin’s first term as president set the benchmark for themes that would dominate the relationship between Russia and the West for the following decade, as dissonance emerged over issues old and new. Old themes included NATO enlargement, since prospective new members included the Baltic states. Reflecting the ambiguity of relations between NATO and Russia, if the Prague summit in 2002 had set in place the NRC, it also set in motion the second round of NATO enlargement. Although senior leaders on both sides sought to emphasise continuing cooperation between NATO and Russia, there was strong opposition to this wave of enlargement from within the Russian parliament and in Russian military circles, as the Alliance moved closer to Russia’s borders and former Soviet states became members.

If the main Russian response remained ‘calmly negative’, it also revealed the emergence of differing interpretations of the international situation. As Sergei Ivanov, then Minister of Defence (now head of the presidential administration) said in 2004, ‘we cannot see any connection between creating new military structures on the territories of new NATO member states and the problems of combating international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, recognised by NATO and Russia as the highest priorities’.¹⁹

At the same time, a series of newer disagreements emerged that have subsequently resonated throughout relations. In 2002, the USA withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Russian opposition to the withdrawal was initially muted, but this opened the way for Russia’s unilateral suspension of the CFE treaty and subsequent and ongoing disagreements over the USA’s ballistic missile defence programme. Russia also opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, with Putin calling it a ‘great political error’. The invasion also served to underline Russian concerns about Western interventionism that had been first stimulated by the Kosovo campaign, and has since featured prominently in Russian concerns about Western-led regime change operations and the USA generating regional instability.

If there had previously been unease in the West about Russia’s internal development, most obviously about human rights and the
ongoing war in Chechnya, these grew as concern about a roll-back of democracy under Putin intensified for three reasons. The first was the increasing state control over media outlets. The second was the loud Western criticism of the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky and the start of the Yukos case. And the third was the electoral defeat and departure from the Russian parliament in 2003 of all the representatives of the parties recognised in the West as more liberal or democratic.

In 2004, these disagreements were intensified by the ‘Colour Revolutions’, particularly the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the complex negative impact of the terrorist attack in Beslan. The Russian authorities vigorously rejected Western criticism of how they had handled the attack, and suggested Western support for those who sought to attack Russia, including terrorists. President Putin’s subsequent introduction of legislation for the direct presidential appointment of regional governors in late 2004 only increased Western criticism of a ‘roll-back’ of democracy.

If the period 2002–2004 had set the dissonant tone, the following years compounded it, as criticism, disagreements and problems multiplied. 2006 was a particularly difficult year. It was the year of the high-profile murders in London of the former Russian security services member Alexander Litvinenko, who had just become a British citizen, and, in Moscow, the well-known journalist Anna Politkovskaya. Both murders have echoed through Russia’s relations with the West ever since: Politkovskaya’s murder has served as the beacon for criticism of the plight of journalists in Russia, and the UK–Russia relationship is still hampered by the dispute over the responsibility for Litvinenko’s murder and how justice should be achieved.

Three other important developments came to light in 2006 that soured the relationship further. First, in April, the Russian authorities introduced legislation that added an extra documentary burden on both Russian and foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to register and provide detailed personal information. Many NGOs were denied registration for failing to meet these requirements. Other elements of the legislation included the requirement to supply annual reports registering the sources of all foreign donations and how these funds were used, and the prevention of foreign nationals from establishing NGOs in Russia. The legislation elicited much protest from Russian NGOs, and loud criticism of Russia by the USA, EU and Council of Europe, and, of course, international NGOs that the Russian authorities were asserting state control over NGOs and restricting and obstructing their activities.
The other two disagreements came over international developments. The first of these was the ongoing divergence in views of Iran. Washington and Moscow had approached the matters of Iran’s nuclear capacity and arms trade from different perspectives. Concerned about the dangers of nuclear proliferation, Washington had urged Moscow to abandon its nuclear assistance to Iran with the construction of the Bushehr nuclear facility. Moscow did not see the question in the same light, however, contending that there was little proliferation threat. In mid 2006, US concerns about Russian military cooperation with Iran led to Washington imposing sanctions on Rosoboronexport and Sukhoi.

The second related to European energy security and the first year of major Western political concern about the reliability of Russian energy supplies to Europe, as a dispute between Gazprom and the Ukrainian company Naftogaz Ukraini led to a short disruption of gas supplies to parts of Europe. This episode, which had long roots in the post-Soviet era, resulted in significant tension between the EU and Russia as the EU began to seek alternative energy suppliers.

By the time Russia took over the G8 presidency in mid 2006, therefore, relations were tense. It was increasingly clear that ‘strategic partnership’ was failing, and that Russia was neither ‘coming home’ nor meeting Western hopes. In remarks that reflected the Bush administration’s position, Dick Cheney accused the Russian leadership of both improperly restricting the rights of the Russian population and using its hydrocarbon resources as ‘tools of intimidation and blackmail’. Although the Russian authorities made some moves to seek to assuage the criticisms, Moscow increasingly firmly re-stated its positions and rebutted Western criticism either as inappropriate or hypocritical (or both).

