

The Roots of Germany's Russia Policy

Christopher S. Chivvis and Thomas Rid

For many American observers, Germany's reaction to Russia's August 2008 invasion of Georgia left something to be desired. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was relatively slow to denounce the invasion, and when she did so she took a position that was less strong than many in Washington would have preferred. After the crisis, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier sought to maintain the warmest possible relations circumstances would permit, pushing to reinstate the NATO–Russia Council as quickly as possible. German politicians across the political spectrum stood behind him. For many in the United States, Russia's invasion had primarily damaged Russia itself and hastened a trend toward Russian 'self-isolation', as then-US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice put it in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.¹ Many in Germany agreed with this analysis, but for most German observers Russian self-isolation was something to be avoided at all costs, a potentially disastrous development for the post-Cold War European order.

It would be too simplistic to contrast a confrontational US policy toward Russia with wobbly-kneed German capitulation. But the responses that Russia's invasion of Georgia evoked in Washington and Berlin pointed to deeper differences that have been apparent for some time, as in the debate over NATO enlargement or US plans to deploy missile-defence installations in Eastern Europe. Within Germany itself, there is an uncanny degree of consensus when it comes to Russia policy. It can be difficult to find major

Christopher S. Chivvis is an Associate Political Scientist with the RAND Corporation in Washington DC. **Thomas Rid** is Calouste Gulbenkian Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies.

differences between not only the main political parties, but also the major social and economic interest groups. Social Democrats, Greens, post-communists and conservatives might differ in their rhetoric on Russia, but in substance they share many of the same views, and these are very different from those that predominate in the US foreign-policy establishment. Indeed, Merkel's delayed reaction to Russia's invasion of Georgia was only the latest manifestation of Germany's emerging *Russlandpolitik* – a policy that is itself a manifestation of the broader trends in German foreign policy since the end of the Cold War.

The nature and logic of Germany's Russia policy is not well understood in Washington, and too often portrayed in wishful or simplistic terms. To fully understand German policy, one must go beyond the tired clichés about Germany's dependence on Russian energy to the deeper historical, political, economic and cultural forces that have shaped Berlin's evolving relationship with Moscow. As Russia regains significance in the transatlantic relationship, finding common ground between Berlin and Washington over Russia policy will grow more important, especially given Germany's central role in the European Union. At the same time, it may grow more challenging.

Germany's new *Russlandpolitik*

Germany's geographical position as the largest country in Central Europe has for centuries encouraged Berlin to pursue a policy of balancing between East and West. Even after the Second World War, some West German leaders favoured a policy of neutrality in the Cold War as a shortcut to German reunification. They were defeated, however, by the pro-NATO, Atlanticist orientation of Konrad Adenauer's conservative Christian Democratic Party. West German economic power was brought fully to bear on the Atlantic side of the East–West standoff. Even Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* of the late 1960s and early 1970s was firmly anchored in the principles of 'Western integration'.

When the Cold War ended, Atlanticism was at its apogee under Helmut Kohl's conservative government. It seemed destined to become a fixture of German foreign policy, and many US observers hoped that a rejuvenated, reunified Germany would now assert itself in favour of transatlantic ideals with renewed vigour and authority. In retrospect, however, the staunch

Atlanticism of the late Kohl era now seems more of a hangover of the Cold War than any indication of Germany's post-Cold War foreign-policy trajectory. Indeed, it masked the real impact of reunification on German foreign policy and retarded full recognition of that impact in the United States. For many Germans, reunification marked the beginning of a process of broader European reunification in which Germany was no longer the edge of the West, but the centre of a pan-European space that stretched from the Atlantic to the Urals. This new Europe, for better or worse, included, or at least overlapped with, Russia, which became a close neighbour – even an odd member of the European family. Germany's *Russlandpolitik* was reconsidered and reassessed in this context.

