

Russias Position towards the Shield Project in Terms of the Neoclassical Realism

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Abstract

The Russian foreign policy (or the reaction of Russia on any phenomena) has been often analyzed only in terms of the balance of power, leaving aside the importance and scope of subjective and internal factors on its conduct. This article aims to demonstrate that Russia's position towards the European missile shield reflects internal factors, as well as some subjective factors, which reflect the perceptions of Russian political leaders. More precisely, by analyzing Russia's position vis-à-vis the missile shield, we argue that subjective factors, such as leaders' perceptions, play a key role in the conduct of the Russian foreign and security policy. that the ontological and epistemological foundations of a neoclassical realist approach can help us to establish a logical and conscious process in our analysis. This can be explained in part by the fact that neoclassical realism focuses on internal factors to explain foreign policy.

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Introduction

During the summit that took place on the 20th and 21st of May 2012 in Chicago, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced that the missile defense system would have an interim capability. According to the Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the missile shield will allow the Atlantic Alliance to defend against threats originating outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Rasmussen also said that the missile shield does not target Russia, and if necessary, is capable of intercepting missiles from Iran. Vladimir Putin surprised everyone by announcing his absence at the G8 summit at Camp David, held just days before the NATO summit, sending in his place his Prime Minister and former President Dmitry Medvedev. According to official Russian sources, Putin could not attend the meeting due to his busy schedule after the presidential elections of March 2012. However, we can assume that it was also a sign of his disapproval regarding the European missile shield.

The perception of Russian leaders of the international system, and the role that this shield would play in the international system would not match up with U.S. perceptions of the international system. The Russians could neither understand nor accept the statements of Americans trying to ensure the Russian political elite that the shield was intended only to protect European allies from possible attacks from "rogue" states. The announcement of this shield was therefore a very negative turning point in Russia-U.S. relations. The Russian response was firm. This project was considered to be a growing threat from NATO. Russia has announced a series of military intimidation tactics to counter the Alliance's influence in Europe.

How can we explain Russia's position toward European missile shield? What factors are most likely to help us understand Russia's position? This article aims to demonstrate that Russia's position towards the missile shield reflects internal factors, as well as some subjective factors, which reflect the perceptions of Russian political leaders. More precisely, by analyzing Russia's position vis-à-vis the missile shield, I argue that subjective factors, such as leaders' perceptions, play a key role in the conduct of the Russian foreign and security policy. It seems that the ontological and epistemological foundations of a neoclassical realist approach can help us to establish a logical and conscious process in our analysis. This can be explained in part by the fact that neoclassical realism focuses on internal factors to explain foreign policy.

First, we will briefly present the neoclassical realist approach. Then, we present the internal and external Russian contexts when the intention to install the missile shield was announced by the Americans. Finally, in the neoclassical realist framework, we will operationalize the following concepts: perceptions of Russian leaders of the relative power of their state and of the balance of power, and the impact of ideology on the design of Russian foreign policy and reformulation of the "grand strategy."

Neoclassical realism

Neoclassical realism is primarily a theory of foreign policy. According to neoclassical realists, the scope and ambition of States' foreign policies are determined by their relative power, but this impact of power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be interpreted by intervening variables at the unit level, such as leader's perceptions and the State structure (Taliaferro and al 2009, 5). Consequently, States (or their leaders) are

mainly guided by their perception of their relative power, and the power distribution becomes subjective (Macleod and O'Meara 2010, 126).

According to the neoclassical realism, anarchy gives states wider latitude in defining their security interests, while the relative distribution of power sets the parameters for grand strategy (Taliaferro and al 2009, 7). Thus, the neoclassical realism focuses primarily on intermediate variables (all factors within a State: its institutions, its relations with society, the beliefs of its leaders, the importance of ideologies, etc.) and how these variables determine the foreign policy (the dependent variable). Neoclassical realists see the balance of power rather "as a desirable solution" based on the perception of the relative distribution of power in the international system (Macleod and O'Meara 2010, 126).

Neoclassical realism identifies State's extraction capacity and resource mobilization as a crucial variable between the systemic imperatives and foreign and security policies. Taliaferro and others have pointed out that, apart from institutions, ideational factors such as ideology and nationalism can play an important role in the extraction and mobilization of society's resources (Taliaferro and al 2009, 38). Thus, the ideology is one of the determinants of State's power, which can facilitate, but also hinder the efforts of political leaders to extract and mobilize resources from domestic society. This profoundly depends from the content of the ideology and the nature which political elites and the public understand the ideas about the State's role vis-à-vis the society. The concept of "grand strategy", according to neoclassical realists, is the level where systemic and unit factors converge. Therefore, the grand strategy involves a process within the States in order

to pursue the objectives of the national interest.