Indeed, as one Russian observer phrased it, Russia appeared to have spun out of the Western orbit and onto a trajectory of its own, determined to find its own system. Western critics could express their dismay all they wanted, Dmitri Trenin argued, but there would be no change in Russian policies, since Moscow had given up on becoming part of the West. There were loud mutual recriminations, and much talk of a ‘new Cold War’, talk that was only emphasised by what was interpreted in the West as a harsh speech by Putin himself at the Munich security conference in February 2007. The sense of tension increased that summer when Putin announced both that Russia would suspend its application of the CFE treaty and resume long-range patrols by Russian strategic bombers.
A year later this tension reached a crescendo, most obviously in terms of the strain in the relationship between Georgia (that had sought NATO membership) and Russia, culminating in a short war in August 2008. The suspension of NATO–Russia relations over the Russo-Georgia War illustrated the wider scale of the crisis, but it was followed almost immediately in late 2008 and early 2009 by a second gas dispute between Gazprom and Naftogaz Ukraini, which both lasted longer than the 2006 dispute and had a more substantial effect on gas supplies to members of the EU.

Altogether, as one Western writer suggested, a ‘sense of crisis’ pervaded wider European security. This drew on both ‘concrete realities and from differing perceptions’. The concrete developments included the uncertainty over the Euro-Atlantic arms control regime that led to increasing opacity in military developments at regional and sub-regional levels, and unresolved conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh. The perceptions included political double standards, the stalling of the democratic transformation in Europe and the emergence of new dividing lines, and the absence of effective instruments to resolve problems. Not only were NATO–Russia relations beset by ambiguities and problems, but so was the EU–Russia debate, as each side sought something different from the relationship. The EU–Russia Partnership for modernisation, for instance, reflected divergent priorities – for the EU, the focus was the development of civil society, but for Russia it was technological development.

Although the immediate crisis passed and relations were resumed in a series of ‘resets’ and ‘reloads’ in 2009, tensions remained. High-profile espionage scandals, including the Russian spy ring broken by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2010, and the arrest of Ekaterina Zatuliveter, a Russian who worked for British MP Michael Hancock, ensured continuing discussion of a ‘new Cold War’ and a lack of trust between the two sides. Disagreements dominated the public agenda, whether over Russia’s recognition of the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, over the US ballistic missile defence programme, over the NATO action in Libya, over possible Western-led intervention in Syria, and over other matters such as Western criticism of Russia’s human rights record and the protest demonstrations in Russia in late 2011 and early 2012. These built up collectively, and although there was no direct crisis in the relationship of the type that took place in 2008, most observers acknowledged the end of the US–Russia reset and few spoke of strategic partnership.
Towards a dual history: same evidence, different conclusions

The deepening intensity of this dissonance reflects two interlocking problems. First, as noted above, the disagreements were self-compounding, in that each new episode formed part of a repetitively negative official and public narrative that usually ignored the successes in the relationship. The (albeit few) positives such as IFOR cooperation and the raising of the AS28 submersible were quickly forgotten, but the long-running disagreements kept resurfacing and were compounded by new developments, and inflamed by other, new disagreements. This process has contributed to the sense of a repeating cycle in relations as they deteriorate towards crisis, the scale of which leads to the top leadership giving an impulse to restore relations.

There is an ambiguity here, too. In one sense, each time the relationship has been ‘reset’, it has become more developed: the establishment of the NRC after the Kosovo crisis, and the practical successes of the US–Russia ‘reset’ and the NATO–Russia reload after the Russo-Georgia War. At the same time, this improvement has been fashioned from a reduction in the scale and scope of possible partnership and as the West and Russia move in different political directions.

The second problem that it highlights is that both sides drew substantially different conclusions from the same body of evidence – not only on almost every point in this chronology of dissonance, but on many other issues. Two examples illustrate the widening gap. First, the global financial crisis in 2008, for instance, seriously affected the Russian economy. Many observers in the West assumed that, as a result, it would undermine the increasingly confident, even strident tone in Russian foreign policy and lead to Moscow adopting a more cooperative approach to relations with a West that it now needed in order to modernise. Russian officials, however, saw it as another blow to Anglo-Saxon influence, weakening the influence of the USA and EU, and showed the post-Second World War international financial architecture to be dysfunctional and outmoded.

The ‘Arab Spring’ provided the second illustration, as the West and Russia drew very different conclusions about its nature and underlying forces, and particularly the revolution in Egypt, and civil wars in Libya and Syria. While many in the West tended to see the events more enthusiastically as democratic movements which could
and should be supported, including with arms, if necessary, to lead to a more liberal post-Spring order, Moscow was more sceptical about both providing support to the revolutionary elements and the likelihood of a benign outcome. Russian officials saw the unfolding developments more in terms of security and stability and questioned the nature and aims of the rebels and opposition movements themselves, and the desire and capacity of the West to help them. Moscow strongly opposed the idea of Western-led intervention in Syria, arguing that the civil war is not substantially about democracy, nor even a responsibility to protect.

