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Sarotte, Mary Elise. 2021. *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post–Cold War Stalemate*. **New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 550.**

"In Victory – Magnanimity".
Winston Spencer Churchill

There should be no second thoughts – Sarotte's book is thoroughly researched, extremely well documented, rich in details, and thrillingly well written study of the first post-Cold War decade. A job very well done! It pushes the reader from one page to the next, from one event to the following one, from one explanation to its possible alternative. The reader feels just like reading an exceptional novel. The author's crystal clear thinking has led to the crisp and clear sentences, unambiguous and well explained insights, making it easy for the reader to agree with them or not. And, with all these qualities, perhaps the biggest value of the book is that it provides the reader abundant food for thought about post-Cold War international relations, about NATO expansion, so the reader is equipped to search for their own conclusions, especially about post-2000 developments, those not covered in the book – including Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which is entering its seventh month at the time of this review going to press.

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The aim of this review is to provide sufficient evidence to support these assertations and some examples of the reader's insights based on the food for thought provided in this book. This can start in earnest with the title of the book: *Not One Inch*. After all, perhaps it was *one inch* that changed history. Or wasn't it? Who should be blamed for that very inch? Or is it just a propaganda framed question, not a proper historiographic one? Perhaps a clue to the answer to the last dilemma should be found in the speeches of the relevant incumbent officials.

In his annual end-of-year press conference in Moscow in December 2021, which in hindsight is evidently the first propaganda artillery salvo in preparation for the invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin accused NATO of deceiving Russia by giving assurances in the 1990s that it would not expand "an inch to the East". "They cheated us – vehemently, blatantly. NATO is expanding," he said. He cited former US Secretary of State James Baker as Exhibit One in his case and quoted a remark Baker made to former President of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990, saying, "NATO will not move one inch further East." The incumbent Russian leader has made the claim frequently about violation of the Western countries solemn pledge not to expand their alliance. The claim has figured prominently as an important component in the Putin foreign policy narrative that presents Russia as the victim and aggrieved party. After Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Putin accused Western leaders of having "lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed before us an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East". In a speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, which some observers consider to be the end of Russia's goodwill for partnership with the West, he asked: "What happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact?".[1] That inch is obviously very important not only in the Russian official narrative regarding the invasion of Ukraine, but generally in the country's foreign and security policy.

At the very beginning of the book the author confirms that this very inch existed – it is in the title of the book with good reason. As in every good historiography book, Sarotte's voluminous study starts with the facts and context of that very inch, a leading motif of the book. On 9 February 1990, about three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, US Secretary of State James Baker was talking with USSR President Mikhail Gorbachev about the unification of Germany, being aware that, due to the Soviet victory over the Nazi Germany in World War II, decades later Moscow still had hundreds of thousands of troops in East Germany and the legal right to keep them there

[1] All quotations from Putin's speeches are according to Dettmer (2022).

indefinitely. "To convince Gorbachev to relinquish this military and legal might, Baker uttered the words as a hypothetical bargain: what if you let your part of Germany go, and we agree that NATO will 'not shift one inch eastward from its present position?'" (p. 1). Hence, "one inch" was spelled out indeed – it was about the unification of Germany – but it was definitely not a promise, let alone a pledge.[2]

Nonetheless, Sarotte's book is not about one sentence, not about one ostensible pledge and its perception, but rather about the reconfiguration of the world after the fall of communism, the crumbling of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, focused on strategic security issues. "This book uses the fight over NATO expansion as its through line. It tells the story not of the alliance itself but of the strategic choices that American and Russian leaders made during their decade-long conflict over the start of its enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, and of the cumulative weight of those choices on today's world" (p. 2). Although Sarotte's book directly explores only the first decade of post-Cold War relations between the West and the East – the period analysed in the book ends with 2000, the year of political demise of Boris Yeltsin and the political advent of Vladimir Putin – the book provides grounds for the reader to consider the post-2000 developments, including further NATO expansion to the East – those that for the time being, have led to all hell breaking loose in Ukraine and no cooperation whatsoever between the West and Russia, but rather hostility.

This book is about strategic trade-offs. On the Western/American side, the main dilemma was about the stance towards the former Cold War adversary – Russia, as the successor, by all means, of the Soviet Union. What should have been the policy priority: security cooperation with Russia or providing firm security for new democracies established on the ruins of the Soviet empire? By choosing NATO expansion to the East, the new democracies proved to be the priority for the US. Nonetheless, "This tougher attitude achieved results, but it obscured options that might have sustained cooperation, decreased chances of US-Russian conflict reocurring, and served Washington's interests better in the longer term" (p. 3). What happened was not inevitable; it was a choice, first and foremost the choice of the US political elite. "Instead of incremental accession by a large number of states, they had the alliance extend the full weight of the Article 5 guarantee to a small number of states" (p. 5). And every political decision has its own opportunity costs. The author

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[2] The record of conversation on that meeting as well as records and notes other relevant meetings dealing with the NATO expansion are available at: *https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/russia-programs/2017–12–12/nato-expansion-what-gorbachev-heard-western-leaders-early* (last visited 31 July, 2022).

points out two of them. The first one is path-dependency as “American options for managing post–Cold War contingency—namely, through the creation of a variety of relationships with such states, most notably with Georgia and Ukraine—became dramatically more limited just as Putin was rising within the ranks in Russia” (p. 5). The other one is, as pointed out George Kennan, the former US ambassador to Moscow, who in the 1940s had conceived the American strategy of containment, that “post–Cold War NATO expansion tipped the balance too far away from protecting newfound cooperation with Moscow” (p. 6).[3]

The main hypothesis of the book is that “NATO enlargement did not, by itself, cause the deterioration of US-Russian relations. Major events happen for multiple reasons; history is rarely, if ever, monocausal. American and Russian choices interacted with each other, cumulatively over time, and with each country’s domestic politics, to produce the decay” (p. 8). The decay went much further since the book went to print in 2021.

