

## **Forum:** **Responses to ‘Russia and the World, 2015 – IMEMO Forecast.**

### **Editors Note, Benjamin Tallis:**

*In the final issue of our predecessor journal (Perspectives: Review of International Affairs – 02/2014),<sup>1</sup> we published an abridged version of the Russian think tank IMEMO’s annual ‘Russia and the World’ forecast. This was the first time that any version of this report had appeared in English. The aim was to allow the work of Russian academics to be more widely available to and understood in the English speaking world, to provoke responses from scholars working elsewhere and to encourage dialogue between them. The forum that we present here is one of the results of this ongoing process, which also included the presentation of the report – with lively subsequent discussion - at the Institute of International Relations in Prague. The forum comprises responses to the IMEMO Forecast from leading scholars on Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. We are delighted to present these responses – from Derek Averre, Vladimir Handl, Egbert Jahn and Iver B. Neumann - which offer a variety of perspectives on the forecast itself as well as on the issues it raises. On some issues there is consensus between IMEMO and the respondents, while other issues draw critique and still more have provoked mixed responses. We are sure that readers will find plenty to agree and disagree with in this composition of different perspectives and that they will prompt further discussion and engagement - which is greatly needed given the current state of relations within and between Russia and the world - in subsequent issues, on our blog and in other formats.*

**Keywords:** Russia, Ukraine, Security, Cold War, EU, US, IMEMO

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### **1. Russia and the world 2015: avoiding the polarisation of Europe**

**Derek Averre\***

#### **Introduction**

Western scholars and policy commentators – while divided over the implications of Moscow’s strategic objectives and the regional and global consequences – have tended to frame the debate over the Ukraine conflict in terms of something approaching a new Cold War. According to the NATO commander in Europe, General Philip Breedlove, the events in Ukraine have prompted a “paradigm shift” in strategic thinking among Western elites (Borger and Lewis, 2014; see also Allison, 2014), who perceive a “revisionist” Russia that challenges international law and, inspired by a “neo-imperial vision”, is hostile to Western values (Heisbourg, 2015: 34). Official statements have called into

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Russia and the World, 2015 – IMEMO Forecast’ was authored by A.Dynkin, V.Baranovsky, I.Kobrin-skaya, G.Machavariani, S.Afontsev, Ya.Mirkin, A.Kuznetsov, F.Voytolovsky, V.Shvydko, S.Utkin, V.Mikheev, S.Lukonin, Yu.Kvashnin, B.Frumkin, N.Toganova, V.Zhuravleva, I.Zviagelskaya

question the post-Cold War idea of indivisible security in the wider European space (NATO Wales Summit Declaration, 2014). Indeed, a study by the Russian government-sponsored Valdai Club argues that “the confrontation [over Ukraine] threatens to bring about a direct clash... looming behind it is the entire cluster of unsettled relations from the quarter-century since the Cold War ended” (Valdai International Discussion Club, 2014: 43-44).

The Forecast published by a distinguished group of scholars from IMEMO, which reflects some of the key ideas and opinions prevalent in Russia and offers a more subtle insight into global developments (Dynkin et al., 2014), is thus welcome. It begins by highlighting the differences between the current political situation and the Cold War environment. The first difference is that, as a result of the spread of nuclear weapons, bipolar confrontation is no longer the defining feature of a global balance of power. Nevertheless, as the Forecast points out, the breakdown of arms control agreements, apart from the strategic nuclear arms treaty between Russia and the US, and a lack of mutual trust are in serious danger of undermining regional and, to an extent, global stability (*Global Zero Commission*, 2015). The Forecast additionally points to an upsurge in NATO activities and the upgrading of Russia’s military potential, but it might also have noted Moscow’s increased willingness to deploy that potential, with numerous reports of Russian aircraft and submarines approaching the Western space. We may no longer live in a MAD world, but in an increasingly turbulent global security environment, the danger of escalation stemming from what the Forecast calls “the inertia of military preparations” is widely recognised. At the current time it is vital that both Western and Russian leaders summon the political will to rebuild trust and work towards a shared vision to underpin international institutions and stabilise potential flashpoints. That this is not happening, with the Russia-Western cooperation largely frozen, reveals a woeful lack of statesmanship. The IMEMO experts forecast continuing “selective pragmatism” in Russia-US relations at a time when a new framework, inspired by a political vision and engaging both experts and practitioners, for arms control and security-building measures is demanded.

The second difference is the interdependence of the global economic system – arguably the defining feature of the post-Cold War era – which binds the (re)emerging powers into global trade and investment networks and mitigates security dilemmas. Yet the Ukraine crisis has entangled both economic and political disputes. A leading conservative economist and Putin advisor has attacked the EU’s Eastern Partnership (EaP) as possessing “imperial features” and producing “puppet regimes” which, with the help of political interference by the West, provoke “colour revolutions” and compel neighbourhood states to accept Euroatlantic integration (Glaz’ev, 2013). Meanwhile, Western commentators are equally insistent that Moscow is using political pressure to foist its economic model on these same states, citing then President Yanukovich’s decision to forego signing the Association Agreement with the EU, which triggered the Euromaidan. The political deadlock over Ukraine locks both sides into ongoing sanctions and trade restrictions (Connolly, 2015) that not only make the prospects for stability and prosperity in the shared neighbourhood precarious, but also appear to be prompting Moscow to demarcate its own regional legal-normative space through the Eurasian Economic Union and turn to a traditionalist model of import-substitution and “mobilisation” of society at home. Furthermore, Russia’s modernisation – a *leitmotif* of the Medvedev presidency – is in danger of stagnating: zero-sum thinking prevails over the positive sum gains of a genuine common economic space. How resilient is Russia in terms of sustaining the longer-term costs of marginalisation in Europe and the potential loss of commercial and technological advantage it brings with it? The Forecast offers a sober assessment of the Russian economy but says far less about the domestic political consequences of prolonged economic stagnation.

