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The Failed Western Challenge to Russia's Revival in Eurasia

Roger E. Kanet
University of Miami

Research of the Program in Arms Control,
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roger E. Kanet is Professor in the Department of Political Science of the University of Miami, where he served as Dean of the School of International Studies 1997–2000 and a member of the Department of International Studies 1997-2014. Prior to 1997, he taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he was a member of the Department of Political Science and served as Head of that Department, 1984–87, and as Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Director of International Programs and Studies (1989–97). He is also a Faculty Affiliate of ACDIS. He has authored more than two hundred scholarly articles and book chapters and edited or coedited thirty books, including [with Rémi Piet), *Shifting Priorities in Russia’s Foreign and Security Policy*. 2014; (with Maria Raquel Freire), *Guest Editors, Russia in the New International Order. A special issue of International Politics*, vol. 49, no. 4 (July 2012); (with Maria Raquel Freire), *Russia and Its Near Neighbours*, 2012; (with Maria Raquel Freire), *Competing for Influence: the EU and Russia in post-Soviet Eurasia*, 2012; (with Maria Raquel Freire), *Russia and European Security*, 2012; (with Maria Raquel Freire); *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-first Century*, 2010; *Key Players and Regional Dynamics in Eurasia*, 2010; *The United States and Europe in a Changing World*, 2009; *A Resurgent Russia and the West: The European Union, NATO and Beyond*, 2009; (with Edward A. Kolodziej) *From Superpower to Besieged Global Power: Restoring World Order after the Failure of the Bush Doctrine*, 2008; *Identities, Nations and Politics after Communism*, 2008; *Russia: Re-Emerging Great Power*, 2007; *The New Security Environment: The Impact on Russia, Central and Eastern Europe*, 2005. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, New York.

The Failed Western Challenge to Russia's Revival in Eurasia¹

Roger E. Kanet, University of Miami

An important aspect of U.S. policy toward the Russian Federation in the years following the implosion of the Soviet Union was the generally unstated effort to contain the new Russia and ensure that it could not successfully re-impose its influence across former Soviet space.² In some respects, as the Eastern policy of the European Union evolved after 1991, it also included elements of what, from the perspective of Moscow, were seen as efforts to expand its influence over areas that Moscow viewed as the legitimate sphere of Russian influence.³ Initially Moscow facilitated this process by virtually ignoring what was then termed the “near abroad” and focusing its foreign policy interests on gaining acceptance by the West and integration into the community of “civilized nations”.

More than two decades later the situation has changed dramatically. Already by the middle of the 1990s, the dominant political elites in Moscow revived their interest in their new neighbors. The entrance onto the political scene of Vladimir Putin at the turn of the century resulted in a commitment to reassert Russia's greatness as a regional, even global, power and to begin that process by reestablishing what Bertil Nygren has called “Greater Russia” (Nygren, 2008). At the same time, the West proceeded with its efforts to limit the reassertion of Russian influence with a variety of policies beginning with NATO and EU incorporation of former communist states, including former Soviet Baltic republics, and the establishment of special relationships with other former Soviet republics via NATO's Partnership for Peace Program and the Eastern Neighborhood policy of the European Union.

As the leadership under Putin succeeded in revitalizing both the Russian economic and the political system, it came increasingly into conflict with the United States and the European Union. Western refusal to respond as Russia wished about its

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at the Workshop “Actors, Processes and Architecture in the Contemporary Eurasian Order: Political, Economic and Security Challenges,” at the annual conference of the International Studies Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 25 March 2014. The author wishes to express his sincere appreciation for critical comments provided by Andrei Tsygankov and by Bertil Nygren, as well as by the participants in the workshop. A shorter version of the article is scheduled to appear in *International Politics*, no. 5 (2015). The views expressed here are those of the author and not those of ACDIS.

² Writing in the first year of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Stephen F. Cohen (2000) developed a similar argument, when he noted that throughout the 1990s the United States pursued a confrontational approach toward Russia aimed at taking advantage of Russia's weakness. The result -- in his view -- was counterproductive. The policy contributed to Russia's growing hostility toward the West -- although, no doubt, it did not cause that hostility. Cohen continues to voice his concern about Russia-bashing in the U.S. media and its impact on U.S.-Russian relations, but more recently has almost gone to the point of excusing Mr. Putin for his many heinous acts (Cohen, 2014). For a similar assessment based on a different theoretical framework see Mearsheimer (2014).

³ In a recent study Stephen L. White and Valentina Feklyunina (2014) demonstrate the European Union's persistent view of its moral superiority and the tutorial relationship with Russia and other post-Soviet states.

criticisms of NATO expansion, Western intervention in former Yugoslavia and a U.S. anti-ballistic-missile system, along with criticism of the suppression of human rights, especially in Chechnya, began to sour the relationship already in the 1990s. Later, EU and U.S. support for the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005 was followed by largely successful Russian efforts to undercut democratization processes in post-Soviet areas, including in Russia itself. This conflict seemingly peaked in August 2008, when Russian troops entered Georgia to make clear – to the Georgians, the Ukrainians, the Americans and NATO, among others – that further NATO expansion eastward was simply not acceptable and that Russia could and would act forcefully to prevent it. The current disastrous situation in Ukraine results, among other causes, from the divisions in that country over the path to be pursued in the future – that of closer ties with the EU or of integration with Mr. Putin’s project of creating a Eurasian Union centered on Moscow. The Russians have responded, much as they did in Georgia, by taking forceful action whose long-term negative consequences for themselves, they are convinced, they will be able to weather, given the weak and disunited responses of the Western states,

As reprehensible as many aspects of Russian policy might be, both domestic and foreign,⁴ the West has contributed to the increasingly hostile relationship ever since the Soviet collapse by ignoring Russian policy concerns and attempting to take advantage of Russian weakness – both charges brought by Russia that have a basis in reality. In some respects, at least, Russian security paranoia has been stimulated by various Western behaviors.⁵

The purpose of the present paper is both to track the developments in Russian relations with the West over the past two decades and to determine the impact that the initial Western policy of containment, including expansion eastward, had in feeding the nationalist surge that has emerged in Russia and now flourishes in the rebuilding of an increasingly authoritarian state committed to reasserting its dominance throughout Eurasia and even on a broader world stage. The analysis will be developed under seven broad headings: 1) the collapse of the USSR and Russia’s flirtation with the West, in parallel with initial US, NATO and EU policies of containment and expansion; 2) the shift in Moscow’s policies away from the West under both Yeltsin and Putin, followed by the economic and political revival of Russia; 3) growing Russian hostility to the West’s support for the color revolutions and opposition to the EU’s Eastern Neighborhood policy; 4) US plans for further NATO expansion and the Russian military intervention in Georgia and, more recently, its role in the chaotic situation in Ukraine; 5) the Russian

⁴ I am referring to the increasingly authoritarian nature of domestic policy, the brutal use of energy dependency to bring neighboring states into line, the military intervention in Georgia, the seizure of Crimea, constant meddling in Eastern Ukraine, and a growing list of other behaviors, including threats to deport large numbers of workers from neighboring countries. The reader should note that the purpose of the article is not to evaluate the moral aspects of Russian or Western policy. It is, rather, to demonstrate the degree to which Western policy has influenced, or re-enforced, the direction of Russian policy.

