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Domestic Pathologies: United States/Russian Federation
Relations and NATO Expansion in the 21st Century

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Abstract:

Defensive realist theory holds that despite the rationality of aggression in the face of the security dilemma, such rationality is not unbounded. After a point, aggression becomes pathological. Therefore, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States, without a competitor or threat, would disarm. As Russia took steps towards democracy, even relations with the United States looked promising. But barely a decade later, tensions between the United States and Russia began again as the result of two different worldviews. Neoconservatism is the dominant American military, social, and economic ideology supported by domestic interest groups. Created in the Cold War environment, neoconservatism views the world as a dangerous place that must be contained with dramatic force and absolutely no compromise. Because of this leftover ideology, American foreign policy appears to be both pathologically aggressive and headed for collision with Russia's. The Russian Federation in turn has drawn inspiration from Neo-Eurasianism, an ideology that embraces Russia's unique geopolitical position and history. Combined with rationalist thinking, this view has ushered in a foreign policy that calls for renewed interest in the surrounding states of Eastern European, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Russia also entertains the possibility of regimes other than capitalist democratic norm of other developed countries, most notably, the United States. In this analysis of the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), it is clear that the United State's overly hostile and, at times, hypocritical role in the process, particularly in regard to Georgia and Ukraine, is the result of irrational domestic support for neoconservatism ideology, without which, there would be no eminent clash, as the current political atmosphere suggests.

Keywords: United States, Russian Federation, Defensive Realism, NATO Expansion, Neoconservatism

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With the end of communism and the fall of the USSR, relations were initially optimistic between the United States and the Russian Federation. During the 1990s, under Yeltsin, the new Russian Federation experienced extreme financial hardship. It took a relatively submissive stance in world politics, as oligarchs, corruption, and general civil deterioration ran rampant (Lo, 2003). But Russia's greater integration with many Western institutions, such as the United Nations, new agreements with other organizations, as well as apparently democratic elections, and a freer economy and civil society made for significantly improved relations than the earlier 40 years.

One clear theme underlies Russian foreign policy: state interest (Gill, 2000). Rather than quickly announcing a pro-American policy, the new Russian Federation sent a quiet self-asserting message: while it aimed to cooperate, Russia would not apologize for its controversial past. Russia has been accommodating, but consistently makes its personal interests known, and complains if they are violated. Russian foreign policy was initially submissive and followed American example, for example, reluctantly acquiescing to Western influence in Kosovo and Yugoslavia in the late 90s (Riasanovsky, 2011). President Putin, who came into power in 1999 and was elected in 2000, after Yeltsin's unremarkable foreign policy continued Russia's declared policy legacy and emboldened it as Russia's economic strength and the political situation would allow (Lo, 2003).

President Putin's strategy was to stay true to Russia's declared best self-interest, over any foreign opinion. During his first term from 2000 – 2004 the Russian economy slowly began to improve. Unfortunately, this occurred just as American international view soured. The 11

September 2001 terrorist attacks caused America to cast any potential threats, including the growth of a former super power, in an extremely negative light. In the aftermath Russia and the United States initially cooperated in 2001. However, tensions grew markedly after President Bush withdrew the United States from the ABM Treaty in 2002 (CNN Politics, 2001) and invaded Iraq in 2003. Russia became alarmed at increasingly unilateral American action (Volkov, 2012). Since both Russian stability and American paranoia have grown, a consequent divergence in perception, infiltrating the media and social bias, has augmented some notable issues of tension in the past decade, best exemplified by the controversy over the expansion of NATO. These heightening tensions have caused both countries to act in ways outside their strategic ideal and cyclically drive down cooperation.

EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENON

As examined further, two specific instances of NATO events clearly demonstrate the unexpected and severe deterioration of relations and cooperation between the two states. Particularly from an American stance, cooperation and good relations with Russia are strategically desirable. Russia still retains a massive stockpile of aging weapons (many probably still trained on American targets, and all under varying degrees of security), as well as some of the largest energy and natural resource caches in the world. It is also the largest country in the world, home to many hundreds of thousands of educated and creative people. Furthermore, Russia is nearly America's arms exporting equal, and strategically located at the crossroads of three continents (Cohen, 2009). But in the late 1990's and early 2000's, relations between the two once again became strained. Both countries began to view each other's actions as aggressive again, creating snowballing policies culminating with the stark and tense relationship the two

now share.

