Ideas, Identity, and Interests:
A Study on U.S.-Russian Relations in the Post Cold War World

Angie Selvaggio

Samford University

This paper was prepared for the Alabama Political Science Association Conference held at Auburn University, March 30-31, 2012
Abstract

The end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a new era in which cooperative partnership was possible, and at times plausible, between Russia and the United States. This thesis addresses the changing relationship between these two states in the 1990s in light of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) first expansion to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. I trace the process of American domestic politics leading to the expansion, analyze the United States’ interactions with Russia throughout the process, and describe the outcome in terms of Constructivist International Relations theory. I argue that the ideas and identity of domestic actors caused NATO’s expansion and subsequent change in the international system. This argument serves to strengthen Constructivist theory’s credibility relative to Realism and Liberalism in explaining change in international relations.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................. 1

Chapter 2: Research Context ........................................................................ 4  
  i. Theoretical Context ............................................................................. 4  
  ii. Literature Review ............................................................................... 10

Chapter 3: Research Questions ................................................................... 11

Chapter 4: Research Methods ..................................................................... 11

Chapter 5: NATO Expansion ..................................................................... 13

Chapter 6: Conclusions .............................................................................. 22  
  iii. Argument ........................................................................................... 22  
  iv. Implications ......................................................................................... 24  
  v. Further Research ................................................................................. 25

Bibliography ................................................................................................. 26
Introduction

*USA Today* named the fall of Communism in 1989 the most influential news story of the last thirty years, trumping even the 2001 terrorist attacks.¹ This event, marking the end of the Cold War, “generated…the greatest change… [and] the most immediate impact” on the world.² It possessed the ability to transform the bipolar Cold War world into one of cooperation between the United States and Russia. Russian President Yeltsin and U.S. President George H. W. Bush held a press conference on February 1, 1992 to highlight this fact. They declared a new relationship between the two states based on trust and “a strong hope for true partnership.”³ Why, then, in January of 1995 was President Yeltsin proclaiming that the Western world was ruining this relationship and “risking encumbering itself with a cold peace?”⁴

The Cold War, an international ideological conflict that revolved around the Communist Soviet Union and the liberal democratic United States, was officially declared ended in December of 1989. The conflict had defined international relations for over forty years. From 1945 to 1989, the Soviet Union and the United States were fearful, weary, and distrustful of one another. With the end of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, these relations were open to change. The future nature of relations between the U.S. and Russia was uncertain as these events unfolded.

---

² Ibid.
Russia expected a much more cooperative world order entering into the 1990s than had existed for the past century. Negotiations that settled the Cold War, particularly those concerning arms control, were based on the “mutual vulnerability” of both parties in the context of nuclear weapons capabilities. Because of this mutual vulnerability, the negotiations treated both states as equal, rather than declaring a victor of the Cold War.\footnote{Daniel Deudeny and John G. Ikenberry, “The Unravelling of the Cold War Settlement,” \textit{Survival} 51:6 (December 2009): 39-62. https://login.ezproxy.samford.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mth&AN=49232406&site=eds-live (accessed September 26, 2011).} Russia assumed this equality would lead to itself and the United States being cooperative partners in the future. This outlook of friendly cooperation was expressed in the press conference given by Presidents Bush and Yeltsin in 1992. President Bush articulated that the two men met “as friends,” and President Yeltsin added “that in the future there will be full frankness, full openness, and full honesty in [the U.S.-Russian] relationship.”\footnote{Peters and Woolley, “The President’s News Conference.”}


Why was the cooperation between Russia and the United States that was both expected and sought after in the closing of the Cold War never fully realized? I argue that expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1997 caused deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations. From Russia’s perspective, NATO was a military alliance created among the United States and Western European states during the Cold War to balance against Soviet power. Since Russia expected to be no longer treated as a threat, but as a cooperative partner, Russians
saw no reason for NATO to grow. The fact that the organization was expanded into Central Europe was thus a slap in the face to Russia.\textsuperscript{8}

Why did the United States pursue a policy of NATO expansion even though it would hurt U.S.-Russian cooperation? I argue that Constructivist International Relations theory explains the process leading to the U.S. decision to expand the organization. Domestic actors’ identities and ideas shaped their interests and foreign policy goals, which then shaped the norms and institutions governing the international system. Through this process, key American domestic officials were able to change the system.

