

# **United They Stood: Elite Consensus on NATO Expansion and Presidential Foreign Policy Making in Yeltsin's Russia<sup>1</sup>**

**By Kari Roberts**

## **Introduction**

Russia's relationship with NATO has been among the most important and contentious of its relationships in its short history. Russian officials have been reasonably outspoken with respect to their position on the presence of American troops in areas of former Soviet influence.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Russian opposition to the expansion of NATO into Central and Eastern Europe, particularly into the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, has punctuated the relationship.<sup>3</sup>

For many decades, NATO was the enemy and its persistent encroachment toward post-Soviet Russia serves as a haunting reminder of what many perceive as Russia's crushing defeat in the Cold War. For NATO to position itself strategically in the territory of its former adversary serves as a daily reminder for Russians of this defeat and for the loss of great power status, previously a source of great national pride. President Yeltsin

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper was prepared for the 2004 CPSA Annual Conference at the University of Manitoba, June 2004, and represents an extensively modified and truncated version of a chapter of my PhD thesis at the University of Calgary, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> In a 2001 poll of Russian political elites, when asked what they most feared, 52.9% of respondents identified "NATO's eastward expansion to include the former Soviet republics." Poll originally reported in *Izvestia*, May 25, 2001 and reprinted in the CDPSP. See "Poll Charts Russian Elite's Foreign Policy Views," *Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 53:21 (2001): 6. More recently, Alexei Arbatov, head of the Center for International Security (IMEMO-RAN), cited statistics that placed the percentage of Russian elites that oppose NATO enlargement at 90%. See "Nearly 90% of Russia's Political Elite Opposes NATO Enlargement," *Rosbalt*, reprinted in Johnson's Russia List #8188, 29 April 2004.

<sup>3</sup> This paper is concerned exclusively with the views of Russia's political elite regarding enlargement and is not concerned with public attitudes toward expansion. This is due, in part, to the fact that, as William Zimmerman notes, when it came to foreign policy issues in the Yeltsin era, foreign policy makers tended to "waltz before a blind audience;" Russians in general did not seem overly concerned with foreign policy issues. More specifically, Zimmerman also notes that, overall, the Russian masses seemed far less fearful of NATO than were elites. See William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy: Russian Elite and Mass Perspectives 1993-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

himself once claimed NATO expansion to be a “mistake, and a serious one at that,” and former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov labelled it as a “very grave error.”<sup>4</sup>

The continued existence of NATO as a military-political organization has been of major concern to Russian policy makers. After all, NATO’s oft-touted *raison d’être* was to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down.” Because of the baggage NATO carried forward into the post-Cold War era, former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev once argued that, if it was to exist, NATO should transform itself from a military organization to a political one that would address the security concerns of a post-Cold War Europe and would fall under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE – then the CSCE).<sup>5</sup> In his explicit opposition to expansion Kozyrev proclaimed, “it is not a matter of increasing the number of NATO team members, but of reconstructing the field itself and adjusting the rules of the game to apply the new conditions.”<sup>6</sup> He called for the creation of “a new institution with the goal of maintaining security and stability in close cooperation with Russia.”<sup>7</sup> Russian elites perceived NATO expansion as an attempt to exclude Russia from European security arrangements and viewed the potential expansion of the Alliance into former Soviet states and satellites, still considered by Russia to be within its sphere of influence, as a threat to Russia’s vital strategic interests; an agenda that prompted a reassessment of Russia’s national interests.

---

<sup>4</sup> RFE/RL OMRI *Daily Digest* 58:1 (March 24, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Crow, “Russian Views on an Eastward Expansion of NATO,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 2:41 (October 15 1993), 22. Although it was never aggressively stated publicly, the Russian consensus was that it was preferable to get America out of post-Cold War Europe altogether. The OSCE, of which Russia is a member, was a favourable alternative to an American-led NATO, which was perceived by the Russians as protecting American interests above all others.

<sup>6</sup> Kozyrev quoted in *Moskovskie Novosti*, 39 (September 1993), A7, and reprinted in Suzanne Crow, “Russian Views on an Eastward Expansion of NATO,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 2:41 (October 15 1993), 22.

<sup>7</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, “Partnership or Cold Peace?” *Foreign Policy* 99 (Summer 1995): 8.

In the early 1990's there was a great deal of optimism about a new era in East-West relations with the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. However, an unconditional peace was not in fact forged; rather, while the relationship has remained relatively peaceful, it has been challenged, repeatedly, by NATO's enlargement agenda. Post-Soviet Russian foreign policy has been somewhat puzzling for Western scholars, as it has been characterized by inconsistency and even incoherence at times. But one thing that has remained constant is that, while Russia's NATO policy has necessarily been largely reactionary, its position on expansion has been one of consistent opposition.

Given the tremendous and ongoing importance of the Russia-US relationship in the post-Cold War era, it is important for scholars to gain an understanding of what lay beneath Russia's early opposition to NATO expansion throughout the 1990s, why Russia's position on NATO expansion remained consistent *and* consistently communicated, and what this reveals about foreign policy making in Yeltsin's Russia more generally. Such an agenda could fill volumes, and has; however, this writer's goals are somewhat more modest. This paper first asserts that, unique about Russia's relations with NATO, is that this is one issue for which there has been consensus among the foreign policy community, despite the fact that precisely *why* Russia feels threatened by NATO has not been clearly articulated. Rather than identifying the challenges NATO presented to a newly democratic Russian Federation, elites, and chiefly President Yeltsin himself, have relied upon Soviet-era articulations of the threat posed to Russian security by NATO. While a more exhaustive study of Russian foreign policy making toward the West reveals widespread disagreement over Russia's foreign policy orientations, elite

views on NATO have been comparatively harmonious. NATO has been closely associated with Soviet defeat in the Cold War and, as such, agreement about the threat it poses has been consistent throughout the post-Soviet era.

