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Momentos de transición. El organismo ruso y la intervención internacional

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Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the ongoing Ukraine conflict, speculation has been rife about the likely direction of Russia's foreign policy and its relations with the West. Relatively little analysis has so far situated Russia's actions in a wider context of debate about international intervention and post-modern values. This article seeks to achieve this. Relying on insights from Foreign Policy Analysis in relation to agency-structure debates, it argues that Russia's recent actions have to be seen as a response to longer developments in relation to international intervention. Additionally, it focuses on the need to recognise the impact of units on systemic structures and thus contributes to the literature on the agency-structure relationship. The article situates Russia's foreign policy in the wider context of modern versus post-modern thinking, arguing that the primary driver of Russian foreign policy today is to ensure the international system that finally emerges after the transition from Cold War structures is a reformed one in which Russia has a say and in which firm principles of international law and order are established and maintained.



Abstract

Russia; international intervention; Foreign Policy Analysis; post-modernity; sovereignty; agency-structure

Rusia; intervención internacional; Análisis de Política Exterior; posmodernidad; soberanía; organismo-estructura



Key words

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Fechas

Desde la anexión rusa de Crimea en Marzo de 2014 y el conflicto en curso en Ucrania, han proliferado las especulaciones sobre la posible dirección de la política exterior rusa y sus relaciones con Occidente. Relativamente pocos análisis hasta el momento han situado las acciones de Rusia en un contexto de debate más amplio sobre la intervención internacional y los valores posmodernos, que es lo que este artículo pretende conseguir.



Abstract

Apoyándonos en las ideas del Análisis de Política Exterior sobre los debates organismo-estructura, se argumenta que las acciones recientes de Rusia deben ser consideradas como una respuesta a la evolución a largo plazo de la intervención internacional. Además, se centra en la necesidad de reconocer el impacto de las unidades sobre las estructuras sistémicas y por lo tanto contribuye a la bibliografía sobre la relación organismo-estructura. El presente artículo sitúa la política exterior rusa en el contexto más amplio del pensamiento moderno versus el posmoderno, argumentando que el motor primordial de la política exterior rusa en la actualidad es asegurarse de que el sistema internacional que emerge tras las estructuras de la Guerra Fría es un sistema reformado, en el que Rusia tiene voz y en el que se establecen y se mantienen los principios fundamentales del derecho y del orden internacionales.

1. Introduction

Russian foreign policy continues to divide, confuse and perplex us. That has been very clear in the last year and more since the conflict in Ukraine broke out. Predictably, much analysis has focused on the person of Putin himself, what he thinks, his manoeuvrings in relation to other political and economic elites at home and his view of the wider world. However, it is well understood that foreign policy analysis must be situated in a number of levels of analysis and therefore range of contexts. Analysis must also take account of temporal factors, decisions made about the origins of events and actions. This article contends that Russia's interventions into Ukraine since the outbreak of conflict in 2014 must be situated in a wider context of post-Cold War international intervention¹ and seen as part of a wider attempt by Russia to be treated as an equal partner, most particularly by the West. It contends also that this motivation reflects a Russian understanding that the international system has dynamic as well as static qualities and that Russia therefore seeks to influence the structures of the international system and does not accept simply being influenced by them. At the base of much of Russian foreign policy activity lie questions of sovereignty: what is it; who has it; how is it best assured; and who has authority to breach it. These are the defining questions of the post-Cold War world and, as far as academic and policy debates go, nowhere are the stakes as high than in the matter of humanitarian crises and the international interventions that have often been carried out to end them. It is in this arena, however, that Russia and the West have most often become entangled.

The then-US President George H. W. Bush's 1991 New World Order speech set the US and many of its western allies on a post-Cold War course to ensure the protection of the human rights of all citizens, even where that meant breaching the principle of non-intervention into the affairs of states. In the period prior to that, from 1945 and the creation of the United Nations (UN), Cold War structures had resulted in practices that shifted understandings of sovereignty away from interpretations that emphasised sovereignty as responsibility to a point where the rights of states predominated – all too often at the expense of their citizens. Atrocities such as those committed in the 1990s in Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia and Kosovo followed in the wake of similar Cold War atrocities and to this extent constituted nothing new. Calls for military intervention after 1991, however, were made in the context of a changing international system in which new possibilities for action were identified and in which the subversion or

1 References to international intervention throughout the article largely refer to military intervention rather than other forms, such as sanctions, that intervention can take.