One particular example of the tensions NATO expansion exacerbates is the United States' proposed a developing missile defense system. The system is intended to destroy incoming ballistic missiles coming from North Korea and Iran, and was to have 10 interceptors in Polish silos. The proposal also called for the construction of a radar station in the Czech Republic to bridge the gap in American Eastern European missile defenses (Pravda, 2007). Moscow was unhappy with the development, stating that it threatened Russia's own defenses and that the technology could be used against Russia, citing the United State's 2001 withdrawal from the ACBM treaty (BBC, 2009). Tensions around such situations are quickly outgrowing their ability to be resolved through diplomacy and compromise, causing bad feeling to compound and bias further interactions.

There are several possible ways to interpret the reactions of both countries, from a realist strategic standpoint, an offensive realist view, or a defensive realist position. Only the defensive realist strategy makes sense in the case of the United States and Russia. Following a strictly strategic realist foreign policy would require the new Russian Federation to be very aware of the security dilemmas that all states face in an anarchic system. Acting strategically in response to the security dilemma, Russia would naturally want to be a powerful nation with a strong economy, in order to have advantages over its weaker adversaries. It would also have little regard for regime types and international organizations that do not benefit Russia or make it more secure. Offensive realist policies would be similar, but focused on prevention. Strong states in the region, and even extra-regionally, if large enough, would be considered a threat. According to offensive realist policy, the only appropriate way to mitigate such threats and to secure Russia's position is to attack and disable other rising states, economically, politically, or

militarily. Defensive realist strategy, on the other hand, would be more restrained. States would view the security dilemma more moderately, focusing on keeping a peaceful status quo, and minding their own interests. Aggression and provocation would be pathological in such a world. Defensive realists realize that the world is not perfect and conflict does arise. War, discord, and the breakdown of otherwise secure and stable relationships are therefore attributed to domestic pathologies, or interests (Snyder, 1991). Defensive realism most accurately describes Russian foreign policy and why domestically driven American aggression appears as an excessive, pathological response to Russia's rational foreign policy.

The United States' aggression stems from the political phenomenon of neoconservatism. Neoconservatism developed during, and eventually outlived, the Cold War. The ideology can be described as the marriage of Wilson-esque projections of American culture, regime-type, and economy, and aggressive militarism (Bacevich, 2006). While perhaps at first an understandable emotional response to some parts of the Cold War, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, neoconservatism's obsession with global political, economic, strategic, and cultural dominance has become an insatiable and recurring feature of both foreign and domestic American politics. Prominent neoconservative politicians, think tank members, journalists, analysts, and military personnel continue to produce and support a domestic neoconservative atmosphere of crisis and paranoia, which thus requires massive government military spending and military endeavors in the name of national security and strategic interests (Mueller, 2006).

9/11 has helped neoconservatives maintain political dominance by ensuring consistent funding for their "security" endeavors in the face of such "threats." As the American media exaggerated the event, the threat of terrorism, and the devastation caused by weapons of mass destruction, politicians and citizens alike looked for someone to blame, creating excessive

policies abroad and at home (the Patriot Act, and the Iraq War, for example) (Mueller, 2006). America's neoconservatism has been expressed through hardline requirements for democratization and the introduction of neo-liberal economics in third-world countries, a predisposition towards preventive and total war, and a growing tendency to act unilaterally.

After Yeltsin's both half-hearted economic reform and foreign policy – verbally voicing discontent with policy for the media, but acquiescing in private – Russia too has an obsession: restoring national pride. This policy has manifested in neo-Eurasianism, an ideology that has united many Russians, as they work to make Russia the leader of the Eurasian continent (Chaudet, 2009). Neo-Eurasianists believe in Russia's rehabilitation and seek to unite the Eurasian continent under Russia with Eurasian nationalism. Neo-Eurasianism, as politicized in the 1990s, was viewed a way to counter Western influence, bringing together those opposed to the Yeltsin reforms and those disappointed with the way they had turned out (Chaudet, 2009). Many hardline neo-Eurasianists, similar to neoconservatives, believe Russia is at the mercy of the outside world, losing allies, territorially isolated, and militarily threatened, and call for appropriately responsive policy. Their influence has been moderated by more popular moderate democratic neo-Eurasianists who strive to blend Western liberalism with this brand of neo-nationalism through emphasis on Russia's near abroad (Chaudet, 2009).

Russia realizes that in its relatively weakened position, it cannot afford to contradict Western policy directly (Berryman, 2011). Therefore, Russia's neo-Eurasian restorative feeling has manifested mostly economically. Russia seeks to increase its GDP, average salaries, and industry, in order to become a unique Eurasian leader. To sustain this high level of economic growth, Russia heavily relies on its significant reserves of oil and natural gas (Lo, 2003; Riasanovsky, 2011). Russia has the largest natural gas reserves and 8th largest oil reserves in the

world (Åslund, 2007), giving it significant leverage over other less endowed states in the Eurasian region. Russia is beginning to use its natural resources to foster and maintain its influence in its near abroad by taking advantage of the hungry European market and growing Asian demand.

