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U.S.-Russia Relationships: How Superpower Relations Affect Conflict Resolution

An honors thesis presented to the
Department of Political Science,
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Abstract

Russia and the United States struggle for power throughout the 20th and 21st century has imprinted itself on many current conflicts. While the post-war international order has focused on avoiding violent conflict, the inability of Russia and U.S. to cooperate has hindered the ability to create peace throughout these zones of conflict. This paper seeks to demonstrate how U.S. and Russian relations have influenced current conflicts as well as which policies they should adopt in order to help resolve conflicts in the future. It specifically analyses ideological, military and economic actions taken by both nations throughout the Ukrainian, Syrian and Afghanistan conflicts.

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Introduction

Russia and the United States throughout the 20th century, dominated the international order, exerting influence on fundamental aspects of the international system. Going into the 21st century, both nations maintained a significant amount of power and continued to push for supremacy over each other. This push for power has been a source of continued strife between the two and as a result, both have imprinted themselves on modern conflicts, in the hope to tilt the scale in favour of themselves. The rational/realist approach that they have adopted, which has hindered their ability to create a peaceful coalition between the two. The relationship between Russia and the U.S. raises the questions of how do superpower relations influence global peace and order and why have superpowers been incapable of creating a peaceful global community? This question has salience as unlike any other point in history, we are seeing the rise of new international superpowers such as China, India and Brazil at a unprecedented level. In a period of rapid development of nations, re-evaluating the relationship between two of the most prominent superpowers, becomes important to avoid a resurfacing of pre-war imperialism. Furthermore, with the development and integration of new international superpowers, understanding how international superpower relationships may influence the global community will be extremely important for maintaining and creating perpetual peace within the global system. This research attempts to both highlight relationships between two current superpowers as well as evaluate how peaceful superpower relationships can be fostered in order to create a more peaceful society. By evaluating the military, economic, and ideological relationships between Russia and the U.S. throughout the Ukrainian, Syrian and Afghanistan conflicts, we can evaluate how effective past superpower relationships have been in creating peace, and what policy both nations should adopt to create a more peaceful system.

Background

The race to supremacy between the two nations commenced after World War II. The once powerful European imperialist nations were weak after years of war and destruction, and the form of the international system was quickly shifting. As a result of the devastation caused by the two World Wars, the post-war international orders main intention shifted towards conflict avoidance/resolution and creating a nonviolent international order. Kantian and western notions of democratic governments, interdependence amongst nations and protection of natural human rights became the prevailing view of the post-war system. The United Nations (UN) was specifically designed to maintain positive relationships between nations and ensure a relatively more civilized international system. Furthermore, the Geneva Conventions and other documents codified the means of war and outlawed imperialism which was the driving factor for nations leading up to World-War II. With these ideas were faced with retaliation from many nations who did not necessary succumb to Western ideologies and saw the rise of these values as a means of the west, specifically the U.S. and Europe, to maintain power. The Soviet Union, who looked to further expand their empire and promote communist ideologies, especially in Eastern Europe, became the main opponents of this view. Despite their cooperation throughout the World Wars, both nations quickly turned on each other do to fear of the perceived dangerous ideologies on the rise, as well as the fear of losing power. As a result, both countries entered into the infamous Cold-War, which saw a series of aggressive politics between Russian and the U.S., without direct conflict. The ideological difference between the two nations became the main conflict as both vehemently opposed the other form while strongly representing their own, with Russia representing communism, and the U.S. democracy and capitalism. Despite the lack of physical confrontation, this period became a period of extreme military, economic and social expansion to

gain an upper hand on the other nation. From the period 1947 to 1985, the United States increased their defense by almost triple the amount that they had throughout the 1940s. (Higgs, 1994) Furthermore, the USSR continued to exert its influence on eastern Europe, creating the Eastern Bloc, and inserting communist leaders within nations such as Poland and Hungary. The contrasting systems of economic policies were both racing to convert as many surrounding nations as possible to their own ideologies on economic policies. While the Western market economy had proven successful in achieving growth in many European and Asian nations, early soviet economy had performed relatively well due to the increase in production sectors such as, oil and steel, and faced a price increase in its major export. (Cooper, 2008) The use of sanctions and economic policy became an essential tool for each in the condemn their perceived enemies. The U.S. would directly target communist nations such as in March 1948 the Department of Commerce introduced restrictions on exports to the Soviet Union and other communist allies, which was later formalized in the Export Control Act of 1949. The United States further imposed embargoes on North Korea, China and Cuba to stop the spread of communism. Both nations began providing arms, and military equipment to developing nations and were met with counters from the other. While the U.S. emerged as the economic superpower Russia throughout this period gained significant economic and military influence around the globe primarily do to its reservoir of natural resources, most notably its exports on crude oil and gold. Up until the collapse of the Soviet Union, both nations were confident in their ability to overcome the other.