Third, the Forecast reiterates the view, prevalent in Moscow’s political class, that many global security challenges cannot be tackled without Russia’s involvement. The present writer’s opinion is that Russia has in fact been constructive, or at least not overtly obstructive, in dealing with a number of pressing problems since the end of the Cold War - for example, nuclear nonproliferation, Afghanistan and even conflict management in the Balkans – a fact that is conveniently forgotten by some in the Western

commentariat, who prefer to peddle drivel about “Russia’s ongoing transformation into a rogue state” (Motyl, 2014). Russia has re-emerged as a global power whose material and diplomatic resources could make a substantial contribution to international security. In the recent period, however, the interventions in Georgia and Ukraine and the conflicts in Libya and Syria further afield have been marked by a “clash of values” narrative which has reinforced legal-normative disputes and complicated relations with the Western liberal democracies. While Moscow sometimes puts forward valid arguments about the neglect of its legitimate concerns by the West and the latter’s own “double standards”, its desire to be seen as a constructive actor upholding standards of legitimacy has been compromised in Western eyes by its readiness to undermine the Georgian and Ukrainian post-Cold War sovereignty and lend support to authoritarian regimes. Moscow thus appears prepared to disregard the costs of opposing the West when its perceived vital interests are at stake and – in concert with other emerging powers - offer a more radical challenge to liberal norms. Any attempt by the Western powers to engage Russia in renegotiating the fundamental rules and principles of security governance must take this development into consideration.

Finally, and following on from the previous points, the Forecast focuses on shifts in an international system marked by the rise of the emerging economies. Although the IMEMO experts declare that “the western vector will remain among the key priorities” in Russia’s foreign policy, Moscow now looks to position itself in global markets in line with the US “pivot” to the Asia-Pacific and Europe’s growing fixation on trade with Asia (Trenin, 2015); emerging alternative centres of global governance may produce a more pluralist multi-hub international order that would be more accommodating to Moscow’s ambition for strategic independence. But this brings with it risks as well as opportunities. First, as the Forecast recognises, international law and institutions continue to degrade; in the current writer’s opinion Moscow must seek to play a role in renegotiating the “rules of the game” and not just rely on *ad hoc* coalitions. Russia may not be high on Washington’s list of priorities – even in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis - but the US is still the world’s preeminent power and its security guarantees are still in demand in Europe and in parts of Asia so that reviving cooperation with it is vital for Russia. Second, Russia is not yet a major actor in the Asia-Pacific; the integration processes in Eurasia described by the Forecast, while having considerable potential, are weak and patchy, riven by contradictions among the regional states, and populated by under-governed countries dependent on resource-based economies (particularly in Central Asia). Furthermore, Russia’s economic performance – outlined in excruciating detail in the IMEMO paper - is overshadowed by China’s relative success, which brings with it longer-term geopolitical implications.

The IMEMO experts have offered some convincing arguments, not least of which is that the Ukraine conflict is a symptom of a wider crisis in international relations. The Forecast glosses over some aspects of the crisis, however. A venomous “information war”, waged both in the political and diplomatic arena and in the social media, has accompanied “hybrid” or “asymmetric” warfare tactics (Freedman, 2014) in Crimea and eastern Ukraine and unsettled European countries, which are bewildered by what seems an abrupt shift from the narrative of partnership and modernisation during the Medvedev presidency. Although the West cannot escape its share of the blame - some of the arguments advanced by Western commentators ignore legitimate Russian concerns about political order and sovereignty - certain interest groups represented in Russia’s governing elite appear to be gaining from the crisis, eclipsing the contribution of modernising elements in government and expert circles to the detriment of the country’s longer-term interests (a sign of weakness rather than strength in the Russian body politic). The official Russian narrative has depicted post-Yanukovich Ukraine as being in thrall to extremists and even fascists; but despite the many shortcomings of the Ukrainian political and economic system, and the burden it may well place on the EU, there is, in fact, an emergent civil society and evidence of political renewal in Ukraine. As a result the rift in trust between Russia and Europe may take many years to heal at the very time when a common positive approach to the neighbourhood could lay the foundations for greater stability and prosperity, and when shared challenges - economic interdependence and the risks it brings with it, diffusion of power away from the

state, the fragility of international institutions, increases in migration flows and emerging security challenges – are better addressed jointly.