Part One of the book (“Harvest and the Storm”) covers the years 1989–92 and opens with the fall of the Berlin Wall and new democracies ascending, to the joy of most of the (western) world but, according to the author, “to the horror of Putin and Soviet leaders who believe their victory in World War II earned them the lasting right to dominate Central and Eastern Europe” (p. 13). The origin of the title of this part of the book is a metaphor that Helmut Kohl, the West German chancellor at the time, consistently used to advise his fellow Western leaders how to respond: get the harvest in before the coming storm. The West must rush in 1990 to secure the gains of its Cold War success before hardliners in Moscow mount a resistance to Gorbachev. Although Kohl was primarily, if not solely concerned with the unification of Germany, the early period after the collapse of the Berlin Wall was the period of the West’s rush to get as much as possible of the political spoils of the Cold War victory. At the end of period covered in this first part of the book, the Soviet Union was no more, and the George Bush Senior’s administration was out of office.

There is no doubt that the fall of the Berlin Wall was a tectonic change in modern history. As the author pointes out it “signaled the end of the Cold War order and the beginning of another, as yet unknown; everything, including NATO’s future, was on the table. Moscow could demand that Germany pull out of NATO in exchange for Soviet approval of its reunification, a presumably fatal development for an alliance that had been a prominent landmark of the transatlantic world for forty years” (p. 20).

[3] This is a crucial sentence from Kennan (1997) quoted in the book.

The first issue in establishing a new order in chaotic time was the unification of Germany – the most important country in Central Europe for many, not only historical reasons. As well documented in the book, there were three major players. The first one was the US government, which had a clear goal: to maintain NATO in Europe and, in that way, to preserve the US' leading role in Europe's security; specifically to secure NATO's future in a united Germany by extending Article 5 to the country's new eastern territory. The other player was Germany itself, with unquestionable political strength and determination for the unification, whatever the cost may be. The third player was the Soviet Union with its political elite in quite defensive mode, aware that the foundations of its reign was crumbling, and without any clear idea or aim, save the self-serving goal of survival, but with great leverage due to the deployment of Soviet troops in East Germany since the end of Second World War. As the author pointed out "Gorbachev himself apparently did not yet know what he wanted, and both Bonn and Washington noticed this indecisiveness" (p. 45). Nonetheless, for the Soviet establishment it was obvious that the unification of Germany was inevitable. It was the head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, with impeccable hardliner credentials, who pointed out at the time that "it is necessary to train our people gradually to accept the reunification of Germany" (p. 46).

Considering this constellation, Sarotte points out, the US government feared that the US and German goals were separable. "There existed realistic scenarios under which the [German] chancellor could cut a deal with Moscow to achieve German unification at the cost of NATO expansion beyond the Cold War line, or even of NATO membership altogether. Kohl and Gorbachev could reshape political order in Europe without having any Americans in the room" (p. 44). According to the author, it was the US National Security Advisor at the time, Brent Scowcroft, who later admitted that his nightmare was Gorbachev making Kohl an offer that the German could not refuse: "an offer for German reunification in exchange for neutrality" (p. 44).

With the German political elite ready to accept anything (in terms of international relations) in exchange for the unification, with the political elite of the Great Powers from Western Europe being without clear ideas, with the exception of the traditional British concerns about a strong unified Germany, and the French rather nebulous and entirely undeveloped ideas of a brand new pan-European security system (a sad echo of Charles de Gaulle ideas), with the Soviet political elite without a clear aim, though with a substantial leverage, the author demonstrates that the crucial actor was US President George H. W. Bush, whose response to the idea that Moscow might decide Germany's relationship with NATO was unequivocal and spoken

with Texan sophistication: “To hell with that!” (p. 43). According to the US President, a hard line was necessary because “we prevailed and they didn’t. We can’t let the Soviets clutch victory from the jaws of defeat” (p. 73).

Nonetheless, Sarotte demonstrates that it was not the determination of the US president that was decisive, but something else – the economic collapse of Soviet Union. After all, “It is the economy, stupid”. Hence, the Soviet leadership was in the humiliating position to ask the West for financial assistance. It was Germany that stepped in, providing concessionary loans and grants, gaining diplomatic leverage in return. The frenetic diplomatic manoeuvring, with Germany leaders doing the work for the US establishment, made that a format two plus four for negotiations (two German states and four victorious powers that divided Germany in 1945) was established and an agreement was reached. According to the author, it was the West Germany government that bought off Soviets for security concessions suitable for Americans. “Using Kohl’s ‘deep pockets’, they would take advantage of the Soviets’ economic weakness and make financial and economic incentives, not security concessions, the core of their strategy” (p. 74).

On 12 September 1990 the Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany was signed in Moscow by the ministers of foreign affairs of the six (two plus four) countries, including the Soviet Union.[4] Not only that, according to the Treaty, Germany was to be united, but the country would be free joint and/or remain in any alliance it wished to, meaning that the united Germany would be in NATO (effectively Article 5, para 3 of the Treaty) – it was about to become a sovereign country without the restrictions introduced after 1945 – and Soviet troops were about to leave (East) Germany for good, by the end of 1994.[5] The Second World War was finally over.

Accordingly, the reader concludes, NATO moved to the East – not one inch, but hundreds of kilometres, up to the border with Poland, with the explicit consent of the Soviet Union government, both executive and legislative, as the Treaty was ratified in the national parliament. So, about seven month after the hypothetical question about one inch, which one could have perceived as a pledge or understand as a promise, it was crystal clear that this was neither a pledge nor a promise, that NATO had expanded to the East and that the Soviet government had endorsed it in writing. The incumbent

[4] Available at: *https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201696/volume-1696-I-29226-English.pdf* (last visited 31 July, 2022).

