

Reconsidering NATO expansion: a counterfactual analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s

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Abstract

This article re-examines the history of NATO's original post-Cold War enlargement to include the Visegrad states of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. It uses both published materials and the author's new interviews with key US and Russian policymakers, and employs robust qualitative counterfactual methods to ask two questions: whether there were any realistic alternatives to NATO enlargement, and whether NATO enlargement was responsible for the downturn in Russian relations with the West. It concludes that domestic politics were the dominant factors explaining policy directions on both the US and Russian sides; that NATO enlargement was probably inevitable given US domestic political factors and West European acquiescence; that Russia's turn against the West preceded the NATO expansion discussion in the US; that the tenor of the Russian turn is explained by status concerns rather than military threat perceptions, and that it was aggravated most by Western unilateral airstrikes rather than NATO's geographical enlargement; and that the one policy initiative that might have realistically slowed NATO enlargement if it had been adopted differently, Partnership for Peace, did not affect those Russian status concerns and thus could not have redirected the relationship.

Keywords

NATO; Russia; Counterfactual History; Status; Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy

Introduction

The enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to include more than a dozen new members since 1991 remains a major irritant in Russia's relations with the West. Russian President Vladimir Putin first raised complaints about NATO enlargement in an angry 2007 speech that shocked the annual Munich Security Conference,¹ and later tied Russia's annexation of Crimea to concerns about further NATO expansion.² In September 2014 Russia announced it was amending its military doctrine in part because of NATO enlargement,³ and in October 2016

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¹ 'Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy' (10 February 2007), available at: {http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml}.

² Office of the President of Russia, 'Address by President of the Russian Federation' (18 March 2014), available at: {<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>}; 'Direct Line with Vladimir Putin' (17 April 2014), available at: {<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034>}.

³ Mikhail Popov, Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council, quoted in 'Russia to Adjust Military Doctrine Due to NATO Expansion, Ukraine Crisis' RT (2 September 2014).

Putin called the deployment of NATO troops to Poland part of ‘a root change in the sphere of strategic stability’.⁴

The debate over whether NATO enlargement threatened Russia’s security has a long history in the Western policy community as well, beginning with Cold War diplomat George F. Kennan’s February 1997 statement that it was ‘the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era’.⁵ The argument gained new traction in 2014 when John J. Mearsheimer published two prominent articles that termed NATO enlargement and Russia’s fear that it would extend to Ukraine the ‘taproot’ of the current crisis between Russia and the United States.⁶ The question’s relevance has been deepened by a lively debate in the Western literature about whether NATO enlargement violated implicit or explicit promises made to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev or Russian President Boris Yeltsin, as Russians have long claimed.⁷ Yet former US ambassador to Russia Michael McFaul claims that in his eight years working for US President Barack Obama he never once heard Russian leaders complain about NATO enlargement.⁸

This study uses counterfactual methods to unpack and re-analyse NATO’s initial decision to enlarge. Rather than engage in idle speculation about unrealistic worlds with trajectories far different from our own (or what E. H. Carr memorably called ‘a parlour game with the might-have-beens of history’),⁹ it aspires to be a well-designed, historically informed study in the best tradition of recent high-quality qualitative counterfactual analysis.¹⁰ It focuses on two major questions: Was NATO’s enlargement inevitable, or were there other choices that had policy traction and a realistic chance of

⁴ The Kremlin, ‘V Gosdumu vnesen proekt zakona a priostanovlenii deistviia soglasheniia mezhdou Rossiei i SSHA ob utilizatii plutonia [In the Duma a Bill Was Introduced on Ceasing Activities of the Agreement between Russia and the USA on Plutonium Utilization]’ (3 October 2016), available at: {<http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/53009>}.

⁵ George F. Kennan, ‘A fateful error’, *New York Times* (5 February 1997). For a more recent argument on the same point, see Stephen M. Walt, ‘NATO Owes Putin a Big Thank-You’ (4 September 2014), available at: {www.ForeignPolicy.com}.

⁶ John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Getting Ukraine wrong’, *New York Times* (13 March 2014); John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Why the Ukraine crisis is the West’s fault’, *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2014).

⁷ See, for example, Kristina Spohr, ‘Precluded or precedent-setting? The “NATO enlargement question” in the triangular Bonn-Washington-Moscow diplomacy of 1990–1991’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14:4 (autumn 2012), pp. 4–54; Mary Elise Sarotte, ‘A broken promise? What the West really told Moscow about NATO expansion’, *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2014); Steven Pifer, ‘Did NATO Promise Not to Enlarge? Gorbachev Says “No”’, *Brookings Up Front* blog (6 November 2014); Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, ‘Deal or no deal? The end of the Cold War and the U.S. offer to limit NATO expansion’, *International Security*, 40:4 (spring 2016), pp. 7–44; and James Goldgeier, ‘Promises Made, Promises Broken? What Yeltsin Was Told About NATO in 1993 and Why It Matters’, *War on the Rocks* blog (12 July 2016).

⁸ Michael McFaul, ‘Faulty powers: Who started the Ukraine crisis?’, *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2014).

⁹ Cited, among many other places, in Philip E. Tetlock and Geoffrey Parker, ‘Counterfactual thought experiments: Why we can’t live without them and why we must learn to live with them’, in Philip E. Tetlock, Richard Ned Lebow, and Geoffrey Parker, *Unmaking the West: ‘What-If’ Scenarios that Rewrite World History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), p. 28.

¹⁰ For additional examples, see Philip E. Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Niall Ferguson, *Virtual History: Alternatives And Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Jeremy Black, *What If?: Counterfactualism and the Problem of History* (London: Social Affairs Unit, 2008); Richard Ned Lebow, *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); and Frank P. Harvey, *Explaining the Iraq War: Counterfactual Theory, Logic and Evidence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

being adopted in the West? And, if another choice had been made and NATO had not expanded to include the Visegrad states (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) in 1999, would Russia's relationship with the West have looked any different going forward?

It would be ideal to analyse the entire history of NATO enlargement, but space limitations prevent that here. And while some might argue that expansion to include the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania was the real problem for Russia, once NATO decided to admit any newly democratic state, it was virtually inevitable that these states – which the West had never recognised as Soviet possessions during the Cold War, which had undergone their own costly liberal democratic reforms, and which cooperated with Poland in lobbying efforts to get into NATO – would also be admitted. Russian analyst Andrei Kortunov argued in 1996 that by December 1994 it was already clear that the Baltics would be considered for NATO membership.¹¹ And as late as June 2002, Putin stated that NATO enlargement to include the Baltics was 'no tragedy', as long as no new military infrastructure was introduced.¹²

This study comes to three overarching conclusions. First, the primary cause of NATO enlargement was a confluence of domestic political forces inside the United States in the early 1990s. The views on NATO that emerged triumphant in the White House then gained bipartisan political dominance, probably until the 2015–16 presidential campaign of Donald J. Trump. Despite pitched internal opposition to the idea among many US defence and foreign policy experts, a few savvy policy entrepreneurs inside President Bill Clinton's Democratic White House were able to seize the agenda and run with it before those experts could marshal any pushback, especially as congressional Republicans goaded Clinton forward in the 1994 midterm electoral cycle. To imagine a different outcome for NATO would require removing the dominant personalities and politics of that time from history – and as is argued below, that kind of reimagining of the historical record is exactly what high-quality counterfactual analysis seeks to avoid. Second, there was one alternative policy, Partnership for Peace (PFP), which could have slowed the enlargement process if its advocates in the Clinton administration had done a better job of arguing for it earlier. But it remains unclear whether the hopes of PFP advocates were correct, that slowing the process down would have led to Russian acceptance of the Western-dominated new security order, because Russia's perception of its own status was meanwhile being slighted in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) through Western actions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq. Third, the underlying cause of Russian distrust and hostility toward the West was *not* NATO's geographical enlargement. While enlargement certainly aggravated the relationship, the core problem was located in Russian domestic politics: Russian nationalists and statistes opposed first to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and then to President Boris Yeltsin could not accept a diminished role for Russia in a Western-dominated liberal democratic world order, and their status concerns eventually dominated the Russian political space. Angry Russian nationalism first came to the fore when the Warsaw Pact and the USSR crumbled from internal weaknesses, threatening Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's hold on power, and requiring liberals in Russia to temper their policies years before NATO expansion was being considered. While NATO's geographical enlargement undoubtedly bolstered the nationalists' and statistes' fervour, the most irksome development for Russian politicians and military leaders was not NATO's geographical enlargement, but rather the enlargement of NATO's military mission and the use of

¹¹ Andrei Kortunov, 'NATO enlargement and Russia: In search of an adequate response', in David C. Haglund, *Will NATO Go East? The Debate over Enlarging the Atlantic Alliance* (Kingston: Queens's University Centre for International Relations, 1996), pp. 71–2.

¹² Marcus Warren, 'Putin lets NATO "recruit" in Baltic', *The Independent* (25 June 2002).

NATO airstrikes, with or without UNSC approval, in out-of-area operations. Russians knew their nuclear deterrent prevented those airstrikes from ever being used against them, but saw them as a symbol of Russia's declining global influence. Russia mourned its lost status more than it feared a new security danger, and no realistic alternative to NATO's geographic enlargement would have restored Russia's status in the system, especially given the expansion of NATO's mandates and the growth of US unilateralism.¹³

In sum, domestic political factors on both sides, and the confluence of domestic political power balances with domestically generated ideas, are what explain outcomes best. US domestic politics made NATO's geographic expansion inevitable by late 1994 – while Russian domestic politics made any Russian partnership with the West untenable as long as the West insisted on leading the new international security order, with or without NATO's geographic enlargement. In the words of leading Russian international relations analyst Dmitry Trenin, Russia 'cannot put up with the military dominance of the U.S. And this is the key difference of Russia from other countries.'¹⁴

The requirements of rigorous counterfactual analysis

The literature on qualitative methods of counterfactual analysis is small but growing,¹⁵ and scholars addressing the issue have largely come to agreement about what 'good' counterfactual methodology involves.¹⁶ They argue that almost any causal argument in the social sciences, especially one based on the logic of necessary conditions, contains an inherent counterfactual statement. If we claim that x caused y, then we must be able to imagine a world where x (NATO enlargement) did not exist, and therefore y (a fraught relationship between Russia and the West) did not happen.

