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# Back to the Wall: Myths and Mistakes that Once Again Divide Europe

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## Abstract

Europe is once again subject to an epidemic of wall and barrier building. The war in Ukraine is accompanied by the fortification of its border with Russia, while the Baltic republics are creating the foundations for what is an embryonic new ‘iron curtain’ dividing the Atlantic community from Eurasia. Elsewhere fences are being built to halt the flow of refugees and migrants. These new barriers symbolise the failure to build a Europe ‘whole and free’ in the post-Cold War era, and the failure of the era of globalisation to create the conditions for security and development in Europe’s neighbourhood. The spate of ‘walling’ reflects not the strength of national sovereignty but its weakness, and not the power of the Atlantic community to spread prosperity, peace and security but the opposite. The era of globalisation is accompanied by deepening disjuncture and contradictions, and European leaders have no coherent response. The roots of the crisis lie in the patterns established at the close of the original Cold War in the late perestroika years, with a power shift rather than the transcending politics espoused by Mikhail Gorbachev. The Malta summit of 1989 only partially repudiated the politics of Yalta. The asymmetrical end of the Cold War and the 25 years’ crisis represented by the subsequent cold peace contained within itself the violence and the new divisions that now predominate. The myths and mistakes of the cold peace era need to be challenged and a new transformative politics envisaged.

**Key words:** Cold War, Berlin Wall, Ukraine, liminality, Yalta, Malta, Mikhail Gorbachev, H.W. Bush, NATO, cold peace.

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The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the subsequent end of the Cold War encouraged expectations of a new era of reconciliation and healing in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev’s ‘new political thinking’ tried to transcend not only the division of Europe but also the very logic that had divided the world into ‘East’ and ‘West’. He sought to overcome the historical division between revolutionary and social democracy to create a new type of society that remained loyal to what he called the ‘socialist choice’ as well as to the classical tenets of representative democracy. The ‘Charter of Paris for a New Europe’, adopted by a plenary meeting of all the heads of state or government of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) at a meeting on 19-21

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was published in *Polis*, No. 4, 2015, pp. 46-63, in Russian, with the original English version on the website: <http://www.politstudies.ru/en/article/5018>. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers, whose extremely helpful comments have helped shape this much-revised version of the paper, as well as my colleagues at the University of Kent, Glenn Bowman and Keith Hayward.

November 1990, acted as the manifesto for the new era, stressing that ‘The era of confrontation and division in Europe has ended. We declare that henceforth our relations will be founded on respect and cooperation [...] Europe whole and free is calling for a new beginning’.<sup>2</sup> Instead, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dismantling of the ‘iron curtain’ across Germany and Europe, Ukraine announced plans to build a new wall along its 2,295 kilometre-long border with Russia.

On 16 June 2014 the head of the National Security and Defence Council, Andrei Parubiy, stated that building the wall would ‘avoid any future provocations from the Russian side’.<sup>3</sup> The Ukrainian Prime Minister, Arseny Yatsenyuk, on 5 September 2014 announced that the plan, imaginatively named ‘Wall’ or ‘European Rampart’, had been adopted, and construction of the fortifications began soon after. In the first instance there would be a four-metre wide and two-metre deep ditch equipped with electronic surveillance systems, towers and other structures.<sup>4</sup> The wall would also separate the contending sides in the Donbass, reinforcing the economic and social blockade. As the deputy commander of the anti-terrorist operation (ATO), colonel Valentyn Fedychev, put it the following April, ‘Ukraine has to spend a lot of money – about 1 billion hryvnia – to transform the demarcation line into a fortress impregnable for Russian occupiers’.<sup>5</sup> This was an attempt physically to separate Ukraine from Russia, and reflected the deeper psychological and political gulf between the two countries. Yet for many in the Donbass, the border had long been considered artificial and imposed. With the creation of the Donetsk and Lugansk people’s republics, Kiev lost control of some 300 of the near-2000 km land border.<sup>6</sup> Russia also began to fortify its part of the frontier bordering the insurgent region, in part to control the flow of weapons and militants in both directions.<sup>7</sup> Yatsenyuk noted that what had now become known as the ‘Great Wall of Ukraine’ would improve national security, improve the business climate and facilitate Ukraine’s membership of NATO and the EU. For him, the fortifications would serve as Europe’s de facto eastern boundary.<sup>8</sup> How can we explain the return of the wall as the metonym for our times, and what does it say about the quality of international political relationships?

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Charter of Paris for a New Europe’, Paris, 19-21 November 1990, <http://www.osce.org/node/39516>.

<sup>3</sup> Iana Koretska, ‘Changes to terrorism law give Ukraine forces fighting chance to defeat Eastern insurgency’, *Kyiv Post*, 20 June 2014, <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/changes-to-terrorism-law-give-ukraine-forces-fighting-chance-to-defeat-eastern-insurgency-352701.html>, accessed 16 July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Ukrainian border guards start building wall’, ITAR-TASS, 10 September 2014, <http://tass.ru/en/world/748902>, accessed 5 May 2015.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Fortification work on demarcation line in Donbas to cost UAH 1 bln – ATO deputy commander’, Interfax-Ukraine, 8 April 2015, <http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/economic/259416.html>, accessed 16 July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Tatiana Zhurzhenko, ‘Ukraine’s Eastern Borderlands: The End of Ambiguity’, in Andrew Wilson, (ed.), *What Does Ukraine Think?* (London, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), pp. 45-52.

<sup>7</sup> Petr Kozlov, Evgenii Rakul’ and Aleksei Nikol’skii, ‘Rov naprotiv rva: Rossiiskie pogranichniki ukreplyayut granitsu s Donbassom, kak i ukrainskie, no deklariruyut drugie tseli’, *Vedomosti*, 27 May 2015, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> ‘“Great Wall of Ukraine” fortification along Russian border set for completion before late 2018’, *Ukraine Today*, 23 May 2015, <http://uatoday.tv/politics/great-wall-of-ukraine-fortification->

## Walls, culture and power

Some 274 people died along the Berlin Wall between it going up in August 1961 to its dismantling in November 1989, whereas already thousands have died in Ukraine. The Russo-Ukrainian border is only slightly shorter than the US-Mexican border, whose 3,141 kilometre length is now secured with increasingly ramified fences and intruder detection systems. The building of the Ukrainian wall demonstrated that a new iron curtain threatened to divide Europe, no longer ‘from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic’, as Winston Churchill put it in his speech announcing the Cold War in Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946, but from Narva on the Baltic to Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. Churchill was not the first to use the phrase ‘iron curtain’. It was coined by Ethel Snowden in her book about her visit to Soviet Russia in 1920 as part of the British Labour Delegation, referring to the level of ignorance that ‘separated the countries of the West from Soviet Russia’.<sup>9</sup> This ‘iron curtain’ is if anything more impenetrable than ever before