The paper's second task is to demonstrate that this elite consensus on the threat posed by NATO represented an anomaly in Russian foreign policy making and signified a noteworthy departure from the trend of presidential foreign policy making in Yeltsin's Russia. To this end, the paper will first discuss the reliance on Cold War language to articulate concerns about NATO expansion in the absence of an elite consensus on Russia's foreign policy priorities, brought on by a post-Cold War crisis of identity within Russia. Second, the paper will discuss the rare elite consensus on NATO expansion, a consensus that marked a major departure from the vigorous foreign policy debates that characterized the Yeltsin era, which had required and enabled Yeltsin to dominate the foreign policy making process. On the issue of NATO expansion, Yeltsin did not need to dominate the foreign policy process to the degree he was accustomed due to the domestic elite consensus on the perils of NATO expansion. Throughout his two terms as Russian President, Yeltsin was able to subordinate the interests of the various foreign policy making institutions to his own. In the interests of brevity, this paper will not discuss them all, but instead will discuss Yeltsin's manipulation of the Russian Security Council to demonstrate his dominance of the wider foreign policy process.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> In my PhD thesis I provide a more comprehensive examination of the weaknesses of Russia's foreign policy institutions and Yeltsin's ability to exploit these weaknesses to his own political ends. In addition to the Security Council, I examine the roles of the Russian Duma, the Security Services, and the Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs in greater detail.

## **A post-Cold War “Crisis of Identity”<sup>9</sup>**

As stated above, there is the perception in the West that post-Soviet Russian foreign policy has been both reactionary and somewhat inconsistent in its short history – a view attributed, in part, to the short tenure of the early “honeymoon” period enjoyed by Moscow and Washington between 1991-1993. Both Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister, Kozyrev, took a decidedly pro-Western foreign policy orientation, privileging their relations with the West above all else. While the pro-Western agenda was logical in light of the perceived economic advantages of close cooperation with the United States, it was highly criticized by Yeltsin’s political opposition, whose voices grew louder and more menacing with the 1993 Duma elections. The result was a step backward from policies of Western appeasement and the introduction of a more pragmatic approach, characterized by more assertive rhetoric toward the West. This pragmatism is exemplified by Yeltsin’s warning of a “cold peace” descending upon the relationship should Russia’s concerns about NATO not be addressed. But while domestic political battles exerted influence upon Russia’s orientation toward the United States, at the root of these battles was a deeper disagreement about Russia’s interests and its identity, both at home and abroad.

There has been a notable lack of consensus among the Russian political elite about Russia’s role in the world and how it should orient itself toward the United States, its former enemy for so many years. Much was at stake for Russians at the end of the Cold War, and Russian elites have been mourning the loss of Russia’s international prestige, a loss that is exacerbated by Russia’s struggles to ground itself domestically, a process that could well take decades. And as Russia struggles to define itself, one thing is

---

<sup>9</sup> I advance a similar iteration of Russia’s “identity crisis” and its impact upon foreign policy in “Empire Envy: Russia-US Relations post-9/11,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* (2004 – forthcoming).

certain: the empire is lost and Russia suffered defeat at the hands of America and its allies; the notion of Russian greatness had been “humbled.”<sup>10</sup>

While there is a shared sense of loss among Russians with respect to their perceived defeat in the Cold War, there is no collective definition of what Russia has become – Russians are undergoing an “identity crisis,” of sorts, characterized by differing definitions of “Russian-ness.” This crisis of identity is widely acknowledged by scholars<sup>11</sup> and Vera Tolz aptly identifies five competing conceptions of the Russian identity, each contributing to a unique sense of the national interest with implications for foreign policy: Russians as Russian speakers; Russians as Eastern Slavs; Russians as imperialists; Russians as race; and, Russians as a civic nation.<sup>12</sup> For example, if Russians are defined as Russian speakers then this could have implications for the extent to which Russia actively and assertively promotes the interests of its Diasporas throughout the former Soviet Union, especially in the Baltic states where citizenship and language laws are said to discriminate against Russian-speaking populations. Should “Russian-ness” be understood to reflect a traceable racial lineage, or the assertion of Russia as part of a greater pan-Slavic connection, then perhaps a logical path for Russian foreign policy might be to pursue closer relations, or perhaps even unification, with Ukraine and Belarus. Should Russians view themselves as imperialist, this could provoke an interest in some form of reunification of the former Soviet Union. And finally, though unlikely, should Russian identity come to be defined in terms of patriotic citizenship – to be

---

<sup>10</sup> See John Lloyd, “A Superpower Humbled,” *Transitions* 5:6 (June 1998).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Dmitry Shlapentokh, “The Russian Identity Crisis,” *Contemporary Review* 273:1592 (September 1998); Ronald Grigor Suny, “Russia’s Identity Crisis,” in Archie Brown, ed., *Contemporary Russian Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Vera Tolz, “Conflicting ‘Homeland Myths’ and Nation-State Building in Postcommunist Russia,” *Slavic Review* 57:2 (Summer 1998): 267-294; Vera Tolz, “Russians’ Identity Crisis,” *Transitions* 5:6 (June 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Vera Tolz, “Conflicting ‘Homeland Myths.’”

Russian is to live in and love Russia – then this may resemble the notion of identity and citizenship often shared in Western liberal democracies and may reflect Russia’s adoption of Western-style governance, which may influence a more Western-oriented foreign policy agenda. But there are so many competing definitions of the national identity, and consequently, of the national interest, that consensus on this subject has been elusive.