The challenge is to develop counterfactual scenarios that are realistic, involving as little manipulation of history as possible. Imagined scenarios should be based on events that were likely to have occurred in the real world, and the most convincing counterfactuals arise when multiple realistic choices were truly available to (and considered by) powerful policymakers at the time that they made their decisions. Furthermore, deep structural processes cannot be wished away, and counterfactual alternatives are only plausible when different policy choices could reasonably have led to different

¹³ For examples of the extensive literature on status in international relations and Russian status concerns in particular, see Anne L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, 'Status seekers: Chinese and Russian responses to US primacy', *International Security*, 34:4 (spring 2010), pp. 63–93; T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge, 2014); and Regina Heller, Tuomas Forsberg, and Reinhard Wolf (special guest eds), 'Status and emotions in Russian foreign policy', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47:3–5, Special Issue (September–December 2014), pp. 261–363.

¹⁴ Pavel Koshkin, interview with Dmitry Trenin, 'What kind of Russia should the West fear?', *Russia Direct* (11 January 2017), available at: (<http://carnegie.ru/2017/01/11/what-kind-of-russia-should-west-fear-pub-67658>).

¹⁵ See, for example, the special 'Symposium on Counterfactual Analysis' in *Security Studies* 24:3 (autumn 2015).

¹⁶ Key writings include Tetlock and Belkin, 'Counterfactual thought experiments in world politics: Logical, methodological, and psychological perspectives', in Tetlock and Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, pp. 1–38; Tetlock and Parker, 'Counterfactual thought experiments', pp. 14–46; Levy, 'Counterfactuals and case studies'; and Levy, 'Counterfactuals, causal inference, and historical analysis'. See also Ian S. Lustick, 'Tetlock and counterfactuals: Saving methodological ambition from empirical findings', *Critical Review*, 22:4 (2010), pp. 427–47.

long-term outcomes.¹⁷ Otherwise decisions become small bits of noise in a powerful historical machine whose general direction was unalterable.¹⁸

Finding a tipping point – a well-defined event that caused history to move overwhelmingly in a particular direction, and where significant movement away from that historical momentum became unlikely – is crucial. Reasonable policy alternatives must be in play before that tipping point is reached for any alternative future to be realistically imagined. Philip E. Tetlock and Geoffrey Parker use the ‘Polya Urn game’ from probability theory to illustrate this. At the start of this exercise, a large urn is partially filled with a matched number of blue and red marbles. Each player removes a marble at random, and then replaces it with two marbles of that colour (symbolising a change in a random historical factor). At some point in the game one color becomes dominant, ‘rapidly transforming the improbable into the inevitable’.¹⁹ This is the tipping point.

At the same time, each opening move of the game, before the tipping point is reached, has a negligible effect on the outcome and is soon overcome by random chance, allowing any one subsequently changed factor to have a potentially huge impact on the outcome. (The idea that random interactions can have an unexpectedly large impact on final outcomes is a basic tenet of chaos theory, as well, which explains, for example, why the exact path of major weather systems always remains unpredictable until the last minute.) This has an additional implication: the more counterfactual items an analyst introduces into the story, the more increases in random variation are also introduced, and the less plausible any alternative outcome becomes.²⁰

We might enjoy imagining alternative worlds that bear no resemblance to our own, but that kind of counterfactual analysis cannot help us understand real-world causal processes. In addition, the strongest counterfactual scenarios reflect generalisable principles that lead to other observable predictions. Unless the counterfactual is grounded in clear causal theory, the number of potential alternative outcomes is infinite, since if scenarios are left to the creative license of the analyst, anything becomes possible.²¹

In the sections that follow, I will first summarise the real-world history of US and NATO decision-making on NATO enlargement. The initial push came not from the US and its allies, but instead from Central and East European (CEE) states who were desperate to get out of the Russian orbit. This means Russia had lost its regional status and influence *before* NATO began considering expansion. I will then focus on identifying the tipping point, the time at which the enlargement decision reached sufficient momentum that there was no going back, and any policy alternatives had lost realistic traction. The evidence shows that this occurred in late summer and autumn of 1994, much earlier than many players recognised at the time. I will then describe Russian reactions to the real-world NATO expansion decision, which are different and more complex than what either Putin or Mearsheimer claim. As is well known by many experts, prominent Russians’ concerns at the time focused on lost status and what that would mean for the rise of domestic nationalism – not about a NATO threat to Russian security. Next I will lay out the two major potential counterfactual

¹⁷ Levy, ‘Counterfactuals, causal inference, and historical analysis’, pp. 392–3.

¹⁸ For example, Harvey, *Explaining the Iraq War*, argues that the US would have invaded Iraq even if Al Gore had won the 2000 presidential election instead of George W. Bush.

¹⁹ Tetlock and Parker, ‘Counterfactual thought experiments’, p. 20.

²⁰ Levy, ‘Counterfactuals and case studies’, p. 634.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 631–9; Levy, ‘Counterfactuals, causal inference, and historical analysis’, pp. 395–7.

scenarios that have been suggested by Western and Russian experts as alternatives to NATO expansion, weighing the plausibility of each being chosen before late 1994 – when the tipping point for enlargement was reached – as well as whether the most plausible alternative would have improved the relationship with Russia. My analysis relies largely on already published materials, but includes new evidence from my own interviews with several key players on both the US and Russian sides.

The decision to enlarge

After NATO's initial expansion to include reunified Germany in late 1990, questions about the future of the alliance did not receive much US attention either in the last two years of George W. H. Bush's presidency, or in the early months of Bill Clinton's presidency in 1993.²² Yet the CEE states began thinking about joining NATO even before the Warsaw Pact dissolved. The first public signal appeared in June 1990, when at a Western-sponsored conference in Warsaw, 'a Polish general stood up to ask whether it was possible for US forces to be stationed on Polish soil to help provide them with security'.²³ The Soviet response to this came at the November summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, the predecessor to the OSCE), and it was mixed. Gorbachev signed the Charter of Paris, where all CSCE member states pledged to 'fully recognize the freedom of States to choose their own security arrangements'.²⁴ Yet Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Yulii Kvitinskii simultaneously engaged in backdoor negotiations with the CEE countries, using economic pressure to try to convince them to sign individual bilateral agreements that would prevent them from joining other alliances in the future.²⁵

In the face of Kvitinskii's pressure, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland reached a joint strategy known as the Visegrad process. Each refused to sign agreements with Moscow that included the Kvitinskii clause. By November 1990 the Soviet press reported that leaders in Hungary were discussing their desire to join NATO.²⁶ While Czechoslovakia had originally preferred neutrality,²⁷ by early 1991 Moscow recognised that all the Visegrad states shared the NATO membership goal,²⁸ even though some members of the Polish military expressed a preference for neutrality for several more months.²⁹ The Soviet newspaper *Izvestiia* proposed in April 1991 that Moscow might join NATO itself, noting the Soviets had first suggested this possibility in 1954.³⁰

²² James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington: Brookings, 1999); Ronald D. Asmus, *Opening's NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²³ Asmus, *Opening's NATO's Door*, p. 13.

²⁴ Charter of Paris for a New Europe (21 November 1990), available at: {<http://www.osce.org/node/39516>}.

²⁵ László Póti, 'The Hungarian-Ukrainian-Russian triangle: Not like Rubik's Cube', in Margarita Balmaceda (ed.), *On the Edge: Ukrainian-Central European-Russian Security Triangle* (Budapest: Central European Press, 2000), p. 133. See also Alfred A. Reisch, 'Central and Eastern Europe's quest for NATO membership', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2:28 (9 June 1993), pp. 33–47.

²⁶ F. Lukyanov, 'New stage in relations: Will Hungary join NATO?', *Izvestiia* (26 November 1990), as reported in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press* (hereafter *CDSP*), 42:47 (26 December 1990), p. 21.

²⁷ Milada Anna Vachudova, 'The Visegrad Four: No alternative to cooperation?', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2:34 (August 1993), pp. 39–40.

²⁸ F. Lukyanov, 'Are Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia returning to Western structures?', *Izvestiia* (19 February 1991), as reported in *CDSP*, 43:7 (20 March 1991), pp. 22–3.

²⁹ Howard E. Frost, 'Eastern Europe's search for security', *Orbis*, 37:1 (winter 1993), p. 43.

³⁰ Vikenty Matveev, 'Political commentator's opinion: It isn't such a fantastic scenario', *Izvestiia* (29 April 1991), as reported in *CDSP*, 43:17 (29 May 1991), pp. 20–1.

After the Charter of Paris was signed, the Warsaw Pact began to dissolve, and completely ended its existence in July 1991. There were not yet any public statements, nor even much private discussion, by US or NATO leaders about the possibility or desirability of enlargement. As Ronald Asmus argued, ‘The fact that Moscow had agreed to German unification in NATO was considered a near miracle by all. No one wanted to push the envelope any further.’³¹ Even within the Visegrad states discussion was muted, since their primary goal was to get the remaining Soviet troops off their territories.³² (The last Soviet troops were not withdrawn from Poland until November 1992.)

Just before the Soviet Union itself dissolved in December 1991, a summit of the North Atlantic Council (the NAC, NATO’s highest decision-making body) met in Rome and invited the USSR and former Warsaw Pact states to join a newly created body called the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). The NACC’s goal was to provide a new forum for regular high-level security consultations, but its original focus had nothing to do with NATO enlargement. Instead it centred on trying to save one of the key agreements that had marked the end of the Cold War, the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, which had to be renegotiated now that two opposing alliances were no longer facing off.³³ At the first NACC meeting there was no Western discussion of NATO enlargement.³⁴

Meanwhile US Secretary of State James Baker reported that Yeltsin believed the post-Soviet states might ‘merge’ with NATO. He quotes Yeltsin as saying: ‘It would be an important part of Russia’s security to associate with the only military alliance in Europe.’³⁵ Yeltsin signed a letter drafted by Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev to a NATO foreign ministers’ meeting on 19 December 1991 that stated: ‘We are raising the question of Russia’s admission to NATO, although we are prepared to regard this as a long-term political goal.’³⁶

This prehistory gives us two important clues about Moscow’s ultimate reaction to NATO enlargement. First, Gorbachev and Yeltsin were not threatened by the NATO alliance. Instead these leaders wanted to work with NATO, hoping that NATO could be transformed into some kind of new security architecture for the new Europe, perhaps by submitting itself to CSCE (soon to become OSCE) oversight. Second, it was clear to Moscow that its former Warsaw Pact allies were lost to them long before NATO expanded. Moscow’s Cold War ‘buffer states’ were gone, and NATO itself had no role in this.

The first public statement by any Western official about NATO enlargement was Secretary General Manfred Wörner’s declaration in a visit to Warsaw in March 1992 that ‘NATO’s door is open.’³⁷

³¹ Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 7.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³³ Gerald B. Solomon, *The NATO Enlargement Debate, 1990–1997: Blessings of Liberty* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), p. 14.