In his study of the term, Patrick Wright describes the ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ patterns of the division of humanity.<sup>10</sup> This is vividly illustrated by European responses to the pressure of refugees and migrants at its frontiers. Spain has turned its enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in North Africa into heavily fortified bastions, while in 2014 Bulgaria built a fence along its border with Turkey, forcing refugees to undertake the perilous sea crossing to the Greek island of Kos. In 2015 Hungary followed suit to build a four-metre high fence along its 110-mile border with Serbia.<sup>11</sup> The EU’s asylum system, formalised in the Dublin Regulation, penalises those frontline countries at Europe’s borders. A recent study argues that ‘The inability of the European Union to agree a meaningful response to the current migrant crisis is not only disgraceful, it risks defining the Union’s legacy as a spectacular failure’.<sup>12</sup> Such a perception is reinforced by Estonia’s plans to build an eight foot-high metal fence reinforced by barbed wire, ostensibly to keep out illegal immigrants, along its 108-kilometre border with Russia.<sup>13</sup> This really would be the beginning of a new ‘iron curtain’, and like the trenches in 1914, could gradually snake its way down to the Black Sea and once again divide Europe. In earlier years the EU had done much to try to soften its frontiers through the establishment of trans-border regions

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[along-russian-border-set-for-completion-before-late-2018-pm-428981.html](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30742898), accessed 16 July 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Service, *Spies and Commissars: Bolshevik Russia and the West* (New York, Public Affairs, 2012), p. 92.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Wright, *Iron Curtain: From Stage to Cold War* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Patrick Kingsley, ‘We’ve come so far – your wall won’t stop us, desperate migrants warn Hungary’s leaders’, *Guardian*, 22 June 2015, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Françoise Sivignon and Janice Hughes, ‘Europe’s Refugee Crisis: Bridges, not Fences, Are the Answer’, *OpenDemocracy*, 2 September 2015, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/fran%C3%A7oise-sivignon-janice-hughes/europe%E2%80%99s-refugee-crisis-bridges-not-fences-are-a>, accessed 9 September 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Artem Kureev, ‘Can Estonia Build a New Berlin Wall Between Russia and the West?’, *Russia Direct*, 2 September 2015, available at <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/can-estonia-build-new-berlin-wall-between-russia-and-west>, accessed 9 September 2015.

and programmes like the Northern Dimension, but in the end these initiatives were overwhelmed by the failure to achieve a comprehensive and inclusive post-Cold War political settlement.<sup>14</sup>

In the case of Ukraine, the divisions that have accompanied state building since 1991 have profound local causes, but the language of the ‘new Cold War’ endows them with a more universal geopolitical significance. Ukraine has long been torn between ‘Eurasia’ and ‘Europe’, with the tendency to reify both terms. Defenders of the Ukrainian wall argue that this one is different, designed no longer to oppress people within its confines, but like the Great Wall of China, to keep the barbarians out. The revised name of ‘the Line of Dignity’ echoes East Germany’s name for the Berlin Wall, ‘the Anti-Fascist Protection Rampart’. The Separation Wall in Palestine is also claimed to defend civilians, as are the defences around Gaza. Glenn Bowman has likened the blockade of Gaza to the dual meaning of ‘encystation’, the radical isolation of diseased elements and the protection of a foetus in the womb. The quarantining of Gaza in his view has established mechanisms for the future containment of West Bank Palestinians.<sup>15</sup>

The Separation Wall reinforces the Israeli presence in the occupied West Bank. Equally, the radical imposition of a state of exception on the people of the Donbas exempted them from the political process by labelling them ‘terrorists’ while subjecting them to extreme assault in the form of the ‘Anti-Terrorist Operation’ (ATO). The dehumanisation of the population deprived them of the legal and political protection of the nation state and pushed them into the extraterritorial limbo status analysed so powerfully by Giorgio Agamben. As he argues, ‘The exception that defines the structure of sovereignty is [...] complex. Here what is outside is included not simply by means of an interdiction or an internment, but rather by means of the suspension of the juridical order’s validity – by letting the juridical order, that is, withdraw from the exception and abandon it’.<sup>16</sup> The blockade of the Donbas deprived its peoples of pensions, welfare services and the basic means of survival. Over 500 civilians were killed by shelling from Ukrainian positions in the first eight months of 2015 alone. Walls and war have returned to the continent and to world politics, accompanied by new forms of vertical and horizontal separation.

Makarychev and Yatsyk argue that political borders are ‘largely perceptual phenomena’, and stress that ‘Europe as a construct lacks clear borderlines’.<sup>17</sup> They analyse the tension in both the EU and Russia between strategies that ‘unlock’ borders, and those that reinforce divisions. They note that value-oriented approaches are ‘conducive to articulating and fixing normative borders with Russia’, while interest-oriented approaches foster ‘more economic openness and less restrictive border crossing

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<sup>14</sup> For perceptive discussions of the issue, see Ilkka Liikanen, James W. Scott and Tiina Sotkasiira (eds), *Migration, Borders and Regional Stability in the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood* (London, Routledge, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Glenn Bowman, ‘Encystation: Containment and Control in Israeli Ideology and Practice’, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XLIV, No. 3, Spring 2015, pp. 6-16.

<sup>16</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, ‘(Un)locking Political Borders: Implications for EU-Russia Relations in Eastern Europe’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 61, No. 6, November-December 2014, pp. 34 and p. 35.

regimes'.<sup>18</sup> The establishment in March 1995 of the Schengen Area of passport-free travel within Europe entailed the hardening of external borders, which in the case of Ukraine affected not just its frontier with the EU but also the Ukraine-Russia border.<sup>19</sup> The crystallisation of frontiers between the various zones of Europe reflects the radicalisation of normative confrontation and assumes a harsh physical form. Europe as a whole is undergoing a type of self 'encystation' on its outer borders in response to internal 'post-modern' fluidity and the tide of miserable humanity pressing at its gates. Rather than ending, history appears to have come full circle, and the continent is entering a new era marked by the construction of walls, fences and other medieval remnants within the European polity. This reflects the broader resurgence of the new medievalism, with an array of overlapping political competencies and social forces eroding classical representations of the state.<sup>20</sup> Post-Cold War Europe may well have become increasingly 'post-modern';<sup>21</sup> but at the same time it is assuming some pre-modern characteristics. Ken Jowitt's warning in the early 1990s about the onset of a 'new world disorder' proved prescient.<sup>22</sup> Instead of inaugurating a sustainable and inclusive peace, the last 25 years have been characterised by a growing range of challenges to European and global order.<sup>23</sup>

The only question is what we should call this new period of turbulence. Andrew Monaghan is right to argue against the attempt to shoehorn present events into the procrustean bed of a 'new Cold War' narrative.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the 'Cold War of the mind', as Ken Booth already noted in the late 1990s, was never overcome.<sup>25</sup> Booth notes that the *systemic* struggle between the US and the Soviet Union ended with the disintegration of the latter in 1991, but the bipolar mindset continued, and in his view the historical Cold War was only one manifestation, admittedly one of the most intense, of what he identifies as the 'international political culture of conflict'.<sup>26</sup> It is this characteristic, with politics reduced to a morality play, which was replicated in new

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<sup>18</sup> Makarychev and Yatsyk, '(Un)locking Political Borders', p. 42.