The contours of Germany's new policy first began to emerge in the late 1990s, when the Social Democrats returned to power. At that time, the prevailing comity in the broader East–West relationship under Russian President Boris Yeltsin made the warming German–Russian relationship less remarkable. By 2003, however, the new closeness of the relationship became more apparent when Chancellor Gerhard Schröder chose to split with the United States over the Iraq War, siding ostentatiously not only with France, but also Russia. For a time, this choice appeared to have more to do with the war itself than German–Russian relations, and those who hoped for a return to the Atlanticism of the Kohl era could argue that Schröder's stance would prove ephemeral – all the more so given Schröder's close personal ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin. As the immediate fallout of the Iraq War dissipated, however, and Schröder eventually left office, Germany continued to seek warm relations with Moscow, even as the US–Russia relationship deteriorated. This trend was all the more striking given that Schröder's successor, Angela Merkel, was both heir to the staunchly Atlanticist party of Adenauer and Kohl and an East German – a leader hardly inclined to romanticise a common Communist past.

*Merkel was
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To be sure, Merkel is critical of aspects of Russia's past as well as its present domestic evolution. But under her chancellorship, the diplomatic

distance between Berlin and Moscow has continued to decrease – especially if measured against the near standstill in US–Russian relations during the final years of the Bush administration. US critics noted Merkel’s decision to continue plans for the Baltic Nord Stream pipeline, which, in carrying Russian gas to Western Europe, would circumvent the states in Russia’s old ‘sphere of influence’ to the East, rendering Poland and the Baltic states more isolated in terms of energy supplies and more vulnerable to Russian energy manipulation. Meanwhile, Russian objections encouraged German resistance to the planned US missile shield, and Merkel led the charge against American plans to offer Georgia and Ukraine NATO Membership Action Plans at the Alliance’s 2008 Bucharest Summit.

In part, Germany’s pro-Russian orientation can be attributed to the fact that Merkel is the head of a Grand Coalition, and her foreign minister, Steinmeier, was Schröder’s former chief of staff. Steinmeier, himself now running for chancellor, clearly seeks to continue the tradition of Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*, which he has explicitly tried to reinvigorate.² Nevertheless, the differences between the parties over how to deal with Russia are smaller than one might expect. For example, opposition to a third round of NATO enlargement in the wake of the August 2008 crisis has intensified across the German political spectrum. The Social Democrats’ foreign-policy spokesman, Gert Weisskirchen, argues that past rounds of NATO enlargement had a negative effect on the evolution of Russia’s internal politics.³ On the conservative side, leaders doubt that a NATO commitment to Georgia or Ukraine could be credible, and worry that moves toward NATO enlargement would now be interpreted as a direct challenge to Russia, inviting more problems.⁴ German Conservatives and Social Democrats both also express reservations about missile defence. Even some of the most staunchly pro-American politicians in the Bundestag have been critical. ‘The American plans are right and important’, said Hans-Ulrich Klose, a conservative-leaning Social Democrat and co-chairman of the foreign-relations committee, ‘but in the implementation, Washington did not take Moscow’s sensitivities into account enough. The Russians feel humiliated.’⁵

In general, whereas US leaders have tended to view Russian proclamations of alarm at NATO’s enlargement or missile defence as political

grandstanding, German leaders have tended to interpret Russia's reactions as signs of deeper, and more dangerous, Russian discontent with the way the post-Cold War European political order has developed. They do not think Russian fears are justified, but they do worry that Russia's sense of insecurity could pose a more serious problem if it encourages Russia's leaders to behave even more erratically.

All this is not to say that there are no differences between the German political parties. On the hawkish end of the spectrum is Eckart von Klaeden, the foreign-policy spokesman of the Conservative parliamentary group, who dismisses the Social Democrats' views of Russia as 'misty-eyed' and 'driven by post-Soviet phantom pain'.⁶ In general, the Conservatives tend to be more willing to criticise Russia than their Social Democratic counterparts. Yet, on Russia, fundamental differences between the parties can be hard to find, especially when their views are compared with the consensus view in the United States.