[5] There was around 380,000 Soviet troops with all military hardware located in the East Germany at the time of the signing of the Treaty.

Russian political elite and its fans in Russia and other countries may in hindsight regret this development, lament over the political decisions of the Soviet government at the time, but this book made it clear that it had nothing to do with ostensibly broken promises and unfulfilled pledges. This is not to say that the NATO expansion to the East was not one of the main (if not the main), although definitely not only cause of deterioration of the US-Russian relations, leading to the 2022 war in Ukraine, as demonstrated by Mearsheimer (2022), but just to assert that the "not one inch" broken pledge thesis is hardly anything other than a Kremlin's propaganda gimmick – definitely not grounds for serious debate.

Sarotte demonstrates that the August 1991 failed *coup d'état* by Soviet hardliners was a watershed development.[6] "Shock waves from the failed putsch rippled across the region. They fatally undermined Mitterrand's attempt to create some kind of a pan-European confederation; Moscow now seemed less like a desirable partner and more like an unstable danger" (p. 119). Furthermore, it was not only the stability of the Soviet Union as a trustworthy partner that was in question, but, according to author, the putsch provided a boost for the secessionist movements of the Soviet republics, primarily the Baltic and Caucasian republics, and Ukraine. Perhaps the crucial development, Sarotte concludes, was a power struggle between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin, president of Russia, and the author refers to Brent Scowcroft, former US National Security Adviser, who believed that the Soviet Union was disintegrating, "almost completely because it was the way Yeltsin could get rid of Gorbachev – by making the latter man into the leader of a political entity that no longer existed" (p. 124). The Soviet Union was no longer sustainable. And the author rightly points out that at the time the Soviet collapse was expanding NATO's opportunities.

The final blow to the Soviet Union, the author points out, was dealt by Yeltsin who decided he needed to get far away from Moscow and Gorbachev. Yeltsin, Ukraine leader Leonid Kravchuk, and Belarus leader Stanislav Shushkevich (the three Slavic leaders with nuclear weapons on their territories) took advantage of a previously scheduled visit by Yeltsin to Belarus to retreat to Viskuli, a hunting estate in the Belavezha forest near the

[6] Some people joined the putsch due to their disappointment and idealism, like Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev, a Second World War hero and chief of the Soviet General Staff at the time. He committed suicide after the putsch failed, leaving a note saying, "I cannot live when my fatherland is perishing and everything that I believe to be the meaning of life is being destroyed" (p. 119). The head of the KGB, Vladimir Kryuchkov, a chief organiser of the coup, did not follow his example.

Polish border, in early December 1991, and to reach an accord that dissolved the Soviet Union.[7] Yeltsin had decided to map out the future only with them, excluding other republics and the Soviet leader. The political elites of the other republics decided to accept that future. Gorbachev had no choice.

With the demise of Soviet Union to the "dustbin of history", to use the expression of one of its founding fathers, the US administration's main concern was control of the nuclear arsenal, now located in four independent states (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). The US goals were clear: to get the nuclear-armed republics to renounce independent command authority and to commit either to disabling weapons or transferring them to Russia for destruction. Hence, the concept was that only Russia, as a successor state of the Soviet Union, should remain a nuclear power, and replace the Soviet Union as the permanent member of the UN Security Council. Hence, the first priority for the US administration in the aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse, according to the author, was to ensure the transfers of nuclear arsenal from the three countries to Russia and enforcement of the START-II accord on reduction of nuclear capacities of both the USA and Russia, rather than expansion of NATO to Eastern Europe. The sudden death of the Soviet Union turned the tables and produced other US priorities in international relations.

If there is politically tragic person during this era it is undoubtedly Mikhail Gorbachev, the last president of the Soviet Union. The author, with substantial justification, believes that he should be blamed for it, as "Gorbachev, an idealistic visionary, was undone by the overwhelming failures of the Soviet system and his own ineptitude as a leader and negotiator. He could not weather the political storm of 1991" (p. 144). A year lates, his US counterpart was removed from office, as George H.W. Bush was voted out of the White House. The time had come for new *dramatis personae* – Bill and Boris.

Part Two of the book ("Clearing"), focused on the 1993–94 period, explores the clearing in US-Russian relations after the storm in Moscow and the potential that it revealed. Despite the upheaval in Moscow, the author points out, reactionaries did not regain control as Kohl had feared. Instead, remarkably, there was a precious second chance for the East-West cooperation. The period ends with, according to the author, Yeltsin's tragic use of force against political opponents in Moscow and in the war in

[7] Officially the accord is a set of agreements under title Agreements Establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States. Available at: *https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL(1994)054-e* (last visited 31 July, 2022).

Chechnya, the resurgence of the Republican Party, and skilled manoeuvring by insiders in Washington – all these developments cleared the way for NATO expansion to the East.

It was precisely during this period that the political stage was set for the expansion of NATO. The reader infers that there were three main players (nations or groups of nations) with a substantial number of actors with different scripts in the process. One player was Russia, at the time in deep turmoil, both economic and political, as it experienced three major transitions simultaneously: a political one, from authoritarian political institutions to a democracy; an economic one, from a command to a market-based economy; and one in the area of international relations, from superpower and empire to a country of shrunken postimperial frontier and at peace with its neighbours. Quite a demanding agenda!

There was one blow after other in all these areas, and all of them had implications on the Russia's relations with the West and further NATO expansion to the East. The first significant political crisis, points out the author, was Yeltsin's decision in September 1993 to disband the parliament and then to use military force against deputies, with tanks shelling the parliament house, killing 145 and wounded 800 not only unarmed civilians, but also fellow citizens. This was a domestic political success for Yeltsin, but "While successful in the short run domestically, his use of violence was a Pyrrhic victory abroad. It sent chills throughout Europe, particularly Germany" (p. 172). The caveat was clear: if Russian executive government is prepared to do this to its own citizens... Well, the reader makes out that September 1993, with Yeltsin showing an unexpected willingness to use violence to achieve political ends, demonstrated (it seems unintentionally) to all abroad that the "Russian bear" was still alive and well.