even bypassing of the UN also became possible, even deemed necessary. The First Gulf War and subsequent incursions onto Iraqi territory set the stage for an ongoing debate about the interlinked concepts of sovereignty, (non-)intervention, responsibility and human rights. The US and some of its western allies, notably France and the UK, played an important part in raising and shaping the debate but Russia, as early as Bosnia in the early 1990s, had grave concerns about the dangerous consequences of interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign states. It was in relation to Kosovo that Russia's position on so-called humanitarian interventions began to crystallise and for nearly a decade, Russia rhetoric on this was consistent with its actions. Its invasion of Georgia in August 2008 and annexation of Crimea in 2014 gave the lie to the rhetoric, however. Some states, it seemed, were more sovereign than others.

This article seeks to understand the logics by which Russia can, on the one hand, argue that states are sovereign and any breach of their sovereignty a breach of international law and, on the other, invade the sovereign territories of two neighbouring states, arguing that these do not constitute breaches of sovereignty. The work is theoretically informed by Foreign Policy Analysis, specifically in relation to the need to ensure the application of an interactive approach that sees actors as responding to each other as well as to domestic and international structures (Hermann, 1995). After setting out the rationale for such arguments and identifying the further implications for analysis, the article moves to setting out the contexts in which Russia has formulated its ideas on international intervention. It argues for a return to debates about whether the international system reflects modern or post-modern values, a debate sidelined by the events of September 11, 2001. In the final section, I examine what Russia has said in relation to international intervention, arguing that its proclamations and policy must be understood as emerging in a time of transition, for Russia as a state, as well as the international system itself.

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2. Interactive theorising in Foreign Policy analysis

That actions breed reactions is a given in foreign policy and persuasive arguments have been made that direct us to understand why any actor behaves in the manner that it does. Twenty years ago, for instance, the question was posed:

How does one create an interactive theory that takes the perspective of an actor in the system, rather than that of the system itself, while at the same time taking into account that the actor is constantly responding to perceived external feedback to its prior actions, new initiatives of others, differing situations, and shifts in the international structure? (Hermann, 1995, p. 256)

This was an argument to see that the unit and cognitive levels of analysis (Ziegler, 2012) were not disconnected from the structural one. However, the disadvantage of such subjective accounts has since become clear. They have led to *cul de sacs* in analysis of foreign policy with agreement on what constituted the original action seldom achieved. As a result, in analysing Russian foreign policy today, all too often analysis falls into us and them type argumentation featuring finger pointing and talk of “inevitable” in responses. Such blocks reflect a wider failure to consider sufficiently i) the agency that actors have in respect of the alternative responses and ii) that actors do not merely respond to structural shifts, they also create them.

To take the first of these, ultimately, it must be remembered, all actors have choices available to them. Even those who lean more towards the structure side of the agency-structure debate can (albeit they do not always do so) recognise that structure does not dictate the nature of the reaction. That this is so has been amply demonstrated by those who focus on agency (Hudson, 2005), particularly at the cognitive level (Danilovic, 2002; Holsti, 1970; Johansen, 1980; Mintz, 2002). Empirical evidence also suggests a high level of self-evidence for arguing for a good degree of agency, else how do we explain weaker actors outperforming their stronger competitors? In contributing to the fight to find a resolution of the agency-structure debate, Carlsnaes has persuasively argued that:

Whatever specific solution is proposed for the agency-structure problem, it must at a minimum include the notion that agents produce and reproduce, while par passu being determined by, international and domestic social structures. This constitutes, broadly speaking, the “codetermination” aspect of the issue. (1992, p. 260)

This article therefore recognises that other actors’ behaviour may have produced responses in Russia but that a) Russia had a choice of responses to make; b) Russia’s responses will have elicited responses from others; and c) all the agents’ responses have capacity to wreak change upon international structures. Through a focus on Russia’s responses to developments in international intervention in the post-Cold War period, I argue that the structures in respect of intervention have been and remain in a time of transition and that this transitional period facilitates an even greater potential for change than in more settled times. In addition, Russia itself is in a time of transition – adapting to the loss of the Soviet Union while still seeking to retain its influence, both regionally and globally. At the cognitive level, depending on the subject of the analysis, transition is more common as leaders and/or their advisors and ministers come and go.