Background

Before beginning our analysis, to contextualize and acknowledge the Russian situation (on intern and external levels) when the U.S. decision on a missile-defense system was put on the table. We can distinguish five phases of Russia's research for its place in the international system since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Levesque 2012, 1). The first-phase ran from 1991 to autumn, 1993. The second was 1994 – 2001. The third phase began after the September 11th attacks and ended in 2003. The fourth began in the end of 2004 and ended with the Russia-Georgia War of August 2008. The fifth phase began in 2009 with the Obama Administration and his attempt to reset U.S. Russia relations (Levesque 2012, 1-2).

As Levesque noted, between 1992 and 1993, Russian foreign policy was fully and unconditionally aligned with the U.S. positions (2012, 2). This first phase was largely fueled by illusions and unrealistic expects toward the West. However, very quickly Yeltsin and his team began to lose popularity. The first adjustments were already starting to appear in 1993. The second phase was characterized by greater inconsistency and Russia's long struggle against NATO enlargement in Eastern Europe. As Mankoff noted, this was when Russian leaders recognized that Russia's integration to the West and its institutions was neither possible nor desirable, at least in the short and medium terms (2012, 5).

Thus, at the end of second phase, when Vladimir Putin succeeded Boris Yeltsin in 2000, he inherited a range of problems such as an unstable institutional environment, a climate of demoralization, the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West, the

diminishing role of Russia in world policies, etc. (Lo 2002, 157). As Bobo Lo noted, Russia's weakness manifested in four primary areas: the search for a new identity (the place of Russia in the post bipolar world), a dysfunctional political system, the rampant corruption and the inability to choose concrete policy priorities (2003, 10). Thus, Putin faced huge challenges in the development of a consensual vision of national identity to reform a chaotic political system and to stop the decline of Russia's international position (Lo 2003, 29). In addition, 1999 and 2000 were marked by not just the rise of xenophobia in the Russian society, but also by the growth of anti-American and anti-Caucasian sentiment in connection with the events in Kosovo, Chechnya and Moscow (as a result of Moscow terrorist attacks).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were seen as an opportunity for Putin to establish a truly strategic partnership with the United States. He was the first head of state to express his solidarity to George W. Bush. At the same time, the Russians expressed their desire to support the Americans in Afghanistan. In fact, Putin was obsessed with "international terrorism" based on radical Islam. For him, it was the main cause of the inability to win the war in Chechnya (Levesque 2012, 8). Putin has therefore focused on the international instability (terrorism) and potential economic opportunities. He has begun to move closer to the West.

However, to the great displeasure of Russians, Bush formally supported the further enlargement of NATO in the Baltic States in November 2001. Then, in December, he announced that the United States would withdraw from the ABM Treaty to focus on Central Europe and start the construction of the missile shield against long-range missiles. From the beginning of this initiative, the United States indicated

that their goal was to defend not only the United States but also its European allies against missile attacks from "rogue states" (referring to Iran and North Korea). In June 2002, the United States abandoned unilaterally the ABM Treaty, and in December of the same year, they announced the deployment of interceptors and radars from 2004. However, even if Russians saw these events as very negative, they still continued to cooperate with the Americans. Shortly after his re-election in March 2004, Putin was confronted with a series of new challenges, both nationally (intensification of terrorist activities in the North Caucasus) and internationally (the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, preceded by the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the destabilization of Central Asia, the expansion of the American military infrastructure near the Russia's borders, etc.). The United States also intensified contacts with the former Soviet States—Georgia and Ukraine—that expressed their intention to join NATO.

In 2005, Putin adopted a vision of "assertion" in foreign policy. Moscow no longer believed in the defense cooperation with Western countries and insisted on the acceptance of Russia's interests in world politics (Tsygankov 2010).

Russian leaders' perceptions of the relative power of the Russian State and the balance of power

The two concepts—relative power and the balance of power—are closely interrelated and depend largely upon perceptions of political leaders. In this sub-section, we will try to answer the two following questions: How do Russian political leaders (political elite who head the Russian Federation) perceive the relative power of Russia? And consequently, how these leaders perceive the

international system and the role of Russia in this system?

The analysis of governmental documents and Russian leaders' speeches could provide important insights for understanding the current views on the perception of the post-bipolar international system and Russia's place in this system.