⁵ It is important to note the growing importance of China, in particular in Central Asia, as a competitor for influence with Moscow. Even though the West may have lost out in its attempt to contain Russian influence across Eurasia, Moscow still faces an important challenge emanating from China, in particular in Central Asia, where some local elites have proven to be rather adept at setting the agenda for their relations with outside powers (see Herd, 2014; Sussex, 2014).

goal of establishing a Eurasian Union that is expected to provide it with the structures to dominate much of Eurasia both economically and politically; 6) an assessment of the general failure of Western efforts to contain Russia and to strengthen democratic and Western-oriented forces across the region and tie them closely to key Western institutions such as the EU and NATO; and 7) a concluding assessment of the “new normal” in Russian relations with the West, including Mr. Putin’s apparent willingness to destroy Ukraine as a unified state rather than accept its incorporation into Western economic and political institutions

1. Russia’s Turn to the West and the West’s Eastward Expansion

The collapse of the USSR in December 1991 brought with it a singular focus in Moscow among the liberal elites around President Yeltsin on improving relations with the West, integrating the Russian economy into the global economic system, and inducing the West to help with the rebuilding of the Russian economy. The newly-independent states of the Commonwealth of Independent States virtually dropped out of Moscow’s view. The major exception was Russian involvement in secessionist movements across the “near abroad,” from Moldova to the Transcaucasus (Kozhemiakin and Kanet, 1995), presumably to enhance Moscow’s bargaining power in relations with the titular nations that had just gained sovereignty.

It was during this period of two or three years that Foreign Minister Kozyrev and President Yeltsin emphasized the importance of Russia’s effort at integration into the global economy, of collaboration with and support for Western policy initiatives – such as the then recent U.S.-led military intervention against Iraq and facilitating the U.S. initiative to dismantle Soviet-era nuclear weapons held by Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (Stent, 2014, pp. 9-10). Almost immediately, however, voices arose in Russia, including within the more liberal segment of the political elite, charging that Yeltsin had sold out Russia’s interests and gotten nothing in return. The expected development assistance from the West was slow in coming, and both the European Union and NATO were signaling plans to expand eastward into former Soviet-dominated areas. Russia, Yeltsin’s critics charged, had received nothing for the major concessions that it had granted under both Soviet President Gorbachev and Yeltsin himself, including the withdrawal of its forces from Central Europe, the reunification of Germany within NATO, etc.

Beginning about 1995 Russian policy shifted in a more nationalistic and assertive direction as the first indications appeared of what the Russians now charge was the West’s taking advantage of Russia’s weakness.⁶ First, and no doubt of greatest importance, was the decision to reinvent NATO, rather than to shut it down after the end of the cold war, and to incorporate post-communist states into its fold, thereby moving NATO closer, and eventually up to, Russian borders. Among the dominant Russian security elites this expansion of NATO provided clear evidence of evil intent.⁷

⁶ Alexander Voloshin, a key figure in the administrations of both President Yeltsin and President Putin, noted the ways in which the United States ignored or attempted to undercut Russia’s position with its neighbors (cited in Jack, 2004, p. 290).

⁷ The overwhelming majority of the political elite and the general population in the Central European and Baltic states wanted to join NATO as a hedge against a possible future assertive Russia, as was clear from the parliamentary debates in those countries that preceded membership (Mattox and Rachwald, 2001). But

Associated with this policy was the establishment of NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which, besides socializing and preparing Central European military establishments for entry into NATO, also provided the United States with access to and influence over the post-Soviet militaries and their governments in Eurasia. Twenty years later this broad set of issues remains one of the central sources of friction between Moscow and the West.

The Western refusal to respond to Russian protests about NATO expansion,⁸ military intervention in Yugoslavia and related actions was based, in part at least, on the general view in the West that NATO expansion was not targeted against Russia, as those in Moscow should understand. It was based, as well, on a consensus that Russia was no longer a major power and, thus, its views could be ignored with relative impunity, since it was in no position to back up its complaints with meaningful action (Kanet and Ibryamova, 2001; Kanet, 2010a). This Western downplaying of Russia's place in the international system directly challenged the sense of honor and status that, in the view of Andrei Tsygankov and others, lies at the very heart of Russian foreign policy.⁹ Western behavior fed Russian nationalist paranoia, a paranoia that Vladimir Putin has done much to expand and effectively manipulate (Umland, 2015). Besides the extension of NATO and EU influence into former Soviet space in the 1990s the West pursued other policies based on the extension of views and concerns that had their roots in the cold war, including the commitment to ensuring that the Russian Federation not be in a position to reassert its dominance across former Soviet space. The Partnership for Peace was an important instrument in this effort, as was the U.S. attempt to push for the development of energy pipelines – e.g., the now defunct Nabucco gas pipeline – from Central Asia to Europe that would avoid Russian territory, thereby enhancing the independence of the new states of Central Asia vis-à-vis Russia, and limiting Russia's ability to control the flow of energy to Europe for political purposes.¹⁰ Initially, at least, the leaders in Central Asia found that expanding ties with the United States were a means to strengthen their hand in bargaining with Moscow. But, the conditions placed on cordial relations with the United States – e.g., those concerning human rights and political competition in the domestic political system – soon brought the United States into conflict with local leaders.

Long before the shift in power in Moscow from Yeltsin to Putin, the honeymoon period in Russian-Western relations had come to an end. The West was committed to pushing Russia, and the other post-Soviet states, in the direction of democratic political systems and capitalist economic institutions that would be fully integrated into existing Western institutions. President Putin and his supporters in Moscow were increasingly

the issue before us is not local preferences, but the perceptions of the political elite in Moscow, who saw the region as their sphere of influence and the extension of NATO (and EU) membership as an unwarranted incursion.

⁸ According to former Russian Prime Minister Primakov, "Our conversations with [U.S. Secretary of State] Warren Christopher left no doubts that they decided not to pay any attention to us as far as NATO enlargement was concerned" (Primakov, 2004, p. 242). For a careful assessment of this issue see the discussion of former U.S. ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock, Jr. (2014).

