**Has the New World Order Finally Arrived?**

*Richard Sakwa*

University of Kent

Twenty-five years after the Cold War ended in 1989, Europe in 2014 once again entered a period of deep confrontation and division. For some, this represents the onset of a New Cold War, a period of entrenched confrontation accompanied by the rhetorical condemnation of the opponent.[[1]](#footnote-1) Others are rather more sceptical, arguing that the appropriation of the term ‘cold war’ is an abuse of history and misunderstands the realities of the present situation in Russia.[[2]](#footnote-2) It is clear that elements of cold war have returned to Europe, including the militarisation of the frontier between NATO and Russia in the Baltic, military exercises to prepare for conflict between the two, a nuclear stand-off based on the classic postulates of deterrence (above all mutually-assured destruction, MAD), accompanied by intense propaganda designed to delegitimate and undermine the other.

The 25 years of the cold peace between 1989 and 2014 failed to resolve any of the fundamental problems of European security. For Russia, NATO enlargement represented not only a betrayal of the verbal assurances given at the time of German unification that the alliance would not move ‘one inch to the East’ of the former East German territory, but above all a pointless provocation that only intensified the security dilemma that it was intended to avert. For the Atlantic powers, the enlargement of the zone of peace and security could only ultimately work to Moscow’s benefit, avoiding a return to the endless inter-war conflicts between small states and the tensions between the great powers. By contrast, Russia considered the Concert of Europe established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 as the golden age of European diplomacy, and one of the most pacific periods in its history.

 It is clear that elements of the Cold War have been restored, but that only describes part of the current situation. The New Cold War is only part of a broader shift in international politics, and thus does reflect the deeper dynamic at work. The renewed division of Europe is only a relatively minor, and undoubtedly archaic, part of a global shift in the balance of power and ideology. Something far bigger than a New Cold War is taking place, and it is the aim of this paper to explore some of the parameters of the shifting contours of global politics.

 There can be many different levels of analysis to examine these shifts. First, the focus could be on the structural shift of economic power from the Atlantic to the Pacific basin. In particular, the return of China as one of the world’s top economic powers cannot but change the structure of global power. China has now emerged as the only potential peer competitor to American hegemony, and for that reason John Mearsheimer predicts that the two will inevitably come into conflict. The US will do everything in its power to contain China’s rise, while China will consistently push back against the US in the South China Sea and elsewhere.[[3]](#footnote-3) Second, if the focus is on brute military power, then those who dismiss ‘declinist’ interpretations of America’s status are undoubtedly right. The US remains overwhelmingly the predominant global power, and this is unlikely to change soon.[[4]](#footnote-4) Third approach could focus on ideational factors, including the emergence of social movements dissatisfied with the neo-liberal hegemony established since the 1980s. Often described as a ‘populist’ challenge, Ernesto Laclau is right to note that in conditions of political closure, populism becomes the vernacular in which new ideas can be articulated to challenge the failings of the ruling system.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**New world orders**

All these approaches, and many others, are valid, but they tend to reduce complex global interactions to a single range of determinants. While structural theories tend to denigrate the role of agency, the clash of ideas, and the ability of leaders to shape outcomes; social movement theories tend towards the opposite fault, focusing on volitional factors while under-playing the structural factors which constrain and often shape the behaviour of actors. The notion of ‘world order’ is an attempt to combine structural and behavioural approaches. A notable example is the book by H. G. Wells, published in January 1940, called *The New World Order*, calling for the nations of the world to unite on the basis of a legal system based on human rights to advance world peace.

 In particular, this paper focuses on the notion of ‘new world order (NWO)’. It could justifiably be argued that the notion of a ‘new world order’ is as anachronistic and misleading as the notion of a New Cold War. Applied in a mechanical way, the charge is undoubtedly correct. However, in this paper I will argue that the notion helps capture the tension between multiple projects being applied in Europe since 1989, and thus help explain how the continent is once again divided. Although focused on Europe, the analysis has broader applicability to the shifts in global politics. I will argue that a number of NWOs today are in competition, in both the spatial and temporal dimensions. These are struggles over space (especially sharp in the European ‘borderlands’ between Russia and the Atlantic alliance), and also over ideational projects that operate in the temporal dimension, advancing specific interpretations of history while proposing defined projects for the future.