³⁴ Hans Binnendijk, ‘NATO can’t be vague about commitment to Eastern Europe’, *International Herald Tribune* (8 November 1991).

³⁵ James A. Baker with Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989–1992* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1995), p. 572.

³⁶ Yeltsin quoted in Vladimir Persada, ‘From Cold War to security: North Atlantic Cooperation Council created’, *Pravda* (23 December 1991), as reported in *CDSP*, 43:51 (22 January 1992), p. 21; author’s telephone interview with Andrei Kozyrev, January 2015.

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, ‘Poland’s Road to NATO’ (2012), available at: {www.msz.gov.pl/en/foreign_policy/security_policy/nato/polands_road_to_nato/}.

By June, US officials also began raising the issue publicly,³⁸ and privately singling out Poland for potential membership.³⁹ But no one in a position of power in the West had put the question on any kind of policy agenda, and Bush's foreign policy focus at the end of 1992 was centred on the sanctions and proliferation crisis in Iraq, and growing humanitarian crises in Somalia and Haiti – not NATO.

Analysts agree that the first time the new US president, Bill Clinton, began to think seriously about NATO enlargement was several months into his administration, in April 1993, when he attended the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. Presidents Lech Walesa of Poland, Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia, and Arpad Goncz of Hungary met with Clinton there and argued passionately on behalf of joining NATO.⁴⁰ Clinton had long held the belief that since democracies don't go to war with each other (the 'Democratic Peace' theory), the US should promote democracies and free markets abroad. He began to see NATO expansion as a means for realising this vision.⁴¹ The CEE states put more pressure on the US at the June 1993 NACC meeting in Athens.⁴²

Expanded membership in NATO dovetailed with the thinking of some prominent members of Clinton's foreign and security policy team. Proponents of expansion⁴³ included National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, who had led foreign policy issues on Clinton's presidential campaign and saw democracy promotion as a way of bringing conservative Democrats to Clinton's side;⁴⁴ Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Lynn E. Davis, freshly arrived from the RAND Corporation; Samuel W. Lewis, head of policy planning at State; and Charles Gati, a senior State Department adviser who was worried about anti-democratic backsliding and ultra-nationalism in eastern Europe. Gati wrote a well-received internal memo arguing that NATO membership would cement democratic reforms in the CEE states.⁴⁵ That autumn, three strong advocates of NATO enlargement inside the RAND Corporation who had earlier worked with Davis published an influential pro-expansion article in *Foreign Affairs*, in cooperation with both the Polish government and the German defence minister, Volke Rühle.⁴⁶ Rühle hired the RAND team as consultants to his ministry, marking the first time RAND had ever accepted a commission from a non-American client.⁴⁷ Rühle believed that German stability would be threatened if its new eastern

³⁸ William Drozdiak, '29 nations approve arms control treaty; conventional arsenals in Europe to be cut', *Washington Post* (6 June 1992).

³⁹ George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), p. 73. See also Theresa Hitchens, interview with William H. Taft IV, 'One on one', *Defense News* (13–19 July 1992), p. 30, and Goldgeier, *Not Whether But When*, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 20; Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 93; Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 25.

⁴¹ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 20.

⁴² Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 95.

⁴³ Michael R. Gordon, 'U.S. opposes move to rapidly expand NATO membership', *New York Times* (2 January 1994).

⁴⁴ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 43; author's interview with Charles Gati, Washington, DC, November 2014. The best public summary of the views he expressed at the time is Charles Gati, 'If not democracy, what? Leaders, laggards, and losers in the post-communist world', in Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Post-Communism: Four Perspectives* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1996), pp. 168–98.

⁴⁶ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. xxx. The article is Ronald D. Asmus, Richard L. Kugler, and F. Stephen Larrabee, 'Building a new NATO', *Foreign Affairs*, 72:4 (September/October 1993), pp. 28–40.

⁴⁷ George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), p. 46.

borders became the dividing line for NATO going forward, and wanted the line drawn further east instead.⁴⁸

But Germany's foreign minister and national security adviser both made clear to their American counterparts that they did not support R  he's position, and that Germany as a whole was not in favour of quick NATO expansion.⁴⁹ And a majority of officials inside Clinton's government opposed immediate or overly quick enlargement (it is not clear in retrospect whether they opposed *any* enlargement ever, because they quickly fell into line behind Clinton's policy). These included Defense Secretary Les Aspin, Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Perry (who would soon replace Aspin as secretary), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili, military adviser to the State Department Lieutenant General Barry McCaffrey, US Ambassador to Moscow Thomas Pickering, and most Russia experts in the State Department. They argued that Moscow would see expansion as being directed against it, and that this might create a self-fulfilling prophecy of a nationalist backlash. Pentagon representatives further argued that including CEE states inside NATO might compromise the alliance's effectiveness and require enormous expenditures to bring the military equipment of new members up to NATO interoperability standards. They also feared that hostile intelligence operatives would infiltrate NATO and use its military secrets against it, and that expansion would embroil the US in more violent conflicts like the one underway in the former Yugoslavia.

On the one hand, disagreement within the Clinton administration (as well as in its key German ally) might have been a pathway to alternative policy choices being considered. But as we will see below, what mattered for the outcome was not the *number* of voices opposed to at least immediate NATO enlargement. It was instead the political savvy and manoeuvring of powerful individuals inside the White House who favoured enlargement intensely. Lake in particular was known for his 'bureaucratic gamesmanship', someone who 'alone [saw] Clinton on a daily basis', whose foreign policy views were rarely 'reversed or changed or modified', and who took advantage of 'the colorless qualities of his would-be rivals' at State and Defense.⁵⁰ A different outcome would have required a different set of players, violating the few-changes-as-possible rule of good counterfactuals.

Clinton's overall foreign policy direction in 1993 was being attacked as indecisive and un-strategic by Republican leaders in the House of Representatives. The idea of NATO's geographic expansion to reward movement toward liberal democracy fit with the administration's desire to show initiative on the international stage. Clinton asked Lake to hold a sort of 'sweepstakes' inside the NSC to come up with a foreign policy term to define the administration's strategic vision. The goal was to replace Kennan's Cold War moniker of 'containment', while capturing the concept of US support for global democracy building. The winning term was 'enlargement', created by NSC speechwriter Jeremy Rosner.⁵¹ (Rosner would later lead the NATO Enlargement Ratification Office, spearheading the lobbying effort alongside incoming Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to gain Senate approval for NATO's geographic expansion.)⁵² Lake announced this new theme in a

⁴⁸ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 313, fn. 40.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Jason DeParle, 'The man inside Bill Clinton's foreign policy', *New York Times* (20 August 1995).

⁵¹ Douglas Brinkley, 'Democratic enlargement: the Clinton doctrine', *Foreign Policy*, 106 (spring 1997), pp. 110–27.

⁵² Asmus, *Opening's NATO's Door*, p. 253.

21 September speech. He did not yet publicly advocate NATO enlargement per se, but began to hint in that direction.⁵³

In an explicit attempt to slow NATO enlargement (discussed in greater detail in one of the counterfactual scenarios below), the Pentagon developed the Partnership for Peace (PFP) initiative. The goal of PFP was to include both Russia and the CEE states in expanded military cooperation, including exchanges, joint training, and joint participation in peacekeeping operations with NATO, while the expansion of NATO's membership list was deferred. Its principal author was General Shalikashvili, and it was first proposed to NATO members at a defence ministers' meeting in Germany in October 1993. Perry thought it was particularly important to reach out to the Russian military through PFP because 'it was the institution that would endure, whatever might happen to ... Yeltsin's democrats or their successors'.⁵⁴

PFP became the focus of the January 1994 NAC summit. While Davis wanted to announce a set of criteria for future NATO membership and suggested offering 'associate membership' to the Visegrad states there, Strobe Talbott (Clinton's ambassador-at-large and special adviser to the Secretary of State on the newly independent post-Soviet states) had written a crucial internal memo in October 1993 that convinced Christopher to make PFP the centrepiece of the meeting instead.⁵⁵ Talbott cautioned against what he called the 'NATO-Plus-V3 [Visegrad 3] Fast Track', writing, 'The key principle, as I see it, is this ... An expanded NATO that excludes Russia will not serve to contain Russia's retrograde, expansionist impulses; quite the contrary, it will further provoke them.'⁵⁶

Perhaps because of this internal Clinton administration disagreement, US and NATO plans about enlargement remained publicly ambiguous. Kozyrev convinced himself that PFP was actually an alternative to NATO enlargement, even though Talbott tried to make clear to both him and Georgii Mamedov (the Russian deputy minister of foreign affairs in charge of relations with the US) that enlargement was still very much on the agenda.⁵⁷ In an official announcement on 11 January 1994, Kozyrev stated that PFP marked 'the further transformation of the alliance', claiming that it was 'an alternative to the mechanical expansion of NATO and the forced admittance of new members'.⁵⁸ The next day Clinton undercut Kozyrev's statement, saying in a speech in Prague, 'The question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members, but when and how.'⁵⁹ Despite this, Kozyrev told a group of Russian ambassadors later that spring, 'The greatest achievement of Russian foreign policy in 1993 was to prevent NATO's expansion eastward to our borders.'⁶⁰

⁵³ Anthony Lake, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 'From Containment to Enlargement', prepared remarks for speech given at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, DC (21 September 1993), available at: {www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/lakedoc.html}.

⁵⁴ Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ Michael Dobbs, 'Wider alliance would increase U.S. commitments', *Washington Post* (5 July 1995). For the date of the memo, see Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 317, fn. 100.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, pp. 100–1.

⁵⁸ 'Zaiaavlenie Predstavitelia MID Rossiiskoi Federatskii [Announcement by the Head of the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation]' (11 January 1994), as published in *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, 3–4 (February 1994), pp. 63–4.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 57.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

It was not only Kozyrev who was confused. Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrzej Ananicz, a leading advocate for Poland's entry into NATO, suggested that PFP represented the perpetuation of the 'Yalta' spheres-of-influence agreement between the West and Joseph Stalin that had divided Europe after the Second World War.⁶¹ The Yalta theme re-emerged later that year in a statement by Polish Foreign Minister Andrzej Olechowski, and in the lobbying materials of the Polish-American community that agitated on behalf of Poland's admission.⁶² Walesa in January 1994 called PFP 'a "major tragedy" bordering on appeasement'.⁶³

Already in 1991 the Polish American Congress (an ethnic interest group) had petitioned President Bush to allow the Visegrad states into NATO.⁶⁴ They interpreted PFP as 'NATO lite', and in December 1993 worked with the Central and East European Coalition (another lobbying group) to overwhelm the White House switchboard with complaints about this new Yalta.⁶⁵ They also joined the Polish ambassador to the US, Jerzy Kominski, in crafting a detailed lobbying plan centred on members of the US business community who had Polish ties. They targeted areas with large Polish and Central European ethnic communities, including in the key 1994 midterm election battleground states of Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

The first foreign policy plank of the September 1994 'Contract with America', authored by Newt Gingrich and other conservative leaders of the Republican Party, called for NATO expansion to include the Visegrad states.⁶⁶ Successful campaigns that autumn led to Republican dominance of both the House and the Senate in the 104th Congress in 1995. While domestic economic concerns were the primary focus of the election, the foreign policy preferences of the Republican victors meant that there was no strong congressional pushback against the Clinton initiative.