⁹ Tsygankov (2014) summarizes this argument in a recent article and presents it more fully in his broad historical overview of Russian foreign policy (Tsygankov, 2012). Regina Heller (2012) and Dina Moulioukova and Kanet (2015, in press) develop similar arguments.

¹⁰ These arguments are presented more fully in Kanet (2010b).

committed to a nationalist agenda that would reestablish Russia's dominant role in its near neighborhood and equality in the international system.¹¹ These two policy orientations came into increasing conflict after Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency on the last day of the twentieth century.

2. The Revival of Russia and the Growing Russian Challenge to the West

By the time that Putin took office as acting president at the end of 1999 the Russian political and economic systems had bottomed out and were just beginning to recover. The new president announced that his central goal was to reestablish Russia's regional dominance and its global importance. Essential preconditions for accomplishing these objectives, as noted in Putin's first "Foreign Policy Concept" (2000), included the internal political stability and economic viability of Russia.¹²

Using increasingly coercive means, President Putin was able to re-impose central control over the territory of the Russian Federation. Republic-level governors, many of whom had been elected, were now appointed directly by the president; political dissent was squelched and his opponents ran the risk of imprisonment or worse.¹³ Putin's success in dealing with the major domestic problems challenging the Russian state at the turn of the millennium meant that Russia increasingly faced Europe and the United States from a position of vastly increased strength. Besides rebuilding the foundations of the Russian state, at great cost to political liberty and democracy, as a precondition for Russia's ability to reassert itself as a major power, Putin and his associates benefited greatly from the exponential rise in global demand for gas and oil – at least until the global financial meltdown in fall 2008 – and the ensuing revitalization of the Russian economy. This, in turn, contributed to Russia's ability to pursue a much more active and assertive foreign policy.¹⁴ This assertive foreign policy with its nationalist rhetoric, in turn, has proven to be an important factor in maintaining Putin's popularity and in generating support for his repressive domestic policies.

In the foreign policy realm Putin sought allies who shared Russia's commitment to preventing the global dominance of the United States that represents, in the words of the *Foreign Policy Concept* (2000), a threat to international security and to Russia's goal of serving as a major center of influence in a multipolar world. Until the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, there was little evidence that the disagreements dividing Russia and the United States during the 1990s would be resolved soon – in particular since they derived from core elements of their respective foreign policy commitments. Immediately after George W. Bush entered the Oval Office in

¹¹ As Karen Dawisha (2014) demonstrates, analysts who have interpreted Russia as a failing democracy were wrong. Rather, at least after the rise of Mr. Putin, the goal of the new leadership was that of establishing what can only be termed a "competitive authoritarian" state (Levitsky and Way, 2010).

¹² For this set of objectives see, also, "Kontseptsiia natsional'noi bezopasnosti" (2000).

¹³ For example, numerous journalists, such as Anna Politkovskaya, were murdered and the billionaire owner of Lukos Oil Company, Mikhail Khodorkovsky was imprisoned in 2003 and his company confiscated after he challenged the politics of President Putin. Khodorkovsky was released from prison in late 2013, apparently as part of a public relations gesture in the run-up to the Sochi Olympic games (Oltermann and Walker, 2013).

¹⁴ However, the revived role of Russia as a regional and global political actor is based extensively on oil and gas production and exports, despite recent improvements in other aspects of the Russian economy. See, for example, Hancock (2007); McFaul and Stoner-Weiss, 2008); Menon and Motyl (2007).

Washington in early 2001, US-Russian relations reached their first post-cold war nadir. Bush expelled a group of Russian diplomats charged with espionage in spring 2001. This was followed by a tit-for-tat expulsion of Americans in Moscow. Over the first eight months of Bush's presidency relations deteriorated further, as the United States refused to consider signing the Kyoto Accords on the environment, announced that it would withdraw from the 1972 ABM treaty and would proceed with the development of an anti-ballistic missile system.¹⁵ It was at that point that the terrorist attacks occurred in New York and Washington.

In the immediate aftermath of these attacks President Putin offered Russian support to the United States in its initial response to the attacks. This initiative opened a brief period in which relations between the United States and Russia were generally cordial – more cordial than they had been in a number of years. The divisions that had characterized the policies of the two countries in the late 1990s continued to exist, but were overshadowed by the obvious areas of collaboration between the two governments – especially in the area of combating terrorism. Russia supported the U.S. military intervention against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, in part by facilitating U.S. access to air bases in Central Asia that proved to be essential in the U.S. carrying out of military operations in Afghanistan. However, by summer and fall of 2002,¹⁶ as the Bush Administration pushed for military intervention and regime change in Iraq, the relationship unraveled. In fact, Russia, along with key U.S. NATO allies France and Germany, comprised the core opposition within the UN Security Council to U.S. demands for direct military intervention against Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Putin's attempt to "reset" Russian relations with the United States in fall 2001 failed to achieve its primary objective of reestablishing Moscow's position as an equal in the international system. The United States under George W. Bush was unwilling to share policy-making authority or grant equal status to any other state, including the closest of its long-term allies. This was most obvious, when Washington eschewed the official involvement of NATO in Afghanistan, but noted that it was interested in other countries providing support of a bilateral nature where the United States would "call all the shots."¹⁷ From this point we can track the renewed deterioration of relations between Moscow and Washington – a deterioration that by early 2009, at the time of the transfer of presidential power to Barack Obama, had reached the level of confrontation on a variety of issues of central importance to the foreign policy of both countries. These issues concerned, first and foremost, the relative standing and role of the two countries in the international system. More specifically, however, they concerned Russia's lack of input in key global discussions about future security, the West's political, security, and economic encroachment in areas viewed in Moscow as Russia's legitimate sphere of influence, and the West's position on a whole series of developments. In sum, they concerned, more than virtually anything else, Russia's

¹⁵ George W. Bush brought into office with him neo-conservatives committed to restructuring the world according to a U.S. model and to America's benefit. The backing off from existing or new treaties was part of the effort to remove limitations on the U.S. freedom to act in world affairs (Kanet, 2005)

¹⁶ This decision was, apparently, a reversal of Moscow's original attempt to pressure the Central Asian leaders not to grant basing rights to the United States (Stent, 2014, p. 65)

¹⁷ For discussions of U.S. unilateralist policy, see Kanet (2005) and Kolodziej (2008).

standing in the international system and the conviction in Moscow that Russia's interests simply carried no weight in Washington, or in Brussels.

3. Russia, the Color Revolutions and the EU's Neighborhood Policy¹⁸

At the same time that Russia's relations with the United States collapsed, those with the European Union deteriorated, as well. Russian treatment of Chechen dissidents and Russian human rights policies more broadly had long been a problem, as the EU, the European Parliament and other European institutions berated the Putin government for its brutal behavior, as well as its increasingly coercive treatment of political opponents.