*New World Order 1*

The term ‘new world order’ was first used in contemporary international relations in Mikhail Gorbachev’s landmark speech to the UN on 7 December 1988. He effectively declared the Cold War over, and went on to argue: ‘Further world progress is now possible only through the search for a consensus of all mankind towards a new world order’. He outlined what could be called a ‘dialogical view of international affairs: ‘It is a question of cooperation that could be more accurately called "co-creation" and "co-development." The formula of development "at another's expense" is becoming outdated’. He went on to stress the importance of ‘freedom of choice’ and the ‘de-ideologisation of interstate relations’.[[6]](#footnote-6) The speech was a powerful representation of what by then was called the ‘new political thinking (NPT)’, and was developed in Gorbachev’s book published the previous year.[[7]](#footnote-7) The NPT was itself the product of a long period of intellectual gestation in Soviet intellectual life, notably in the various institutes of the Academy of Sciences.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The NPT represented a radical repudiation of the classical Marxist-Leninist foundations of Soviet foreign policy. Among the many postulates that were jettisoned was the view that the capitalist states were inherently aggressive and militaristic, a view that may have been tempered rather too precipitously. A few months after his UN speech, Gorbachev delivered his landmark ‘common European home’ speech at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 6 July 1989. His emphasis on the creation of a single political community from Lisbon to Vladivostok is rightly noted, but it should not be forgotten that he also stressed ideological pluralism and the co-existence of states with different social systems. In other words, he was calling for a new world order that was not ideologically homogenous but pluralistic and diverse. He called for ‘a restructuring of the international order existing in Europe that would put the European common values in the forefront and make it possible to replace the traditional balance of forces with a balance of interests’.[[9]](#footnote-9)

A few months later the communist systems in Eastern Europe crumbled, mostly peacefully in various ‘velvet revolutions’. A certain representation of the old order of Yalta-Potsdam was repudiated. The Malta summit between the American president H. W. Bush and Gorbachev of December 1990 tried to make sense of it all. Focusing on the future of the two Germanys, the meeting was followed in later months by controversial discussions over whether a united Germany would join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in whole or in part.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Malta summit represents the symbolic end of the Cold War.[[11]](#footnote-11) The old bloc politics was dissolving and it seemed that everything was possible. The promise of 1989 for Gorbachev and later Russian leaders was an entirely new logic of power in Europe and the world. It appeared that there was a unique opportunity to overcome not only the specific forms of Cold War confrontation but to transcend the logic of ideological conflict that had given rise to it in the first place. This would allow the unification of the continent as a political community of free nations, while transforming the quality of global affairs and the character of the international system.

Although Gorbachev became the most prominent exponent of this model of the new world order, the idea is far bigger than his formulation of new political thinking. We have noted the importance of the intellectual ferment of the pre-perestroika years. Elsewhere, in the West various peace and other social movements also called for a politics that could transcend sterile and dangerous divisions in Europe and across the globe. In the context, these ‘idealist’ views were in fact substantively realist, since the hyper-realism that was formalised in the conventions of the Cold War had become increasingly dysfunctional and damaging. This is why the Non-Aligned Movements since the 1950s, various social movements in the 1960s, and the push for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s also fed into a politics of transcendence.

Although realist thinkers in Russia feel uncomfortable to be part of any tradition that involves Gorbachev, since he is held responsible for weakening the Soviet Union in international affairs and ultimately for creating the conditions for the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991, nevertheless the ‘idealism’ of NWO1 became and remains a potent in Russian foreign policy thinking to this day. This takes two main forms. At the end of the Cold War Russia was offered associate membership of an existing enterprise, the Historic West, but Russia’s enduring aspiration was to become a founder member of a transformed Greater West. Post-Communist Russia’s membership of the transformed community would have provided a benign framework for Russia’s domestic transformation, while removing the institutional and ideational structures of the Cold War. Fearing normative dilution, institutional incoherence and a weakening of American leadership and its commitment to the defence of Europe, such a transformation was rejected. The response from Russia could have been anticipated. As a recent report by the Rand Corporation puts it, ‘Although Russia initially sought to integrate into the Western system in the early 1990s, … Russian leaders and analysts see the current international order as dominated by the United States and as a threat to Russian interests and security’.[[12]](#footnote-12) It was not so much that Russia rejected the values-based system enshrined in the 1990 Paris Charter of Paris for a New Europe, but feared that values had become interests in the context of the dynamics of enlargement. This sentiment was expressed by Sergei Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, when he argued in a landmark article that the West had long been the source of existential threat to Russia in a way that the East had never been. Western Europe in Lavrov’s view tried to impose its will and way of life on Russia, and thereby deny the Russian people their identity.[[13]](#footnote-13)

This is why Russia sough to transform the monist and axiological logic of EU enlargement into a more dialogical process. Instead, Russia was offered a ‘strategic partnership’ with the smaller or core Europe, as institutionalised in the EU, in which the norms and institutions of the EU would predominate. Instead, Russia always favoured the transformative and pluralistic creation of a Greater Europe (the current term of the common European home), in which it would be at its origins a founder and core member. The idea of Greater Europe displaces the monist idea of the EU as the sole representative of Europe in favour of a more plural model, in which the EU would be part of a broader pan-European community. Both the Greater West and Greater Europe ideas are based on a dialogical approach to politics – the view that engagement transforms both subjects. Instead, the West tried to stay the same and enlarge; while Russia was to change to reflect the assumed new power and normative realities.[[14]](#footnote-14) Instead, Lavrov argued that Russia had long been an integral part of Europe and had no intention of becoming an outsider to European politics. Previous attempts to unite Europe without Russia had failed, and they would again today. The continent would only be at peace when Russia, on its own terms, took its proper place at the European table.[[15]](#footnote-15)

