

SPEECH BY THE RT HON LORD OWEN TO THE MOSCOW STATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

Forty years ago in October 1977 I visited Moscow as Foreign Secretary, the first to visit for over six years. I talked with President Brezhnev who then watched as Foreign Minister Gromyko and I signed the Anglo-Soviet Agreement on the Prevention of an Accidental Outbreak of Nuclear War. Later I was the Treasurer of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security Issues, chaired by Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme with among others former US Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and two Russians as members. We produced the report *Common Security* which was later used by President Gorbachev as a new policy framework. Ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 I have believed the Russian Federation should become a partner in many aspects of world politics.

I first started to work closely with President Yeltsin's Government in the Balkans in 1992 within the framework of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia established by the London Conference at the end of August 1992, having been appointed, along with Cyrus Vance, the UN Co-Chairman, as the EU Co-Chairman. I can truly say that Russia was a respected partner during all my time until May 1995, contributing troops to UNPROFOR, actively engaged in helping the ICFY-led negotiations and even ready to be persuaded to support the introduction of a NATO imposed no-fly zone with the UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina where NATO as the regional security force was authorised by UN Resolution to use airpower in carefully calibrated circumstances. As Co-Chairman of the ICFY I did not agree with the US, UK, and French 'safe haven' policy that was also supported by the Russians when the UN Secretariat, despite constantly trying, could only find 6,000 extra blue helmets despite UN commanders saying they needed over 31,000 to be effective. The Srebrenica genocide in the summer of 1995 was a predictable, and predicted, disaster. A case of four permanent members of the Security Council willing the end but not producing the means. Yet it did agree to the use of force to implement peace negotiations. Russia in December 1995 agreed to work alongside the NATO-led implementation force, IFOR, to implement the Dayton Accords and joined NATO's operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean.

Yet by February 1997, in the *New York Times*, the veteran US diplomat and Russian expert George Kennan was warning us all very clearly of the risks of NATO stretching to the boundaries of the Russian Federation:

The view, bluntly stated, is that expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era. Such a decision may be expected to inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.

His intervention, having been ignored by the Clinton Administration, Kennan returned to the charge in May 1998 in an interview with Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times* when he commented on the US Senate's agreement on NATO expansion:

I think it is the beginning of a new Cold War. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the founding fathers of this country turn in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way. [NATO expansion] was simply a lighthearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs.

I was particularly bothered by the references to Russia as a country dying to attack Western Europe. Don't people understand? Our differences in the Cold War were with the Soviet Communist regime. And now we are turning our backs on the very people who mounted the greatest bloodless revolution in history to remove that Soviet regime.¹

Sadly, well before NATO's bombing of Kosovo in 1999, Russian/NATO diplomatic cooperation was cooling. I talked to Russian diplomats early on in the conflict and they predicted bombing would not succeed but that the time was not right for an early intervention and they would wait and intervene diplomatically later. The true story over Kosovo has never been told, I suspect because Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin were of a generation that zealously regarded Gazprom's reputation for not being used as a diplomatic tool by closing gas pipelines, whereas now it is more overt. I am of the view that when Yeltsin's special envoy, Chernomyrdin, first visited President Milosevic in Belgrade by himself, that he warned him that when he returned a few weeks later with the UN special envoy and Finnish President Ahtisaari he would be demanding a Serbian military withdrawal from Kosovo and that if this was not done there would be a total cut off of Russian gas. I am sure it was this far more than a fear that the US under President Clinton would intervene militarily with troops on the ground, which forced Milosevic to order a reluctant Serbian military to withdraw despite having successfully withstood more than 80 days of NATO bombing.

1. Thomas L. Friedman, 'Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X', *New York Times*, 2 May 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>

The Russian troops arriving at Kosovo airfield in 1999 in advance of the negotiated time for General Jackson to take over command was a provocative act and raised the political temperature between Russia and NATO countries. But Jackson was right to keep to the agreed Serb timetable for withdrawal and was supported in this by the US Defense Department against the order of the then US SACEUR. NATO's proven command and control structures are flexible and resilient. They respect democratic control, and this is something you in Russia should not underestimate. Kosovo was a political bridge too far for President Yeltsin to support. Rather than provoke his veto in the UN, NATO made a humanitarian intervention and did not cite a threat to the peace under the UN Charter.