Added to this was the generally enthusiastic support that the European Union, and in particular, some of its newer members gave to the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan that challenged "established" political figures with close ties to Moscow. In a series of developments strongly supported by the West and by Western NGOs, Western-oriented and nominally democratic political forces came to power in several post-Soviet states – the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. In all three cases, peaceful demonstrations and Western support and encouragement played a central role in forcing authoritarian leaderships to relent and to step down from power.

What these cases had in common was the fact that those who came to power were committed, at least rhetorically, to the development of democratic political institutions and integration into European "clubs" such as NATO and the European Union. In Moscow, however, they were seen as part of the ongoing challenge to Russia's legitimate regional interests and to its efforts to reestablish itself as the dominant power throughout Eurasia. As then Prime Minister Putin has since noted, "As far as 'color revolutions' are concerned, I think that everything is clear. It is a well-tested scheme for destabilizing society. I do not think it appeared by itself We know the events of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. By the way, some of our opposition members were in Ukraine and officially worked as advisers to its then President Yushchenko. They are now transferring this practice to Russian soil in a natural manner" (Putin, 2011).¹⁹

Over the course of the next five years, or so, Russia successfully worked to reverse the impact of the color revolutions. Although defeat in the military confrontation with Russia in August 2008 did not bring down the government of Mikheil Saakashvili, plans for possible membership in NATO were put on indefinite hold. In Ukraine corruption and the deep divisions within the Orange coalition itself²⁰ greatly undermined the reform movement and facilitated the election in early 2010 of the Russian-oriented party supporting President Viktor Yanukovich. No doubt, the longstanding Russian economic pressures, including the gas wars of both 2006 and

¹⁸ See Stent's (2014, pp. 97-123) excellent treatment of the impact of the color revolutions, and other factors, on Russian relations with the United States and the West more broadly.

¹⁹ The assessment of Paul Craig Roberts, former U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy coincides with Putin's view that the color revolutions were manipulated, even organized, by the West (Samphir, 2014; Roberts, 2014).

²⁰ The struggle was between the two factions into which the Orange Revolution dissolved – one around Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko and her supporters and a second of former President Viktor Yushchenko and his backers ("Timoshenko's Rise," 2012).

2009, and substantial Russian financial support contributed to the electoral victory of the Russian-oriented forces in the country.²¹

With the changed balance of political forces in Kyiv after the presidential elections of January 2010, Russia was able to “normalize” its relations with Ukraine in ways that had been impossible earlier. Most important, Russia and Ukraine signed agreements that extended Russia’s lease on the naval base in Crimea by 25 years until the year 2042 in return for stable, long-term access to Russian natural gas at discounted prices. In effect, the election of President Yanukovich seemingly brought to an end the prospects for Ukraine’s entry into NATO and raised questions about the further integration of the Ukrainian economy with the European Union until the political confrontation of February 2014 brought down his government.

The overthrow of the Bakiyev government in Kyrgyzstan in spring 2010 ended the impact of the color revolutions in post-Soviet territory, although, in fact, little remained at that time of a commitment to democratization in Kyrgyzstan (Walberg, 2010).²² Although the three cases of color revolution evolved in quite different ways, in all of them Moscow found itself initially facing opposition to its plans for post-Soviet space and the possible challenge to the type of authoritarian political leadership with which it preferred to deal. The Kremlin employed a variety of means – economic blackmail, outright military intervention, offers of expanded economic assistance, and, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, probable support for a coup – in order to achieve its objectives of stopping what it viewed as Western efforts to consolidate influence in Russia’s sphere of influence.²³

The European Union’s Neighborhood policy, which emerged after the extension of membership to a large group of post-communist countries in 2004, was intended to prevent the creation of new boundaries in Europe by establishing special relations with countries in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean littoral that were not formally members of the EU itself. In envisaged close economic and political ties between the expanded European Union and its new neighbors and, in many respects, complemented the Western commitment to extending democratic and market economic institutions eastward. The EU has committed significant funding to support these initiatives. The Eastern Partnership, initiated in 2009 as a core part of the policy, was intended to focus on expanded relations with six post-Soviet states -- Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. But, increasingly the EU’s efforts came into conflict with and were challenged by Russia, which viewed EU policy as part of a coordinated Western effort to expand its influence, even control, into the areas of

²¹ On the factors involved in the “gas wars,” in particular the importance of honor and status, see Moulioukova and Kanet (2015, in press).

²² The U.S. position in Central Asia was tied, in part, to developments in Kyrgyzstan, since one of Russia’s objectives was the departure of the United States from air bases in the region. Immediately after 9/11, as part of his attempted *rapprochement* with the United States, President Putin had facilitated U.S. access to air bases in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to support the war effort in Afghanistan. The base in Uzbekistan was closed after the United States condemned President Karimov’s brutal crackdown on political dissidents in 2005. Later, when Moscow became concerned about the length of the U.S. stay in Kyrgyzstan and its longer-term impact, the Russians began pressuring the Kyrgyz government to close the base there. For a discussion of these issues, as well as the broader context of U.S. policy in Central Asia, see Kanet (2010c),

²³ For a recent discussion of Russian-EU relations see Nitoiu (2014). On Russian policy toward its near neighbors see Humphrey (2009) and Adomeit (2011). On resistance to color revolutions see Polese and Ó Beachán (2011). On the argument that the West *de facto* manipulated the revolutions see Roberts (2014) and Samphir (2014). On the role of Poland in supporting democratic elements in Ukraine see Petrova (2014).

Russia's "privileged interest," as then President Medvedev put the matter when justifying Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 (Medvedev, 2008a).²⁴

In addition to differences between Russia and the Europeans over their overlapping neighborhoods, a number of specific issues soured relations even before the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008. When the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the Russian Federation, signed originally in 1994, came up for renewal more than a decade later, Poland and Lithuania used their *de facto* veto power within the EU to prevent for more than a year and a half the negotiation of a new partnership agreement between the EU and Russia. At a joint meeting between the EU and Russia in May 2007, these and other issues split the two sides and precluded any meaningful agreement on issues deemed important by each side.²⁵ Although negotiations on a new agreement resumed in 2008, no agreement has been reached seven years later.