The controversy over NATO's expansion suggests that defensive realist strategy is important in the United States and Russian Federation. But first, it is unclear whose pathologies are inciting whose. Do Russia and the United States have simultaneous domestic pathologies that weaken their relationship, or is one state reacting to the other? This examination aims to explain how defensive realist strategy explains Russia and America's current relationship and but concludes that American domestic pathologies from neoconservative interest groups are responsible for creating aggressive policies that have resulted in the deteriorating relationship between countries that would otherwise have a friendly and highly functional relationship.

NATO, A HISTORICALLY ANTI-USSR ORGANIZATION

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is an intergovernmental military alliance based on collective defense. If a non-NATO country attacks a NATO member, the rest of the alliance is obligated to respond. The treaty was signed with twelve signatories, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, and the United States on 4 April 1949 (NATO, 2012a). The organization states that it seeks to promote international security and peace through the enforcement of United Nations principles, as well as stability and wellbeing by honoring rule of law and democratic practices in the North Atlantic (NATO, 1949; Maksimov, 2000).

The ideological trend of American-led Western support for NATO membership quickly

became relevant for Russia. Just a few years later, as a sort of bulwark against any further communist expansion, West Germany joined NATO in 1955, only to be joined by the rest of Germany after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 (NATO, 2012a). This trend continued even after the threat of communism dissolved with the USSR. The military alliance expanded to include many former Soviet Bloc countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999; Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004; and Croatia in 2009. NATO and the Russian Federation, however, have come to the conclusion that Russia does not want to join NATO, and NATO cannot accept Russia. The Russian Federation joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Program in 1994 with many other former Soviet Bloc countries because of NATO's political salience, and a specific Russia-NATO council was created in 2002 (NATO, 2010; NATO, 2012b).

Russia's discontent with NATO expansion is both obvious and understandable. NATO, for all intents and purposes, is still a military alliance in 2012. While it may have re-focused and re-marketed itself as an organization for peace, democracy, security, and, most importantly, stability (Maksimov, 2000), these are side operations to NATO's true purpose. However, in the absence of the Cold War, it relies on "threats" from countries, such as Russia, to stay relevant. This comes at the cost of creating policies that aggravate Russia and could provoke the very attack NATO stands to protect against. From a strategic standpoint, the alliance is dangerously close to Russian borders. Russia's only remaining buffers from this encroaching European alliance are Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.

By signing the North Atlantic Treaty, which had so long sought the destruction of the Russian-dominated communist state, the former Soviet countries are sending a strong political message. While the Russian Federation does not pretend to care much about insulting a former

state, what does remain is the sworn allegiance to a Western form of democratic capitalism that provokes reaction. Since its formation, the Russian Federation, while dedicated to democracy, has argued that there are alternatives to the Western ideal of democracy. This philosophy has become increasingly popular after the economic disaster of Russia's earlier incomplete and painful political and economic transition. Many Russian politicians, including Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, maintain that the West, especially the United States, expects developing countries to conform to the neo-liberal capitalist economic and representative democratic system it has created over several hundred years.

Russia, like many other developing states, has come to the conclusion, that for better or for worse, several key industries, like oil and media, are more profitable for the state (and an additional select few) when managed in ways that would not be acceptable in developed countries with liberal economies decades old. Russia does not claim that its system is perfect, and there exist many flaws in the semi-liberal economic and political regime it upholds. Problems include extensive corruption, governmental ability to abuse its extensive control, and dangerous reliance on energy exports. Yet the fact remains that Russia's economic policies are working better than any of those of Gorbachev or Yeltsin. Since the country began to recognize the necessity of a strong economy and focused on attaining economic growth in foreign investment, trade, and gradually rising standards of living, Russia now deserves increased international attention. Consequently, Russia acutely feels how its capabilities have been mostly dismissed for concentration on its flaws and past failures that "necessitate" the approach of a military alliance.

Russia considers itself entitled to political influence in the former Soviet Bloc through like-minded diplomatic policies or economic cooperation. This idea does not mesh well with

NATO expansionist rhetoric, but has been a part of Russian foreign policy for many years, extending as far back as Joseph Stalin's rule in the mid-twentieth century. First, a sphere of influence serves as a political and strategic military barricade against armed aggressor states, of which Russia has seen more than its fair share (Suny, 2011). And secondly, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia had many significant political and economic interests at stake in several former bloc countries, as well as shared histories, cultures, and previous interdependencies, many of which still exist on some level today. Therefore, Russia feels that this area should be exempt from what it perceives to be the endless expansion of a "Western empire," with NATO for a military, the EU and various other institutions for economic and political control. Moreover, many of these less-developed and smaller countries lack the resources to stand alone without some larger economy or institution, and thus are forced to choose between Europe and Russia for stability, creating a competitive environment. In the end, the combination of Russian desire for influence in the former Soviet bloc and recognition of NATO as a military organization have caused particular conflict over attempted NATO expansion into two countries in particular: Ukraine and Georgia.