One noteworthy development is the re-emergence, at least in some circles, of the idea of *Äquidistanz*, or equidistance, between Moscow and Washington. While the idea remains controversial, it is not without its proponents. 'It is Germany's strong interest that its partnership with Russia is at least on the same level as Germany's partnership with United States', says Martin Schulz, a Social Democratic member of the European Parliament and one of the party's foreign-policy leaders. He adds, 'Equidistance means same distance. I would prefer same proximity.'⁷ Similarly, Peter Struck, Gerhard Schröder's former minister of defence and now head of the Social Democratic parliamentary group argued in 2007 that 'Germany should have the same proximity to America on the one hand and Russia on the other hand'.⁸ As one might expect, straightforward statements of support for a policy of equidistance are even more common on the German far left. Wolfgang Gehrcke, foreign-policy spokesman of Die Linke, the newly established left-wing party in Germany's state and federal governments, believes that the policy of 'equidistance' will gain momentum.⁹

Of course, none of these leaders would deny the towering significance of Germany's close economic ties to the United States. And many German politicians and opinion leaders, including those cited above, remain vocal

critics of the general direction of Russian domestic policy in recent years. Nevertheless, they do want to see the German–Russian relationship in all its dimensions treated as a high priority. By contrast, for many observers in the United States, the end of the Cold War also meant the end of Russia as a major power and the beginning of an era of US – or at least Western – primacy. The significance of Russia in US foreign policy was thus downgraded, a trend accelerated by the post-11 September focus on the Muslim world. For most Germans, however, the end of the Cold War only returned Russia to its pre-Soviet status as a great power, in the European system at least, and hence a priority in German foreign policy.

Explaining the relationship

The factor most commonly taken to be the driving force in contemporary German–Russian relations is energy, especially natural gas. Across the political spectrum, German politicians have two overriding fears when it comes to Russian gas: firstly, that Moscow will continue to threaten Ukraine’s gas supplies, and thereby the supplies of some members of the European Union; and secondly, that Russia may not be able to meet Europe’s demand for gas over the medium term. The second concern weighs at least as heavily as the first, if not more so, though the intensity of the January 2009 Russian–Ukrainian gas dispute was serious and damaged Russia’s image across the political spectrum in Berlin.¹⁰

Russia’s significance as a reliable energy supplier across Germany and Europe is not in question. Germany is Europe’s largest importer of gas. It is also Russia’s largest market for gas, followed by Italy and Ukraine.¹¹ 20% of Russia’s natural-gas exports and 10% of its oil exports flow to German households and industrial centres. In the near and mid-term future, it will be impossible to satisfy Germany’s growing hunger for energy without Russian gas supplies. Although gas imports from other parts of the world – North Africa, for example – are likely to grow, and Russia’s share likely to fall, Germany will still need Russian gas to meet its basic energy requirements.¹² Given that some 37% of the gas burned by German consumers is of Russian origin, the general public’s sense of vulnerability to Russian manipulation is likely to remain significant.

The security of Russia's future supply is uncertain, however, and this increases German unease. Russia has long been the world's leading producer of natural gas, and, according to current estimates, is home to the world's largest natural-gas reserves, with about 1,680 trillion cubic feet.¹³ But Russia has growing energy needs of its own. It is second only to the United States in natural-gas consumption, having consumed some 16.2tr cubic feet in 2005, and more than half of Russia's electrical energy is generated from natural gas, a high figure for a modern industrial country. (In Germany, the equivalent figure is 10%.¹⁴) Russia sells its gas at a significant discount on domestic markets as well as in some former Soviet states, such as Ukraine and Belarus. This encourages higher levels of domestic energy consumption, discourages consumer energy efficiency and increases pressure on Russian reserves.¹⁵ During an exceptionally cold winter in 2006, Russia's industrial centres had difficulty meeting their own energy needs. Meanwhile, the financial crisis and falling gas prices have hit Russian energy producer Gazprom hard. There is reason to doubt that the company's development of new natural-gas fields, such as on the Yamal Peninsula or the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea, will remain on budget and on schedule. The company's market capitalisation has fallen by three-quarters, and its foreign debt has risen to more than \$49 billion.¹⁶ All of this will impede badly needed investment in infrastructure.

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In these circumstances, Gazprom has been forced to rely on gas from the Caspian region to meet its contracts in Europe. But Turkmen gas production could itself decline, and suppliers such as Kazakhstan may have difficulty filling the gap. If Russia's own economy continues to grow, even at a more moderate rate than it has in recent years, domestic demand will rise, and the risk of production shortages will become real. Keeping pipeline pressure up during future winters, without interruptions, will be a challenge. This poses a real problem for Germany and other European consumers of Russian gas.