My arguments for seeing the international system as being in a period of transition are supported by the developments we have seen in relation to humanitarian intervention, discussed in more detail below. However, those developments themselves need to be situated within a context that explains what the system is changing from and to. Debates about intervention are, it is argued, indelibly intertwined with debates about the modern and post-modern. In the next section, therefore, I examine the literature on the post-modern, situating Russia within it.

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3. Russia in a dual context of transition

For the decade from 1991 until 9/11, much scholarly literature argued that we had moved or were moving from a modern into a post-modern world. The post-modernist literature was rooted in debates about interdependence, globalisation, European integration and international intervention. Since 9/11 and the War on Terror, to judge by the backgrounding of this formerly prominent debate, the post-modern age has retreated. What has been lost in this retreat, however, is an analytical sense of how the sands of the international structures, particularly in respect of sovereignty, continue to shift. For Russia, however, the sense of transition has remained. In the 2000 Russian Military Doctrine, its authors referred to the document as belonging to “a transitional period”, that transition referring not only to Russian’s internal transformation but also that of the “system of international relations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). It is only in very recent years, that there has been a suggestion that Russia has completed its own transition (Hellevig, 2012), although this remains in doubt. Russia’s support for Eurasian Eco-

conomic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, its returned focus to the former soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia and its extremely troubled relationship with the EU and NATO are all suggestive that Russia has decided on an Eurasianist identity but more time is needed before such final judgments can be made. International structures also remain contested, most particularly in relation to the concept of sovereignty that should dominate and the emphasis that should be given to the protection of human rights versus the inviolability of state borders. Positioning any actor in relation to a system that is in flux is fraught with difficulties. This is, perhaps, why Russia has alternately been called a revisionist and a status quo power. More usefully, and consistent with the discussion above on agency and structure, Russia is treated here as a reformist state (Konyshev & Sergunin, 2014).

3.1. The modern versus the post-modern world

As Syria's conflict continues, it is estimated by the UN that over 200,000 have died, 1 million been injured and 7.6 million displaced (OCHA, 2015). Syria is yet another in a long line of civil conflicts that have made the world ask whether it is really more important to protect the sovereignty of states than to protect those citizens for which those states have responsibility. In the 1990s, after the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda, this question was at the top of many scholarly agendas, culminating in a body of literature that argued we were witnessing the materialisation of a post-modern state system. The emergence of the European Union in 1992, a firm declaration of the desire or certain European states to unite politically as well as economically, also gave impetus to this debate. The fact of and response to 9/11 brought an abrupt halt to such analyses. Yet many of the same phenomena that occasioned the modern versus post-modern debate remain in evidence. In this section, that debate is rehearsed in order to demonstrate the nature of the context in which Russia is operating and to reveal, therefore, its capacity to affect international structures.

The Westphalian state system is the beginning of the modern state system, characterised by an emphasis on state sovereignty, defined territories, the balance of power and an international state system based upon these basic principles (Caporaso, 1996; March & Olsen, 1998). The post-modern era is characterised by changes in state borders, fragmentation and increasing contact at the national, international and sub-national levels that undermines state autonomy (March & Olsen, 1998). These are accompanied by the rise of international-level institutions, organisations, networks, etc., which also compromise state dominance. Michael Smith (2003) speaks of a “post-modern’ or ‘post-sovereign’ foreign policy” where power and resources are “diffuse” (2003, p. 569). Wallace (1999), also remarks upon the blurring between the domestic and the foreign, concentrating in part on the emergence of collective security measures, and arguing, essentially, that post-modernism in this respect is dependent upon the absence of threat (1999, p. 519). One of the reasons for the decline of the post-modern debate after 9/11 was precisely this association with security; the attacks on US territory seemingly gave the lie to any idea that it was not the rules of the modern world that prevailed.

Yet the debate also contained reflections on the ordering of the world and its evolution that remain relevant today. For Trainor (1998), for instance, the modern era began with the end of the feudal, medieval era and post-modernism with the decline of the nation state and the decreasing importance of the individual as compared to the collective. He also characterises the

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post-modern era as a universe constituted of various communities, each conscious of existing within “ever wider worlds”. Here, as in many of the ideas about post-modernism, are underlying references to globalisation and its effects. States’ awareness of being under scrutiny, for instance, stems not least from the communications revolution that distinguishes the global from the international. The emphasis on deterritorialisation and its effects on state sovereignty, whether in relation to increased contact across people, the increasing emergence and salience of both international organisations and networks or to the blurring of borders between the domestic and the foreign, is common to globalisation literature too. Trainor went on:

The current trend, however, seems to be towards a less contractual/atomistic and more organic/substantive’ view of the international community, one which raises complex questions about the (post) modern state, its role as a medium of the international community and the source of its authority when it acts in the latter capacity. (1998, p. 141)

This argument about the authority of the international community to act was recognised most obviously in the subsequent work of the ICISS (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty) and the acceptance of the Responsibility to Protect by the UN General Assembly in 2005. It is this lack of clarity about authority to act that also captures the concerns of Russia, not least because arguments about a post-modern world order seemed most often to reflect the argument that the modern world’s structures were defunct, delegitimised and therefore could be bypassed, for Russia the most obvious proof being the 1999 NATO bombing of Belgrade in response to the crisis in Kosovo.

Perhaps the most definitive argumentation on modernism and post-modernism, however, is delivered by Robert Cooper (2000, 2004). Despite agreeing that the origins of the modern state system lie in Westphalia, Cooper said no single political system was discernible in today’s world. He identified a three-way division: the pre-modern, modern and post-modern worlds and contended that states could, under certain circumstances (war, civil war, for instance), descend into the chaos of the pre-modern era, becoming, in effect, “pre-states” (Cooper, 2004, p. 1). In the modern state system, “the classical state system remains intact”; the status quo is retained through balance of power or hegemonic tactics; states are sovereign, so domestic and foreign affairs are separate and the principle of non-intervention is vaunted; states monopolise force, important in this conception of the world where security is achieved through the exercise of force. For Cooper, the post-modern had some way to go, for, “[t]he concepts, values and vocabulary of the modern world still dominate our thinking” (2000, pp. 16-17). For him, the post-modern world was brought into existence with the Treaty of Rome and the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), although Cooper contends that these two treaties constitute only a step into a post-modern world. Full transition is contingent particularly upon the development of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), but other institutions seen as belonging to this order were identified as The Court of Human Rights, the International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. What each of these has in common is monitoring and therefore a high level of transparency. Therefore, for Cooper, distinguishing itself from the modern system, the post-modern system lacks the reliance on balance and de-emphasises sovereignty, the line between the domestic and the foreign as well as borders. Echoing Wallace (1999), Cooper said, “[i]n this environment security, which was once based on walls, is now based on openness and transparency and mutual vulnerability” (Cooper, 2004, p. 30).

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Table 1: Modern versus Post-Modern

Modern	Post-Modern
State sovereignty	State autonomy undermined by increasing contact at international level
Non-intervention	Humanitarian intervention
Defined territory	Fragmentation: shared responsibility for borders
Balance of power	Collective security
International state system	Internationalism: increasing numbers of international institutions & organisations
Separation of domestic and foreign	Blurring of domestic and foreign
State monopoly of force	Diffusion of power and resources
Defence of status quo	Transformation

Table 1 sets out the differences between the modern and post-modern. It renders visible also the fact that the West, versus the Rest, falls most easily into the post-modern column. Indeed, Cooper² claimed membership here for the EU Member States³ but warned also that these types of relations pertained only to intra-EU relations and that bilateral relations between an EU state and a non EU state might still be defined by the rules of the modern state system. Russia was singled out as “an important problem” (2000, p. 27), with signs that it could meet the conditions of any of the three types of state, although ultimately Cooper argued against a pre-modern categorisation. Arguments for Russia as a modern state resided in the power of the state itself and the continued reliance on balance, claims made all the forcible by events since then. A possible Russian claim to post-modernism was substantiated by the CFE Treaty and the initial presence of OSCE observers in Chechnya; claims undermined again by Russia’s withdrawal from one and evident doubts about the other. Cooper understood, however, the vulnerability of the post-modern world and therefore the security logics that might prevail:

[C]haos, or at least the crime that lives within it, needs the civilized world and preys upon it. Open societies make this easy. At its worst, in the form of terrorism, chaos can become a serious threat to the whole international order. (Cooper, 2004, p. 77)

As a final point on the post-modern world, it is important to remark that the role of norms and ideas is elevated here. Power takes on ideational connotations and the international world is conceived of as an intersubjective rather than objective reality, implying a large measure of dynamism and the capacity of international actors to shape their own practices. However, much of the post-modern literature emerged primarily as a commentary on the experiences of the Western world, particularly Europe. Much also, Cooper excepted, suggested a somewhat linear quality to developments internationally. The abrupt cessation of the debate meant that

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2 It is worth remembering that this was four years prior to the enlargement to former Soviet and satellite states.