<sup>19</sup> Tatiana Zhurchenko, *Borderlands in Bordered Lands: Geopolitics of Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (Stuttgart, Ibidem-Verlag, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Jan Zielonka, *Europe as Empire: The Nature of the Enlarged European Union* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007). See also Jan Zielonka, *Is the EU Doomed? (Global Futures)* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> The *locus classicus* of the argument is Robert Cooper, *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2003), which develops the argument originally presented as *The Postmodern State and the World Order* (London, Demos, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Ken Jowitt, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, *The New European Disorder* (London, European Council on Foreign Relations, November 2014), [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the\\_new\\_european\\_disorder322](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_new_european_disorder322), last accessed 14 August 2015; Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (Washington, DC, Brookings, 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Monaghan, *A 'New Cold War'? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia* (London, Chatham House Research Paper, May 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Ken Booth, 'Cold Wars of the Mind', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Statecraft and Security: The Cold War and Beyond* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 29-55.

<sup>26</sup> Booth, 'Cold Wars of the Mind', p. 31.

forms in the post-Cold War era, giving rise to the cold peace. This was a type of ‘mimetic Cold War’, in which the antagonisms, practices and responses of the earlier period were reproduced while refusing to acknowledge the inherently conflictual character of the statecraft of the period.<sup>27</sup> This was a classic case of mimetic rivalry, as powerfully so brilliantly by René Girard, in which both Russia and America, desired the object of the others’ desire, namely recognition of great power status.<sup>28</sup>

If the Cold War was at root an ideological conflict over different representations of community and social power, reminiscent of the great wars of religion that culminated in the suicidal Thirty Years’ War from 1618 to the series of treaties in 1648 that are known to posterity as the Treaty of Westphalia, then the conflicts of the new era are about cultures of power. For the one side what is termed ‘democracy’ is the only appropriate form for a modern society, while on the other side the substantive features of democracy, such as the rule of law, secure property and individual freedom are not denied, but are embedded in cultures of power which place greater weight on collective responsibility, communal (traditional) values and authoritative rights than the liberal societies of the west. This is by no means the same as Samuel Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’, which used religion as the marker of distinctive cultural complexes.<sup>29</sup> In cultures of power religion is only one marker among many, and includes what used to be called political culture as well as ideational representations of the proper role of the state, relations between the state and the market, as well as authority in general. The struggle is not so much between normative orders as about the role that norms should play in shaping relations between states. The thirty years of neoliberal pre-eminence in the Atlantic world has influenced cultures of power across the world, including Russia and China, yet these two affirm development trajectories that remain located in their own understanding of the particular challenges facing their countries. Affirmations of political sovereignty are a synonym for the attempt to retain control over their own histories and a rejection of meta-historical claims that developmental problems resolved elsewhere are of universal applicability.

The fundamental tension is between contrasting appreciations of historical time. In the post-Cold War era the concept of *revolution* has returned to its earlier meaning, a representation of the cyclical nature of human endeavour, although its modern connotation of a sudden breakthrough in the life of a society to some sort of superior condition has not disappeared.<sup>30</sup> Contemporary liberal democracy is shaped by the specific conditions of its emergence in western societies, but in much of the transitological literature norms and practices that took generations to devise in one

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<sup>27</sup> See Richard Sakwa, ‘The Cold Peace: Russo-Western Relations as a Mimetic Cold War’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2013, pp. 203-224.

<sup>28</sup> Wolfgang Palaver, *René Girard’s Mimetic Theory*, translated by Gabriel Borrud (East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, ‘The Clash of Civilizations?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 23-49; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of the shifting meanings within the framework of *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history), see Reinhart Koselleck, ‘Historical Criteria of the Modern Concept of Revolution’, in Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. by Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1985 [1979]), in particular pp. 41-2.



context is applied as the solution to the problems of countries facing very different challenges. This type of revolutionary revisionism has undermined the foundations of European post-Cold War order. The specificity of the historical context is denigrated, and instead universal solutions are recommended. Curiously, progressive development today assumes a spatial rather than a temporal aspect.<sup>31</sup> The ideology of the ‘return to Europe’ contains aspirations for improved governance and standards of living, but it also entails a respatialisation of politics that is at odds with ‘post-modern’ notions of scapes and flows that define the claimed liquidity of the modernity associated with globalisation. By definition, if some countries can ‘return to Europe’ at some point there will be a line differentiating them from those that cannot or will not. The contradiction between universalistic claims and the specificity of the historical experience that gave rise to these practices, accompanied by the border ‘locking’ that this entails, provokes much of the present disorder.<sup>32</sup>

### **Liminality and sovereignty**

The problem of ‘timeliness’ is uniquely acute in the case of Russia. Neumann and Pouliot apply the term hysteresis – the resilience of historical affects on a physical or social organism – to describe the long-term phenomenon of a Russia in which time is out of joint and in which the burden of history distorts the current appreciation of real time challenges.<sup>33</sup> This is now compounded by the harshly spatialised quality imposed on temporal disjuncture. The Ukrainian wall seeks to delineate the ‘European’ societies to the west from the ‘barbarians’ to the east. It is thus invested with global significance, representing the Ukrainian struggle as one for the very soul of Europe.<sup>34</sup> This certainly was the way that the post-Maidan Kiev authorities portrayed the war against the insurgency in the Donbass.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, Fyodor Lukyanov, the editor of *Russia in Global Affairs*, argues that the events in Ukraine, despite the depth of the tragedy, are ‘somehow parochial, that this obsession with peripheral matters is only a distraction from much larger and more important processes’.<sup>36</sup> The whole Ukraine crisis can be considered a case of hysteresis, where the cumulative memory of previous bending and

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<sup>31</sup> A point made by Tony Judt in his *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, Vintage, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> For an analogous discussion, see Tony Judt, *Ill Fares the Land: A Treatise on our Present Discontents* (London, Penguin, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Pouliot, ‘Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian-Western Relations over the Past Millennium’, *Security Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2011, pp. 105-137. See also Iver Neumann, ‘Russia in International Society over the *Longue Durée*: Lessons from Early Rus’ and Early Post-Soviet State Formation’, in Raymond Taras (ed.), *Russian Identity in International Relations: Images, Perceptions, and Misperceptions* (London & New York, Routledge, 2012), Chapter 3.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the interview by Sebastien Gobert with Petro Poroshenko in Kiev on 1 August 2015, ‘Ukrainian president says Putin wants the whole of Europe’, *Libération*, 12 August 2015, reproduced in *Johnson’s Russia List*, No. 157, 2015.

<sup>35</sup> For example, ‘Ukraine’s Yatsenyuk prepares Germany for USA’s war’, 3 April 2015, [http://english.pravda.ru/world/europe/03-04-2015/130183-yatsenyuk\\_germany-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/world/europe/03-04-2015/130183-yatsenyuk_germany-0/), accessed 29 July 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Fyodor Lukyanov, ‘Russia must exploit its pivot East’, *Moscow Times*, 26 June 2015.



pressure prevents a release into that brave post-modern world that had been anticipated but so tantalisingly hidden in the cold peace years. The Ukraine crisis drags Europe back to an era that had been considered transcended, hence the parochial feel to the events, and it is hard to see anything other than the clash of retrogressive nationalisms at play.