In every instance in the chronology of dissonance noted above, although the evidence is largely the same, the context, causes, guilty parties and consequences are differently interpreted and understood. Moscow’s suspension of the CFE treaty and resumption of strategic flights, for instance, aroused criticism in the West for taking threatening and unilateral steps that undermined Euro-Atlantic security; yet more signs of a more assertive and aggressive foreign policy. Moscow instead laid the blame on the West, arguing instead that the suspension of the CFE treaty was in the context of the US missile defence programme and the ongoing failure of some NATO members to ratify the revised treaty agreed in 1999.28 As for the strategic flights, Putin stated that Russia unilaterally stopped these flights in 1992, but others had not followed suit. The persistence of strategic flights by other states created certain problems for Russian security, he argued.29 These different conclusions have evolved to take a complex multifaceted form with the result that these dissonant episodes have acted as a wedge being driven into the wood of Europe’s post-Cold War history, splitting it into two separating and increasingly divergent histories.

The Russo-Georgia War is the best illustration of this problem, as not only have the conclusions differed dramatically at several levels, but they have had a clear and direct impact on policy. Most observers and officials in Western capitals placed the blame for the war squarely at Moscow’s door, blaming Russia either for starting the war or for provoking Tbilisi into launching the attack. Russian officials, however, laid the blame with Tbilisi for launching the attack on South Ossetia and killing Russian peacekeepers, and with the West for providing specific support to Georgia and creating the wider conditions in which the crisis took place. If the war was seen in the West as a result of Russian pressure on Georgia, therefore, it was seen by Moscow in the context of NATO’s enlargement and Georgia’s potential membership of the Alliance.
These different conclusions were compounded by further divergences over the results of the war. Some in the West, for instance, saw the war as a reflection of Russian weakness because the Russian armed forces did not win ‘efficiently’, instead using disproportionate force against Georgia, and the results either as ambiguous or as a loss for Russia: Russia may have won on the battlefield, some argued, but the result of the war was that the financial, foreign policy and moral costs were much higher for Russia. Andrei Illarionov, a former advisor to Putin who had emigrated to the West and become a prominent and influential critic, argued that Moscow failed to achieve its main goal (regime change in Georgia), and that the international community saw Russia as the aggressor and Georgia as the victim – and as a result, Russia was isolated.30

Stephen Blank, a US observer, argued that although Moscow won the war in tactical terms, it was becoming clear that Russia’s strategic losses were mounting and with time would eclipse the gains through the use of force.31

Although many Russian observers subsequently questioned the performance of the armed forces and Moscow’s failure in the information war, the Russian authorities saw the war in a different light, which included conflict and instability on Russia’s southern border and NATO enlargement. For Moscow, the result of the war met these concerns. The war to all intents and purposes resolved the unresolved conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. It also, as then Russian Ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin pointed out, seriously prejudiced Georgia’s accession to NATO (there has been little advance on Georgian membership in the subsequent six years).32

These differing interpretations and the effect of this ‘dual history’ began to be felt in policy, which reflected a disagreement over existing mechanisms, for example the role of the NRC. The alliance suspended the formal workings of the NRC in response to what it saw as the disproportionate use of force by Russia (another source of disagreement between Russia and the West, since Moscow did not view the force used as disproportionate), while Moscow complained that the NRC should be exactly for discussing and resolving such differences – and suspended much of the military dimension of the relationship in protest.

The war also served to multiply differences over Moscow’s proposals to rethink the European security architecture. Many members of NATO saw the war as yet more evidence for the existence of the alliance, another reason to emphasise collective defence and to reflect on Russia’s obviously aggressive behaviour – and thus
were less inclined to look favourably on the proposals. There was even a sense that Moscow would surely drop them after the war. The Russian authorities, however, saw the war as yet further proof of the failings of the current European security architecture – and the increased necessity of the proposals, which were subsequently pursued in the Corfu Process.

If the above has focused on the NATO–Russia relationship, similar problems course through the EU–Russia and US–Russia relationships. Both have been burdened by similar mistrust and crises. In sum, together with the increasingly obvious divergence over common values that underpinned the Rome and St Petersburg summits in 2002 and 2003, these compounding disagreements, diverging agendas and dual histories emphasise the difference in how the world is seen in Moscow on one hand, and Western capitals and Brussels on the other, and how each sees the world differently and as a result misunderstands the other.

**From Vladivostok to Vancouver: an agenda ‘common’ but not ‘shared’**

If compounding disagreements caused by differing histories are an important cause of tension, they do not by themselves explain the failure to develop strategic partnership. Returning to the question of Russia’s involvement in Euro-Atlantic security, and peeling away further layers, other conceptual problems come to light and gaps in the interpretation of wider Euro-Atlantic developments become ever more obvious. The problem of definition of terminology goes to the heart of the strategic dissonance, and apparently similar terms are understood in a different way. This has meant that even when a cooperative agenda has been set on apparently common interests, its foundations have been weak and realistic prospects inherently limited, and problems have been exacerbated.