3 Wallace (1999) claims that the five states situated around the Rhine valley and delta constitute the post-modern core.

little attention was paid to when and how certain aspects of post-modernism were taken up by non-western states as the developments associated with post-modernism impelled other actors into more intensive integrative tendencies. For impelled they were, as the following quote from the former Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ivanov, makes clear:

But why should Russia participate in everything? Maybe we should limit our actions to the sectors which directly affect the interests of the country? Such an approach does not take into account the situation in the context of globalization. The contemporary world is very interdependent and interrelated. Security is indeed today more indivisible than hardly ever before. In support of this thesis I will cite but one example – the entry of Switzerland into the United Nations.

Is any further proof necessary that a common understanding has formed in the world of the need for collective efforts and of the indivisibility of security. (Ivanov, 2002)

Also under-analysed was the question of how post-modern structures emerged and how they could be sustained. For all the talk of “absence of threat”, the EU, the flagship organisation of post-modernism, emerged from threat and the desire to overcome its worst effects. As we have seen cracks in the European Union emerge, however, one cannot help but wonder whether a continued focus here may also have brought policy suggestions about how to maintain forward progress.

Another critical absence noticeable now is an understanding of whether and how the emergence of the EU has spawned the appearance of other regional organisations and, crucially, how each impacts upon the other. Cooper’s insights in relation to how states could step back into and well as forward into different eras deserve attention now in the context of the advent of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a regional organisation that abuts with the EU. The EEU reflects both Russia’s response to the sense of threat it feels from EU enlargement, as well as its own and others’ understanding that collective action and integration can bring benefits that make any reduction in sovereignty worthwhile. As far as external actors go, when the EEU was first mooted, few, if any concerns were expressed by other actors, indeed the World Trade Organisation spoke benignly of itself and one of the EEU’s earlier precursors, EurAsEC (Eurasian Economic Community) as “overlapping” arrangements (World Trade Organization, 2011, p. 5). On the one hand, the creation of Eurasian Economic Union and its intentional modelling upon the European Union would look to be a positive step, indicating Russia had accepted some of the precepts of the post-modern world and was committed to regional cooperation and integration. After all:

For those concerned with international order, regionalism has many positive qualities. Aside from promoting economic, political and security cooperation and community, it can consolidate state-building and democratization, check heavy-handed behaviour by strong states, create and lock in norms and values, increase transparency, make states and international institutions more accountable, and help to manage the negative effects of globalization. (Fawcett, 2004, p. 429)

On the other hand, the Ukrainian conflict, originating in a clash in 2013 between ideas on whether integration into the EU or EEU represented the better alternative for Ukraine, suggests that ordering arrangements associated with the post-modern world bring as much capacity for conflict as those of the modern.

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4. Russian responses to international intervention

The questions of what constitutes humanitarian intervention, who should undertake it, under what circumstances and when have occupied much space in debate about international relations and the relationship between states and their citizens. The United Nations itself, born out of the failures of the League of Nations, is built on an understanding that states are sovereign but that sovereignty is not without limits. Protection of human rights also sits at the heart of the UN identity. Practice in the years between 1945 and 1991, however, strayed far from a belief that sovereignty did not grant states the right to behave as they would without impunity, prompting, amid a changing international system, Bush Senior's once famous, now infamous, New World Order speech in 1991 in which in reference to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he said:

What is at stake is more than one small country; it is a big idea: a new world order, where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind -- peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law. [...]

We will succeed in the Gulf. And when we do, the world community will have sent an enduring warning to any dictator or despot, present or future, who contemplates outlaw aggression.

The world can, therefore, seize this opportunity to fulfill the long-held promise of a new world order, where brutality will go unrewarded and aggression will meet collective resistance. (Bush, 1991)

This speech and the actions that followed were possible in the context of a time when the Berlin Wall had fallen and the Soviet Union was liberalising. A mere eight years later, however, Russia was questioning the new world order that had emerged.

