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## THE U.S. AND U.K. STRATEGIES TOWARDS RUSSIA AND THE BALKANS SINCE 1991

### ABSTRACT

This paper presents the comparative analysis of the specifics of the U.S. and U.K. strategies in the Balkans and the post-Soviet area with the definition and explanation of the differences in the political agenda of these two states. The political decisions of the U.S. and U.K. governments were supposed to create a global Euro-Atlantic security system by the enlargement of NATO and the management of the local conflicts. The transition from unipolar moment to multipolar international system determined U.S. withdrawal from liberal internationalism of the 1990s and its return to the containment strategy of political realism after the annexation of Crimea. The Russian geopolitical position was also analysed as important for understanding the current situation in international relations. The paper consists of five parts which include introduction, an analysis of U.S. and U.K. approaches towards the Balkan wars and Russia, escalation of tensions between the West and Russia caused by these events followed by some conclusions.

**Keywords:** international relations, Balkan wars, Russia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Ukrainian crisis

### 1. INTRODUCTION

After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the West had to answer a bunch of questions in regard of European collective security, especially about the future of post-Soviet countries and the former Yugoslavia. The “unipolar moment” with U.S. as a sole superpower had created the possibility for democratic transformation in the former Soviet bloc. The collapse of socialism was unexpected for the West because of informational closeness of the socialist countries. Obviously, the end of the Cold War gave a reason for optimism about future democratization.

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There was also a reason to worry about the inevitable instability within the period of transition to market economy in post-socialist countries. Also, the Western establishments feared a potential “domino effect” in the Balkans and in the post-Soviet area – when local conflict in one country sets the conditions for potential conflicts in the neighbouring countries. The collapse of Yugoslavia was a problem because of its border with the Western European countries. The main issue in case of the post-Soviet area was the Soviet nuclear arsenal and economic instability. The potential “nightmare” scenarios included leak of weapons of mass destruction to the terrorists and dictators and the rise to power in Russia of the radical left- or right-wing politicians with the plans for the restoration of the Soviet Union or the Russian Empire by force. After the stabilization of the former Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom concentrated their attention on the enlargement of Euro-Atlantic security system which should stabilize the continent and preclude the emergence of new conflicts. In reality, hopes for democratization of the post-Soviet area, firstly in the Russian Federation, appeared to be way too high, but the worst scenarios were averted. With the consolidation of power under President Vladimir Putin, Russia began to transform into an authoritarian state which considered the enlargement of the NATO as a threat to its national security and risk for the Russian sphere of the influence. The U.S. pragmatic attempts to “reload” relations with Russia after Russian-Georgian conflict had failed after the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis. As a result, Western elite under U.S. leadership had to return to the containment strategy of political realism and accept the resurgence of rivalry between major geopolitical powers, including U.S., Russia and China.

USA and Great Britain were important players in the system of international relations. Balkans and Russia became priority for the western elite after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The purpose of this article is to analyse the specific moments of the U.S. and U.K. foreign policy approaches to Balkan region and Russia and how United States and Great Britain interact with each other with respect to the above-mentioned issues. To answer these questions, we should consider next the following scientific topics:

- The evolution of the U.S. and U.K. crisis management during the Bosnia war and Kosovo crisis and its consequences for the current geopolitical alignment.
- The post-imperial stabilization of the Russian Federation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the evolution of Russia’s revisionist foreign policy doctrine as a main obstacle for the U.S. and U.K. attempts to integrate Russia into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.
- Continuous escalation of tensions between the West and Russia after the Russian-Georgian conflict and Ukraine crisis that caused the compelled revisiting of the U.S. and NATO containment strategy.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. THE BALKAN CONFLICTS**

The Balkan wars were one of the most controversial topics in the international relations that raised many questions about future of the international world order and use of humanitarian interventions for conflict management. The assessment of the U.S. and U.K. foreign policy at the time of Bosnian war was concluded in the academic debate about adequacy of the

non-interventionist position of the western countries in first years of the conflict and change of the course after Srebrenica massacre (Gow, 1997; Simms, 2002, Glaurdic, 2011). The NATO military intervention in the Kosovo conflict that was proposed as a solution to the crisis of realist approach for the local conflicts had divided specialists about its necessity and consequences for the international world order with some authors supporting this decision as important to stop ethnic conflict and protect NATO's credibility (Hodge, 2006; Wheeler, 2004, Roberts, 1999) and others criticising intervention as an instrument of power projection for U.S. influence in the Balkans (Waltz, 2001; Johnstone, 2002).

