RUSSIAN AND SOVIET RELATIONS WITH THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO)

Russian and Soviet Relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

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Abstract

This project seeks to explore the political history of the present-day Russian Federation in regard to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), following a historical path beginning with the Soviet Union. Primarily, this research seeks to develop a historical understanding of the adverse relationship between the former Soviet Union and NATO, and how their past has influenced the current precarious relationship between them. It will also examine the unlikely possibility of Russia, the successor nation of the Soviet Union, joining this western organization by looking at it through a historical perspective, as the USSR has had a historically negative relationship with NATO. Generally, this research will explore the relationship throughout the history of the former Soviet Union and NATO and how that has determined Russia's negative attitude toward the organization in the present day.

Introduction

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has been one of the most prominent organizations to have influenced international relations and the course of history since the end of the Second World War. The alliance has been most significant within their actions and policies towards their main adversary: The Soviet Union (USSR). The USSR, combined with their military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, helped to shape international politics up until present day. The relationship has morphed into one between NATO and Russia today, which is just as capricious as the one with the Soviet Union. Due to these similarities, it is crucial to analyze the history between the two in order to better understand the current relationship. In general, the adverse relationship between NATO and the Soviet Union was one that was antagonistic, which later mirrored how the alliance interacts with Russia today.

The formation of NATO was an important step in securing western European borders from the Soviet Union. The contact between the two was further altered with each leader of the state. Most important in this regard are Premier Nikita Khrushchev, Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, and President Vladimir Putin. Each of these men had a different relationship with the Soviet Union or Russia, which ultimately influenced how they were perceived by NATO and how they interacted with each other. Additionally, the relationship began to change again once the Soviet Union collapsed and became the present-day nation of Russia. All of these changes combined helped to establish what the relationship between NATO and Russia would be today, even setting up the potential of the state joining the organization. Finally, with further analysis, the historical events of the Cold War helped to determine how Russia acts towards NATO. Overall, this relationship has been consistently very unfavorable.

Establishment of NATO

End of WWII and Beginning of the Cold War

Despite being allies throughout the Second World War, the United States and the Soviet

Union (USSR) eventually became despised enemies in the aftermath of the war and throughout

the entirety of the Cold War. Hopes were set high after the end of the war, as many anticipated

that the establishment of the United Nations (UN) would usher in an era of world peace and

prosperity. However, this did not happen. Tensions rose between the former allies and nations in

western Europe feared the increasing power and aggression possessed by the USSR beginning in

1949.[1] Much of Europe felt threatened by Soviet military advances and leader Joseph Stalin's

ambitions of placing all of Europe under his control.

In order to combat this increasing aggression posed by the USSR, the United States and

several other western nations, notably Canada, the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, and

others, decided to join together in a military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty.

The treaty, which was signed by seven nations, was finalized on April 4, 1949 and thus created

the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[2] It functioned in the way of a traditional

military alliance, in which if one member was attacked, it was considered an attack against them

all. Specifically, Article 5 of the treaty states that "an armed attack against one or more of them

in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently

they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of

individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United

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[1] "A Short History Of NATO" (National Public Radio, 14 July 2018).

[2] "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (Herzliya: Helicon, 2018) 1.

Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area."[3]

Not only was NATO a military alliance, but it also served as a way for them to protect a common ideology through their governance. NATO was comprised of western nations, meaning that many of them were proponents of liberalism, capitalism, and democracy. This stood as a stark contrast to totalitarianism and communism promoted by the Soviet Union.[4] Furthermore, the nature of the organization was "to *preserve* the balance of power against an adversary who enjoyed a crushing superiority in conventional weapons and the advantage of geography."[5] The USSR at the time of the formation of the treaty had already been invading countries in eastern and central Europe, where they aimed to influence their style of government and promote their model of communism. Countries that fell under Soviet influence became part of what was known as the Iron Curtain. The metaphorical Iron Curtain stood as a stark reminder of the difference of ideologies in Europe and the divide between east and west. Many in the west also feared a communist uprising from within. For example, Italy and France had developed powerful communist parties by the end of World War II that proved to be worrisome.[6] The organization sought to push back both the physical and ideological encroachment of the Soviets during this

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[3] Haglund, David G., "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020).

[4] "A Short History Of NATO" (National Public Radio, 14 July 2018).