CASES OF PARTICULAR TENSION, UKRAINE

NATO first began a relationship with Ukraine in 1994 when Ukraine entered the Partnership for Peace Program. The program typically involves agreements between NATO and individual countries, with specific goals and behaviors for each country. Agreements are renewed every two years (NATO, 2012b). The Partnership for Peace Program is often considered the initial step toward membership. In 1997, Ukraine strengthened its position in the Partnership for Peace Program and began additional individual work with NATO toward yearly

goals through the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NATO, 2002). In November 2002, NATO and Ukraine adopted an individual Action Plan (NATO, 2009). Many viewed this step as preparation for full NATO membership, because the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan's goals were remarkably similar to NATO Individual Partnership Action Plans (NATO, 2010) which, while proposed at the same 2002 Prague summit, were only implemented two years later in 2004 with Georgia.

In 1999, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic allied with NATO. At the same time, Russia was recovering from the economic havoc of the 1990s. Russia held a relatively weak international position and was unable to contradict any international policy. President Putin's 2000 election, on a platform of stability and strength, symbolized a public desire for Russia to reverse its downward trajectory. This logically equates to the ability to strengthen Russian interests and influence in several states closest to it over time (Berryman, 2011). This reasoning initially led Russia to internationally conciliatory policies with regard to Western demands, including evacuating forces from Bosnia and Kosovo, and ceding the area to Western influence as the US invaded Iraq in 2003 (Berryman, 2011), despite Russian displeasure with the move to do so (France, 2003). While Russia had several specific goals in mind, most notably economic growth and eventual prowess, as well the preservation of Russian interests and influence in its near abroad, the country's foreign policy has been reasonable and compromising. The key has always been international security and relative peace. Therefore, observers must conclude that while Russia cannot have been pleased with the level of discourse between NATO and Ukraine specifically, it did nothing to prevent the partnership, because to do so would have accomplished nothing but criticism and more negative feeling.

Starting in 2004, during Putin's second term as president, several events changed the nature of the tense situation surrounding Ukraine-NATO relations. First was Russia's re-

emergence as a political power, as rising oil prices buoyed President Putin to a position to begin work to achieve Russia's aforementioned goals. Concurrently, NATO expanded to include more former Soviet Bloc countries: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (Berryman, 2011). Second was the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004. The Orange Revolution was a reaction to the Ukrainian run-off presidential elections in 2004 that elected pro-Russian President Kuchma's Prime Minister, Viktor Yanukovich, over opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko. Many Ukrainians and politicians perceived this election as fraudulent. Protests and civil disobedience began on the eve of the second run-off vote (BBC, 2005). The second run-off vote, later verified by the Ukrainian Supreme Court as illegitimate, led to a final re-vote, which pronounced Yushchenko the winner (Fouskas, 2005), (Ukrayina, 2004). This election support, while international, was conducted with American funds (Kelley, 2004), a fact that did not go unnoticed by Russia, especially as it became more and more apparent that conservative "reformer" Viktor Yushchenko was closely aligned with United States conservative politics (Fouskas, 2005).

NATO's invitation to Ukraine to move into a stage of Intensified Dialogue in early 2005 (NATO, 2005) also disturbed US-Russian relations. The move, according to then NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy Ambassador Martin Erdmann, marked "a real milestone in NATO Ukraine relations in Ukraine's pursuit of Euro-Atlantic integration" though it "does not guarantee an invitation to join the Alliance" (Новини НАТО, 2005). This left the door open for interpretation on Ukraine's likelihood for NATO membership. After both the complicated election of a pro-American president in Ukraine and Ukraine's further steps towards NATO membership, Russian-Ukrainian relationships decayed. For the next two years, disputes over oil prices from the Russian company Gazprom to Ukraine

were frequent (SET, 2006). Russian displeasure grew when the Ukrainian government asked in January 2008 to be considered in NATO's upcoming Bucharest Summit for a Membership Action Plan, an even more intense relationship tailored for the needs of countries seriously aspiring to become NATO members (UNIAN, 2008). The triangular tensions between Ukraine, Russia, and the United States mounted to the point where Ukraine was forced to announce that it would no longer allow foreign military bases on its territory (Interfaks, 2009). Tensions came to a head when NATO belatedly recognized Russia's concerns of influence in the area. The practicality of offering NATO's Article 5 to a country facing fierce opposition from Moscow was dubious. Despite "rash" and extensive personal support from President Bush, NATO declined to give Ukraine a Membership Action Program (Atwell, 2008; Berryman, 2011). Ukraine is no longer seeking full alliance status with NATO after being turned down in 2008, although it maintains a special relationship with NATO, similar to but more positive than that of Russia.