Putin's speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in early 2007 was a turning point in Russia's relations with the United States and other Western countries. At this conference, Putin has clearly shown how he saw the international system. During his speech he criticized the conception of an American "unipolar world," noting that: "The United States go out of their national borders in all areas and it is very dangerous. Nobody feels safe because nobody can find refuge behind international law" (RTN, 2007). He also criticized the Bush Administration for supporting the missile shield project. At this conference, Putin has sent a clear message by stressing that Russia's relations with the West have been compromised because of America's destabilising politics (Tsygankov, 2010: 171). At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008, Russia was able to block the delivery of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia and Ukraine. Medvedev, as the new Russian president, criticized the security system of the OSCE and NATO. In addition, he has said that Russia was "extremely disappointed" that the United States signed an agreement to deploy a missile shield in Central Europe. Meanwhile, the Russians had already tested new missiles capable of penetrating the missile defense system and announced their intention of re-equipping the new ballistic missiles. In fact, seeing no positive response from NATO and the United States, Russia adopted a series of measures in order to counter

Western ambitions (especially American) in Eastern Europe.

As Tsygankov has noted, Russia felt humiliated because it had to swallow the Kosovo war, the enlargement of NATO, the U.S. unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, the U.S. military presence in Central Asia (the area considered to be Russia's backyard), the invasion of Iraq and the proposed deployment of a missile shield in Central Europe. After the Russian-Georgian War, Medvedev stated that "we will not tolerate humiliation any more, and we are not joking" (Tsygankov, 2010: 226).

Russian leaders' concerns about a missile shield centered around three key elements (Caves & Bunn, 2007: 5-6). Firstly, according to the Russians, this missile shield posed a threat to Russia, upsetting Russia's strategic stability and causing an arms race. Secondly, in the case of missile shield deployment, Russians plan to respond by targeting Europe with ballistic nuclear missiles, and by withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (1987), which would allow Russia into Western Europe to target its missiles SS-20 (Shirinov, 2008: 98; Caves and Bunn, 2007: 6). Thirdly, according to the Russian officials, the Americans had not sufficiently informed and did not consult Russians about the missile shield plan. According to the Russians, these defense interceptors can be turned into offensive weapons (Shirinov, 2008: 98), so they fear that the missile may have a "potential first strike" against Russia (Felgenhauer, 2009). In the end, the Russians accused the Americans of being non-compliant with the principles of international law as the United States took the decision to withdraw unilaterally from the ABM Treaty.

To sum up, the Russians had several reasons to be wary of the Americans. In the context

of their history with the U.S., they see the installation of a missile shield in Central Europe as a campaign to degrade the capacities of Russian nuclear strategic deterrence. Russian leaders' suspicions regarding NATO are partly fueled by a long period during which the two sides were enemies. NATO, with its shifts in policy since 1991, has greatly contributed to Russian suspicions. In addition, under George W. Bush, in response to Russian attempts at rapprochement in the early 2000s, the Americans responded with attempts to extend their influence in the former Soviet space and support the new waves of the NATO enlargement. In the end, the Russian political elite were convinced that the Americans had also supported color revolutions in some former Soviet republics (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan), undermining the Russian influence in the region. In this context, the unilateral withdrawal from the ABM Treaty and the project of the missile shield in Central Europe is seen as a new attempt to increase U.S. influence in the post-Soviet space.

Therefore, the Russian political leaders perceive the relative power of Russia diminished and threatened by foreign forces. According to them, the Iranian threat does not exist and over time the number of interceptors can grow, that will create a global missile defense system, thus strengthening the position of the United States as hegemony in a unipolar world.

Impact of ideology and the "grand strategy"

In this section, we will analyze Russia's position from two other concepts: the role of ideology in the extraction and mobilization of resources from society and the development of a "grand strategy." These two concepts, as in the previous case,

are closely interrelated. We will try to identify how threat perceptions through strategic ideas have "facilitated" the extraction of resources from domestic society and developed a "grand strategy."

Various geo-political schools emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose objectives were to examine the role and identity of Russia in the post-Cold War world. Lo argues that ideology in post-Soviet Russia remains a powerful factor in the formulation of domestic and foreign policy. However, he notes that every ideology brings a unique perspective to the debate on foreign policy (Lo 2002, 40). We can distinguish the three main geo-political currents of thoughts with its sub-schools: Westernism, Eurasianism and Centrism.

First, Westernizers argued that Russia is primarily a European country associated with the Western world and its institutions. According to them, the only condition to adequately respond to different political and economic challenges is the ability to collaborate with Western countries, as well as integrate Western institutions. This school of thought thus shows a perception of the West as the only viable and progressive civilization in the world (Tsygankov 2003, 107).