My thesis employs the qualitative technique of process tracing to analyze the case study of NATO’s first post-Cold War expansion. I present the sequence of events leading to NATO’s enlargement, focusing on statements made by American policy-makers and dialogue between American and Russian officials throughout the process.

The following chapter defines the research context within which I frame my argument. It also reviews the existing literature on NATO’s first post-Cold War enlargement. Chapter 3 details the thesis’ research questions. Chapter 4 explains and justifies the research methods employed in my thesis. Chapter 5 provides a comprehensive overview of the process leading to invitations for NATO membership being offered to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1997. Finally, Chapter 6 highlights the thesis’ conclusions, implications, and suggestions for further research.

Research Context

Theoretical Context

Three prominent International Relations theories: Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism, all made predictions about the future of the international system as the Cold War came to an end. Through failures in these predictions, Realism and Liberalism have proven unqualified to explain significant change in international relations. Since this thesis will explain change in U.S.-Russian relations in the context of a grander change to international relations (the end of the Cold War), a conceptual framework that contains assumptions that emphasize the malleability of the international system is needed. Realism and Liberalism do not provide the explanatory power of change that is necessary to the thesis, while Constructivism does.

The Realist theory of International Relations (IR) rests on the assumption that states in an anarchic international system act out of rational self-interest to compete for power and security. This theory was developed during the Cold War “because its emphasis on competition was consistent with the central features of the American-Soviet rivalry.” That is, Realism is able to explain that the bipolar world of the Cold War existed because of a struggle for power between the Soviet Union and the United States that was due to the lack of an international government to regulate power.

Assumptions upon which Realism rests make it impossible for the theory to foresee certain changes in the international system. Realists claim that their theory is conducive to forecasting state actions because those states carefully calculate moves based on self-interest, and those calculations can be predicted. State calculations cannot

---

be foreseen, however, when they are based on anything other than realist assumptions. These assumptions hold that the international system is anarchic and states seek to “maximize their relative power positions over” each other.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, the world is in a state of constant security conflict. Given this, in a Realist world, states’ calculations are always motivated by security and power. Realist theory is thus unable to predict changes in state motivations.

For example, while Realism could very simply explain the nature of the Cold War, it failed to predict the fall of the Soviet Union and the peaceful end to the war.\textsuperscript{11} Power transition theory, Realism’s answer to how states respond to decline, failed to foresee “the possibility of a peaceful accommodation between” the United States and the Soviet Union and that the Soviet Union would in fact “relinquish its core sphere of influence to bring about that accommodation.”\textsuperscript{12} Realist theorists also predicted with the end of the Cold War that, without a “clear enemy” to oppose, NATO would struggle and fall apart.\textsuperscript{13} As of the present, however, NATO has been able to adapt to the post-Cold War world and thrive. The two preceding examples prove that Realism is not a conducive theory to explaining change in the international system, and is thus not an ideal framework for this thesis.

Liberalism provides more theoretical room for interpretation of the system than Realism does. By assuming that “societal ideas, interests, and institutions influence state

\textsuperscript{11} Walt, “One World, Many Theories.”
behavior by shaping preferences,”14 Liberalism solves Realism’s limitation in assuming that the same power and security concerns always motivate state interests. However, Liberalism still has significant shortfalls in predictability power. Liberal theory, like Realist theory, was unable to predict both the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.15

Liberal theory of IR is actually a family of theories that all rest on the assumption that cooperation among states is more significant than Realists claim. In the liberal world, Realists’ preoccupation with power is trumped by economic and political concerns.16 Liberal theorists assume that domestic societal actors, both individuals and groups, are fundamental to understanding international politics. They also focus on state preferences in determining state behavior.17 Peace can be strengthened by such things as the spread of democracy, economic cooperation, and international organizations.18