Russian reaction to this incident was one of particular distaste. Unlike the United States and other Western NATO countries, Russia had everything to lose. Russia correctly understands that much of NATO's relevance is from the Cold War, and it views the military alliance's continuation into the 21st century with concern. Additionally, as more traditionally Slavic countries "side with the West" through NATO, they redefine themselves not just militarily, but socially, economically, and culturally as well (Brzezinski, 1995). The actions of NATO and the United States in relation to Ukraine likewise increased Russia's negative perception of the alliance as not simply a Western organization promoting democracy, but as a specifically American organization. None other than President Bush himself supported NATO's expansion into Ukraine. It also occurred after what Russia considered to be an inappropriate and

sovereignty-violating invasion of Iraq. Unsurprisingly, many Russian policy makers came to the conclusion that the West is intent on illogical and continual expansion through political, economic, and military influence (France, 2003).

CASES OF PARTICULAR TENSION, GEORGIA

Georgia initially followed the same path as Ukraine towards NATO membership, with more controversial results. Like Ukraine, Georgia was immediately deemed a NATO (specifically, United States) foreign policy goal and remains so today (Cornell, 2007). Georgia began strengthening its relationship with NATO in 1994 when it too signed onto the Partnership for Peace Program (NATO, 2012c). Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003-4, which brought a pro-American leader to power, has often been considered a precedent for Ukraine's Orange Revolution, and gave the United States a perceived upper hand in United States-Russian relations via Ukraine. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia has experienced the renewal of deep-rooted conflict with ethnic groups both within and adjacent to its current borders. The conflict is particularly raw because, so soon after the dissolution of an expansionist Soviet regime within Russia, Russia is again and often involved. As a result, this ethnic conflict has left Georgia in the same situation as Ukraine, with both deepened NATO ties and a reluctance to ignore the latent and more rational power on its border.

Georgia's main ethnic conflicts exist between ethnic Georgians and the Abkhaz and Ossetian minorities. The conflicts often exacerbate each other, but it would ultimately be conflict with Ossetia that would cause the most discord between Georgia, NATO and the United States, and Russia. The South Ossetian conflict primarily concerns the Ossete population currently straddling Georgia's north-central border with Russia in Georgian South Ossetia and

Russian North Ossetia. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the region was re-divided between Russia and Georgia, having been ceded to Russia in 1774 (König, 2009). Following the 1917 revolution in Russia, the Democratic Republic of Georgia was founded. It included South Ossetia, which Georgia brutally occupied to prevent it from seceding, while North Ossetia was engulfed by Russia. By 1936, both respective parts of Ossetia had become autonomous regions or republics within their respective states. While passions were quelled in the Soviet Union, South Ossetian discontent simmered under the surface because of the region's economic disadvantages in comparison to the Georgian heartland. In 1990, South Ossetia declared sovereignty, held parliamentary elections, and rejected its status as an Autonomous Region within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. Georgia then took military action against South Ossetia in 1991, a move that escalated into violence in 1992 as the Soviet Union absolved itself from former union republics. Russia has continued to play a significant role as peacekeeper in the conflict, much to Georgia's ire (König, 2009).

When these skirmishes were patched with cease-fires, an uneasy peace held over the region. Georgia then declared its intention to join NATO through participation in an Individual Partnership Action Plan in 2002, and it became the first country to do so in 2005 (NATO, 2012c). Then, in late 2003, pro-American Mikheil Saakashvili ousted former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze through Rose Revolution. This prompted the South Ossetian parliament to hold similar, but de facto, elections. Saakashvili's Georgia retaliated with a "military stability" intervention that escalated once again into violence until another cease-fire was signed in late 2004. Just after Georgia was offered Intensified Dialogue with NATO in 2006 (NATO, 2012c), South Ossetia was restored as an administrative district of Georgia in 2007. Georgia had begun to improve the infrastructure for the area's development when violence broke out yet again, and

suspicion of Russia increased. The Russian Federation had established several bases very near the border and conducted fly-overs that violated cease-fire provisions and Georgian sovereignty on several occasions (König, 2009).