The Cold War ended in the 1990s under Mikhael Gorbachev who introduced reforms known as *perestroika*. The Soviet Union was on the verge of collapsing, and had been worn down by the long period of competition with the U.S. This brief period starting with the collapse of the Soviet Union, saw a relative increase in positive relationships between the two. What

became apparent, despite positive relationships was that both nations still desired influence and power and were unwilling to completely accept the policies and actions of the other nation. As stated by D'Anien (2023), "the end of the Cold War set in motion two forces that were necessarily in tension: democratization in eastern Europe and Russia's quest to regain its "great power" status and dominion over its neighborhood,". There were still tension with regarding to key issues such as the war in the former Soviet republic of Georgia and Yugoslavia and the respective role and laws governing each nation. On April 8, 2010, in another attempt to create peaceful relationships, President Obama and President Medvedev signed the *New Start Treaty* which attempted to create better relationships between the United States and Russia. This Treaty held each other accountable for military and aggressive tactics by limiting the deployment of military equipment as well as allowing both nations further transparency in their military endeavors. This treaty highlighted the importance of military cooperation between the two and attempted to create a greater sense of safety in each nation by holding each other accountable in a non-violent and codified law. Furthermore, for a brief period, Russia and United States cooperated on many important global security problems such as addressing nuclear weapons problems such as Iran. The two Presidents worked with the UN Security Council to agree on UN security Council Resolution 1929, which set forth sanctions towards Iran for not meeting the international obligations for a nuclear program. Russia joined the United States in supporting the UN Security Council Resolution 1887 which sets new guidelines for how to improve the safety of nuclear weapons practices and nation security as whole. Throughout this brief period of cooperation, the governments tackled certain problems such as North Korean attempting to gain nuclear power, creating a more peaceful Afghanistan and working together to create a more stable Kyrgyzstan with both nations becoming much more cooperative. It marked a period of

greater cooperation as well as the ability of both nations to overcome differences to tackle common goals. The improved relationships between the two were only conditional on certain issues and as the leading global superpowers they still diverged on their respective rolls a means of maintaining a peaceful global order. Russia had not joined NATO, and there was still a sense of disagreement between Russia and the USA on whether the Westernized form of international order would be effective in ensuring global peace. In 2011 with the return of Vladimir Putin to presidency, the United States and Russian relations deteriorated and once again both nations developed an uncompromising agenda, developing a black and white approach to relationships with the other. As we've seen, poor relations between the two nations have been a longstanding tradition and the hope and possibilities of these relationships eventually turning peaceful will prove a very significant aspect of the future. Despite attempts by leaders of both nations to ameliorate conditions and relations, they have all eventually proven futile in creating longstanding cooperation.

Scholarly Review

Post Cold War, the United States and Russia, reevaluated their relationships in an attempt to create more civility between the two. This can be summed up by the 1992 declaration that was signed by both Boris Yeltsin and George H.W Bush, which stated, "Russia and the United States do not regard each other as potential adversaries. From now on the relationship will be characterized by friendship and partnership founded on mutual trust and respect and a common front to democracy and economic freedom." (Safranchuk, 2018) Despite this formal agreement between the two states both continued to pursue their own agendas which, often came into conflict with one another. As expected, mutual agreement did not withstand, and ideological and national interests took precedent. This separation between the two, as stated by Safranchuk, as

differences in ideational agendas. He distinguishes between two separate agendas, the practical being more short term, attainable and smaller goals, and the ideational which focus on broadscale cultural and ideological views of the two nations. In the early stages of the post-Cold-War period, Russia and the U.S. were capable of cooperating on certain practical agendas such as nuclear control. Throughout time, they separated on more and more issues and stating how, “disagreements on practical issues increased in the 200s, and so did Russia’s will not to compromise its vital interests for the sake of holistic principles promoted by the West.” (10) He argues that by separating the practical/materialistic agendas from the ideational/ideological agendas, of both nations, will help tackle issues but also is one of the main causes for these relationships to not withstand the test of time. He states how “The negative correlation between the two agendas, which has been described above, proves that sustainable progress in Russia-U.S. relations cannot be achieved within one of them without reconciling the disagreements with the other one.”(16) His view is that positive relationships between the two cannot be achieved without limiting ideational disagreements

Thomas Graham and Mathew Rojansky offer a different view on policy objectives for US and Russian relations. They similarly state how, “the most common U.S. policy responses to Russia – from both Republican and Democratic administrations across three decades-have depended either on the hope that “Moscow can be fully defeated or that it can become a friend and fellow democracy.”(Graham and Rojansky, 2016) They expand on this idea, by stating that Russia generally believes that “the US and the West on the whole did wrong and how Russia was forced to react under pressure of necessity rather than willingly.” In their view both the ideological difference between Russia and the USA as well as the desire to impose their values on one another, has and will continue to prohibit their ability to work together. In both the

countries there was a common belief that their ideologies and form of government was supreme and the other was inherently bad. Therefore, unlike Safranchuck's policy of ideational reform, with regards to tackling the problem of improving relations between the countries, they believe the two must focus on codified and 'practical' solutions such as nuclear and economic agreements rather than attempting to convert each other to their own ideological view points. Graham and Rojansky (2016) state how "if forced to choose between securing cooperation on nuclear non-proliferation and supporting pro-Western political change in Russia's neighborhood, a tactical withdrawal on the latter may be necessary to preserve a larger victory on arms control". This fight for supremacy has completely hindered any chance at peaceful relationships between the United States and Russia.

On the complete opposite end of the argument, Julianne Smith and Adam Twardowski, propose a much more aggressive and uncompromising policy for the US. They proposed that in order to create a more peaceful society US needs to resist and deter Russian politics directly through military or economic actions. Throughout their paper they state that "to Resist Russian expansionism, the next U.S. president must invest in the United States' ability to counter Russia's newly honed abilities in cyber and information warfare, in traditional U.S. strengths such as maritime warfare that have lagged since the end of the Cold War, and in new potentially dangerous domains such as outer space."(Smith and Twardowski, 2017) Overall, their view on international politics is much more U.S. centric. Russian and US relationships, in their view, should not be viewed under the lens of co-operation but instead through control. It highlights the idea that global superpower relationships cannot promote peace and that countries must take a more realist approach. In this view military and economic relations most valuably used to counter each other rather than promote peace.