The IMEMO experts conclude on a positive note, identifying the central problem: “Russia needs to define some strategic and implementable points of reference” that may allow for negotiation to “set the framework for preserving Ukrainian statehood”. The implication here is that its tactical gains are in danger of being outweighed by strategic losses. But Europe too must overcome the inertia of its eastern policy and define its own strategic interests (Youngs and Pishchikova, 2013); a strategy of political engagement with Moscow, aimed at preventing the polarisation of the wider Europe, need not signal appeasement. Stepping back from Cold War logic before it reproduces the military manifestations of past confrontation, in the form of containment and even deterrence, and seeking shared understandings of contemporary norms in the international order is a key imperative for 2015 and beyond. The Forecast’s conclusions make this only too clear: the question is whether Russia’s policy elites – and elites in the West - can overcome past grievances and create a forward-looking foreign policy.

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## **2. The IMEMO Forecast, 2015: A Bridge Over Troubled Waters?**

**Vladimir Handl\***

The IMEMO forecast is an interesting and high-quality piece of analysis. In many ways, it is also an encouraging read, primarily when compared with the massive Russian state propaganda and the political statements of the radical ends of the Russian political spectrum. But what is most problematic about the text is not what is included in it, but rather what is left out: a serious critical engagement with Russia's actions in Ukraine (and their consequences) and a sustained reflection on the linkages between Russia's domestic and foreign policies.

However, the forecast does indirectly offer a critique of Russian policy in other ways and acts as a warning of the dangers – primarily for Russia - of pursuing its current course and, particularly, of failing to address the country's economic stagnation and political instability.

The forecast argues that we are witnessing a renaissance of geopolitics in the world, but rejects the notion of a "new cold war" and emphasises the many ways in which Russia and the West remain interconnected and interdependent. Although it elides several key differences between the two sides, the theme of common interests - and the need to develop on them - is present throughout the text. The authors emphasise the desirability of building bridges between Russia and the West, although significant change will be required to do so.

### **No New Cold War, but Dangers Lurk for Russia**

According to the forecast we are facing a return of realpolitik (IMEMO, 2014b: 115). However, while this claim surely reflects the Russian - and perhaps also the US – attitude it is inadequate for describing the way the EU operates. It would be more fitting to say that the EU's rather technocratic approach to its Eastern neighbourhood foreseeably clashed with Russian geopolitical claims. A fascination with geopolitics and realpolitik has been perhaps the most prominent feature in Russian foreign policy and also the Russian media discourse over a number of years – though it has been hardly present in Europe.

Of course, the forecast misses the point when it comments on the Ukraine crisis, styling it as something external and as a cause of trouble for Russia and, indeed, for the West. Vladimir Putin's decree extending the ban on information on casualties of the Russian army to peace time can be interpreted as a cover up for the Russian army's action in Ukraine in the past and perhaps (although hopefully not) in the immediate future.

The forecast correctly points at the differentiation of the EU countries as regards their relations with Russia and specifically the sanctions (*ibid.*). What is missing here, though, is a mention of the (presumably surprising) fact that despite these differences, the EU managed to establish and maintain its unity so far.

Some of the numerous critical observations in the IMEMO report are not attributed to any specific country, which is in contrast to Russian propaganda, which generally purposefully portrays the USA as the great villain. Several possible interpretations of this come to the reader's mind:

First, IMEMO, while critical enough of US policy, distances itself from populist anti-Americanism and seeks to defend its analytical high ground. Second, IMEMO understands all too well the level of manipulation in Russian policy and policy-guided media. One of the features of policymaking like that of Russia (which continues in many ways the deep tradition of Soviet foreign policy making) is that once a deal with the great omnipresent enemy is struck, the hateful tirades disappear and are replaced with realist argumentation about mutual respect and shared interest. The forecast makes clear that IMEMO seeks to keep its distance from this political game.

Thirdly, and most daringly, it can be argued that IMEMO's general and unattributed laments about the international law, the new colonialism, etc. can be interpreted as a thinly veiled criticism of Russian policy itself. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that IMEMO would engage in the "Krym naš!" (Crimea is ours) nationalist outburst. In fact, the Russian annexation of Crimea and Russia's hybrid war in/against Ukraine fit the picture of the degrading of the current world order, which IMEMO is critical of (*ibid.*: 116).

### **Trouble in the Shared Neighbourhood and Trouble at Home for Russia**

The IMEMO forecast argues - correctly - that the European Neighbourhood Policy has failed. However, it is important to note the genesis of the ENP in this regard: a major part of it is the tension between the attractiveness of the EU on the one hand and the need to consolidate the EU after its historically biggest enlargement and after the deepest crisis the EU survived so far on the other. The ENP and, indeed, the EU (and NATO) enlargement were not primarily about the West expanding into the suddenly uncontrolled territories of the former East and of Russia. It was about the newly independent states running away from the East and trying to join the western institutions. The ENP was designed to deal with this overflow.

Some carefully crafted critical statements as regards Russian policy reveal that IMEMO is well aware of the dire state in which Russia has been since the Ukrainian crisis: it is claimed that propaganda and counter-propaganda turn "both sides, but first and foremost, Russia, into hostages of election campaigns and [the] public sentiment crisis" (*ibid.*: 116).