Despite this ethnic conflict, Georgia's stated national interest – territorial integrity and integration with NATO and other European institutions (König, 2009) – has nicely interlocked with NATO's desire for influence over Russia in the region. Even after increased tension in 2008 and Russia's "vow to support [South] Ossetia" (BBC, 2008b), it was surprising but not unprecedented that Georgia, friendly with both NATO and the United States, invaded South Ossetia in early August. Russia came to South Ossetia's defense, while Georgia claimed that Russia had annexed the region to unite it with North Ossetia (BBC, 2008c), and Russian troops engaged with Georgian troops over the weeks of military skirmishes. Russia's role in the conflict and in several ceasefires (BBC, 2008c) has caused significant Georgian discontent as a sovereign state, leading to even further deterioration of relations between the two states and pushing Georgia closer to NATO and the United States than ever before.

Russia's material reaction also simmers as a warning to Ukraine (Shumilin, 2008). During the same Bucharest Summit that failed to give a Membership Action Plan to Ukraine (despite previous promises), Georgia was similarly denied its expected NATO Membership Action Program. NATO allies' inability to fulfill Article 5 in such a volatile area was cited as the reason (Berryman, 2011), and Georgia instead settled for signing onto a Georgia-NATO Commission (NATO, 2012c).

In this case, NATO feels particularly justified for encroaching on Russia's borders because of Georgia's obvious discontent with Russian support for the Abkhaz and Ossete minorities. This sentiment is perfectly mirrored by stated American goals in the region:

peacekeeping and stability through control (Cornell, 2007). It is interesting to note that Russia's inflammatory response was not just a political statement, but military, for the first time. Refusing to acknowledge that one of the causes of Russia's intervention was in fact NATO, the contested nature of who started the 2008 aggressions is a common feature of Georgian media coverage. Nonetheless, this much is clear: NATO cannot prevent conflict within a country; it is a collective defense organization. NATO's attempt to act as a stability mechanism for membership candidates because of their "great insecurity" in the face of Russia, when in fact stability is considered a pre-requisite for admission, is a logical failure. NATO should reflect upon how Russia interprets such actions (Pouliot, 2010). It appears to be sheer luck that some NATO members found issue with Georgia receiving a Membership Action Plan in 2008 during a period of obvious intense conflict. It is difficult to predict how Russia would have reacted to the expansion of NATO to its very borders, especially because the most recent conflicts coincided with newfound voice and strength from the economic recovery under Presidents Putin and Medvedev.

AMERICAN NEOCONSERVATIVE PATHOLOGY

After a thorough investigation of NATO's push for expansion into Ukraine and Georgia, it is clear that this proposed plan of action is unwise for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, is the clash of interests: both Russia and the West (especially the United States) desire influence in Eastern Europe. Russia has only intervened militarily and politically in its backyard, mostly complaining rather than reacting forcefully, while NATO has been aggressively expanding far from the Atlantic. There have already been three successful rounds of expansion, while the Warsaw Pact has since withered away with the Soviet Union. From an objective standpoint,

NATO's policies contrast directly with Russia's declared interests. Russia has been consistently forced to capitulate to NATO and the West.

Continuing in this objective, rationalist strain, Russia's foreign policy does not warrant the enlargement of a military alliance to its very borders in response. A nation's interest in bordering countries is not necessarily imperialistic. Nor is the desire to use abundant resources to increase economic and political power. For example, the United States would understandably feel threatened if Mexico joined a hypothetical version of the Warsaw Pact; why does similar logic not apply to Russia? It is additionally worth noting that NATO began its policy of expansion for stability in the early 1990s, well before Russia could put together a coherent domestic regime or foreign policy. And then, NATO's stated aim was to combat Russian neo-imperialism, before Russia had a chance to implement real policy of any kind. According to Pouliot, "the alliance provided a uniquely powerful venue in which the new situation [after the end of the Soviet regime] could be defined, policies pronounced, forces mobilized" (Pouliot, 2010, p.153).

Despite military superiority and Western promotion of democracy and human rights (Pouliot, 2010) to use as tools to reshape the region as it sees fit, NATO cannot provide the necessary internal stability or garner and retain support for the former Soviet Bloc countries, their trade and institutions. As we have seen, Russia poses no direct military threat unless provoked, and the notion that the country constituted a threat large enough to merit protection from a military alliance in the late 1990s and early 2000s was politically unsound. During the first round of NATO expansion in 1999, Russia proved inept in conflicts with both Chechnya and Georgia (Brown, 1995). Furthermore, the lack of military growth in Eastern European countries, a decrease in military might, suggests increasing security, despite Russia's "threat"

(Brown, 1995).

