

CONCLUSIONS

As explained in the Introduction, the purpose of this book is to examine the reasons why Germany was divided after the Second World War; why the division was maintained for such a long time; why the Soviet Union accepted German unification; and why Moscow consented to membership of unified Germany in NATO. The inquiry was set into the general theoretical framework of the rise, decline and fall of empires and the specific context of the evolution and collapse of the Soviet empire in what was then called 'Eastern Europe'. The examination produced the following results:

The division of Germany did not occur as a consequence of Stalin's 'foresight' and on the basis of 'scientific' analysis derived from Marxism-Leninism. It was also not part of a deliberate, well thought-out Soviet policy of establishing an empire in East Central and South Eastern Europe with the inclusion of East Germany. Instead, it constituted the outcome of unplanned processes, uncoordinated actions and a perceived lack of better alternatives. The division thus occurred by default rather than by design. The default, however, was not spurious or accidental. It conformed to a particular logic that rested in what has been called here the Ideological and Imperial paradigm. Stalin was the unchallenged leader in the Soviet Union after the Second World War. He made his imprint on and, in a fundamental way, he *was* the Soviet system. Thus, his political philosophy and world view were a decisive factor in the evolution of events. Both centered on the acquisition, maintenance and expansion of power, no matter whether in the Soviet Union itself or abroad. His was an imperial mind-set. In his approach to international affairs, furthermore, raw indicators of power took center stage, including population size, geographical expanse, natural resources, volume of industrial output, acquisition of territory, control over human and material resources, and the number and quality of divisions, tanks, aircraft, artillery and nuclear weapons.

Stalin's drive for personal power and the expansionist tendencies inherent in imperial systems were reinforced by the universalist features of Marxist-Leninist ideology. By ideological definition, the existing world system was considered to be unjust. The *status quo* had to be changed in favor of 'world socialism', that is, in favor of the Soviet Union. Since

Stalin lacked confidence in autonomous political processes and distrusted unplanned activities ‘from below’, history had to be given a push by bayonets. There was, of course, nothing in Soviet ideology that would have supported the *de facto* pre-eminence of military and geopolitical factors in Soviet policy over economic considerations. On the contrary, historical materialism posited a world development in which autonomous socio-economic processes determined politics. It was Stalin, if not Lenin, who gave Marxist-Leninism a peculiar bent towards the preeminence of political and military power. At the end of the Second World War, the internal empire constructed on that basis was already firmly in place. Not much was required for its expansion when the opportunity arose in East Central and South Eastern Europe. An ‘informal’ empire was added to the existing formal empire. It was this triangular structure – the confluence of Stalin’s personality, Soviet imperial structures and Marxist-Leninist ideology – that predetermined the fate of the part of Germany occupied by the Red Army.¹⁷¹¹

A revolutionary transformation of the whole of Germany, as Stalin came to realize, was not a viable option. German nationalism, as he knew, militated against a division of Germany. But the logic of the paradigm required holding on to an area under Soviet control, and subjectively Stalin considered the risks of doing anything else to be greater than keeping what he had.

But why did the division of Germany last for such a long time? Part of the answer again rests in the compelling nature of the paradigm combined with the *normative Kraft des Faktischen*, or the ‘power’ of facts to establish norms. The ‘building of socialism’ in the Soviet zone of occupation and the German Democratic Republic within the context of the Soviet imperial system in East Central Europe, including the Warsaw Pact and Comecon, created powerful vested interests among both Soviet and East German institutions. Bureaucratic inertia is always an important characteristic of imperial systems, and this certainly applied to the Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors. This reinforced pressures not to tamper with the imperial possessions. Yet the currency reform in the Western zones and the momentum towards the creation of a separate West Germany allied with the United States posed in a most tangible form the dis-

1711 Stalin changed the name of Red Army to Soviet Army in 1946.

advantages of a continued division of Germany. Stalin reacted by imposing the Berlin blockade.

The 1948 Berlin crisis underlined the complete lack of conceptual clarity on the German issue. Stalin was unable to convey a clear message as to what it was he wanted, that is, the incorporation of all of Berlin to round off the Soviet empire in East Central Europe (Berlin as a *prize*) or the prevention of the formation of a separate West German state (Berlin as a *lever*). If the former was his goal, he was unprepared to accept the risk of a military confrontation with the United States which such a goal carried with it. If the latter was his aim, he was unwilling to relinquish Soviet control in the Soviet zone of occupation and make a reasonable offer of German reunification.

In 1952, he made such an offer. On paper it looked reasonable. But it was not credible. As the archival evidence underlines, the objectives to be achieved to one degree or another were to gain greater influence over West German public opinion; to counteract Western initiatives on free elections to be held in both parts of Germany under United Nations supervision; to delay or prevent West German defense integration in the framework of a European Defense Community; and to obtain a gradual pullout of Western allied troops from West Germany.

Imperial dilemmas again became dramatically evident in 1952-53. In reference primarily to the mass exodus of East Germans to West Germany, Prime Minister Malenkov had to acknowledge at a meeting of the government in May 1953 that the Soviet leadership faced an internal catastrophe in East Germany and that it was obliged to face the truth and admit that without the presence of Soviet troops the existing regime in the GDR was not stable.¹⁷¹² The available evidence is strong that Beria was prepared to draw appropriate conclusions and do something about the problem but that he was unprepared to set a price acceptable to the West, let alone to abandon the GDR unconditionally. No one knows what result, if any, negotiations conducted under Beria's leadership would have obtained. In any case, he was not given a chance to try, and his executors – some of them at least – used both the East German popular uprising of June 1953 and the argument that Beria had embarked upon a criminal scheme towards the GDR as justification, if justification indeed was needed, to stay the course.

1712 See above, pp. 117-18.

This meant that the imperial dilemmas would return, as indeed they did in 1958-61. As early as August 1958, Central Committee department head Andropov had warned of another critical phase in East Germany caused by another mass exodus of skilled workers and the intelligentsia. In November 1960, an exasperated Khrushchev complained to Ulbricht about the costs of empire and constantly being asked to bail East Germany out. The GDR, he said, should have learned how to walk on its own feet. Khrushchev's solution, after long hesitation and pressure exerted on him by Ulbricht, was to give his consent to the building of the Berlin wall.¹⁷¹³

The wall had major consequences. The East Germany appeared to become a viable political entity after all. The wall induced conformity and cooperation of the population with the regime, rising identification with the state, or *Staatsbewußtsein*. It also produced economic progress and advances in technology – but not enough of it. Like in the Soviet Union, the communist system in East Germany failed to adapt to the challenges of globalization, proved incapable of political and socio-economic modernization and innovation, and fell behind in the competition with the capitalist world. As a result, the GDR's financial and economic dependency on West Germany was incessantly rising which, in turn, for Moscow meant the return of imperial dilemmas and increasing 'costs of empire'.