Thus, Germany's medium-term concern is not so much that Russia will once again seek to cut gas supplies to Europe temporarily, as it did in January

2009, but rather that Russia may not have the production capacity to supply Europe's gas in the long term. This concern diminishes the relevance of potentially malevolent Russian intentions. Russian gas supplies are thought to be in danger not for political reasons, but on account of inefficiency and lack of investment in the energy sector. Given that European demand is expected to grow by about 40% in the next two decades,¹⁷ it seems essential, from the German perspective, to strengthen ties with Russia if only to encourage needed investment in energy, gain levers for the liberalisation of Russian energy markets, and help make Russia's domestic consumption more efficient. In other words, Germany's aim is not just closer diplomatic relations to appease Russia and protect German households from the 'energy weapon'; Germany seeks a real deepening of its influence in the development of Russia's energy sector.

Russia as a market

The energy issue must be placed in the broader context of Germany's evolving relationship with Russia and viewed, in particular, alongside Germany's search for profitable new export markets. Germany's long-standing economic strategy of maintaining relatively high wages through exports of high-quality, value-added industrial goods and expertise requires that German businesses perpetually seek new markets. During the Cold War, this strategy was maintained in part by European integration and the growth of global trade through the GATT process. In the post-Cold War era, the extension of European integration to growing economies in central and Eastern Europe, along with a new wave of globalisation, allowed Germany to continue this model, despite the challenge of integrating less efficient East German firms into the West German economy at an overvalued exchange rate.

The growth of the Russian economy over the last eight years promises new opportunities for German exports. Russia had real GDP growth of over 7% in 2006 and over 8% in 2007.¹⁸ German–Russian trade has grown apace, with Russian imports from Germany more than doubling between 2005 and 2007, from \$99bn to \$200bn.¹⁹ Although the diversity of German exports to Russia has increased, industrial machinery is still by

far the largest segment and represents more than 40% of German exports. (Automobiles represent 14%.²⁰) Germany's exports to Russia constitute more than 13% of total Russian imports by volume, making Germany the world's largest exporter to Russia.²¹ As Germany's exports to Russia have grown, German businesses have developed valuable expertise and contacts within Russia, which German business leaders would prefer not to see go to waste.

When it comes to investments, the picture is somewhat more complex. In 2007, Russia became both a major recipient and source of foreign direct investment.²² Before the financial crisis, Russia received only a small share (4%) of the EU's total outward foreign direct investment, but still came in ahead of China.²³ From the Russian perspective, EU investments are crucial, and German investment in Russia is larger than US investment. Powerful German corporations including E.ON, Volkswagen, Bosch and Siemens are among the major investors.

Germany's trade and investment flows to Russia are small when compared with the volume of goods and capital exchanged between Germany and the United States, but it is the growth potential of the relationship with Russia that attracts many German businesses. After decades of neglect, Russia's industrial infrastructure is in dire need of new investment and machines. With an increasingly wealthy Russia, large and medium-sized companies in export-oriented Germany find themselves in a good position to meet this growing demand, even if it is temporarily stifled by the current economic crisis.

These economic interests foster a mutual recognition of interdependence between the two countries. More importantly, they encourage German industry to lobby for good relations with Russia. This factor was almost completely absent during the Cold War, when German business was focused almost exclusively on European and especially US markets; Germany's conservative foreign policy was oriented accordingly. Now, the Christian Democratic and Liberal parties, the parties with the closest ties to German industry, are evolving from Cold War anti-communist sceptics into pragmatic Russophiles who see the former Soviet Union as a promising target for capitalist expansion.

Geopolitical determinants

Although economic factors are significant, it would be too easy to conclude that Germany's emerging *Russlandpolitik* is driven entirely by political economy. Energy and exports are no more important than geopolitics and a range of historical factors that have shaped not just Germany's approach to Russia, but Germany's entire post-Cold War foreign-policy culture.