And in the absence of a united answer to the question “what is Russia,” it has become easier to identify what Russia is *not* – it was *not* the victor in the Cold War, it is *not* the great power it once was, it is *not* the great power it should be; its influence in the world does *not* match Russians’ perceptions of what its status should be. Russians have long been an imperial people and in many cases still see themselves in this light. Thus, to suffer defeat at the hands of the enemy and then to see this former enemy reap the benefits of this defeat has been painful for many Russians and this has stirred up much resentment both toward America, toward NATO (read America), and toward democracy itself, commonly viewed as an American export. And for some, American power in the world today comes at the expense of the Russian defeat. Russia, through the Soviet Union, was the only country able to balance American power effectively, and many Russians still envision this as their responsibility today.<sup>13</sup>

Without a collective national identity to serve as a compass for defining both the national interest and foreign policy priorities, there has been a tendency to rely on known

---

<sup>13</sup> Former Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov underscored this idea during an interview when he hinted at the problem of American dominance: “First, during the transition from a bipolar to a multipolar world, Russia must play the role of counterbalance to the negative trends that are displaying themselves in international affairs. During this transition period, not all the power centres that make up this multipolarity have emerged yet. And some are trying to achieve dominance in this situation.” See Glenn Chafetz, “The Struggle for a National Identity in Post-Soviet Russia,” *Political Science Quarterly* 11:4 (Winter 1996/1997).

quantities – to establish Russia’s international role within a Cold War context in which Russia and the United States, though certainly no longer enemies, still balance power in the international system. Within this context, Russia reacts to its clear inability to serve in this capacity to the degree its predecessor once did; it reacts unfavourably to what it worryingly perceives as American global hegemony, which it closely identifies with the expansion of NATO. And concerns over expansion have dominated the Russian foreign policy discourse and have represented one issue about which there is consensus. President Yeltsin and even Kozyrev, both with early pro-Western orientations, were staunchly opposed to enlargement.<sup>14</sup> And this concern for the threat NATO posed to Russian security was echoed by many Russian officials, including Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Security Council Secretary Marshal Evgenii Shaposhnikov, and Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who warned in 1993, “if the former Warsaw Pact states joined NATO in the near future... this step would relegate Russia to a much more isolated position.”<sup>15</sup> Even among unlikely allies within the foreign policy community, consensus was reached on this issue. It is important to note, however, that what enabled this atypical consensus among foreign policy interests was not collective agreement on the challenge to Russian security that NATO posed – this would imply the national interest had been determined and articulated – but rather a collective sense of humiliation over Russia’s defeat at American hands. And this collective *posture* toward NATO determined the resulting *principle* that NATO represented a threat to Russian national security; as a

---

<sup>14</sup> See, Andrei Kozyrev, “Partnership or Cold Peace?” *Foreign Policy* 99 (Summer 1995): 3-15; and “The Lagging Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 1994): 59-71. It should also be noted that, initially, upon first hearing of the possibility of NATO’s enlargement into the Visegrad states in 1993, Yeltsin expressed his sympathy for Poland’s desire to join NATO. However this sympathy was short-lived and Russia’s anti-expansion stance was quickly advanced in a series of letters to Western leaders.

<sup>15</sup> Suzanne Crow, “Russian Views on an Eastward Expansion of NATO,” 22.

direct result of an inability to define the national interest, as witnessed so often in Yeltsin's Russia, *the posture determined the principles*. Oddly, consensus over the *principles* of Russian foreign policy – the underlying interests on which foreign policy would be based – were not present; however, in their absence, Cold War thinking about the West was employed by default, and *this* enabled consensus on a Russian *posture* toward NATO. So the consensus reached on NATO expansion occurred *despite* the important absence of consensus on the national interest.

This widespread disagreement about Russia's identity and interests had serious implications for foreign policy that can be seen in the presence of a number of competing schools of thought with respect to how Russia should orient itself toward the United States, ranging from pro-Western Atlanticism to anti-Western Eurasianism, characterized by a desire to rebuild the former USSR as a global balance to American power.<sup>16</sup> Though each of these perspectives has evolved over time and each has enjoyed its moments of influence, one thing they share in common is the desire to restore Russia's great power status. For many Russians, because pride in their country was shaken with the Soviet Union's collapse, the goal of Russian foreign policy should be to restore Russia's greatness. In 1994 Duma Speaker and future presidential candidate Ivan Rybkin asserted that there was virtual agreement among all parties that "great power patriotism... (was) an idea everybody (was) ready to work for."<sup>17</sup> And it was this consensus that led to a

---

<sup>16</sup> Scholars label these schools of thought in various ways, but, for the most part, the content is the same. See Michael McFaul, "Russia's Many Foreign Policies," *Demokratizatsiya* 7:3 (Summer 1999): 393-412; Ilya Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 240-264; and, Andrei Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," *Mershon International Studies Review* 41 (1997): 247-268.

<sup>17</sup> Rybkin quoted by *RFE/RL Research Institute Daily Report* (November 18, 1994), and reprinted in Neil Malcolm, "Foreign Policy Making," in Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, eds., *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 139.

departure from Yeltsin's standard operating procedures of foreign policy making. In so many other instances, Yeltsin possessed numerous tools at his disposal to dominate the foreign policy process. And his manipulation of the foreign policy process often led to conflicting assertions by important ministers or high profile elites that differed from the official policy statements of the President. In pursuit of an explanation for this trend in presidential policy making, most responsible were institutional weakness and Yeltsin's personal willingness to exploit this weakness and, subsequently, his own power. But in the case of NATO expansion, this was one area in which Yeltsin did not need to exercise this ability. The following section will outline the nature of presidential foreign policy making in Russia in general, which will be followed by an elaboration of how the elite consensus on NATO expansion provided an exception to this trend.