**Diverging definitions, dividing security**

A joint statement published following the NRC meeting in Lisbon in 2010 states that all nations represented ‘recognise that the security of all the states in the Euro-Atlantic community is indivisible’, and that they share common important interests and face common challenges. This apparently innocuous and inclusive statement, however, was an optimistic assessment. Instead, a series of distinctions and divergences in understandings have hindered
the development of an agenda for practical cooperation and its implementation.

Western officials have often hailed the major transformations that have taken place in Europe since 1991, saluting the vision and emergence of a Europe that is whole, free and at peace – a development that is in significant part the result of the enlargement of the EU and NATO. NATO’s Strategic Concept emphasises the goal of a Europe ‘whole, free and at peace’ (and that NATO enlargement contributes to that goal), and the EU’s security strategy stated in 2003 that Europe had ‘never before been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history.’ The Russian authorities have a very different view that asserts not just a lack of major transformation, but a Europe that is fragmented, insecure and bound by bloc mentalities inherited from the Cold War. This gap has had far reaching implications.

The first and best known implication, of course, is that many Russian observers and officials not only distrust NATO, but argue that it should have been disbanded at the end of the Cold War, since, following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, there was no need for it to exist. Indeed, for many in Russia the alliance represents a hostile entity with designs not only on Russia’s international influence, but even on Russia itself. These concerns include NATO’s agenda, and its development of a wider international area of activity and partnership, particularly out of area operations under its own mandate.

The most significant concern, however, is that NATO’s eastern enlargement is understood as bringing hostile forces closer to Russian borders, weakening of Russian influence in its own neighbourhood, and, in the context of NATO’s out of area operations such as Afghanistan and wider partnership activities, part of a process of encirclement of Russia. Thus for Moscow the enlargement of NATO (particularly in tandem with the EU’s enlargement) is seen in a negative light as a danger to Russia, with the potential to become a multiple political and military threat.

Russian concerns about and objections to NATO have been hard to grasp for Western leaders. Javier Solana stated in 2009 that ‘for us the idea of Russia feeling threatened is absurd’, and from the perspective of officials in NATO and the EU, ‘Russia’s Western borders have never looked so peaceful and unlikely to produce an attack as they do today. If anything, Western officials suggest NATO and EU enlargements have produced a strategic stability there that is
probably unmatched in history.\textsuperscript{37} That view is not shared in Russia for a number of reasons, in large part because of the role of Western interventions both in Europe (Kosovo) and elsewhere in the world, whether in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Middle East, and the resultant chaos, have generated a high degree of concern in Moscow about US and NATO activities and intentions. Enlargement is therefore seen not in the light of spreading peace and stability, but in terms of possible intervention.

This basic but significant gap in understanding leads to the second and deeper implication, the different conceptualisation in Moscow of the nature of security threats and the wider Euro-Atlantic institutional architecture. Not only were there long-term unresolved conflicts in European security,\textsuperscript{38} but the Euro-Atlantic space was fragmented into blocs that offer different levels of security and that coexist with friction. This reveals a further divergence about the core definitions of wider Euro-Atlantic security, particularly Rasmussen’s point about the indivisibility.

In the West, the term ‘indivisibility of security’ is understood to relate to, first, the comprehensive nature of security in its three dimensions (human, economic and political-military); second, the indivisibility of security among states, including the right of all states to choose alliances and no state to have a sphere of privileged interests; and third, the recognition that European and Eurasian security are embedded in wider global security and that security within states is as much a part of security as security among states.\textsuperscript{39}

In Moscow, however, the concept of indivisibility of security is understood to mean a whole and balanced pan-European common security space. This entails resolving what is seen as a two-tier European security architecture in which the pan-European structure, the OSCE, is seen to offer only political commitments, while regional organisations such as the EU and NATO offer legally binding political commitments. This division serves to expel states that are not members of these regional organisations and thus fragment European security. Thus Sergei Lavrov told the OSCE in June 2009 that, after the end of the Cold War, ‘it did not in the event prove possible to put into place a stable and effective system that would bring together the countries of the West and East’. ‘We have been unable to devise guarantees’, he continued, ‘to ensure the observance of the principle of the indivisibility of security’, and it was possible today to violate the ‘obligation to refrain from strengthening one’s own security at the expense of the security of others’.\textsuperscript{40} Without these legal commitments, Moscow
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sees European security as divided, and fragmented by the enlargement of NATO and the EU.

This difference illustrates the divergence between the Western version of a Europe whole, free and at peace, and the Russian version of a Europe bound by bloc mentality, fragmented and insecure, and for NATO specifically, it again places the question of trust squarely at the heart of the matter. Of course, the demand for legally binding guarantees appears as an echo of the broken promise to not enlarge, discussed above. But it also has important ramifications for the future of the relationship. Russian officials have stated, for instance, that Moscow wants to see the proclaimed principles of indivisibility of security translated into practice, and expects that the principle will be confirmed by all, not only in words, but in achieving a practical embodiment of how business is done.