Among the many other factors that have complicated the negotiations has been the growing criticism of many in the EU about the increasing dependence of members of the Union on Russian energy and the ability and the recent history of Russia's willingness to use such dependence to achieve political objectives. Even before the confrontations of 2014 concerning Ukraine this and other concerns about Russia have been voiced most strongly among new EU members. In fact, the expansion of EU membership into former communist Europe added appreciably to the complexities of the relationship between the organization and Russia (DeBardeleben, 2009, 2011).²⁶

4. The Russo-Ukrainian "Gas Wars," the Russo-Georgian War, and the 2014 Crisis in Ukraine

As we have already noted, the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008 represents an important indication of the level of confrontation that had evolved over time between the Russian Federation and the West, including both NATO and the European Union, as they competed for influence within post-Soviet space. By summer of 2008 the strains in Russian relations with the West were quite evident. Many of them had their roots in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition, the United States was pursuing a policy that, in effect, largely ignored Russia's interests, but at the same time was intended to constrain any Russian attempts to reestablish its former dominance across Eurasia.²⁷

²⁴ For an excellent analysis of the competitive relationship between the EU and Russia in their overlapping neighborhoods see Adomeit (2011). See, as well, the five chapters that comprise "Part I: Russia, the European Union and their Common Neighborhood" (Kanet and Freire, 2012, pp. 13-130), especially those by Casier (2012), Tolstrup (2012) and Fernandes (2012).

²⁵ Although specific issues between Poland and Lithuania on the one side and Russia on the other sparked their policies, these issues were directly related to a much broader concern among the new Central European members of the EU about the bullying tactics that Russia regularly used in its relations with its smaller neighboring states. As Russian analyst Fyodor Lukyanov (2007) pointed out at the time, "For a long while, Old Europe didn't want to deal with the problems of Poland's meat or Lithuania's oil supplies; it suggested that these countries should resolve their own conflicts with Russia."

²⁶ For a discussion of the evolution of Russian-EU relations see Kanet (2012).

²⁷ John Mearsheimer (2014) frames his assessment of U.S.-Russian relations in an explicitly neorealist perspective that focuses on the relative power position of the two countries. In both cases, as noted earlier, the interests of other small states and the moral aspects of Russian policy are not really in play in this

Added to this were the growing challenges, from Moscow's view, that both NATO and the European Union represented to Russia's European "neighborhood" with the extension of membership that had already occurred and the plans for continued NATO expansion to include both Georgia and Ukraine and the growing influence that the EU expected to play as part of its emerging Neighborhood Policy. Moreover, growing friction characterized Russia's bilateral relations with both Ukraine and Georgia. The result was a series of confrontations between Moscow and both Kyiv and Tbilisi.

The so-called gas wars of 2006 and 2009 had their roots in both economic and political factors. In both cases Russia announced that it planned to increase the subsidized price at which they supplied gas to Ukraine. The Ukrainians pleaded their inability to pay higher prices – as they had on various earlier occasions – and threatened to increase dramatically the transit costs for gas intended for Western markets. But, the political environment after the Orange Revolution was quite different from that earlier and Russia was not willing to continue the level of its subsidies to the Ukrainian economy. When the dispute was not resolved, Russia cut off gas intended for the Ukrainian market; the Ukrainians, in turn, began tapping the gas flowing through the transit pipelines intended for Central and West European markets. In the end the Russians cut all gas supplies in 2009, and many within the European Union suffered several very cold weeks at the height of winter.²⁸

The result was a major public relations loss for Russia which came across in Europe as an unreliable supplier of a crucial material. Yet, in this case, as in others, Russian policy was driven more by issues of status, respect and honor than commercial concerns.²⁹ The Russian leadership would simply not permit the Ukrainians to manipulate the situation. Even if the end result included economic losses for Russia, the image of Russia backing down or being manipulated was even more unacceptable.

There were similarities in the deteriorating relationship between Russia and Georgia. Ever since the breakup of the Soviet Union relations were tense, at best. Georgia under its first post-communist president refused to join the Commonwealth of Independent states until forced to do so as part of the cost of Russia's enforcing a ceasefire in the secessionist wars in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Over the next decade Russia largely imposed itself on Georgia until the Rose Revolution that brought a new leadership to Tbilisi, one led by President Mikheil Saakashvili that was committed to NATO membership and to close ties with the West. In the years leading up to the military conflict, the U.S, through the Partnership for Peace program, provided the Georgians with a shiny new army. By 2007 and 2008 President George W. Bush was pushing full NATO membership for Georgia, and for Ukraine – something that the Russians were not willing to tolerate. Added to all of this were the public commitments

analysis, since we are attempting to explain the factors that have driven Moscow's policies, not the interests or their legitimacy of the other post-communist and post-Soviet states.

²⁸ The brief scenario described here applies most fully to the events of 2009 and to a lesser extent those of 2006. For detailed analyses of both of the "gas wars" see Stern (2006) and Pirani, *et al.* (2009).

²⁹ This argument is developed in Moulioukova and Kanet (2015, in press).

and policies of Saakashvili aimed at reincorporating the secessionist regions, by force if necessary, and the strongly-stated Russian opposition to such an approach.³⁰

The Russian invasion into Georgia sent messages to a variety of recipients. To President Saakashvili and the Georgians, as well as to other post-Soviet states, including Ukraine, it demonstrated that Russia was indeed capable of and willing to use the resources necessary to accomplish its objectives. To the United States and NATO it made clear that Russia would not permit further movement eastward of the Western alliance system. To the EU and the European states it indicated that Russian interests must be taken into account. To an audience at home the war demonstrated the ability of Russia to protect its interests and to enforce its views of the future for post-Soviet space.³¹ To all the target audiences the message was that Russia indeed was back as the dominant regional power and as an important actor in the international system more broadly. In terms of the central issue of this article, it represented probably the major Russian challenge until then to Western efforts to establish stable, long-term influence in post-Soviet space.

The “reset” in U.S.-Russian relations initiated by the Obama Administration in 2009 had but limited impact. Russia and the U.S. did reach agreement on several issues of mutual concern – a new nuclear arms agreement was the central component. They also collaborated to a degree on the Iranian nuclear issue and the elimination of chemical weapons from Syria. But, overall, relations remained strained, until the crisis of 2013-14 over political developments in Ukraine, after which relations have been overwhelmingly negative, even hostile.

The issues surrounding the events in Ukraine since fall 2013 have been exceptionally complex. Going into fall 2013 it appeared that Moscow was going to win its struggle to attract Ukraine into its proposed Eurasian Union and, thus, forestall once and for all, its concern that Ukraine would tie itself to the European Union and, even, to NATO. A combination of Russian pressures on and financial promises to the new Ukrainian government elected in 2010 led to President Yanukovich’s announcement in November 2013 that Ukraine was going to forego further negotiations with the EU and pursue membership in the Russian-sponsored Eurasian Union. This immediately sparked Western-supported mass demonstrations in Kyiv that culminated by February 2014 in the *de facto* coup that brought down the corrupt Yanukovich government. Moscow immediately intervened, openly and surreptitiously, with the invasion of Crimea and its incorporation into the Russian state and widespread support for secessionist elements in eastern and southeastern Ukraine. Ukrainian elections in May 2014 brought to the presidency Petro Poroshenko, but much of Eastern Ukraine remains in rebellion and under the control of pro-Russian militias, joined and supported by Russians at the time of

³⁰ Bertil Nygren (2007) tracks the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations immediately after the Rose Revolution of 2003. For analyses of the conflict see, also, Nygren (2011), Forsberg and Seppo (2011), March (2012), and Dunlop (2012).