Instead of the elusive democratic peace based on international law and adaptive institutions of global governance, for Lukyanov the big story is the reconstitution of the East as a powerful new entity – politically, geographically and culturally – under China’s leadership. In the twentieth century Russia had embodied the East, but this had always been more of a rhetorical device than a substantive reality, since the modernity espoused by the Soviet Union was only an idealised variant of the modernity practiced in the West. It is for this reason that Viatcheslav Morozov labels Russia a ‘subaltern empire’. Russia’s vision of modernity in his view is ultimately derivative, generated by a Europe with whom it has traditionally had an ambivalent relationship; but its self-image as a great power perpetuates the imperial dimension, with profound consequences for its domestic and international policies.<sup>37</sup> If Morozov’s interpretation of the specificity of Russian postcolonialism is right, then it makes sense for the other post-Soviet Eurasian states to draw on the fount of modernity at its source rather than through the derivative, and no doubt distorted, model provided by Russia. Thus postcolonial discourse only reinforces the anti-colonial narratives generated by the Ukrainian ‘back to Europeans’.<sup>38</sup>

The spatialisation of the Ukrainian nationalist project has in turn provoked the respatialisation of Russia’s political aspirations, notably through the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The sanctions and other ‘walling’ devices have reinforced Russia’s long-term attempt to take advantage of the reconstitution of an economically dynamic and geopolitically separate East. However, this does not mean that Russia has repudiated its European and even its Western identity. Russia remains an intermediate state, in political terms liminal and as always ‘betwixt and between’ (to use Victor Turner’s phrase) the great processes of our time.<sup>39</sup> The more dogmatic the assertion of axiomatic characteristics, the more Russia’s identity becomes fluid and contingent. Equally, Ukraine as much as Russia is part of the broader post-Soviet postcolonial condition, where it is not clear who is the subaltern and who is the coloniser. Anti-colonialists in Ukraine have appropriated, sometimes in fruitful ways, postcolonial discourse to examine the dilemmas facing Ukrainian national development, although there is a tendency to reduce the whole question to the struggle against an alien colonising power.<sup>40</sup>

This is countered by the traditional Russian view that the two countries have a shared history and culture, and that the fundamental challenge is to find a way of

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<sup>37</sup> Viatcheslav Morozov, *Russia’s Postcolonial Identity: a Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Richard Sakwa, ‘Ukraine and the Postcolonial Condition’, *Open Democracy*, September 2015.

<sup>39</sup> The term ‘liminal’ is derived from the Latin term ‘limen’, meaning threshold, representing a space of waiting, not knowing, transition and expectation. For a recent study, see Bjørn Thomassen, *Liminality and the Modern: Living Through the In-Between* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Mykola Riabchuk, ‘Culture and Cultural Politics in Ukraine: A Postcolonial Perspective’, in Taras Kuzio and Paul D’Anieri (eds), *Dilemmas of State-Led Nation Building in Ukraine* (Westport, CT, Greenwood Publishing, 2002), pp. 47-69.

accommodating differences within Ukraine and externally to devise a political community in which both countries could flourish. Instead, separation and division came to predominate. The fundamental struggle over what it means to be Ukrainian in the modern era opposes a monist version (which includes the Ukrainising ethnic nationalists but is not limited to them) to a broader pluralistic appreciation of the multiplicity of Ukrainian identities. These could have been (and may one day be) united under the banner of the constitutional patriotism of a civic nation, allowing Ukrainian culture and language to become universal while accommodating Russian and other languages and cultures.<sup>41</sup> In the event, the triumph of a peculiarly aggressive form of Ukrainising nationalism in February 2014 exacerbated internal divisions and gave birth to the wall building project against its neighbour.

The *limes Germanicus* was the system of frontier installations that defended the Roman Empire from German raids. Ukrainian wall-building symbolises a latter-day endeavour to defend ‘Europeans’ from the uncivilised Eurasian ‘barbarians’. This demonstrates how little has changed in the course of two thousand years. The *limes Ukrainus* illustrates the failure to transcend the logic of the Cold War to build a Europe ‘whole and free’. No less significant, it is a potent symbol of the fragmentation of the Ukrainian state-building enterprise, and thus it joins the other great ‘walling’ projects of our era that demonstrate not the strength of Westphalian sovereignty but its dissolution. The disorder in European affairs represents not a repudiation of the post-modern condition but is an essential part of the neoliberal order. The violence unleashed by what Naomi Klein calls ‘disaster capitalism’ was greatly in evidence in Russia earlier and Ukraine today.<sup>42</sup> As Wendy Brown argues, ‘While many of its proponents frame neoliberalism as an *alternative* to the wars, coups, struggle, and strife of Realpolitik and paint a picture of a global order pacified by economic integration, it is no secret that neoliberal reforms are often ushered in by or generate a palpable share of violence that results in new security concerns for every region they touch’.<sup>43</sup> This applies to the European Union (EU) as a whole, which in the eyes of its critics has become transformed from a peace project to an instrument for the continuation of Cold War struggles in new forms. By engaging in un-negotiated enlargement into contested territory it was drawn into geopolitical conflict for which it had no effective instruments, and only reinforced its subordinate status within the Atlantic security community. This prompts the reflection that, having lost a broad continental European vision, it is the EU that has become the ‘subaltern empire’, focusing its identity on an Atlanticism that was once assumed to be contingent and circumscribed.

Brown stresses that the trend to build walls around and between states is a token not of their increased power but of the opposite. In conditions of so-called globalisation, the state is increasingly hollowed out as the economy becomes more autonomous, services traditionally carried out by a professional civil service or dedicated departments are outsourced, and the powerful transnational flows of migrants, capital, labour and services leave what remains of the state increasingly powerless. Thus, the new era of walls signals the waning of state sovereignty. As she notes, the ‘frenzied building’ of the

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<sup>41</sup> For my examination of the issue, see Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London, Penguin 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York, Zone Books, 2014), p. 95.

‘new walls striating the globe’ was being undertaken at precisely the time when ‘crumbling of the old Bastilles of Cold War Europe and apartheid South Africa was being internationally celebrated’.<sup>44</sup> When theorists of globalisation were celebrating the emergence of a world without borders, new barriers were going up across the world, as well as within countries in the form of gated communities.

The Ukrainian wall is exceptional. It is designed as a defence against a traditional state, whereas mostly the new walls are reactions to transnational forces rather than international threats. This only reinforces the parochial and regressive nature of the struggle between Ukraine and Russia, locked in pre-modern conflicts that degrades their political cultures and returns the whole region to the war of all against all. Elsewhere, walls are a feature of the post-Westphalian world. This is not to suggest that nation-state sovereignty is ‘either finished or irrelevant’. Instead, Brown argues, ‘the prefix “post” signifies a formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed’. This very much applies to the post-Cold War era. Brown continues: “‘Post’ indicates a very particular condition of afterness, in which what is past is not left behind, but, on the contrary, relentlessly conditions, even dominates a present that nevertheless also breaks in some way with this past. In other words, we use the term “post” only for a present whose past continues to capture and structure it’.<sup>45</sup> It is in this spirit that I examine the legacies of the Cold War and the pathologies of the post-Cold War condition. This is indeed a condition which is conditioned by the Cold War and mimics it in the form of the cold peace.