As a collective security alliance, NATO cannot project stability. Therefore, the promise of Membership Action Plans from NATO to Georgia, with still simmering ethnic conflict, and Ukraine, with volatile tension with Russia, is reasonably unsound. It would have been impossible for Georgia to enact the necessary democratic, economic, and military measures required to join NATO without American influence. Nor does NATO membership guarantee that a state's domestic issues will be solved through "stability" or "influence." Rather, membership guarantees only that if a member is attacked, other signatories will come to its aid (Brown, 1995). The fact that NATO entertains the idea of admitting a member with long-standing and significant conflict with another non-signatory member again suggests a potentially irrational invitation for conflict. As for the question of influence, it appears to be more of an economic than a security issue. Most countries seeking NATO admission are already looking West and desire to join the European Union, which has real stabilizing power due to its economic nature and concrete, less political requirements (Brown, 1995). With such stiff requirements, such countries are in little danger of again becoming Russian regime puppets.

So why does NATO hold Russia in such poor regard (Silin, 2002)? The answer stems from the United States, one of the largest monetary and military contributors to NATO. During the Cold War, when the United States found itself bogged down in a proxy war with the Soviet Union in Vietnam, the counter-culture of the 1960s flourished, promoting peace and acceptance. In the following decades, the conservative counter to this liberal movement took hold, with such figureheads as Ronald Reagan. As this movement grew, it created an atmosphere of paranoia and a hypersensitive mentality in which geopolitical insecurity and threats were exaggerated. Every potential un-democratic or anti-capitalist threat had to be defeated for national security.

This need for absolute domination led to the creation of advanced military technology and demonstrations of United States power such as the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Gulf War. These conflicts were characterized by overwhelming force and much celebration. This was the pattern, despite the fact that such conflicts may not have been very effective. The United States under President Reagan “won” the technological weapons competition with the Soviet Union, simply because the Soviet Union’s economy forced it to retrench. And later, under President Bush, the Gulf War, while obliterating Iraqi forces, was not a decisive victory. If it had been, it would have actually increased United States security after the Gulf War, by instating a more democratic or United States sympathetic regime, rather than leaving Saddam Hussein (Bacevich, 2006).

As previously discussed, the atmosphere of paranoia and reactionary defense was fueled by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. The irrational, biased, and sensationalist media and political response (Mueller, 2006) resulted in military action, which highlighted the skewed national perception of geopolitical threat. According to defensive realist theory, this type of excessive and irrational political, social, and military justification behavior is called mythmaking (Snyder, 1991). Mythmaking is used to rationalize military action and expense to the public, usually with some form of nationalism (prevalent in the United States right, of which neoconservatism is an off-shoot), while protecting the monetary and domestic political interests of those who benefit from such irrational policies.

One of the primary neoconservative myths has been the fragile nature of United States supremacy, which consequently requires excessive force to secure (Lekov, 2008). While American supremacy is indeed threatened by the rise of China, an aging population, and a depressed economy, neoconservative solutions involving military spending and military might

do not adequately address these problems. Instead, they unnecessarily strain US relations with other nations (Lekov, 2008). This may have dangerous repercussions should US power indeed wane.

How does this relate to Russia? Much of the available American rhetoric on Russia from the 1990s is inflammatory and negative. It can be construed in terms of similar “security threats” (Silin, 2002). For example, influential former Presidential National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote a series of articles in 1994 and 1995 for the leading journal *Foreign Affairs*, in which he claimed that Russia’s “imperial impulse [remains] strong and even appears to be strengthening” (Brzezinski, 1994, p. 72), citing an assertive Russian military and economic dominance in the near abroad. In fact, Russia’s military appears to be mostly concerned with areas of ethnic conflict on its borders or previous territorial disputes and is not expansionist. Furthermore, according to Brzezinski, “economic dominance” is nothing more than other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) states feeling unready to leave the ruble zone (Brzezinski, 1994). A year later, while acknowledging that Russia may be concerned with the expansion of NATO, Brzezinski still argued that, “the West cannot accept Russian effort[s] to dilute NATO...” (Brzezinski, 1995, p 36) and that “the Russian obsession with big-power status, the growing desire to reconstitute a bloc of at least satellite states ... and the effort to limit the sovereignty of the Central European states could produce a crisis” (Brzezinski, 1995, p 39). Brzezinski construed Russia’s rational reactions to NATO expansion as dismay at the idea that its imperialistic impulse was restrained.