## 2.2. RUSSIA

The collapse of the bipolar order had created a new geopolitical reality in which Russia lost its status of the world power, but saved a significant influence at the post-soviet area. The scholars of the various branches of political realism (Brzezinski, 1997; Huntigton 1996; MacFarlane, 1999) argued that US and its western allies should have a pragmatic approach to the Russia that would prevent recidivism of the aggressive imperial policy and create possibilities for the integration of the Russian state in the Euro-Atlantic framework. The specialists of the liberal school of international relations (Fukuyama, 1992; Mansfield and Snyder, 1995) thought that market reforms and democratic transformation would conclude in the integration of Russia in the liberal international order. Constructivists pointed out that their counterparts from the two other main schools of political thought did not consider important historical and social context that had influenced Russian foreign policy-related decisions (Kosłowski and Kratochwil 1994). With the gradual resurgence of Russian geopolitical revisionism after Munich speech (2007), which concluded itself in the Russian-Georgian conflict and the Ukrainian crisis, the scholars began to analyse its internal and external causes (Smith, 2020; Snyder, 2018) and possible solutions to the problem (Brzezinski, 2012; Mearsheimer, 2014; Kissinger, 2014).

## 3. METHODOLOGY

For the proposed topic we will use a conceptual framework of neoclassic realism as a descriptively most adequate account serving to discuss specifics of the post-bipolar world order. By this conception the national foreign policy is a result of the country's place determined by its position in the system of the international relations and power capabilities (Rose, 1998). The active use of constructivist ideas by neoclassical realists help to understand subjective factors that influence the process of political decision-making (Baumann, Rittberger, and Wagner, W., 2001; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, 2009; Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman, 2009a). The concept of the "adaptive politics" is useful to the understanding of a complicated geopolitical situation in the period of decline of the liberal international order, when geopolitical rivals (U.S., Russia, China) have to cooperate with respect to some issues because the globalist nature of the modern economy rendered economic autarchy impossible (Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman, 2009b).

#### 4. U.S. AND U.K. APPROACHES TO THE CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS

The collapse of Yugoslavia was a result of long-term ethnic and religious tensions between the Serbs, Croats and Bosnian Muslims. The authoritarian regime of Josip Broz Tito tried to solve this fundamental problem of the Yugoslavian state. Every part of the country had an equal status of the federal republic with their own communist parties and the federal government invested heavily in the modernization of the poor regions of the country. But after Tito's death (1980), tensions began to grow again coupled with the escalating economic crisis (Boduszynski, 2010).

For the United States and the United Kingdom, the Balkan crisis posed a serious problem. The collapse of the Yugoslavia would cause a civil war on the border with EEC countries. The U.K. Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hogg, came to Yugoslavia in February of 1991 to meet with the national leaders (A. Markovich, S. Miloshevic, F. Tudjman, A. Izitbegovich) in an attempt to find a way to save the *status quo*. The problem was that the collapse of the federation was imminent – the analytical documents of the CIA confirmed this (Glaurdic, 2011). Slobodan Milosevic wanted to create a centralized state with a domineering role for Serbia. This solution was unacceptable for the other sides. From the very outset of the conflict between Croatia and Serbia, Great Britain chose not to intervene in the conflict because of their conservative sceptical position on this question, and due to the traumatic political experience of the Ulster conflict. U.K. conservatives prefer the doctrine of “political realism”, with the doctrine considering idea of intervention in the local conflicts meaningless. The position of the United Kingdom was criticized by their allies as counterproductive after U.K. protested against the suggestion to send Western European Union forces to Croatia to separate the combatants (Glaurdic, 2013). The administration of the George H. W. Bush also did not want to intervene in the Balkan crisis – the region was of low importance to the U.S. at time of Cold War and there was a fear of a new Vietnam war (Western, 2002).

The war in Bosnia became the main issue in the Special Relationship in this period, after Bill Clinton's election. The motley ethnic map of the country with many enclaves made any peaceful separation problematic. The Bosnian Serbs backed by Serbia did not want the proclamation of independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina and this escalated the conflict between the Bosnians and Serbs. The U.K. conservative government continued its policy of non-intervention, dismissing any proposition of military intervention in the conflict as dangerous, and suggested to continue the talks about the implementation of the Vance-Owen peace plan (Simms, 2002). This position was contrary to the U.S. approach which condemned the Serbian aggression in Bosnia and proclaimed the protection of Bosnian Muslims. The main reason for the U.S. position was the 24/7 of media attention to the conflict that brought about a perception of the weak response to the war atrocities by the Clinton administration. The second reason was connected to the expansion of Euro-Atlantic system of security – enlargement seemed impossible without ending the Balkan crisis. Thirdly, the conflict cast doubt upon the authority of NATO and U.S. global leadership (Tuathail, 1999).