Liberalism, like Realism, claims the power of prediction. Andrew Moravcsik states: “that systemic predictions can follow from [Liberal theories] should be obvious simply by inspecting the literature on the democratic peace.”19 Democratic peace is a branch of Liberal theory that explains why liberal democracies have historically maintained a “separate peace” amongst themselves, meaning that liberal democracies do

not fight one another. Such states are able to maintain this peace “because they exercise
democratic caution and are capable of appreciating the international rights of foreign
republics.” Democratic peace theory dates back to Immanuel Kant’s 1795 *Perpetual
Peace*. In this philosophical essay, Kant argues that republican states are likely to avoid
war because domestic actors within the states influence policy. Citizens would be more
reluctant to allow a war than would a head of state of a non-republican country because
the head of state would not have to bear the hardships of war directly as citizens would. More recently, John Owen has argued that “liberal ideology and institutions” within
liberal democracies “work in tandem to bring about democratic peace.” Such
explanations are examples of Moravcsik’s claim that Liberalism can explain international
systemic trends (in this case the trend is sustained peace among liberal democracies).

Moravcski’s statement does not hold completely true, however. While this
branch of Liberal theory is able to explain a trend in the international system, it is
incapable of foreseeing changes in that trend. Snyder points out that Liberal theory of
democratic peace is unable to predict “the timing of democratic transitions,” and
Duffield points out that the theoretical approach was not able to “forecast with any
precision the forms of active cooperation” liberal democracies would engage in after the
Cold War. Liberal democratic peace theory thus simply explains a historical trend
rather than providing a framework in which to predict changes in that and similar

October 2, 2011).
international trends. Liberalism, like Realism, proves incapable of adequately explaining change in the international system.

Constructivist theory of IR focuses on state interests in terms of ideas and social discourse. Figure 1 summarizes the fundamental assumptions of Constructivism. Ideas and identity of actors shape state interests, which in turn transform the norms, rules, and institutions of the international system. In this way, individuals’ perceptions can change the system as a whole. Alexander Wendt defines the two basic principles of Constructivism: “(1) that the structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces, and (2) that the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than by nature.”

The theory also emphasizes history has an organic “process of change” that shapes state identity and interactions between states.

Walt points out in his survey of dominant International Relations theories that given these constructs, “constructivism is especially attentive to the sources of change.”

Koslowski and Kratochwil expand upon this by explaining that Constructivism views

---

International Relations as a conglomeration of man-made institutions and norms. Because of this framework, actors can inflict fundamental changes on the system by changing “the rules and norms constitutive of international interactions.” They provide an explanation for the end of the Cold War (which both Realism and Liberalism have struggled to do) in terms of this Constructivist context by arguing that “Gorbachev’s decision to end the Brezhnev doctrine” reshaped norms governing the soviet bloc and consequently the whole system. Similarly, my thesis argues that American domestic actors reshaped norms governing NATO, and consequentially the whole international system.

Constructivism has also been used by Thomas Risse-Kappen to explain the origins of NATO and its endurance through the Cold War. He asserts that the perception of the Soviet Union as an ideological threat drove a “security community based on common values and a collective identity” together in the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This emphasis on ideas and values as the basis of explanation is a Constructivist framework. Risse-Kappen does note that the post-Cold War world has the potential to change NATO, but he is not able to offer an explanation for the change that actually happened with NATO expansion in 1997 since his work was published in 1996. I will employ a similar Constructivist framework in my thesis, taking it a step farther than Risse-Kappen by explaining NATO expansion.


29 Ibid., 228.

Literature Review

Existing explanations of how NATO expansion hurt U.S.-Russian relations fail to provide a complete picture of the situation surrounding the enlargement. Goldgeier explains that Russia felt betrayed by the United States’ pursuing of NATO expansion into former-Warsaw Pact states because Russian government officials had been led to believe by American government authorities in the early 1990s that such growth would not happen. Russia also felt that NATO moving into lands which had previously been under its “sphere of influence” was a security threat. The United States’ policy of pursuing expansion, however, was “designed to create greater stability,” and, according to Goldgeier, the U.S. was “too powerful… not to proceed with an enlargement strategy.”