On 31 August 1994 Russian troops left Germany for good. Although this was envisaged four years earlier, by the Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany, significant Russian leverage in relation with the West was removed at that very moment. As Sarotte points out: "The farewell ceremony marked a humiliating low point in Russian foreign policy. The victory over the Nazis had been a central component of Soviet and Russian identity, politics, and life for decades. Now Moscow was having to beat what felt to Russians like an unworthy retreat." (p. 192). The humiliation was augmented by an inebriated Russian President who attended the ceremony and made a spectacle of himself.

The First Chechen War, which started at the end of November 1994, featured brutality that was supposed to offset the incompetence of the engaged Russian military forces, which was televised across the world and

inevitably, producing a bad image of Russia, and made an adverse impact on Russia's international relations. "The conflict also reduced Russia's ability to oppose NATO expansion because it seemed to prove that the states insisting Russia remained a military threat were right. Seeking allies to defend themselves against that threat suddenly seemed reasonable rather than paranoid" (p. 206).

The other main player in the process of NATO expansion were the nations of Eastern Europe that had escaped the Soviet empire and regained their substantive independence. The appalling experience of the Soviet rule and communism made that memory an unavoidable guidance for the new post-communist political elites in these countries. For them, the first best solution was full NATO membership, with security guarantees embedded in Article 5 of the Charter.[8] According to the author, the two crucial countries and leaders for the process were Poland with Lech Wałęsa and the Czech Republic with Václav Havel. Both of them were dissidents-turned-presidents, with substantial moral credit internationally (somewhat boosted by the US media). It seems, according to the evidence provided in the book, that Wałęsa was more effective. With the support of the Catholic Church, with the straightforward approach – "we are all afraid of Russia" – of an electrician from Gdańsk (without the sophistication of a playwriter), with his rude charm, and with a substantial US constituency of Polish origin, especially in the swing states – such an outcome was not a big surprise.

Nonetheless, Wałęsa was aware that NATO expansion would not sit well with Moscow. According to the author, "over dinner and drinks [...], Walesa fairly easily persuaded Yeltsin to go along with a statement indicating that Russia had no objection to Poland joining NATO. Yeltsin agreed to issue a remarkable declaration that Polish membership in NATO was not contrary to the interest of any state, also including Russia" (p. 164).[9]

The author provided ample evidence that it was not NATO that marched in Eastern Europe, like Red Army did in 1944–45, but it was the desire of these nations to obtain the Article 5 insurance policy against a repeat onslaught of

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[8] Although spelled out in sophisticated legal language, Article 5 effectively stipulates that an attack against one of the members is an attack against all of them. It is "all for one" rather than "one for all".

[9] Perhaps, or at least it should not be ruled out, Yeltsin was rather drunk, but there was an important sideshow: "an implicit understanding that the Poles would not intervene in the Ukraine in any dispute involving Russia except in the event of a military attack." (p. 164–165). Poland has not broken this "understanding" for the time being: there has been no misunderstanding even with the ongoing Russia's military attack.

the Red or any Russan army of any colour on these territories that moved NATO to the East. It is Czech writer Milan Kundera who once defined a small nation as "one whose very existence may be put in question at any moment; a small nation can disappear, and it knows it". The small nations in Eastern Europe realized at the end of 20th century that the best protection was to integrate themselves in the modern international structures. So, celebrations in the capitals of the new NATO members in 1999 were quite expected.[10]

The third and unquestionably the most important player in this game was the United States. The basic dilemma for the first Clinton administration was how to handle the question: should there be new frontiers? Should the priority of the US administration be long-term collaboration with Russia (at some inevitable costs) or providing security for the former communist, now democratic countries in Eastern Europe (at the costs of deteriorating relations with Russia)? From the other viewpoint, the same dilemma could be formulated as should a new security line be drawn, and if so – where should it be? Perhaps the most important framework question was: should Russia be considered a partner or an adversary? Friend or foe?

It was the US Department of Defence (civilians) and Pentagon (military) people who wanted partnership with Russia, i.e. not antagonising the country about NATO expanding to the East but creating an inclusive framework for security and military cooperation. According to Sarotte, they did not want new lines to be drawn, mainly because their priority was managing the aftermath of the Soviet Union nuclear arsenal and creating a viable structure that would enable the American military to be redeployed in other troublesome places on the planet. Accordingly, it was US Secretary of Defence William Perry and Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General John Shalikashvili who proposed the Partnership for Peace (PfP). This was inclusive and well-balanced concept that enabled all the nations in the East to move freely, depending on their political preference, within this framework and to select the speed of security and military adjustments. The author points out numerous virtues of the PfP, perhaps the most important one bring that the Russian political elite liked it. President Yeltsin labeled it as "a brilliant idea, it is a stroke of genius". With all these political advantages, President Clinton accepted the idea and its implementation started at earnest at the beginning of 1994.

[10] There were simultaneous celebrations in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest in March 1999 with magnificent fireworks, the festivities quite distinctive from many recurring fireworks of other sort over Belgrade, Serbia that started few weeks later, in the first NATO war operation in its history against a sovereign nation, conducted entirely outside of its jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, the author points out, there was strong opposition in the US administration to the PfP, from the people whose strategic vision was drawing a new line further to the East, entailing NATO Article 5 protection (from Russia) for selected, not all countries. Sarotte points out that Russia, naturally, was to be excluded from the club. In short, Russia was considered to be a foe, and arrangements would be made accordingly. After President Bill Clinton launched the PfP in January 1994, skilled bureaucratic in-fighters, like National Security Advisor Antony Lake and Assistant Secretary of State Richard "Bulldozer" Holbrooke, immediately, according to the author, mounted an extended attack, with generous support from the US Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright. With the 1994 mid-term elections being a disaster for the Democratic Party, signalling that public opinion was much more pro-Republican than expected, President Clinton changed his view, sinking the idea he advocated earlier (PfP) for NATO expansion to the East.