The arms embargo initiated by the UN resolution in 1991 gave an advantage to the Bosnian Serbs backed by the Yugoslav People's Army. The government of Izetbegovic could not stop the ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian enclaves conducted by the Army of Serbian Republic. According to the CIA, the Serbian forces were responsible for 90% of crimes against civilians that were committed for the sake of establishing homogenous Serbian territories (Jones,

1995). The war atrocities, such as the siege of Sarajevo (1992–1995), discredited Milosevic government and gave rise to the popularity of idea of military intervention in the conflict.

The non-interventionist agenda of the United Kingdom had created a problem – the radicalization of the Bosnian Muslims, who got in touch with the Middle East countries for military help. The Croatian Bosnians also launched their own separatist project which resulted in a war between them and the Bosnians. The U.K. journalist A. Russel condemned John Major's Cabinet for this situation: "With the Croats of Herzegovina killing and cleansing away, the argument of the Foreign Office was becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. Bosnia had at last become a place where village fought village – but only because we had sat on the sidelines while the anarchy gathered pace" (Russel, 1993).

The diplomatic efforts had failed after the rejection of the Vance-Owen plan following a national referendum in Bosnia. The UN contingent, deployed in Bosnia for the protection of humanitarian relief, could not stop the conflict because it did not have enough forces and authority to do that. John Major's Cabinet agreed on a limited intervention under pressure from Washington that decided to support Bosnian Muslims from July 1993 and tried to find a way to unblock Sarajevo. The former Prime Minister M. Thatcher said that the absence of an answer for the war crimes in Bosnia discredited NATO's authority and its security capabilities (Simms, 2002). The Srebrenica massacre became the point of divergence – the brutal killing of 8 thousand Bosnian Muslims created a powerful resonance in the world. Clinton's administration perceived this action as an insult to the U.S. status as a security guarantor in Europe. John Major's Cabinet supported the proposed NATO airstrikes against the army of the Serbian Republic in fear of diplomatic isolation (Simms, 2002). The operation "Deliberate Force" consisted in the series of airstrikes which supported the offensive of Croatian and Bosnian forces. The pressure exerted by the world powers forced the leaders of the Serbian Republic to hold talks which concluded in the signing of the Dayton agreements in December of 1995, which had stopped the conflict (General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Daytona Agreement)).

After the end of the Bosnian wars, the U.K. establishment came to the understanding that the "realistic" foreign policy concept of the Conservative government became obsolete and complicated the relations with the United States, with the latter preferring a more active position in case of regional conflicts. The New Labour government under the leadership of Tony Blair implemented the new doctrine of humanitarian interventions by proposing a new approach to the problem. In case of regional conflicts, the world powers tried to find a diplomatic solution. If there were no room for a diplomatic solution, the Western countries would initiate a limited military intervention with the object of "compulsion to peace". This concept was supported by the United States and was first used during the Kosovo crisis (1998–1999). The conflict between the Milosevic government and the Albanian population of Kosovo escalated in full-scale war with the ethnic cleansing of the Albanian population. After the failure of the Rambouillet conference between Serbia and KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army), NATO launched the air campaign against Serbia (24 March–11 June 1999) to force the withdrawal of the Serbian army and the paramilitary organizations from Kosovo. The United Kingdom and USA had an identical standpoint about Kosovo that was caused by the intention not to repeat the tragedy of Bosnia with supposed reputational damage. After the withdrawal of the Serbian forces from Kosovo, the U.S. and U.K. soldiers participated in the police mission KFOR which kept order in the region (Williams, 2005) under the UN

mandate (United Nations Security Council resolution 1244). For the next decade international community tried to find diplomatic solution to the Kosovo problem which would not violate the principle of territorial integrity, but these efforts, first of all the Ahtisaari plan concentrated on the idea of decentralization, have failed to find some compromise between the Serbian government and Kosovo. The government of Kosovo officially declared country independence in February of 2008. The problem of recognizing Kosovo has divided the world leaders. While the United States and Western European countries supported the independence, the Russian Federation tried to block this decision by the UN institutions. The International Court after consideration proclaimed by the majority vote that Kosovo declaration of independence does not violate international law (International Court of Justice. In accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo. Summary of the Advisory Opinion). This decision set a new precedent, because for the previous 60 years the principle of self-determination was applied only in cases related to decolonization. With the recognition of Kosovo, the West revised this principle making the war atrocities a valid reason for the application of self-determination principle with the inevitable demands of other unrecognized countries for official recognition.