Whether NATO enlargement or expansion was an active policy decision in some quarters or an inadvertent lack of attention is discussed in the book *British Foreign Policy After Brexit* which I have written with David Ludlow.² The end result was the same – a growing feeling of humiliation and resentment in Russia, and a harkening for a return to the glory days, as Robert Skidelsky highlights in an article entitled 'Reset for West's Relations with Russia?':

... Robert Gates, who headed the CIA in the early 1990s, later conceded that the West, and particularly the US, 'badly underestimated the magnitude of Russian humiliation in losing the Cold War'. The spectacle of 'American government officials, academicians, businessmen, and politicians' arrogantly 'telling the Russians how to conduct their [...] affairs' inevitably 'led to deep and long-term resentment and bitterness'.³

Vindictiveness was not the problem as much as condescension. This attitude started with President George W. Bush ignoring in 2001 the substance of Putin's speedy offer of cooperation after 9/11 with the closure of bases in Cuba and North Korea. Then Bush and Blair grossly mishandled Afghanistan and Iraq from 2003-2006. Then Obama, intellectually dismissing Russia as a regional power, failed to anticipate that war in Syria gave Russia the opportunity to return to a position of influence in the Middle East. Empires hang on to exaggerated power because of their history and the aspiration to exert influence. It can be a somewhat painful adjustment period as we in the UK experienced after the Suez Canal failure in 1956 and you in Russia experienced in Afghanistan in the 1980s. But Empires leave a legacy which cannot be glibly disparaged, particularly if the

² David Owen and David Ludlow, *British Foreign Policy After Brexit* (Biteback Publishing, 2017) Chapter 5: Russia and Stability in wider Europe.

³ <https://www.socialeurope.eu/2017/01/reset-wests-relations-russia/>

will of the people wants to remain a player internationally as they believe they do in both Russia and in the UK.

Despite differences of opinion by 2004 NATO and Russia drew up a list of cooperative projects which included a counter terrorism plan and cooperative exercises in civil defence, emergency management, theatre missile defence, nuclear materials and submarine search and rescue culminating when a UK-led NATO team raised the Russian submersible AS28 in 2005.

In the summer of 2003 President Putin came to London for a State visit with the joint venture between TNK-BP and Rosneft being agreed shortly afterwards. I attended the Buckingham Palace State Banquet having been doing business in Russia since 1995 as chairman of a small company called Middlesex Holdings, with a shareholding in OEMK, the modern steel plant in Stary Oskol. Since 2002 I had also been chairman of Yukos International, a post I remained in until 2005. The chairman of the Leningrad Region approached me during the evening with a terse message, 'Tell Khodorkovsky to stay out of politics'. I did relay such a message and believed it would be wise for him to do so, but to no avail. Khodorkovsky was arrested a few months later, tried and imprisoned. Yukos was a very well run commercial company and it was a sadness for those who worked in it and a huge setback for shareholders that it was broken up and became part of Rosneft.

All through the next 20 years until 2015 I continued to be involved in a UK trading company, Europe Steel, selling OEMK products from the UK. I stress this to this audience so you understand that I was not just an observer of Russia but actively engaged in business here for 20 years. This was a deliberate choice. I looked at going into business in Africa in 1995 but chose Russia as the country in addition to the UK and US to start a new non political life as a businessman. While in business I deliberately eschewed politics in Washington and Moscow. Apart from social meetings, I never met any politician except Deputy Prime Minister Shuvalov who I saw in the Kremlin and tried to persuade him to let Khodorkovsky out of prison. This was a deliberate decision. I believe in the separation of politics and business. I hoped that after 1989 it would be through a developing mixed economy in Russia that commercial relationships would build up trust between Russia and the rest of the world, and your Communist command economy would never return. Commercial relationships did lead to a better intergovernmental relationship for twenty years and gather in its wake personal relationships that still bind business people together. I remain of the view that this will be the

dynamics for the rebuilding of our currently very strained national relationships. I fear the figure that some use today that 70% of the Russian economy is controlled by the Russian Government. That is too high a percentage and it has to be admitted that it is still rising. One of the many bad consequences of our current economic stand off and sanctions is that it is pushing you in Russia back into the command economy of the past with all its diseconomies and threats to freedom of choice.

Yet at times we who represent the Western economies have not been the best proponents of the market economy. The first warning sign I had that our commercial relationship would not be smooth came with rouble devaluation in August 1998. I had been involved with the negotiation of a US \$100 million loan from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development for OJSC. We had even exchanged 'tombstones' to mark the completion of the deal, but a technical cancellation of the contract took place immediately after devaluation. It was an outrageous decision. Never again could I engage with Russian managers on the need for the honouring of commercial obligations and acting in good faith with the same conviction. OJSC overcame this shock decision and in the years that followed joined up with the iron ore mine Lebedinsky GOK as part of Metalloinvest whose iron ore flows down a pipe into the steel mill with virtually no transport costs. The combined business is now a profitable modern equipped plant selling iron briquettes around the world and raising private finance from many different countries.

There was no single event which of itself triggered the present deterioration in relations between NATO countries and Russia but a sequence of ongoing events. Georgia 2008, Libya 2011, Syria 2011, Ukraine 2014. I believe the most poisonous is the lack of trust in the Security Council that was generated over Libya.