Meanwhile Talbott became a stronger advocate for enlargement with time. He learned he would be nominated as deputy secretary of state over Thanksgiving weekend in 1993, and recalls that his position had gelled by then. He came to favour NATO enlargement as an 'ethical choice ... a historical wrong to be righted' in the CEE states, while recognising the need to 'apply as much balm as possible to the shame and pain' expressed by Moscow. He hoped that a two-track policy of NATO enlargement coupled with outreach to Russia could 'help Russia change its path and get out of that narrative'.⁶⁷ Following the announcement of his nomination in February 1994 he faced brutal Senate confirmation hearings where Republicans accused him of being a Russia apologist.⁶⁸ When he entered his new role at State, he publicly joined the side of enlargement advocates. This is significant because Talbott had a greater role in Clinton's inner circle than his title would imply. He and his wife Brooke Shearer had been close friends of the Clintons for almost 25 years, since he and Clinton had been housemates as Rhodes

⁶¹ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 161.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁶ Michael Dobbs, 'Enthusiasm for wider alliance is marked by contradictions', *Washington Post* (7 July 1995). The text of the 'Contract with America' appeared in The National Security Revitalization Act, a bill passed by the House on 16 February 1995 that was never passed by the Senate. See HR 7 (104th), TITLE VI—EXPANSION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION, referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (23 February 1995), available at: (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/104/hr7/text>).

⁶⁷ Author's telephone interview with Strobe Talbott, September 2015. Talbott's justification for enlargement is laid out in 'Why NATO should grow', *New York Review of Books* (10 August 1995).

⁶⁸ Dobbs, 'Wider alliance'; Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 65.

Scholars at Oxford. Shearer served as Hillary Clinton's personal aide during the 1992 campaign,⁶⁹ and Talbott had been Bill Clinton's primary adviser on Russia policy during the presidential transition.⁷⁰

Europe at this time was also undergoing change in its thinking about NATO. Some NATO allies, particularly France, had earlier looked askance at US post-Cold War involvement in European security matters, preferring that the European Union (EU) or the long-standing but rather impotent West European Union (WEU) security organisation take the lead instead. But by the January 1994 NAC summit it had become clear that Europe alone could not manage an effective response to the new challenges raised by ethnic conflict in the former Yugoslavia.⁷¹ NATO could bring the vastly greater military resources of the US to the European table, and Washington's outsized political weight could sway NATO consensus on behalf of military intervention and overcome intra-European squabbling.

By 1994 Europe was increasingly willing to follow whatever lead Clinton gave on the question. While France had proposed a WEU-alternative to NATO enlargement in 1993, already by the January 1994 NATO summit Paris decided it did not want to be the only NATO member standing in the way of enlargement.⁷² Western Europe provided a permissive environment for whatever the Americans wanted to do.

In spring 1994 Lake had his staff prepare a NATO enlargement plan, presented to Clinton in June 1994 for approval.⁷³ On 1 July Clinton visited Warsaw and made his first clear public statement in favour of enlargement, calling PFP 'a first step toward expansion of NATO'.⁷⁴ He told the Polish Sejm on 7 July that Poland would likely be among the first invited to join.⁷⁵ Clinton promised Yeltsin that there would be 'no surprises, no rush, and no exclusion' as expansion went forward.⁷⁶ But on 1 December 1994, both Yeltsin and Kozyrev were surprised when the NAC foreign ministers announced their launching of an official NATO enlargement study to be completed by December 1995. Yeltsin reacted with fury, claiming that this marked a new 'Cold Peace' that replaced the Cold War, and believing that he had been tricked into complacency by the ambiguity of US policy statements.⁷⁷

The tipping point of inevitability

James Goldgeier argues that NATO expansion 'was by no means inevitable'.⁷⁸ Yet by the NAC meeting in December 1994, expansion had reached a tipping point of virtually inevitable forward momentum. This means that to be convincing, any counterfactual scenario must posit a different policy choice as being possible *before* that point.

⁶⁹ Adam Bernstein, 'Former journalist and private investigator Brooke Shearer dies at 58', *Washington Post* (20 May 2009).

⁷⁰ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), pp. 504–5.

⁷¹ See Susan L. Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1995), and Richard Holbrooke, *To End a War* (New York: Modern Library, 1999).

⁷² Pascal Boniface, 'NATO's enlargement, France's dilemma', in Haglann (ed.), *Will NATO Go East?*, pp. 181–96.

⁷³ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, pp. 59–60.

⁷⁴ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 68–9.

⁷⁵ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 78.

⁷⁶ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 136.

⁷⁷ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 190–1; Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 140; James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia after the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003), p. 184.

⁷⁸ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 1.

The enlargement study itself was designed to bring western Europe solidly on board, since ‘after its release, no member-state could say that it had not anticipated or thought through carefully enough the possible implications of accepting new members’.⁷⁹ Domestic politics in the US were also pushing expansion forward. The Democratic Clinton administration had reached consensus on expansion virtually simultaneously with the victorious Republicans in both houses of Congress.

Opposition in the broader United States policy community to NATO expansion developed too slowly to stop this forward momentum. Despite the prominence of former officials who argued against expansion in 1995,⁸⁰ the drive failed to attract a powerful congressional lobby and thus to gain political leverage.⁸¹ Kennan’s famous anti-expansion article was not published until February 1997, and a similar open letter to Clinton signed by 48 experts wasn’t published until June 1997.⁸² Meanwhile NATO foreign ministers had already agreed by September 1996 to offer invitations to the Visegrad states the following July.⁸³ Enlargement opponents had missed the boat.

The history of the Russian reaction

It is extraordinarily difficult to characterise ‘the Russian reaction’ to the NATO expansion decision, because it was so varied. The 1990s in Russia were a decade of political and intellectual ferment, with Russian opinion leaders’ views of Russian national identity split among many different possibilities ranging from pro-Western liberalism through realist statism, to ethnic nationalist revanchism.⁸⁴ In addition, the Russian government was unorganised and protean, leaving the US administration to operate in an environment where it lacked a clearly defined Russian counterpart for security decision-making with a well developed world view.⁸⁵ One of the elements that allowed NATO enlargement to remain politically attractive to the Clinton administration was the absence of a unified and determined Russian counter-thrust.

As both Talbott and Perry describe the situation, the Clinton administration was afraid that Yeltsin’s government might fall at any time, and they were convinced that Kozyrev’s days as Russian foreign minister were numbered.⁸⁶ There was no clear message coming from the Russian side about what it wanted. Some of the debate in Moscow was normal for any freewheeling democracy, with analysts expressing a wide variety of views in the press, and criticism by opposition parties in the parliament.⁸⁷ But there were two components of early 1990s Russia that were much more disturbing for the West.

⁷⁹ John Barrett, ‘NATO’s year of study: Results and policy implications’, in Hagland (ed.), *Will NATO Go East?*, p. 96.

⁸⁰ See the 3 May letter to Talbott published in Richard T. Davies, ‘Should NATO grow? A dissent’, *New York Review of Books* (21 September 1995).

⁸¹ Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, pp. 139–46.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁸³ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 105.

⁸⁴ For a sophisticated discussion of these possibilities, see Clunan, *Social Construction of Russia’s Resurgence*, pp. 60–74.

⁸⁵ Talbott, *Russia Hand*.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*; Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 26.

⁸⁷ Vyacheslav Gorskii, *Problems and Prospects of NATO-Russia Relationship: The Russian Debate*, Final Report from the NATO Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council Fellowships Program, 1999–2001 (Moscow: June 2001), available at: {<http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/99-01/gorskii.pdf>}.

First, much of the opposition to Yeltsin came from members of the old Soviet Communist Party and newly vocal ultranationalists who had opposed Gorbachev's opening toward the west for years, and who were willing to court instability and violence. The first expression of anger appeared at the 28th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in July 1990, where Chief of the Soviet General Staff Mikhail A. Moiseyev spoke out against Gorbachev's unilateral concessions to what he termed a hostile NATO.⁸⁸ (Moiseyev's statement was especially striking because just the year before he had signed a major new military-to-military accord with his US counterpart, the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities Agreement.) This was long before anyone inside NATO was seriously considering expansion; Germany was not yet unified, and the Warsaw Pact still existed. The rise of the hardliners led to the sudden resignation of Gorbachev's reformist Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, in December 1990. Shevardnadze had been sharply criticised simply for urging the CEE states to have their diplomats accredited to NATO headquarters, and he resigned in disgust.⁸⁹

After the USSR dissolved, the Russian regional (RSFSR) parliament (elected in 1990) continued to function, unchanged, as the new Russian national parliament – with all of the anti-Western baggage this entailed from its earlier Soviet incarnation. Domestic unhappiness accelerated after Yeltsin's shock therapy economic reforms of 1992 caused skyrocketing inflation that wiped out the savings of many ordinary Russians. Many Russians blamed these policies on the West both because of the presence of prominent American economic advisers in Moscow, and because the US failed to offer any significant economic assistance to the new Russian state.

In December 1992, Kozyrev gave an infamous speech at the Stockholm CSCE summit where he pretended (without informing the audience for the first hour) to be an anti-Western nationalist; many in the audience thought at first that a coup had occurred in Russia.⁹⁰ By February 1993 – again before NATO expansion was being seriously considered inside the US administration or NATO – Yeltsin felt pressured by nationalists to take an illiberal spheres of influence stand in the Russian 'near abroad' states of the former Soviet Union, asking the UN to give Russia unique authority to lead peacekeeping missions in its own backyard.⁹¹

By spring 1993 the conflict in Russian politics had grown into a full-blown constitutional crisis.