////Contemporary Eurasianism (unlike the Eurasianism of the early twentieth century) is a mixture of different ideas of identity in response to a range of emotional and intellectual needs. There is the specificity and exclusivity of Russia as a country both European and Asian, the importance of its geographical size, its mission, etc. In general, Eurasianists see the West (and particularly the United States) as the main threat to Russia's cultural identity. They believe that Russia should take advantage of its geographical position and mobilize its resources in order to face the "Atlantist" world widely associated with the United

States. In summary, contemporary Eurasianism was designed as a "recipe" for the reconstruction of a Soviet-style Russia, in terms of its borders and its authoritarian political system (Mankoff 2009, 65). In other hand, it allows the participation of Russia in almost of all major issues of world politics (Lo 2002, 18-19).

The last major geo-political current is "Centrism." This school of thought has emerged as a reaction to the pro-Western liberalism conducted under the Yeltsin-Kozyrev tandem and focuses mainly on the new liberal era. According to the centrists, given its geographical location, Russia must play the role of bridge between the Western and non-Western world. Centrists do not necessarily see the West as hostile and are willing to cooperate with anyone who supports the balance of international power and the role of Russia in this balance (Tsygankov 2010, 95).

In sum, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political elite began to search for a new identity and a place for the "new" Russia. Westernizers' failed attempts to develop a strategic partnership with the West and its institutions during the 1990s have increased the mistrust among the Russian political class and the general public. For example, according to the 2006 polls, approximately 50 percent of Russians believed that NATO was a threat to Russia, compared to the 2005 rate of about 40 percent. In 2008, approximately 59 percent of respondents saw as negative the possibility of NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia (Korrespondent 2008). Eurasianism, which is considered as a major ideology, has been reduced to certain elements of its "geo-politics." As noted by Natalia Morozova, Russia had neither the capacity nor the desire to exercise Soviet-style control over the post-Soviet space. It

lacked the resources to compete with new major players (the EU, China, etc.), and especially with the United States, which began to pursue their own goals in the post-Soviet space (Morozova 2009, 672-3). As a result, Putin has opted for a more pragmatic and moderate policies while adopting elements of each current of thought in order to consolidate Russia's position. Westernizers saw the opportunity to get closer to the West, and Eurasianists saw the opportunity to see Russia as a great power. Basically, the desire to become a great power was seen as a necessary condition to defend national interests in interactions with other states. Thus, as Miller noted, the main policy objective was to restore Russia's great power status, even if the ideology behind these objectives was not always clear. The key was to recognize the necessity of their existence as a factor of orientation and legitimation (Miller 2011, 18-9).

The missile shield project contradicted the Russian ideational inspirations, undermining Russia's desire to once again become a great power and play a major role in world politics. In summation, the external threats to Russia were determined by the Russian leaders' perceptions of the post-Cold War international system and the relative power of the Russian state (as we saw in the previous section). This conception of threats, in turn, has pushed the Russian leaders to adopt a new "grand strategy", which was a mixture of various strategic ideas borrowed from different ideologies. As an ideational factor of extraction and mobilization of society's resources, the ideology has facilitated the Russian government's position in that it largely reflects the opinion of the general public. Indeed, the political elites and the general public distrusted Western institutions and favored the Putin's method of undertaking.

Conclusion

We made an analysis of Russia's position toward the European missile shield from the neoclassical realist approach. Each of the variables that we analyzed gave us a different perspective. We explained the position of Russia based on perceptions of Russian leaders, including how they perceive the relative power of their state and the international system. We also showed the scope of ideology and position of the general public towards this ideology.

At the end of our analysis, we can draw certain core conclusions corresponding to the objective set in the introduction of this article. First, Russia's position towards the missile shield depends largely on internal and subjective variables. Therefore, in the eyes of Russian leaders, the installation of a missile shield in Central Europe implies both a threat to Russian security and the desire of the West to undermine Russian influence in Europe. They viewed the international system as dominated by the United States, where they act unilaterally without taking into account the interests of other states. NATO is seen as the U.S.'s strategic and military instrument.

As an ideational factor of the extraction and mobilization of society's resources, the impact of ideology was significant and favored the Russian government's stance against the installation of the missile shield. In fact, looking at the unsuccessful attempts of "Westernizers" in the early 1990s to approach the West and its institutions, the Russian political elite and the general public were convinced that it was better to rely on their internal resources. It thus was agreed that the way to achieve this goal was to become a great power and gain respect from the other powers.

In the end, since the collapse of the USSR, the general public has shown a more

distrustful attitude towards the West, particularly toward NATO. During Yeltsin's first presidential term, part of the general public was convinced that Russian foreign policy was dictated from Washington. This has largely influenced the change and continued the pattern of foreign policy under Putin.

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