*New World Order 2*

Gorbachev’s urge to transcend the Cold War was countered by a very different model advanced by Bush senior. He outlined his ideas in a speech on 31 May 1989 in Mainz, where he talked of a ‘Europe whole and free’. He argued that ‘The forces of freedom are putting the Soviet status quo on the defensive. And in the West we have succeeded because we’ve been faithful to our values and our vision. And on the other side of the rusting Iron Curtain, their vision failed’. In this way he reinserted the logic of victory and defeat into the Cold War end game, something that Gorbachev and the Soviet leadership had explicitly repudiated, considering it a common victory for all. Bush insisted that ‘The Cold War began with the division of Europe. It can only end when Europe is whole’. He repudiated the transformation agenda and instead advanced a programme based on enlargement. At the core of this was the proposal to ‘strengthen and broaden the Helsinki process to promote free elections and political pluralism in Eastern Europe. As the forces of freedom and democracy rise in the East, so should our expectations. And weaving together the slender threads of freedom in the East will require much from the Western democracies’.[[16]](#footnote-16) This represented a powerful vision of European unity, but it was based on the extension of an existing order rather than the transformation of that order. This introduced the logic of monism, including the reduction of ‘the political’, defined as the open-ended agonistic debate over issues of common concern. Dialogical transformation gave way to monist enlargement.

 Bush used the term ‘new world order’ for the first time in his address to the US Congress on 11 September 1990. While normatively congruent with the vision of world order advanced by Gorbachev, the emphasis was rather different. He stressed that there was ‘no substitute for US leadership’, which in the context of the crisis in the Gulf as a result of Iraq’s seizure of Kuwait was understandable, but he insisted that even in those ‘troubled times’ a

new world order -- can emerge: a new era -- freer from the threat of terror, stronger in the pursuit of justice, and more secure in the quest for peace. An era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony. A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today that new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we've known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. A world in which nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The old order born of the Yalta summit in February1945 was irrevocably shattered, but in the first Gulf War the US and Soviet leaders came together to chart what Bush called the ‘new world order’. It was clear that the USSR, and later Russia, would play a subaltern role in this system. The fundamental dynamic was enlargement rather than transformation.

 This was the view enshrined in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, adopted on 21 November 1990. It heralded ‘a new era of democracy, peace and unity’, stressing that ‘Europe is liberating itself from its past’.[[18]](#footnote-18) The focus was on the temporal challenge – overcoming the past; but the new spatial order entailed the logic of enlargement. The human rights agenda of Helsinki was appropriated into the enlarging power system, effectively rendering human rights an instrument in power politics. This is not to deny the importance of human rights, but when appropriated in this way they were in danger of becoming instrumentalised. This was especially the case when the Atlantic system at the heart of NWO2 combined the normative system represented by the EU, and the power system of NATO, with the US at its core. The NWO2, as stressed above, represented a particular power and normative constellation that formed at the end of the Cold War, and represented a partial appropriation and a partial repudiation of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. The human rights agenda became primary, whereas the confirmation of the Yalta state system of ideological plurality and interest-based politics was repudiated.

In the end, it was this logic meant that Russia and the EU failed to find an adequate balance in their relationship. Enlargement meant that the subjectivity of the other was taken as temporary until it was subsumed into the expanding project of ‘Europeanisation’ – itself a strange term that appropriated the universal concept of Europe to the particularistic ambitions of the EU. It is hardly surprising that in the end, in the absence of the traditional diplomatic framework, the relationship broke down.[[19]](#footnote-19)

**The clash of orders: from cold peace to New Cold War**

The NWO1 model is based on transformation, whereas NWO2 is based on the very different logic of enlargement. This is not the place to trace the enlargement of NATO and the EU, but both processes in the end generated resistance in Russia. There were plenty of well-advertised warnings about the consequences of NATO enlargement, and most have come to pass – notably in the form of a deepening security dilemma, where measures to increase the security of one side is perceived detrimental to the other, which responds in ways which intensified the initial dilemma. As for the EU, the logic of enlargement (although not necessarily accompanied by accession) reflected the monist view that it was the only legitimate normative power on the continent. This meant that the EU effectively was unable to engage in ‘inter-national’ relations with the substantive political subjectivity of ‘the other’, which became the object of a directed process of change to render the other more in conformity with the original. This is the essence of monist enlargement, and weakens the impetus for dialogical transformation.

 While the enlargement of the Atlantic system was not intended to marginalise Russia, its structural logic did precisely that. The same applies, in a different way, to the EU. The various mitigation measures – notably the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations of May 1997 and the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in May 2002, and the various partnership strategies with the EU – in the end turned out to be little more than sticking plaster and were unable to alleviate the underlying causes of separation.