Deudeny and Ikenberry argue that the reason for strained relations between the U.S. and Russia is a disconnection between what Russia expected the relationship to be based on the “Cold War settlement” and reality. The Cold War settlement the authors speak of is a “sequence of steps and agreements,” centered on arms-control negotiations, in the late 1980s and early 1990s that ended the war. The Russian perception is that “Washington…encroached upon legitimate and historical Russian national and security interests.” The authors hold that NATO expansion was a decisive issue in the transformation of U.S.-Russian relations. They assert that expansion came about largely under the influence of American domestic actors and politics, and that it was used as “a tool of democratic consolidation,” but that consolidation should have included Russia.

---

32 Deudeny and Ikenberry, “Cold War Settlement,” 44.
33 Ibid., 41.
34 Ibid., 51.
These arguments fail to address the depth of reasoning behind NATO’s first post-Cold War enlargement and the subsequent deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations. For example, why were American domestic politics able to lead to NATO expansion? Why was democratic consolidation in Eastern Europe important for stability? If the United States and Russia had recently defined their relations as friendly, why would more Western influence in Russia’s old territory be seen as a security threat by the Russians? All these questions can be answered by reference to the ideas, identities, and subsequent interests of American actors pushing for NATO’s enlargement. My argument will assume this Constructivist approach to deepen reasoning previously given.

**Research Questions**

My thesis will first address: How did NATO expansion come about? Then: Why did the expansion have a negative impact on U.S.-Russian relations? Why was NATO’s enlargement seen as a security threat to the Russians? In light of IR theory, how can Constructivism explain NATO’s expansion? How did differing perspectives on American security concerns shape the decision making process? Finally: How did NATO expansion transform the international system? What implications does this have for Constructivist theory?

**Research Methods**

The phenomenon I am addressing in this thesis is change in U.S.-Russian relations within the broader context of change in the international system at the end of the Cold War. I am using a case study as a medium through which to analyze this phenomenon. Such a qualitative method of research is most suitable to this thesis because it allows me and the reader to understand the meaning behind events and actions
and the context within which these events and actions took place.\textsuperscript{35} A qualitative research design is particularly important when describing phenomena in terms of International Relations theory, which depends upon meaning and context to make sense of the world. Case studies are also useful for applying evidence of “private speech and writings of policy actors” to test political theory.\textsuperscript{36} My thesis makes wide use of such evidence. Specifically, I will apply a disciplined interpretive case study, which “interprets or explains an event by applying a known theory to” it.\textsuperscript{37}

I apply Constructivism to my case study: NATO expansion to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in the 1990s. I chose the first post-Cold War NATO expansion because it is a case in which competing theories: Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism, offer differing predictions and explanations. These predictions are very relevant to strengthening the power of Constructivism in comparison to Realism and Liberalism because the latter two theories made faulty predictions in the face of a major change in the international system (the end of the Cold War). My analysis of NATO expansion in terms of Constructivism serves to strengthen the theory even more.

I focus my analysis of the process leading to NATO’s expansion on United States’ foreign policy. From its conception in 1949, the organization has been dominated by U.S. influence. The United States provides “between one-fifth and one-quarter of NATO’s budget,” totaling $711.8 million in 2010.\textsuperscript{38} Such a significant share of the organization’s budget is both a result and a cause of the U.S. prominence in NATO

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
operations and decision making. Thus, the decision to extend membership to central European nations was almost exclusively an American one, and was essentially presented to, rather than discussed within, NATO. Therefore, the best way to understand how NATO’s expansion came about is to study how the policy was formed within the United States. Because of the length limitations of this thesis, I stop analysis of NATO’s expansion at the 1997 issuance of invitations to the three new member states, rather than the formal inclusion of those states in 1999.

I use process tracing in describing my case study. Process tracing is a method that traces the “decision-making process” through the “sequence and structure of events and… the testimony of actors explaining why they acted as they did.”