In September 1994, when Clinton already had made up his mind to expand NATO, he told Yeltsin that there "will be an expansion of NATO... we're going to move forward on this." (p. 197). Trying, the author points out, to bring everyone along, he reportedly softened the blow by reassuring Yeltsin "that there were three 'nos' in place: no surprises, no hurry, and no exclusion of any state from the expanded alliance" (p. 197). Yeltsin did not erupt in response, but obviously remembered the pledge very well. The 1994 pledge wasn't about not expanding NATO to the East; it was about how NATO would expand to the East.

Nonetheless, out of the blue, at the NATO ministerial meeting on 1 December 1994, at which Russia was to sign accession to the PfP, a press release was issued that "we expect and would welcome NATO enlargement that would reach to democratic states to our East." (p. 201). It was humiliating for Russia, as its president learned about it from media reports. Sarotte points out that "Yeltsin now felt angry and cheated. Despite Clinton's promise of three 'nos'—no surprises, no hurry, and no exclusion—he now faced all of them. He decided Russia would not sign the detailed PfP accords after all" (p. 202). This was the pledge that was broken – not the ostensible "not one inch". The momentum of US-Russia collaboration was lost. Irretrievably, the reader would add, in hindsight.

On January 13, 1995, Clinton gave a speech at a conference in Cleveland on trade and investment in Central and Eastern Europe, during which he described NATO expansion as "inevitable" (p. 208). In politics something is "inevitable" only if a firm political decision has been made. This was the end of any hope for a balanced solution, one that would take care of the security concerns of both the Eastern Europe countries and Russia.

Part Three of the book ("Frost"), chronicles the 1995–99 period, during which the Clinton administration took a more aggressive stance on NATO expansion, with the first three new members from Eastern Europe being included under the umbrella of Article 5 of the NATO Charter and with the disagreements with Russia over NATO military action in Kosovo. The author points out that at the end of this period, "with both Moscow and Washington having failed to create lasting cooperation in the thaw after the Cold War, the Russian forces of reaction that Kohl had feared back in 1990 win out after all" (p. 14). The advent of Vladimir Putin was a landmark political development, although it did come out of the blue.

Compared to the previous two periods, this period, although longer, was not as eventful – at least not in diplomatic terms. The US administration decision to expand NATO was made in the previous period, so it was only, according to the author, that two questions needed to be answered: when and how? As to "when", the answer was straightforward – after the 1996 presidential elections in both the USA and Russia, which both incumbents eventually won. As to "how", the question was twofold: which countries should be invited to join NATO and what would be Russia's role in this? The US administration's decision was to invite only three countries to join the NATO in the first bout of expansion and to signal that the doors will be kept open for the others. As to Russia's role, the US answer was – none. Of course, there was a PR demonstration of cooperation between NATO and Russia, like the high-profile signing of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, but the document was, as author demonstrated, more about principles than about well-specified rights and obligations of the signatories – it was far more declaratory than binding, but it created the illusion that Russia was onboard.

Although President Clinton's concept was to buy-out the Russian political elite once again – with G7 membership making it the G8 from that moment on, accession to the OECD, WTO and the Paris Club – dark clouds gathered in Moscow regarding collaboration with the West. Kozyrev was out and the new foreign minister was Yevgeny Primakov, an old-school apparatchik and a KGB breed of official. The change was noticeable immediately, as pointed out by Strobe Talbott, a leading State Department officials during this period,[11] as

[11] With President Clinton being a lame duck because he was completely preoccupied with the Lewinski scandal and its political outcome, key persons for dealing with NATO expansion Russia during this period were Albright and Talbott, a close friend of Clinton's from their days at Oxford, both ardent supporters of NATO expansion to the East.

he found Primakov “to be a true believer in ‘Lenin’s maxim that all history can be explained by answering one question, imaginatively translated by Talbott as ‘who kills/beats/screws whom?’” (p. 250).[12]

Primakov was trying to minimise the impact of the now unstoppable expansion of NATO to the East by proposing various restriction regrading further NATO expansion and deployment of personnel and military hardware in soon-to-be new NATO members (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary) but all proposals were rejected by the US administration. Russia was in the midst of the 1998 financial crisis and needed financial support, and this was the leverage used for the unconditional NATO expansion. It was, as the author points out, “‘not one inch’ was gaining a new meaning: not one inch was off-limits to the alliance” (p. 261).

The Kosovo War was a shock for the Russian political elite. Sarotte emphasis that “Yeltsin and his advisors were horrified not only that NATO would take the unprecedented step of bypassing the UN Security Council in order to bomb a country but that it would do so for reasons unrelated to either Article 5 or aggression against another state. Instead, unbelievably in his view, the alliance was taking this dramatic step simply because of actions inside a country’s own borders. Coming at the same time as the implementation of enlargement, it seemed to prove irrefutably that the claim NATO expansion would bring peace to Europe had been pure deceit. As one US diplomat put it, ‘Yeltsin’s critics warned him: Belgrade today, Moscow tomorrow!’” (p. 316). Of course, the reader concludes, it was Chechnya that was on the mind of the Russian political elite. Not only Chechnya, but it was definitely high on the list. Nonetheless, it was the end of benevolent attitude of the Russian political elite towards the West.[13]

Meanwhile, on the home front President Yeltsin suffered not only from bad health but also from involvement in the largescale corruption, effectively as part of “the Family”, a crime organisation run by his daughter Tatyana and her soon-to-be third husband, the author explains. They all felt under siege because Russia’s chief prosecutor, Yuri Skuratov, was looking into presidential largescale corruption. Hence, President Yeltsin needed someone

[12] The cynical reader would comment that not only the translation is imaginative, but it is also even creative. What a pity that Talbott did not realise that his deeds related to the relentless expansion of NATO to the East – regardless of Russia’s interest – fit perfectly into ostensibly Lenin’s maxim.