One of the most mainstream ideas with regards to how to create peaceful relationships between nations is the liberal ideology. The liberal ideology is much believed that higher levels of trade and integration into the global community will promote greater peace. As stated by Philippe De Lombaerde (2005), “Regional Economic Integration leads to more trade and more intense capital flows, in turn leading to higher levels of interdependence and “trust”, more secure access to strategic resources, and lower threat of trade embargoes. This is supposed to lead to welfare, peace and stability. Higher levels of interdependence increase the cost of war and the political pressures against war.” This ideology places specific emphasis on reducing trade barriers and becoming more interdependent economically believing that this should create a more peaceful society. On the other hand, bilateral agreements and hard nationalist policies can subsequently promote a less peaceful culture

Methodology

To demonstrate how Russian and U.S. relationships were able or unable to produce or more peaceful global international system, we will evaluate their actions throughout periods of conflict and the effect it had on deescalating the tensions. By analysing three separate conflicts we hope to find trends in the actions of both nations. The three cases that will be evaluated are the Ukrainian/Russian conflict, the Syrian civil war and the Afghanistan conflict. Each case marked a different situation and conditions that Russian and US relationships were formed, but all demonstrate similarities in how each government dealt with the situations and how their reaction shaped the conflict and the ability of the conflict to be resolved easily. To evaluate military actions and how they effected the conflict, we will specifically look at any sort of military support, or intervention by either of the nations within conflict, and how the other subsequently responded. The economic actions will be measured through trade patterns at the

current period and any further actions taken during the conflict which could have affected the economic situation of the nations. Finally, the ideological actions will be measure by analysing the differences in views surrounding each conflict and the reasons for Russian and US intervention into each. By evaluating the change in ideological, military and economic factors during the conflict we can see how their relationships changed and how effective it was in resolving or escalating the conflicts. In the end we hope to determine how each nation can adopt policy that would create a long-lasting positive relationship between both of the nations.

Ukraine

History

This section will only provide a brief summary of the long and entangled Russian and Ukrainian history, but understanding their history as integrated nations is important to understanding the implications of the recent invasion of Ukraine. Since early integration in the 1700s into the Russian empire, Ukraine as a nation has been closely tied with the former Soviet Union and current Russia. In the 20th century, despite its attempt to fight for independence, it lost and joined the Soviet Union where, Ukraine adhered to their principles and values supporting a communist and anti-West ideology. In 1991, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine declared independence. The paths of Russia and Ukraine separated and while Russia continued a more communist and authoritative path, Ukraine worked to achieve a democratic and more Westernized form of government. Throughout the 21st century Ukraine continued to push for a more Westernized society, one of their most symbolic actions being their attempt to join NATO. Despite their rejection, the Ukrainian society was leaning more and more towards the West and away from Russia altogether. The Orange Revolution was a monumental moment for the pro-West Ukrainian people and indicated a strong willingness to create a democratic society the was

separate from its Soviet past. The pro-West civilians were successful in pushing out Viktor Yanukovich, the pro-Russian candidate who was suspected to have skewed the voter count, and elected instead the Viktor Yushchenko, a pro-integration and democratic candidate. Throughout Yushchenko's time in presidency, Ukraine was guided away from Russia with promises towards NATO and the EU, but this period was very contentious with lots of uncertainty regarding the direction of Ukraine in the future. In 2010, Yanukovich won the presidency again, and the Ukrainian government ends the talks with EU and instead chooses to revive their economic ties with Russia. His rejection of this deal with EU caused mass protests which pushed Yanukovich out of office and in retaliation and an attempt to maintain status quo, Russia attacked and Annexed Crimea in 2014. This sparked tensions throughout international politics and resulted in strife between the U.S. and Russia. Tensions continued and while there seemed to be a period of positive relationship between President Trump and Putin, on February 24, 2022, Putin announced he would conduct "special military operations" in Ukraine and commenced the Russia and Ukrainian war.

Ideological

Of the many analyses proposed with regards to why Russia annexed Ukraine, the one that seems the most convincing is the fear of Western expansion into Eastern Europe. Ukraine has always held symbolic power for Russia as a past Soviet Union and communist nation. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 initially occurred with Ukraine's attempt to further integrate themselves into the Western world and the revolutions that occurred as a result. The Orange revolution demonstrated a shift towards Western values as well as threatened a significant loss of power for Russia within the global order. The Orange revolution furthermore highlighted the possibilities of revolutions and the ability to separate with communist and Russian history. To

reduce this conflict to the will of Putin or other men in power and colonialist desires, would be to ignore the long history of competition between the US and Russia and Russia and Ukraine. Instead, what this conflict demonstrates is the retaliation of Russia towards the perceived threat of the West and the loss of power and influence within the global system. The actions of Russia directly contradicted the values of the West and liberal international orders, but for a large portion of the Russia population, these actions were justifiable and not seen as unlawful or aggressive. (Survation, 2022) On the other hand, the United States viewed the invasion of Ukraine as a clear violation of the principles of the liberal international order. Russian's actions towards Ukraine were a direct violation of the western liberal values, as well as the values of free will, sovereignty and natural rights of the people. Throughout this conflict Russia completely undermined Western institutions that were perceived as maintaining peace in the international order. The U.S. Department of States how, "Russia's campaign aims to undermine core institutions of the West, such as NATO and the EU, and to weaken faith in the democratic and free-market system." The actors within this conflict demonstrate completely contrasting ideologies with the western views and institutions in place being perceived as threatening as well as peaceful.