That problem the wall had *not* solved. In fact, all the Soviet leaders following after Khrushchev – Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko and Gorbachev – warned of the 'great danger' of East Germany's indebtedness to the West. At a meeting in East Berlin in October 1979, for instance, Brezhnev pounded his fist on the table and in front of the assembled SED Politburo accused Honecker of leading the GDR into bankruptcy.¹⁷¹⁴ In August 1984, after the GDR had accepted another major credit from West Germany and after yet again having failed to inform Moscow in advance of plans to that effect, Chernenko reminded Honecker that the GDR, by accepting new credits, was becoming even more dependent on West Germany.¹⁷¹⁵

'Dependency', from the Soviet perspective in the early to mid-1980s, meant the translation of West German economic power into a never-end-

1713 The argument, however, that the tail wagged the dog, that is, that Ulbricht forced Khrushchev to build the wall contrary to his own assessment of the requirements, is unconvincing; see above, p.137.

1714 See above, p. 206.

1715 See above, pp. 222-23.

ing chain of East German *political* concessions and ultimately change of the communist system – an assumption, given Honecker's utter aversion to reform, that in retrospect appears strange. Equally wide of the mark was Moscow's assessment that the German-German contacts, including Honecker's wish to visit West Germany, were somehow the harbingers of all-German unification.

The Gorbachev Era

Viewed through the conceptual lenses of the paradigm in force from 1945 until 1985, the GDR looked indispensable. It was regarded in Moscow as an integral part of the Soviet empire in East Central Europe, a bulwark of ideological orthodoxy, a strategic glacis, a staging area for the Soviet armed forces and a supplier of machinery, chemical products and uranium. Gorbachev initially did not abandon this frame of reference when he assumed power in March 1985. In fact, in the period of perestroika without democratization, with the declared aim of 'acceleration' and 'perfection' of the communist system, the perceived importance of East Germany in the bloc was even *rising*. A telling example of this was Gorbachev's – utterly unrealistic – endeavour to bundle Soviet and GDR high technology (and that of Czechoslovakia) to counter president Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative. In 1986-87, however, Gorbachev moved away from the Imperial and Ideological paradigm to a new framework, to that of the New Political Thinking. This had serious consequences for the Soviet Union's role in East Central and South Eastern Europe and the German problem.

Gorbachev and the German Problem. When Gorbachev took office he did, of course, have some notions about Germany and the Germans. However, these essentially appear to have been stereotypes, consisting of a mixture of standard Soviet interpretations and traditional Russian views. His attitudes were also governed more by common sense than by intellectual sophistication or in-depth knowledge. Importantly, however, he proved capable of learning and willing to adjust to ever changing circumstances. One of his beliefs, shared widely in Europe, was the notion that in an era of nationalism and the nation state the division of Germany was unnatural and artificial and could not last. But contrary to that, he also subscribed to the idea that East Germany was basically politically stable, socially integrated, economically viable and operating in a favourable environment of increasing international acceptance of the division of Ger-

many. Both of these two, in principle, contradictory and irreconcilable notions – ‘the division of Germany is artificial and cannot endure’ and ‘the division of Germany will last because the GDR is stable and no one really wants reunification’ – coexisted in Gorbachev’s mind until the summer and fall of 1989.

The Politics of Soviet Non-Interference and Deference. One of the ways in which these contradictions were ‘solved’ was typically Gorbachevian and perhaps inspired by Marxist dialectics: history would decide. He, Gorbachev, was *not* to take up the question of the continued division or reunification of Germany but to wait for things to get more mature. For shaping his own political agenda, the ‘realities’ of the division were the decisive frame of reference; and thus there was no point, as he admitted to president von Weizsäcker in July 1987, in worrying about what would be ‘in a hundred years’. The extension of glasnost and the introduction of *demokratizatsiia* as a new priority in domestic politics in January 1987 objectively had the effect of undermining the legitimacy of orthodox, bureaucratic, and neo-Stalinist regimes, including that of Honecker in East Germany. However, contrary to widely held assumptions, Gorbachev did *not* interfere in the course of events, let alone embark on a coordinated policy initiative for comprehensive change within the bloc.

In fact, in what may be considered as one of the most astounding features of his tense relationship with Honecker, in the many private conversations with the East German leader he not only abstained from criticism but was complimentary about the GDR’s economic and technological achievements, praised its social policies and even lauded its internal *political* development, comparing it favourably with the course pursued by Hungary and Poland.

- To his close associates in Moscow, he complained about Honecker being recalcitrant and arrogant, and incessantly portraying the GDR as a model of socialist development in the bloc but in conversation with the East German leader Gorbachev *de facto* acknowledged the model character of the GDR’s development.
- He repeatedly complimented Honecker and the GDR for having drawn the appropriate lessons from the global scientific-technological revolution and having developed and applied the concept of the ‘unity of economic and social policy’ and, in retrospect incomprehensively, averred that perestroika was essentially the same kind of response to that very development that East Germany had adopted fifteen years earlier.

- Whereas his explanations to Honecker of his program of change in the Soviet Union were utterly defensive, his attitudes and tone concerning developments in the GDR were laudatory and deferential.

At no point in time did he clearly and openly impress upon Honecker the need for democratic change and liberalization in the GDR. His repeated warnings that ‘those being late will be punished by history’, as he himself clarified, meant to apply first and foremost to the Soviet experience. It was only in October 1989 in East Berlin that he included the GDR in this warning.¹⁷¹⁶

GDR Debts and Dependency. Gorbachev shared the wide-spread notion of his predecessors that West Germany was deliberately and effectively using large-scale credits, trade preferences and transfer payments to undermine the ‘socialist foundations’ of the GDR. In contrast to his predecessors, however, Gorbachev was too polite, too timid or perhaps too ill-informed to raise the matter head-on with Honecker. In his many private conversations with the East German leader, he merely alluded to the problem, and only meekly. It was only in November 1989, after Honecker’s successor Krenz had described in detail the disastrous economic and financial state of the GDR, that Gorbachev was to acknowledge that he had not imagined the economic situation to be that precarious and East German dependence on West Germany to be so far-reaching.¹⁷¹⁷

The ‘Freedom of Choice’. His aversion to volunteer for the role of mid-wife of history was complemented by his refusal to interfere in order to stop change. That provided the major dynamics of change in East Central and South Eastern Europe, including in East Germany. Since the ruling communist parties had relied on the threat of Soviet military intervention to guarantee their survival but in 1989 were faced with broad popular movements for regime change, they (the *anciens régimes*) did not risk using the required massive force themselves to try to turn back the clock of history.