[13] One of the early reformers from the start of Yeltsin’s tenure, Yegor Gaidar, a private citizen at the time, contacted Talbott with a lament: “if only you knew what a disaster this war is for those of us in Russia who want for our country what you want” (p. 319).

who would fix all these troubles. He found the man, the head of the FBS – the successor organization to the KGB – and he got the job done, very well done. His name was – Vladimir Putin. The rest is history.

In the final chapter of the book, Sarotte points out (before Russia's invasion of Ukraine) that "American and Russian choices, in a series of cumulative interactions, had [...] yielded [...] a post–Cold War order that looked much like its Cold War predecessor, but with a more easterly European dividing line" (p. 339). Without disputing the claim, the reader can be somewhat disappointed in such an outcome.

The author asks and answers the critical question: in hindsight (the one before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as such was the timing of the publication of the book), was NATO expansion a bad idea? Any serious response to the question, specifies the author, demands another: bad for whom? "The Central and Eastern European countries that pushed hard to join had a right to choose their alliances, and were rightly thrilled when they succeeded in joining NATO as full members, protected by Article 5 from the start" (p. 348). In hindsight (before Russia's invasion of Ukraine), NATO membership had been good for them. Nonetheless, the author points out that "Ukraine was left in the lurch, as were some other post-Soviet republics" (p. 348–349).

The other question is: was it bad for the United States? The author does not provide an unequivocal answer to that question, although the book provides ample evidence regarding superior policies from a US point of view, such as PfP and the partnership with Russia regarding nuclear armament control and reduction. The most direct answer to this question is a quotation: "As the historian Odd Arne Westad wrote in 2017, it is 'clear that the West should have dealt with post–Cold War Russia better than it did,' not least because 'Russia would under all circumstances remain a crucial state in any international system because of its sheer size'" (p. 350). The reader infers that the author's position is that NATO expansion to the East was not so good for the United States and that superior policies were available. After all, Churchill did not recommend magnanimity in victory for nothing.

Interestingly enough, the book does not include the question: was it bad for Russia? But the book provided ample evidence, enough food for thought in this respect – enough for a few insights for the reader. The NATO expansion to the East undermined the position of liberal and democratic political stakeholders and was not beneficial for their efforts to transform Russia into a liberal society and free-market economy. On the contrary, NATO expansion provided wind in the sails of hardliners, who had believed in an authoritarian political order (with them in the office, of course) and tycoon

infested crony capitalism, with multiple exchanges between the political and business elites. And that very expansion created the perception in Russia of an external threat, which in turn helped authoritarian-prone political actors to be more effective in their impact on day-to-day political life in Russia, especially in defining the political agenda. In short, the reader concludes that NATO expansion had an impact on Russia – it contributed that Russia today being worse country than it could have been. The historical responsibility for Russia being what it is today is not only on one side.

Perhaps, at the end of the review, the reader should share just a few additional takeaways from the book. The first one is that for a long time there was nothing akin to the monolith American policy towards NATO expansion to the East, but only ups and downs of the concepts and their political success. The PfP concept was reasonable; it was a sound compromise and acceptable to the Russian side, but then due to the political dynamics in Washington, the other political notion ultimately prevailed. Those who advocated different concepts did so for some specific even pragmatic reasons, for their ideology and political and individual interests, not solely because they believed in the ideas they were pursuing and advocating. These insights are so some extent along the lines of the political economy of international relations. Only somewhat, because what was predominant was the battle of ideas, the battle of interests was only secondary.[14]

Nonetheless, it is instructive that when the firm attitude of the US political elite towards NATO expansion to the East was establishes, there was effectively no deviation from it anymore.[15] Perhaps, the reader infers, demonstrating credibility was a paramount for these US administrations – even if the policy is wrong, it should not be publicly admitted; let us

[14] The was not the case with the US engagement in Afghanistan, featuring not only the lack of a clear goal of the intervention and incompetence, but also substantial private interests conflicting with each other, influencing political decision regarding the aims of the involvement and, especially, the methods for accomplish those aims. Recently published documents about the American involvement in Afghanistan (Whitlock 2021) demonstrate vividly the political economy of that involvement, with corporate interests influencing quite inconsistent and shifting political goal.

[15] Since the book covers the period up to 2000, the reader lacks information about internal debates in the US administrations after that period, if any, but from the decisions of the subsequent administrations, it seems that there was hardly any hesitations about it. Possibly with the exception of the Donald Trump administration, but that administration is an aberration one way or the other.

continue to apply it to demonstrated to the world that we are consistent in policy making and credible in its implementation. In short, to uphold the reputation of the United States.[16]

The other observation of the reader, on the margins of the book, is that the NATO expansion to the East did not happen in a Yalta-style framework, with the great powers unmitigatedly deciding about everything. Important players included countries in Eastern Europe just emerging out from the Soviet empire and with determined leaders with substantial moral credit. The world was quite different in 1990s compared to in 1945. In the 1990s, it was not only sheer military power and prowess that counted. Hence the rhetoric question, attributed to Stalin as a reply to US President Rosevelt at Yalta – "The Pope, the Pope? How many divisions does he have in battle?" – was irrelevant in the 1980s and 1990s. At that time the Pope was part of this battle – he was Polish, he was an ardent anticommunist and anti-Soviet, he inspired and encouraged many people not only in his home county but across Eastern Europe, he supported firm security arrangements for the countries in Eastern Europe. He was the most effective (spiritual) nuclear warhead in the last chapter of the Cold War and a fulcrum for many nations in Eastern Europe in the first chapter of post-Cold War history.