### **The myth of Yalta**

The cold peace represented a 25 years’ crisis, lasting between 1989 and 2014 before giving way to a new era of overt confrontation between Russia and the Western powers. The Ukraine crisis is only the latest symptom of the long-term failure to find an adequate post-Cold War ‘mode of reconciliation’ on the European continent, and instead a whole set of divisive practices operated. While the causes of the Ukraine crisis remain contested, one essential point is often overlooked: the conflict was rooted in decisions made long before any fighting broke out. The roots of the gravest geopolitical crisis of our time lie in contesting interpretations of two events that helped shape the course of the twentieth century and continue to resonate today. The Yalta Conference of 4-11 February 1945, held in the Livadia palace on the peninsula’s south coast, and the Malta Summit of 2-3 December 1989, held on two ships off Marsaxlokk Harbour, are either long-forgotten or poorly understood by many in the West. Though they were quite different in substance and historical context, both meetings sought (and ultimately failed) to produce a more stable European security order.

The myth of Yalta is one of the most powerful in Russian historiography. In February 1945, when the fate of the small European countries trapped between the advancing Red Army and Western forces was to be decided, leaders representing the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union gathered in Yalta to forge a post-war order for Europe. The military division of the continent forced Franklin D. Roosevelt, Churchill and Joseph Stalin to accept the idea of European pluralism—different social

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, p. 21.

systems would have to learn how to co-exist by recognising the interests of the other and thereby limiting their own ambitions. This represented a type of forced geopolitical pluralism, although within the blocs ideological discipline was imposed. The great powers in the end managed European affairs by taking into account the realities of power and the interests of others, not because they necessarily approved of these interests but because rational statecraft required this recognition. This meant granting Stalin effective control over most of the territories liberated by the Red Army, while the Western part of the continent achieved unprecedented economic growth and stability within the framework of American hegemony. Although this system was always challenged by radicals on both sides and by those caught in the middle, the new European order created a stable state system and the framework for economic development.

It may seem perverse after all these years to return to Yalta as one of the foundational events of European order. For the Central and East European countries, Yalta was less a myth than a brutal reality. As Jacques Rupnik so powerfully argues, ‘For the nations of the Other Europe Yalta is the “original sin”, the founding myth of a divided Europe. It has become synonymous with Sovietization and with the disappearance of the very notion of Central Europe’. In short, ‘Europe divided by non-European superpowers: that is the potent myth of Yalta’.<sup>46</sup> The Yalta conference also reflected the fissures in the Atlantic alliance. The rift in relations between Churchill and Roosevelt had been evident at the Teheran conference in November 1943 when the American president ‘ostentatiously courted Stalin and was cool to Churchill, seeking to demonstrate that the Americans and the British were not “ganging up” against the Russians. From the American point of view, this was perfectly reasonable. By the end of the war the Soviet Union was going to be a stronger power than Britain, playing a greater role in world affairs, and it was a shrewd move to come to terms with the rising star’.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Yalta presaged the power shift from Britain to the US. Nevertheless, the Yalta conference settled a whole range of detailed issues, including borders in Eastern Europe, spheres of influence, democratic elections in Poland and the project to create the United Nations. The participants agreed to the American plan for the establishment of a Security Council with five permanent members (Churchill insisted on France’s inclusion), each of which had veto powers on Security Council resolutions.

A myth is a way of freezing time. The Russian myth of Yalta confirms Russia’s status as a great power with legitimate security interests in a broader region, while the Western myth (although not couched in those terms) connects West European security and developmental interests with American hegemony. The Yalta conference enshrined a mutual understanding that the Soviet Union was a great power whose interests would henceforth have to be taken into account. It is for this reason that Yalta was so much appreciated by the Soviet Union, and has attained such a mythological status in Russia today. The seventieth anniversary of Yalta in 2015 was celebrated by numerous conferences and events, reinforcing the view of Russia as one of the world’s great sovereign powers. Above all, the Yalta Conference recognized that Red Army victories in the war gave the Soviet Union the right to be treated as an equal in deciding global issues.

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<sup>46</sup> Jacques Rupnik, *The Other Europe*, revised and updated edition (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989), p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Bell, ‘Europe in the Second World War’, in Paul Hayes (ed.), *Themes in Modern European History 1890-1945* (London & New York, Routledge, 2008), pp. 249-273, at p. 264.

Hence Russia's repeated assertion that when Russia is involved, a lasting peace can be secured – as at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 or Yalta in 1945 – but when it is excluded, as it was from the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and the resulting Versailles Treaty, then peace is fragile and insecure.<sup>48</sup> It is this status of Russia as an 'essential' nation in world affairs that Vladimir Putin has tried to restore. He has complained endlessly that in the post-Cold War years Russian views have been ignored, just as President Boris Yeltsin did before him, and any future Russian leader will do as well. On the Western side, challenges to the Atlantic alliance are considered heretical and dangerous. On both sides, the myth of Yalta has stymied creative thinking and the establishment of new institutions and processes reflecting not the Cold War but its transcendence.

### **From Yalta to Malta and back**

When he came to power at the head of the Soviet Union in 1985, Gorbachev quickly signalled his commitment to serious domestic reform. In 1986, he launched what he called 'perestroika,' the 'restructuring' of the Soviet system, which ultimately became a grand exercise in trying to create a 'humane, democratic socialism'.<sup>49</sup> Gorbachev encountered a sympathetic although tough interlocutor in the person of President Ronald Reagan, and soon the tensions of the Cold War began to ease. Gorbachev's speech at the UN on 7 December 1988 represented the moment, according to Jack Matlock (the US ambassador to Russia at the time), when 'Gorbachev publicly called off the ideological Cold War'.<sup>50</sup> In his address to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989, Gorbachev outlined his idea for a 'Common European Home' that would unite the continent on the basis of a shared commitment to peace and development. He argued that different systems could coexist peacefully, noting that 'Now that the twentieth century is entering a concluding phase and both the post-war period and the Cold War are becoming a thing of the past, the Europeans have a truly unique chance – to play a role in building a new world, one that would be worthy of their past, of their economic and spiritual potential'.<sup>51</sup> Gorbachev's programme for geopolitical and normative pluralism in Europe since the mid-2000s has been taken up in the form of the Russian project for a 'Greater Europe'.<sup>52</sup> Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' precipitated the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and was a moment of unlimited opportunity to reunite the continent and overcome global confrontation.

The Malta Summit of December 1989 represented the culmination of these developments. Gorbachev and the American President George H. W. Bush met to devise

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<sup>48</sup> Vladimir Putin, 'Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club', Sochi, 24 October 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/23137>.