The dialogical processes at the heart of NWO1, notably the transformation of the Historic West into a Greater West based on an inclusive security regime, and the transformation of the smaller EU-centred Europe into a Greater Europe, represents a powerful normative vision of a possible post-Cold War peace order. While the NPT has been subject to radical condemnation in Russia, and its practices as conducted by Gorbachev are certainly open to critique, its fundamental principle of a transformed global order endure in various ways to this day. Equally, the values at the heart of NWO2, notably human rights and a ‘Europe whole and free’ based on international law and rules, is also obviously normatively attractive.

If that is indeed the case, then how can we explain the breakdown, signalled long before 2014 in the tensions of the cold peace? At least three factors can be identified. The first is the failure to create an overarching ‘mode of reconciliation’ between the two contrasting visions of post-Cold War security in Europe, and in general, their different representations of world order itself. The various ideas to create some sort of European security council under the aegis of the OSCE were firmly rejected by the Atlantic powers, considering that this would have represented a reconstitution of the Yalta-Potsdam system, giving Russia veto rights in the new European security order. This would have run firmly against the logic of enlargement, which is premised on the homogenisation of political space. Equally, neo-Gaullist ideas about establishing some sort of over-arching pan-European ‘union of unions’, encompassing the entirety of Europe’s 800 million people, was given short shrift, since it would have decentred Brussels. It was assumed that Moscow’s logic in advancing such ideas was to drive a ‘wedge’ between the two wings of the Atlantic system. This may well have been the effect, but the normative intent was based on the ideas advanced in NWO1. The fact that two normative systems came into confrontation only added to the intensity of the conflict.

The second factor is the radicalisation of NWO2. This is a function of the typical pathologies of a unipolar system. Soon after 1945 the Cold War had stabilised as a bipolar system, but the Soviet collapse allowed the US to emerge as the single power in a unipolar system. The maintenance of its unrivalled supremacy, as the theory of offensive realism posits, became a goal in itself. This in the end led to ‘over-balancing’ against a threat from Russia that did not exist, but which the very process of over-balancing helped bring into existence. Over-balancing was encouraged by most of the former Soviet bloc communist states, exacerbating the security dilemma that ultimately came to threaten their security. The idealism of NWO1 was condemned not only as unworkable, but also as a threat to the US-led liberal international order and as ‘appeasement’ of Russia.

The ideology of American supremacy was formalised in the neo-conservative Programme for a New American Century (PNAC) and other statements. It was thereafter radicalised as the liberal internationalists joined forces with neo-conservatives in a programme of democracy promotion and regime change. This gave rise to ‘transdemocracy’ – the combination of security and democracy within the framework of democratic peace theory. If democracies indeed do not go to war with each other, then it made sense to create as many democracies as possible, and thereby ensure American security. This harshly realist strategy thus became bound up with liberal interventionism and democracy promotion. Thus the liberal international order repudiated the pluralism that had once been characteristic of liberalism, while generating conflicts that in the end precipitated state failure in Iraq and Libya, and engulfed Syria and Ukraine in conflict.

The third factor is the re-emergence of Russia as a global actor. In the 1990s Russia’s concerns about NATO enlargement and US intervention in the various Balkan conflicts could be safely ignored. However, as Russia’s benefitted from windfall commodity prices in the 2000s and the revived Russian state’s ability to extract rents, the Kremlin was in a position to challenge the practices of NWO2. The process was a gradual one, but had been signalled from the very beginning. It was after all Boris Yeltsin who in December 1994 had used the term ‘cold peace’, indicating Russia’s dissatisfaction with NWO2 even at this early stage. When Yevgeny Primakov took over as foreign minister in January 1996, he articulated the desire for multipolarity, and advanced the idea of a RIC (Russia, India and China) alignment to resist American unipolarity though the strategy of competitive peaceful coexistence. On coming to power in 2000, Putin believed he could do better, and in his typical manner sought to reconcile competing viewpoints. His policy of new realism, which sought to subordinate foreign policy to the goal of economic development and modernisation, endured until 2012, although with declining conviction. The litany of Russian complaints grew ever-longer, including America’s unilateral abrogation of the 1972 ABM treaty in 2002, the lack of significant strategic cooperation following Russia’ s alignment in the ‘war on terror’ after 9/11, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the various ‘colour revolutions’, the ‘big bang’ NATO and EU enlargements of 2004, as well as the ballistic missile defence (BMD) programme and the later announcement of BMD deployment in Poland and the Czech Republic. Putin’s Muich Secrity Conference speech in February 2007 outlined his grievances. This did not prevent him advancing a successor in 2008, but even this was not enough to temper the perceived aggressiveness of NWO2, notably over Libya in 2011.

On returning to power in 2012, Putin was in a militant mood. His return marked the beginning of the period of neo-revisionism – an assertive posture that sought to push back against American unilateralism. Neo-revisionism does not repudiate the normative framework of international society as it has developed since 1945, but it does repudiate the practices of NWO2 as they have been practiced since 1989. This entailed the acceleration of Eurasian integration efforts, giving rise to the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. It also entailed cultural and political resistance to transdemocracy, which in the end precipitated the conflict in Ukraine in 2013-14. Neo-revisionism does not entail the reconstitution of a ‘Russian empire’ or even the Soviet Union, but it does assert historical and political pluralism. In other words, despite Putin’s reputation as a hard-headed realist, up to 2012 he remained loyal to some version of NWO1. However, the failure to achieve anything substantive within its framework, to create some sort of reconciliatory framework between NWO1 and NWO2, the world moved into the new territory of new world order 3, a period fraught with dangers of outright war, but also with the possibility of finessing the wars that typically accompany the shift from one model of global order to another.