But this divergence goes further, not just representing the gaps in priorities between Russia and the West, and has an important bearing on both the EU–Russia and NATO–Russia relationships, striking at the heart of a ‘common’ agenda and suggesting that rather than pursuing the more comprehensive understanding of security adopted by the EU and NATO, Russia was focused on specifically political-military matters. The difference in understanding of the indivisibility of security is the conceptual centrepiece of Moscow’s proposals for a new European security architecture. As Dmitri Rogozin, then Russia’s Permanent Representative to NATO, suggested, while the current arrangements may suit the West, they do not suit Russia – ‘we don’t like it’.

There are numerous examples of apparently common vocabulary reflecting different concepts and understandings of European security, including on post-Cold War questions. These discrepancies mean that interests and threats may be ‘common’, but they are not ‘shared’: in other words a list may be drawn up of issues that both the West and Russia see as important, but in which each side defines differently the nature of the problem, where it lies in its hierarchy of priorities, and how best to approach it.

International terrorism

Terrorism is a prominent common challenge for the West and Russia, illustrated by attacks on London, Madrid, New York, Paris and Moscow and the attempts to develop counter-terrorism cooperation noted above. But while some technical cooperation has taken place, as noted above, and while the longer-term effects on
relations of the Boston bombings in April 2013 and the subsequent trial, conviction and sentencing of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev remain to be seen, it depicts well the gap between ‘common’ and ‘shared’. Indeed, it illustrates the complex knot of disagreements, dissonant definitions and divergent priorities that hamper Russia’s relations with the West.42

The overarching problem has been the considerable difficulty in establishing a common definition of who terrorists are and how to deal with them, largely because this was entwined with wider disagreements between the West and Russia, particularly the lengthy war in Chechnya. Many in the West saw the war in terms of Chechen independence from Russia, and referred to the Chechens as freedom fighters or rebels – whereas the Russian authorities defined them as terrorists, as noted in the introduction by the problems caused in interpretation and use of the word ‘povstanets’.

This difference took on practical ramifications when Chechens who had fled Russia, such as Akhmed Zakayev, were granted asylum in the EU. As a result, the disagreement evolved, since it widened the debate into contentious and politicised areas of the relationship – the West placed emphasis on Russian oppression and flawed legal processes, and the Russian authorities accused the West of double standards, harbouring terrorists and thus undermining the common anti-terrorist front.

At the same time, this has drawn attention to different approaches to countering terrorism. While the Russian authorities have attempted to increase economic and social measures to counter terrorism in the North Caucasus, the approach has retained a very robust security element. This could be defined as ‘catch and destroy’, which is at strong variance with the West’s more idealistic approach, particularly EU members, which could be described more in terms of attempts to ‘find and try’.

Although much of the focus in the West has been on Putin’s harsh approach to terrorists, Dmitri Medvedev was equally robust while he was president, asserting the need to ‘stamp out the scum with unflinching resolve’, and, when they were caught they were to be killed without hesitation or emotion. As president, he also introduced new legislation that meant that terrorists should not be tried by jury but by selected judges and that penalties for those associated with terrorists, ‘even those who cooked and cleaned for them’, should be toughened. This forceful approach has led both to widespread criticism from many quarters in the West about Russia’s human rights record (criticism rejected by Moscow) and meant that
Western states have had to be careful in advancing cooperation with Moscow, concerned that it might smack of endorsing these policies and methods.

A further complication is that if the Russian authorities accuse the West of double standards, there are also senior figures who accuse the West of not only of harbouring terrorists, but actively supporting them and even being terrorists themselves. Accusations focus on two levels. First, numerous senior Russian security personnel, including Putin himself, have asserted that the West has provided direct support for Chechen terrorists. Second, senior political and security service personnel suggest that this is part of a wider policy, and that the West’s war on terror is a tool for advancing US interests and keeping Russia focused on the North Caucasus rather than playing a wider international role. For Moscow, there is ambiguity in the position of the West. Although it pursues a war on terror, at the same time it has supplied weapons to rebel groups in Libya and Syria. Therefore, Moscow argues that the West is supporting its own enemy, since these rebel groups have links to Al Qaeda, and giving these groups such assistance destabilises international security and may facilitate the migration of the terrorist threat to Russia.

Finally, for Moscow, counter-terrorism is predominantly a Russian domestic question, focused on the terrorist activities emanating from the North Caucasus. This complicates and abbreviates cooperation because it links it to questions of Russian sovereignty: real cooperation might entail Western security services working with the Russian security services on Russian territory to resolve a Russian problem. As we have just seen, however, many of the senior Russian authorities involved believe that Western security forces aid and abet terrorism in Russia.