The controversy around the military intervention in Libya continues to this day, as the country has both collapsed into chaos and become a major trafficking hub for migrants seeking to cross to Europe. Once again, the lack of sufficient boots on the ground after initial destructive aerial bombing has raised questions about the continued use of this particular strategy of intervention confined to the use of air power. The reluctance to involve Russia from the start in continuing discussions at the UN Security Council was an error. By abstaining in the Security Council vote, Russia and China had let the UN resolution approving action through, but they had been assured throughout that regime change was not the objective. Dmitry Medvedev, who was, at the time,

the President of the Russian Federation, was helped in his decision not to use the veto by Obama saying publicly: 'Broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake ... If we tried to overthrow Gaddafi by force our coalition would splinter.' Whatever the rights or wrongs of handling Gaddafi, a large section of global opinion believes France and the UK in particular were intent on removing him, and much of what Sarkozy and Cameron said at the time fed the impression that their goal was to capture Gaddafi dead or alive, allowing Putin, then Russian Prime Minister, to talk later of the Libyan operation as a medieval crusade by the West. President Medvedev deserved better from the UK and France. At the very least, they should have involved the Russian military through the NATO–Russia Council on the real problems of target selection, as Gaddafi continued to operate as the controlling force of the military. There should have been a discussion even if there might well have been no agreement. Thereafter, it appears Russian policy has been never to let a UN Security Resolution pass over Syria that could be used to justify damaging President Assad, and this was a serious blow to solving the civil war. The one moment of hope was when Foreign Ministers Lavrov and Kerry negotiated over sarin gas in Syria and there is little doubt that a very large part of that stock was removed and destroyed under UN supervision. Not easy during a war.

President Obama, in an interview with the *Atlantic* magazine in 2016 was also critical of the UK and France for failing to stop Libya becoming what he called a 'mess'. He singled out Cameron for allegedly becoming 'distracted by a range of other things'. Certainly, without US air power the Libyan ground-to-air missiles would never have been so comprehensively destroyed before French and British airplanes flew bombing sorties. This was the major contribution that the US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, made. While being opposed to the whole intervention, Gates made sure that at least in the early stages NATO, because of the US, had the means to create an effective no-fly zone. Gates never made any secret that implementing a no-fly zone is a declaration of war, not a half way house. In Libya, military from Qatar made an important contribution in ground-to-air control, but it is still necessary to reappraise no-fly zones as an instrument of intervention. In Syria, Turkey wanted one to create a safe haven and if done then it could have been extended to cover Aleppo.

It is urgent now that a dispassionate new approach is taken with Russia by the US, UK, France and Germany if we are to see stability and relations return to the optimism from 1989-2011. The existing procedures do NOT work. In any new approach I argue that China may well be

able to help the process as a participant from outside the Middle East and also Eastern Europe. We need to re-examine our language, attitudes and actions.

Andrew Monaghan's book *The New Politics of Russia. Interpreting Change* is a very good starting place as to how we and you might start to change.⁴ He writes about "strong linguistic dissonance, both in terms of translation and different interpretation of terminology" suggesting that the Ukraine crisis has revealed that the West and Russia are speaking different dialects on security. There are gaps in terminology that reflect divergences: in Western terms, for instance, Crimea was 'annexed' by Russia, but in Russian terms, Crimea was 'reunified' with Russia. Similarly, NATO's policy is one of 'open door' or 'enlargement' whereas the Russian term is 'expansion'. Linguistic differences were commonplace in the Cold War whether in terms of peace, détente and deterrence. But there is more than linguistics to the breakdown in relations that I believe have been highlighted in Syria and now permeate the Middle East.

As I explain in this lecture, two areas of foreign policy - the Middle East and Eastern Europe - must come together with sufficient, cooperative activity to rebuild again the relationship which has led to - let us not avoid the term - hostility between Russia and NATO. Firstly, be clear I and many others in the UK believe that we need to increase the percentage of GDP we spend on defence from 2% to 2.5% over the next five years. This is to ensure we match some of your Russian military decisions that directly impact on us in the UK as a fully committed member of NATO. President Putin has admitted that he considered putting Russian nuclear forces on full alert at the time of maximum tension over Crimea which shows how unwise it is to assume that Russian nuclear strategies are anywhere near the same as ours in the UK. It is true also that President Putin has threatened to base nuclear forces in the Crimea and has deployed missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads in Kaliningrad, your Russian enclave on the Baltic Sea that neighbours Poland and Lithuania. Nevertheless, I do not believe we are inexorably locked into an arms race and I do not wish to exaggerate; the might of the USSR far outweighed that of the Russian Federation.

The relevant concern we have is the growth in the belief amongst informed NATO military opinion that your Russian conventional forces are now able to punch a hole in NATO's conventional defences, particularly in the Baltic region. This is the rational case for increased

⁴ Andrew Monaghan, *The New Politics of Russia. Interpreting Change* (Manchester University Press, 2016), p.9.