[5] Hatzivassiliou, Evanthis, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964" (Cambridge: *Journal of cold war studies*, 2009) 112.

[6] Haglund, David G., "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020).

period in time and keep communism contained to the Iron Curtain. Essentially, this fear and attempts at push back launched the beginning of the Cold War era in world history.

One of the main issues perpetuated throughout the Cold War was the build-up of nuclear arsenals. The USSR, and later its counterpart alliance, the Warsaw Pact, and NATO were all trying to beat each other with the number of nuclear arms that they had in their possession, thus escalating an arms race. The western European members of the treaty believed that possession of nuclear arms would prevent an attack from the Soviet and would ensure that communism would be kept out of the west, while being contained within the Iron Curtain. Specifically, in 1957 the United States started to establish nuclear bases throughout western Europe.[7] In sum, the Soviets felt extremely threatened by the alliance and wanted to respond immediately.

In general, the end of the Second World War headed not to immediate peace and tranquility in a war-torn Europe, but instead to a world of hostilities between two former-allies that ultimately established the Cold War. The creation of NATO allowed for the perpetuation of democracy and liberal values to propagate in western Europe, while the Soviet Union attempted to dominate eastern and central Europe through the establishment of the Iron Curtain so they could force communism. These acts of aggression led to a decades long conflicts and Russian disagreements with NATO lasting long after the fall of the Soviet Union.

Relationship between NATO and the Soviet Union

Throughout the entire Cold War, NATO and the Soviet Union had an adverse relationship, which gradually became more hostile as the conflict continued. After the

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[7] Haglund, David G., "North Atlantic Treaty Organization" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2020).

establishment of NATO in 1949, tensions were becoming more aggravated. In 1953, Soviet

Premier and leader through the Second World War, Joseph Stalin, died, thus altering the course

of NATO relations. With this, the themes and messages that the Soviets promoted did not

change, but the tactics they used did. This prompted the need for NATO to change their course

of action and for both sides to go through revitalization.[8] With this, the process of de-

Stalinization was led by Nikita Khrushchev, who became Soviet Premier in 1958. He was the

influential Communist Party secretary general from 1953-1964 as well.[9] Within the era of

Khrushchev and the de-Stalinization process was the establishment of the Warsaw Pact. The

alliance acted as the adversary organization of NATO and was founded in May 1955.[10] They

were considered enemies because they both sought to influence European and global politics and

shape the world in their ideology. These internal alterations in the political orientation of the

Soviet Union led to many changes in relationship between the USSR and NATO, especially

considering the importance of Khrushchev and the Warsaw Pact.

It is also important to note here how individual Soviets felt towards Americans and

westerners in general in order to provide a more complete picture of NATO-Soviet Relations.

According to a 1959 congressional hearing, the American Ambassador to the Soviet Union

Llewellyn Thompson described how the average Soviet citizen felt about the west. He stated that

in 1959, there was little organized dissent for the policies of Khrushchev, but people individually

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[8] Hatzivassiliou, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 91.

[9] "Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeyevich" (Herzliya: Helicon, 2018).

[10] Wolfe, Thomas W. "The Warsaw Pact in Evolution" (London: Chatham House, 1966) 191.

felt disillusioned. In Thompson's hearing, he believed that the average Soviet also did not feel

any hostilities towards Americans, but was instead forced into the six million strong Communist

Party and became prisoners of their ideology, which acted as their religion. Despite attempts by

Khrushchev to move away from the Stalinist pressure of joining the party, Thompson believed

that the Premier was pressured to revert back to it to maintain control.[11] These early tensions

between Soviet citizens and the Soviet leadership would go on to effect later foreign policy

attitudes and actions towards the west. This was especially prevalent when the Soviet Union fell

in the early 1990s and attempted to westernize.

Warsaw Pact

The Warsaw Pact-was a military alliance of the Soviet Union and six neighboring

countries. Essentially it was created when West Germany joined NATO and sought to act more

like an instrument of propaganda for Soviet-style communism than a true military alliance like

NATO. Momentum for the alliance really did not start until the fall of 1961 when there were

joint military exercises between Soviet, Polish, East German, and Czechoslovak troops. At this

time, the organization also began to focus more on defending communism and the enhancement

of the military.[12] Not only did the Warsaw Pact seek to alter the politics of eastern Europe in this

timeframe, but they also made internal reforms within the alliance with help from Khrushchev.