**New World Order 3**

Before delineating the features of NWO3, a brief word about my understanding of the structure of the international system is in order. Drawing on English School ideas, the international system as it has developed since at least 1945 can be represented as a two-level system. At the top are what English School scholars call the ‘secondary institutions’ of international society, notably the UN, the framework of international law, the institutions of international economic governance, and the normative framework of such conventions as the prohibition on genocide and Responsibility to Protect. The lower level is comprised by the anarchical ‘society of states’, governed in English School thinking by the rules of war, great powers, diplomacy, the balance of power, and international law, all regulated by the mutual recognition of the sovereignty of states. The lower level can be understood in a ‘pluralistic’ sense, with little in common between states, and in a more ‘solidaristic’ version in which common rules acquire a more substantive character. English School thinkers sought to steer a middle way between the harsh realism of what Martin Wight called the Hobbesian tradition, and the idealist revolutionism of the Kantians, based ion the idea of a world society. This middle way was considered rationalist and was based on the thinking of Hugo Grotius.[[20]](#footnote-20)

 For our purposes, this two-level system can be mapped on to Russian representations of neo-revisionism. Russia remains committed to the normative framework of top-level international society (in keeping with its residual commitment to NWO1), but it resists the claims of the US-led liberal international order, as formulated in the practices of NWO2. In other words, NWO3 emerges as a binary system, in which Russia (along with China and other states) remain committed to the independence of the normative order of international society, but repudiate the claims of the liberal world order to be synonymous with order itself (the ultimately hubristic and counter-productive claim of NWO2). China, for example, in the recent period has emerged as the champion of economic globalisation, even as America under Donald J. Trump began to step away from its traditional globalism. The coalition of Russia and China represents an anti-hegemonic alignment in defence of the autonomy of top level international society. This is not an anti-American bloc, let alone an anti-western axis, but simply the emergence of an alternative world order based on traditional notions of multipolarity. Although the states in NWO3 are uniformly committed to the maintenance of state sovereignty, they are ready to dilute sovereignty at the vertical level with the secondary institutions of international society, and even to a degree to share sovereignty with partners in the anti-hegemonic alignment. This latter aspect remains to date largely a potential, even though these states share membership in such bodies as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the BRICs association. All this, in the view of Oliver Stuenkel, represents the emergence of the ‘post-western’ world.[[21]](#footnote-21)

 The central claim of NWO3 is that the US-led liberal international order is not synonymous with order itself. In other words, the international system is made up of a developing network of distinct orders, to create what Trine Flockhart calls a ‘multi-order world’.[[22]](#footnote-22) In that context, Russia has put itself at the head of a critique of the West. In part, this reprises its tradition view that it represents the ‘true Europe’, against an actual Europe that has allegedly repudiated its traditional values.[[23]](#footnote-23) Although ideational issues are important, the structural view ultimately rejects this interpretation of Russian behaviour. Instead, the focus, as in English School thinking, is the attempt to define a rationalist path between the liberal word order’s extraordinary combination of neo-conservative Hobbesian power politics and Kantian revolutionary liberal interventionism.

 NWO3 represents the partial repudiation of the idealism of the first version, the belief that a cooperative new security can be built, that the UN would emerge with enhanced status and authority, and that Europe would really be able to build some sort of common community across its whole territory from Lisbon to Vladivostok. But NWO3 also represents the beginning of the unravelling of NWO2, the era in which a monist conception of ‘Europe whole and free’ predominated, in which a Brussels-centric version of Europe was overlain by an American-led security system. This was the era of unipolarity and the US-led liberal international order. In NWO3 a series of changes are becoming apparent.

 First, Russia has given up on any serious belief that a cooperative and substantive relationship can be established with the Atlantic system and the powers of which it is comprised. Existing relations will be maintained, as with the EU, and opportunities for improvement will be seized, as possibly with France under Emmanuel Macron, but this does not signal the sort of deep relationship that was envisaged in 1989 within the framework of NWO1. Instead, Russia and China have created an anti-hegemonic alignment to resist the unipolarity and normative monism of NWO2. As my model of the international system suggests, both Russia and China remain committed to the normative values and sovereignty-sharing of top-level international society (the vertical level), but repudiate the tutelage and hegemonic ambitions of what used to be called ‘the West’ (the horizontal level). In this conception, the nascent NWO3 is pluralist, inclusive, developmental and post-western. From this perspective, not only is order without western hegemony possible, it is a far more substantive and dynamic form of order. Its proponents argue that it restores a healthier balance of power into the international system, tempering the militaristic and aggressive impulses of the hegemonic powers that had been left unchecked in the post-Cold War era of NWO2.