<sup>49</sup> This was the programmatic declaration of the 28<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, 2-13 July 1990, 'K gumannomu, demokraticeskomu sotsializmu' (Moscow, Politizdat, 1990)

<sup>50</sup> Jack F. Matlock, *Super-Power Illusions: How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray – and how to Return to Reality* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2010), p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Europe as a Common Home', Strasbourg, 6 July 1989, [https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/gorbachev-speech-7-6-89\\_e3ccb87237.pdf](https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/gorbachev-speech-7-6-89_e3ccb87237.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Alexei A. Gromyko and V. P. Fëdorova (eds), *Bol'shaya Evropa: Idei, real'nost', perspektivy* (Moscow, Ves' mir, 2014).

what Bush would later call the ‘new world order’.<sup>53</sup> As the Eastern European countries one by one shook off Soviet power and dismantled the communist system, Gorbachev confirmed that the Soviet Union would not intervene in the various revolutions. As Archie Brown puts it, ‘Bush had been convinced in the course of the preceding months – as the Soviet leadership made clear that it would not intervene militarily to put a stop to regime change in Eastern Europe – that the new thinking was being matched by a completely new pattern of behaviour’. In other words, the ‘Brezhnev doctrine’ of limited sovereignty was replaced by what the Soviet foreign ministry spokesman Gennady Gerasimov called the ‘Sinatra doctrine’ – ‘letting the East Europeans do it *their way*’.<sup>54</sup> Although no agreements were signed, the two leaders had a chance to review the rapid changes taking place in Europe. At the concluding press conference Gorbachev declared, ‘The world is leaving one epoch and entering another. We are at the beginning of a long road to a lasting, peaceful era. The threat of force, mistrust, psychological and ideological struggle should all be things of the past’. Bush, too, was positive: We can realise a lasting peace and transform the East-West relationship to one of enduring co-operation. That is the future that Chairman Gorbachev and I began right here in Malta’.<sup>55</sup>

The tumultuous events of autumn 1989 appeared to inaugurate a new era of peace and reconciliation. This would allow not only the reunification of Germany but above all the coming together of the European continent. Gorbachev understood that the Cold War stand-off between the Soviet Union and the Western powers served to undermine the development of both. The Malta meeting represented another moment, as at Yalta earlier, when the great powers held the fate of Europe in their hands. Gorbachev envisaged that Russia would remain a great power, but now one that worked cooperatively with the West. At the Malta meeting Gorbachev argued for the transcendence of Yalta *and* Malta. He called for the creation of a new dynamic in European international relations that would encompass the interests of both the small and great powers. This would be a multipolar Europe with space for experimentation and diversity. In the event, the Malta summit represented only a partial repudiation of the world born out Yalta. The changes focused only on the Eastern part of the continent and no institutions or processes were created that could invest in and maintain broader processes of continental reconciliation. The Malta summit registered the changed diplomatic and strategic balance of power but failed to transcend the logic which sustained that balance of power.

Although Malta discussed the fate of Europe, only one part of the continent was represented at the summit. The tragedy of Malta is that Gorbachev was not talking with European leaders but with the president of the United States. Unlike at Yalta, there was no Churchill to speak on behalf of Europe. Not surprisingly, the idea of a ‘Greater Europe’ was the last thing that Bush wished to talk about, since it would signal precisely what America had long feared: a split between the European and American wings of the Atlantic alliance. Equally, it was confirmed that the post-Cold War order would be built on the Helsinki Final Act of August 1975. Helsinki had confirmed Yalta, above all the borders and the framework for the conduct of relations between the great powers; but at

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<sup>53</sup> For an analysis of the context and outcome, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 239-40.

<sup>55</sup> History Learning Site, ‘The Malta Summit 1989’, [http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/malta\\_summit\\_1989.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/malta_summit_1989.htm).



the same time Helsinki's 'third basket' package of human rights commitments provided a mechanism its transcendence. It established a particular method to overcome the politics of Yalta, which ultimately proved corrosive of post-Cold War international relationships. Instead of Gorbachevian geopolitical and ideological pluralism, a universalist agenda was pursued premised on the view that the task of the post-communist world was simply to adjust its historical time to that of the West. It also failed to instantiate an independent West European presence as an independent interlocutor.

The emphasis on human rights at Helsinki and its legacy in the CSCE and then the Organisation for Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) began the shift from the realist focus on structural relations between great powers, the principle of Yalta, to *systemic* issues, the question of regime type and the associated emphasis on normative values. Already in his study what he dubbed the 'twenty years' crisis', E. H. Carr had critiqued the inherent hypocrisies and double standards inherent in this sort of 'idealist' politics.<sup>56</sup> In the end, critique of Russia's systemic failings in the post-Cold War era provoked what was perceived to be the denigration of its interests. The incommensurability of historical time, or, more simply, different perceptions of the historical challenges facing the country, eroded trust and mutually beneficial interactions. This was accompanied by a dramatic decline in the quality of pan-European diplomacy, and instead a tone of hectoring and mutual recrimination came to predominate. This ultimately was the basis for the twenty-five years of the 'cold peace' between the Malta meeting in 1989 and the Euro-Maidan revolution in Kiev in 2014.

The opportunity for a common victory that Gorbachev presented at Malta was squandered. Perceiving the decline of Soviet power, Bush seized the opportunity to strengthen US dominance. Although the personal relationship with Gorbachev was a strong one, and Bush was acutely sensitive of the Soviet leader's accumulating domestic problems and the growing wave of criticism of his policies, the shift in the balance of power was palpable.<sup>57</sup> The Soviet Union had now effectively become a hostage of American good will, something that the hard-nosed American domestic constituencies would only ration out for tangible advantage. Thus, over the course of the Malta summit the pattern of post-Cold War politics was established, and the conditions were created that ultimately exploded in Ukraine in 2014. Instead of an equitable and inclusive post-Cold War settlement, an honourable draw, which was so much desired by Gorbachev, the Cold War ended in a sharply asymmetrical manner. Rather than establishing a new framework for the conduct of power relations, Malta was indeed a 'missed opportunity' to place European and global international relations on a new basis and instead only registered the changed balance of power.<sup>58</sup> Gorbachev proposed a way to transcend the

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<sup>56</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919-1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Reissued with a New Introduction and additional material by Michael Cox (London, Palgrave, 2001 [1939]).

<sup>57</sup> For a detailed and perceptive account, see Jack F. Matlock, *Autopsy on an Empire: The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York, Random House, 1995).

<sup>58</sup> This is argued most eloquently and eruditely by Joshua R. Itzkowiz-Shifrinson, 'The Malta Summit and US-Soviet Relations: Testing the Waters Amidst Stormy Seas. New Insights from American Archives', <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-malta-summit-and-us-soviet-relations-testing-the-waters-amidst-stormy-seas>.

logic of conflict and subordination, but another path was chosen that imposed a new hierarchy based on a normative agenda that ultimately made diplomacy impossible and prevented reconciliation. Europe was unable to emerge from the shadow of Yalta as an autonomous subject of international politics. The quarter century of the cold peace ended in something akin to a new Cold War. This was as predictable as it was avoidable. The writing was long on the wall – and what the writing said was that the wall would be coming back. The medium was indeed the message.

### **The asymmetrical end of the Cold War**

The Malta meeting has become a symbolic turning point in East-West relations but it represented only the partial repudiation of the Yalta conference. A number of elements were involved. First, the lands in between, including Germany, reclaimed their political subjectivity. By October 1990 the process of German unification was complete, much to the alarm of François Mitterand and Margaret Thatcher. In response to the perceived threat that the enhanced power of the united country would create a ‘German Europe’, the road to Maastricht was taken to forge a ‘European Germany’, which in the end led to the creation of the euro and thus only confirmed the predominance of a German Europe. Second, the problem of European security was unresolved, with a quarter-century long debate over the role of NATO and the consequences of its enlargement to former Soviet-bloc territory. Third, issue of winners and losers at the end of the Cold War represents an ideological debate that acts as the surrogate for a discussion on the appropriate model of European order.