Geopolitics, understood in the literal sense as the politics of geography, has always been fundamental to the German–Russian relationship.²⁴ Russia's proximity to Germany is a matter of fact that has influenced German policy toward the Kremlin for centuries, regardless of the political ideology of the Russian regime. Outside observers can easily underestimate the significance of the fact that Berlin is only 1,600 kilometres from Moscow – closer than Madrid. Across the party spectrum, advisers and politicians agree that having Russia at Germany's doorstep is important. 'We just don't have an ocean between us and Russia', says Niels Annen, a young Social Democratic member of parliament and foreign-affairs expert.²⁵

Geographical proximity has political consequences. From Berlin, Russia not only feels close, it also seems enormous. Russia's vastness is a second geopolitical fact that Germany and other European states have been forced to grapple with since the time of Peter the Great. Off the record, most German politicians will agree that Russia is, to put it bluntly, more important than the smaller states in the Soviet Union's former sphere of influence, which are already 'on safe shores' and thus do not require as much special treatment as Russia.

The weight of history

Geopolitics is also at the root of the two nation's complex historical relationship, which continues to weigh heavily on politics today. For one, a large part of the German political class feels a 'historical responsibility' to Russia. The extent to which the legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust still influence German foreign policy and political culture in general should not be underestimated. The process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, continues, and this affects the German–Russian relationship. During the Second World War, more than 10.6 million Soviet soldiers

perished, one-third of them in German captivity. The number of Soviet civilian fatalities was even greater, with estimates ranging from 11.4m to well over 15m. As the Green Party's leading Russia expert, Marieluise Beck, put it, anybody who does not understand what German historical responsibility means should visit the memorial in St Petersburg that commemorates the city's siege, during which more than 1.2m civilians were starved to death by the Wehrmacht.²⁶

The past can make it difficult for German leaders to take positions that appear aggressive toward Russia. They tend to exhibit, as do others in Europe, though to a lesser degree, a strong preference for engagement and cooperation. 'Historical guilt [*Schuld*] vis-à-vis Russia makes it an imperative for us to be markedly restrained, particularly regarding [Russia's] internal condition', says Beck.²⁷ Germany's deep-rooted emphasis on its 'historical guilt' is, of course, the counterpart of Berlin's supreme confidence in the moral superiority of its policy, especially evident when it comes to broader transatlantic discussions of how best to cope with Russia.

History has also shaped contemporary Germany's overwhelmingly positive perception of *Ostpolitik*. Brandt's decision to reach out to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the late 1960s offers a basic model of how to promote change within authoritarian regimes, and in Russia in particular. As Germany emerges from its Cold War shell, it is hardly surprising that the memory of one of its most successful Cold War policies has an impact, as does the overwhelmingly positive view of the process of European integration, which also implies that relations between states can be transformed through economic interdependence.

Many German leaders absorbed a different set of lessons from the end of the Cold War than their counterparts in Washington. The peaceful and generally cooperative approach of Soviet leaders to German reunification left a lasting impression in Germany, where Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin are viewed as having played especially constructive roles.²⁸ Some politicians in Berlin also believe that an implicit promise not to enlarge NATO was

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part of the post-war settlement. While many Germans staunchly supported the first two rounds of NATO enlargement, that round was accompanied by parallel enlargement of the European Union. Proposals to enlarge the Alliance further, well beyond the EU, are viewed with more suspicion.

This historical relationship has created a Germany that is deeply concerned about what happens inside Russia, both economically and socially. The consensus is that Russia needs gradual and steady political and economic modernisation. Germany (and its allies) can either help or hinder this process, but it cannot remain ambivalent or allow Russia to experiment with its own path. ‘Russia does not act out of a position of strength, it acts out of a position of weakness’, says Weisskirchen. The country’s grim demographic outlook and falling life-expectancy figures, failing health and education systems, and high levels of alcohol abuse, HIV infection, domestic and public violence and environmental pollution all point in one direction: Russia is in dire need of an ‘efficiency revolution’ to reverse the social decay rooted in the country’s faltering economic and industrial base. Many Germans believe that their country can be a catalyst for this revolution, indeed, that it has a historical responsibility to play this role, if only to help avert a Russian version of Germany’s early twentieth-century descent into nationalism and militarism.