On the international relations level, IMEMO sees the cause of the Ukrainian crisis in the competition between the EU and Russian integration projects. The thesis is, however, not complete in its analysis. On a deeper level, the cause has been the competition of the two models of policy making and the two policy cultures – one based on strong institutions and rule of law, and the other based on weak institutions and patrimonial linkages and networks. While the EU can be blamed for failing to produce an adequate policy vis-a-vis Ukraine (see, for example, the repeated postponement of the signature of the Association Agreement with Ukraine), Russia waged a limited trade war against pro-European producers in Ukraine at least since 2012 in order to prevent her from signing the Association Agreement.

For IMEMO, the USA is clearly the real power, not the EU. Unlike the Russian media, the forecast does not describe the US as Russia's enemy, though. It also recognises the fact that Russia is not - and will not be - a priority of US policy and that the Republicans would pursue a harsher political line vis-à-vis Russia than the Democrats. IMEMO expects that the Obama administration – with the sanction mechanisms still in place - will seek a co-operation with Russia in areas of her interest (an assumption that seems to have been proven correct by the May visit of Secretary of State John Kerry to Russia).

A similarly practical approach dominates IMEMO views of the European Union, Russia's most important trading partner. The EU is expected to maintain a "consolidated policy" in regard to the sanctions. IMEMO also notes that Russia's relations with Germany will only be normalised when "there is a progress in the peace settlement in Ukraine" (*ibid.*: 126). Russian politicians and media usually put all the blame for the European sanctions policy on the USA. IMEMO, however, explains the European approach not only by the strong Atlantic link, but also by normative preferences: "A common understanding (*among the EU member countries*) of the basics of international order is very important here" (*ibid.*: 125). Tellingly, the Russian full version of the forecast refers to "apprehensions caused by the Russian policy towards Ukraine" in the Baltic states (IMEMO, 2014a: 134).

The forecast sees three types of approaches to Russia among Central East European states: tentatively pro-Russian, disinterested and tentatively anti-Russian ones. This view is, however, too optimistic when it regards Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia as "tentatively pro-Russian": while there is a strong pro-Russian sentiment mainly among the older generations in these countries, the nature of Russian domestic policies and the Russian action in Ukraine dramatically enhanced the distance from and rejection of Russian policy among the younger and better educated populations of these countries. If there is a need for a short-cut definition of the stance of these countries, one would argue rather for referring to it as "not a priori anti-Russian".

## Greater Reflection Needed to Build the Desired Bridges with the West

IMEMO is a bridge-builder between Russia and the West (primarily the EU and the USA). Unlike some policymakers and the Russian media, it does not prioritise the search for alternatives to co-operation with the West. It supports the intensification of Russia's relations with China but argues that "China will not be able to substitute for Europe and the US as a source of technologies, while an overdependence on loans from Beijing is also highly undesirable" (IMEMO, 2014b: 128). Moreover, Russia "feels apprehensive of Beijing's future political and economic dominance and it will have to collaborate with Washington in the field of arms control" (*ibid.*: 127).

In the post-Soviet space, the "traditional priority vector" of Russian foreign policy, the Eurasian trend is viewed as dominant. However, here, the competition between the "pro-Eurasian" and the "pro-European" trend is growing, which is seen to enfeeble Russia's position (*ibid.*: 129).

For IMEMO, the desirable bridge building with the West requires the competition between integration initiatives to be overcome. The solution here would be a dialogue between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union and an enhanced search for the compatibility of the "Eastern partnership" countries with *both* the EU and the CIS formats, as proposed by Germany (*ibid.*: 130).

Significantly, the full version of the forecast comes to the conclusion (after all the harsh talk on the Russian side) that the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine will not lead to substantial losses of third parties (IMEMO, 2014a: 141).

Not less importantly, the US and Russian global agendas are viewed as similar in the forecast (IMEMO, 2014b: 135). Unlike in the Russian political discourse and state-run media propaganda, there is no talk in it of a military threat to Russia from the side of the West. Also, Russia's strength and military build-up are not mentioned in it, but Russia's weakness is: three major challenges for Russia will be her economic stagnation, failed modernisation and reform. IMEMO clearly does not see a strategy behind the current Russian policy and action.

An alternative reading of the forecast thus could be that it is a call on Russian policymakers to come to reason and to deal with strategic and not only tactical issues – and moreover, to involve expert circles in the development of adequate responses to the increasingly challenging environment in which Russia operates in order not to lose the co-operative links with the West.

It is in the nature of the forecast that it does look at Russian foreign policy action only passingly and does not deal with Russian domestic developments at all. This is understandable given the Russian political context; however, keeping the internal and the external dimension of the political process separate belongs to the tradition of official and semi-official Russian foreign policy analysis (IMEMO would fall into the second category).

The Realist school of thought is thus dominant here not only because of the accent on geopolitical factors, but also because of the absence of domestic factors in the analysis of the formation of Russian foreign policy. This limits the scope of the analysis: for example, in the forecast, it is the sanctions which burden the relations between the West and Russia – but not the reason for the imposition of the sanctions; the military activities of NATO are mentioned, but not the Russian hybrid warfare or Russia's shows of strength in which it sends bombers close to the borders of NATO countries.