For example, some internal reforms included alterations to the structure of the Soviet military,

creating a stronger defense against NATO by engaging in Sino-Soviet relations, and unifying

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[11] *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* (1959) 56-65.

[12] Wolfe, "The Warsaw Pact in Evolution", 191-192.

fellow communist countries even more to prevent them from straying.[13] Despite all of these

changes and reforms, the real message that the Soviet Union was trying to get across was that

they were the adversary to NATO. According to NATO, "the Warsaw Pact embodied what was

referred to as the Eastern bloc, while NATO and its member countries represented the Western

bloc."[14] The two alliances represented two sharply contrasting ideologies. This established the

perfect breeding ground for tensions and conflicts, which lasted for the duration of the Cold

War.[15] The establishment of the Warsaw Pact created a stark divide between east and west that

became more prevalent as the Cold War waged on, where their fundamental differences left little

room for cooperation. The tensions between NATO and the Warsaw Pact led to an adverse

relationship with NATO and the Soviet Union because the USSR was essentially the powerhouse

behind the alliance.

Impact of Khrushchev

One of the most instrumental individuals in the history of the Soviet Union's adverse

relationship to NATO was the Communist Party Secretary General and Soviet Premier Nikita

Khrushchev who acted as premier during the height of the Cold War in the 1960s. Khrushchev

was thrust into the premiership of the Soviet Union in 1958 and had to immediately take control

of the growing tensions with NATO. In a paper issued by experts involved with NATO, he was

described as giving off a "vague impression of relaxation, in which it would be easier for him to

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[13] Wolfe, "The Warsaw Pact in Evolution", 194-195.

[14] "The Cold War: Defense and Deterrence" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

[15] "The Cold War: Defense and Deterrence" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

extract concessions from the Western Governments."[16] Earlier in his rise of power, the premier

had adopted hostile attitudes towards the west, especially to the United States. Most salient were

his remarks in a speech in Poland in November 1956. Khrushchev was noted as stating, "if you

don't like us, don't accept our invitations and don't invite us to come see you. Whether you like

it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you!"[17] The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

explained in a 1962 intelligence briefing that it is uncertain whether he meant that the Soviet

Union wanted to bury the west militarily, or if socialism and communism would bury western

style democracy in general. In actuality, he meant that the Soviet Union would outlive the west.[18]

However, it is undisputed that Khrushchev has held on to the idea of disdain of the west and

NATO since the inception of his political career. From this, it can be analyzed that Khrushchev

gave off the impression of being a more relaxed leader than his predecessor Stalin, but he was

actually very cunning in his methods of action towards Soviet adversaries.

According to author Evanthis Hatzivassiliou, the 1960s presented many challenges for

the analysts and experts at NATO regarding Soviet relations. He detailed how at this time in

Soviet history, their economy and military strength was growing. This was coupled with

Khrushchev's capricious advances in foreign policy with the west and NATO, in which he

alternated between pacifism and threatening policy. These erratic changes could be attributed to

the fact that eastern bloc countries part of the Warsaw Pact were not as colossal as they had once

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[16] Hatzivassiliou, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 100.

[17] Central Intelligence Agency. *Khrushchev's We Will Bury You,* 1.

[18] Central Intelligence Agency. *Khrushchev's We Will Bury You,* 1.

been because of the growing pressure from the fellow communist nation of China. Ironically,

NATO experts did not expect the altered relations with both East and West Germany, despite an

ad hoc committee deciding that there was instability in East Berlin. Because of this, the Building

of the Berlin Wall came as a surprise to NATO, as they believed there could be a change in

NATO-Soviet relations.[19] Generally speaking, Khrushchev was instrumental in the change in

policy towards western nations and organizations, like NATO.

Not only was Khrushchev important in changing relations to the west, but he was crucial

in the events that occurred between the Soviet Union and operatives in Cuba in the early 1960s.

Again, Hatzivassiliou noted analyses by NATO researchers entailing Soviet policy. For example,

he noted that in some of the alliance's studies on Khrushchev and Soviet motives, they

"[ignored] aspects of Soviet policymaking that recent scholarship has brought to light, such as

the role of the East German regime in influencing Soviet policy or the possibility that

Khrushchev was influenced by his own misperceptions of U.S. policy, especially after the

debacle in the Bay of Pigs."[20] Hatzivassiliou described how Khrushchev implemented policies

that were seen as very risky to NATO. This was meant to scare off the alliance from engaging in

relations in Cuba. However, much to the dismay of Khrushchev, many of his policies regarding

Cuba were too ambitious, for example, trying to get East Germany on board to help them push

the US out of Cuba, which ultimately led to a western bloc advancement in Cuban policy.[21]

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[19] Hatzivassiliou, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 104.