Economic

In response to Russia's violations of international laws and current norms of the international community, the United States has instituted sanctions and embargoes against Russia, in hope to deter further actions by Russia. As reported by John Psaropoulos (2022), "Since February 22, more than 7,782 sanctions have been imposed on Russia, making it the most sanctioned country in the world." The sanctions started in 2014 with the invasion of Crimea and have maintained to this day. On February 28th, 2022, US imposed sanctions that prevented the

central bank of Russia from “accessing about half of the US\$643bn that it holds in foreign-exchange reserves by blocking its ability to convert assets held in US dollars and euros into rubles.” (EIU, 2022) The Ukrainian and Russian conflict resulted in further sanctions which were placed into three categories by the. (U.S. Department of Treasury, 2014) The first were, “Blocking sanctions against individuals and entities designated pursuant to E.O. 13660, E.O. 13661, E.O. 13662, or E.O. 13685 and listed on the List of Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons” The second were “Sectoral sanctions against entities operating in sectors of the Russian economy identified by the Secretary of the Treasury pursuant to E.O. 13662 and listed on the Sectoral Sanctions Identification List” and the final set were “A new investment ban and prohibition on the exportation or importation of goods, technology, or services to or from the Crimea region of Ukraine.” As of February 24, 2022 Biden has announced a further set of sanctions against Russia that “restrict the exports of some products from the U.S. to Russia, blocking Moscow’s ability to acquire semiconductor chips and other technology essential to defense, aerospace and other critical sectors.”(Egan, 2022) In the early stages of the conflict Russian oil became a large aspect of economic actions taken by the U.S. and other western nations as many of them pledged to end import of Russian oil. (Horton and Palumbo, 2023) These economic actions taken by both nations have been reactionary and futile in deteriorating the other nation in any sense. The sanctions on Russia merely pushed it towards other means of trade such as with China and India, who continued to import Russia throughout the periods. Furthermore, nations who were already heavily reliant on Russian exports such as Slovak Republic, Hungary and many Eastern European nations continued to rely on Russia resources. These sanctions have hardly had any effect on Russian economic growth, as since 2020, their GDP growth rate has continued to rise has seen very similar trends with that of the US.

Therefore, it is hard to see any true effects that the economic actions taken by the US have had on the conflict resolution.

Military

Like all conflicts between the two nations since the start of the Cold War, Russia and the US have not challenged each other directly. The conflict is fought directly between Russia and Ukraine and is only influenced by the US through support towards the Ukrainian government. The investment into the conflict by both nations has been substantial and have furthermore been on opposing sides of the conflict. The USA has been one of the largest contributors to Ukrainian security. As reported by the U.S Department of State (2023) “Since January 2021, the United States has invested more than \$32.8 billion in security assistance to demonstrate our enduring and steadfast commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.” Furthermore, President Joe Biden’s administration has “used the emergency Presidential Drawdown Authority on thirty-three occasions since August 2021 to provide Ukraine approximately \$19.6 billion in military assistance directly from DoD stockpiles” (U.S. Department of State, 2023) The USA has been hesitant to provide on ground support, but they have provided training for the Ukrainian military, on ground weaponry and advanced military technology. The Russian investment into Ukraine has been substantial. As stated by Nick Mordowanec (2023), “Boris Grozovski, a Russian economics expert from the Wilson Center think tank, estimates that Russian military expenditures continue to rise rapidly and are estimated to already have surpassed \$9 trillion in spending.” Furthermore, throughout the war Russia is suspected to have lost a total of 130,000 personal, 1,769 vehicles and 300 military jets, but Russia has expressed many times the willingness and ability to continue to invest military resources into Ukraine. (Mordowanec, 2023) The Ukrainian conflict has taken a large toll on Ukraine, Russia and the USA in terms of

military investment and is unlikely to stop anytime soon. Investments into Ukraine are continuing but further investments into the conflict show no signs of resolving or deteriorating the other actors any time two. Both nations have and continue to demonstrate a willingness and capacity to invest significant number of resources and manpower in combating the other.

Afghanistan

History

Like the Ukrainian crisis, Russia and Afghanistan history has been long and intertwined. In the early years of Russian and Afghanistan relations, Afghanistan marked an important intersection between India and British colonial countries, and Soviet control of Afghanistan was important in insuring Soviet influence in the East. The fear of increased Soviet presence caused the Anglo-Afghan wars resulting in Afghanistan becoming a very highly contested region and the battlefield for Britain and Russia. At the end of the final Anglo-Afghan war, which commenced in May 1919, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union became close allies. Their status as allies changed in 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Action by the Soviet Union was primarily against anti-communist Islamic guerrillas, who were quickly gaining more and more influence, and who threatened to dismantle the communist government in place. This group is known as the Mujahadeen and were a diverse group of middle Eastern fighters who opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and fought to create an Islamic government. The U.S. and President Carter, throughout these conflicts, to stop the spread of communism, supported the Mujahadeen by funneling money and arms through Pakistan to the rebel group. Along with the support from the USA, the Mujahadeen saw the rise of many individuals who funded the conflict in pursuit of their own interests, including Osama Bin Laden. In 1988 Gorbachev signed the Geneva peace accords and the Soviet Union military began to withdraw from Afghanistan. This