4.1. The Kosovo crisis

The crisis in Kosovo that captured the attention of the world in 1998 has proved to be the pivotal moment in the opposition of Russia to the Western narrative of humanitarian intervention. It is not necessary to tell the story of the events in Kosovo here, except to identify the crucial verdict on the legality or otherwise of the NATO action against Belgrade. The question of legality centred on whether the UN had authorised the NATO air strikes that began in March 1999. Article 2 of the UN Charter relating to the sovereignty of states became relevant in the legality debate, as was Art. 24.1., which confers the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security on the UN. When either voting for or abstaining from UN Security Council Resolutions 1160, 1199 or 1203, Russia was on record, stating its position that none authorised the use of force (United Nations, 1998a, 1998b). Art. 33.1. under Chapter VI on dispute settlement was an additional focus given the relatively quick resort to use of force to end the crisis.

On less than firm ground with legalistic arguments, the case was made for intervention on humanitarian grounds: "[t]his is a just war, based not on any territorial ambitions but on values. We cannot let the evil of ethnic cleansing stand" (Blair, 1999). NATO was requiring states (Russia) to make a conceptual leap that was not underpinned by international law or even wide agreement. It was true that the Preamble to the UN Charter offered some scope with its emphasis on Rights and this, coupled with the experiences of Bosnia and Rwanda in the preceding years led to advocates of the NATO intervention arguing that its critics (Russia) were relying on

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outdated concepts, constituting a grossly prejudicial position. Russia simply continued to play by the rules of the modern world order, of which it believed itself and all other states, to be a part. The failings of the UN system should also be acknowledged, however. The inevitable boycotting by Russia and China of a further UN Resolution to authorise military action against Belgrade was reason enough, seemingly, to permit the breach, indeed it forced it. Russia was not alone though in questioning the legality of the NATO action. The point for dissenters was that defence of human rights is not the primary basis of international law while the inviolability of sovereign states is. To this end, Bradshaw says, “[b]ombing Serbia was not merely a case of preventive, or coercive, diplomacy. It was aggression. It was also illegal” (Bradshaw, 1999, p. 5).

The ultimate verdict on the NATO air strikes was that they were illegal but legitimate. This put Russia on the wrong (modern) side of the debate about the relative priority of state sovereignty versus human rights in international relations. But for the Russians this was not just about a traditional sphere of influence, nor was it solely about the European security architecture. This was about the role of the state, what protections were available to it and, crucial to this last point, the role of the United Nations:

In our eyes, an extremely dangerous precedent for the resolution of situations of conflict has been established -- not on the basis of the UN Charter, of international law, the principles and norms of the OSCE, but on the basis of a primitive law of force. (Yeltsin, 1999, p. 62)

Fedorov (then-President of the Foundation for Political Research, Director of the political programmes of the Council for Foreign and Defence Policy) explained further the significance as Russia saw it:

For the first time, over the last ten years one of the sides in this world has not only secured a military-political victory, but is using the results sufficiently openly to form its own new policy on a global scale. We need to honestly tell ourselves that the Kosovo crisis has become the de facto beginning of a new political redivision of the world, the depth and limits of which will be determined above all by the USA and NATO. (Fedorov, 1999, p. 19)

Legitimacy had now become a major problem as the post-modern met the modern world. Insufficient attention was paid in the West at this point to the fact that post-modernity was easily interpreted as a fig leaf for Western ambitions. From the perspective of non-Western states, the future shape of world politics looked as if was being decided by a few states and would be the result of the definition and implementation of a few states’ foreign policy objectives. This was precisely the point that Russia appreciated early on and on which it sought a wider debate. The UN was sidelined during the Kosovo Crisis and it was this event that sparked off much subsequent discussion about whether the UN still had a role to play in international relations and what that role should be (Glennon, 2003). Yeltsin’s claim in the midst of the airstrikes that: “We are on a higher moral plane than the Americans” (in Ulyanov, 1999, p. 1), however, would be fatally undermined by its own actions in Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014.

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4.2. From Georgia to Ukraine

The events of the recent years confirm that without lasting peace and sustainable development, it is impossible to ensure human rights. In its turn, the protection of human rights should contribute to security and development of people rather than serve as a pretext for illegal interference in the domestic affairs of States. (Lavrov, 2012)

It is precisely this type of discourse that gives cause to wonder whether Russian actions in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine 2014 were motivated, in part anyway, to make clear the dangers of the path Western states have taken in relation to international intervention. Certainly, the statement encapsulates the central difficulty in the development and projection of post-modern values in international intervention, i.e. mistrust over motives. This is not to suggest such mistrust is inevitable, rather, it can be a response to others' actions.