 Second, even in the US the exaggerated Atlanticism of NWO2 had long been questioned. Barack Obama was seriously critical of the primacy of the European vector in US foreign policy, and this was why he launched the ‘pivot to the East’. In keeping with classic realist views, China’s emergence as a peer competitor had to be contained, and thus the old post-war policy of the primacy of Europe should give way to the management of Asian challenges. As far as he was concerned, Europe no longer represented a security challenge, and thus it could manage its own affairs rather more (while also contributing more to its own defence). What he had not taken into account is that NWO2 had generated so many potential conflict points, some of which were directly generated by US actions (the installation of BMD systems, the encouragement of Eastern European over-balancing, and above all, the fundamental drive for Atlantic enlargement) that the US could not simply walk away, while the Europeans in the 25 years of the cold peace (and the 45 years of the Cold War) had become so used to the American security umbrella that they had lost the ability to think critically and independently in security matters. The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 was a clear signal that the pathologies of NWO2 were generating conflict, and was obvious that unless a substantial policy corrective was applied, that Ukraine would be the next flashpoint. Instead, the EU radicalised its policy in the form of the Eastern Partnership and ploughed on regardless, provoking the greatest security crisis in Europe since the end of the Cold War.[[24]](#footnote-24)

 While Obama’s policy represented a calibrated shift of emphasis, his successor, Donald J. Trump, potentially signalled a change of policy. Trump’s conservative neo-isolationist strategy downplayed the promotion of American values through democracy promotion, and placed less emphasis on multilateral institutions.[[25]](#footnote-25) This ‘new thinking’ raised hopes in Moscow for some sort of rapprochement with Washington, based on a common repudiation of NWO2. Trump certainly had no time for any of the ideas contained in NWO1, and instead reached back to the pre-Atlanticist era, and thus jettisoned the whole Wilsonian tradition in US foreign policy. He therefore repudiated the old bipartisan policy of US ‘leadership’, supported by the neoconservatives and liberal interventionists alike, in favour of American ‘greatness’. Trump expressed the view that ‘NATO is obsolete and it’s extremely expensive for the United States, disproportionately so’, and ‘it should be readjusted to deal with terrorism’.[[26]](#footnote-26) He later warned that he would only assist European nations during a Russian invasion if they first ‘fulfilled their obligations to us’. He also noted that the US had ‘to fix our own mess before trying to alter the behaviour of other nations’: ‘I don’t think we have the right to lecture’. He also insisted that ‘America first’ was a ‘brand-new, modern term’, and did not signal isolationism of the sort advocated by Charles Lindbergh’s America First Committee before the US entered the Second World War.[[27]](#footnote-27) Above all, candidate Trump adopted a radical position:

We desire to live peacefully and in friendship with Russia. … We have serious differences … But we are not bound to be adversaries. We should seek common ground based on shared interests. Russia, for instance, has also seen the horror of Islamic terrorism. I believe an easing of tensions and improved relations with Russia – from a position of strength – are possible. Common sense says this cycle of hostility must end. Some say the Russians won’t be reasonable. I intend to find out. If we can’t make a good deal for America, then we will quickly walk from the table.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In the event, Trump was subject to an unprecedented attack by defenders of the old Atlanticism, which used Russia as a stick to beat him not only for his wavering on post-war US globalism and weakened commitment to Atlanticism, but also to destroy his presidency as a whole.

 The third development shaping NWO3 is the EU’s growing awareness that it had to take increased responsibility for its own security. In the first instance this meant intensified discussions about bolstering the Common Foreign and Security Policy, accompanied even by talk of a stronger autonomous military identity. The EU’s *Global Strategy* of June 2016 dropped all talk of a partnership with Russia, and instead talked about ‘strategic autonomy’ while strengthening its links with NATO.[[29]](#footnote-29) Many of the suggested areas of cooperation were sensible, but the document and later discussions focused on the operational level, and failed to think about ways that the EU could contribute to shaping a more benign security environment for the continent as a whole. Instead, the various countries reacted to Trump’s various *démarches* with anger and resentment, but only slowly did the realisation begin to dawn that the whole epoch of NWO2 was coming to an end. For a decade the EU had been consumed by the Euro and Greek debt crises, the mass influx of migrants and then by Brexit, but unless it could gain genuine strategic and political autonomy in dealing with the big issues facing the continent, it was doomed not only to marginalisation but also to irrelevance.