Cultural ties

Cultural ties also matter, and those between Russia and Germany go back centuries. Catherine the Great was a German noble, born in Stettin. Her father held the rank of a Prussian general, and her marriage to Peter III was a symbol of Prussian–Russian friendship. German generals, including Carl von Clausewitz, fought with the Czar’s armies against Napoleon, and when Nicholas I died in 1855, the headline in the German newspaper *Kreuzzeitung* read, ‘Our emperor is dead’.²⁹ Russian support made Otto von Bismarck’s unification of Germany possible before and after 1870, and the chancellor praised Russia as a ‘natural historical and intimate ally’.³⁰

In the nineteenth century, German writers and thinkers were especially fascinated by Russia and the ‘mythical’ Russian soul (*die russische Seele*): deep, sensual, melancholic and patriotic. The widespread idea that Germans and

Russians shared a *Seelenverwandschaft* (relationship of souls) captured a specific self-image of German intellectuals and artists, who longed for a more authentic and genuine life in contrast to the industrialisation and orderly, disciplined processes of capitalist Germany. For Friedrich Nietzsche, Russia was the antithesis of 'European particularism and nervousness'.³¹ The popularity of Russian music and culture continued into the twentieth century and can be seen to this day: in a recent poll, 64% of Germans agreed that Russia had a 'great cultural tradition'.³²

Russia's Cold War occupation of East Germany has imparted a special character to contemporary Russian–German cultural ties. Not all East Germans have a benign view of the Soviet occupation (Angel Merkel, for one, clearly doesn't) and criticism of East Germany's former political regime can be stark. But Russia's 40-year occupation of half of Germany has resulted in a more pro-Russian perspective than in many other countries once under the Soviet yoke; the fear of Russian aggression that characterises the political culture in so many East European states is absent in the former East Germany. The reasons for this are complex and rooted in German history and self-perception as well as in the special position of East Germany in the communist bloc.

Today, more than a million people of Russian origin live in Germany, although they are mostly not organised politically. Russian migration to Germany has reached levels last seen in the early 1930s. Charlottenburg, one of Berlin's largest boroughs, is popularly known as 'Charlottograd' thanks to its large Russian population. One of the city's trendiest night clubs for the past few years has been Russendisko, and Berlin's gallery scene in downtown Mitte is bustling with Russian artists and customers.

The lasting desire to 'understand' Russia and put its actions into perspective is even evident in the German reception of the recent book-turned-blockbuster-movie, *Anonyma*. The film tells the story of a German woman raped by Russian soldiers in war-ravaged Berlin. When it appeared in Germany, many critics noted that a film with such a horrific theme could easily have portrayed the Russian soldiers as cruel and barbaric, but it did

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not, suggesting the deeper, more tragic nature of the German–Russian relationship.³³ This says much both about the way Germany sees Russia and the way it sees itself.

Against this backdrop it is unsurprising that many Germans want close ties to Russia, and vice versa. A recent poll by the Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach, one of the largest German polling firms, found that only 5% of Germans see Russia as ‘hostile’, the same number that think the United States is hostile. Less surprisingly, perhaps, only 2% of Russians see Germany as hostile, while 65% see the United States as hostile.³⁴ When asked how much cooperation they desire with other countries, 56% of Germans want closer cooperation with the United States, while 45% would welcome close cooperation with Russia. The links are particularly strong for the ‘generation of ‘68’, many of whom are important figures in Berlin today.

Toward a transatlantic approach to Russia

In the aftermath of the Cold War, many American observers expected that the new Germany would more or less follow in the strong Atlanticist tradition of the old West Germany and its Conservative leadership in particular. A rejuvenated, reunited Germany is now seeking a more prominent role in international affairs, but its foreign policy is evolving away from the staunch Atlanticism that predominated during the Cold War. Even conservative Germany is no longer the bastion of Atlanticism it once was. Two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Germany unquestionably sees the United States as a crucial ally, but also sees Russia as an inevitable partner for the stability of the European order.