[20] Hatzivassiliou, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 105.

[21] Hatzivassiliou, Evanthis, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 105-106.

Finally, regarding Soviet and NATO relations, Khrushchev became an ineffective leader,

which ultimately changed relations with the western bloc. Within the Sino-Soviet split in the

early 1960s, according to author Hatzivassiliou, western powers and NATO were hesitant to

intervene too much between the two most powerful communist nations in the world: the USSR

and China. This reluctance to act was based upon the notion that any intervention would push the

two together again when they were faced with external and western influence. Furthermore,

differences regarding the two communist nations and the lack of effective action on behalf of the

premier led to his political downfall in 1964-1965.[22] In tangent with all of this was the actual

downfall of Khrushchev and its impact on relations between NATO and the Soviet Union. Most

salient in an analysis from NATO researchers in the aftermath of his fall was because of his

failure with the Sino-Soviet Split, domestic economic struggles, and the theory of "revolutionary

democracy" that was gaining traction in the USSR at this time.[23]

Impact of Gorbachev

Another important individual in the strained relationship of NATO and the Soviet Union

is the former Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev. Since he was in power towards the end of the

history of the Soviet Union, he was crucial in promoting "controlled change" within the country.

He laid the precedent for how Russia should act in regard to NATO, the west, international

organizations, and the United States.

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[22] Hatzivassiliou, Evanthis, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 106.

[23] Hatzivassiliou, Evanthis, "Images of the Adversary: NATO Assessments of the Soviet Union, 1953–1964", 109.

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Gorbachev first started his political career in the Soviet Union by becoming a member of

the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1971. From there, he rose to become the

general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) from 1985-1991, and then

subsequently the Soviet president in 1990 until 1991.[24] His style of governing was described as

being "a true believer" in the Soviet style of government, deeming potential for the nation to

revert to its founders' original conception and interpretation of Marxist communism.[25]

Gorbachev wanted the nation to return to its Marxist roots and often criticized his predecessors

Joseph Stalin and Leonid Brezhnev for their alterations to Marxism. When he first entered the

government, he was more approachable. He accomplished this by televising speeches and

holding open discussions.[26] Overall, Gorbachev's legacy runs parallel to the closing of the Cold

War and the change in relations to the west once the Soviet Union fell.

The domestic policies that Gorbachev created as leader of the Soviet Union varied from

what his predecessors had established. He initiated key reforms like *glasnost* (openness) and

perestroika (restructuring) between 1987-1988, in which "freedoms of expression and of

information were significantly expanded…[and] the first modest attempts to democratize the

Soviet political system were undertaken."[27] Additionally, he undertook key reforms to help

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[24] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Mikhail Gorbachev" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021).

[25] Magnúsdóttir, Rósa. "The Lives and Times of Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev" (Bloomington*:* Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, 2020): 214.

[26] Magnúsdóttir, "The Lives and Times of Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Gorbachev", 214-216.

[27] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Mikhail Gorbachev" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021).

establish a positive relationship with western nations and organizations, like the US and NATO,

which helped to thaw the tensions of the Cold War. Additionally, it can be argued that a

significant global restructuring change to have taken place while Gorbachev was in power was

the reunification of Germany in 1990, which also allowed for them to join NATO, thus

decreasing the enemy status of the organization.[28] These significant reforms undertaken by the

leader of the Soviet Union helped to usher in a new era of east-west relations at a time when the

Cold War was coming to a close. This created the need for configuring how the relationship

between the Soviet Union, and later Russia, and NATO should progress into the future.

Regarding his relationship to NATO, his attitudes were somewhat different from those of

his predecessors. For example, once the USSR collapsed in 1991, he sought to unify the eastern

and western blocs by placing a newly unified Germany in both the Warsaw Pact and NATO.