accord also terminated intervention from the USA, Pakistan and other nations that were involved in the conflict. Mohammad Najibullah was the president of Afghanistan at that time, from 1986 until 1992 and ruled over a communist regime in Russia. In the periods after the Soviet withdrawal, Afghanistan was thrown into a civil war due to the continued presence of individual actors still wishing for further reforms of the new government. Despite UN and Western attempts at peacekeeping including the United Nations Special Mission in Afghanistan, the period was very volatile, and the UN was unsuccessful in maintaining any peace. Najibullah's pro-communist government eventually fell with the collapse of the Soviet Union and resulted in the rise of the Taliban and other terrorists' groups. At the end of Najibullah's time as president, the warlords of the Mujahadeen had surrendered the capital Kabul. To create a withstanding government, they all agreed on Massoud's proposal to institute an Islamic coalition that was formed throughout the 1990s. With conflict persisted due to opposition from Hekmatyar's Pakistani backed army which sought sole control of Afghanistan. Throughout this conflict later Mohammed Mullah Omar and the Taliban eventually rose to power within Afghanistan and instituted a new form of government. The Taliban executed the former president Najibullah and later executed Massoud on September 9th, 2001, marking the start of the Taliban control. Only a few days after the Taliban executed Massoud, the 9/11 terrorists' attacks occurred. The September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States were one, if not the most, influential moments for American involvement in the middle East. The group that the US had once supported in fighting the Soviet government now became one of their strongest enemies and both Russia and US were desperate to tackle this problem. This created the rise of very cooperative relationships and as stated by Angela Stent (2021), "The period immediately after 9/11 was in retrospect the high point in U.S.-Russian relations in the three decades since the Soviet collapse."

Ideological

Unlike Ukraine, Afghanistan was not a symbolic representation of Russian ideology, but instead perceived as a threat to Russian National Security. Russian interests momentarily shifted away from control and opposing Western forces towards maintaining internal security. Unlike in the past, throughout this conflict their national interests were aligned and as stated by Stent and Shevtsova (2007), “Americans and Russians attributed this new Russian foreign-policy course to Putin’s pragmatism and realism: his willingness to base policies on Russia’s national interest and economic needs, rather than on nostalgia for the Soviet past.” The relationship between the two nations became much stronger under the united front of counter terrorism. Russia engaged with US under more direct terms and “not only joined the anti-terrorist coalition but also endorsed the presence of American troops in Central Asia and Georgia. Moreover, Putin reacted with equanimity to the US abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and to the prospect of further NATO enlargement.” (Stent & Shevtsova, 2007). While both nations understood the importance of countering terrorism, their definition of terrorism were different and highlights a fundamental difference in ideology of the two. Alexander Shein, the Russian ambassador to Israel, in an interview stated that terrorist organizations are defined, by the Supreme Court of Russia, only “when the intentionally conduct acts of terror in Russian territory, or against Russian interests abroad – installations, embassies, offices, or citizens.” (Shein, 2017) This differed from the United States who viewed, or at the very least framed, the issue as a global security threat. Despite ideological differences between the two, the fear of the rise of terrorism was sufficient in creating a state of cooperation between the two nations. Both nations acted in a rational way, but U.S. took the role of a global peacekeeper, whereas Russia was explicitly concerned with its own national security. When the President Biden announced the drawdown of

US troops starting on May 1, 2021, and the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan, Russia instead of continuing the battle, created closer ties with the Taliban. Putin, has since then condemned the U.S. for their actions in Afghanistan, saying “the west “must stop the irresponsible policy of imposing foreign values from abroad.”” (Roth, 2021) With that being said, throughout the early periods of counter terrorism and cooperation between the two nations, there was a strong mutual agreement in countering terrorism in Afghanistan. Unlike what we saw within the Ukrainian conflict, both ideologies aligned in their respective fears of the rise of terrorist groups. There main differences were aligned with the purpose of their involvement and while the U.S. would fundamentally never align with the Taliban or any other terrorist organization, once Taliban took control again, Russia, still pursuing its national interests, took a less harsh stance on the Taliban.

Economic

Russian proximity and history to the Middle East has made it a very strong influence within the region economically. As stated by Nikolay Kozhanov (2020) in an interview stated, “Russian agricultural sector is exporting 50 percent of its produce to the Middle East. The Middle East is responsible for 20 percent of Russian arms trades, for instance and definitely Moscow is interested in cooperation in the oil and gas sector.” Russia has, always held a significant amount of say within the region and due to its close ties to the middle east, has a lot invested within the region. Therefore, its willingness to counter terrorism and cooperate with the U.S. was very high during the years of volatile Taliban rule. Within the conflict Russian and US relations on the economic level were increasing. The US and Russia agreed and “in December 2000, Moscow joined Washington in supporting United Nations sanctions against the Taliban, and later appealed for additional sanctions against Pakistan for aiding the Taliban—all a precursor to cooperation with the United States in the war against terrorism after September 11.”

(Hill, 2002). In wake of the cooperation over Afghanistan, President Obama and Medvedev signed the New Start Treaty and the Northern Distribution Network allowing further transportation of supplies to American troupes. Following the new agreement, there was a period of increases in bilateral trade between the two nations which ended in 2014 with Crimea. The major result of the Afghanistan conflict were the new prospects for integration of Russia with the U.S and talks between President Bush and Putin as well as President Obama and Putin throughout this time seemed to indicate a desire to increase their bilateral cooperation. While economic actions between the two were not the defining factor of the relationship, cooperation on the economic level seemed to momentarily ameliorate conditions between the two.