The Malta summit was a moment of power transition. The Atlantic powers appeared to triumph, and Russia entered a long period of decline, a retreat that only began to be reversed when Putin rose to power in 2000. Malta was also a moment of transition from the geopolitical pluralism and concert of powers symbolized by Yalta to a unipolar security order in Europe. The EU became the centre of a ‘Wider Europe’ agenda, which systemically excluded the greater European aspirations of Gorbachev’s idea for a common European home. This was accompanied by the delegitimation of systemic alternatives. Normative pluralism came to an end (in other words, there would no longer be variety of social systems, in this case the liberal capitalism of the West and the more humane and democratic socialism that Gorbachev sought to build in the Soviet Union), and instead the virtues of a particular type of liberal capitalism were proclaimed as universal. The neoliberal revolution later merged with elements of authoritarian restoration in Russia to create a peculiar hybrid system that jealously guarded its prerogatives at home while asserting its assumed great power status abroad. The western experience of democracy, the product of a long process of historical evolution and torn by some powerful social and political contradictions, became the ‘gold standard’ for the rest of humanity. Thus Malta represents the moment when geopolitical and systemic pluralism died in Europe. The peculiar myth of 1989 as a moment of liberation and the triumph of a particular social order stymied more creative attempts to devise pan-European modes of reconciliation.

Everything that has happened in the quarter century since the Malta meeting is little more than a playing out of the strategies adopted at that time. Matlock notes, ‘too many American politics looked at the end of the Cold War as if it were a quasi-military

victory rather than a negotiated outcome that benefited both sides'.<sup>59</sup> The West assumed a triumph that effectively extinguished the hope of a true partnership with Russia. Under President Bill Clinton NATO began an enlargement that brought it to the very borders of Russia, and the West nurtured its own myth of the 'end of history'. The triumph of Western market democracy against a debilitated opponent became part of a triumphalist discourse that reinforced division rather than multivalent reconciliation. In Matlock's view both 'America and Russia have both fundamentally misunderstood how and why the Cold War ended, and it [Matlock's book] shows how that crucial misconception gave rise to misconceived policies that continue to this day'. There were serious attempts to downplay the triumphalist rhetoric and to engage with Russia, but this too often was perceived to be condescending when it was not derogatory.<sup>60</sup>

Menon and Rumer, in their recent study of the Ukraine crisis, note that Europe had learned the lesson of the catastrophic mistakes made after the First World War by imposing the humiliating Versailles peace on Germany. They note that after 1918 'the major powers failed in one crucial respect: they failed to devise a blueprint for Europe that would have enmeshed the vanquished nation – Germany – in a new European security network'. The price for the failure was the Second World War, 'but [Europe] learned the lesson of the previous disaster and, after 1945, secured Germany in the web of transatlantic institutions, thus ensuring its role as the model European citizen'.<sup>61</sup> It was this lesson that was forgotten after Malta. While Germany's place in post-war Europe, after the initial period of reconstruction and in conditions of Cold War, was never in question, Menon and Rumer continue,

That was not the case with Russia after 1991. Its place in post-Cold War Europe, whole and free, has always been tenuous. NATO membership for Russia was never seriously considered, and if it came up. It was only as a far-fetched, theoretical possibility. Devising a new security arrangement to replace *both* Cold War structures – the Warsaw Pact and NATO – was never considered either. There was never any question as to NATO's future after the Cold War: it would continue, period.<sup>62</sup>

Not only would NATO continue, but it would expand all the way to Russia's borders. Matlock reiterates this point: 'The Clinton administration, without any provocation, in effect repeated a fundamental mistake made at Versailles in 1919. By excluding Russia from the peace settlement when it was not even a defeated party but actually one of the victors over the Communist Soviet Union, the Clinton administration practically ensured that there would be no new world order in Europe'.<sup>63</sup>

Various structures were devised to manage the risks and mitigate the potential sense of threat. Russia was included in NATO's Partnership for Peace programme in 1994; the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations in May 1997 'defined the

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<sup>59</sup> Matlock, *Super-Power Illusions*, p. x.

<sup>60</sup> Matlock, *Super-Power Illusions*, p. xiii.

<sup>61</sup> Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Boston, MIT Press, 2015), p. 160.

<sup>62</sup> Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, p. 160.

<sup>63</sup> Matlock, *Super-Power Illusions*, p. 173.

goals and mechanisms of consultation’, including the creation of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council and a NATO commitment not to station troops permanently in the newly-acceded countries; and in 2002 the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was established as a forum to advance cooperation. None of these mechanisms worked in moments of crisis – just when they were most needed. All of these were mere palliatives in the absence of a coherent strategy vis-à-vis Russia. In practical terms three options were available. First, full-scale *engagement*, which could have taken the form of Russia joining a transformed NATO or equivalent structure, as an equal founding member; or the abolition of NATO and the strengthening of the OSCE or some equivalent as the supreme security body on the continent. Moscow at various points showed a willingness to engage in either of these variants.

The second option was to adopt a *hedging* strategy, which effectively entailed the strengthening and enlargement of Western institutions, while trying to mitigate the effects on Russia and other neighbours. This is the position adopted by NATO, but also by the European Union. Despite all the talk of ‘partnership’, from the very beginning Russia was an indigestible and alien entity for the ‘wider Europe’ model of development, whereby the Brussels-centric world would encompass the smaller states of Central and South-Eastern Europe and find some way of managing the relationship with those left outside, above all through various mechanisms of ‘external governance’. Thus, as the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, put it on 6 December 2002, they would ‘share everything with the Union but institutions’.<sup>64</sup> Designed to prevent new dividing lines between the EU and its neighbours, the idea was to create a ‘ring of friends’ engaged in an integration process that would not necessarily result in accession, a policy that resulted in the creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004. In 2009 this assumed a pronounced geopolitical aspect with the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in May of that year. It was no accident that the Ukraine crisis was provoked by President Viktor Yanukovich’s decision in November 2013 to postpone signing the Association Agreement with the EU.

The third option was a *transformation* of the type envisaged by Gorbachev. One variant of this was the conscious strategy of creating a ‘greater Europe’, which itself could take many forms. One of these was the creation of a ‘union of unions’, whereby the EU and Russia would create some sort of pan-continental union along the lines of a Euro-Asian union. This would have created a dynamic whereby the logic of conflict on the continent would be transcended, based on economic and security integration of the sort applied to Germany and Japan after the Second World War. Countries in the lands ‘in between’ could join the EU if they met the appropriate conditions, or remain part of the pan-European construction. Either way, they would not be faced with a stark choice between the EU or Eurasia, and new dividing lines by definition would have been avoided. This would have been an effective ‘mode of reconciliation’ in both institutional and ideational terms. This model of European development would not only have transcended the logic of conflict on the continent, but it would also have transcended the need for the Atlantic security community in its traditional form. By contrast, the asymmetrical end of the Cold War only perpetuated the institutions and postures spawned by that conflict. A Europeanisation of Europe would have changed and possibly made

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<sup>64</sup> Romano Prodi, ‘A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the Key to Stability’, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_SPEECH-02-619\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm).

redundant America's role in European affairs, and it precisely this element of the legacy of Yalta that raised traditional defensive reactions. Proposals for the transformation of European politics have instead been condemned as part of the traditional Russian attempt to drive a 'wedge' between the two wings of the Atlantic alliance.