**Cyber security**

Cyber security is another example of diverging definitions and conceptions of apparently common challenges. In 2012, although the USA and the UK again sought cooperation with Russia and China on cyber security issues, a series of conceptual and linguistic problems have hampered cooperation. Although the language suggests superficial similarity, there are numerous differences in emphasis and approach, and they suggest that these gaps apply at several levels. At the highest conceptual level, there is no commonly agreed view of what constitutes cyber security – Russian and Chinese
doctrines and writing do not subscribe to the Euro-Atlantic consensus on the nature and future of cyberspace, and emphasise a very different set of security challenges. Moscow, for instance, has long adopted a wider approach to information security rather than the narrower Western focus on cyber issues.

Beneath this conceptual level, there are further differences. Keir Giles and William Hagestad point to fundamental incompatibilities in terminology, noting that in some cases, terms have no direct translation, and in others there are important discrepancies. In English, cyber warfare consists of cyber attacks that are authorised by state actors against the cyber infrastructure in conjunction with a government campaign. In Russian, combat actions in cyberspace are cyber actions carried out by states, or groups of states or organised political groups against cyber infrastructure that form part of a military campaign. As with the Cold War era understandings of ‘peace’ discussed above, the differences may appear slight, but the ramifications are significant. Consequences are two-fold – not only is progress in building cooperation hampered, but it contributes to the sense of dual history and divergent conclusions from the same evidence described above, illustrated by the cyber attack on Estonia in 2007.

‘Soft power’

One final example of divergence over apparently common vocabulary that has emerged recently is the distinction in understanding of ‘soft power’. This returns us to a higher level of how the West and Russia see international affairs more broadly – and, in a sense, although it may appear subtle, it represents the culmination of the three points outlined through this chapter: dual histories, differing conclusions from the same evidence and divergent definitions of apparently common language.

In the West, soft power is understood to mean the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants through attraction, rather than coercion or payment. Doing so, according to Joseph Nye, means ‘economising on carrots and sticks’. Soft power relies primarily on culture, political values and attractive foreign policies to persuade others to want what you want. For much of the post-Cold War era, most Western observers have focused on Russia’s use of the traditional tools of hard power and coercion and payment.

In 2013, however, Moscow published a new Foreign Policy Concept that stated the need for Russian diplomacy to increase its
use of soft power assets. But this evolution has taken place in the context of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, which has lent a very specific colour to the Russian understanding of what soft power is and how it is used. For Moscow, soft power represents Western interventionism as a destabilising force, part of a regime change or ‘Colour Revolution’ agenda: the Russian concept asserted the illegal use of Western soft power and human rights concepts to pressure sovereign states and intervene in their internal affairs to destabilise them by manipulating public opinion. Similarly, Moscow accused the USA of encouraging support for opposition parties in Russia at the time of the protest demonstrations in December 2011 and early 2012. Putin suggested that hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign money had been spent on influencing Russian domestic politics, and accused Hillary Clinton of giving the signal for activists to begin the demonstrations with the support of the USA.47

In short, if for the West soft power is a stabilising feature of international relations, since it minimises the need for force, for Moscow, soft power is different, and is about the need to engage in an information campaign, and provide state support both to promote Russian culture and language and to counter ‘soft attacks’ on Russia. For Moscow, soft power is a tool that can only be guided by the state (an interpretation not shared in the West) and is perhaps better defined, therefore, as ‘soft strength’.

The Crimea crisis and the war in Ukraine: compounding strategic dissonance

The war in Ukraine compounded and intensified the strong sense of dissonance between the West and Russia, weaving together these threads of mutual distrust, the divergent histories and different conclusions from the same evidence, the conflicting views of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture and the role of NATO (and EU) enlargement, and the use of soft power, information and propaganda. Many of the old themes returned to the fore: the question of NATO’s non-enlargement promise, for instance, and, as discussed in Chapter 1, the debate about a ‘new Cold War’, with many comparing Putin not just to Stalin, suggesting that he sought to rebuild the USSR, but to Hitler and late 1930s Nazi Germany.

Often referred to as the Ukraine ‘crisis’, a turning point or sudden change, and a decisive moment, it was more accurately a ‘paroxysm’ – an episode of increased acuteness or severity, a sudden
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worsening of the symptoms. Indeed, the compounded intensity of the paroxysm reflected the most serious deterioration in the West’s relations with Russia for many years, much deeper and more prolonged than even the effects of the Russo-Georgia War.

There is much to be said about the war, but three important points stand out for mention here. First is the difference in how the events in Ukraine were understood in Western capitals and in Moscow – and who was to blame for them. It is perhaps the most pronounced example of the drawing of different conclusions from the same body of evidence. As one experienced Western observer remarked, even the start date of the war is disputed: for the West, the war began with the Russian occupation of Crimea in February. In Moscow, however, those who followed military affairs would argue that because the Ukrainian troops in Crimea did not fire back, it was not a war – and that the war began with Kyiv’s ‘anti-terrorist operation’ against the separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk.