This was based on the fact that Germany was part of the Group of Seven (G-7), the European

Community (EC), and NATO.[29] This would allow for a harmonious blend of east and west, and

Russian influence, in the foreign affairs of international organizations. However, there were talks

regarding the status of NATO. Since the alliance had been formed to act as a counterweight in

Europe to balance the increasing power and strength of the USSR, there was not really a

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[28] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Mikhail Gorbachev" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021).

[29] Sarotte, Mary Elise. "Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to 'Bribe the Soviets Out' and Move NATO In." (Cambridge: *International Security*, 2010), 111.

pertinent need for it. However, thanks to the efforts of President George H.W. Bush, NATO

remained so as to continue American influence in eastern Europe.[30]

Despite these efforts, a permanent relationship between the USSR and NATO was yet to

be established during the era of Gorbachev. The Soviet Union went through many policy

changes and fluctuations once the nation fell and officially became the Russian Federation on

December 31, 1991. From there Boris Yeltsin was sworn in as president and helped to usher in a

new era of Russian-NATO relations.[31]

Current Attitudes

Fall of the USSR and Beginnings of Russian Relations to the West

The fall of the Soviet Union began in 1989, following a series of economic and political

defeats. The Soviet GDP was slowly falling, which was dramatized when compared to the

successful economies of western democracies. Additionally, the cohesion of western nations in

NATO seemed to out-perform the disorganization of the Soviet Union. Many contemporary

historians believed that the fall of the USSR was inevitable, with many announcing a western

victory over their former WWII allies; President George H.W. Bush even declared a victory in

the Cold War in a 1992 speech. However, this was contrary to the intensions of President Regan,

who wanted to establish relations with Gorbachev during his presidential term. This could have

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[30] Sarotte, "Perpetuating U.S. Preeminence: The 1990 Deals to 'Bribe the Soviets Out' and Move
NATO In." 112.

[31] Hellie, Richard, et al., "Russia" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021)

created a renewed sense of mistrust between the US and USSR.[32] With the perceived defeat of socialism in the Cold War, the remains of the Soviet Union had no choice but to adopt Western identity.

The westernization process in Russian began with former Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev. They believed that the end of the Cold War gave them no other choice but to abandon the socialist utopia presented by former Premier Gorbachev and advance towards a democratic and pro-capitalist society.[33] Kozyrev was instrumental to these westernization reforms. He held the unorthodox view that Russia had always been a western nation at heart but was overtaken by the Bolsheviks early in Soviet history and thus became "wrongfully developed."[34] The new nation of Russia then went through a series of reforms to develop a new identity. As described by author Andrei Tsygankov, Russia incorporated westernism into their new nation interest, which was threefold: "radical economic reform, rapid membership in the Western international institutions, and isolationism from the former Soviet states."[35] The first step was to create economic partnerships with the West, instead of acting as fiscal enemies. In addition, they sought monetary assistance from the west. Those in power in the new Russia also decided to join many international organizations so that they could create alliances with the west. Russia decided to cooperate with organizations like the International

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[32] Tsygankov, Andrei P., *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*(New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010) 55-56.

[33] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 56-57.

[34] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 56.

[35] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 59.

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Monetary Fund and the European Union. Finally, they decided it would be more beneficial to

cooperate with the west rather than with former Soviet republics.[36] These new internal and

external reforms in Russia were not unanimous in support, however.

In opposition to the western integration reforms was the statist model of reform. This was

rooted in the skepticism of the actual ability to raise people's standards of living. At this time,

Russians were upset with the fall of Soviet prestige, which only exacerbated the disillusionment

with western values. In particular, "public support for the United States model of society fell

from 32 percent in 1990 to 13 percent in 1992."[37] This significant loss of support for the west

also mirrored the waning support of Yeltsin and Kozyrev, where their political party lost to

nationalist parties in the 1993 parliamentary elections.[38] Through this, the public support of a

Russian westernization process began to drop by 1993. Many of the reformist objectives that

Yeltsin and Kozyrev tried to instate ultimately failed. For example, much of the promised

financial assistance from western nations and organizations were not enough to finance the

integration process and they had minimal success in getting close to international

organizations.[39] This most likely occurred because the western offers of help were conditional, in

which they wanted to see internal Russian change before they would give financial assistance. In

attempts to raise their global status and prestige, Russia joined the G-7 in 1992. However, instead

of being seen as a strong, global leader, the state was actually seen as an aid recipient and donor

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[36] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 59-60.

[37] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 64.

[38] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 64.