### **Presidential Policy Making**

Post-Soviet Russian foreign policy shares a number of characteristics with its predecessor. Yeltsin's leadership style can be traced back to similar styles of leadership in the Soviet era. Even though a host of institutional changes were made in the early 1990's, there is a visible institutional continuity that has influenced the behaviour of political elites. This continuity comes not in the form of offices and departments, but rather in formal and informal procedures and norms.<sup>18</sup> Power in post-Soviet Russia is not simply institutionally given, but rather is dependent upon one's relationship to the centre of power – put simply, one's influence depends heavily upon one's relationship to the President. Thus, one institution – the presidency - has the *ability* to dominate, and this is

---

<sup>18</sup> Edwin Bacon, "The Politics of Defence in Post-Soviet Russia," *Contemporary Political Studies* 1:2 (1997): 761.

dependent upon the leader occupying the office and his propensity to maximize his position. It has Soviet-era characteristics because it “attempts to consolidate power in one particular organ of the executive; [builds] links between this central power base and the regions; [woos] security forces; and [builds up] a coalition of political forces.”<sup>19</sup> Even the Russian media picked up on the similarities. The *Moscow News* reported in October 1991 that presidential decisions were “prepared in a factional, unpublicized manner in a narrow circle of persons linked by their *nomenklatura* past...”<sup>20</sup> *Kommersant* asked in one of its articles, “Is the Security Council a New Politburo?”<sup>21</sup> In fact, Yuri Skokov, the first Secretary of the Council, made the same comparison in 1992.<sup>22</sup>

The 1992 version of the Security Council was modelled after the body of the same title created by Gorbachev in 1990, which was intended to establish high-level decision making that revolved around the President.<sup>23</sup> After taking office in 1991, President Yeltsin immediately faced a contentious parliament and so began the struggle for power between the two branches that has characterized post-Soviet Russian politics. He designed the Security Council as a means to circumvent parliament when making important decisions.<sup>24</sup> As Neil Malcolm notes, the Security Council was used “more as a weapon in the internal political struggle than as a staff office for working out policy.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 765.

<sup>20</sup> *Moscow News* report cited by Neil Malcolm in “Foreign Policy Making,” 146.

<sup>21</sup> *Kommersant* 28 (6-13 July 1992), 2, cited in Suzanne Crow, “Processes and Policies,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 2:20 (14 May 1993): 50.

<sup>22</sup> Edwin Bacon, “The Politics of Defence in Post-Soviet Russia,” 767.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 761.

<sup>24</sup> Yeltsin established the Security Council in June 1992 by Decree 547, “On the Formation of the Russian Federation Security Council,” and it was installed as a constitutional body in the 1993 constitution. Interestingly, Secretaries of the Security Council were meant to be confirmed by the Duma; however, this was not common practice.

<sup>25</sup> Neil Malcolm, “Foreign Policy Making,” 132.

The Council was appointed by the President himself and was intended to provide a consultative service to the President and to develop proposals for his consideration on matters of security, which he could choose to implement by decree.<sup>26</sup> The Security Council enables the President to direct foreign policy making because it occupies the political space between the power ministries and the presidency and is independent of electoral procedures.<sup>27</sup> This means it is not directly subject to public reprisal in the event of unpopular policy. This also allows the President to be selective in his appointment of Council members and to retain control over the day-to-day business of the Council. Because the President can appoint the Secretary of the Council (second only to the President as the most powerful member of the Council because of its agenda setting role), and the other non-permanent members, this enables him to ensure that the Council does not become too powerful and to restrain strong figures who may be in disagreement with him. Moreover, it is also the President's prerogative to decide whether or not he will adhere to the decisions of the Council. It is really an advisory body attached to his office, at his behest, and it does not issue directives; it simply counsels the President. The Council enjoys power only when the President supports its decisions.<sup>28</sup> Jeffrey Checkel contends that Yeltsin's creation of the Security Council as a presidential apparatus, intended to centralize foreign policy making, was not conducive to coherent foreign policy because Yeltsin's team did not articulate a clear vision for foreign policy, but rather adopted a series of ad hoc measures that used foreign policy as a means to

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>27</sup> Edwin Bacon, "The Politics of Defence in Post-Soviet Russia," 762.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 765.

strengthen the bureaucratic structures associated with the presidency.<sup>29</sup> And according to Stephen Blank, the result was that “because personal interest trumps national interest, Russia suffers from multiple clashing security policies.”<sup>30</sup>

With the exception of the permanent members, membership on the Security Council is often seen as a gift the President bestows upon loyalists. For example, when Yeltsin was grooming Vladimir Putin to be his successor and was looking for ways both to reward him for his loyalty and also to increase his profile and influence within government, Yeltsin appointed him Secretary of the Security Council.<sup>31</sup> However, just as easily as membership can be awarded, it can also be rescinded. Yuri Skokov learned this the hard way. Appointed Secretary in April 1992, Skokov earned his position through loyalty, but lost it because his loyalty was not strong enough; he wavered in his support for Yeltsin during the constitutional crisis of 1993.<sup>32</sup>

Aleksandr Lebed’s appointment to the Security Council further exemplifies the extent to which the Council could be used as a political tool of the President. General Lebed had been appointed Secretary between the first and second rounds of the 1996 presidential election. Lebed had placed third on the first presidential ballot and Yeltsin wanted Lebed’s support to transfer over to his candidature on the second ballot.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Lebed was a popular politician and was often openly critical of Yeltsin’s presidency. His appointment reflected Yeltsin’s desire to seek

---

<sup>29</sup> Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet/Russian Behaviour and the End of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 115-116.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen J. Blank, “Who’s Minding the State? The Failure of Russian Security Policy,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 45:2 (March/April 1998): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Putin was Secretary for a brief period in 1999. Yeltsin discusses the need to reward Putin by having him chair special sessions of the Security Council. See Boris Yeltsin, *Midnight Diaries*, translated by Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 337.