NATO defence spending; to allow that new feature to consolidate would lead to a risk that NATO would be forced to make a choice over resorting to nuclear weapons at a far earlier stage than hitherto. It is essential, therefore, that the UK puts money and effort into our deterrence strategy in its modern setting and its relationship to cyber warfare.

The Sixth US Strategic Command Deterrence Symposium on 27–28 July 2016⁵ looked at deterrence in its widest context. One conclusion of the symposium was that ‘space is not deterred in space and cyber is not deterred in cyber, they must be considered in conjunction’. The symposium saw hybrid warfare – characterised by misinformation, unconventional activity and ambiguity – as designed to be kept below the threshold which would involve conventional conflict, and carefully planned to avert state conflict, but supportive of an overall hostile strategy.

Your renewed Russian political and military involvement in the Middle East is not new. It is easy to forget that on 24 October 1973 Leonid Brezhnev nearly sent a Soviet airborne force to the Arab-Israeli war zone and US forces were put on increased alert.

Fortunately, that dire crisis passed. Later a conference was held in Geneva in December 1973, which was co-chaired by the US and the Soviet Union. Following the conference the Soviet Union’s influence in the Middle East, however, began to wane. Nevertheless, on 1 October 1977 a joint US–Soviet statement on the Middle East was made by US Secretary of State Vance and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko. A vituperative attack on this statement by Begin’s government showed they were totally opposed to a reconvening of any Geneva Conference. This view was reinforced by the Jewish community in the US. Also President Sadat of Egypt had private doubts about yet further involvement of the Soviet Union, then Egypt’s main arms supplier, and was trying to back away from Egypt being seen as part of a Soviet sphere of influence. President Carter had also wisely sent Sadat a handwritten note towards the end of October appealing for a bold and statesmanlike move to help overcome the hurdles to the Geneva process.

On 13 November 1977, after some private diplomacy between Egypt and Israel, Menachem Begin invited Sadat to come to Israel, and on 18 November Sadat flew into Israel to propose a world summit in East Jerusalem to be attended by Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the PLO with the US, Soviet Union, China, France and the UK. That proposal was soon dropped in favour of the start of a dialogue between Sadat and Begin, but it had merit then and it could yet have merit forty

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/user/stratcompa>

years later.

Experience over the last 24 years shows that US Presidents Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama – all second-term Presidents – when they are meant to have more scope to influence the Israeli government have not been politically capable of exercising sustained authority to force a compromise. The UN, Russia and the EU were for much of this time corralled into the so-called Quartet with the US, making it hard for the UK or France to take independent positions. Attempts were made to improve the economy of the Palestinian Arab areas by the appointment of special envoys as representatives of the Quartet. The first was the previous head of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, who initially did well but stepped down after a year because of restrictions in dealing with Hamas and the withholding of money from the Palestinian Authority. Initial objections were made by Russia to the second envoy, Tony Blair, as to the scope of his authority. But Blair's views on potential military action against Iran in light of its nuclear programme – a matter totally outside his remit – helped neither the Palestinians' relations with him nor the British government, who did not agree with his views. Attacks from southern Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank continued into Israeli-held territory. A high wall has been built between the two potential states by Israel, highlighting the image of irreconcilability but perhaps only temporarily leading to some diminution in attacks.

During much of this time the Israeli government, but not many of their key strategic commanders, wanted the US to help them bomb Iran. Fortunately, that resistance from the Israeli military and intelligence community has so far succeeded in preventing any such pre-emptive military action. It is to the credit of President George W. Bush that he made it publicly clear in the transitional period of the incoming President Obama that he had refused the request of the then Prime Minister Olmert, making it easier for President Obama to also refuse Prime Minister Netanyahu.

A fresh approach has to take account of two dramatic changes in the recent politics of the Middle East.

The first was in the summer of 2015 when Assad during a visit to Moscow warned President Putin that the road link between Damascus and the Mediterranean was in danger of being blocked militarily by rebel forces, and Putin responded swiftly and intelligently. In September 2015,

the Russian naval base, which you have occupied since 1971, was quickly reinforced by adapting a nearby Syrian airfield, and your Russian planes began a bombing campaign to tilt the balance back in favour of Assad, while claiming you were going in primarily to attack ISIS. Russia was obviously now going to control an area of Syria in the west like the Turks had wanted to do in the east. President Obama should have acted at this stage very differently, for the threat to Damascus, to which your President Putin was responding, was real. Had Damascus, a multi-religious centre, not dissimilar to Jerusalem, been captured with ISIS already ensconced in the suburbs, it would have been devastating. Obama should have suggested to Putin that Russia focus on Damascus and the Alawite Mediterranean stronghold while the US would help protect Aleppo and work with Turkey to create from the air the safe haven for refugees on Syrian territory. They might not have agreed but Russia was embarking on a risky venture and did want to collaborate over ISIS. The situation in the Middle East now involves Lebanon which has created a situation where both Russia and the US must cooperate. Neither can resolve it on their own.