For this reason the hedging strategy predominated. The Bucharest NATO summit of April 2008 unequivocally stated that 'NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO'.<sup>65</sup> The 2008 Russo-Georgian war demonstrated that Russia would not tolerate being encircled by NATO countries, and the Ukraine crisis was a predictable second act. The Atlantic alliance was caught in a logical trap: enlargement was not intended to threaten Russia, but in the absence of an effective mode of reconciliation, enlargement inevitably became a hedging strategy in case Russia reverted to what was assumed to be some sort of innately aggressive and threatening stance; but the very act of enlargement provoked a negative reaction that became more assertive and ultimately threatening. The hedging strategy became self-fulfilling, provoking precisely the outcome that it was ostensibly intended to avert. As I argue in my study of the Ukraine crisis, 'NATO exists to manage the risks created by its existence'.<sup>66</sup>

As Menon and Rumer note, its advocates 'have no grounds to lament that engagement with Russia has failed, as their own advocacy of hedging undercut engagement's prospects'.<sup>67</sup> Gorbachev, who had done so much to bring the original Cold War to an end, could only lament in his speech on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall on 8 November 2014 that trust had been eroded, 'the trust that was created by hard work and mutual effort in the process of ending the cold war. Trust – without which international relations in the global world are inconceivable'. He noted that the roots of the current crisis lay in the events of the 1990s, and argued that

Instead of building new mechanisms and institutions of European security and pursuing a major demilitarization of European politics – as promised, incidentally, in NATO's London Declaration – the West, and particularly the United States, declared victory in the Cold War. Euphoria and triumphalism went to the heads of Western leaders. Taking advantage of Russia's weakening and the lack of a counterweight, they claimed monopoly leadership and domination in the world, refusing to heed words of caution from many of those present here. The events of the past few months [in Ukraine] are consequences of short-sighted policies, of seeking to impose one's will and *faits accomplis* while ignoring the interests of one's partners.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> 'Bucharest Summit Declaration', 3 April 2008, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm), accessed 30 July 2015.

<sup>66</sup> Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine*, p. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, p. 161.

<sup>68</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, 'Speech for 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Fall of the Wall', 8 November 2014, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 12 November 2014; available at <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/Gorbachevs-full-speech-during-the-celebrations-of-the-25th-Anniversary-of-the-Fall-of-the-Berlin-Wal>, accessed 29 July 2015.

There can be few more damning indictments of the pattern of post-Cold War international relations by one more qualified to pass judgement.

### **Back to the wall**

The last straw was the perceived attempt to wrest Ukraine away from Moscow's economic and security sphere. Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014, including the repatriation of Crimea and support for the insurgency in the Donbass, is perceived by the West to represent a violent challenge to the system of international law. However, from the Kremlin's perspective—and, it must be said, from the point of view of the great majority of Russian citizens—the struggle over Ukraine is considered to be a desperate last stand to defend not only Russia's interests but also that alternative vision of Europe's destiny enunciated by Gorbachev in the Cold War's dying days. Putin's Russia is a deeply conservative country at home, and in international affairs it claims to be defending a status quo threatened by what has come to be seen as the West's revisionism, manifested by the restless urge to remodel regimes in its own likeness while pushing its security system to Russia's borders. Although the repatriation of Crimea was a revisionist act, it was not part of a revisionist strategy.

NATO's efforts to manage its enlargement with Russia were ultimately only mitigation measures and did not deal with the fundamental issue of the structural exclusion of Russia from the Atlantic security system. In this way, at the end of the Cold War, the cold peace was born. Long before Putin assumed the presidency in 2000, NATO was perceived by Moscow to be a security threat, and all of Moscow's attempts to create some sort of pan-European security dynamic were blocked. The Western powers (and even more so, not surprisingly, the Central and East European countries, driven by their own myth of Yalta) were content to defend the peace order emerging out of the Helsinki process, and considered any return to the great power politics represented by Yalta a retrograde step. The transformatory potential for European international relations outlined by Gorbachev in the late perestroika years, notably at Malta, was left unfulfilled. Instead of pan-continental solutions to problems of European security and identity, Atlanticist and wider Europe approaches predominated, in which Russia did not have a stake or substantive voice. Russia was ultimately prompted to articulate and institutionalise Eurasian, greater Asian and even global alternatives, institutionalising the new division of Europe.

This brings us back to where we started. If the West had truly opened itself up to Gorbachev's visionary concept of European transformation, we would not be facing the catastrophic breakdown of the European security system provoked by the conflict in Ukraine. Gorbachev came to Malta with radical ideas about transcending the Cold War logic of ideological conflict between East and West. Instead, this logic was reaffirmed, but with the opposite polarity. The Atlantic alliance system emerged as the supreme power on the European continent, while ideas of geopolitical and systemic pluralism were negated. Soviet concerns and interests were increasingly marginalized, as were those of the newly formed Russian Federation. Although the former communist countries joined NATO by invitation and desire, all this did was to perpetuate the logic of confrontation and division, undermining the security of all.



Malta turned out to be not just a lost opportunity but also a political disaster. Malta represented not the repudiation of the politics of Yalta but their inversion. Instead of establishing a new pattern of international politics, it reconfirmed the predominance of great power politics, but now in a system that lacked alternatives, and to which was added a normative dynamic, driven by the human rights agenda of Helsinki's 'third basket'. The security concerns and historical specificity of others were effectively delegitimated. The EU turned into one of the pillars of the larger Atlantic community, although its member states continued to exercise autonomy in the management of their foreign and defence policies. NATO steadily enlarged to the point that it threatened to encircle Russia from the south and west. NATO is an association to ensure the collective security of its members, but in the absence of a mode of reconciliation of the type outlined at Malta, its enlargement generated fears and insecurities typical of a security dilemma. From a geopolitical perspective, it is irrelevant whether NATO is a benign or malign force if one of Europe's great powers considers it a threat, and the dismissal of these concerns only exacerbated mistrust. The hedging strategy reflected the asymmetrical end of the Cold War and intensified the unstable conditions of the cold peace. In this context, it is not inappropriate to talk of the 'death of Europe', in the sense that the 'Europe whole and free' promised at the end the end of the Cold War has instead given way to new divisions and conflicts.<sup>69</sup>

Gorbachev understood where all this was heading, and since his forced retirement in December 1991 he repeatedly lamented this outcome. It is for this reason that he broadly endorsed Putin's policies regarding Ukraine in 2014, although he was critical of the way that the regime had evolved.<sup>70</sup> The forty-five years shaped by Yalta gave way to another twenty-five years of a world shaped by Malta. As the Ukraine crisis makes painfully clear, fundamental questions of European security remain unresolved. The cold peace was always pregnant with conflict, and it has now given birth, opening up a new era of confrontation and war. The West lives in a world where the myth of its victory in the Cold War is considered the foundation of the contemporary international order, while for Russia the enduring myth of betrayal and marginalisation drives it to challenge the practices if not the principles of European order. For stability in Europe, the myths and mistakes of the last quarter century need to be challenged. The foundations of European and global security need to be rethought. With our backs to the wall, the stakes could not be higher.

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<sup>69</sup> Richard Sakwa, 'The Death of Europe? Continental Fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 3, May 2015, pp. 553-579.

<sup>70</sup> Mikhail Gorbachev, *Posle Kremlya* (Moscow, Ves' Mir, 2014), translated with a new afterword as *The New Russia* (Cambridge, Polity, 2016).