To sum up, the positions of United States and Great Britain in the Balkan evolved from non-interventionist approach to the doctrine of the humanitarian intervention. The new reality of globalized economy and permanent involvement of media in conflict bolster the pressure at the U.S. and U.K. governments to find a solution to the crisis. The United States became actively involved in the Yugoslavian conflict to contain the Serbian expansion, which meant ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims. Under pressure from Washington and the political fallout of the Srebrenica massacre, the United Kingdom agreed to military intervention in the Bosnian war. The failure to provide an effective solution to the Bosnian conflict concluded in a revision of U.K. foreign policy about military interventions. The Cabinet of Tony Blair proposed new conceptions of humanitarian interventions which were similar to U.S. foreign policy approaches. Both countries actively participated in the intervention in the Kosovo conflict and recognized its independence later, which raised a question about the future of territorial integrity principle.

## **5. U.S. AND U.K. POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA**

The collapse of the Soviet Union was an unexpected event for the West. The closeness of the information about economic situation in the country made impossible correct understanding of resilience of the soviet system. The U.S. remained the sole world power. The main questions for the West were concentrated on the containment of weapons of mass destruction and the economic inequality by the geographical lines West/East and North/South (Ramsbotham & Miall, 1991). The main constants of U.K. foreign policy remained unchanged. Any questions related to the collective security of Europe should be realized in the NATO framework in partnership with the U.S. (Strategic Defence Review, 1998). The Pan-European security structures, proposed by France and Germany, were unacceptable to the United Kingdom. The United States and United Kingdom had to come up with a political concept for diplomatic work with the new countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Generally, the U.S. and the U.K. positions about relations with Russia were pretty similar because the economic ties between countries were objectively weak. This was drastically different from the

continental countries of Europe which bought Russian resources and were the main investors in the Russian economy. The U.S. and U.K. elite built their policy towards Russia from the geopolitical perspective – Russian influence was important to find solutions regarding international terrorism, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the creation of a global system of collective security.

The first point of attention was the Russian Federation, as the biggest and potentially the most powerful country of the region. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the market reforms led to a rise in poverty and a deep economic crisis. The Russian political elite saw the post-Soviet area as a sphere of Russian influence. They saw the enlargement of NATO as a danger for the national security by the logic of a “zero-sum” game (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2007). Where the West perceived the creation of a Euro-Atlantic system of collective security, Russia saw this expansion as an objective to encircle it (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2007). For the USA and United Kingdom, the main point of worry was the risk of the collapse of the Russian state with the inevitable leak of weapons of mass destruction and catastrophic global consequences. Western countries concentrated on the political and economic stabilization of Russia. In an optimistic scenario it would mean democratization of the country and its involvement in a Euro-Atlantic collective security system as a buffer-state between NATO and PRC. The geopolitical “hawks”, e.g. Zbigniew Brzezinski, considered this scenario as unrealistic, because they thought that a new Russian regime was the logical continuation of the Soviet Union and Russian empire, so conflict of interests would be inevitable. In their opinion, the West should prioritize the enlargement of NATO and the EU in Central and Eastern Europe as an instrument of geopolitical containment. The independence of Ukraine was critical for European security because without the Ukrainian territories Russia could not be the serious threat for the West as an “Eurasian empire” (Brzezinski, 1997). The idea of Russian integration in NATO was not popular either as it would be impractical. The Western elite could not predict potential risks for the Alliance having borders with China.

With regard to the question of Soviet nuclear weapons, the United States and the United Kingdom assumed identical attitudes. They supported Boris Yeltsin’s initiative of the concentration of the nuclear arsenal in Russia by the agreements with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which could not maintain nuclear weapons. At the Munich summit (1993), the Russian government agreed to stop 15 obsolete nuclear reactors of the RBMK type, but its realization was delayed (Fairhall, 1996).