Reform Socialism in the GDR. Until the very end of the GDR’s existence, Gorbachev’s approach to that country remained rife with unresolved contradictions. The reason for this in all likelihood was that he anticipated the creation of a reform socialist East Germany that would remain an integral part of the Soviet sphere of influence in East Central Europe and con-

1716 See above, pp. 265, 351-52 and 501-2.

1717 See above, p. 520.

tinue to be an active member of a reformed Warsaw Pact and Comecon. The replacement of Honecker, first by Krenz and then by Gysi as party chief, and by Modrow as prime minister, reinforced rather than detracted from this idea. Although Gorbachev appreciated the fact that it was too early to present a detailed plan of change, as he told Krenz on 1 November 1989, he was nevertheless heartened by the outlines of the main directions of an action program which Honecker's successor had allegedly developed and which Gorbachev considered to be characterized by 'more socialism', by renewal and democratization. The idea that the East Germans would build a reform socialist country persisted until the 18 March 1990 parliamentary elections in the GDR, where more than two thirds of the voters voted for the branches of the main West German political parties, with the ex-SED, now called the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), received only 16.4 percent and the Allianz 90 a mere 2.9 percent of the vote.

Acceptance of German Unification. In retrospect, Gorbachev and his supporters have argued that their primary concern in the period from the opening of the wall on 9-10 November until the end of January 1990 was not the prevention of unification but the management of a process that could have gotten out of control and led to unpredictable consequences. Support for this view could be found in the fact that Gorbachev refrained from adopting the kind of forceful measures at the military level, but also at the political and diplomatic level, that would have been necessary in order to arrest the inexorable movement towards German unity. The means for him to do so were certainly still available to him in the form of the continued presence of substantial Soviet military forces in Europe. But this interpretation is credible only up to a point. Gorbachev's preferences, as noted, were clear: East Germany was to be transformed from a moribund, orthodox system to a viable, reform socialist country. To that extent he was against unification. It is, therefore, not convincing to argue that his negative attitude towards German unification was essentially tactical and temporary, embarked upon under the assumption that the GDR and with it Soviet empire in 'Eastern Europe' were irretrievably lost. Until March 1990 it was still unclear, certainly to Gorbachev, whether a reform experiment in the GDR might not succeed after all. There was nothing to tell how long this purportedly provisional support for a reformist GDR would have lasted and what its impact would have been on the distribution of power and influence in Central Europe. Paradoxically, therefore, German unification – like the division of Germany – did not occur in accordance with Soviet preferences. It also did not take place on the basis of Soviet

policy initiatives. It was not even formally discussed and decided upon as a policy option but *accepted* or ratified at the end of January 1990 as an accomplished fact.¹⁷¹⁸ This also applied, with some modification, to the Soviet consent to unified Germany's membership in NATO.

Consent to German NATO Membership. Gorbachev was torn fundamentally between various positions and refused to commit himself to any of them, essentially until the talks with Kohl in Moscow in July 1990. On the one hand, he recognized the dangers of Versailles but, on the other, he emphasized the necessity of Four Power cooperation and firm guarantees to be provided within that framework. In accordance with the New Political Thinking, he allocated important security functions to the Atlantic alliance and American forces in Europe but he opposed the logical extension of this framework to include unified Germany's membership in NATO. The New Thinking principle of the Freedom of Choice as well as the CSCE principle of freedom for the signatories to decide to which alliance, if any, they wanted to belong to, in essence prejudged united Germany's membership in NATO. Gorbachev, however, for several months in the spring of 1990, attempted to prevent the application of this principle. All the ambiguities, it appeared at that point in time, had been resolved in favor of retrenchment and a hardening of positions on both the internal and external aspects of German unification.

The reversal of that position occurred as a result of several domestic and international factors.

- There was no viable alternative option to unified Germany's membership in NATO.
- The Soviet Union was isolated on both the issue of German neutrality and Gorbachev's idea of unified Germany's dual membership in both NATO and the Warsaw Pact.
- There was no support for it in Western and Eastern Europe, let alone from across the Atlantic.
- At the end of January 1990, Gorbachev in essence had consented to East Germany's accession to the West German constitution on the basis of article 23. This meant that West Germany's network of treaties, including the Final Act of 1954 that provided for the Federal Republic's membership in NATO, would automatically be extended to the eastern part of the enlarged Germany.

1718 See above, pp. 581-84.

- Gorbachev and his military advisor, Marshal Akhromeev, still thought that the Warsaw Pact could be salvaged and would continue, albeit in a thoroughly reformed shape, to provide a counterbalance to NATO.
- They and the adherents to the New Political Thinking came to accept the Western argument that the policies of unified Germany would be more predictable if it were to remain firmly anchored in Western institutions, including the Western military alliance.
- NATO had committed itself to structural reforms and to abandoning its previous anti-Soviet political and military orientation. To the extent that NATO could still be considered a military competitor in Europe, the problem was mitigated by the fact that foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers would not be stationed in the former East Germany.

The 'Price Tag' of the Consent. The tremendous security implications of unified Germany's membership in NATO for the Soviet Union affected Gorbachev's bargaining position on the price to be exacted for his consent. In theory, he could exact a heavy price. But he faced a dilemma. The Soviet economic and financial state of affairs in the spring and summer of 1990 was critical and perceived to be so both in Moscow and internationally. Gorbachev and his political and economic advisors considered involvement of the Western industrialized countries, including West Germany, a matter of top political priority both for the short term (to alleviate severe bottlenecks in the supply of the population with foodstuffs and other consumer goods) and the medium- and long term (to assist the Soviet leadership in a comprehensive reform effort). However, direct linkage between the security and economic dimensions of the German settlement had to be avoided. The impression had to be dispelled that the leadership of the Soviet Union was making far-reaching concessions on security issues for short-term and possibly short-sighted economic and financial benefit. This at least in part explains the reluctance by Gorbachev and his top economics and trade officials to adopt a tough negotiating stance and demand a high price. It was only after the security issues had been settled in principle that a concomitant attempt to do so was made with results that permit different interpretations. Measured against the vast sums expended by West Germany for the reconstruction of the new *Länder*, the sums obtained by Gorbachev after some tough bargaining at a late stage, in September 1990, can be considered rather modest. Nevertheless, the comprehensive rearrangement of the political relationship between the Soviet Union and Germany created significant economic opportunities which the

former country, however, was unable to realize due to its failure to create a viable framework of reform.