[39] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 67.

nation.[40] From this, it can be concluded that too much westernization in Russia at this period of

time was detrimental to the nation's success. It established many hostilities between Russia and

the west, as the loss of Russian prestige in the world combined with the decrease in the standard

of living caused by difficulties in obtaining the necessary amount of loans from the International

Monetary Fund to maintain a standard of living comparable to that in the Soviet Era created a

lasting animosity towards the west. Essentially, it seems as if relations between the former USSR

and NATO were going smoothly in the aftermath of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet

Union. In 1991, Russia was admitted to the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which later

turned into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. These organizations promoted the

cooperation of states across the Atlantic. Most influential was when the NATO-Russia Founding

Act was created in 1997. This act was meant to encourage bilateral relations between Russia and

NATO. Finally, the last of the positive actions and cooperation happened in 2002, when the

NATO-Russia Council was founded to discuss security issues.[41] This also served as a precedent

for Russia's relations in the present to NATO.

Rise of Putin and Foreign Policy

Today, there is not a single individual in Russia politics more influential than the current

president of Russia, Vladimir Putin. He is tasked with establishing and maintaining the nation's

relationships with other countries and organizations, including NATO. Because of the

aforementioned adversarial relationship between NATO and the Soviet Union, he decided to take

it upon himself to re-forge Russia's relationship with the West. Putin became acting president in

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[40] Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity,* 71.

[41] "Relations with Russia" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

December 1999, when Boris Yeltsin resigned; he promptly won the presidential election in

March 2000. He ran on a platform of rebuilding Russia-and restoring the nation to its former

glory, which he believed could be achieved with ending corruption and strengthening the

financial markets. More broadly, Putin was president of Russia from 1999-2008, then

transitioned to the role of prime minister under president Dmitry Medvedev from 2008-2012.

After his brief stint as prime minister, he was once again elected president in 2012, where he

remains to this day.

Additionally, Putin currently has an interesting foreign policy agenda as president. For

example, author Fiona Hill outlines six different foreign policy identities that correspond to his

goals for interactions with western nations and organizations, like NATO. First, she argued that

Putin takes into account his own personal history and ties it to the history of Russia. He believed

that his difficult upbringing could be correlated with the difficult history of Russia and the

outside world.[42] He believed that Russia was always attacked by the outside, which also mirrored

his life. Second, Putin saw Russia in a survivalist sense, in which "in [his] view, for Russia to

survive as a sovereign state and regain control of its own destiny, the state had to increase its

ability to resist western pressure."[43] From this, he believed that in order for Russia to survive into

the next decade in international relations, they had to bend to the demands of the west. Third, he

saw himself as a "statist" who would return Russia to its former glory. He believed that the

nation had the potential to become a great power in the world once again, just as the Soviet

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[42] Hill, Fiona. "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy." (London: *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 2015) 45.

[43] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 46.

Union had once been. He wanted to explore all political and economic strategic avenues in which

this could be accomplished.[44] These statements on behalf of the Russian president emphasize

how dedicated he was to restoring Russian greatness, which was a prestige presumably lost after

the end of the Cold War where NATO tried to shape the former Soviet Union into its image.

Fourth, Putin had a foreign policy goal of establishing a national identity. This identity

would emphasize the unique history and culture of the Russian people. Furthermore, "Russia was

more than just a 'nation,' 'a people,' 'a state.' It was a separate 'civilization.' In Putin's

formulation, any attempt to impose non-Russian values on Russia would pose a threat."[45] It can

be argued that Putin meant that any external influence towards the Russian Federation would be

unwelcome, especially from those who were inherently different from their unique culture. It

was also an attempt to separate Russia from any outside influence. NATO was systematically

different from Russia because the alliance had once been the enemy of their predecessor, the

Soviet Union. Additionally, Putin developed a sense of nationalism in his foreign policy,

especially towards the west. This means that he wanted to put Russia first in all matters of

foreign affairs. Primarily, this was seen with the hostile annexation of Crimea in 2014. Putin saw

Crimea as a crucial territory to ethnic Russians, which led to the invasion in Ukraine and

subsequent control of the peninsula.[46] This act displayed how Putin was willing to go to extreme

lengths to protect all Russians and deter any external influence. Finally, Hill described the final

priority of Putin's foreign policy as being concerned with restoring the prestige and status of

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[44] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 44.

[45] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 49.