<sup>32</sup> More specifically, Skokov was reportedly unsupportive of Yeltsin’s decree establishing direct presidential rule.

<sup>33</sup> Edwin Bacon, “The Politics of Defence in Post-Soviet Russia,” 763.

accommodation with the opposition, as he conceded that winning limited support from the nationalists was necessary for his own political survival.<sup>34</sup> Lebed's appointment helped Yeltsin to win the election and, for a time, enabled him to silence Lebed by co-opting him into the Security Council, a plum position from which he would be less likely to attack Yeltsin's policies openly.<sup>35</sup> However, Yeltsin's plan did not work as well as he had hoped, as Lebed quickly lost patience with the decision making process, expressed such, and was eventually removed from his post once his loyalty to Yeltsin was in doubt.<sup>36</sup> One-time Council Secretary, Marshall Yevgeny Shaposhnikov, lasted only two months in the job in 1993 when he resigned,<sup>37</sup> complaining that his job as Secretary required unconditional political loyalty to Yeltsin and little more than organizing conferences between the President and the heads of ministries.<sup>38</sup>

Yeltsin benefited tremendously from the Security Council as a political tool. In addition to his use of membership rewards to loyalists, he was also able to keep the power ministries in check through their membership in the Council because they became a body subordinated to his office. By including the power ministries on the Council, Yeltsin was able to increase his authority by effectively co-opting them and making them answerable to him. Because the ministerial and governmental members of the Council

---

<sup>34</sup> Robert Donaldson and Joseph Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia: Changing Systems, Enduring Interests* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 292.

<sup>35</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee and Theodore W. Karasik, *Foreign and Security Decisionmaking Under Yeltsin* (Washington, D.C.: National Defence Research Institute, Rand, 1997), 38.

<sup>36</sup> According to Yeltsin, the real reason Lebed was fired was for his "radicalism" and for his "bungling" of the Chechnya problem after his peace deal with Maskhadov failed. See *Midnight Diaries*, 61-67.

<sup>37</sup> Shaposhnikov did resign, however his appointment had required parliamentary approval that was not forthcoming. Interestingly, Shaposhnikov's appointment made many wonder about the continued relevance of the Security Council since, previous to his Secretaryship, every post Shaposhnikov had been appointed to (i.e. the Soviet Ministry of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of the CIS), had lost its influence and had been abolished. It appeared as though these concerns had some basis, as Shaposhnikov was meant to become another of Yeltsin's "yes" men. He refused and resigned only two months later. See Robert Donaldson and Joseph Noguee, *The Foreign Policy of Russia*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> Edwin Bacon, "The Politics of Defence in Post-Soviet Russia," 769. Neil Malcolm also discusses the reasons behind Shaposhnikov's resignation in "Foreign Policy Making," 136.

owed their membership to Yeltsin himself, he was able to “subordinate parliament *and* the government to carry out the will of one person.”<sup>39</sup> Stephen Blank underscores this point as he writes,

...no regulated interagency process exists. Everyone either acts on his own or runs to his boss, and he and his boss appeal to Tsar Boris, who maintains final authority. By constantly dividing people, groups and institutions, Yeltsin deliberately destabilizes the government, fostering the privatization of Russian security policy.<sup>40</sup>

Yeltsin was able to use the Security Council to put himself firmly in charge of foreign policy making. And much like the Soviet period, one’s seat at the foreign policy making table was not necessarily determined by institutional affiliation but instead by proximity to the President. For example, it would be fair to expect that by virtue of its legal mandate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), would head the foreign policy debate in Russia and would be responsible for devising policy options for the government. However instead of taking on this role steadily, its influence has fluctuated, depending upon the Minister and his relationship to Yeltsin. Illustrative of this reality is the fact that the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence have not enjoyed permanent seats on the Security Council. This enabled Yeltsin to subordinate the power ministries to his office and to involve them in policy making only when he so desired; their influence and involvement was not institutionally given, but was rather a personal decision of the President, and to a great extent, this depended on their personal relationship to Yeltsin.

Stephen Larrabee and Theodore Karasik recall the change in the MFA’s influence once Kozyrev had been replaced by Primakov.<sup>41</sup> Under Kozyrev, skirmishes between the

---

<sup>39</sup> This accusation was made by former Russian Minister of Justice Yuri Kalmykov, OMRI *Daily Digest*, January 27, 1995, cited by William Derleth, “The Evolution of the Russian Polity: The Case of the Security Council,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 29:1 (1996): 53.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen J. Blank, “Who’s Minding the State?” 3.

<sup>41</sup> F. Stephen Larrabee and Theodore W. Karasik, *Foreign and Security Decisionmaking Under Yeltsin*, 10.

Foreign and Defence Ministers and between them and the Security Council Secretary were frequent. Often, whomever had Yeltsin's support won the battle. Primakov was in Yeltsin's favour and was a well respected and assertive politician who knew the system well and navigated it expertly. Prior to his MFA appointment, Primakov was Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), and under his stewardship, the SVR enjoyed an as yet unmatched degree of influence over foreign policy. Upon his transfer, the prominence of the MFA in foreign policy increased exponentially and the SVR, under new leadership, became less prominent.<sup>42</sup> So throughout the post-Soviet period, the President has been able to manipulate the foreign policy institutions and the individuals at their helm to advance his own political agenda or to safeguard his own political position. And the absence of consensus on foreign policy issues and orientations has exacerbated the relative weakness of these institutions vis-à-vis the President.