Even before Clinton took office in January the Bush/Clinton transition team feared 'Russia going bad on us.'⁹² By March, Yeltsin was facing the threat of impeachment, and Kozyrev told US Secretary of State Warren Christopher that he saw those proceedings as an attempted 'quasi-constitutional coup'.⁹³ Yeltsin beat the impeachment effort and held on to office with a successful popular referendum on his rule in April, but declared a unilateral 'special regime' that limited parliament's powers, raising fears that he would impose martial law.⁹⁴ Over the next several months Yeltsin faced a battle of duelling constitutions and high-level appointments and dismissals, including his attempt to

⁸⁸ Gorskii, *Problems and Prospects*, pp. 5, 56, fn. 7.

⁸⁹ Reisch, 'Central and Eastern Europe's quest', p. 37.

⁹⁰ William Safire, 'Kozyrev's wake-up slap', *New York Times* (17 December 1992).

⁹¹ Alexei Arbatov, 'Russian foreign policy thinking in transition', in Vladimir Baranovsky (ed.), *Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 142.

⁹² Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 42.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 55. For a Russian reaction, see Alexei Arbatov, 'The vicissitudes of Russian politics', in Baranovsky (ed.), *Russia and Europe: The Emerging Security Agenda*, pp. 77–89.

dismiss his own Vice President, Aleksandr Rutskoi, who was active in the opposition and would be Yeltsin's constitutional successor if Yeltsin were to be impeached.

The crisis peaked in October 1993 when Yeltsin disbanded the parliament and opposition leaders staged an armed insurrection. Yeltsin called in the Russian military under Defense Minister Pavel Grachev to storm the parliament building where his opponents were holed up, as armed opposition militias roamed the streets of central Moscow and ordinary civilians were caught in the crossfire. Talbott notes that 'the insurgents briefly occupied Smolensk Square in front of the Foreign Ministry, shaking their fists at the windows above and noisily vowing to hang Kozyrev'.⁹⁵ In other words, Yeltsin's pro-Western foreign policy, not merely the direction of Russia's domestic economy, was at stake in the battle.

The violence was short-lived as the Russian army stamped out the opposition, itself stoking fears of a new role for the Russian military in brokering domestic politics. When new parliamentary elections were held that December, the ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia and its firebrand leader, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, won 23 per cent of the vote, and the Communists who often voted with them won 12 per cent. Together they formed a plurality in the Duma, what came to be called a 'red-brown coalition', and Yeltsin had no choice but to compromise with the nationalists who threatened his rule.

Scholars disagree about exactly when the shift in Russian domestic thinking about foreign policy became entrenched, whether it was 1992⁹⁶ or 1993.⁹⁷ But as Anne L. Clunan notes in her masterful study of Russian identity in the 1990s, by 1992 69 per cent of the Russian public favoured Russia 'ensur[ing] that she remains a great power, even if this leads to a worsening of her relations with the surrounding world',⁹⁸ and 'by 1994, the liberal internationalist national self-image had been discredited for ignoring Russia's past greatness ... Most of its proponents had been removed from office and replaced with statist. Russian foreign and domestic policy shifted toward positions more in line with statist and national restorationist self-images.'⁹⁹ This shift away from liberalism and accommodation happened *before* any consideration of NATO expansion had gone beyond White House walls.

The second important fact about the Russian reaction is that the government did not speak with one voice. Russian foreign and security policy decision-making was disorganised, uncoordinated, subject to feuds within the Yeltsin administration, and unconnected to the broader political realities that Yeltsin faced in Russia.¹⁰⁰ The Foreign Ministry was so ill-prepared that it often had no set agenda for diplomatic meetings.¹⁰¹ Yeltsin was impulsive, unpredictable, and often drunk (including in his first phone conversation with President Clinton after the latter's inauguration in January 1993).¹⁰² Individuals with access to Yeltsin were often able to sway him in one arbitrary direction or another.

⁹⁵ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 88.

⁹⁶ Anne L. Clunan, 'Historical aspirations and the domestic politics of Russia's pursuit of international status', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 47 (2014), p. 284.

⁹⁷ Arbatov, 'Russian foreign policy thinking in transition', p. 135.

⁹⁸ Clunan, *Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence*, p. 244, fn. 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁰⁰ F. Stephen Larrabee and Theodore W. Karasik, *Foreign and Security Policy Decisionmaking under Yeltsin* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1997); Arbatov, 'Russian foreign policy thinking in transition', p. 140; Andrei Zagorski, 'Russia and European institutions', in Baranovsky (ed.), *Russia and Europe*, p. 521.

¹⁰¹ Holbrooke, *To End a War*, p. 209.

¹⁰² Talbott, *Russia Hand*. The observation about Yeltsin's January 1993 drunkenness is on p. 44.

Kozyrev says that the whole question of NATO expansion was ‘never widely discussed’ within the Russian government until after NATO’s December 1994 announcement of the enlargement study. Instead he developed various proposals as an individual for how to interact with the West, and when discussion occurred, it was ‘mostly me and Grachev and Yeltsin’.¹⁰³ Sergei Karaganov, then a member of both the Presidential Council of the Russian Federation and the Advisory Committee of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, says that ‘Kozyrev was not communicating with other people in the foreign ministry.’¹⁰⁴ Anatoly Adamishin, first deputy foreign minister at the time, writes that even senior officials in the foreign ministry had little impact on either Kozyrev’s or Yeltsin’s actions. Adamishin claims that ‘once in a while Kozyrev played some tricks’ when it came to US and NATO relations, operating behind the backs of his supposed advisers.¹⁰⁵ There was a lot of passive opposition within the ministry to Kozyrev’s direction.¹⁰⁶ Kozyrev faced special ire because he cleaned house at the ministry, insisting that Soviet-era appointees reapply for jobs in the new Russian Foreign Ministry, and promoting those who favoured cooperation with the West.¹⁰⁷

Meanwhile Russian Defense Minister Grachev did not see NATO expansion as a military threat as long as technical issues could be ironed out through negotiation.¹⁰⁸ The Russian military doctrine adopted in November 1993 – seen as ‘Grachev’s doctrine’, and a form of payback for the Russian military coming in on Yeltsin’s side in the October standoff with parliament¹⁰⁹ – is framed as being designed for an era when ‘partnership and all-around cooperation are expanding’. While it does cite expansion of alliances as a ‘source of external military danger’, this ranked as the ninth most important future military threat, after such things as nuclear proliferation and harm done to Russian citizens in foreign states, and then only if new military infrastructure was built ‘to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation’s military security’.¹¹⁰ (Similar remarks indicating that it was infrastructure expansion, not the expansion of the alliance per se, that would be threatening were published by Vitaly Churkin, then-ambassador to Belgium and the de facto representative of Russia to NATO, three years later.)¹¹¹

Yevgeny Primakov, a leading realist statesman and at that time director of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR in its Russian initials) did argue in November 1993 that expansion without the political transformation of NATO held ‘danger for Russia’s interests’, in particular by obliging Russia to redeploy its forces and weapons to the West, undercutting Yeltsin’s planned military reforms and

¹⁰³ Author’s telephone interview with Kozyrev.

¹⁰⁴ Author’s interview with Sergei Karaganov, Moscow, March 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Anatoly Adamishin, ‘The Yugoslav prelude: a prototype for modern approaches to “peacemaking”’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 3 (July–September 2013), available at: {<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The-Yugoslav-Prelude-16158>}.

¹⁰⁶ Arbatov, ‘Russian foreign policy thinking in transition’, p. 140.

¹⁰⁷ Author’s interview with Andrei Zagorsky, then a member of the Russian Foreign Minister’s Advisory Council, Moscow, March 2015. This was confirmed by author’s interview with Viktor Mizin, then a Soviet and Russian Foreign Ministry arms control expert and negotiations adviser, who said that Kozyrev changed about half the experts across Foreign Ministry departments; Moscow, March 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Talbott, *Russia Hand*; author’s telephone interview with Bill Perry, January 2015; author’s interview with Zagorsky.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander A. Konovalov, ‘The changing role of military factors’, in Baranovsky (ed.), *Russia and Europe*, pp. 196–218.

¹¹⁰ ‘The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation’, edict 1833 of the President of the Russian Federation (2 November 1993), available at: {<http://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/russia-mil-doc.html#polbase>}.

¹¹¹ Cited in Zagorski, ‘Russia and European institutions’, p. 536.

budget cuts. But he emphasised (in a rather convoluted fashion), 'It would be incorrect to proceed from the conjecture that the geographic expansion of NATO would create a platform whose goal was to carry out strikes against Russia or its allies.'¹¹² In other words, top security officials in Russia in late 1993 did not see NATO expansion as an offensive military threat.

The clearest indication of disarray within Russia on the subject of NATO expansion occurred in late summer and autumn 1993. On 25 August Talbott told Mamedov, his closest Russian counterpart, that 'the issue of NATO expansion was going to be front and center in 1994'. According to Talbott, Mamedov responded: 'only our worst enemies would wish that topic on us'.¹¹³ He reportedly added, 'NATO, in Russian, is a four-letter word.'¹¹⁴ An hour later the two were still meeting when they received a news bulletin: 'Yeltsin had just announced at a press conference in Warsaw that Russia had no objection to Poland joining NATO.' Talbott reports that Mamedov was 'thunderstruck'.¹¹⁵

It remains unclear why Yeltsin made this statement in Warsaw. Many believe that the Poles had plied Yeltsin with vodka.¹¹⁶ Kozyrev, who was in Warsaw along with Yeltsin and Grachev, delicately says that people 'tried to exploit Yeltsin's dining in excess sometimes'.¹¹⁷ He adds that Polish President Lech Walesa had 'invited Yeltsin to a one-on-one dinner' the night before, and 'the next morning appeared with a signed piece of paper, a Yeltsin-and-Walesa amendment to a declaration signed earlier [which had been simply] a precooked document, a declaration of friendship'.¹¹⁸ But the Poles insisted to their American counterparts that Yeltsin was sober when he signed this new document. They claim he did so after Walesa threatened to enter into an anti-Russian alliance with Ukraine if Yeltsin did not agree to Poland's membership in NATO.¹¹⁹ (Ukraine at that time had not yet agreed to give up the strategic nuclear weapons that remained on its soil after the Soviet collapse.)

In any case, Kozyrev and Grachev immediately tried to get Yeltsin to backtrack.¹²⁰ Kozyrev was especially embarrassed because Yeltsin had come out in favour of Polish membership in NATO before Washington had publicly expressed interest in such a thing.¹²¹ Two weeks later Yeltsin sent a letter 'drafted by the Foreign Ministry'¹²² to each NATO member-state leader. The letter said that rather than a 'quantitative build-up of the Alliance by adding East European countries', Russia would 'support a different approach, one which would lead to a truly pan-European security system ... Security must be indivisible and rest on pan-European structures.'¹²³ The letter added:

We understand ... that a possible integration of East European countries with NATO will not automatically produce a situation where the Alliance would somehow turn against Russia.