[46] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 57.

Russia. As president, he strongly believed that the Soviet Union used to hold immense status and
prestige in the world, only rivaled by that of the US and NATO allies. Inspired by this drive to
reclaim respect, he developed a "conservative political and social agenda, combing the precepts
of the Russian Orthodox Church, nostalgia for the USSR and patriotic support for Great Russia,
were key elements for mobilizing his base constituency…"[47] Putin was not interested in forging
better relations with the US and NATO because he explicitly stated how there was public support
for the Soviet Union. This essentially detailed how popular the USSR still is in Russia. If Putin
were to revert back to Soviet-era policies, they most likely would entail returning to being
enemies of NATO. President Putin wanted to separate Russia from the West instead of
cooperating with it. Primarily, these issues began with NATO intervening in Kosovo in 1998-
1999, in which they bombed fellow the fellow Slavic Orthodox state of Serbia. According to
author Benn Steil, "these attacks on a brother country appalled ordinary Russians, especially
since they were not carried out in defense of a NATO member, but to protect the Muslim
population of Kosovo, then a Serbian province."[48] From there, Russia realized that they could
never fully trust NATO.

Strained NATO-Russian Attitudes

Within recent years, there have been many challenges in the relationship between NATO
and Russia, some of which mirror the adverse relationship of NATO and the Soviet Union. As

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[47] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 58.

[48] Steil, Benn. "Russia's Clash With the West Is About Geography, Not Ideology." (Washington,
D.C.: *Foreign Policy,* 2018).

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noted earlier, many Russians still feel a strong connection and nostalgia towards the Soviet

Union. With many Russians longing for the prestige and greatness, it would be difficult to forge

a positive relationship moving forward. This is an unfortunate coupling with the views of NATO.

The alliance officially states on their website that "for more than two decades, NATO has

worked to build a partnership with Russia, developing dialogue and practical cooperation in

areas of common interest. Cooperation has been suspended since 2014 in response to Russia's

military intervention in Ukraine but political and military channels of communication remain

open. Concerns about Russia's continued destabilizing pattern of military activities and

aggressive rhetoric go well beyond Ukraine."[49] Not much really occurred in terms of direct

NATO-Russian relations between 2003 and 2007. However, the newly established relationship

took a turn for the worse when Russia took disproportional military action against the nation of

Georgia in 2008. These actions led NATO to end formal meetings and cooperation with Russia

until further notice. Furthermore, the alliance went one step further and asked Russia to

derecognize the states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[50] Support and communication between

Russia and NATO has been suspended ever since the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea.

Relations continued to sour after these actions. For example, the alliance became concerned

about Russian military presence in the Black Sea and the Baltic, which is close to the "borders"

of NATO. The nation continued to breach international norms with their military intervention in

Syria and the 2018 nerve agent attack in the member state of the United Kingdom. Things

became extremely intense when in 2019, NATO supported the American withdrawal from the

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[49] "Relations with Russia" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

[50] "Relations with Russia" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty after Russia broke the terms of the treaty. Finally, NATO strongly condemned the 2020 nerve gas attack on Alexei Navalny, a Russian adversary of Putin.[51]

From this, it can be determined that there is currently a negative relationship between Russia and NATO. According to the organization, they have "responded to this changed security environment by enhancing its deterrence and defense posture, while remaining open to dialogue. The Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia."[52] However, Russia does not interpret the military buildup on its European borders the same way, since they see it as a threat. As of right now, there are escalating pressures between the two sides that seem to mirror the relationship between NATO and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War.

Analysis of Relations Between NATO and Russia

The relationship between the Soviet Union and NATO was extremely strained and tense. Many of the Soviet leaders held an extreme disdain towards the organization and saw the other side as the enemy. This was extremely evident with the words and actions of Nikita Khrushchev.[53] The leader also subtly promoted lack of cooperation with the west, notably at the height of the Cold War. He encouraged fighting with NATO in hopes that the Soviets would come out on top. Additionally, the establishment of the Warsaw Pact under the sight of Khrushchev was the single most instrumental counterweight towards western expansion and

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[51] "Relations with Russia" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

[52] "Relations with Russia" (*North Atlantic Treaty Organization*).