In over a decade, United States rhetoric has not changed. In a US government publication on Georgia from the Strategic Studies Institute at the U.S. Army War College (2007), Georgia is deemed to be extremely relevant to United States interests and security. Its tense

relationship with Russia and lack of internal stability necessitate a firmer position in the region and stronger support for NATO's extension of a Membership Action Program to Georgia (Cornell, 2007, p 35-8). The same reasons are cited for NATO's necessary expansion: if NATO doesn't expand, Russia will do so through its energy economic policy (Talbot, 1995).

This rhetoric has led to expansionist NATO policy, including unnecessary bilateral agreements with specific Partnership for Peace Program nations, education of local military personnel and training, and so on. There is some evidence of support in Washington for those anti-Russian groups, including pro-Georgian and pro-Ukrainian influence (Mikoyan, 1998). Washington's idea of a successful democratic transition and regime reform in Russia seems to be Russia's complete acquiescence to United States influence in the former Soviet states, under terms that would frighten the United States if it were in the same position (Mikoyan, 1998). As Russia consolidates its regime and builds its economy, the country gains more weight behind its words (Lekov, 2008), and the United States reacts with full force, furthering already irrational policies and NATO support.

Policy makers in the United States can surely recognize that the Russian Federation is an entirely different entity than the former Soviet Union. Russia poses as significantly reduced threat, politically, economically, and militarily. So who benefits from disseminating misinformation about the continued danger of Russia's neo-imperialism? The benefit accrues to the military industrial complex, including think tank members, media, government contractors, and various government and military personnel, who have made careers, political identities, and money manufacturing and developing otherwise unnecessary media and military products (Bacevich, 2006). It is not sheer happenstance that an alliance, for which the United States is one of the largest contributors, holds the same values and views as the United States. It must be

more than a coincidence that both the United States and NATO are irrationally afraid of Russian influence and its “destabilizing effects” in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. The two are tied military and, even more strongly, monetarily, giving the impression that NATO is but one of the United States’ foreign policy tools (Silin, 2002).

CONCLUSION:

As we have seen, American domestic interest groups have created policies that result in a hypocritical, expansionist, and, at times, irrational foreign policy. These policies have spread to NATO as well, affecting its reasoning for choosing the countries it is considering for membership. What conclusions can be drawn? First, according to defensive realist theory, the United States has emerged as a pathologically aggressive state. Neoconservative domestic interest groups that shape American foreign policy and the behavior of American have dominated international institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or NATO. This is made clear by the United States’ continual shock at rational Russian defensive reactions to the aggressive nature of American foreign policy and NATO expansion (Pouliot, 2010). What would have happened, for example, if Ukraine and Georgia had received NATO Membership Action Plans at the 2008 Bucharest Summit? Every member of the NATO alliance would have been put at risk because of the unpredictable relationship both countries have with Russia and, in the case of Georgia, among domestic groups within its borders. The fact that this policy was considered (for various, strategically untenable, “stability” reasons) is unjustified and counterintuitive. Only the fact that the United States does not completely dominate the alliance helped avoid this catastrophe. Additionally, every time Russia has voiced displeasure or attempted to influence its neighbors (to defend its security or to keep NATO out, for example),

NATO and the United States have rushed to put these defensive actions in a negative expansionist light that fits with neoconservative myths that negatively portray Russia and exert United States dominance.

This policy may evolve into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Russia continues to consolidate its political regime and expand its economy, the United States and NATO will find themselves in exactly the situation they have created through biased accounts of Russian policy: defending against an angry and powerful Russian state. But for now, the Russian Federation is still relatively new. It has voiced its displeasure with NATO expansion in mostly peaceful fashion, and it has not yet undertaken serious military or political action. But when Russia has the ability to take decisive action, and NATO reaches a certain threshold of aggressive pathology, the country eventually will react, rationally fulfilling the irrational role NATO and the West have laid out for it, because the threat they have created is real.

The United States has strong motives to cooperate with Russia. Russia and the United States remain the most heavily nuclear-armed pair in the world and should have incentives to cooperate over arms control after the shared experience of the Cold War. Russia's unique geopolitical position, large land mass, population, and economic capacity make it a powerful country with which it is in any country's strategic interest to have good relations. There is some evidence that the United States neoconservative foreign policies and impact on NATO are already failing. As NATO pushes further, it has been unable to meet its own politically misguided goals, failing to promote security or extending NATO membership to Ukraine or Georgia, and instead inciting the wrath of Russia, thus endangering the whole alliance. Additionally, the United States' increasingly unilateral action, such as that of the missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, only decreases American dependence on NATO,

making it more of a tool of the United States than an organization of which the United States is merely a member. The United States needs to check its expansion and aggression, beginning with an assessment of what is necessary and rational at home, before it creates further poorly designed foreign policy destined to create equally poor results.

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