Under Yeltsin there were no formal standard operating procedures for formulating foreign policy, only norms and common practices, which enabled individuals to participate in the foreign policy process on the basis of their personal relations with, and loyalty to, the President. However it might be fair to say that Presidential foreign policy making was *necessary* in post-Soviet Russia due to the weak institutions Yeltsin helped to initialize and to the fact that consensus among the political elite on foreign policy matters was difficult to attain. And while elites debated Russia's national interests, decisions were being taken in the international community that required a Russian response. In the absence of elite agreement, Yeltsin, nearly exclusively, decided how Russia would react to its new security challenges. But in the case of NATO, he did not

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 28.

need to worry about parliamentary opposition or political manoeuvring, as agreement on NATO enlargement was in ready supply.

### **Russia and NATO Expansion**

From early on, Russian political and military leaders have been saying much the same thing: Russia considers American unilateralism as purposeful and as a threat to international stability and to Russia's own national security.<sup>43</sup> In 2000, Anatoly Kvashnin, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, echoed this statement by accusing the West of ignoring Russian security concerns, of deliberately opposing its consolidation as an influential force in a multipolar world, and by claiming that NATO troops in Eastern Europe would potentially "split the continent, which is extremely dangerous owing to the presence there of mobile attack forces (and) nuclear weapons..."<sup>44</sup> He warned in rather alarmist terms that NATO's eastward expansion of its zone of responsibility "substantially reduce[d] the strategic early warning time for the Russian Federation."<sup>45</sup> Precisely what Russia feels it would have to respond to was not articulated, but this statement communicates well just how serious a threat Russia perceives NATO to be. Among the harsher responses to NATO enlargement were former Defence Minister Igor Rodionov's assertion in December 1996 that Russia would

---

<sup>43</sup> Michael P.C. Carns, "Rethinking the Deterrence Debate: Thinking About a Peaceful and Prosperous Tomorrow," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 11:2 (Autumn 2000): 10. Carns also notes that in 1999, Defence Minister Igor Sergeyev publicly accused the United States of trying to weaken Russia's international position by their "disregard for international law...and high handedness."

<sup>44</sup> Anatoly Kvashnin, "Main Security Challenges: A Military Response," *International Affairs: A Russian Journal* 1 (2000): 3. (Available at: [http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/iarj/iarj\\_00\\_01a.html](http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/iarj/iarj_00_01a.html)). Stanley Kober of the CATO Institute echoes this notion that NATO expansion could split the continent. See, "NATO Expansion and the Danger of a Second Cold War," *The Cato Institute: Foreign Policy Briefing* 38 (31 January 1996): 1.

<sup>45</sup> Anatoly Kvashnin, "Main Security Challenges: A Military Response," 3.

consider retargeting Russian missiles on countries that joined NATO<sup>46</sup> and, more recently, concerns have been expressed by Foreign Ministry officials about the security challenges posed to Russia by NATO patrols in Baltic airspace and warnings that Russia may be forced to take “corresponding measures.”<sup>47</sup>

## **The Expansion Agenda**

The issue of NATO expansion has been consistently on the agenda of Russian policy makers since 1993 when word of potential enlargement first began to circulate, although as early as 1990 some East-Central European states had expressed an interest in NATO. To address this, NATO created the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), as a means of information sharing and cooperation.<sup>48</sup> However, this represented a rather weak attempt to incorporate the security concerns of these states into NATO planning. The NACC was ineffectual in the end and amounted to little more than a springboard for the Partnership for Peace (PfP).<sup>49</sup> Since the early 1990’s, it has been difficult to find

---

<sup>46</sup> “NATO Official Regrets Rodionov’s Remark on Missiles,” *Moscow Interfax* (2 December 1996). Translated in FBIS Document FBIS-TAC-97-002.

<sup>47</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesman Aleksander Yakovenko quoted by William Branigin, “Bush Welcomes Seven New NATO Members,” *The Washington Post* (29 March 2004), <http://www.washingtonpost.com>. (accessed 29 March 2004).

<sup>48</sup> Renée de Nevers, “Russia’s Strategic Renovation: Russian security strategies and foreign policy in the post-imperial era,” *Adelphi Paper 289* (UK: Brassey’s for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1994), 66.

<sup>49</sup> Officially, the NACC was succeeded by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997. The EAPC was a forum for its 44 member countries to consult on security issues. See Peter Shearman, “Russia and NATO Enlargement: The Case Against,” in Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross, eds., *Russia After the Fall* (Longman:2000), 308; and, “NACC/EAPC,” *NATO Review* 3 (1998): 3. The Partnership for Peace (PfP) was announced in January 1994 and was open to all former post-communist states of the former Soviet Union. Signatories were offered various forms of military coordination and cooperation with NATO, including the potential for joint military exercises, the discussion of military doctrine, and the standardization of military equipment to facilitate interoperability. Membership in the PfP was not akin to full membership and NATO was abundantly clear about this in its invitation to candidate countries. Membership in the PfP did *not* constitute a firm security guarantee from NATO and did not guarantee future membership. For more on the PfP see Paul J. Marantz, “Neither Adversaries Nor Partners: Russia and the West Search for a New Relationship,” in Roger Kanet and Alexander V. Kozhemiakin, eds., *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 93.

support for NATO within Russia. Regardless of their place along the political spectrum, most Russian officials have been in agreement with respect to their opposition to NATO and the view that Washington's support for the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe signified the lack of a genuine American commitment to the East-West partnership.<sup>50</sup> Representatives of all foreign policy orientations in Moscow were united; for example, both Primakov (when he was Head of the SVR), and Kozyrev were in agreement on the threatening nature of the *military* alliance on their doorstep.<sup>51</sup> Proponents of more Western oriented, liberal internationalist thinking feared expansion into East-Central Europe would precipitate the dangerous establishment of yet another partition of Europe - a new iron curtain of sorts.<sup>52</sup> The realists feared Russia's isolation from Europe, surrounded by Western allies, with Germany enjoying a comparatively favourable balance of power.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of worldview, the political elite were unified with respect to their opposition to NATO expansion. Since then, expansion has remained on NATO's agenda, and therefore has featured prominently on the Russian foreign policy agenda.