³¹ President Medvedev pointedly noted: “We really proved—including to those who sponsored the current regime in Georgia—that we are able to protect our citizens” (Medvedev, 2008b). First, and primarily, he was referring to the United States, which had been pushing Georgia’s membership in NATO, but also to Poland and other post-communist states, which had supported the Saakashvili government. In like vein, Prime Minister Putin also presented the Russian intervention in Georgia as a response to cold-war style provocations by the United States.

writing in early 2015. Whether or not Ukraine will continue to exist as a unified state – albeit minus Crimea and possibly the southeast – is under challenge. For the purposes of the argument of this article, which focuses on the ability of Russia to counter Western efforts to contain Russian influence, developments in Ukraine provide a mixed response. On the one hand, it is clear that Russia’s primary objective of stopping Western encroachment into areas of Russia’s “privileged interests” has been achieved, along with clear evidence that Russia will use the means at its disposal to protect those interests, including military intervention. It is clear, as well, that the West is not united on the issue of responding to Russia – on what its role in Europe should be or how the West should react to Russian behavior. So, recent developments in Ukraine support the argument that Russia has succeeded in challenging the efforts of the West to expand its role in post-Soviet space and to limit that of the Russian Federation.

As we shall argue in the next section, developments in Ukraine in 2014 and early 2015 also have a serious negative side for Russia, since Ukraine – whether a rump Ukraine or a revived state – is no longer a candidate for President Putin’s Eurasian Union, which has become the centerpiece of his effort to reestablish a “Greater Russia.”³² In this respect, the Ukrainian situation parallels that of Georgia,

5. The Eurasian Union: The Challenge to Western Influence in Eurasia

Over the course of the first decade of the new millennium Russia’s relations with the West continued to deteriorate. The underlying issue in most cases related to the Russian leadership’s demand for equality and respect, as well as the more concrete issue of Russia’s reestablishing its dominant position in post-Soviet space. This, in turn, was related to the consolidation of power by President Putin and his supporters and their use of international confrontation and growing Russian nationalism to generate support for the return of an authoritarian political system.

President Putin’s (2007) wide-ranging attack on the United States and the West at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 represents a watershed in Russian foreign policy. It announced that Russia was back as a major international actor and that Russia would no longer follow the lead of the West in pursuing its foreign and security policy interests. But, it also indicated that Russia saw itself as a pole in the international system separate from and in conflict with the West.

It is at roughly this time that Moscow also began to assert itself rhetorically in response to Western charges that it was corrupting or abandoning democracy.³³ The Russian response was the assertion that Russia was not bound by Western definitions of democracy and that, in fact, it was in the process of establishing a superior form of “sovereign democracy” that was characterized first and foremost by independence from external standards or influences. In other words, Russian democracy is *sui generis* and

³² The mass media and academic publications have been swamped with assessments of the developments. Many, if not most, are so constrained by pre-conceptions that there is, in effect, no agreement on the facts, not to speak of the meaning of the facts. Several examples of the quite different assessments can be found in the following sources: Golstein (2014) and Kramer (2014).

³³ As Dawisha (2014) argues, Putin and his team never intended to establish a democratic political system and those who saw Russia as a flawed democracy were simply incorrect.

will not be bound by any external criteria or rules.³⁴ But, more than a framework for political developments in Russia, “sovereign democracy” was presented as a model for other countries and a justification of the type of top-down management that Vladimir Putin has fashioned in Russia. For authoritarian or semi-authoritarian political leaders across Eurasia, the arguments underlying “sovereign democracy” have proven to be quite attractive.³⁵

In the wake of Russia’s invasion of Georgia and Moscow’s formal recognition of the breakaway republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, then President Dimitri Medvedev laid out the “principles” on which Russian policy was to be carried out. These principles included “protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be” and the claim that “there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests. These regions are home to countries with which we share special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbors” (Medvedev, 2008a). Given Russia’s policy of granting citizenship to large numbers of those living outside the Russian Federation, the first of these two principles *de facto* justifies intervention throughout most of former Soviet territory. The second calls for a sphere of Russian interest across Eurasia in which Russia has the right to protect its interests, including by economic coercion or military intervention.³⁶

By the end of 2008 all the pieces were in place for Russia’s “taking back” at least some of the area that it was contesting with the West. By then Russia had rebuilt its economy. It had effectively moved to strengthen the economic dependence of most of the post-Soviet states on Russia – primarily via energy dependence, including increasing Russian ownership of the energy infrastructure of these states (Nygren, 2008, 2012).³⁷ Presidents Putin and Medvedev had provided the rhetorical foundations on which to base the conflict by noting the threat to regional and global peace that the United States represented (Putin, 2007) and by emphasizing Russia’s legitimate role in the affairs of neighboring states (Medvedev, 2008a). The Foreign Policy Concept issued in 2008 focused on external, rather than internal, challenges to Russian security – with U.S. global dominance at the very top of the list. In line with the extensive discussion of “sovereign democracy” in Russia, the Concept stipulated that global competition was acquiring a civilizational dimension, which suggested competition between different value systems and development models within the framework of universal democratic and market economy principles. The new foreign policy concept maintained that the reaction to the prospect of loss by the historic West of its monopoly over global processes now found its expression, in particular, in the continued political and psychological policy of “containing Russia.” The document emphasizes throughout Russia’s

³⁴ For an extensive discussion of the concept, first used by Vladislav Surkov in 2006, and its place in Russian policy see Herd (2009).

³⁵ For a definition of what they term *competitive authoritarianism* and its place in post-Soviet states see Levitsky and Way (2010).

³⁶ Both of these arguments are central to the Russian justification for its military intervention in Crimea (Putin, 2014).

³⁷ Russia systemically took over the control of the pipeline infrastructure of Belarus as a means of dominating the latter’s economy (Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013). On the broad aspects of Russian energy policy see Ehrstedt and Vahtra (2008) and Nygren (2008).

independence and sovereignty as the foundation on which all of Moscow's relations with the outside world must be built ("Foreign Policy Concept," 2008).³⁸

Moscow had already demonstrated through the use of economic pressures that the it was quite willing to use its economic clout to achieve political goals. Finally, in Georgia it demonstrated that the use of military power was also an acceptable weapon in competing with the West for influence in the regions of "privileged Russian interest."