We can go on with Russia working in its interests and the US in theirs, but it will not deal with Iran and Saudi Arabia, the UAE and some other Arab countries are locked into the war in Yemen. Any moment war can extend to Lebanon. Take another example. NATO is in danger of losing Turkey as a member, something which would be both a grave strategic loss, and a serious political loss. In the short term you in Russia who are obviously wooing Turkey think this will help you. I doubt it will, even in the short term. There are many Muslim countries with which you have strong strategic and political links, one need only mention the 'Stans'. Whereas the US, UK, France and Germany have far fewer Muslim countries not locked in conflict. why try to reduce them? Turkey in NATO widens our perspective on the Muslim World. Narrowing that perspective will be detrimental to us, but also to you in Russia.

The other dramatic change of huge potential importance is the recent announcement by the 32 year old Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman, to create over his lifetime a new i-city Neom that will be representative of the modern Saudi Arabia. He is intent on returning Saudi Arabia to moderate Islam introducing social change in relation to women and religious change in a distancing of the government from the powerful Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism has done huge harm to you in Russia – think of their attempt to destabilize Chechnya and the 'Stans'. Also to the US; think of 9/11

with 15 of the 19 perpetrators coming from Saudi Arabia and masterminded by Bin Laden on the Afghan border with Pakistan. As yet the Crown Prince has not spoken about engaging Gaza in his Neom vision but this I am sure will come and could be crucial for creating a prosperous Palestine.



A Gaza able to 'breathe' across the Egyptian border could hasten the emergence of Palestine as a stable state. Hamas now accepting the Palestinian Authority personnel on Gaza's border points with Egypt and the Israeli military is a much-needed stabilising move.

There can be no stability in a Middle East with the Sunni and Shia people divided and while Iran and Saudi Arabia pursue their present enmity. Russia, the US, Europe, Israel, Palestine and Egypt can all be a crucial influence ending this divide. Firstly, the Shia-led Iraq should become evermore important. Secondly, Israel's pragmatic relations with the Alawite-led Syrian government over the decades has been important and Golan surprisingly stable. You in Russia did not make the same mistaken judgement as the US and many European governments, including the UK, that the Assad regime was likely to be overthrown by the uprising within Syria in 2011. Now Syria must be rebuilt.

In Iraq there is still the unfulfilled potential for Haider al-Abadi, the Prime Minister since 2014, to garner the confidence of the Sunnis but their disillusionment with Baghdad is

growing now particularly after ISIS has been routed in Syria and Iraq, a more precise word incidentally than beaten. ISIS are moving elsewhere but are still ensconced in Sinai. The Saudis may be in the process of stepping back from their hitherto supportive role for Iraqi Sunnis which could have consequences. In Parliament the Sunni-led grouping has 78 seats correctly proportional, dwarfed by the Shia grouping which has 182 and the Kurdish element 65 seats. Yet that Parliament is seen to be heavily influenced by Iran, more so than the government. In April next year al-Abadi will come up for re-election and he will need to win support from the Sunni group, as well as the Kurds who are alienated following al-Abadi's military action after Barzani's ill-fated referendum. Stability in Iraq is still suffering from the consequences of the US/UK de-Baathification in 2003. Under Prime Minister al-Maliki from 2006-2014 many Sunnis were further deprived of prominent jobs in the military and government; some jobs came back under al-Abadi. Financially, Sunnis ask, who is going to help rebuild Mosul? What about towns like Karma with a population of around 95,000 liberated in May 2016? Money has been promised but is yet to materialise in anything like the amounts that will be needed. Al-Abadi as a Shia will obviously want to maintain good relations with Iran but there are few signs that he wishes to be dominated by Iran. Yet short-sighted policies from Saudi Arabia, US and Europe could very easily deepen al-Abadi's dependence on Iran. Bombing Iran would be exactly the wrong way to proceed. There is no future whatever for the US, UK, France, Russia or Israel in taking sides between the Shia and the Sunni population in the Middle East. Nor is there any future for the Saudi-dominated Sunni grouping's economic and political, often illegal, actions against what some refer to as the Islamist Sunni grouping of Qatar and Turkey.

The first line of defence against the Iranian Revolutionary Guard becoming an expeditionary force beyond the boundaries of the Islamic Republic is to encourage a more moderate Iraqi Shia government to play a mainstream role in Middle East politics.

The second line of defence is to create a Syria genuinely independent and not dominated by Iran. Can Assad be such a leader? Certainly his father was never in the pocket of the Shah or until very recently so dependent for survival on Iran. Here the role of Russia is becoming ever more important but the most stable solution is to mobilise the Middle East regionally to reject any assumption that Assad can be allowed to control the whole of Syria without defining security conditions affecting his neighbours. In Syria a well-

judged Kurdish policy could help reduce Iranian influence. As could a new push for Sunni unity. The strengthened American military in Iraq and Syria that is focussed on ISIL has work to do to help constrain Assad. How much better if that could be done as a regional policy and supported by Russia.