The decision to enlarge NATO is especially fitted to be studied through process tracing because it was not made on one single occasion, but rather evolved through politics within the United States.

**NATO’s Expansion**

The decision to extend NATO membership to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in 1997 was not made on one occasion, but was the result of a process of push-and-pull politics within the United States as well as between the U.S. and Russia. The Clinton administration’s dual post-Cold War foreign policy goals of promoting an enhanced democratic stability in Europe as well as continued stability and reform in Russia competed with one another throughout the process. In the end, key voices within the administration supporting a short-term expansion timeline prevailed, leading to NATO formally offering membership invitation to three Central European states at the July 1997 summit in Madrid.

---

The first time NATO’s post-Cold War future was openly discussed was during the German unification talks of 1990. When addressing the role NATO would play in a unified Germany, officials first explicitly stated that the alliance would not extend East. For example, West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher stated in a speech during these talks that “what NATO must do is state unequivocally that whatever happens in the Warsaw Pact there will be no expansion of NATO territory eastwards, that is to say closer to the borders of the Soviet Union.” U.S. Secretary of State James Baker affirmed this message in meetings with Soviet President Gorbachev, stating that “there should be no extension of NATO’s jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east.” These statements would later be cited by Russia to justify its belief that it had been guaranteed that NATO would not expand eastward. The treaty that ended up unifying Germany, however, included ambiguous language that gave Germany room to interpret whether it would allow foreign NATO troops to be deployed on former East German lands after Soviet troops had been withdrawn from the area. This was the first of many ambiguous statements that would lead Russian opinion astray as far as where the prospect of NATO expansion to the East stood.

The only other step taken during the George H. W. Bush administration towards determining NATO’s future was the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) revealed at the 1991 Rome Summit. This organization gave former Warsaw Pact members “a formal mechanism” through which to communicate with NATO.

---

NACC was only a temporary venue, however. The first step taken towards determining NATO’s future within the Clinton administration was U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s calling in June of 1993 for a heads of state summit to meet in Brussels in January of the following year. His main concern was to strengthen the NACC and determine where to take NATO from there.43 The upcoming summit forced talks within the Clinton administration as to how to handle NATO’s future, in which expansion to the East was a possibility.

President Clinton’s top foreign policy advisors, or “Principals,” met in early October 1993 to discuss policy stance for the upcoming summit. Most at the meeting supported the creation of the previously proposed Partnership for Peace (PFP). This would be a program open to all European countries, including all former Soviet states. It would build military relationships between each state and NATO.44 Both the supreme allied commander in Europe General Shalikashvili and the U.S. Secretary of Defense Aspin were particular proponents of this plan. The Pentagon’s main foreign policy concern was success of Russian internal liberal reforms and continued bilateral denuclearization negotiations. The U.S. Military was also interested in ensuring any new members of NATO would be able to positively contribute militarily to the organization and uphold NATO standards. The military-to-military relationships the Partnership for Peace promised would allow for Newly Independent States to gradually meet the military standards the Pentagon deemed necessary for membership into NATO.45

43 Ibid., 19.
44 Goldgeier and McFaul, *Power and Purpose*.
45 The Pentagon’s and the military side of NATO’s foreign policy concerns largely focused on practical military power of both the organization and bilaterally decreasing nuclear power. These concerns reflect a Realist perspective. The fact that domestic actors were supporting a policy using Realist reasoning does not detract from my argument to strengthen Constructivism because the very fact that Realist ideas shaped the officials’ policy perspective supports Constructivist idea theory.
Another foreign policy concern was represented by several “fast-track NATO expansion” proponents within the State Department. These fast-trackers wanted to see criteria for future enlargement laid out at the January Brussels summit. Their argument was that, with the very real possibility of NATO membership hanging in their near future, Central and Eastern European states would quickly and stably make the liberal market and political reforms necessary to join the organization. This would help stabilize European security as a whole.