¹¹² Yevgenii Primakov, 'Perspektivy Rasshireniia NATO i Interesy Rossii [Perspectives on NATO Expansion and the Interests of Russia]', *Izvestiia* (26 November 1993).

¹¹³ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 95.

¹¹⁴ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, pp. 95–6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹¹⁷ Author's telephone interview with Kozyrev.

¹¹⁸ Author's telephone interview with Kozyrev.

¹¹⁹ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 96.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*; author's telephone interview with Kozyrev.

¹²¹ Author's telephone interview with Kozyrev.

¹²² Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 96.

¹²³ 'Russian President Boris Yeltsin's letter to US President Bill Clinton, 15 September 1993', included in Appendix 7A, 'Documents on European security', *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 1994* (New York: Oxford, 1994), p. 250.

We do not see NATO as a bloc opposing us. But it is important to take into account how our public opinion may react to such a step.¹²⁴

In other words, Kozyrev's primary concern was domestic nationalists, not a NATO threat. Kozyrev once again said, this time to US Ambassador Thomas Pickering, that Russia had no objection to NATO expansion as long as Russia was the first to join.¹²⁵ Grachev chimed in that it 'would be unfortunate if the former Warsaw Pact states joined NATO in the near future, because this step would relegate Russia to a much more isolated position'.¹²⁶

The counterfactual scenarios

While we might imagine a whole slew of possible alternatives to NATO enlargement, two primary possibilities have gotten the most attention in the literature and are worth discussing here. The first, the idea that Russia might have joined NATO or that NATO might have put itself under the oversight of an organisation where Russia had a strong voice (like the CSCE/OSCE), has been repeatedly and frequently raised by members of the Russian policy community. However, that was not a realistic possibility anytime from the early 1990s onward, given Russia's own political trajectory and its lack of consolidated liberal democratic reforms. The second, the idea that PFP could have delayed enlargement, was a real alternative being discussed in the White House in 1994 (and of course, PFP as a set of educational, training, and policy programmes continues to this day). However, its proponents lacked both the political savvy and the personal connections to boost it in time as an enlargement alternative – and it remains unclear that a delay of NATO enlargement would have had any effect on Russian status perceptions.

Counterfactual #1: Russia in NATO, or NATO under CSCE

This often intertwined set of counterfactual proposals arose frequently in Moscow: either that Russia could join NATO itself, or that NATO could put itself under the authority of the CSCE or the follow-on Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), where Russia was a dominant player and could have influenced the direction of security decisions. The idea was repeated (half-heartedly) by Yeltsin several times during his years in office, and later by Putin as well.¹²⁷

Indeed, Russian experts in the Working Group on Russia's Policy toward NATO (led by Karaganov as a member of Yeltsin's Presidential Advisory Council, and including a wide-ranging group of foreign policy analysts, government officials, and military officers) offered these two possible scenarios together in May 1995: either that Russia would join NATO, or that the security roles of the OSCE would be expanded into a 'UN regional arrangement' above NATO. In amazingly Soviet-style phrasing (and unanimity) for 1995, the group's stated goal was to work 'with main groups of the ruling classes in Western countries that consider the decision to enlarge too risky and/or too costly' to prevent NATO expansion.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Asmus, *Opening NATO's Door*, p. 47.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Reuters, 1 October 1993, according to Suzanne Crow, 'Russian Views on an Eastward Expansion of NATO', *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2:41 (Oct. 15, 1993), p. 22.

¹²⁷ See, for example, Hannes Adomeit, 'Inside or Outside? Russia's Policies toward NATO', Working Paper FG 5 2007/1, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Berlin, January 2007).

¹²⁸ The report from the conference was published as Sergei Karaganov et al., 'View from Russia: Russia and NATO: Theses of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy', *Comparative Strategy*, 15 (1996), pp. 91–102.

It should be noted, though, that this group did *not* worry that NATO enlargement posed a direct military threat to Russian territory, recognising that Moscow's nuclear deterrent prevented that.¹²⁹ They wrote, 'The North Atlantic Treaty Organization as a defensive military and political union of democratic states is not a military threat for a democratic Russia.'¹³⁰

Instead these counter-proposals reflected a different concern about NATO expansion: that it would lead to Russia's isolation from Europe and its marginalisation in European security decision-making, so that Moscow's interests would be ignored. These fears were repeated frequently by Russian academics and analysts.¹³¹ They were reflected in the Foreign Ministry's January 1993 draft 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation',¹³² which grew into a classified document issued by the newly formed Russian Security Council.¹³³ Sometimes the fear was expressed in economic terms: that Russia might lose traditional arms markets in Eastern Europe.¹³⁴ But most often the statements were couched in terms of lost status and influence over global events.

A particular concern was that this isolation and marginalisation would give ultranationalists an opportunity to come to the forefront. Kozyrev repeated this frequently,¹³⁵ and it was also raised by Primakov in late November 1993.¹³⁶ The US was sufficiently concerned about this possibility – especially when it was repeated by First Deputy Defense Minister Andrei Kokoshin¹³⁷ – that NATO agreed to postpone its public announcement of an enlargement decision until after the July 1996 Russian presidential election.

But inviting Russia to join NATO or placing NATO under CSCE/OSCE authority were not scenarios that the US or NATO would have seriously entertained, and top Russian analysts realised this. Arbatov pointed out the folly of hoping for NATO membership already in April 1992,¹³⁸ and Kortunov argued that the proposal 'lost most of its original supporters' after 1993, 'surviv[ing] as' more or less a fantasy of radical democrats'.¹³⁹ Kozyrev later said that he knew full well at the time that the OSCE idea would never fly, calling it 'totally unacceptable and counterproductive ... moot from the beginning'. He instead hoped that OSCE's cooperative political and human rights provisions would become stronger, and says that he wanted a treaty between NATO and Russia 'on alliance, not membership'.¹⁴⁰

¹²⁹ Sergei Karaganov, 'Questions facing the future of Europe', *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 37:5 (May 1991), pp. 39–48.

¹³⁰ Karaganov et al., 'View from Russia', p. 94.

¹³¹ Gorskiĭ, *Problems and Prospects*; Kortunov, 'NATO enlargement and Russia'.

¹³² 'Kontsepsiia Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii [The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation]', *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik* [Diplomatic Courier, the flagship publication of the Russian Foreign Ministry], Special Issue (January 1993), pp. 12–15.

¹³³ Vladislav Chernov, 'Russia's national interests and threats to its security', *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (29 April 1993), as reported in the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 45:17 (1993), pp. 13–15.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Andrei Kozyrev, 'The New Russia and the Atlantic Alliance', *NATO Review*, 1 (February 1993), pp. 3–6; Talbott, *Russia Hand*.

¹³⁶ A brief version of the document was published as 'Perspektivy Rasshrieniia NATO i Interesy Rossii: Doklad Sluzhby Vnesnei Razvedki [Perspectives on NATO Expansion and the Interests of Russia: A Foreign Intelligence Service Document]', *Izvestiia* (26 November 1993), p. 4.

¹³⁷ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 146.

¹³⁸ Aleksei Arbatov, 'Russia and NATO: Do we need each other?', *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (11 March 1992), as reported in *CDSP*, 44:11 (15 April 1992).

¹³⁹ Kortunov, 'NATO enlargement and Russia', p. 86.

¹⁴⁰ Author's telephone interview with Kozyrev, January 2015.

Either the NATO-under-OSCE or Russia-in-NATO proposal would have given the unstable Russian government veto power over NATO's use of force, or at least a significant chance to obstruct it. When Primakov took office as the new Russian foreign minister in 1996, he hinted that Russia would support NATO expansion if it got 'restrictions on NATO and rights for Russia in a legally binding treaty'.¹⁴¹ But barring long-term consolidation of a true liberal democracy in Russia, with firm civilian control over the military and ethnic nationalists relegated to obscurity, the US and NATO would never have given Russia that right. And as far as putting NATO under OSCE authority, the 1990s saw violent instability in several CSCE/OSCE members, including Yugoslavia (and its successor states) and the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. NATO would never have left its decision-making subject to the whims of what would become OSCE's 57 participating states.

While former Secretary of State James A. Baker III did publicly broach the notion of Russia joining NATO in a December 1993 opinion piece, he was very clear that this proposal was conditional on Russia meeting membership criteria that it had not yet managed, including 'institutionalization of democratic practices and values ... protection for minorities and acceptance of borders; adoption of free-market economics, and implementation of responsible security and proliferation policies'.¹⁴² In 2002 Baker raised the option again, this time as a reward for Russian support in the US war on terror, but again emphasised its conditionality on Russian domestic political, human rights, and economic reforms.¹⁴³ In fact the option of Russia joining NATO has always been on the table, and remains there still – no US or NATO leader has ever said that Russia could not apply to join NATO. But during the period in question no Western leader believed Russia was close to meeting the criteria that defined an alliance which (in Baker's words) was fundamentally designed 'to promote one specific set of values', that of liberal democracy.¹⁴⁴

Counterfactual #2: the Partnership for Peace delaying scenario

The most plausible alternative scenario – and a policy choice that was actually part of the Clinton administration's deliberations – was the notion that PFP could have truly become a temporary alternative to NATO enlargement, significantly delaying the expansion decision. This is what Perry himself preferred.¹⁴⁵ He and his Pentagon colleagues hoped this would allow 'Russia and other eastern European nations ... more opportunity to work with NATO', and that 'by working on real operations with NATO, they would come to see NATO not as an enemy, but as a partner'.¹⁴⁶ Part of the goal was to socialise the Russian military into Western norms of democratic control, replicating what NATO had done in the 1950s by embedding Germany into the West after the Second World War.¹⁴⁷ Charles A. Kupchan, who worked on these issues as an NSC member under Clinton, writes that PFP was designed as a 'hedge strategy' that would enable European-wide defence cooperation if Russian democratic consolidation moved forward, without damaging NATO core functions if

¹⁴¹ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 218.

¹⁴² James A. Baker III, 'Expanding to the East: a New NATO alliance', *Los Angeles Times* (5 December 1993), pt. M, p. 2.

¹⁴³ James A. Baker III, 'Russia in NATO?', *Washington Quarterly*, 25:1 (2002), pp. 95–103.

¹⁴⁴ Baker, 'Russia in NATO?'.