In that process there is no substitute for a US/Russian military dialogue and that must extend at the right time to Trump and Putin. This will be difficult given US domestic politics. It has been one of the successes of Putin's personal diplomacy in the Middle East that it has been surprisingly inclusive. Netanyahu has been frequently consulted. Russia, so far, has not fallen into the trap of being identified only with the Sunni or the Shia. Putin has also seen the Saudis and talked to Iran. All this gives me hope.

Despite much comment a permanent land bridge has not yet been established from Tehran to Beirut. Israel will not accept this. Yet the potential for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to achieve this is considerable. It looked as if after his successful visit to Saudi Arabia that President Trump was determined that the US should side with Saudi Arabia's views, but that appears to have been too simplistic an assumption. US diplomacy has helped Kuwait moderate somewhat the hostility between Qatar and Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The US Secretary of State has warned about intervention in the Lebanon after the resignation of the Lebanese Prime Minister announced from Saudi Arabia. The need to continue to suppress ISIL and their associates means the American military ought to be able to continue to work closely with Russia. Much depends on President Putin and President Trump and both most recently talked at the Asia-Pacific summit held in November 2017 in Vietnam.

President Trump on Iran, instead of abandoning the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran (JCPOA), the multilateral agreement negotiated by China, France, Germany, Russia, the UK and the US, referred the matter to the US Congress. This was a clever and wise move. Congress will recognise that the Plan is enshrined in UN Resolution 2311 unanimously adopted by the UN Security Council in early 2016 and cannot just be overthrown. Congress is wisely taking their time and fixing many hearings. China is well placed to influence Congress as is the UK, France and Germany in such hearings. On Iran there are critical issues on which the US Congress will be justified in demanding progress such as missile programmes, regional responsibilities, cooperation with al-Qaeda and

their stance on Israel, and more generally on human rights. What they must not do and in my opinion will not do is challenge the essence of the Plan of Action. The one forum for negotiation with the Islamic Republic of Iran that has worked for the US is this one. That forum I profoundly believe is the only way now in which Russia and the US can together work with Iran to help stabilise the Middle East. I suggest we do not need to reinvent the wheel. Work with what works.

China will not be silent on Iran. China has a very direct interest in Iranian oil and gas, as well as Saudi, Qatar and the Gulf States, coming out through the straits of Hormuz and turning left into the Indian Ocean. Whereas in the past the US had an overriding interest in Iranian and Saudi oil turning right outside the straits, the US build up of regional and national self-sufficiency in oil and gas has made them far less dependent. China played a very constructive role in JCPOA. They do not want to see that Agreement swept away by the US. They, I hope, can be persuaded as a permanent member of the Security Council to go on using influence for a wider purpose such as over Syria, to define steps that a recognised government must accept as part of Middle East recognition. Particularly the passage of arms, on the ground or in the air, and military personnel from any country into another; whether Saudi Arabia or Israel, not just Iran to Lebanon. Here again there needs to be a dialogue between you in Russia with your naval and air facilities in the Alawite-dominated Mediterranean area only minutes flying time from Lebanon and with the UK in Cyprus as well as and the US and Israel. Some of that dialogue is already happening between the respective military in all these countries. Russian aircraft have twice breached Israel's boundary but were not shot down as they were once by Turkey. We need restraint.

In Lebanon unless there are significant checks placed on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard-Alawite-Hezbollah axis there will be war involving Israel again. The increased Shia influence in Lebanon is a reality but it risks becoming Iran dominated. Hezbollah is basically a Lebanese phenomenon though backed by Iran. They will not go away but they have to be contained. Hezbollah has fought in Syria using heavy weapons in a way they have never done in Lebanon. They are in possession of many more sophisticated missiles than they have ever had in their armoury before. This is very dangerous.

I hope you here in Moscow understand why an Iranian military presence in Lebanon is unacceptable to many countries in the Middle East. An Iranian presence on the Syrian parts of the Golan Heights is also unacceptable. Your Russian surface to air missiles such as the S-300, if deployed within range of the Golan Heights is very provocative. A Russian-influenced Syrian government can be persuaded that limitations such as these must be negotiated. This must not be a purely US or Israeli demand, it must come from a Russian medium term assessment of what is in your self interest. But, more importantly, such bans must have the authority from a consensus in the Middle East regionally. It will not be easy to achieve.

Any Iranian government lead by President Rouhani has to recognise the strength of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. It is an industrial organisation in Iran, not just a military one. It helped save Iran during the Iran/Iraq war despite the US and Europe turning a blind eye to Iraq's use of chemical weapons. But so did the Iranian air force still flying US aircraft bought under the Shah and the Iranian naval special forces who before 1982 helped hit Iraqi military installations. Both played a crucial role in forcing Iraqi forces out of Iran.