It is roughly at this time that Moscow began to push a variety of potential programs aimed at integrating more effectively post-Soviet space and, thus, reducing or expelling entirely Western involvement and influence. In addition to the call of Dimitri Medvedev for a Eurasian-wide security system, the Russians moved to develop closer economic and security ties among those members of the Commonwealth of Independent States that were willing to go this route or who succumbed to growing Russian pressures. At that time, this meant Belarus and Kazakhstan for economic integration and a slightly larger group of countries for security cooperation.

Although the Collective Security Treaty Organization was created by six post-Soviet states already in 1992, it only recently expanded its role into a military alliance among the six member states [Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan]³⁹ and overlaps with and collaborates with the Shanghai Treaty Organization, established in the mid-1990s as a means of facilitating cooperation in security-related activities between China and Russia and several Central Asian countries. Russia is clearly the dominant actor in the CSTO, which is now touted as part of the growing set of integrative projects that are tying together the peoples of the countries that emerged two decades ago out of the Soviet Union.

Probably more important for the future of relations across Eurasia are the various aspects of President Putin's vision of a Eurasian Union.⁴⁰ This represents Moscow's ongoing effort to knit together the disparate pieces that formerly comprised the Soviet Union and, thus, challenge what it views as Western efforts to undercut the position and role of Russia in former Soviet space. Drawing upon a proposal first made in 1994 by Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev, President Putin first broached the idea of an integration scheme for Eurasia based on the model of the European Union during his presidential election campaign in fall 2011. A month later Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus agreed to a framework for developing the Union over the course of the next several years. By summer and fall of 2013 the Russian president was engaged in an all-out effort to attract – or coerce – other Eurasian states to the view that their future lay with the Union and not with closer ties to the West or to a "go-it-alone" strategy.

For Moscow the EU's Eastern Partnership (Simão, 2013), which foresees a closer relationship between the EU and six East European and Caucasian states, is seen increasingly as the West's attempt to supplant Russian influence and to tie these countries

³⁸ For an extensive discussion of Russian criticisms of the United States and the West in general see Vladimir Shlapentokh (2008).

³⁹ Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan are former members. Ukraine, Turkmenistan, and Moldova have never been members of the CSTO.

⁴⁰ For quite different assessments of the Eurasian Union see Lomagin (2014) and Arakelyan (2014). See, also, Adomeit (2014). The Eurasian Union is intended to build on the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia that became operational on 1 January 2010.

into the Western orbit.⁴¹ In fall 2013, when the president of Armenia announced that Armenia would abandon its negotiations with the European Union, in order to pursue membership in the Eurasian Union, it was reported that Moscow had threatened to reduce its security support for Armenia in its ongoing conflict with Azerbaijan, deny work permits to the tens of thousands of Armenian citizens working in Russia, reduce the flow of subsidized energy to Armenia, and generally make economic life more difficult for the landlocked and beleaguered country (Peter, 2013). Similar pressures were reported in the discussions between Russia and Ukraine in the run-up to President Yanukovich's announcement in November 2013 that Ukraine also would opt for membership in the Eurasian Union rather than continue to pursue closer ties with the European Union (Walker, 2013).

Although the Russians present the Eurasian Union as the means to integrate and modernize the economies of the former Soviet republics, so that they can compete more effectively in the global economy (Lomagin, 2014), most Western analysts see the Eurasian Union primarily as a political tool for Moscow's re-imposition of control over as broad a swath of post-Soviet territory and people as possible (Adomeit, 2014). It represents a continuation of Putin's policy initiated more than a decade ago of rebuilding Greater Russia (Nygren, 2008) and undercutting the attempts of the European Union, NATO and the United States to expand their ties to former Soviet areas. Moreover, it is meant to ensure that challenges to the authoritarian and semi-authoritarian leaders in neighboring states will not succeed and, thus, influence potential Russian challengers to the system of top-down political management that now characterizes the Russian Federation.

The confrontation in Ukraine has meant that, although Russia has prevented Ukraine from pursuing membership in the European Union and/or NATO, it has also eliminated Ukraine as a realistic candidate for Eurasian Union membership.

6. The Western Challenge to Russian Domination in Eurasia: The Scorecard?

When I began writing this paper in early 2014, I was convinced that the evidence pointed decidedly in the direction that, in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the West had expected to be able to limit Russia's ability to reestablish its role in post-Soviet space, but that the Russian Federation had, indeed, met and successfully turned back the Western effort to challenge Russian domination in Eurasia. The evidence indicated that the West had already "lost" the competition with the Moscow for influence in Central Asia four or five years earlier – although the weakness of the Western position did not necessarily translate into Russian dominance in that region.⁴² Some local political elites have proven able to set the agenda and to establish a degree of autonomy in their relations with Russia (see, Kanet, 2010b, and Cooley, 2012).

⁴¹ The general approach that Russia has taken as it stumped for commitments to join the Union is the one outlined by Nygren (2008) -- i.e., the promise of economic rewards and, more important even, the threat of and application of economic punishment. In 2012, after Moldova noted its plans to pursue an agreement with the EU, Moscow cut off the import of Moldovan wine as a health threat, much as it had banned Polish meat imports a few years earlier after a political dispute with Warsaw (Emerson and Kostanyan, 2013).

⁴² I had also concluded that in the longer term Russia was likely to be outdistanced by the Chinese in Central Asia (Kanet, 2010b). See, also, recent analyses by Sussex (2014) and Herd (2014).

Although President Putin has experienced resistance to his proposal for a Eurasian Union, the decision by the Armenian president in fall 2013 to break off negotiations with the EU and join the Eurasian Union,⁴³ followed little more than a month later by President Yanukovich's similar announcement for Ukraine, seemed to put the matter at rest. Moscow's plan for an economically and politically reintegrated Eurasia under Russian leadership seemed well on the path to realization. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and also Ukraine, along with Russia, had all apparently 'signed on' to the plan. Yes, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan continued to resist Moscow's overtures and threats, and the route that Uzbekistan might take was not clear. But, with Ukraine in the fold, the likely success of creating the Eurasian project seemed enhanced – although its long-term impact in modernizing the economies of the member countries was by no means guaranteed.