The first wave of expansion finally came after years of negotiation. In 1999, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic became new members of the Alliance, and at the NATO summit in Rome in November 2002, a formal invitation was made to seven more post-communist states (including three former Soviet republics), for membership.<sup>54</sup> But while NATO continues to expand and Russia has really been powerless to impede its growth, the Russian leadership continues its opposition. Despite the closer relationship

---

<sup>50</sup> Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," *Political Science Quarterly* 114:4 (Winter 1999/2000): 547-569.

<sup>51</sup> Renée de Nevers, "Russia's Strategic Renovation," 66.

<sup>52</sup> Eugene B. Rumer, *Russian National Security and Foreign Policy in Transition* (Santa Monica, California: RAND, 1995), 46-47.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> The seven countries invited to join NATO in 2002 were: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

forged between Russia and the United States in the wake of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent war on terrorism, and despite the Treaty of Moscow signed by Presidents Putin and Bush in May 2002, and the simultaneous establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, President Putin still referred to NATO expansion as an “unwarranted problem.”<sup>55</sup>

From the time the issue arose, there have been numerous alternative suggestions advanced for promoting security in post-Cold War Europe. As mentioned previously, Yeltsin proposed transforming the OSCE into a more influential body, empowered to maintain peace and security in Europe.<sup>56</sup> According to the Russian plan, it could serve as an institutional umbrella under whose authority all other relevant European security organizations, such as NATO, the EU and the WEU, would fall. This idea met with minimal appeal among Western governments, however, and when it was clear that this suggestion would not be given sufficient consideration, Yeltsin shifted his position and suggested that to justify its continued existence, NATO would do well to make the much needed transition from a military alliance to a more open, politically-oriented organization.<sup>57</sup> Foreign Minister Kozyrev even went so far as to suggest that perhaps *both* NATO and Russia could offer security guarantees to the Central and East European states. Naturally this was met with scepticism within the former Soviet Republics and satellites, which greatly feared Russian resurgence in the region - a fear that had led them to NATO’s doorstep in the first place.

---

<sup>55</sup> President Putin quoted by Bill Sammon, “Putin Pouts Over NATO ‘Problem,’” *Washington Times* (November 23, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Paul Kubicek, “Russian Foreign Policy and the West,” *Political Science Quarterly* 114:4 (Winter 1999/2000): 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

By the end of 1994, Yeltsin had steeled his attitude toward Brussels and was even warning that a green light on NATO expansion would usher in a new era of “cold peace”<sup>58</sup> between the two nations. Yet despite his assertiveness, Russia still, after much deliberation, joined NATO’s Partnership for Peace programme, which was intended to help establish a cooperative security relationship between NATO and Eastern Europe, and was seen by many as a stepping-stone to future membership. For a brief period, membership in NATO was even bandied about among the Russian political elite; however, in the end, the idea was disregarded because NATO could not guarantee Russia a unique role within the alliance commensurate with its desired stature.<sup>59</sup> Russia requested but was denied a special veto over NATO operations, particularly with regard to the use of force. Russia also asked for this special consideration within the PFP; however, this was also rejected by Brussels. But despite disagreement over Russian membership in NATO, a warming of relations did take place, even though the Russian public still saw NATO as an “alien institution” and despite Kozyrev’s warning that the “special relations” between Russia and NATO could be only an interim solution to a challenging problem.<sup>60</sup> Both Yeltsin and a number of Foreign Ministry officials began to suggest that both NATO *and* Russia should offer Eastern Europe mutual security guarantees. This insistence by Yeltsin on playing a key role in the security of the former Soviet bloc symbolized for many in the West and in the FSU that Russia did not yet recognize these states as fully independent.<sup>61</sup> Instead of solidifying the Russian position

---

<sup>58</sup> Yeltsin warned of this new era of “cold peace” in a November 1994 speech in Budapest.

<sup>59</sup> Renée de Nevers, “Russia’s Strategic Renovation,” 67.

<sup>60</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, “Partnership or Cold Peace?” 8.

<sup>61</sup> Renée de Nevers, “Russia’s Strategic Renovation,” 67.

within the European security architecture, its efforts only strengthened the resolve among the former Soviet states to move closer to NATO.<sup>62</sup>

As Paul Kubicek recounts, NATO and Russian leaders took steps toward further cooperation with the signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security in Paris in 1997.<sup>63</sup> This agreement guaranteed that NATO would not deploy nuclear weapons in the new member states and it created the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC), as a venue for communication and cooperation between both sides. This gave Russia a voice but not a veto in NATO deliberations and operations.<sup>64</sup> And finally, just weeks after the 11 September 2001 tragedy, President Putin, upon instructing then-Foreign Minister Ivanov to offer Russian airspace to American and allied forces in their war on terror, announced that NATO should admit Russia as a full member.<sup>65</sup>

## Discussion

Throughout the brief history of the post-Cold War period, Russia has maintained its position that any effective European security arrangement should include Russia as an important partner. Russia has refused to condone the expansion of NATO and has maintained this position continuously, despite its reception of overtures made by the West, specifically Washington, intended to engage Russia and ease its insecurities about

---

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West."