Furthermore, what is evident from the book is the idealism and amateurism of the Russian political elite of the 1990s, at least the majority of it, especially Kozyrev *at al*. This is quite similar, according to Morson (2022), referring to early work of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, to the attitude of 1917 Russian post-revolutionary political elite (Kerensky *et al.*). It should not be ruled out that the political elites of the new democracies, those who succeeded in overthrowing authoritarian leaders, seem to have been under the illusion that liberal democracy itself, almost at a stroke of magic wand, would solve all the problems and sort out all dilemmas. As if all the problems, discrepancies and legitimately confronted interests, within the country or in international relations, were actually the consequence of the previous authoritarian regime. "We are friends now" was the attitude of the majority of the new Russian political elite in the early 1990s. For the other, American side, it was business as usual – taking care of what the political elite believed was the US strategic interest against the other side.

[16] Economic theory predicts that in the situation of asymmetric information, huge investments that are sunk costs are a credible signal of the agent's intention not to exit the market. By initiating NATO enlargement, the US government made substantial political sunk cost investments, demonstrating that the process would go on – no exit from the strategy whose implementation has already started.

There is a significant side effect of the US administration's management of its relations with Russia and its ardent support of Boris Yeltsin, the candidate preferable to the US in the 1996 Russian presidential elections. The author points out that the Clinton administration succeeded in convincing the IMF to give Russia a USD 10.2 billion loan. As the author emphasises "Even better, the loan did not commit Moscow to the IMF's usual onerous requirements for economic reform. [...] 'the political purpose of this IMF credit was obvious to everybody: helping re-elect President Yeltsin in the face of a potent Communist threat. The IMF lost its credibility'" (p. 247). Exactly the same manoeuvre was performed with IMF engagement in Ukraine when the government favourable to the US was in the office. Accordingly, the US' way of supporting "friends" undermined international institutions and ruined their credibility. Following these exercises, the IMF reports and decisions on any country are always taken with a pinch of salt. That was not the case during the Cold War.

In hindsight, which includes the war in Ukraine, it is tempting to reconsider the Russian political elite's concern that NATO's bombing of Serbia was a precedent for the bombing of Russia, as Yeltsin's critics had warned him: Belgrade today, Moscow tomorrow! If the Russian invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated something, it is, at least for the time being, that the West red line is that it should not be involved in military conflict with Russia. After all, Russia is – unlike Serbia – a nuclear power. Taking that into account in hindsight, the concern of the Russian political elite at the time was exaggerated and it seems almost paranoid. Nonetheless, in the words of Golda Meir "Even paranoids have enemies",[17] hence the Russian concern was legitimate. The other side at the time, it seems, could not have cared less about that concern.

In post-24 February 2022 hindsight – with the war in Ukraine (a special military operation, in Kremlin's parlance) entering its sixth month when this review goes to press – many more questions can be asked, and many tempting counterfactuals can be explored. For example, Kaplan (2022) asks if Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had not joined NATO, would they still be independent states, and answers that from the viewpoint of the ongoing war in Ukraine, that it is doubtful. Nonetheless, an equally legitimate counterfactual is that had NATO not declared at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine and

[17] Although the insight is frequently attributed to Henry Kissinger, it is the reply that Golda Meir is said to have made to Henry Kissinger who, during the 1973 Sinai talks, accused her of being paranoid for hesitating to grant further concessions to the Arabs.

Georgia "will" join the alliance, would Russia – even with all the subsequent changes of governments in Kiev – have attacked Ukraine.[18] The reader is simply not certain what the answer is.

Nonetheless, what is crucial is the great counterfactual. What if NATO had not expanded one inch to the East? Technically, that would have meant that NATO stepped a few inches, rather hundred kilometres back to the West, with unified Germany as a neutral country. A distinctive new security structure for Europe would have been established in this case, with a substantially smaller possibility for drawing new lines, with a strong – not only economically – and quite independent Germany in the middle of Europe – a nightmare for many past generations. One way or another, there would have been no pressure on Russia from a NATO expansion to the East.[19] The key element for verifying this counterfactual is that post-Soviet Russia demonstrated substantial political and economic instabilities, but almost none of them were related to international relations, but to the nation's internal features. The other insight of this counterfactual is that the re-emergence of the imperial mentality and nostalgia for the old imperial times (whoever the Tzar is) among the Russian political elite, after the shock collapse of the empire, has not been only the consequence of the NATO expansion to the East. And it is well documented in the book that Vladimir Putin's rise to political prominence has nothing to do with the expansion of NATO to the East, through some of his policies could have been facilitated by this expansion. His early rhetoric emphasising that "the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" had, it seems, little to do with the NATO expansion to the East, but resonated well with the political elite and some segments of the public. Obviously, imperial nostalgia has deep roots – it did not need NATO expansion to flourish, but the expansion helped.[20]

[18] It is Kaplan (2022) who considers that this move, inviting Ukraine to join the NATO, was "a profound error" and explains that it was an outcome of the irresponsible drive of George W. Bush for glory ("to lay down a marker") following the fiasco of spreading democracy Iraq and the lack of democratic spill-over effects in the Middle East that were expected in Washington. Even for reckless players like Richard Holbrooke "Ukraine is the most delicate issue" (p. 217). Not for George W. Bush!

[19] Another great counterfactual, similar to this one in terms of consequences, would have been the united Germany being in NATO, but without any NATO expansion east of the eastern borders of Germany. In short – not one inch beyond the Oder and the Nissa border.