The administration of Clinton and the Major Cabinet prioritized relationships with Russia in an attempt to persuade the Russian elite about the good will of Western countries and mutual benefits of liberal international order. Russian attention was concentrated on the United States because the United Kingdom was considered by the Russians as a junior partner of the USA. This was a main obstacle to constructive relations between the countries. Russia continued to consider itself equal to the USA, even if it was in reality an illusion. The United States regarded Russia as a declining power – an important figure in world politics, but nothing more. The nationalist sentiment in Russia concluded in the discreditation of pro-Western approaches in Russian foreign policy as a betrayal of national interests, and the Yeltsin government began to adopt a harsh position to contain the growing popularity of communists and nationalists in the country. The U.S. and U.K. had a similar strategy about NATO enlargement and it also became a reason for a conflict with Russia. The Russian

politicians criticized this idea as a threat to their country. In protest against the enlargement, the Russian State Duma refused to ratify the START II agreement (Ruthland & Dubinsky, 2008).

In December 1995 Boris Yeltsin appointed the former leader of Soviet foreign intelligence, Evgeniy Primakov, as a Foreign Minister. This decision marked the beginning of the cooling in U.S.-Russian relations. At the 1996 election, Western countries supported Yeltsin's bid in fear of communist revanche, but in the next year it became clear that market reforms had failed to build a stable economy. The economic crisis of 1998 discredited the government and fuelled anti-liberal sentiments in Russian society. The United States, the United Kingdom and their allies also had reasons for dissatisfaction. The decisions of the Russian government raised questions about the authoritarian tendencies in the country and had cast a doubt upon the sincerity of the Russian elite. The researchers think that the Clinton policy regarding NATO enlargement "was an insurance policy that protected U.S. interests in case Russia went bad" (Ruthland & Dubinsky, 2008).

The Kosovo crisis became a point of tensions between the U.S. and Great Britain from one side and from Russia on the other after the beginning of air strikes against Serbia. Russian society historically supported Serbia and the Russian government criticized the U.S. and U.K. agenda by withdrawing from the permanent joint council of NATO. The situation became dangerous after Russian peacekeeper forces invaded Pristina's airport before the U.K. troops, so there was a potential risk of military conflict between Russian and NATO forces.

There were changes of administrations in all three countries in this period. New Labour won the parliamentary election in 1997. In Russia Boris Yeltsin announced that the director of Federal Security Service (FSB), Vladimir Putin, would be his successor. In the United States, republican candidate George W. Bush won the presidential election. After Yeltsin's resignation, Putin held the presidential post until the elections of 2000, which he won thanks to a victory in the Second Chechen war. Putin's government tried to warm relations with the United States as a means to raise the status of Russia in the global arena and to formalize the Russian sphere of influence at the post-Soviet territories. He persuaded the Russian parliament to ratify the START II treaty and tried to establish contacts with the George W. Bush, especially after the attacks of 9/11. There were two main issues on the agenda – the Iraq war (2003) and the authoritarian tendencies in Russia. U.S.-U.K. intervention in Iraq to dethrone Saddam Hussein was met with criticism on the part of the Russian elite. It seems that the U.S. failure to accomplish military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan incited Russia's government to believe in the rise of a multipolar world (Smith, 2020). This is a highly controversial idea as there is no certain answer about the future of the international order. Some scholars think that U.S. geopolitical decline is quite relative and is not inevitable (Brzezinski, 2012), while the others think that the formation of a multipolar world will take decades (Smith, 2020).

The U.S. and U.K. governments were worried about the abolition of gubernatorial elections and the imprisonment of Mikhail Khodorkovsky with the *de facto* nationalization of his oil company "Yukos". The relations between countries continued to cool after the "colour revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005). The Russian elite saw these events as a result of western covert actions, even if there was no evidence for this case (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2007). The U.K.-Russian relations were harmed by the polonium-210 poisoning of the former FSB agent Alexander Litvinenko



(2006), but the U.K. government limited their reaction to the deportation of the 4 Russian diplomats. After the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis the position of U.K. government was criticized in the Parliament as a weak answer that convicted Kremlin that they could pursue a more aggressive policy towards their neighbours (Hansard, 21 January 2016). The 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict became the first military conflict in Europe since the Second World War. The plans for the restoration of the Russian geopolitical hegemony in the post-Soviet countries was known to the U.S. and U.K. establishments and the Russian government never hid their ambitions. Despite Russia's reputation being tarnished in the West, the U.S. and U.K. elite preferred to solve the conflict without harsh sanctions against Russia, because of its importance to the solutions of global problems, such as nuclear programmes of Iran and North Korea and international terrorism (Allan, 2018). The Russian-Georgian conflict became the first sign of the coming crisis of the liberal international order. The U.S. governmental institutions anticipated the danger of Russia's potential geopolitical revisionism but the price for confrontation with Russia seemed too high, especially in the context of geopolitical dawn of China that could turn Russia into a position of a Chinese geopolitical satellite.