IMEMO's analysis is overall a very welcome Russian expert assessment of the challenging international environment as well as (indirectly) of the pitfalls of the current Russian position. To some extent, it can be read as a call for Russian policymakers to return to reason and pursue the strategic interests of Russia, which are seen in many instances as concordant with those of the West. However, without an analysis of the domestic situation and the process of foreign policy making in Russia, the impact of the expertise remains uncertain.

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### **3. IMEMO, Russia and the Interdependent World: Hope Between Rocks and Hard Places?**

**Egbert Jahn\***

“Russia and the World: 2015. IMEMO Forecast” (2014) is an abridged English version of the Russian original text *Rossiya i mir: 2015. Ekonomika i vneshnyaya politika. Ezhegodnyi prognos* (2014) (165 pages), which consists of two parts, and the former contains the most important political elements of the latter. In the original text, Part I - “Economics” (pp. 5-98), which will not be discussed here, presents and discusses extensive material on the comparative economic situations in various world regions and many single states and on key trends in the world economy. Part II - “Foreign Policy” (pp. 99-165) - consists of six chapters, the titles of which reveal much about the authors’ perceptions of the international situation: (1) “The Risks and Possibilities for Russia under the Conditions of the Sanctions”, (2) “The USA”, (3) “The EU”, (4) “The Post-Soviet Space”, (5) “The Near East”, and (6) “The Asia-Pacific”. The sequence of the chapters is an expression of the political priorities and concerns of the authors, as the order is from the most prioritised topics to the least. In the text, world politics are seen from a Russo-centric point of view which looks at the important political challenges around Russia, but largely ignores the rest of the world, including Africa, Latin America and, to a significant extent, South East Asia. In this view, Russia is seen as a world power with a regional focus on Europe and Northern Asia.

The text can be read from two main standpoints. Firstly, the report can be seen as an interpretation of the international situation by Russian academics in one of the leading Russian academic institutes – perhaps the leading Russian academic institute - on international relations with close contacts to and advisory functions for the leadership of the state. The text can thus be interpreted as an indicator of the real and detailed political perceptions of the Russian political elite, revealing much more than crude internationally and domestically directed propaganda. The second reading then asks: To what extent are the academics still free to express opinions that differ from the official line of foreign policy in an exposed institute of a country that is leaving its democratic intentions to become a full-fledged neo-autocracy?

One can observe that the IMEMO report adapts to the official line by ignoring the fact of the undeclared and covert war of Russian military units and extremist Russian nationalist volunteers against Ukraine, which stimulated a civil war in the South East of that country. Without the Russian military intervention there would have been a sincere and tough political conflict with several regional, ethnic, linguistic and prevailing socioeconomic characteristics in Ukraine because of the serious cleavages in the Ukrainian society, but most probably there would have been no civil war there.<sup>2</sup> This war has cost the lives of many thousands (and some even say tens of thousands) of civilians and soldiers, with at least several hundred or even more than a thousand Russian citizens among them.<sup>3</sup> Instead of speaking of a war when discussing this topic, however, the Russian colleagues prefer to speak of a “Ukrainian crisis” or “Ukrainian conflict.” The military occupation and annexation of Crimea is just an “action” in their wording. However, apart from the various adaptations to official foreign policy stances, the IMEMO report contains a sober and realistic approach to the present international

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<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is more extensively elaborated in the author’s article “Neuaufgabe des Ost-West-Konflikts? Friedenspolitische Herausforderungen durch die neuen Kriege in Europa” in the journal *OSTEUROPA* (No. 3/2015: 3-27) (Jahn, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> According to the information provided by the Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko at the Munich Security Conference the casualties until the beginning of February 2015 consisted of 1432 soldiers and 5638 civilians. The UN assume that the numbers are considerably higher, though. According to some anonymous “German security circles” there are “up to 50.000 soldiers and civilians” that ended up as casualties (Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung, 2015; Ukraine-Analysen, 2015).



situation and some important critical commentary on the widespread ideological delusions in Russian society.

### **Interdependence, Congruence and Rejecting the “New Cold War” Thesis**

The Russian authors stress the growing international economic interdependence of the world in the last 25 years, which precludes the possibility of restoring two separate, largely self-sufficient parallel world economies: Russia on the one hand (even if in cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the BRICS states) and the West on the other hand. They stress the mutual economic dependence of Russia and the EU and back this up with empirical data. However, they also underline that this interdependence has two sides. On the one hand, it makes the EU and Russia vulnerable and endangers the stability of both sides. On the other hand, this interdependence has been responsible for the strong limitations of the European and Western sanctions as well the Russian counter-sanctions so far and perhaps for the hesitance of both sides to act more intensely and overtly.

Thus the authors clearly oppose the widespread and alarmist thesis of a renewal of the Cold War between the East and the West (e.g. Lucas, 2014; IMEMO, 2014b: 114-115). They advocate four arguments for this: a) nuclear deterrence works differently in a multilateral international system than in the old bipolar system, b) “the deep inter-dependence of the global economic system” prevents both sides from imposing overly harmful sanctions, c) common global security problems such as the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the terrorism of Islamic extremists require a cooperation between the West and Russia, and d) the growth of new emerging economies such as the Chinese one transform the international system from a bipolar and a US-unipolar system (as the system in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) to a new system that the authors do not explicitly call a multipolar system.