When it comes to Germany’s *Russlandpolitik*, the bottom line for most German leaders is that the isolation of Russia is unacceptable and must be avoided at all costs. Isolating Russia would deprive the West of its few remaining economic levers over Russian policy and leave Europe and the United States with only cruder means of influencing Russian behaviour. Meanwhile, Russian nationalism and even militarism could accelerate. ‘We need a stable Russia’, argues Heinrich Kreft, a senior diplomat and foreign-policy adviser to the Conservative parliamentary group. ‘Policies that strengthen the hawks in the Kremlin should be avoided.’³⁵ Others might

add that a strong Russia is a better partner than a weak Russia, and that Russia could eventually turn into a security threat for Europe precisely on account of its weaknesses; Russian narcotics trafficking and modern slave trade are just two of the many problems that already affect countries beyond Russia's borders. From this perspective, saving Russia is the only option. The sense that Germany has become Russia's last strong link with the West only intensifies German concern, driving German leaders to redouble their efforts to maintain good relations.

NATO enlargement, in this light, is not a priority for Germany. 'For most Germans, NATO is history,' says Niels Annen. There are 'no more emotional ties' to the Atlantic Alliance.³⁶ Annen, of course, is far too intelligent to dismiss the broader German–American bilateral relationship in all its political, economic and cultural dimensions. His statement comes across more as an observation of political fact by an astute politician than any normative statement of his own aspirations for Germany. It suggests a real dilemma for US policymakers: a hawkish policy toward Moscow designed to cater to East European fears might ultimately strengthen Berlin's proponents of *Äquidistanz*. Needless to say, this could also hurt the transatlantic relationship, and the common interest shared by countries on both sides of the ocean in seeing Russia emerge from its current precarious condition without unacceptable costs to its neighbours or the world.

Although there will inevitably be ups and downs in German–Russian relations, the fundamentals of German policy toward Russia seem unlikely to change anytime soon. Anyone who seeks to strengthen transatlantic cooperation in the future will need to take this into account. The prospects for cooperation may be improving, however. When US–Russian relations soured in the later years of the Bush administration, this resulted in a certain degree of German accommodation toward Russia as Germany sought to avoid Russia's isolation. By contrast, if the Obama administration pushes the 'reset button' on US–Russia relations, as Vice President Biden has promised,³⁷ and demonstrates to its German allies that it recognises German concerns and interests in Russia, Germany may find it easier to take a tougher line with its eastern neighbour. Serious transatlantic discussions over issues of common concern – Russian energy supplies, Russia–NATO

relations, and, above all, the probable impact of the current economic crisis on Russia's future – are strong imperatives for a more coordinated transatlantic approach.

In the end, of course, Germany and the United States can only do so much to affect Russia's future direction. Mutual suspicion and latent hostility could still complicate a reorientation of US policy. Moreover, even as US policy changes and the outlook for a new transatlantic consensus over Russia improves, there is no guarantee that the Russia problem will be resolved. This will depend as much on Moscow as on Washington or Berlin.

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Notes

- 1 According to Rice, the United States would aim 'to make it clear to Russian politicians that their decisions send Russia down a one-way-street into self-inflicted isolation and international irrelevance'. Condoleezza Rice, 'Russland isoliert sich selbst', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 September 2008.
- 2 Steinmeier, in direct reference to Egon Bahr's 'Wandel durch Annäherung' ('change through rapprochement'), the cornerstone of *Ostpolitik*, coined the phrase 'Wandel durch Verflechtung' ('change through interdependence'). Markus Wehner, 'Steinmeiers Moskauer Karte', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 24 September 2006, p. 8.
- 3 Interview with Gert Weisskirchen, Berlin, 23 September 2008.
- 4 Andreas Schockenhoff, quoted in Ralf Beste et al., 'Wandel durch Bestürzung', *Der Spiegel*, 25 August 2008, p. 24.
- 5 Hans-Ulrich Klose, quoted in Ansgar Graw, 'Die Russen fühlen sich gedemütigt', *Die Welt*, 4 June 2007.
- 6 'Von Klaeden: Russland und Europa entfernen sich immer weiter voneinander', Deutschlandradio, 28 April 2007; 'Moskaus Doktrin ist geprägt von postsowjetischem Phantomschmerz', interview with Eckart von Klaeden, *Die Welt*, 9 September 2008.
- 7 Martin Schulz, quoted in 'Die Russland-Versteher', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 May 2007, p. 6.
- 8 Peter Struck, 'Schäuble ärgert mich ziemlich', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 May 2007, p. 7.
- 9 Interview with Wolfgang Gehrcke, Berlin, 24 September 2008.