In conclusion, the U.S. and U.K. approaches to Russia were mostly similar and concentrated around economic and political stabilization of the country that should prevent risks of collapse. The western elite had a consensual position about necessity of integration of the Russia in Euro-Atlantic system of collective security to strengthen liberal international order. The attempts to democratize Russia failed due to authoritarian traditions of the Russian elite that continued to view the West as a competitor, not partner and denied to accept status of Russia as a regional power.

## 6. ESCALATION OF TENSIONS BETWEEN THE WEST AND RUSSIA

The recognition of Kosovo, resolving not to include Ukraine or Georgia as prospective members of the NATO and conflict between Russia and Georgia coincided with Global recession (2008), which opened a route for the new period of global geopolitical instability. The U.S. president Barack Obama tried to revise the U.S. foreign policy that was concentrated on the Middle East under the Bush-jr. administration. As a part of this "pivot to Asia" strategy, Obama's administration declared "reloading" of the U.S.-Russian relationship after the war in South Ossetia. The Obama's approach was aligned with the ideas cherished by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who proposed noninterventionist politics and pragmatic diplomacy as a means to engage Russia as a partner of West with the uneven long-term perspective of Russia's associated membership in NATO and the EU (Brzezinski, 2012). The western policymakers mistakenly evaluated that the decision-making process in Russia was based on rationality and political pragmatism. However, in reality Russia's ruling regime believed in its own propagandist narratives that portrayed the West as a decadent and decaying entity and viewed Russia as an emerging economic and military power (Snyder, 2018). The other misconception lies in the belief of the Russian ruling regime in the geopolitical concepts of territorial control. Similarly to the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation regards the maintenance of economically unprofitable regions as a national security-related issue.

The U.K. government also preferred not to escalate the tensions with the Russia. The Russian government used the recognition of Kosovo as a precedent for the official recognition

of pro-Russian governments of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This decision was not supported by the western countries that continued to support territorial integrity of Georgia.

The turning point was constituted by the protests in Ukraine against the government of Viktor Yanukovich after his refusal to sign the Association agreement with the EU (December 2013–February 2014). After the flight of Yanukovich from Ukraine, Russian army occupied the Crimea and began to infiltrate the Donbass area by the pro-Russian paramilitary forces (March 2014). The beginning of Ukrainian crisis had demonstrated serious misconceptions about Russia in the European Union, Great Britain and the United States. While the politicians in London and Washington correctly understood the Russian geopolitical intentions, they underestimated the level of mistrust of the Russian officials, who never stop to view the West as a geopolitical rival, not a partner. The position of the EU institutions made the situation even more complicated as most of European countries perceived relationship with Russia only in the economic context, ignoring Russian geopolitical ambitions and potential security risks for Europe. The U.S. and U.K. governments condemned Russian invasion as an encroachment on the European system of security and in consequence implemented economic sanctions as an instrument of deterrence for Russian expansionism. Both countries provide humanitarian and military assistance for Ukraine as a means to make the country resilient and tried to induce Ukrainian government to implement the economic reforms. But at the same time the U.K. government was criticized for bad understanding of the situation in the Ukraine, concentration of the U.K. officials on Russia in the regional foreign policy and non-participation in the Minsk talks and “Normandy format” (Hartel, 2017). The Obama’s administration was also criticized by the republican opposition for too soft a position and ignoring Ukrainian requests to buy U.S. anti-tank missiles “Javelin”. The Ukrainian researchers pointed out that an uneven position of NATO and U.S. in the Ukraine crisis was a result of “Moscow-centric perception of Ukraine”. The political realist approach of Obama administration concluded in a fear that escalation of tensions with Russia at the Cold War level could lead to a total victory of the West and collapse of the Russian state. In this case the U.S. and their NATO allies would have to intervene in Russian affairs in order to prevent anarchy and nuclear proliferation (Potiekhin and Fesenko, 2020). The Russian scholars admitted miscalculations of the Russian elite that concluded in Russian isolation and economic stagnation but made the accent at the prevention of military escalation between NATO and Russia as a more important issue for the both sides. (Trenin, 2018).