However, the reasons that the present Moscow-Brussels (the EU and NATO) tension cannot be equated to the historical East-West-conflict and the Cold War are, in the view of the current author, different from those presented by the IMEMO authors. The East-West conflict was a conflict of two competing universal concepts (“ideologies”) relating to the socioeconomic system (bureaucratic socialism vs. capitalism), the political system (a single-party dictatorship vs. pluralist parliamentary democracy) and the state system (centralised internationalism vs. a free association of nation-states). Today the world is characterised more by congruence than by such bipolar differentiation. The dominant socioeconomic system is global capitalism. The nation-state organisation of that system is, in principle, generally accepted. Only pluralist parliamentary democracy is still opposed by many autocratic systems of various kinds, which are only united to some extent by their common opposition to democratisation processes – sometimes with the tacit support of governmental and non-governmental actors from the democratic countries. The new Russia, like the other ex-communist countries, began with democratic intentions at the end of 1991, but since December 1993 it has gradually taken a path of neo-autocratic restrictions of political freedoms and of transformation into a plebiscitarian adoptive autocracy that is limited as to time. But it nonetheless still employs some important democratic and constitutional restrictions against its becoming a full dictatorship.

A free, democratic Russia would not perceive NATO as a threat or a competitive challenge, as Mexico, Japan, India, Australia, and, indeed, Sweden do not perceive it as such. Therefore, the core of the Moscow-Brussels conflict consists in the incompatibility of the universalist liberal-democratic political system with the nationalist, “geopolitically” limited neo-autocratic systems in Russia and the associated countries. Nuclear deterrence is still working and is certainly a main reason why the West does not dare to support the territorial integrity of Ukraine by military assistance against the military intervention by Russia, even though Ukraine took significant steps back to a democratic, Westernising path after the previous detours that it took with the introduction of the oligarchic system shortly after it gained independence and after the self-destruction of the proponents of the Orange Revolution. Therefore, both sides, Moscow and Brussels (NATO), are unlikely to threaten the other explicitly with a nuclear response as the East and the West did several times during the Cold War. Because NATO

accepts the fact that Russia has a de-facto blank cheque to intervene militarily in the post-Soviet space (with the exception of the Baltic countries), there is no danger of an escalation of the war in Ukraine to a Third World War. Russia is only running the risk of limited economic sanctions from the West, which are unlikely to lead to either a policy change or a regime change in Russia. The effect of the Western economic sanctions is weaker than the effect of plummeting world oil prices (MEMO, 2014b: 117). In addition Russia runs the risk of military resistance from non-compliant regimes and peoples in the occupied countries and potential dissatisfaction and dissent of the Russian population as a reaction to the costs of the military expansion.

### **Competition Between Integration Projects**

I fully agree with the interpretation by the Russian colleagues of the present crisis in the relations between the West and Russia in which they state that it is a consequence of a “competition among the integration projects, namely, between the EU Eastern Partnership and Russia’s initiatives of Eurasian integration that provoked the Ukrainian crisis in November 2013” (MEMO, 2014b: 117; MEMO, 2014a: 103). In a broader perspective the Russian authors see also a military dimension in this relationship: “Competition between the ‘pro-European’ or, in fact, pro-Western and the ‘pro-Eurasian’ trends is on the rise in the region. As part of the swelling pro-European trend, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have embarked on a political and economic association with the EU and seek rapprochement with (or potential accession to) NATO. Moldova is also eyeing a potential ‘reunification’ with Romania” (MEMO, 2014b: 136; MEMO, 2014a: 129). On the other hand, though, they state that “[i]n the Eurasian format, Russia and Belarus are strengthening their ties with the countries of Central Asia and Armenia in the format of the EEU and the CSTO, as well as with China in the format of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (*ibid.*).

However, simply building an alternative political coalition of autocracies against the West is no prudent policy in the eyes of the MEMO authors. In such a coalition Russia would only be a junior partner of China. Furthermore, diversification of gas and oil exports (new pipelines to China) is deemed necessary by the authors, but they still see a priority in the restoration of good and normal relations with Europe (mainly due to the mutual economic dependencies) and also with the United States (due to political reasons such as nuclear non-proliferation, the struggle against terrorism, the need to limit of the international influence of China, etc.). Therefore they are advocates of a détente between Russia and the West, support the Minsk accord and plead for a further rapprochement between both sides by a policy “of common sense, rational egoism or the survival instinct” and for a “dialogue between the EU and the EEU” (MEMO, 2014b: 135,129).