[53] Central Intelligence Agency. *Khrushchev's We Will Bury You,* 1.

influence in Europe. However, to balance out the negativity of the era of Khrushchev, Premier

Mikhail Gorbachev served as a positive influence when looking at relations with NATO. He

oversaw the fall and dissolution of the USSR and the formation of the Russian Federation. For

most of his rule, he wanted to establish a positive working relationship with NATO and western

Europe in order to create a more peaceful world that was the antithesis of the Cold War. He

implemented many reforms, like glasnost and perestroika, that sought to connect better to the rest

of the world.[54] Many of these aspirations were dashed once Vladimir Putin rose to power. He

wanted to restore Russia to its former glory during the height of the Cold War, in which the

nation was a respected and revered member of society. He quickly closed off many of the

reforms and contact with the west. Later on, Putin incited actions illegal in international law, like

the invasion of Crimea, that helped give off the image that Russia did not care about

international norms or cooperation.[55] Overall, the establishment of the Warsaw Pact and the

influences of Khrushchev, Gorbachev, and Putin have all contributed to the current relationship

between Russia and the Soviet Union.

One of the most salient questions being asked in the international community since the

establishment of the Russian state is whether or not the nation should join NATO. While it may

seem ironic that the nation that once created the Warsaw Pact, the main adversary of the alliance,

it was at one time a plausible question. This is evident with the massive push by Gorbachev to

ally with the west and establish reforms that opened the country. Today, however, Russia is far

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[54] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Mikhail Gorbachev" (Chicago: *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2021).

[55] Hill, "How Vladimir Putin's World View Shapes Russian Foreign Policy" 57.

from close to joining NATO, especially in light of recent events. Additionally, Secretary General

Stoltenberg hinted at maintaining an adversarial relationship with Russia. On June 17, 2020, he

stated in a tweet that NATO had recently released a series of arms packages aimed at balancing

Russia's growing nuclear arsenal, but it should not be perceived as starting a new arms race.[56]

Both of these tweets serve as evidence of an increasingly tense relationship between NATO and

Russia. At times, the Secretary General's views mirror those of past NATO leaders and their

words on the Soviet Union. For example, Secretary General Paul-Henri Spaak stated in a 1957

speech the importance of building up military forces for NATO in order to effectively combat

the Soviets for the sake of deterrence.[57] In general, it appears that the Secretary General of

NATO has not had the most positive association with Russia or the Soviet Union. Due to this

adverse relationship, it seems extremely unlikely that Russia would join NATO. The Secretary

General of NATO has voiced his disdain and negative opinion on the domestic and foreign

affairs of the state numerous times, which essentially means that Russia is not in a good enough

standing to become part of the alliance.

Overall, it is extremely important to note the extreme degree of tension between NATO

and Russia in the present day international arena. It seems that peace between the two groups is

unlikely and that the only time that it had occurred was during the end of the Soviet Union and

towards the transition away from communism. This was most likely the case because Russia was

struggling economically and NATO and the west wanted to influence the new policies of the

nation so that it would benefit them. In the future, it appears most likely that NATO and Russia

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[56] @jensstoltenberg "#NATO Defence Ministers…" (Twitter, 2020).

[57] Spaak, Paul-Henri, "NATO Speech: 1957" (San Francisco, 1957).

will continue on a path of mutual disdain. This is especially evident with the presidency of Putin, who's main objective once he took office was to restore Russia to its former glory and prestige. However, only time will tell what the relationship would look like in the future, especially once a new leader assumes power in Russia.

Conclusion

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union had proved that there is no hope for a relationship with NATO. Within the words and actions of various Soviet leaders, notably Khrushchev, they decided that the west and NATO were their sworn enemy. However, things began to change once Gorbachev led the Soviet Union through the end of the Cold War, communism, and the nation and began to shift towards a more favorable opinion of the west. Despite these attempts, Russia began to revert to Soviet era policies and practices once Putin rose to power, as he placed a special emphasis on returning to Cold War level prestige. Even today, the relationship has yet to recover. The current Secretary General of NATO has squashed any hopes of a positive, or even a less hostile, relationship with Russia because of their repeated attempts to disregard international norms and laws. When one side has little regard for the other, it makes a healthy and beneficial relationship difficult. The historic pattern of Soviet dislike for NATO has evolved into Russian disregard for NATO. Overall, it appears that the relationship between NATO and Russia is very capricious, but as of present-day activities, it will remain adverse until both sides agree upon what will be the rules of the game going forward.

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