But, importantly, it also showed an increasing divergence, as the two sides began to draw different conclusions from different bodies of evidence about the same developments. The situation might be said, therefore, to have evolved from ‘dual histories’ to ‘duelling histories’.

Differences emerged on almost every issue, including over the nature of the end of the Yanukovich regime – with Western emphasis on a democratic upheaval against corrupt leadership, and Moscow asserting a US-backed, unconstitutional coup, about the role of and number of fascists in Ukrainian politics, about the referendum in Crimea and about the shooting down of flight MH17, and about the roles of Ukrainian forces. The differences reflected the point that Western capitals and Moscow were drawing on separate narratives – the West seeing it as an extension of the post-Cold War democratic transition and Moscow seeing it as a new wrinkle in the Western-generated ‘Colour Revolutions’ and instability. This is related to the confusion caused by the term ‘hybrid’ warfare: many in the West suggested that Moscow’s actions in Ukraine reflected a new form of Russian warfare, one largely invented by Chief of General Staff Valeriy Gerasimov. This caused some confusion in Moscow, where ‘hybrid’ warfare was seen as a response to new Western forms of conflict understood as ‘war by humanitarian intervention’ or ‘war by Colour Revolution’, as illustrated by the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ and now being deployed in Ukraine by the USA.
These differences were also evident in regular mutual accusations of lying, exchanges of ‘fact sheets’, and assertions of each side living in different realities. Angela Merkel, for instance, was cited in the German newspaper as having wondered whether Putin was ‘no longer in touch with reality’, for instance, and Vitaliy Churkin, Russian Ambassador to the UN, suggested that Western powers ‘distorted reality’.50

Second, and building on this, the war has had a significant practical impact on relations. Important aspects of the institutional framework have been suspended: Russia’s participation in the G8, for instance, as has the work of the NRC. The negotiations for Russia’s accession to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), begun in 2007, were suspended in March 2014, and the Council of Europe voted to have the Russian delegation suspended from the Parliamentary Assembly – after which there has been prolonged discussion about whether Russia would remain in the Council.51

Moreover, the two sides have begun to accuse the other of undermining the post-Cold War international order. NATO (and some of its member states) have asserted that in annexing Crimea and intervening in eastern Ukraine, Russia is undermining the post-Cold War European security order. Russia, for its part, has asserted that the USA and NATO have been a destabilising force in international affairs, citing interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now Ukraine.

This has led to a range of practical responses by each side. The reciprocal imposition of sanctions has significantly affected the scale of business and economic cooperation. And the build-up of NATO has emphasised that Russia poses a challenge to some of its members and implemented measures designed to provide reassurance – including the Readiness Action Plan and a significantly increased schedule of exercises.

Third, the combination of these effects has accelerated mutual concerns about the ‘soft power’ interference of the other. Some in the West have suggested that Russian military actions in Ukraine were a response to Putin’s declining popularity – that the protest demonstrations in Russia in 2011 reflected this decline, and that, combined with the economic slowdown, the Russian president had become vulnerable. The annexation of Crimea reversed this, as Putin’s popularity rose to over 80 per cent: thus some suggested that Russia might repeat such operations in response to any future waning of support for Putin or in response to internal trouble within...
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Russia. The protest demonstrations and the extent of decline of popular support for Putin will be addressed in the next chapter, but it is important to note that there is considerable concern in the West about possible Russian interference in the Baltic states, about Moscow inciting ethnic Russian minorities there to destabilise the states and challenge NATO’s defence commitments. At the same time, Moscow’s interpretation of events in Ukraine and the imposition by the USA and EU of sanctions have accelerated concerns in the Russian leadership about an attempt by the USA to use public organisations, NGOs and other politicised organisations to ‘destabilise the internal situation’ in Russia and ‘planning actions’ for the electoral 2016–2018 cycle.

The war in Ukraine provoked a serious deterioration in relations between the West (particularly the USA, NATO and the EU) and Russia, therefore, and is a serious problem in its own right. But it is a symptom of the wider strategic dissonance: fundamental differences in understandings of, and interests in Euro-Atlantic security have become ever more evident, relating to the post-Cold War European architecture and the question of the indivisibility of Euro-Atlantic security, and the nature of Russia’s representation in it. This is a deep division in how European security and the roles of NATO, the EU, the OSCE and Russia are understood by the various actors, and is at the heart of most of the current and likely future problems in European security, from the war in Ukraine to arms control, unresolved conflicts and ballistic missile defence.

Although the war has dominated attention, the problem of missile defence has long simmered, is not resolved and may re-emerge to compound the problems still further. Again, important misinterpretations abound on both sides: the USA has long insisted that the programme poses no threat to Russia, and Moscow has long rejected this. Underlying this is the gap in messaging: what looks from the US side like flexibility for the programme to develop in accordance with an evolving threat, to Russia seems inconsistent, unpredictable and destabilising.