That was the situation in mid-February 2014, despite the ongoing challenges to the Ukrainian president's announced decision to opt for closer ties with Russia and the Eurasian Union. Then came the unexpected events that toppled President Yanukovich, followed by *de facto* Russian military intervention in Crimea – complete with propaganda about a fascist takeover in Kyiv that threatened the security of ethnic Russians in Ukraine – and the decision to hold a referendum in Crimea about union with the Russian Federation followed by incorporation of the region into the Russian Federation

Let me return to the issues posed in the title of this paper. Did the West, much as Presidents Putin and Medvedev have charged, attempt to constrain or contain Russian influence in its "near abroad," and, if so, were they successful in their efforts? I believe that the answer to the first question is a definite "yes"⁴⁴ and that to the second is a resounding "no." Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union– the United States and the European Union have pursued policies aimed at drawing post-communist states, including former Soviet republics, into closer union with the West. One clear implication of that attempt has been to lessen Russia's influence and role in those countries. Putin's charge, however, completely ignores the fact that local populations were appealing to the West for such closer ties and for inclusion in Western political and economic institutions. This was true concerning those Central European and Baltic countries that joined NATO and the European Union. It was also true of those post-Soviet states that signed on to the Partnership for Peace to help strengthen their new status as sovereign states. So, although the answer is "yes" that the West did get involved in what Moscow views as its own neighborhood, there also existed an attraction on the part of important parts of the population in those areas for greater involvement and association with the West. It was Moscow's decision to pursue its own path, not integrating into the West that put it at odds with the West.

In many respects, once the Russians had rebuilt their domestic economy and decided that focusing on reestablishing their dominant role in former Soviet space rather than integrating into Europe, they had clear advantages in competing with the West.

⁴³ Armenian membership was formalized in October 2014 ("Armenia Joins," 2014).

⁴⁴ That is, in fact, the central argument that John Mearsheimer makes in asserting that the West, more than Russia, is the cause of the current Ukraine crisis (Mearsheimer, 2014). Mearsheimer goes much further than the evidence warrants, however, in virtually whitewashing the policies of Russian president Putin. But, he is looking at the competitive relationship between two major powers in a neo-realist system, not raising questions about moral responsibility.

Most important was the economic and, especially, energy dependence of most of the other states on Russia – and Moscow’s willingness to use that dependence to its advantage. Only Azerbaijan, with its energy wealth – plus several resource-rich Central Asian states -- is in a position easily to resist Russian “invitations.” For countries such as Moldova and Georgia efforts to resist the Russian embrace and pursue stronger relations with the Europeans have continued and even expanded after Russian military intervention in Crimea (Secieru, 2014).⁴⁵ Another factor has been, as some of the leaders of Central Asia discovered, that support from the United States – as well as from the EU – came with conditions. Those conditions, which included support for human rights and a more open political system, might well carry a high price to pay for Western support. This factor played into the hands of Moscow, as the Russians recalibrated their relations with the countries of Central Asia.⁴⁶

Overall it appears by early 2015 that Russia has successfully warded off most of the Western attempt to tie a number of post-Soviet states more closely to the West. With the collapse of the Yanukovich government in Ukraine, the Russian military intervention in Crimea and its incorporation into the Russian Federation, and whatever else might occur in Russian-Ukrainian relations, the future of the East-West relationship, as well as of the Eurasian Union, is unclear. Although Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus officially signed an agreement in early June 2014 for the formal introduction of the Union on 1 January 2015 – and Armenia signed on four months later -- the prospects for Ukrainian membership have disappeared (“Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus Sign Treaty,” 2014). Moreover, at the same time NATO announced a package of military assistance to Ukraine meant to modernize the Ukrainian military (“NATO to Finalize Military Aid Package,” 2014) and has decided to upgrade NATO’s role and presence in Central Europe and the Baltics (De Luce, 2014). But, Ukraine’s entry into either NATO or the European Union in the near or medium term is also virtually impossible.⁴⁷

7. The “New Normal” in East-West Relations?

Predicting what is likely to occur over the near- or long-term future of the Russo-Ukrainian confrontation is virtually impossible – whether one focuses on Ukraine itself, or on Ukraine’s future relations with Russia and/or the West, or the implications that a changed Russian-Ukrainian relationship might have on Russia’s relations with other post-Soviet states and the proposed Eurasian Union. One thing is clear; namely, President Putin has decided to forge ahead with the creation of the Union without Ukrainian membership. Moreover, he has abandoned any pretention of patching up relations with the West – in part, because he is convinced that the West is so disunified that it cannot agree on any coordinated response.

Several things come across quite clearly: 1) as Karen Dawisha makes clear, Russia is not and has not been a failed or failing democracy but, rather, an increasingly consolidated authoritarian system; 2) confrontation with the West is a useful stimulant for

⁴⁵ Recent evidence indicates that the attraction of the EU has seriously waned in Moldova (Higgins, 2015).

⁴⁶ For an assessment of the U.S. position in Central Asia, as U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan nears, see (“Going, going...,” 2013).

⁴⁷ At the time of writing a second ceasefire has not yet taken hold; the United States is considering sending lethal weapons to Ukraine and the prospects for peace in Ukraine really seem no brighter than they have been for the past year.

the nationalism necessary to generate domestic support for that system; 3) the Russian leadership has abandoned any expectation of normalizing relations with the West in the foreseeable future.⁴⁸ Given the fact that Putin's policy is driven by power considerations, not economic or welfare issues, there is little that Putin and colleagues want that requires them to respond to Western policy concerns. Moreover, the West has few levers that it can use to pressure the Russians – current sanctions notwithstanding.

In fact, the energy dependence of the EU member countries on Russia makes them hostage to Moscow for the foreseeable future. In 2010 more than half of all energy consumed in the EU came from outside the Union, with a full one-third coming from Russia.⁴⁹ This is a very vulnerable position from which to operate, should the EU decide to put any kind of serious political or economic pressure on Russia. Just as important is the fact that the Ukrainian crisis has demonstrated the lack of unity within the EU and NATO communities on the issue of Russia and its policies in Eastern Europe.

The track record on Western efforts to use sanctions to influence Russian policy is not strong. In August 2008 the West raised a furor about Russian intervention in Georgia. Within months the continued presence of Russian troops on Georgian territory supporting secessionist governments had become the “new normal.”⁵⁰ By early 2015 Crimean incorporation into Russia and direct and indirect Russian meddling in eastern Ukraine appear to have become the next “new normal.”

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⁴⁸ The usually restrained Dimitri Trenin (2014) takes an almost apocalyptic view of the long-term implications of the current crisis between Russia and the West.

⁴⁹ “The origin of EU-27 energy imports has changed somewhat in recent years, as Russia has maintained its position as the main supplier of crude oil and natural gas and emerged as the leading supplier of hard coal (see Table 3). In 2010, some 34.5 % of the EU-27's imports of crude oil were from Russia...” (Eurostat, 2012).

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