President Rouhani, having won the Presidency for a second time, will feel he has to move very carefully. He knows the problems of rapid movement in changing policy towards the Revolutionary Guard. Yet the record shows the Islamic Revolution has moved slowly but definitely back into a dialogue with the rest of the world. That dialogue will take longer to develop than we all want. Patience is, however, an essential prerequisite for dealing with Iran.

I can only conclude with one simplistic assertion. There will be no peace in the Middle East if Russia sides with the Iran-Alawite-Hezbollah axis alone. Yet being realistic, President Putin, at the moment, has every reason to continue to focus Russian attention on that axis because he and Russia feel in their own backyard in the Ukraine that Russian interests are being ignored. The skill is for Russia to feel they have more to gain from becoming an overall peace negotiator with the US in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East as a region. How can this be done?

Geographical linkage is a proven diplomatic tool. Where your room for manoeuvre is limited, you trade across geographical boundaries and linkage of negotiating forums is also a proven source for compromise. There is, therefore, a very strong case for using the same combination of P5+1 (the Security Council permanent members plus Germany) that underpins the JCOPA across the Middle East and the same combination in Eastern Europe. A more prominent Chinese input, I have already shown, will help a wider Middle East strategy. The American military are feeling their way towards a joint strategy for dealing with North Korea with China while not ignoring Russia. There is much evidence that the US military are much respected by President Trump. The case for China being involved in Eastern Europe is that they are now a major global power and any forum needs balance and Russia should find some comfort in their involvement. Your two countries have also very successfully agreed your own boundary.

What about influencing Saudi Arabia? The new factor is the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia. He may still be attracted to bombing Iran but he is on a rapid learning curve and I detect signs that he is realizing that a Middle East solution cannot be reached by just working with the US, also bombing Iran is no longer on anyone's agenda.

It is a Middle East interest that Iran understands that they cannot follow the path that they seem set on of a military axis from Tehran through Iraq and the Alawite in Syria to install Hezbollah in power in Lebanon. It is increasingly clear that while the military and security experts in Washington and Tel Aviv have found common ground in their forthright opposition over the last few years to a pre-emptive attack on Iran they are identifying Lebanon, in the light of what has happened in Syria, as the place to call a halt to an Iranian military presence.

There has been a chain of events starting with what the Crown Prince has done in initiating reform in Saudi Arabia, already described, and the promise of a revived economic region around Neom with Jordan and Egypt, to what has been happening in Gaza in the reconciliation of Palestinian Authority with Hamas, to developments in and around Syria over the last week. There is not in place any proven mechanism to stop an outright military confrontation between Hezbollah, Iran, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Such a confrontation will not take place if President Putin is determined to stop it and if he is helped by President Trump and Prime Minister al-Abadi in Iraq. A genuine Middle Eastern settlement in which Russia and America act in concert would be a breakthrough. Its essential message must be that Hezbollah are not going to be allowed to control the Lebanon and a new very serious attempt must accompany that to forge a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine.

Look how rapidly things have moved. On 31 October 2017, the Israeli army blew up Islamic Jihad attack tunnels under the border of the Gaza strip. On 1 November it was reported out of Syria that the Israeli airforce had bombed a Hezbollah weapons factory in central Syria and anti-aircraft missiles were fired at Israeli planes as they flew over Lebanon. The Israeli army then said it would intervene militarily to prevent the occupation of a Druze village called Khadeer in the Syrian Golan Heights, some 3km from the Israeli border that was being threatened by the Islamic Nusra Front. While the situation on the ground appears to have eased since then it is clear Israel is asserting a position on which they are likely to stick. The Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned during a trip to Saudi Arabia alluding to an assassination attempt. He has lived constantly with death threats and his father was assassinated when Prime Minister in 2005. He declared in Saudi Arabia – whether under pressure or not – using unequivocal terms in his TV broadcast that “Iran arms in the region will be cut off”.

There are new signs that Israel is serious about easing the horrendous humanitarian situation that has been allowed to develop in Gaza. Major General Mordechai, the coordinator of Israeli ground activities in Gaza, has called for the implementation of an equivalent of a Marshall Plan in an article with two others published by the Institute for National Security Studies. The article does not specify the source of the funding but it does not require a genius to see the potential link to the new economic region that the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia sees developing at Neom linked with Jordan and Egypt.

Palestinian reconciliation in Gaza is the result of ongoing talks between Egypt, Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia and the UAE and it is an integral part of the Arab effort to cut Hamas off from Iran and advance the peace process. They are setting a new path in the Middle East that is both an optimistic and dangerous one.

The best diplomatic response would be for Russia and the US to suggest the P5+1 nations that worked on the Iranian nuclear question, together with different personnel, should focus on the Middle East as a whole. They are used to working with Iran and Iran with them. China, already mentioned, has a greater interest than any other nation in oil and gas coming from Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and all the Gulf states.