This provided an opportunity for a fundamental re-evaluation of relations with Russia. Certain leading EU politicians in Italy and France had long understood that some sort of neo-Gaullist continental strategy was required, but the German leadership of Angela Merkel remained a stubborn defender of NWO2. As long as she led the country, sanctions would remain in place and relations with Russia would continue to be seen through the prism of Ukraine; a disastrous stance for Europe, and probably not very helpful in the long run for Ukraine as well. Merkel was enraged by Trump’s mercantilist policies, notably in the planned imposition of new sanctions in June 2017 that would damage the prospects for Nord Steam 2. More broadly, the enlargement dynamic at the heart of NWO2 had mostly run its course. The EaP had turned into a rather banal attempt to engage in geopolitics without the necessary instruments or even convictions. The revised European Neighbourhood Policy now talked of ‘differentiation’ and reflected a belated awareness that the EU was dealing with a range of very different countries in its ‘neighbourhood’.[[30]](#footnote-30)

The fourth change is the emergence of a range of political movements and leaders who sought to re-engage with the substantive issues raised by NWO1. It was clear that the radicalised Atlanticism of NWO2, accompanied by damaging over-balancing pushed by vengeful Eastern Europeans and their allies in Washington and London, had inflicted enormous damage on European security, while the EU institutions in Brussels also fostered a type of normative rage against Russia that further damaged trust and the ability to engage in normal diplomatic intercourse. The response in the UK was Brexit, with the country walking away from problems that it had in part caused. On the other hand, the Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn represented precisely the old peace movement that had fed into the original new thinking of the perestroika years, and in that sense we can argue that the present epoch represents a reconnection of concerns from ‘Gorby to Corby’. The various ‘populist’ movements in Europe also in part repudiated the political stagnation inherent in NWO2, and looked for new democratic and political openings.

**Conclusion**

The various models of world order presented above represents a type of temporal sequencing, while recognising that these three ‘new world orders’ are also superimposed on each. In other words, they are both sequential and synchronous: representing a progression over time; while at the same acting as sedimentary overlays in a diachronous manner. The three models are ideal types, accentuating the differences while under playing the elements of continuity, yet they provide a stark political topography of the recent period of European history. As heuristic devices, they not only provide a framework for periodisation but also expose the dynamic elements of each period. They act as political programmes, with each outlining in its own way a particular model of international politics.

 The first model, NWO1, is based of the logic of transformation, and this carries an enormous normative, and even utopian, charge. Its most powerful expression was the new political thinking of the Gorbachev era, driven by a belief that the Cold War had run its course in geopolitical terms, but also that it represented an anachronistic form of politics. Although the notion of globalisation only became predominant after 1989, NWO1 was premised on the idea that states and social movements were entering into a period of great fluidity, and that technological developments in communications, transport and human movements and interactions meant opened up the possibility for ‘the transformation of political community’, as Andrew Linklater put it.[[31]](#footnote-31) NWO1 was the product of a long period of gestation in the Soviet Union, but it reflected broader global shifts, including the emergence of new social movements demanding greater political representation through more imaginative and dialogical forms of politics. These issues remain on the agenda, and in certain respects the 25 years of the cold peace was also a way of suppressing political demands within western societies.

NWO2 predominated between 1989 and 2014, a quarter century of unrestrained Atlantic predominance. The operating logic here was enlargement, based on the belief that the particular historical experience of certain western societies had universal application. The US-led liberal international order effectively claimed to be the embodiment of order itself. This inevitably brought this Atlantic system into conflict with the genuine universality and impartiality of the top-level institutions of international society. Not surprisingly, Russian and Chinese resistance through the UN provoked condemnation of the UN system itself, since it acted as an impediment to the imperious ambitions of the hegemonic powers. The fundamental belief of NWO2 was that the historical experience of a certain set of countries could be applied to others. Inevitably, this engenders an axiological form of politics, in which influence is uni-directional and didactic. This is the fundamental conceit of the democracy promotion endeavour. Of course, there are lessons to be learned, and governance and legal practices that could be rendered more effective by drawing on the experience of others. However, in the NWO2 this process became transdemocracy, where Kantian revolutionism became embedded in the enlargement of a discrete security, although one that believed its spatial enlargement effectively created a greater zone of peace. Of course, countries on the other side of the leading edge of this expansionist dynamic would feel threatened, however much they may have desired to share in the public goods on offer within the framework of the Atlantic system. The EU engaged in a profound transformatory process of its own within the framework of NWO2, but it was not able to move beyond its own birth as an element of Cold War struggle. In other words, rather than representing a transcendence of the Cold War, NWO2 reproduced the institutions and ideology of the Cold War, and even (in the absence of a serious countervailing force), became radicalised. Unipolarity in geopolitics was reproduced by monism in ideology.

Over time, the obvious pathologies of NWO2 became more apparent, and provoked patterns of resistance. In a sense, NWO2 became parasitic on the aspirations for a politics of transformation, but subverted them by directing them into the channel of enlargement. Expansion here was both spatial, above all a drive to the East; but also in terms of the colonisation of what Jürgen Habermas calls the life world of western modernity. The thirty years of NWO2 is also the period of rampant neo-liberalism and a certain ideology of globalisation. This is not the place to go into detail, but the absence of an ideology of geopolitical pluralism found its counterpart in the denial of agonistic political pluralism. The collapse of the communist alternative *to* capitalist modernity was accompanied by the denial of alternatives *within* capitalist modernity.