The authors are highly sceptical of the economic integrative abilities of Russia in the post-Soviet space and even in the Eurasian space of Russia herself. They clearly see the reason for the weakness of the Russian integration project in the lack of reindustrialisation and technological breakthroughs in the Russian economy (*ibid.*: 117). In their view, only a modernisation of the Russian economy could avoid the future threats to the stability of the Russian society (and the rule of the present elite, one has to add). In addition they see that the integration process in the EEU has been weakened by the Russian “actions” in Ukraine. They note that Kazakhstan “is alarmed by the irredentist moods of some sections of Russian society towards its ‘Russian-speaking’ eastern regions” and that it is expanding its ties with the EU. And they notice also that Belarus raised its profile “in front of Russia and the EU politically (as a mediator at the talks on Ukraine)” (*ibid.*). They further mention that “a reserved position on the Ukrainian crisis and on the Russian policies taken by the partners in the Customs Union and concerns over the maintenance of sovereignty ... ..prove it will [be] rather difficult to assure the Belarusians and Kazakhstanis of the importance of deeper integration, including the transfer of more national authorities to the Eurasian Economic Commission” (*ibid.*: 130).

### **Debunking Conspiracy Theories Despite Undemocratic Constraints**

Rather openly the Russian colleagues warn against conspiracy theories in explaining the economic stagnation in Russia: “The pressure of sanctions on Russia was not the main cause of the economic crisis, but it considerably aggravated it. Also, sanctions will be a considerable obstruction on the way out of the crisis” (*ibid.*). And: “Significantly, [the] IMEMO analysis refutes the widespread delusion of a price conspiracy between Saudi Arabia and the United States intended to undermine the Russian economy” (*ibid.*: 122). And: “It would be equally incorrect to explain the critical assessment of Russia’s actions in Crimea and the conflict in Ukraine by the majority of Western countries by traditionally strong Euro-Atlantic links only. A common understanding of the basics of international order is very important here” (*ibid.*: 125). One can read this last quote as directed against commonplace assumptions that the EU’s eastern policy is simply dictated by a supposed anti-Russian policy of the United States. It is an important critical point that the authors make despite any constraints they may face.

Aside from the distortion of Russia’s responsibility for the war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea the IMEMO report systematically neglects the importance of democratic mass movements (such as those in Ukraine) in addition to the “clash of the financial and political interests of a handful of regional leaders and oligarchs, each having their own army”, which certainly also plays an important role. But speaking here of the “feudalization of a weak state” (*ibid.*: 116) is a simplification of the complex situation in Ukraine. A similar reductionism can be found in the interpretation of “humanitarian interventions” as “features of ‘new colonialism’”. Military interventions with the declared aim to prevent severe violations of human rights are, without doubt, very often very problematic, especially if they are not authorised by the United Nations. Humanitarian motives are, in many cases, combined with simple national, economic or political interests. Many interventions also fail in achieving their proclaimed humanitarian aims. But most such interventions did not have the effect of establishing some sort of colonial rule by a single state or even by a collective of states. The Russian authors simply ignore the problem that states cannot: the fact that in a globalising and interdependent world, severe human rights violations in UN member states cannot be tolerated by the other states, particularly not by members of the Security Council if they have the opportunity to prevent them by appropriate non-military means or even by military means.

On the whole the IMEMO Forecast contains a sober, realistic analysis of Russia’s position in the world order with a plea for a détente in the Moscow-Brussels relations, which should be carefully taken notice of and discussed in the West as well as in Russia and Ukraine. However, its silences also speak loudly – of both the position of Russian elites and the constraints that scholars in Russia continue to face. Nonetheless, the critiques that are presented offer encouraging points of departure for a re-orientation of Russian policy – and indeed that of the West.

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#### **4. ImMEMORised Decline: The Price of Neglecting History** **Iver B. Neumann\***

The most interesting thing about the IMEMO report is that it is written in a register which assumes that Russia is a key power in global politics. The first section of the report asks whether we are on our way towards a new Cold War and answers in the negative. I share that assessment, but not for the reasons suggested here. My reason is a Hegelian one: at some level, quantity becomes quality. During the Cold War, the confrontation between the systems was of such a magnitude that contemporaries and historians named a period of world history after it. Strategic discussions fastened on the Fulda Gap. The maritime discussion concentrated on the sea lanes of communication across the Atlantic. Balance of power debates concerned Soviet-Western clashes in Asia and Africa.

Compare that with the situation now. Strategic discussions fasten on the respective sizes of the American and Chinese economies and militaries. The maritime discussion concentrates on the chains of islands that are decisive for China's sea lanes of communication. Balance of power debates concern Chinese-Western clashes in Asia and Africa. Meanwhile, Russia is a sideshow in the overall geopolitics. It is indicative of this situation that where we once discussed the Russian-European confrontation along the Fulda Gap that divided Germany, we now discuss confrontations along the River Don. These confrontations certainly have repercussions, but these are not repercussions of world historical importance. The key question where the overall picture is concerned is not any question of Russia as such, but in what degree Russia will lend its economic and military weight to the Chinese side in the defining Chinese-American relationship. The size of Russia's population alone is simply debilitating. A population that struggles to reach 150 million is hardly a large enough basis to maintain the country's great-power status. The emergent powers China and India simply operate in another league. Meanwhile, Brazil and Indonesia are well ahead of Russia in this respect. Economically and militarily, Russia remains an important regional power in both its own territory and Asia. Against the view in the report, however, I should like to suggest that Russia's great-power status is in serious and growing doubt.