Military

Military investment and cooperation between both nations was a large aspect of the initial success of Afghanistan. A long series of military actions were taken by both nations. After the September 11 attacks the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom which targeted the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Despite the past strife the military relationships between the two were cooperative and focused on the conflict. Putin in September 2001 decided to allow the United States to build Military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to support the military effort in Afghanistan. Later, he supported the Northern Distribution Network operation which dealt with the movement of equipment and supplies during the Operation Enduring Freedom. Despite ideological differences, both nations demonstrated the ability to cooperate. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Putin announced a five-point plan that would support America in its war on terror. As stated by Putin, “He pledged that his Russian government would (1) share intelligence with their American counterparts, (2) open Russian airspace for flights providing humanitarian assistance (3) cooperate with Russia's Central Asian allies to provide similar kinds of airspace

access to American flights, (4) participate in international search and rescue efforts, and (5) increase direct assistance -humanitarian as well as military assistance -- to the Northern Alliance and the Rabbani government in Afghanistan.” (McFaul, 2001) The military relationship between the two seemed to be improving and, in response to a question about the differences of opinions with regard to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, Putin stated that “the United States and Russia had “a difference of opinion” on the matter but added, “Our differences will not divide us.”(Gutterman, 2021) On October 7 2001, U.S. and NATO began air strikes against the Taliban in Afghanistan and by December, the Taliban government had fallen. While the two countries were not acting together, they were operating towards the same goal, and seemingly supporting each other throughout the crisis.

Syria

History

With the rise of the Syrian civil war, the two nations found each other on opposite sides of the conflict marking the beginning of the regression of the short honeymoon period of relatively strong counterterrorism relations throughout the Afghanistan crisis. In 2011, a set of successful protests against authoritative leaders in Egypt and Tunisia broke out commencing the pro-democracy movement known as the Arab spring. The revolution was sparked in Syria when 15 schoolchildren were arrested and tortured by President Bashar al-Assad for pro-Arab Spring graffiti. This ignited the pro-democratic freedoms movement within the country. The Assad regime in response to the protests and demonstrations began killing and arresting protestors on the street turning the conflict into an international concern. 2011 marked the start of intense fighting between the Assad government and the rebel groups of Syria. The pro-Assad government includes the Syrian Forces, the Hezbollah, foreign Shia Militias, Iran and Russia.

The forces that oppose the government include the Free Syrian army, the National Jihadis, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the US, Turkey, the Islamic State and the Kurdish People's Protection Units. We see many similarities with the Soviet-Afghan, especially with the rise of independent groups within the conflict. Interests from groups such as ISIS, no doubt played a large role in influencing the decisions of Russia to support the Syrian government, especially since cases like Afghanistan, even in times of coalition, governments have fallen to these terrorist organizations. Throughout this conflict Russia and the US were on opposite sides of the conflict and the opinions regarding the Syrian civil war marked the deterioration of the short-lived cooperation that they experienced in the beginning stages of Afghanistan.

Ideological

Despite the complicated interests from both nations, and the geological and economic advantages that they may possess, the actions of Russia and the United States represents, once again, a fundamental difference in opinions of the two nations. In a speech, President Obama stated "The Syrian government must stop shooting demonstrators and allow peaceful protests; release political prisoners and stop unjust arrests; allow human rights monitors to have access to cities like Dara'a; and start a serious dialogue to advance a democratic transition,"(Marks, 2018) As stated by Angela Stent (2021)"The United States and its NATO allies, partly based on the experience of the two Balkan wars in the 1990s, emphasise the primacy of two core principles: the responsibility to protect and humanitarian intervention. The Russian decision to become involved within the conflict became apparent in 2015. One article by Charap et al (2021) stated how "In the Kremlins view, Assad's defeat would have had disastrous consequences for regional and global stability." Throughout their report on the conflict, they state how the fall of the Assad regime meant "a victory for the forces of transnational terrorism

(and thus an increased terrorist threat to Russia) and a legitimization of Western-backed regime change, which also represented a threat to Russia's national security.”(Charap et al, 2021) There was a fear of a repeat of what happened in Afghanistan, and that was mainly caused by a perceived correlation between the rise of extremist groups and fall of government within these regions at the time. This conflict resulted in larger implications for the international order. The United States viewed the association and support of the Assad regime as an unethical and immoral action taken by other leading powers. Susan Rice, then the American ambassador to the United Nations, said at the time: "The United States is disgusted that a couple of members of this Council continue to prevent us from ... addressing an ever-deepening crisis in Syria." (Plumer, 2013) Throughout this period, both the United States and Russia created a divide between the countries.

Economics

In 2019, President Trump signed into law the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, which includes travel restrictions on the Assad regime and anyone profiting from the Syrian Civil war. The Russian government countered this action as, “Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov pledged on Monday that his country would help Syria's government survive crippling U.S. economic sanctions.” (Baghdadi, 2020) In the direct aftermath of the commencement of the Syrian conflict, Russian and US trade relationships began to deteriorate. From 2011 to 2012 overall trade between the two nations decreased by 2,878,100,000 US dollars, and a subsequent 1,829,700,000 million dollars from 2012 to 2013. The Syrian conflict was a first out of a series of conflicts between the two nations. While these numbers are not solely a result of the Syrian conflict it does represent an increase in economic tensions between the two nations, that would eventually reach its peak in the Ukrainian conflict.