National Security Advisor Anthony Lake held the Wilsonian outlook of International Relations that “the expansion of international institutions and the promotion of freedom in economic and political affairs could increase global peace and prosperity.” He was also a foreign policy “moralist” who hoped to see the spread of democracy for ideological as well as strategic reasons. He supported a fast-track NATO expansion policy as well. Secretary of State Christopher did not assume this fast-track policy, however. He ended up taking the advice of Strobe Talbott and supporting a more cautionary role towards NATO enlargement in order to ensure stability in relations with Russia.

Thus, at President Clinton’s October Principal’s meeting, the Department of Defense and Department of State advocated moving forward with the PFP and keeping NATO expansion on a back burner. The only official to support moving directly forward on enlargement was Lake. It was decided at the Principal’s meeting to “put forward the Partnership for Peace and say something vague about NATO’s eventual expansion” at the

46 Goldgeier, Not Whether But When, 20.
48 Lake’s Wilsonian perspective reflects a Liberalist perspective. Again, this fact does not detract from my argument to strengthen Constructivism because the fact that Liberal ideas shaped his policy perspective supports Constructivist idea theory.
January summit. This decision was supported by all involved because each interpreted it to fit his or her own agenda on the issue at hand. For example, Christopher emphasized publicly in November that NATO was opening the door to eventual expansion through the PFP. At the same time, Aspin was emphasizing that the PFP was “no guarantee of NATO membership.” Such ambiguity in remarks and outlook strengthened Russia’s belief that NATO expansion would not happen in the near future.

President Clinton himself was the one to push U.S. consideration of NATO enlargement forward through several public remarks. The first was a statement made at a press conference in Prague on January 12, 1994: “the question is no longer whether NATO will take on new members but when and how.” Clinton made this statement because of pressure from National Security Advisor Lake, who, along with other proponents of speedy NATO expansion, saw it as critical to moving forward. Skeptics of the policy, however, as well as Russia itself, did not view the statement as anything particularly significant. Clinton again “moved the ball” of the enlargement process forward in July of 1994 through remarks made in Warsaw. In response to an interview question, he articulated: “I do want to make it clear that, in my view, NATO will be expanded, that it should be expanded, and that it should be expanded as a way of strengthening security.” Clinton also remarked that a timetable for expansion should be

---

49 Ibid., 41.  
50 Ibid.  
51 Ibid., 46.  
53 Goldgeier, Not Whether But When, 68.  
developed. The newly named assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs Richard Holbrooke took these statements made by the President and turned them into solid foreign policy. At an interagency meeting in September of 1994, he proclaimed “that there was a presidential policy to enlarge NATO that needed implementation.” Subsequently, by the end of 1994, all in the Clinton administration understood NATO’s enlargement to be stated policy; the questions of “who?” and “when?” were yet to be answered.

As described previously, Russia was under the impression in the early 1990s that NATO’s expansion to its former zone of influence would occur far in the future, if at all. This was the result of ambiguous language coming out of Washington regarding its expansion policy. For example, although some were promoting the Partnership for Peace as a first step towards enlargement, Russian President Boris Yeltsin still called it a “great idea,” and a “brilliant stroke” of policy. Yeltsin’s response was to Secretary of State Christopher presenting PFP with the assurance that “any [NATO] expansion would be long-term and evolutionary.” It thus came as an incredible shock to President Yeltsin when the NATO foreign ministers announced on December 1, 1994 that the organization would perform a study, to be completed by December of the following year, on how NATO should go about expanding. Russia responded by refusing to sign two documents that would have moved the Russia-PFP cooperation forward.

President Yeltsin also responded through harsh remarks at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) summit in Budapest. He warned: “Europe,
even before it has managed to shrug off the legacy of the Cold War, is risking
cumbering itself with a cold peace,” adding that expanding NATO would “sow the
seeds of distrust.” Such harsh remarks dumbfounded President Clinton and his staff.
This sharp reaction from Russia made clear the negative impact pursuing NATO
expansion would have on U.S.-Russian relations. As a result, the United States began in
the spring of 1995 to closely follow a “two track” foreign policy involving keeping
Russia happy while still moving forward on enlargement.