<sup>64</sup> Andrei Kozyrev, "Partnership or Cold Peace?" 6.

At its creation, the PJC was meant to hold regular meetings on a broad range of policy issues. On the basis of these meetings, NATO and Russia *might* take joint action when it was warranted, but only on a case-by-case basis. The PJC would consult on matters of weapons proliferation, international terrorism, conflict prevention and peacekeeping, and would share defence and force structure information. For a detailed explanation of the components and implications of the Founding Act see Peter Shearman, "Russia and NATO Enlargement: The Case Against," in Mike Bowker and Cameron Ross, eds., *Russia After the Fall* (Longman: 2000), 306-307.

<sup>65</sup> Vladimir Votapek, "Russia and the United States," in Janusz Bugajski, ed., *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2002), 194.

NATO's motives. And Russia has taken this position for practical reasons. As Aleksander Duleba notes, ruled out as early options were full capitulation to expansion, which could be perceived as a sign of weakness, and aggressive opposition to expansion by renouncing all ties with NATO.<sup>66</sup> This latter option would have been highly impractical, given that NATO had demonstrated in the Balkans that it was prepared to conduct operations within Russia's sphere of interest, without its consent, if necessary. It seemed, in the late 1990's that Russian leaders learned an important lesson from the Kosovo crisis in particular – that the best way to ensure NATO's consideration of Russian interests was not to disassociate with NATO, but to *engage* NATO. And while this was undertaken to a degree throughout the Yeltsin era, this practice has come into sharper focus under Putin's presidency. He has consistently advocated a stronger voice for Russia in NATO deliberations, through its engagement with the Alliance, such as with the NATO-Russia Council, in which Russia enjoys a seat at the table in Brussels when the Alliance considers actions of direct interest to Russia. It does not enjoy a vote or a veto, but it does ensure its concerns are given voice.

Though opposition to enlargement remains, a softening of attitudes toward NATO seems to have taken place in recent years under President Putin. It appears that serious and belligerent opposition to NATO is confined to marginal political groups, such as the military and a contingent within the Foreign Ministry, and that President Putin enjoys broader support for his NATO stance among a greater segment of the political class.<sup>67</sup> This may be attributed to a number of factors, such as the growing awareness among the

---

<sup>66</sup> Aleksander Duleba, "Russia and NATO Enlargement," in Janusz Bugajski, ed., *Toward an Understanding of Russia*, 156.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Legvold, "All the Way: Crafting a U.S.-Russia Alliance," *The National Interest* (Winter 2002/03): 24.

political elite of the benefits to cooperation with America in the wake of 11 September 2001, or to the fact that Putin enjoys an even more prominent role within the domestic political environment than Yeltsin did, and that, pragmatically, Putin believes stronger relations with the United States and with NATO to be in Russia's best interests. As Robert Legvold contends, "Putin... so towers over the Russian political scene that little threatens to knock him off course...only if Putin's general political position disintegrates will critics of his foreign policy have an opening."<sup>68</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There has been no shortage of opinion in Russia on the perils of NATO enlargement; however, in Yeltsin's Russia, this position was, in point of fact, a posture with no substance. As suggested above, the relationship between foreign policy values and positions is somewhat backward. Instead of the value of true multilateralism dictating Russia's opposition to the expansion of an elite and powerful alliance, which it accuses of failing to respect the principles enshrined in the UN Charter,<sup>69</sup> it was NATO's personification of the American Cold War victory and the perceived military threat it posed to Russia that lay at the heart of Russia's NATO posture. And when Yeltsin's "bluster and threat" approach to deterring NATO failed, this necessitated a more subtle approach.

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. There is much speculation about Putin's motivation in seeking a closer alliance with Washington. He appears to be committed, not to democracy in principle, but rather to whatever will best help Russia to complete its political journey. Roy Medvedev suggests that the President is interested in forging alliances and establishing connections with any states and leaders that can help Russia. Interview by author, Moscow, Russia, 20 April 2002. Similarly, Legvold contends that Putin values integration with the United States and with the West because this will enable him to reinforce his policies at home. See "All the Way: Crafting a U.S.-Russia Alliance," 27.

<sup>69</sup> Russian officials continue to point to the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 as the most obvious and egregious breach of international law.

When Putin came to power he enshrined within the 2000 *Foreign Policy Concept* the principle of multilateralism at the heart of Russian foreign policy. Identifying the principles at the heart of Russian foreign policy is a relatively new phenomenon (and one that the Russian leadership has yet to master fully). Much like the impetus behind the Soviet posture of détente, instead of the principles determining the posture in the Yeltsin period - as is the case in many liberal democracies – the posture has determined the principles; the result was that the principles were really little more than a language of justification. And because a rare consensus was reached among elites regarding the threatening presence of NATO on Russia's doorstep, constructing Russia's policy toward NATO expansion was comparatively easy, as Yeltsin did not need to rely on institutional weakness and his ability to exploit this weakness to advance policy. In the final analysis, what this study reveals is that while Russian foreign policy making has been largely presidential, and while a number of factors contribute to this phenomenon, the absence of a collective agreement on the national interest is significant among them. This, in concert with the legacy of Cold War thinking in Moscow has been responsible for a fear of NATO among Russian elites that has influenced Russia's relations with the Alliance and with their (former) adversary, despite early hopes that two democracies, with similar interests, would become natural allies. Instead, the perception is that NATO presents a credible military threat to Russia and it remains an ever-present symbol of the magnitude of what Russians lost in the Cold War. Given the weight of the impact of its expansion, consensus on this issue is likely to continue, in tandem with Russia's inability, practically, to stop it.