[20] Independently of Russian imperial nostalgia, the book provides ample evidence of the US imperial stance in international relations during the post-Cold War period. It is intriguing for the reader that senior US officials have apparently not been aware

The main problem, from the considered standpoint, is that the Soviet empire crashed. It was the Soviet Union that lost the Cold War. It was Russia left, actually volunteered to deal with the aftermath of the Cold War defeat. It was surprising that the Soviet empire collapsed so peacefully (both in Eastern Europe in 1989 and in the Soviet Union in 1991), with negligible casualties. That was, according to Lieven (2022), a deviation from the historical regularity that empires have broken-up violently, inevitability creating death and destruction in many cases with a time lag that can be substantial. Hence, for Lieven, the Ukraine war is just an expected, though a somewhat delayed consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet empire. "The invasion of Ukraine is the belated revenge of the old Soviet security apparatus for what it sees as 30 years of humiliation, retreat and defeat."

Nonetheless, the reader is not convinced that this was inevitable. Which also applies to the deterioration of the US-Russia relations. As Michael McFaul, the former US ambassador to Moscow, is quoted as saying, "Russia was not destined to return to a confrontational relationship with the United States or the West. What happened did not have to happen" (p. 345). This is quite a convincing insight. As pointed out by MacMillan (2013), in analysing the origin of the Great War, almost nothing in history is inevitable. In the post-Cold War era, mistakes and bad judgments has been made on both sides and the book provides ample evidence that both the US and Russian sides should be found responsible for that deterioration. The relative contribution is definitely hard to measure.

As to the recent bout of deterioration, it seems to the reader that perhaps one of the problems has been bad communication, especially from the Russian side and especially after 2000. No firm red line – a line that should not be crossed – was clearly signalled by the Russian political elite regarding NATO expansion. After the 2004 expansion, which included the Baltic republics, former republics of the Soviet Union,[21] there was rather a mild

of it or just take it for granted. As Madeleine Albright put it, "the key issue was how to manage the devolution of Russia from an imperial to a normal nation" (p. 210). By applying this standard, America has not been a normal nation, at least since the end of the Cold War.

[21] Though the Baltic republics became part of the Soviet Union after their annexation in 1940, the 2004 expansion was a precedent, because for the first time former Soviet Union republics entered NATO and NATO countries stepped up to the border of Russia proper (apart from the border of the Kaliningrad enclave). Nonetheless, as pointed out (Banka, 2019) in 2001, during a radio interview with *National Public Radio*, when asked if he opposed the admission of the three Baltic Republics into NATO, Russian President Vladimir Putin responded that the issue could not be summed up in "a yes or a no." He later added that "we cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their

reaction, and the 2007 Munich conference speech by Russian President Putin was a list of complaints about what had already happened, not a list of the future actions that should be off the table. Even after the 2008 kick-off of the process of NATO membership for Ukraine, President Putin's public reaction was rather mild, with rather friendly gestures towards US President George W. Bush at the opening ceremony of 2008 Peking Olympic Games. Perhaps, Putin has subscribed to Stalin's principle that "Cadres decide everything",[22] therefore as long as his close allies, controllable "cadres", are in the office in Ukraine and Belarus, there is no reason for concern. Nonetheless, the problem surfaced when his "cadre" Viktor Yanukovich was removed from office. So the statement that "Ukraine in NATO" is the red line for Russia – if that has been the case – was not properly communicated to NATO by the Russia's side.[23]

A private conversation with a person from the Russian Putin-supporting intellectual elite, and effectively a member of incumbent political elite, perhaps even its inner circle, which took place in the summer of 2008, was quite revealing. To the provocative question "Why is Ukraine so important to Russia?" the brisk and bitter answer was "Because Ukraine it to Russia what Kosovo is to Serbia!". Be that as it may, the crucial difference is that Serbia has not recognized Kosovo's independence, and Russia, with ratified international treaties, the Belavezha Accords and Budapest Memorandum, has explicitly recognized Ukraine as an independent state, and acknowledged its sovereignty and integrity. Also, neither Serbia and Kosovo have signed,

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nations in a particular way". In another appearance, Putin declared that Baltic membership was "no tragedy" for Russia. These statements clearly were not a ringing endorsement. However, by historical standards, this was the least public resistance put up by the head of the Russian state. Vershbow (2019), insists that during his stint as the US Ambassador to Moscow, at the time of NATO enlargement, he heard few complaints from the Russian side when the Baltics formally joined the alliance.

[22] From: Iosif Visarionovich Stalin, Address delivered in the Kremlin Palace to the graduates of the Red Army Academies, 4 May 1935, available at: *https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936–2/year-of-the-stakhanovite/year-of-the-stakhanovite-texts/cadres-decide-everything/* (last visited 31 July, 2022).

[23] Mearsheimer (2022) claims that, according to a respected Russian journalist, after the April 2008 NATO decision to start the accession of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin "flew into a rage" in private and warned that "if Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. It will simply fall apart." The reader infers that had these words been told in straightforward manner to the other (NATO) side, perhaps the accession of Ukraine would have been put on hold, with some assurances to Russia that it would remain so for the foreseeable time. Furthermore, had that message been sent to the American side before the April 2008 NATO summit, one could not rule out that the outcome of the Summit regrading Ukraine's membership would have been different.

like Russia and Ukraine in 1997, a friendship agreement, pledging mutual respect for "territorial integrity" and the "inviolability of borders". It seems, in hindsight, that the incumbent Russian political elite, which has violated all these ratified legal documents and complains about the broken ostensible one-inch pledge, would like to undo the things that happened in 1990s, with the demise of the Soviet Union, and to Make Rusia Great Again. Launching an invasion of Ukraine will hardly achieve that aim. Although Sarotte's book vividly demonstrates that this war did not come out of the blue, that both the Western and Russian sides contributed to the conditions in which it started, the responsibility for this aggressive war against Ukraine rests only with the Russian political elite and its decision to trigger it. As already pointed out, nothing is inevitable in history – it is always about decisions. And with decisions comes the responsibility for the outcomes.

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