9/11 came in the very early days of Putin's first term in presidency. Russia had itself been on the receiving end of terrorist acts and for this reason, initially stood by the US in its War on Terror, arguing that this was part of a global fight against terrorism. Like George W. Bush, Putin painted this as a clash between the civilised and uncivilised world.⁴ By 2007, Russian discourse had shifted into a much more critical stance in which the world was portrayed as unipolar.

Unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions have not resolved any problems. Moreover, they have caused new human tragedies and created new centres of tension. [...]

We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. [...] One state and, of course, first and foremost the United States, has overstepped its national borders in every way. [...] Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this? (Putin, 2007)

It was not that Putin ignored the dilemma presented to the world by conflicts inside states.

When the UN will truly unite the forces of the international community and can really react to events in various countries, when we will leave behind this disdain for international law, then the situation will be able to change. Otherwise the situation will simply result in a dead end, and the number of serious mistakes will be multiplied. Along with this, it is necessary to make sure that international law have a universal character both in the conception and application of its norms. (Putin, 2007)

Ignoring the disingenuous nature of this rhetoric, what successive conflicts, crises and international interventions had shown was that it was vital to see the further development and application of international law; vital too that law was not seen to be applied in a partial fashion. Just a year after the Munich speech, Russia would invade Georgia, without impunity. The International Criminal Court, still opposed by China, Russia and the US, has so far only opened investigations into cases related to conflicts on the African continent. This situation suggests that justice is partial and that powerful states are immune from its application. Events in Georgia 2008 and Ukraine from 2014 suggest Russia has internalised this message.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia's territory comprised two regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which had had a high degree of autonomy under the USSR. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, both sought independence from Georgia. Early violence was stemmed in South Ossetia with the intervention of the OSCE and the 1992 Sochi ceasefire agreement, which established an OSCE observer mission and a CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) peacekeeping mission. Abkhazia's conflict reached the UN. As a result, in 1993, a UN Monitoring Mission, UNOMIG, was authorised under UNSC Resolution 858, to verify compliance with the ceasefire agreement that had been reached in 1992 between Georgia, the Abkhaz forces and Moscow. Often described as two frozen conflicts, in fact, small

9/11 came in the very early days of Putin's first term in presidency. Russia had itself been on the receiving end of terrorist acts and for this reason, initially stood by the US

⁴ See O'Loughlin, Ó Tuathail & Kolossov for a detailed analysis of Russian discourse on 9/11.

flare-ups between them and Georgia have been a condition of their situation since the fall of the USSR. What made Georgia's attack on rebels in South Ossetia in August 2008 different this time was that it came in the wake of a seeming promise earlier that year of eventual NATO membership to Georgia.

Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 occurred while the eyes of the world were focused on the Beijing Olympic Games. The Russians cast their actions as a defence of Russian citizens, an argument that is heard with disquiet today in those places with ethnic Russian citizens, not least the Baltic States. Then-President Dmitry Medvedev sent an additional message about what the Georgian hot war signalled for Russia:

[...] the recent events in the Caucasus signify the end of any illusions that still remained after Russia became an independent state. [...] These were illusions that the world is a fair place, the security system based on the current division of political influence is optimum and keeps the world in balance, and the main players on the global political stage are in a state of equilibrium. But none of this is so. (Medvedev, 2008)

In expressing his (and Russia's) disappointment with developments so far, Medvedev also identified the problem as he saw it.

I do not think the bipolar world that existed during the years of confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact has any future prospects. But it is just as clear today that the single-polar world is completely unable to manage crisis situations. (ibid)

He went on to speak of the necessity of states following international law and of making a place for Russia at the decision-making table. At this point, Medvedev compared this moment in Russia's history to that of 9/11 in the US psyche (Medvedev, 2008), the thrust of the message that this was a turning point and one that needed to be recognised in the same way as 9/11 had been. Again, this was evidence that Russia believed it was neither impossible nor too late for others to impact on western-imposed structures. What was missing, however, was the coalition of support for the Russian message of Russians, versus Georgians, as victims, in the same way that had come for the US in their message. This was not least because it was difficult to avoid the idea that Russia's invasion of Georgia was motivated primarily by an attempt to prevent further NATO (and EU) enlargement eastwards

In this latter regard, the Russian reaction was very successful, not least because it has suffered few, if any, repercussions. Indeed, in 2009, Russia vetoed the rollover of UNOMIG's mandate, which therefore ceased. Further success is seen in developments today. Russia has recognised the secessionist territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as independent, signing border and alliance and partnership agreements with them. Further, at the time of writing, Russian troops, setting out the boundaries of the disputed secessionist state of South Ossetia have moved those boundaries even further into Georgian territory than expected (BBC, 2015). As Mchedlishvili (2015) has said, with all its other preoccupations, Europe is unlikely to respond effectively (or at all) to this.