The effects of the war in Ukraine are more profound not only because of the suspension of cooperation, but because the room for manoeuvre for resuscitating relations is more limited than on previous occasions. If, as discussed above, in the past crises have led to greater development in the relationship, it is more difficult in 2015 to see how a ‘reset’ could be implemented and to what end. Mutual trust has reached a very low ebb, and the agenda for practical cooperation appears limited, while the scope for further
differences, whether over missile defence or over elections in Russia in 2016 and 2018, is considerable. Equally, there are increasingly obvious and important differences in values. The attempts to create a ‘strategic partnership’ ground to a halt in the mid 2000s, and a ‘values gap’ became increasingly pronounced between the West and Russia over the nature of democracy, particularly in terms of human rights and the role of the state in society.

The idea of a values gap, however, no longer illustrates what is an increasing tangible sense of friction between the more liberal values of what might be termed ‘EU Europe’, and the more conservative values that Russia appears to advocate. Putin stated in 2013 that Euro-Atlantic countries are ‘rejecting their roots, including the Christian values that constitute the roots of Western civilisation’, and ‘denying moral principles and all traditional entities’, and are ‘aggressively trying to export this model all over the world’, ‘taking a direct path to degradation and primitivism resulting in a profound demographic and moral crisis’. This increasing friction, illustrated by the war in Ukraine, has given rise to a sense of competition between the West and Russia. In many ways, therefore, Russia has moved from being ‘a part of Europe to a Europe apart’.

Notes

3 Correspondence with Jacob Kipp, May 2015.
4 ‘Speech at meeting with German political, parliamentary and civic leaders’ (5 June 2008), http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/06/05/2203_type82912type82914type84779_202153.shtml.
6 S. Lavrov, ‘Remarks at MGIMO University’ (1 September 2009), www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/A91BB143AE7FD9CCC325762600393FE0.
The author is grateful to Dov Lynch for a series of exchanges about ‘dissonance’ between Russia and the West. V. Baranovsky, ‘Russia: a part of Europe or apart from Europe?’, *International Affairs*, 76:3 (2000), pp. 443–458; T. Casier and K. Malfliet (eds), *Is Russia a European Power? The Position of Russia in a New Europe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), and the debate between Jonathan Haslam and William Odom about Russia’s reintegration into the West, whether it was a place delayed, a place denied, or too many places at the table. J. Haslam, ‘Russia’s seat at the table: a place delayed or a place denied?’, *International Affairs*, 74:1 (1998); W. Odom, ‘Russia’s several seats at the table’, *International Affairs*, 74:4 (1998).

The Four Common Spaces are: the Common Economic Space, the Common Space for Freedom, Security and Justice, the Common Space of External Security, and the Common Space of Research and Education, including cultural issues. www.eeas.europa.eu/russia/common_spaces/.


On this important but forgotten episode and the positive impact it had on UK–Russia relations, see I. Riches, ‘Saving the AS-28’, in A. Monaghan (ed.), *The UK and Russia – a Troubled Relationship. Part I*, Russian Series 7/17 (Swindon: Defence Academy of the UK, 2007).

NATO’s relations with Russia, NATO (3 December 2013), www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm.


Readers will have their preferred crises or disagreements, but may note the absence from the discussion here of wider issues such as Russian activity in the former Soviet space often described by Western observers and officials as ‘neo-imperial’ or attempts to ‘recreate the USSR’, or more specific ones such as the ‘spy rock’ scandal that affected UK–Russia relations in 2006 and the cyber attack on Estonia in 2007. Each of these episodes represents a complex and contentious knot of issues, many of which have long roots. The list sketched out here seeks only to illustrate that numerous problems old and new came to roost in a comparatively short period to generate dissonance.


25 At its summit in Bucharest in 2008, NATO declared that both Georgia and Ukraine would join the Alliance, albeit at an unspecified later date.


27 Zatuliveter was exonerated by the Special Immigration Appeals Commission in November 2011.


29 ‘Russia restarts Cold War patrols’, *BBC News* (17 August 2007), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6950986.stm. Putin did not mention, however, that one of the reasons for Moscow’s unilateral decision to stop flying in 1992 was a lack of fuel.


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36 In one lecture, for instance, Lavrov stated that ‘the existence of NATO has become a problem for all’. Remarks at MGIMO University.’


42 This section draws on A. Monaghan, The Moscow Metro Bombings and Terrorism in Russia, NDC Research Paper No. 59 (June 2010), www.ndc.nato.int/research/series.php?icode=1.

43 Another ambiguity lies in how Moscow sees NATO’s role in Afghanistan: while NATO’s presence is in some respects positive since it saves Russia having to fight terrorism there, Moscow has opposed a more permanent NATO presence in Central Asia.


48 Correspondence with Jacob Kipp, May 2015.


51 ‘Russia delegation suspended from Council of Europe over Crimea’, Guardian (10 April 2014).


54 This point is owed to Keir Giles. Correspondence with the author, September 2013.