¹⁴⁵ Ashton B. Carter and William J. Perry, *Preventive Defense: A New Security Strategy for America* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1998), p. 30; see also Talbott, *Russia Hand*, pp. 145–6.

¹⁴⁶ Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Charles A. Kupchan, 'Strategic visions', *World Policy Journal*, 11:3 (autumn 1994), pp. 112–22.

Russia should ‘again pose a threat to the continent’s stability’. It was ‘deliberately designed to enable member states to put off questions of formal enlargement’.¹⁴⁸

There are two questions that have to be answered counterfactually about this as a realistic alternative to immediate NATO enlargement: Did the PFP initiative actually have a chance at delaying the forward momentum of the expansion decision within the Clinton administration? And, if it had, would PFP have changed the West’s relationship with Russia?

PFP advocates tried very hard to stop Lake and his colleagues, but they lost definitively in August 1994, when Richard Holbrooke was confirmed as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs. Holbrooke had been a major foreign policy adviser on the Clinton campaign as well as Clinton’s first ambassador to Germany, where he advocated for NATO enlargement, and Clinton calls him ‘one of the most important figures’ in his administration.¹⁴⁹ One of Holbrooke’s roles in 1994 was to be Clinton’s ‘enforcer’ on enlargement policy,¹⁵⁰ and on 22 September he held an Inter-Agency Working Group meeting that shocked many attendees, including those from the Pentagon. He insisted to over thirty officials that ‘he had a mandate from the President to enlarge NATO – and the sole purpose of the meeting was to discuss how to implement that decision’.¹⁵¹ When General Wesley K. Clark, head of policy planning for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ‘objected that there were still “some issues we need to discuss”, Holbrooke shot back: “That sounds like insubordination to me. We need to settle this right now. Either you are on the president’s program, or you are not.”’¹⁵² Despite this, Clark created his own interagency briefing two weeks later where Col. Steve Randolph appeared with a ‘mountain of papers on the table’ detailing 1,200 NATO standardisation requirements that CEE countries could not possibly hope to meet anytime soon.¹⁵³

But to have turned PFP into a Clinton administration decision to delay NATO enlargement, Pentagon officials would have needed to be much more politically savvy. They would have had to build a coalition that cut Lake and Holbrooke off at the pass, before Clinton’s close friend Talbott definitively turned to the pro-enlargement side. It is difficult to imagine that the self-described ‘soft-spoken’ and ‘apolitical’ Perry,¹⁵⁴ and the famously ‘tightly wound’ Clark¹⁵⁵ – neither of whom were particularly close to Clinton – could have pulled this off. Indeed Defense Secretary Perry seemed confused, calling a meeting on 21 December 1994 where he believed he could still convince other administration officials to adopt PFP as an alternative to enlargement. It was not until that meeting failed to achieve his goal that he fell into line behind creating a ‘positive momentum’ for enlargement.¹⁵⁶ To this day he believes that his failure to convince people at the December meeting – not his failure to parry Holbrooke’s advance before the September showdown – was what doomed the expansion delay effort.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁸ Kupchan, ‘Strategic visions’, p. 113.

¹⁴⁹ Clinton, *My Life*, pp. 383, 504.

¹⁵⁰ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, p. 11.

¹⁵¹ Asmus, *Opening NATO’s Door*, p. 88.

¹⁵² Dobbs, ‘Wider alliance’.

¹⁵³ Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When*, pp. 74–5.

¹⁵⁴ William J. Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), pp. 87–9.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Gen. Sir Mike Jackson: My clash with NATO chief’, *The Telegraph* (4 September 2007).

¹⁵⁶ Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ Perry, *My Journey at the Nuclear Brink*, p. 128. Confirmed in author’s telephone interview with Bill Perry, January 2015.

Nonetheless, since the PFP initiative is a policy contingency that was actually under consideration by the White House, it is a reasonable counterfactual to consider. If it had delayed expansion, anti-expansion activists in the United States would have had more time to garner support for their cause as well. Could permanent non-expansion have resulted?

The CEE countries would certainly have been furious, and would have continued their all-out lobbying effort in the US. From 1992 on, Poland made NATO ‘the centerpiece of their domestic and foreign policy agenda’,¹⁵⁸ even when popular dissatisfaction with economic reforms brought former communists into elected office. Poland’s strategy was to try to ‘embarrass’ Washington into giving in – constantly asking for membership, prioritising costly economic and political reforms that moved it toward Western norms, participating in every possible PFP activity (even though Warsaw disliked PFP), and shifting its strategy away from talking about a potential Russian threat, toward citing its achievements and Article 10 of the NATO charter that said invitations might be issued to new members who could ‘contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area’.¹⁵⁹ Polish diplomats worked together with the Polish American Congress lobbying group, and even tried to block Stephen Sestanovich’s appointment as ambassador-at-large and special adviser to the secretary of state for the new independent states in 1997 because he had earlier criticised NATO expansion.¹⁶⁰

The combination of Republican dominance of the Congress with the effective Polish lobbying effort meant that the political pressure in Washington driving NATO expansion forward was immense. Robert Dole, then the presumptive Republican presidential candidate for the 1996 elections, had already begun attacking Clinton for not moving quickly enough on expansion.¹⁶¹ The US defence industry also supported enlargement, and in 1996 Bruce Jackson, the Director of Strategic Planning at Lockheed Martin (the world’s largest arms manufacturer at the time), co-founded a bipartisan lobbying group, the US Committee to Expand NATO, which among other things invited two dozen powerful senators to hear Secretary of State Madeleine Albright speak over dinner about the importance of NATO enlargement.¹⁶² Clinton was a savvy political actor who believed in the utility of compromise with opponents. It is unlikely that Clinton, with strong NATO advocates inside his administration and strong lobbyists outside, would have allowed the Republicans to get the better of him by ceding the enlargement initiative to them indefinitely.

Even if Clinton had chosen not to move the decision forward, as soon as George W. Bush took office following his victorious 2000 election – with his doctrine of a muscular foreign policy employed to expand global liberty and democracy,¹⁶³ and with strong conservative Republican support for enlargement – it seems certain that Washington would have pushed the enlargement decision on its western European allies. (Indeed in the real world, his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was the primary driver of NATO’s 2008 Bucharest Summit statement about eventual membership for Ukraine and Georgia, and she continued lobbying for further

¹⁵⁸ Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 157.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 169. For Article 10, see The North Atlantic Treaty (4 April 1949), available at: {http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm}.

¹⁶⁰ Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows*, p. 164.

¹⁶¹ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 139.

¹⁶² Jeff Gerth and Tim Weiner, ‘Arms makers see bonanza in selling NATO expansion’, *New York Times* (29 June 1997).

¹⁶³ Jonathan Monten, ‘The roots of the Bush doctrine’, *International Security*, 29:4 (spring 2005), pp. 112–56; Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, ‘The Bush doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives versus realists’, *Security Studies*, 17:2 (June 2008), pp. 191–220.

NATO enlargement as time went on.)¹⁶⁴ Polish contributions to peace operations in Kosovo and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s (likely to have occurred even if enlargement had been delayed, since it fit Warsaw's pattern of proving its worth to US and NATO military efforts) would have continued to bolster the case.

This leaves us with one last question: even if eventual NATO enlargement, at least to include Poland, was inevitable, could PFP by delaying expansion have changed the Russian reaction to the West? There were deep bilateral personal ties between the Pentagon and the Russian defence establishment that might have made such cooperation possible. Perry had worked for years at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control (CISAC), before coming to the Pentagon, to build relationships between the US and Soviet senior officer corps and US and Russian defence industrial leaders. He held joint meetings that led to the 1989 Dangerous Military Activities Agreement between the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Soviet General Staff.¹⁶⁵ Kokoshin, the First Deputy Defense Minister of Russia from 1992 to 1997, had been a partner in this CISAC effort during his years as Deputy Director of Moscow's Institute for the US and Canada (ISKAN). Kokoshin came from a military family, had welcomed retired General Staff officers into ISKAN as researchers, and worked with the blessings of the Gorbachev administration, along with his colleagues at IMEMO (Moscow's Institute for World Economics and International Relations) to build ties with reformist General Staff officers.¹⁶⁶ Various forms of US-Russian military-to-military contacts, including visits, port calls, and unit exchanges, had become common starting in 1992.¹⁶⁷ In September 1993, Grachev and Aspin signed a Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on Defense and Military Relations, establishing a Bilateral Working Group to coordinate joint PFP activities on an annual basis, and senior officer meetings and exchanges began to be held.¹⁶⁸

It must also be remembered that the Russian military, the key actor in the PFP scenario, had entered the October 1993 violent Moscow crisis on Yeltsin's side, while Kokoshin was deputy defence minister under Grachev. The Russian Defense Ministry might have been able to stand up successfully against ultranationalist pressures inside Russia, and even inside the Russian military organisation.

Unfortunately, though, the crisis in Bosnia intruded – even *before* the Clinton administration had reached consensus about NATO enlargement, and at a time when official statements about expansion were so ambiguous that Poland believed it was facing a new Yalta. In August 1992 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution that allowed NATO to intervene in Bosnia under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, for humanitarian purposes that supported the UN peacekeeping mission in Bosnia (UNPROFOR). The UNSC placed sanctions against Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milosevic for ethnic cleansing carried out by Serbian paramilitary forces in Bosnia,

¹⁶⁴ Judy Dempsey, 'U.S. starts diplomatic offensive on NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine', *New York Times* (25 October 2008).

¹⁶⁵ William J. Perry, 'Preface', in George L. Butler, Anatolii V. Boliatko, and Scott D. Sagan, *Reducing the Risk of Dangerous Military Activities*, Report of the Stanford University Center for International Security and Arms Control (Stanford, CA: July 1991), p. vi. See also Bob Woodward and R. Jeffrey Smith, 'U.S.-Soviet pact to curb incidents', *Washington Post* (7 June 1989).

¹⁶⁶ Kimberly Marten Zisk, *Engaging the Enemy: Organization Theory and Soviet Military Innovation, 1955–1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 125–30.

¹⁶⁷ Michael J. McCarthy, 'Comrades in arms: Russian-American military-to-military contacts since 1992', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 9:4 (December 1996), pp. 743–78.

¹⁶⁸ McCarthy, 'Comrades in arms', pp. 753–4; Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 24.

and created a no-fly zone over Bosnia to protect the civilian population. Both relied on NATO airstrikes for enforcement – and Russia had voted yes.