Domestic Politics: The Institutional Constraints. None of the established institutions played a significant role in breaking new ground. They were all wedded to the Imperial and Ideological paradigm. This applies first and foremost to the CPSU and its subordinate branches, including the CC's International Department but also to the middle and upper-middle levels of the foreign ministry, the KGB and the armed forces. Generating, adapting to, and re-conceptualizing the changes unleashed in Eastern Europe, including in East Germany, fell almost entirely to a narrow circle of top leaders and their closest advisors: Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev, Chernyaev and Shakhnazarov.

- As the CPSU and its central apparatus were lagging behind in the reform process and losing their mobilizing function in Soviet society, attempts were made by Gorbachev to alter this state of affairs. The October 1988 reorganization of the CC departments dealing with international affairs and their merger in one single streamlined ID, with Falin as its head, was to serve this purpose. However, Falin's role on the German problem was symptomatic of that of all major leading *germanist*: He was one of the chief architects of the August 1970 Moscow Treaty and the September 1971 Quadripartite Treaty on Berlin and viewed these agreements as strong pillars of European security. He also had a vested interest in the continuation of the conceptual and practical approaches he had developed. However, times had changed, and he was unable or unwilling to change with them.
- Another leading *germanist* was Alexander Bondarenko. From 1971 to 1991, as chief of the MFA's Third European Department, he was responsible, among other countries, for the relations with both Germanys and Berlin and then, after an ill-advised reorganization in 1986, for the western areas of Central Europe (minus West Berlin). In that function, he played a similar role as Falin – not as valiant head of the advance party on German unification and unified Germany's membership in NATO but as one of the rear-echelon commanders, initially attempting to stop any advance and then, after this proved impossible, to delay or deflect it.
- Bondarenko was supported in this role by Yuli Kvitsinsky, like Falin another former ambassador to West Germany and, starting from May 1990, deputy foreign minister with responsibility for European affairs.

- The attitudes of the chiefs of the ID and of the Third European Department are representative for the role of these and other institutions. Despite several attempts at structural reorganization, the unwillingness or inability of the main institutions to mend their ways remained an obstacle that constantly had to be overcome by pressure and persuasion from the very top. In the central party apparatus this task was fulfilled by Yakovlev as the *kurator* of the new ID in the Politburo and by Shevardnadze in the foreign ministry. In these institutions, as well as in the KGB and the armed forces, there was wide-spread dissatisfaction and frustration. No attempt was made, however, to assemble oppositional leaders and factions in these institutions in a coordinated endeavour to reverse the top political leadership's course on the German problem or, indeed, stop the accelerating drift towards the dissolution of the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union until it was too late.

Domestic Politics: Decision Making. Theoretically, one of the central analytical tasks could be the attempt to pinpoint the precise date when the Soviet leadership consented to German unification and decided on the basic outlines of united Germany's international status. Ideally, one would be able to identify one or more Politburo meetings where the internal and external aspects of German unification were put on the agenda, discussed, and then resolved. In practice, however, both the internal and external aspects were never formally discussed and decided simultaneously. A formal meeting of the Politburo to consent to German unification or to decide the Soviet position on Germany's international status was never held. A meeting that was held at the end of January 1990 and that involved a select circle of decision-makers, including several Politburo members, simply took German unification for granted. Its participants decided a few procedural questions for negotiations with West and East German leaders but failed to address, let alone resolve, the principles of the Soviet negotiating position on the external aspects of German unification.¹⁷¹⁹ A formal Politburo meeting on the German problem took place at the beginning of May 1990, but it continued to treat the internal and international problems of the German problem as separate, and the majority of its participants, including Gorbachev, were adamantly opposed to united Germany's membership in NATO.¹⁷²⁰

1719 See above, pp. 581-84.

1720 See above, p. 617-18.

This apparently firm position was reversed less than four weeks later by Gorbachev, single-handedly, at the Soviet-American summit in Washington – to the surprise of the American and the consternation of the Soviet participants, without prior consultation of other Politburo members and top decision-makers, and contrary to the advice of all the senior experts on Germany. The explanation for this extraordinary state of affairs lies in the deliberate enervation of the power of the traditional decision-making institutions and machinery and their relegation to a secondary role; the disorganization and disruption produced by an incomplete and ineffective shift from a centralized, one-party state to a presidential system with some forms of parliamentary control; the shift in decision-making authority to a small circle of top leaders and their advisers and personal assistants; the exacerbation of conflict between the broad base of conservative bureaucracies and the thin layer of advocates of the New Thinking at the top; and an increase in pressure for more radical reform exerted by the newly created legislative bodies and the politically aware segments of public opinion.

Collapse of the Soviet Empire: The Utility of Theories of Imperialism

Applying theories of imperialism to the demise of Soviet empire in Europe, with the loss of East Germany as a case study, an integrative approach is useful.

Metrocentric Theories. Explanations provided by Schumpeter and Nederveen Pieterse, with their emphasis on political and military power and the political will of elite groups, rather than Marxist, neo-Marxist or radical-liberal economic concepts, probably yield the sharpest and most accurate images. Soviet imperialism, to use their approaches, was not an expression of economic dynamics but primarily a political phenomenon. The quest for power, expressed in the perennial question of *kto-kogo*, or who will beat whom, was a central concern for Lenin, Stalin, Trotsky, Bukharin, Dzerzhinsky and other leading figures of the Bolshevik revolution. Their drive to gain the upper hand in Russia was so determined that they turned Marxism on its head. They, or rather those of them who remained on top in the domestic power struggle, refused to contemplate Gorbachev-style attitudes and policies of waiting for matters to get more mature, that is, in 1917 for backward Russia to develop capitalism and a strong working class. The Bolshevik leaders rather than ‘history’ established a *political* superstructure with which they constructed *ex post facto*

the appropriate socio-economic base for a socialist system. Also, contrary to Marxist ideas about the ‘withering away of the state’, they built strong institutions, including a centralized party, armed forces and a large security apparatus. These instruments of power served these leaders well in the recreation and extension of the Czarist empire, first, with the reincorporation of Ukraine, Belorussia, the southern Caucasian and Central Asian territories after World War I; second, the addition of the Baltic states during the Second World War; and third, extension of the empire to East Central and South Eastern Europe after the war.

Power and political will were also the determining factors in the reformulation and adaptation of Marxist-Leninist ideology to serve imperial needs. This was evident, among other things, in the Stalinist definition of ‘true internationalism’ as defense of the Soviet Union ‘without reservation, without wavering, and unconditionally’.