- ¹⁰ Jonas Grätz and Kirsten Westphal, 'Ende gut, alles gut?' *SWP Aktuell*, 3 January 2009.
- ¹¹ Bernard A Gelb, *Russian Natural Gas: Regional Dependence*, CRS Report for Congress RS22562 (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 5 January 2007).
- ¹² On Russia's need for customers, see Andreas Goldthau, 'Resurgent Russia? Rethinking Energy Inc.', *Policy Review*, no. 147, March 2008.
- ¹³ International Energy Agency (IEA), *Key World Energy Statistics 2008*, http://www.iea.org/textbase/nppdf/free/2008/key_stats_2008.pdf; Energy Information Administration (EIA), 'Country Analysis Brief: Russia', May 2008, p. 8.
- ¹⁴ EIA, 'Country Analysis Brief: Russia'.
- ¹⁵ Russia itself is the largest 'customer' of Gazprom, which produces 85% of Russian gas. The company is obliged, by law, to service a growing domestic market in Russia at prices that are a mere 15–20% of international market rates. Foreign markets, therefore, are a crucial source of cash for the company, particularly in times of tight capital markets and lower energy prices.
- ¹⁶ Andrew E. Kramer, 'Gazprom, Once Mighty, Is Reeling', *New York Times*, 29 December 2008.
- ¹⁷ The US Energy Information Administration estimates that Europe's natural-gas consumption will grow from 19.3 trillion cubic feet in 2005 to 27.2tr cubic feet in 2030. Energy Information Administration, 'International Energy Outlook 2008', DOE/EIA-0484 (2008), June 2008, http://www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo/nat_gas.html.
- ¹⁸ OECD, *OECD Economic Outlook*, EO84, 25 November 2008, available at <http://www.oecd.org/>.
- ¹⁹ Bundesagentur für Außenwirtschaft (BFAI), 'Wirtschaftsdaten kompakt: Russische Föderation', November 2008. http://www.ahk.de/fileadmin/user_upload/BFAI_-_Wirtschaftsdaten_Kompakt/Russland.pdf.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- ²² OECD, *OECD Investment Policy Review: Russian Federation*, 2008, p. 9.
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ The term 'geopolitics' is frequently used today to mean something like 'world politics' or 'international political strategy'. An earlier, more precise meaning refers to the fundamental role that geography has played in shaping international politics. This usage was common in the writings of early twentieth-century figures such as Halford Mackinder in 'The Geographical Pivot of History', *Geographical Journal*, vol. 23, 1904, pp. 421–37.
- ²⁵ Interview with Niels Annen, Berlin, 24 September 2008. Similarly, when asked what matters most about Russia for Germany, a Russia expert in the planning staff of the Ministry of Defence simply pointed to the tiny distance between Moscow and Berlin on a map.
- ²⁶ Interview with Marieluise Beck, 28 September 2008.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ On this point, see Alexander Rahr, 'Germany and Russia: A Special Relationship', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 2, Spring 2007, pp.137–45.
- ²⁹ Peter Brandt, 'Das deutsche Bild Rußlands und der Russen in der

modernen Geschichte', *Jahrbuch für europäische Prozesse*, vol. 1, 2002, pp. 42–70.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³² When asked to name the ten most significant Russian personalities of all time, Germans named several cultural figures including Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Pytor Tchaikovsky. Renate Köcher, 'Das Russlandbild der Deutschen – das Deutschlandbild der Russen', Institut für Demoskopie in Allensbach, 18 September 2008, p. 11.

³³ See Andreas Kilb, 'Kitsch und Vergewaltigung: "Anonyma"', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 22 October 2008.

³⁴ Köcher, 'Das Russlandbild der Deutschen', p. 3.

³⁵ Interview with Heinrich Kreft.

³⁶ Interview with Niels Annen.

³⁷ Vice President Joe Biden, 'Speech at the 45th Munich Security Conference', 7 February 2009, http://www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?menu_2009=&menu_konferenzen=&sprache=en&id=238&.