Kozyrev had at first tried to convince the United States that the resolution was a bad idea, fearing that NATO action against the ethnically Slavic and religiously Orthodox Christian Serbs would ‘stir up a xenophobic backlash in Russian politics’ and put ‘a Russian Milosevic in the Kremlin’.¹⁶⁹ Yet he approved the UNSC authorisation of airstrikes anyway, leaving Adamishin and Churkin (his colleagues in the foreign ministry, whose responsibilities included negotiating with Milosevic) dismayed.¹⁷⁰ They felt that Milosevic was given complete responsibility for ethnic violence that had multiple sources and extended beyond Serbian state control. The Russian ambassador to Washington, the liberal Vladimir Lukin, was ‘openly contemptuous of Kozyrev’ for aiding what he called an ‘anti-Serb vendetta’.¹⁷¹ Kozyrev was harshly criticised in the Duma for not defending the Serbs at the UN, and Zhirinovskiy accused him of betraying Russian interests.¹⁷² In February 1994 Yeltsin complained that policies in Bosnia were being decided without Russian participation, and said, ‘We will not allow that.’¹⁷³ The Russian vote ‘yes’ did not really signify deep Russian support for the Bosnia initiative.

Crucially for our story, though, both Kozyrev and Churkin said that when the Russian Foreign Ministry discussed NATO airstrikes and the later NATO-led peace operations in Bosnia, it was never tied to questions about NATO territorial enlargement. The issues fell into separate policy channels in Moscow.¹⁷⁴ If disenchantment with NATO was growing in 1993 and 1994, it was not (yet) because of geographical expansion plans.

Following a mortar attack on an open-air market in Sarajevo and a Serbian militia attack on a UN-mandated safe area in the city of Gorazde, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and UNPROFOR asked NATO to begin ‘pinprick’ airstrikes in early 1994. Russia officially objected, claiming that the UNSC resolution had been misinterpreted, threatening to veto any further resolutions, and refusing UNPROFOR orders to move a Russian battalion.¹⁷⁵ While the immediate crisis was resolved, Russian feathers remained ruffled. The airstrikes grew in volume and intensity over the next year. Perry called Grachev after each strike to justify it, but did not share the plans beforehand with him out of fear that the information would leak to the Serbs. Grachev objected that Perry was ‘only informing him, not consulting him’.¹⁷⁶ As a result, Grachev declared that Russia would have nothing to do with PFP as long as NATO was bombing Serb positions.¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile Kozyrev began what the US side called a ‘Lucy-and-the-football act’, repeatedly agreeing to sign a document that would authorise specific Russian PFP activities, and then refusing to do so at the last minute.¹⁷⁸ By this time the Bosnia issue and the NATO enlargement issue had become intertwined

¹⁶⁹ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, pp. 73, 74.

¹⁷⁰ Adamishin, ‘The Yugoslav prelude’.

¹⁷¹ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 77.

¹⁷² Gorskiy, *Problems and Prospects*, p. 18.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁴ Author’s telephone interview with Kozyrev; author’s interview with Churkin.

¹⁷⁵ Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 162–3.

¹⁷⁶ Carter and Perry, *Preventive Defense*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Talbott, *Russia Hand*, p. 133. The reference is to the American ‘Charlie Brown’ comic strip, where every fall the character named Lucy would agree to hold a football while Charlie Brown tried to kick a field goal – and

temporarily, so it is impossible to disentangle which was most responsible for Moscow's immediate PFP obstreperousness in late 1994.¹⁷⁹

Russia did eventually send 2,000 troops to participate in the NATO-led IFOR and SFOR peace enforcement operations in Bosnia starting in 1996, and there was significant cooperation on the ground. But joint military operations in Bosnia did not run smoothly, especially because Moscow surprised American officers by sending in a hardline officer, General Nikolai Staskov, to lead Russian forces even though he was outside the chain of command that had been negotiated.¹⁸⁰ Interoperability never gelled above the tactical level.¹⁸¹ And while PFP did eventually include Russian participation, there was no unity inside the senior Russian officer corps about military-to-military exchanges as the 1990s wore on, with 'some leaders of the General Staff trying to derail them even as generals at the top of the Defense Ministry insisted on upholding them' for the sake of maintaining some form of Russian influence in Western security affairs.¹⁸²

As the 1990s proceeded NATO members conducted more and more out-of-area airstrikes, now without Russian consent. Russia was not consulted when the US and UK created no-fly zones with frequent airstrikes in Iraq. The most significant blow came in 1999, when NATO airstrikes against Serbia over the war in Kosovo, launched without UNSC approval, virtually sealed the end of real security cooperation with Russia in Europe.¹⁸³ Even though Russian forces would also participate in the NATO-led KFOR peace operations at the close of that war, their lack of coordination came close to causing a violent standoff with NATO forces under General Clark's command at the airport in Pristina.¹⁸⁴ And of course this was followed in 2003 by the US-led invasion of Iraq without UNSC support; that year Moscow pulled out of both SFOR and KFOR, 'thereby losing the opportunity for ground-level, day-to-day cooperation with NATO'.¹⁸⁵

In the end, there may simply have been too many conflicts of interest between NATO (and the US in particular) and the Russian military organisation to make PFP truly work the way that Perry had envisioned it (even though it continues on the books to this day, and other European states remain strong supporters of the effort). Even without NATO's geographic expansion, PFP could not have overcome the sense that NATO's role in global security affairs was growing at the expense of Russia's statist and nationalist definition of its own security interests.

always pulled the ball away at the last minute, making Charlie Brown fall on his back as he tried to make the kick. Charlie Brown never learned.

¹⁷⁹ Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*, p. 167, argues that it was NATO enlargement that was key, but his analysis does not include Perry's descriptions of his interactions with Grachev.

¹⁸⁰ Rick Atkinson, 'Bosnia force testing New Russian-U.S. ties', *Washington Post* (18 January 1996).

¹⁸¹ Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*, p. 123.

¹⁸² Kimberly Marten Zisk, 'Contact lenses: Explaining U.S.-Russian military-to-military ties', *Armed Forces and Society*, 25:4 (summer 1999), p. 584.

¹⁸³ For in-depth discussions of the Russian reaction to the Kosovo crisis and its effects on status concerns, see Oksana Antonenko, 'Russia, NATO and European security after Kosovo', *Survival*, 41:4 (1999), pp. 124–44; Dov Lynch, "'Walking the tightrope": the Kosovo conflict and Russia in European security, 1998–August 1999', *European Security*, 8:4 (1999), pp. 57–83; and Vladimir Baranovsky, 'Russia: A part of Europe or apart from Europe?', *International Affairs* (London), 76:3 (July 2000), pp. 443–58.

¹⁸⁴ Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning Ugly: NATO's War to Save Kosovo* (Washington: Brookings, 2001), p. 175; Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo, and the Future of Combat* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Pouliot, *International Security in Practice*, p. 124.

FPF and the joint peacekeeping experiences may nonetheless have helped temper the Russian military reaction to NATO enlargement. Indeed, annual military data provided by Russia to other state participants in the OSCE, under the 1999 Vienna confidence-building agreement, shows a steep drop in troops and equipment deployed in Russia's Western and Southern Military Districts (that is, along or toward NATO borders) from 2000 to 2010 (even after Putin's 2007 Munich speech), and a continued but less precipitous decline from 2010 to 2014 (that is, until the Ukraine crisis began, when Russian force numbers in those districts rose steeply). This annual behaviour indicates that Russian planners did not consider NATO's enlargement to be a military threat.¹⁸⁶ Russia was unquestionably dismayed by NATO actions, but does not seem to have been alarmed by NATO's expanded geographic scope, despite Putin's statements.

Conclusions

What does this exercise in counterfactual analysis allow us to conclude?

First, troubles between Russia and the West were not primarily caused by NATO's geographical enlargement. The nationalist Russian backlash began in 1990 and resulted in constitutional crisis, civil violence, and the use of military force in Moscow in October 1993, which was at least partly directed against the Kremlin's pro-Western liberal foreign policy. Pitched, entrenched resentment against the West and Russia's declining place in the world – not only by ultranationalists, but also by more moderate statistes who were dismayed by Russia's decline in relative power – was established years before enlargement was being seriously considered by the United States or its allies.

Second, while NATO territorial expansion was an incredible irritant to Russia, no significant player in Russia believed it posed a direct military threat. Most experts did not view NATO's geographic enlargement in realist, geostrategic terms.¹⁸⁷ Instead the sense of threat came from themes more familiar to constructivists and social identity theorists,¹⁸⁸ who focus on questions of status and its decline and a resulting sense of humiliation, stigmatisation, and outsider standing by state populations. NATO's expanding role in the Balkans and both NATO and US use of airstrikes without Russian consultation and approval probably mattered more than NATO's geographic expansion in status considerations. Russia wanted to remain a great power whose interests would be taken seriously by the West (and especially by the United States, its key competitor), but the West could afford to disrespect Russia.

Third, just as domestic politics mattered most in explaining Russia's reactions to the West, US domestic politics also mattered most in explaining the decision to enlarge NATO. The only plausible US alternative to NATO enlargement in 1994, the Pentagon's Partnership for Peace policy, lacked the internal political traction to slow down the enlargement train inside the Clinton administration. PFP was a real policy alternative, nonetheless, that should be taken seriously as a counterfactual possibility. Yet even if PFP advocates could have somehow won the day inside the Clinton administration, and slowed down or even limited NATO enlargement (probably to Poland), continuing NATO and US airstrikes demonstrating a disregard for Russia's international interests

¹⁸⁶ Email to the author from former NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander R. Vershbow, 10 April 2017. The trend holds for troops, battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and artillery.

¹⁸⁷ An interesting exception is Alexei Arbatov, 'NATO and Russia', *Security Dialogue*, 26:2 (1995), pp. 135–46.

¹⁸⁸ Ayşe Zarakol, *How the East Learned to Live with the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Larson and Shevchenko, 'Russia says no'; Larson and Shevchenko, 'Status seekers'.

would likely have soured the relationship. It didn't really matter whether NATO expanded quickly or slowly. As long as Russia was not getting into Western security institutions, as long as those institutions were not subsuming themselves to the CSCE/OSCE or the UN, and as long as Russia was denied the right to veto the use of US and NATO force, Russian elites would not be satisfied. Meanwhile none of those idealist alternative options would ever have been acceptable to hardheaded realist US and NATO decision-makers, unless Russia had followed the more liberal democratic pathways of its CEE counterparts. It was already clear by 1993 that this would not happen anytime soon.

Finally, what this exercise demonstrates is that exploring counterfactuals is useful because of what the process reveals about history. By learning which contingent policy outcomes were considered by policymakers when, why they didn't happen, and what their likely trajectories and consequences would have been, we gain a much deeper and richer understanding of what did happen in the real world, and why.

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