The problem with the primacy of politics over economics in the construction of the Soviet empire, however, was the gap that opened between economic potential and military capabilities and between foreign-policy ambitions and the means for their realization. This problem existed in the Stalin and the Khrushchev era but became acute under Brezhnev in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Soviet economy became overburdened with a vast and growing bureaucracy, including a large ‘army’ of government officials, economic administrators, the armed forces, police and the KGB. As described by Paul Kennedy, an extraordinarily large portion of the country’s resources was allocated to ‘guns’ rather than ‘butter’. This accelerated the country’s economic decline, impaired its long-term ability effectively to compete with economically more efficient and innovative adversaries and eroded its ability to maintain its internal and external empire. To that extent, the problem of overextension started in the centre, in the form of imperial stagnation and decay. However, this had important implications for the Soviet Union’s global position.

International Systemic Factors. Soviet imperial overexpansion was a relative phenomenon, as indeed were the economic problems of the Soviet imperial system. The collapse of both the Soviet external and internal empire, as Kontorovich has convincingly argued, was not the result of an acute economic crisis but of a crisis of ideology and the disintegration of

the political system in the Soviet Union.¹⁷²¹ The impetus for fundamental change, including the turn away from empire, was rooted in Gorbachev's realization and that of the advocates of the New Political Thinking that in comparative perspective the Soviet Union and its East European dependencies were falling behind in the economic and technological competition with the United States, Western Europe, Japan, and some of the newly industrializing countries. Indeed, one is left to wonder how much change there would have occurred even under Gorbachev if the Western system had *not* performed as well as it did. Given the competitive pressures from abroad, however, the costs of empire had to be considered in a different light. For the Soviet Union successfully to compete, it made a substantial difference whether its European possessions were an asset or a liability. The worsening of the international power position of the Soviet Union necessitated the adoption of conciliatory policies and a reduction rather than an expansion of imperial commitments. Contrary to Snyder's theoretical constructs dressed as empirical observations, a fairly broad coalition of domestic actors, including Gorbachev himself, recognized this objective necessity and acted accordingly. To the extent that there was resistance among the institutions with a vested interest in the maintenance of empire, they had no valid counterarguments.

Pericentric Theories. As for the pericentric analytical lens, nothing could cloud a proper understanding of the relationship between the Moscow centre and its dependencies in Eastern Europe more than the consideration of these relations as 'involuntary imperialism' or conforming to a pattern of 'autocolonization'. The foundation of Soviet empire, to reiterate the point, was predicated upon the centre's political will. The fact that the modern-day Soviet equivalents of provincial governors, satraps or paladins, once they had been put in power by the imperial centre, perennially needed and asked for Moscow's support, including intermittently in the form of military intervention, was not an expression of the centre's aversion to empire but a function of the non-viability of imperial structures in Eastern Europe.

The lack of viability had many reasons. For instance, in contrast to many previous examples of empire-building, including the Russian colonization in Central Asia, where the low level of socio-economic develop-

1721 Vladimir Kontorovich, 'The Economic Fallacy', *The National Interest*, No. 31 (Spring 1993), pp. 35-45.

ment facilitated the establishment of imperial control, the Soviet system in East Central, South Eastern Europe and the Baltic States had been imposed on economies and societies that were in many ways more advanced than Soviet society. This provided the seeds, to use a favourite Marxist-Leninist term, of contradictions between European societies and the Soviet-type communist regimes, and formed the basis for anti-Soviet and anti-Russian national emancipation. Kennan, as he admitted twenty years after the publication of his July 1947 article in *Foreign Affairs*, could have made a much better case for the tenuous nature of Soviet rule if he had added to his analysis the ‘embarrassments’ of imperialism which the Soviet leaders had taken upon themselves with their conquest of European nations.¹⁷²²

In the Stalin era, the imperial possessions had still fulfilled their traditional purpose of adding to the power and wealth of the centre. This was achieved by a blatantly exploitative policy. Khrushchev ended that policy and after 1958 even promoted concepts of voluntary cooperation, supranationality and ‘socialist division of labour’. But neither his reformist attempts nor Brezhnev’s re-emphasis on bloc discipline could transform the centre-periphery relations to a condition of viability and efficiency. Perennial subsidization and recurrent military intervention constituted ‘costs of empire’ which, under Gorbachev, powerfully eroded the centre’s will to empire. As for Gorbachev’s attitudes specifically to East Germany, the perceived dependency of the GDR on West Germany as well as Honecker’s recalcitrance and arrogance played a large part in the erosion of imperial will.

Because of the widely assumed East German economic and technological progress and political stability, imperial overstretch in that exposed part of the periphery was not the most visible. But it was the most fundamental. There were two reasons for this.

- First, to the population in Moscow’s European holdings, liberalization first and foremost meant *liberalization of travel*. For the East Central and South Eastern European countries, this was a manageable concession. Because of the would-be emigrants’ lack of familiarity with the language of the countries abroad and the difficulty for them to receive work permits it was likely that they would return from visits. This, however, was completely different in the East German case. For

1722 See above, p. 45.

would-be emigrants to West Germany there was neither a problem with the language nor with work permits or even citizenship. Liberalization of travel, therefore, would have and, when it was ultimately introduced, did have the opposite effect than elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. It led to population drain and to erosion of the country's stability.

- Second, the *national question* also differentiated the GDR from all other East European countries. The communist regimes in reformist Poland and Hungary as well as in dictatorial Romania could play the national card in order to enhance their legitimacy. This was and turned out to be impossible for the SED. Playing the national card meant raising the issue of German unification and threatening the existence of the GDR. The unresolved German problem, among many other factors, also made it impossible for Gorbachev to transform the European empire to a 'simple' Soviet sphere of influence and change Moscow's relations with its dependencies from imperial domination to hegemony.

This inability was compounded by the exposure of the East Central and South Eastern European societies and economies to Western influence. That brings into play transnational factors of imperial decline and collapse.

Transnational Factors. United States and European technology, trade and credits, as well as businessmen and bankers, were some of the most important transnational 'forces' that made an important impact on the Soviet Union's empire in Europe. Equally important agents of change were the manifold contacts and exchanges between the rank-and-file members of the ruling communist parties and 'social organizations' and activists of the Western 'peace movement'; the Eurocommunist parties, notably those of Italy and Spain; the European social democratic parties; the trade unions; cultural and church groups; and academic specialists in universities and research institutes. The most corrosive influence on the Soviet empire, however, was provided by the extensive rights and freedoms and the rapid rise in the standard of living enjoyed by the citizens of Western European countries. For them, the centre of attraction did not lie in Moscow but in many different Western European capitals.