Military

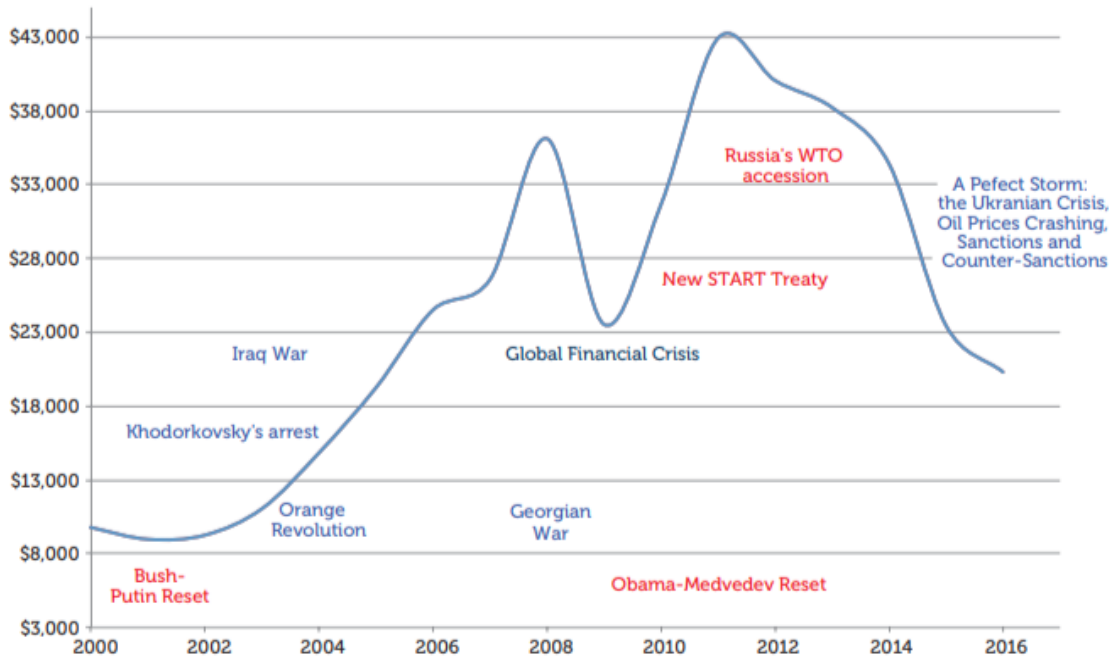
Direct military intervention into Syria commenced. Prior to 2015 though, Russia had been involved as early as 2011 when it “vetoed three proposed resolutions authorizing action in Syria under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in October 2011, February 2012, and July 2012.”(Charap et al, 2021) Russia began supporting Damascus in 2012, delivering “mostly small arms and light weapons, but Moscow eventually began supplying attack helicopters, UAVs, air defense systems, armored vehicles, electronic warfare systems, and guided bombs”(Charap et al, 2021) On September 30th 2015, Russia launched its first set of air strikes in Syria. These attacks were justified by Putin as he states they were acting, “preventatively to fight and destroy militants and terrorists on the territories that they already occupy, not wait for them to come to our house,”(BBC, 2015) Russian actions were met with opposition by the US when US Defence Secretary Ashton Carter stated how “By supporting Assad and seemingly taking on everyone who is fighting Assad you’re taking on the whole rest of the country of Syria.” (BBC, 2015) The United States and America began their military involvement on September 23, 2014, against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) as well as deploying 2000 soldiers to Syria. While both the US and Russia have a desire to combat the Islamic State and have primarily targeted their attacks towards this and other terrorist organizations, the US support of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces and Russia’s support of the Assad Regime has proven to be a large point of tension between the two groups. US begins to provide military training and aid through arms, air support and intelligence. On April 7, 2017, Trump and carried out a military attack on Syrian forces for their use of chemical weapons against civilians.

Discussion

| Conflict | Level of Analysis | US and Russia's level of co-operation |
|-------------|-------------------|---|
| Ukraine | Ideological | Poor (USA were pro Ukraine, Russia were anti-Ukraine) |
| | Economic | Poor (Increase in sanctions) |
| | Military | Poor (USA provided funding for Ukraine, Russia attacked Ukraine) |
| Afghanistan | Ideological | Strong (Both anti-Taliban) |
| | Economic | Medium (Increase in talks) |
| | Military | Medium (Strong cooperation) |
| Syria | Ideological | Poor (USA were pro-Rebel, Russia were pro-Assad) |
| | Economic | Poor (Sanctions and decrease in economic relations) |
| | Military | Poor (USA support Syrian Democratic Forces, Russia supports Assad Regime) |

Figure 1. Table summarizing Russian and US cooperation across four different levels of analysis.

Figure 3.3. U.S.-Russia Trade, Million US\$ vs. Political Cycle, 2000–2016



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Russia," Foreign Trade, last modified June 29, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c4621.html> (see data for 2000–2016); author's evaluation of political and economic data.

Figure 2. Russian and US trade throughout periods of conflict. ¹

¹ *Russia's Economic Ties to the Middle East*. Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020, Available at <www.csis.org/analysis/russia-middle-east-part-two>



Figure 3. Russian and US economic growth throughout 21st century.²

The first aspect of the case studies that we can notice is that the economic and military policies/assistance have hardly been the cause or the solution of conflicts between the nations. Military and economic actions have been taken in reaction to sentiments of threat and loss in power. As we have seen throughout Figure 2, the early 2000s, during periods of cooperation over Afghanistan, as well during the Obama-Medvedev reset we saw relative prosperity, but with the rise of the Syrian conflict in 2011 and the Ukrainian conflict we saw a complete regression in trade between the two nations. Both the Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts resulted in a series of economic sanctions and actions taken by each nation against the other and the Russian/US level of bilateral trade between these periods were relatively low. Overall, these sanctions despite, the significant effects it had on relationships between the two nations did relatively little to influence

² 2020 World Data, The World Bank. Available at <<https://data.worldbank.org/>>

the actions of the other nation and overall failed in resolving of the conflict. Furthermore, Figure 3 indicates that, while there is a correlation between the increase from 2011 to 2015 and the decrease of Russian economic growth, the rise in economic growth starting after 2015 indicates that their economies are not necessarily co-dependant on each other. The economic growth of each country has very little correlation with the trade relationship between the two. In fact, the downfall of the US and Russian relations came at points when their economic growth was relatively strong, indicating that positive economic relationships between the two nations does not influence actions taken by the other.