The report identifies the main reason for this and calls it by its proper name: economic stagnation. This is the same term that was used about the Brezhnev era. One would have expected the report to ask the obvious question of why Russia must time and again face the fact of economic stagnation, but that question is not asked, so it falls to the rest of us to deal with it. Note the cyclical recurrence. As discussed by the late Moshe Lewin (1988), every generation or so, Russia talks of reforming the economy. It happens now; it happened in the late 1980s. It happened in the 1960s with the Lieberman reforms. It happened with the New Economic Policy in the 1920s. It happened under Struve, and it happened at regular intervals throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When such reforms were attempted, however, the result was always the same. Economic forces were set free to organize at the margin of political control. The initial results were always great. But then, fairly quickly, the emerging economic actors tried to convert their newfound economic resources into political ones. Politicians panicked at this new competition, and answered by locking down the economic reform and cowing the new economic actors. The political result of this was business as usual, but the economic result was exactly stagnation. This historical pattern, which has as its root cause the lack of a separate economic sphere of social life in Russia, is basic to an understanding of Russian underdevelopment. It is also basic for understanding Russian foreign policy, for each time reforms have been tried in Russia, they have been Westernising reforms, and each time they have been shut down, and an anti-European reaction of the kind of which we are in the middle now has followed (Neumann, 1996).

This time, the stagnation that resulted from Putin's crack-down on the oligarchs of the 1990s has been exacerbated by a new factor that the report hints at but does not really nail, namely global integration. The economic aspect of global integration is predicated on there being such a thing as a separate economic sphere where agents from all over the world may interact with certain degrees of freedom from political actors. It follows that the main drama of globalization is the relationship between economic and political agents. Russia, which does not have a separate economic sphere, is ill-poised to participate in this game. Even in a key relationship for the Russian economy - the one concerning oil and gas exports to Europe, cooperation has foundered on Russia's principled resistance against any

deal that might infringe on what Russia sees as its sovereignty. The political thinking behind this insistence on sovereignty is obvious, as are the political advantages that it brings, but it should give cause for pause that China and India are both developing world economic champions, whereas Russia is not. Weapons exports and the odd financial transaction going out of places like Cyprus do not add up to a presence in the world economy. The economic consequence of the insistence on sovereignty is once again a hampering of the emergence of a separate economic sphere and further guarantees that economic stagnation will recur, and recur again. One does not have to be a Marxist to grasp that without a solid material base, no state can remain a great power, regardless of how far one cuts standards of living and how much one increases military budgets.

The report does not mention the domestic drivers of foreign policy either. Ostensibly, Russia is in good shape when it comes to the support from the rear: the Putin regime is genuinely popular. The question one should ask, however, is whether the regime is popular with the sectors of society that can deliver what the IMEMO report holds that the country needs, namely reform. It seems to me that the answer to this is negative. The most important reason for this is that the people in the most innovative stratum of any society – professionals and intellectuals – are exactly the ones that the regime does *not* look to for its legitimacy. On the contrary, the rooting out of a free press and free debate and a thing that we might have expected academics to care about and at least acknowledge – the handing over of public debates about history and Russian identity to political rather than scientific actors – are obviously alienating strata that a reforming state simply cannot afford to alienate. We have here a factor that is primarily technical and discursive, but which has clear foreign policy implications. It weakens the economic base and cohesion of the state, it weakens innovation, it weakens competitiveness and it weakens the capacity to integrate globally.

As can be seen, my major bones of contention with the report lie in the realm of its lack of will to look along historical lines and to take a systemic rather than a national(ist) view. I should like to end, however, by questioning the effectiveness of Russian military policy regarding homeland defence. The thinking here seems to be that the best guarantee against the historical bogeyman of encirclement lies in unstable boundaries. From Chechnya, Abkhazia and Ossetia, via Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk to Gagauzia and Transdnistria and increasingly on to the boundary with Poland and the Baltic states, destabilisation seems to be the common denominator. I question whether this strategy is optimal. The advantages are obvious: room for manoeuvre, room for divide and rule, and room for all kinds of operations against neighbouring states. The disadvantages are equally obvious: room for different kinds of state institutions that would stage operations that do not necessarily support the regime, national expectations of take-overs that cannot be met without incurring steep costs internationally, and humanitarian costs that may easily translate into political costs when there are hiccups. The report's only comment on this major strategy is that Russia "did not grant official recognition" to the People's Republics of Lugansk and Donetsk, but that is a moot point when the key thrust of the policy seems to be to maintain a belt of unstable border areas that may be informally handled.

From the end of the Cold War onwards, Russia has, with varying but increasing intensity, supported the idea of a world order based on multipolarity. This is an idea that is clearly in the ascendant (see, e.g., Hobson, 2012). The major challenge for Russian foreign policy in my view is to see to it that Russia remains one of the poles in such a world order. The turn to China is no help in this regard, but rather yet another challenge. At present, it is hard for me to spot in actual Russian policy or in this report any overall strategy that addresses the major long-term challenge facing Russia, namely the loss of its great-power status. Twice before in the previous century, around 1914 and around 1983, Russian regimes reacted to Russia's looming international decline by simply intensifying a failing policy. Russia can do so again – or think tanks like IMEMO can get to work and come up with an alternative.

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