The effectiveness of transnational factors was enhanced by concepts such as *détente*, 'bridge building', 'constructive engagement', *Ostpolitik* and *Wandel durch Annäherung*, or change through rapprochement. The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) provided a particularly useful umbrella under which transnational forces could deploy and operate. East Central and South Eastern European society, therefore,

was thoroughly penetrated. This vastly complicated Soviet control and produced ‘costs of empire’ that were perhaps less tangible than the direct economic and financial costs but no less important because of their political repercussions.

East German society, as the Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev came to realize, was the most penetrated of all. This was the result of a flood of radio and television broadcasts from West Germany and West Berlin unhampered by the language barrier, millions of visits in both directions and East German economic and financial dependencies. The SED, as Honecker repeatedly complained in private conversation with Gorbachev, was put in the awkward – in reality hopeless – position to fight a two-front war: against ideological penetration from West Germany and West Berlin and the effects of glasnost and democratization in the Soviet Union.¹⁷²³

The Importance of Individual Leaders, Ideas and Objective Forces in History. In the evolution of events leading to both the division of Germany and to German unification the party leaders – Stalin and Gorbachev – played a central role. It is more than a play on words and stating the obvious that Stalinism would have been impossible without Stalin. The *vozhd*, or *Führer*, was not merely a party leader but also an institution. He gave Marxist-Leninist ideology a particular bent. His ideas, limited and parochial as they may have been, massively shaped history. This had the effect that his successors, including Khrushchev in his reform effort, were severely constrained in their freedom of action by the ideological and institutional framework that he had created. Hence, in the more than three decades after Stalin’s death, objective forces rather than political will proved dominant. It took a severe crisis in all dimensions of policy and another leader with new ideas to change this state of affairs.

For heuristic purposes, Gorbachev’s role can be said to lie on a continuum, ranging from perfect control to loss of control, and from planning to subjectivism and spontaneity. On this continuum, two schools of thought can be distinguished. The first interprets Gorbachev’s role and the dissolution of empire as a complex and difficult but essentially managed process. The second argues that the Soviet party leader initiated processes over which he lost control. The two schools, in turn, are found in two variants. One variant of the first interpretation sees Gorbachev as a midwife of his-

1723 See above, pp. 347, 353 and 498-99.

tory, helping to give birth to something new and desirable, with pain obviously to be expected in the process. The other variant, ardently promulgated by orthodox communists, sees him as a more sinister character, full of criminal energy, at the head of a conspiracy to destroy both the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union. The first variant of the second school could be called that of the sorcerer's apprentice. It consists of the idea that the Soviet leader did have some idea as to what certain magic spells, such as perestroika, glasnost, New Political Thinking, Freedom of Choice, and the Common European Home, would lead to and that he, like the sorcerer's apprentice in Goethe's ballad, got the abracadabra to work wonders, but that things then spun out of control. The second variant takes this case to the extreme and accuses Gorbachev of lack of foreign-policy professionalism and foresight, incompetence and ignorance, and simply reacting to and endorsing events as they unfolded.

The solution to the riddle of Gorbachev's role in history probably lies in a combination of elements of the various interpretations and in a proper assessment of the changing context of his policies. In the first four years of his tenure in office, Gorbachev acted primarily as 'midwife of history'. Major processes of change were set in motion by his endorsement of the New Thinking and the Common House of Europe in 1985-86, the broadening of glasnost and the introduction of democratization in 1987, and of the Freedom of Choice in 1988. The role of the individual in history and that of ideas was preeminent. In 1989, however, both in domestic politics and in international affairs, Gorbachev essentially lost control. He was no longer guiding the course of events but merely reacting to them. Abroad, the drift became evident first and foremost in East Central Europe, in Hungary and Poland, and then in East Germany. The uncontrollable dynamics culminated in the torrents that led to the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Comecon and then of the Soviet Union itself. This also makes Gorbachev a 'sorcerer's apprentice' – a prisoner of the new paradigm he had constructed. A prominent place for him in European and world history is well deserved, however, not because of his keen analytical sense and political foresight but because of his willingness to adapt to ever changing realities and his unwillingness to use force in order to arrest or deflect fundamental change.

The costs of empire and Soviet imperial overstretch evidently carry important lessons but these appear to be entirely disregarded by present-day Russia.

Lessons Unlearned: Putin in Brezhnev's Footsteps

History, of course, is never ending and it does not repeat itself. Nevertheless, for international relations analysts as well as for Russian policy-makers the collapse of the Soviet Union provides lessons. It can serve as a case study to compare the fate of the USSR with the path taken by Russia under Putin, especially since the beginning of his third term in office as president. The following considerations make this an analytically fascinating and, for the Kremlin, politically expedient endeavour.

First, although the resurgence of imperial ambitions dates back to the Yeltsin era, to 1993,¹⁷²⁴ the pursuit of imperial ambitions has assumed particularly assertive and even aggressive form under Putin.¹⁷²⁵ The framework of reference for the resurgence was provided by his initiative in October 2011 to achieve '*a qualitatively higher level of integration*' on post-

1724 Important markers of that year are, in addition to the above mentioned rejection of the 'Khrushchev formula' for the solution of the conflict over territory with *Japan* (pp. 680-682), the adoption of a more 'even handed' approach toward the war in the former *Yugoslavia*, that is, in essence, a more pro-Serbian stance; revision of attitudes towards *NATO*, now calling it again the 'biggest military grouping in the world that possesses an enormous offensive potential' but remained wedded 'to the stereotypes of bloc thinking' (November 1993, report by the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service); assertion of '*vital interests*' and '*special rights*' on the territory of the former *USSR* with the corollary that 'the United Nations should grant Russia special powers as a guarantor of peace and stability in the region (Yeltsin in February 1993, in a speech to a congress of the Civic Union, a center-right alliance); the claim that Russia did not only have the right but the obligation to *protect not only ethnic Russians but also ethnically non-Russian, but culturally assimilated, citizens in the newly independent states, the russkoiazychnie*; connected with it, military-political pressure exerted on *Latvia* and *Estonia*, where Moscow condemned 'mass violations of human rights' and openly supported the 'rights' of the Russian minority; and, finally, *military intervention* on post-Soviet geopolitical space, e.g. in *Tajikistan*, *Abkhazia* and *Transnistria*. A detailed reconstruction of Russia's turn away from Euro-Atlantic cooperation 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok' to a narrow understanding of Russian interests under Yeltsin, can be found in Adomeit, 'Russia as a "Great Power"'

1725 For the argument that Putin's Russia, because of serious structural deficiencies of the economy, excessive expenditure for internal and external security, low oil prices and confrontationist policies towards the West, is at risk of repeating the stagnation (*zastoy*) and decline of the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, see *id.*, 'Russlands imperialer Irrweg: Von der Stagnation in den Niedergang', *Osteuropa*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (2015), pp. 67-94.