NATO’s enlargement study was released in September of 1995. The study was a
victory for those who did not want to wait for a slow expansion process. It recommended
that new member candidate states “be judged on a case-by-case basis,” meaning that
membership criteria would not be explicitly laid out. It also defined the following for
Russia:

“First, no country would have a veto; second, the alliance did not need to
station troops on the territory of new members, but if it needed to, it
would; third, new members would not be second-class citizens—they
would have the full NATO security guarantee, including the nuclear
umbrella.”

This study was an important step forward, particularly in answering the question of
“how” NATO would expand.

59 Moscow Russian Television Network, December 5, 1994, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily
Report: Soviet Union, December 5, 1994, p. 4, quoted in James M. Goldgeier, Not Whether But When
60 Goldgeier and McFaul, Power and Purpose, 191.
61 Goldgeier, Not Whether But When, 95.
62 Ibid.
The Clinton administration answered the “when” of NATO expansion in the fall of 1996. This was a prime time to push even farther forward than before because two key obstacles had been crossed in the past year. First, peace accords had been finalized in Dayton, Ohio in November of 1995, bringing a peaceful solution to the conflict in Bosnia. The fact that NATO was able to end this conflict was a strong legitimating factor of NATO expansion, because one argument for the expansion was to prevent such conflicts from occurring in the future. Another significant aspect of the Bosnian peace process was the cooperation between NATO and Russian forces in solving the conflict. The second obstacle to expansion that had been overcome was the July 1996 Russian presidential election. President Clinton had been waiting on the election before moving forward with expansion definitions in order to help Yeltsin’s domestic political support.

With Yeltsin’s successful reelection, Clinton was free to announce a timeline. In September, Secretary of State Christopher called for a summit to take place in the summer of 1997 at which NATO would “issue [formal] invitations to those partners ready to begin negotiations for membership.” He also called for a “formal charter” between NATO and Russia. President Clinton then announced on a campaign stop in Detroit that America’s goal was for the next wave of new NATO members to join in 1999, the year of the organization’s fiftieth anniversary.

Before the 1997 summit took place, NATO signed its formal charter with Russia. This was made possible by the United States making a series of accessions to Russia beforehand. The first of these accessions occurred at a December 1996 meeting in Lisbon at which the United States agreed to amend the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. The terms of this treaty grouped military equipment in Europe into Eastern and

---

63 Ibid., 105.
Western blocs, which hardly made sense in the post-Cold War world. A second assurance to Russia came from Secretary of State Christopher in Brussels. He asserted “that in today’s Europe, NATO has no intention, no plan, and no need to station nuclear weapons on the territory of any new members.” This statement eased Russian fears that nuclear encroachment on their boarders would accompany NATO expansion. Another “no” assurance was issued on March 14, 1997 when NATO produced a statement that it “had no intention, plan, or need to introduce substantial [conventional] forces onto the territory of the new members.” Furthermore, in the Helsinki summit in March 1997, the United States agreed to move forward on the START III arms reduction talks as soon as START II had been negotiated. Russia was also offered membership into the G-7, which then became the G-8. With all these political assurances, Russia was ready to sign the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security in Paris on May 27, 1997.

This Founding Act was the final step in the United States’ two-track foreign policy between Russia and NATO before NATO offered membership to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in Madrid in July of 1997. The Madrid summit was a culmination of the process leading towards NATO’s first post-Cold War enlargement that had begun during the German unification talks in 1990. The three states would move on to officially join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1999 as the institution celebrated its fiftieth anniversary.

---

Conclusions

Argument

As the previous chapter described, NATO expanded to include three former-Soviet bloc states in 1997 as a result of influential domestic players within the United States, which was the dominant force behind NATO policy-making. This expansion ultimately had a negative impact on the prospects for more cooperative U.S-Russian relations after the Cold War. Russia had been led to believe by statements made during the German unification talks and later by ambiguous language coming out of Washington that the organization would not expand at all, or at least not so quickly. Russians viewed the movement of what had originally been a military alliance to counter Soviet power closer to its borders as a security threat because it meant the possibility that conventional or nuclear forces could be deployed closer to their country. In fact, Russia agreed to the Founding Act with NATO only after the organization made official statements that it had no intention, need, or plan to deploy such forces into future new member states.