Comparing the Ukrainian crisis with the Balkan crisis of the 1990s and the Syrian civil war we have to underline and ascertain significant differences to these conflicts. First, in the cases of former Yugoslavia and Syria we deal with the polyethnic entities with a long historical legacy of ethnic conflicts and systemic oppression of ethnic minorities. These circumstances created a background for violence and further collapse of multi-composite political entities. Ukraine is a more mono-ethnic state taking into consideration that 92% of population identify themselves as ethnic Ukrainians (Ukraine Crisis Media Center, 2017). The previous practice and traditions of its modern history did not have precedents of systemic oppression of ethnic, religious or language groups. According to T. Snyder (Snyder, 2018) the idea of a ‘conflict’ between western and eastern regions of Ukraine was a false narrative amplified by the Russian state-media as a tool of informational warfare to create a chaos within the country and hide a Russian military invasion in Crimea and Donbass. Secondly, we can witness a serious difference in an inequality of political and military power to the sides in this conflict.

There are some similarities between Ukraine and Tudjman's Croatia, on the one hand, and Russia and Milosevic's Serbia on the other. However, one cannot ignore the fact that Russian Federation is a nuclear power. It is the main reason why the U.S. and their Western allies could not use force projection to enforce international law, as it was in the case of the Balkan crises or the Gulf War. This argument is vital for Ukraine. The Ukraine's Armed Forces are capable of defending their country from Russian proxy forces but they cannot liberate the territories controlled by pro-Russian separatists. The only realistic solution to this problem on the conditions acceptable for Ukraine is to nudge Russian ruling elite to stop occupying Donbass and Crimea as a precondition of lifting economic sanctions that hamper Russia's economic growth. It was also regarded as an instrument ensuring the restoration of the international order based on rules and law.

In conclusion, the controversial decisions of Western political elite to recognize Kosovo and delays with the incorporation of Ukraine and Georgia into the European system of collective security contributed to the global geopolitical instability of the 2010s. U.S. and U.K. politicians underestimated Russian perception of the foreign policy as a 'zero-sum game' that resulted in the geopolitical escalation in the post-Soviet space. Moscow evaluated the fall of the Yanukovich government as a threat to Russia's security interests and started military intervention to Ukraine. As a result, the Obama administration was induced to implement the containment strategy attempting to prevent the disruption of liberal international order and confirming U.S. authority as a sole superpower.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Balkan wars became the reason for the revision of the U.S. and U.K. foreign policy approaches. The attempts of John Major's government and parliamentary majority to avoid the intervention in the Balkan conflict had failed. The U.S. Clinton administration supported military assistance to Bosnia against the Bosnian Serbs as a means to stop the conflict that compromised the U.S. status as a global leader. The new Labour Tony Blair's cabinet proposed an idea of humanitarian intervention, as a crisis management instrument that was used against Serbia in Kosovo conflict.

- With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War the United Kingdom and the United States had to find a way to stabilize the countries of the former Warsaw pact devastated by continuous economic decline. The political stance of the two governments were rather similar. It was based on economic assistance to the market reforms by the Russian government and support for democratization of social affairs. The authoritarian tendencies that were visible under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin became the main factor of Russia's political development under Vladimir Putin's presidency. The relations of Russia with the United States and the United Kingdom were cool, because the Russian government saw the enlargement of NATO as a principal security threat affecting Russia's sphere of influence. The 2008 Russian-Georgian conflict did not cause the deep changes in the U.S. and U.K. approach to Russia, considering its importance for the solution of global issues such as international terrorism, regional conflicts and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and considering the fear that ostracized Russia would turn into China's dependent ally.

- The weak reaction of the Western allies to the Russian-Georgian war and delay of incorporation of Georgia and Ukraine into the Euro-Atlantic system of collective security convinced Russian elite of the possibility to impose Russia's geopolitical preferences in the post-Soviet space and restore a status of a major global power. The Russian officials viewed the domestic conflict in Ukraine between the government of Yanukovich and pro-European protestors as a threat for their regional dominance, which eventually resulted in the annexation of Crimea and local military conflict in Donbass. These developments caused a political and strategic stalemate in relations between the West and Russia, thus bringing about the ongoing crisis of the European security system and sharp tensions between the major powers.

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