Soviet space through the creation of a full-fledged economic and ultimately political union, that is, the 'Eurasian Union'.¹⁷²⁶ Execution of the framework could be seen in operation in the severe pressure exerted on Ukraine to desist from concluding with the EU a Deep and Comprehensive Association Agreement; the annexation of Crimea; the war in eastern Ukraine; and the vision to resurrect and extend the Czarist province (*guberniia*) of Novorossiia to embrace the separatist entities of Lugansk and Donets and stretch from there via Mariupol, the Crimea, Mykolaiv and Odessa to Moldova's breakaway republic of Transnistria. The return to the imperial part of the Soviet leadership's Imperial and Ideological paradigm has significant direct costs attached to it, including expenditure for the integration of the Crimea in the Russian Federation; subsidization of Eurasian Economic Union members Belarus and Armenia; keeping in power the separatist regimes in Donetsk, Lugansk, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria; and maintaining and extending military support and modernizing military bases in the dependencies. The return to imperial policies carries with it also significant indirect costs such as Western sanctions that contribute to the stagnation and decline of the Russian economy.

A second major indication of the return of the Soviet leaders' 'imperial overstretch' syndrome under Putin is the *widening gap between Russia's expenditures for internal and external security and its economic and financial resources*. The Kremlin leader has professed awareness of the problem by saying: 'Some people argue that rebuilding our military-industrial complex will saddle the economy with a heavy burden, the same burden that bankrupted the Soviet Union.' However, he dismissed that idea as 'profoundly delusionary'.¹⁷²⁷ If meant seriously, it would betray an acute loss of a sense of reality. Russia in nominal terms only occupies tenth place on the list of world economies.¹⁷²⁸ Its growth rates have turned from an average 7.8 percent in Putin's first two terms in office as president in

1726 'Novyi integratsionnyi proekt dlia Evrazii – budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia', *Izvestiia.ru*, 3 October 2011, <http://www.izvestia.ru/news/502761>.

1727 In an article for the U.S. Foreign Policy magazine, 'Being Strong: Why Russia Needs to Rebuild its Military', *Foreignpolicy.com*, 21 February 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/02/21/being-strong/>.

1728 Behind the United States, China, India, Japan, Germany, Britain, Brazil, Italy and India. See International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, <http://statisticstimes.com/economy/world-gdp-ranking.php>. Data for 2014. – The picture for Russia looks better in purchasing power parity terms. According to the

2000-2008 to an estimated contraction of between 3.5 and 4 percent in 2015. Growth in 2016 is estimated to be in the range of 1.5 to 0.3 percent.¹⁷²⁹ But Russia continues to implement an arms programme for the years 2011-2020 in the amount of 23 trillion roubles, the equivalent of \$755 billion when it was adopted on 31 December 2010.¹⁷³⁰ The country maintains land- and sea-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and strategic bombers claimed to be on a par with the United States; armed forces of one million men; several hundreds of thousands of troops in other armed formations, including forces of the ministry of the interior (MVD) and the secret police (FSB); an ‘army’ of civil employees in the armed forces and other military organisations; and more than two million employees in the military-industrial complex. Its leadership, furthermore, believes that it can afford to maintain military bases – in part contrary to international law and against the will of neighbouring states – in what is claims to be a sphere of ‘privileged interest’ on post-Soviet space.¹⁷³¹

A third milestone of the return of the ‘imperial overstretch’ syndrome under Putin are increasing *structural similarities between Brezhnev’s USSR and Putin’s Russia* – as, indeed, encapsulated in the latter’s state-

ppp ranking of world GDP, Russia occupies sixth place. That location, however, is still for instance, behind that of Germany.

1729 The 1.5 to 0.3 percent estimate for Russia’s GDP growth in 2016 is that of the economists at the Russian Alpha Bank. The corresponding estimate of the Russia specialists at Bloomberg is 0.5 percent. Data according to Valeria Kushchuk, Pomoshchnik Putina zayavil o neobkhodimosti strukturnykh reform dlia rosta VVP, *Rbc.ru*, 17 August 2015, <http://top.rbc.ru/economics/17/08/2015/55d211f19a7947fabf79f411>.

1730 The official figure for the 2011-2020 State Armament Programme (GPV) is 20 billion roubles. The expenditure of another 3 billion roubles is allocated to specific projects of the military-industrial complex. ‘Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 31 dekabria 2010 g.’, *Biulleten’ Schetmoi palaty*, No. 1565, *Gov.ru*, 6 October 2013, http://ach.gov.ru/userfiles/bulletins/2013-10-06-buleten_doc_files-fl-2454.pdf. – Part of the evidence for Russia’s imperial overstretch is the precipitous fall in the value of its currency. Whereas, on 31 December 2010, the 23 billion roubles were worth \$755 billion, on 31 July 2015, their value had dropped to a mere \$333 billion.

1731 The claim that Russia had ‘privileged interests’ on post-Soviet space was advanced by then president Medvedev after the war in Georgia; see Interview given by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Rossiia and NTV, *Un.int*, August 31, 2008, <http://www.un.int/russia/new/MainRoot/docs/warfare/statement310808en.htm>.

ment that 'The Soviet Union, too, is Russia, only under another name.'¹⁷³² The similarities of the 'Putin system' with that of the Soviet Union can be found in many different areas. In the political realm, they include an authoritarian and arbitrary form of government focused on one single leader; the abolition of 'checks and balances', as evidenced in the pre-eminence of the executive with the emasculation of the legislative and re-establishment of political control over the judiciary; 'the culture of legal nihilism that in its cynicism has no equal anywhere on the European continent';¹⁷³³ limitation of the freedom of the media, with national television functioning as a major instrument of government propaganda; curtailment of civil society as witnessed in the harassment of non-governmental organization; the progressing role of 'state management' of the economy and society; and the elevation of the military-industrial complex to a 'motor' or 'locomotive' for the modernization of the economy.