Although the two states were able to cooperate in forming this charter, the whole process of NATO’s expansion left a sour taste in Russia’s mouth. Russians felt deceived about the timeline of expansion and saw the American need to move NATO eastward as a sign that the United States was not ready to be the friendly allies the two states had promoted at the beginning of the decade.

Application of Constructivist theory can help explain why, although it was harmful for relations with Russia, the United States (and thus NATO as well) decided to push the organization eastward. The ideas and identities of American domestic actors shaped two distinct foreign policy interests and goals within the U.S. The actors favoring
a quicker NATO expansion pursued their foreign policy goal more effectively, thus leading to the 1997 enlargement. In this way, these actors’ ideas shaped their interests, which in turn changed an international institution, affecting the international system as a whole.

The two ideas behind U.S. foreign policy in the process of deciding NATO’s expansion included Lake, Holbrooke, and eventually Clinton’s belief in Wilsonian reasoning that democracies do not go to war with one another. They thus defined U.S. interests as promoting liberal reforms in Central and Eastern Europe to help stabilize the whole region. Consequentially, continually moving forward to expand NATO in order to give these nations incentive to reform became their policy goal. The second idea was Secretary of Defense Aspin and most military leaders’ belief that taming military might is the best way to ensure security stabilization. The Pentagon thus defined U.S. interests as integrating Russia into the West and further bilateral denuclearization. The recent antagonistic history in relations between the United States and Russia also served to strengthen the Pentagon’s argument that Russian security should be the main foreign policy concern.

Anthony Lake and Richard Holbrooke were ultimately able to achieve their goal of NATO enlargement in 1997. Their ideas and subsequent interests were thus able to change an international institution. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the international norm had been to separate the world into two spheres of influence: that of the United States and that of the Soviet Union. With the end of the Cold War, these spheres of influence became ambiguous. NATO expanding into Central and Eastern European states made it so that the international system was no longer separated into
these two strictly defined blocs. It was the first official action of states formerly under Soviet influence integrating fully into a Western institution. The expansion represented a culmination of the change that had taken place with the end of the Cold War. No longer was the world separated into Capitalism and Communism, East and West, Soviet Union and United States.

Implications

By framing NATO’s first post-Cold War enlargement in terms of Constructivism, this thesis’ argument serves to strengthen the International Relations theory. Its assumptions that ideas and identity shape interests and consequentially shape the international system were able to adequately explain the 1997 expansion and its subsequent effects on the U.S.-Russian relationship. Realist reliance on relative military power and security concerns is unable to explain why the expansion happened. Although the Pentagon’s concern for relative nuclear strength in the expansion policy process reflects Realist ideology, the fact that that very ideology was being used by domestic actors to promote policy goals is explained only by Constructivist assumptions. Similarly, Liberalism’s Wilsonian democratic peace ideology being promoted by domestic actors such as Anthony Lake ultimately led to the decision to expand NATO. Liberalism itself does not explain how this Wilsonian idea shaped foreign policy; Constructivism provides the framework to explain the idea’s effect.

This thesis thus strengthens Constructivism relative to Realism and Liberalism as a tool for explaining international political change. The theory can be applied to make sense of future change in the international system, and, through “pay[ing] close attention
to the prevailing discourse(s) in society” that shapes beliefs and interests, can predict such change.66

Further Research

Given Constructivism’s relative strength over other IR theory, it should be applied to further exploration of NATO enlargement’s post-1997 effects on the international system. The theory can also be applied to explaining the organization’s subsequent enlargement in 2004 and the ongoing process leading to possible future enlargements. As far as deepening the analysis of NATO’s first post-Cold War enlargement, further research could include U.S. domestic politics leading to senate ratification of NATO’s expansion in 1998 and events leading to the formal expansion (rather than just formal invitation) in 1999. A deeper analysis of the process leading to NATO’s enlargement could also include more details on the European perspective than is presented in this thesis.

---

Bibliography


Mearsheimer, John J. “Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War.”