All this is now giving way to a new period, NWO3, in which some of the aspirations of NWO1 have been reproduced. This is not just a reassertion of the harsh realist logic of great power politics, with the re-emergence of Russia and China at the heart of an anti-hegemonic alignment, but there are also some powerful normative concerns. These include defence of the autonomy of top level international society, the attempt to broaden the representation of the non-hegemonic powers in its institutions (for example, though changes in the voting weights in Bretton Woods institutions), and the attempt to ‘democratise’ international relations as a whole. This superficially appears to be a return to classic models of great power politics, with the restoration of a balance of power in the framework of a nascent multipolar system. However, this only covers part of the new politics of NWO3. The blunting of hegemonic enlargement ambitions territorially is accompanied by shifts in temporal ideological ambitions, and opens up space for a less axiological and monist form of domestic political interactions. The restoration of geopolitical pluralism is accompanied by the potential for greater ideational pluralism at home. This is why the new era offers the potential to resume the exploration of transformational politics. The quarter century of cold peace in international politics was accompanied by stasis in internal political development. The new politics looks traditional, and even in some forms archaic, because in a strange way it arcs back thirty years to the aspirations vested in the end of the Cold War. NWO3 offers the opportunity for some radical new political thinking. As always, the future lies in rediscovering the past.

1. Stephen F. Cohen, *Why Cold War Again? How America Lost Post-Soviet Russia* (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2017); Robert Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (Cambridge, Polity, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Andrew Monaghan, *A ‘New Cold War’? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia* (London, Chatham House Research Paper, May 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated edition (New York, W. W. Norton, 2014, originally published 2001). The new final chapter describes the inevitable conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21st Century* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London, Verso, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘Gorbachev’s Speech to the UN’, 7 December 1988, https://astro.temple.edu/~rimmerma/gorbachev\_speech\_to\_UN.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. M. S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (London, Collins, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A notable example was the book by Vladimir Lomeiko and Anatoly Gromyko, *New Thinking in the Nuclear Age* (Moscow, 1984). (In Russian). I am grateful to Alexei Gromyko for pointing out the importance of this book in the evolution of the NPT. For a study of the role of the *institutchiki* in bringing an end to the Cold War, see Nick Bisley, *The End of the Cold War and the Causes of the Soviet Collapse* (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘”Europe as a Common Home”: Address Given by Mikhail Gorbachev to the Council of Europe’, Strasbourg, 6 July 1989, https://chnm.gmu.edu/1989/archive/files/gorbachev-speech-7-6-89\_e3ccb87237.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The period is analysed in detail by Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition: American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Robert Service, *The End of the Cold War* (London, Pan, 2016), pp. 416-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order* (Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation, 2017), pp. iii, ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sergey Lavrov, ‘Russia’s Foreign Policy: Historical Background’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 3 March 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\_policy/news/-/asset\_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2124391. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. This is analysed in Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: the Crisis of Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2017), from which this section draws. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Lavrov, ‘Russia’s Foreign Policy’. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. George H. W. Bush, ‘A Europe Whole and Free: Remarks to the Citizens in Mainz, Rheingoldhalle, Federal Republic of Germany’, 31 May 1989, available at <http://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/ga6-890531.htm>, accessed 2 June 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. George H. W. Bush, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit’, 11 September 1990, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=18820 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* (Paris, CSCE, 1990), https://www.oscepa.org/documents/all-documents/documents-1/historical-documents-1/673-1990-charter-of-paris-for-a-new-europe/file. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Sergei Prozorov, *Understanding Conflict between Russia and the EU: The Limits of Integration*, paperback edition (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1977/1995); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984); Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations* (Cambridge, Polity, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Oliver Stuenkel, *Post-Western World: How Emerging Powers are Remaking Global Order* (Cambridge, Polity, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Trine Flockhart, ‘The Coming Multi-Order World’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2016, pp. 3-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Iver B. Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London, Routledge, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For critical views, see John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 5, September/October 2014, pp. 77-89; Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post–Cold War Order* (Boston, MIT Press, 2015); and Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*, paperback edition with a new Afterword (London and New York, I. B. Tauris, 2016). See also Sam Charap and Timothy Colton, *Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia* (London, Routledge/Adelphi, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For example, Shawn Donnan and Demetri Sevastopolu, ‘US Looks to Bypass WTO Disputes System’, *Financial Times*, 27 February 2017, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Interview on ABC’s ‘This Week’, 27 March 2016, http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2016/03/27/trump\_europe\_is\_not\_safe\_lots\_of\_the\_free\_world\_has\_become\_weak.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. David E. Sanger and Maggie Haberman, ‘Donald Trump Sets Conditions for Defending NATO Allies against Attack’, *New York Times*, 20 July 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. ‘Transcript: Donald Trump’s Foreign Policy Speech’, *New York Times*, 27 April 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/28/us/politics/transcript-trump-foreign-policy.html?\_r=0. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. European Union, *Shared Vision: Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit*, Riga, 21-22 May 2015, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/21-22/. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Andrew Linklater, *Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Cambridge, Polity, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)