The effect of Russia's unfettered successes in Georgia was for it to grow confident about the extent to which it could regain influence over the former soviet republics (the Baltics, arguably, aside), consolidating its view that the international system structures continued to be in a state of flux and therefore could simultaneously be subverted and influenced. In 2012, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had said:

The effect of Russia's unfettered successes in Georgia was for it to grow confident about the extent to which it could regain influence over the former soviet republics

In general, we are convinced that today when the world lives through a transition period that is characterized by instability in the spheres of economy, politics or intercivilizational relations, it is particularly important for the UN member States to be able to rely on accepted rules of conduct, and to agree on a joint response to the threats to global stability. We should not allow irresponsible actions dictated by expedient interests to shatter the system of international law. The world order is threatened by arbitrary interpretation of such essential principles as non-use or threat of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their domestic affairs. (Lavrov, 2012)

Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 suggests this constituted yet another disingenuous statement but it is telling of the fact that Russia, like other states, will take its opportunities, especially where previous experiences (Georgia in this case) suggest they are at liberty to do so. As shown elsewhere in this special issue (see Lewis on Kyrgyzstan), Russia seeks to establish legitimacy for its attempts to maintain primacy in the region. This can be achieved by drawing attention to the many pockets of instability that exist. What Ukraine suggests is that Russia is also willing to create or at the very least exacerbate conflict in order to achieve its wider aim of regional dominance. There is the additional possibility that should not be discounted that Ukraine is Russia's clear message to the West that: *this is where your focus on human rights versus sovereignty gets you. If you want to change us – change yourselves first.*

4.3. Concluding remarks

In light of the rather personalised analysis that we often see in Russia-West discourse, this article has argued for a need for analysis to rely more heavily on the insights of existing frameworks, especially those that facilitate the type of intersubjective enquiry that the relationship between Russia and the West demands. Russia's foreign policy often seems to divide analysis in a manner that Chinese foreign policy, for instance, does not. That is in part because Russian foreign policy discourse references the West extensively, often suggesting Russia is a victim of Western attempts to deny it its proper place in the world. It is in part as well, however, because Russia challenges the West to think more closely about its own actions and the likely effects of those. It is important that those challenges are appropriately considered if we are to understand fully the possible range of responses and to understand the impact those responses may have on other actors, as well as international system structures.

Structures, whether at the domestic or international levels, can impel actors to respond (although the manner of that response is not prescribed), but they can also themselves be affected by actors. The analysis here constitutes a reminder too that the dynamic and interactive nature of foreign policy means that no one actor can be held to blame for everything in relation to a conflict such as we see in Ukraine today. Nor, because of the failings of actors b, c or d should we absolve actor a for its reprehensible actions. Thus, adopting a subjective account does not mean forgiving breaches in accepted standards of behaviour but it is a minimum requirement if actors are to understand how to build to a convergence of opinion on important issues relating to international peace and stability, as well as human rights.

As the casualties in Syria and in other ongoing conflicts continue to mount, we seem no closer to having resolved the question of whether the sovereignty of states takes precedence over human rights; and this notwithstanding the Responsibility to Protect. As Russia moves

What Ukraine suggests is that Russia is also willing to create or at the very least exacerbate conflict in order to achieve its wider aim of regional dominance

further from the West, so it makes clear that it will use its Security Council veto to prevent military – and other – forms of intervention. China, more used to abstaining in UN Security Council votes on intervention where its interests are not affected, is looking increasingly willing to use its veto as well. This, and other evidence (see Salzman in this issue) is suggestive of a future where China and Russia will stand together to oppose future attempts to secure a UN resolution to intervene in the internal affairs of another state. At the same time, Russia's interventions in Georgia and Ukraine may yet serve to make the West rethink its stance on intervention (and other matters such as EU and NATO enlargement) if it decides that Mearsheimer (2014) is correct and that the Ukraine crisis is the outcome of Western, rather than Russian actions. Per Cooper (2000, 2004), international structures can “regress” as well as “progress” and in future, Syria may yet prove to be the case that signalled a retreat from post-modern championing of human rights into a modern defence of the sovereignty of states, even where that means a failure to protect.

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