Foremost, however, among the structural or systemic similarities between the Putin and Soviet system is the perpetuation of a 'primitive raw materials economy', 'humiliating dependency on raw materials' and the perennial 'illusion that [because of high oil prices] structural reforms can wait'.¹⁷³⁴ Medvedev, when he was president, recognized that the abolition of this dependency and the establishment of a modern, innovative economy and society was 'a question of our country's survival in the modern world'.¹⁷³⁵ Putin, too, shortly before the Kremlin's 'tandem' arrangement took effect (Medvedev as president, and Putin as prime minister), recognized that only fragmentary attempts had been made to modernize the

1732 Putin on 17 October 2011 in the Direct Line television conference with Russian viewers carried live by all three main channels, the First, Rossiya 1 and NTV; 'Sovetskiy Soyuz – eto ta zhe Rossiya, no s drugim nazvaniem', *Ruskline.ru*, 18 October 2011, <http://ruskline.ru/news_rl/2011/10/18/sovetskij_soyuz_eto_ta_zhe_rossiya_no_s_drugim_nazvaniem/>.

1733 This is a complaint that Medvedev, when he was president in 2008-2012, repeatedly advanced; see for instance his 'state of the nation' address in 2008, 'Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii, *Kremlin.ru*, 5 November 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/11/05/1349_type63372type63374type63381type82634_208749.shtml; the article titled 'Go Russia!', 'Rossiia vpered!', *ibid.*, 10 September 2009, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/5413>; and the 'state of the nation' address in 2009, 'Poslanie Federal'nomu Sobraniuu Rossiiskoi Federatsii', *ibid.*, 12 November 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/5979>.

1734 Medvedev, 'Poslanie', 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/5979>.

1735 *Ibid.*

economy. As a result, Russia's dependence on raw materials exports and imported goods and technology was *increasing*, and 'if we were to continue on this road ... we would be placing [Russia's] very existence under threat'.¹⁷³⁶ Like the Soviet leaders from Khrushchev via Brezhnev and Andropov to Chernenko, however, Putin has proven averse to putting in place a comprehensive and sustainable reform programme to achieve modernisation and instead has placed the emphasis on mobilization.

Fourth, *not only has the imperial part of the Soviet era's Imperial and Ideological paradigm returned under Putin but also an ideological component that resembles Soviet ideology*. Of course, that systemic ingredient has nothing to do any more with Marxist-Leninist universalism. However, it encapsulates its Stalinist deformation towards Russian nationalism and patriotism. Its constituent elements consist of traditional 19th century Great Power attributes; the glorification of the Russian imperial past and the Russian army and navy's brilliant military achievements; the resurrection of Stalin as a great political and military leader who led Russia through the Great Patriotic War to achieve superpower status; the emphasis on the 'liberation' of the Baltic nations, East Central and South Eastern Europe from fascism with the concomitant denial of the replacement of one foreign occupation regime by another – up to including the argument that the Warsaw Pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 was a preemptive move to protect the country against a coup engineered by NATO.¹⁷³⁷

To a large extent, Soviet ideology has been replaced by what today goes under the name of 'traditional Christian values', with the Russian Orthodox Church as a declared bulwark against Western liberalism, individualism and materialism. The Czarist empire's trinity of orthodoxy, autocracy (authoritarianism at present) and nationality – *pravoslavie, samoderzhavie, narodnost'* – is being resurrected and integrated into the Putin system. The 'new' ideological component contains the idea of the Russian World

1736 Putin, still in office as president, on 8 February 2008 in a speech at an enlarged session of the state council, where he introduced his 'Strategy for Russia's Development until 2020'; V. Putin, 'Vystuplenie na rasshirennoe zasedanii Gosudarstvennogo soveta, "O strategii razvitiia Rossii do 2020 goda"', *Kremlin.ru*, 8 February, 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/02/08/1542_type63374-type63378type82634_159528.shtml.

1737 According to a documentary on the Warsaw Pact aired by the Russian national TV channel Rossiia 1, *Russia.tv*, June 2015, http://russia.tv/video/show/brand_id/59427/episode_id/1199513/video_id/1175621/.

(*russkii mir*) with 'the Russian Orthodox Church ... essentially unifying the millions of people who belong to it' and with 'the Russian language as the main form of expression and bearer of national unity, cementing together the vast Russian world that stretches far beyond our country's borders'.¹⁷³⁸ That concept is also being used to deny to Ukraine and Belarus a separate identity. This is because 'at the foundation of the Russian nation and the centralized Russian state are the same spiritual values that unite the whole of that part of Europe now shared by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus', and that their peoples have a 'common destiny'.¹⁷³⁹

The cultural aspect, that is, the defense of the Russian World against the intrusion of the 'libertine' and 'decadent' West with its multiculturalism, radical feminism and homosexuality, is closely linked to the political dimension. The Western governments, through its secret services, are being accused, through 'colour revolutions' and 'so-called non-governmental organisations' – essentially 'foreign agents' – not only to destroy the moral fibre of the countries and peoples of the Russian World but to achieve regime change.

That portrayal, finally, links up with the claim that the West, from the time of the Teutonic Knights via the Cold War to the present, has been hostile to Russia. In recent history, the United States and the CIA in particular have been held responsible for engineering the break-up of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, and attempting to disassemble the Russian Federation – 'to tear off "juicy pieces" from us'.¹⁷⁴⁰ To that extent, the class-based Marxist-Leninist concept of 'U.S. imperialism' has simply

1738 'Vladimir Putin: V osnove russkoi natsii i rossiiskogo tsentralizovannogo gosudarstva lezhat edinye dykhovnye tsennosti', *Regnum.ru*, 23 July 2013, <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1687151.html>.

1739 Ibid.

1740 Putin in a televised address after the September 2004 Beslan terror attack. To put the quote in context, he said: 'Generally speaking, one has to admit that we failed to understand the complexities and dangers of processes under way in our own country and in the world. At any rate, we failed to respond appropriately to them. We showed weakness. And the weak get beaten. Some would like to tear off a "juicy piece" from us. Others help them. They help, because they believe that Russia as one of the major nuclear powers is still a threat to them, a threat that should thus be removed. And terrorism is, of course, a mere instrument to achieve such aims.' 'Obrashchenie Prezidenta Rossii Vladimira Putina', *Kremlin.ru*, 4 September 2004, http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2004/09/04/1752_type63374_76320.shtml.

been replaced by the charge that the rationale of 'U.S imperialism' is geopolitical and geostrategic.

What about Germany in all of this? The collapse of Russia's relationship with Germany has become one of the major indirect costs of Putin's imperial policies. Until Moscow's annexation of the Crimea, Germany had been a major partner in an endeavour in what Berlin hoped would contribute and lead to the political, economic and social modernization of Russia. Putin's turn to imperial reconstruction on the basis of an anti-Western ideological hodgepodge has turned Germany away from cooperation to becoming the mainstay in Europe of economic sanctions.