Military intervention has been seen to have a similar effect on the overall ability to resolve conflicts and it is evident that military involvement from both nations is not sufficient in resolving conflicts. In the cases of both Ukraine and Syria, Russia and the US invested a significant number of resources both in technological equipment, on ground troops and weaponry, but actions taken by U.S. did very little to deter aggression. Furthermore, it is important that military actions between both nations have never been targeted at each other directly and therefore there is in general very little motivation to cooperate militarily between the two. What Afghanistan does teach us is how military cooperation between the two may have positive effects on the situation as a whole. The US troops within Afghanistan and the support of Russia was met with a period of relative peace and successfully dispelled the Taliban from a large portion of Afghanistan. Military action, despite its success in Afghanistan, did not prove to have a long-standing impact on Russian and US relationships and was only used to counter one another. With that being said, military intervention holds a relatively stronger symbolic meaning than economic policy or sanctions will ever be due to the threat on human life. Both nations while not necessarily engaging in violent combat with each other, commit many military actions

that specifically escalate global conflicts. These military actions have a snowballing effect and are more prominent throughout the conflict than economic actions, as we can see through the many special military operations and technological warfare that occurs throughout periods of conflict.

Instead, what this case studies have demonstrated is that the main tensions that arise between the nations are ideological and the main cause of continued actions in the conflict continuous ideologic differences. The United States through its actions and speeches, has attempted to take the role of the global peacekeeper promoting its liberal ideologies throughout many of these conflicts. Their main involvement in conflicts and inability to cooperate with Russia stem from the liberal stance they take which promotes democratization, interdependence, peace, free market etc. In Ukraine, the U. S's opposition of Russia, commenced with the support of the Ukrainian Orange Revolution. In Syria we saw how the US opposed Russian support for the Assad regime do to its authoritative character and its violations of natural rights. On the other hand, Russia has taken a very anti-West view to global politics, and ultimately feels a threat from the prevalence of the West. Both conflicts can be perceived by Russia as an attempt to impose westernized views on the rest of the world as well as limit Russia's sphere of influence. Russia does not attempt to play the role of global peacekeeper like the U.S. does. Instead, they are much more nationally, and power focused. Despite possible external influences on their actions, both the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts can be perceived as actions taken for national security and Russian policy does not reflect the same global peacekeeping objective as the United States. Whereas US throughout these cases have been focused primarily on achieving global peace and ensuring westernized morality, Russian is much less. Furthermore, the Afghanistan civil war indicates how Russia is not unwilling to cooperate with US or the westernized world.

Creating Peaceful Relations

In line with Ivan A. Safranchuk's belief that to reconcile Russian and US relationship they must eliminate non-material/ideological disagreements; this paper demonstrated the strong inefficiencies of solely focusing on military and economic objectives between the two nations. Finding commonalities amongst the two is important but does not necessarily guarantee longstanding cooperation. Each nation is intent on maintaining its status as a superpower and as a result is unafraid of opposing the other. What we may infer from the history and nature of each conflict is that neither nation is unwilling to give up their full ideology for that of the other. While ideology is at the forefront of these conflicts, nations with regards to their ideologies have shown the ability either compromise or accept aspects of the other in order to ensure a more peaceful society. Of the three case studies, the only one relatively successful in both momentarily resolving the conflict and creating peace between the two nations was the US and Russian cooperation throughout the Afghanistan civil. This can be accredited to both nations desire to combat the rise of terrorism. A similar case occurred in Syria with their cooperation over the use of prohibiting the use of chemical weapons. Focusing on the cooperation on goals that are mutually beneficial, such as nuclear arms control and counter terrorism, throughout these conflicts have proven to be the only way to ensure cooperation from both nations. With these ideological goals cannot be forgotten about or overturned by other acts. They will never be able to reach a state where both nation is completely satisfied with the actions of the other but to build greater cooperation and ability to tackle problems, they must constantly be willing to cooperate with each other and make ideological compromises. This policy will most likely need to be pursued by the US, as they have chosen to take a more international approach whereas Russia has taken a much more national one. Understanding superpower relationships purely on an

economic and military bases is insufficient in creating long lasting peace between the nations, but ameliorated economic and military relations may be a very positive outcome of cooperation on the ideological front.

Conclusion

Throughout these three cases studies we can analyse how Russian and US relationships have influenced international conflicts in the 21st century. All three studies show the inefficiencies of conflict resolution without compromising on an ideological level. Russian and U.S. have been portrayed, since their emergence as global superpowers, as opponents on the global stage. With there are similar qualities in both countries with regards to their actions and stubbornness in their ideologies. The main means that have been used by the nations to attempt to create a peaceful society has been measures and treaties that focus on arms control. These treaties have proven to largely be ineffective due to the lack of ability to enforce any law and the overall antagonistic character of their relation. Therefore, new approaches to the relationship must be evaluated to determine how to achieve an overall peaceful global order. Therefore, the military and economic actions taken by both countries are purely seen as reactionary. When targeted collectively such as in Afghanistan they have proven to be relatively effective in resolving international conflicts but in the case of Ukraine and Syria, military actions against the other have a negative effect on the ability of the nations to resolve the conflict at all. The main fuel for each conflict has been when one of the two nations feel threatened. In all the conflicts, any sense of threat has been met by both countries with action.

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