At the moment the incentives for Russia to create strains in its relationship on the ground with Syria, Iran and the Iranian Revolutionary commander and his troops, as well as Hezbollah, are not persuasive enough. Russia will, in my view, only play the constructive role that it could in its new position, with a military airfield close to Lebanon, if we in the other four nations in 5+1 – Germany, France, US and the UK – offer to enter with you into a constructive dialogue in the area, above all, which is of immediate concern for Russia, namely east Ukraine and Crimea. A readiness to establish formal 5+1 negotiations for the settlement of not only these boundary disputes but also involving those near Moldova, namely Transnistria. Also Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh and even perhaps Kosovo, could be a way of unblocking the present stand off in negotiating directly with Ukraine and sets the dialogue in terms of other boundary changes.

Despite a second peace agreement ('Minsk II') being signed in Minsk in February 2015, the fighting has continued and economic and political sanctions remain in place against Russia, with no final resolution in sight. The role of the EU and its member states, in managing the negotiations with Ukraine on the Association Agreement and ultimately in dealing with the subsequent crisis, has come in for much justified criticism. Richard Sakwa, in his article, 'The death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine', wrote:

The Ukraine crisis exposed the flaws in Europe's post-Cold War development... In the Ukraine crisis the EU not only proved inadequate as a conflict regulator but itself became the source of conflict. The EU's ill prepared advance into what was always recognised to be a contested neighbourhood provoked the gravest international crisis of our era, but once the crisis started Europe was sidelined.⁶

The UK's role has also been minimalist. Despite its position as a signatory of the Budapest Memorandum, the UK has not had any real role in trying to find a solution to the crisis. Germany and France have taken the lead in Europe helped by Poland. A House of Lords report highlighted this: 'As one of the four signatories of the Budapest Memorandum (1994), which

⁶ Richard Sakwa, 'The death of Europe? Continental fates after Ukraine', *International Affairs*, May 2015.

pledged to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity, the UK had a particular responsibility when the crisis erupted. The government has not been as active or as visible on this issue as it could have been.' Playing a key role in reaching a resolution to this crisis and developing a new relationship with Russia must form a key plank in any UK foreign policy outside of the EU. It will be by no means easy.

Finding a common approach will require patience and there are likely to be disruptions on the way. The US will not like making any concessions, as they will see them, to Russia over the boundaries of NATO. Yet NATO has made a number of moves to recognise Russia's special position, such as the establishment of the NATO–Russia Council, and bringing Yeltsin's Russia into the G8. Accepting Russia as a major player does not mean acquiescing to every Russian demand; however, it does require a much greater level of genuine engagement on Russian concerns and some greater limits set on NATO expansion than has been the case in the recent past. Patiently, persuasively and persistently in the P5+1 on Eastern Europe and on the Middle East deals can be made that balanced across these two separate regions could help to rebuild the relationship between Russia and the US and involve Iran in the context of Russian help in stabilising the Middle East.

We in the UK as part of NATO, meanwhile, will continue to deploy 800 troops in Estonia where present tensions continue. Prime Minister May's comments in her speech to the Republican Party conference in January 2017 provide a good starting point for the rebuilding of the UK's relationship with Russia:

There is nothing inevitable about conflict between Russia and the West. And nothing unavoidable about retreating to the days of the Cold War. But we should engage with Russia from a position of strength. And we should build the relationships, systems and processes that make co-operation more likely than conflict – and that, particularly after the illegal annexation of Crimea, give assurance to Russia's neighbouring states that their security is not in question.⁷

The scope of P5+1 negotiations would primarily establish a new international map of the many controversial boundaries in the areas already spelt out. Possible confidence-building agreements should be considered so as to help ensure there are no violations. The tensions on either side of any new borders must be addressed. These limited P5+1

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-to-the-republican-party-conference-2017>

negotiations would be a first step. They will hopefully lead on to negotiations on specific bilateral nuclear and conventional weapon reductions, military exercises and conventional force reductions and limitations in both regions. The boundary questions should not take long to conclude, the issues are known to all countries whose territory will be discussed. They must be fully represented in any specific negotiation on their boundaries. The process should be time limited from the start to run for no more than a year. Existing sanctions could be temporarily, partially or totally lifted as negotiations proceeded.

The *Times* of London editorial on 13 November 'War Drums. The Hezbollah terror group is destabilizing the Middle East at the behest of Iran' is blunt. We are on the threshold of another war in the Middle East involving Lebanon and the surrounding countries. We are already in a war in the Ukraine that has cost over 10,000 lives and could have cost many thousands more. There is war in the Yemen. With cooperation, generals and diplomats in Moscow and Washington can do much to defuse both conflicts and in the process help lay the foundations for a regional settlement between Israel and Palestine. We need Presidents Putin and Trump to authorise this process and the sooner the better and start to develop a measure of regard for each other's domestic arrangements. They will not repair all the strains and stresses quickly, but a civilized dialogue can and must be restored.

END