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## Poland/Russia: Peace or ceasefire?<sup>1</sup>

Poland's presidential elections, which concluded on 4 July 2010, were brought on by the air disaster near Smolensk on 10 April, in which 96 died, including the Polish President Lech Kaczyński and many other members of the Polish political and military elite. Also on the plane were representatives of the families of victims of the mass shootings in 1940 at Katyn and elsewhere in the Soviet Union of some 22,000 Polish officers by the NKVD secret police. In response to the crash, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who had a few days earlier attended a landmark joint ceremony with his Polish counterpart Donald Tusk to mark 70 years since the massacre, became even more conciliatory towards Poland.

Russian state-controlled television twice showed the great Polish director Andrzej Wajda's graphic film on the mass murder (it had never previously screened in Russia to a commercial or television audience). This was all the more striking in that in recent years, Moscow had again been flirting with the old Soviet lie that the murders were committed by Nazi forces. There followed a remarkable outburst of popular sentiment in both Russia and, to some extent, also in Poland,

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with many Russians leaving flowers at the Polish embassy in Moscow, and some prominent Poles, including Wajda, calling for demonstrations of sympathy for Russian war dead buried in cemeteries in Poland.

During the election campaign, the late president's identical twin brother and former prime minister, Jarosław Kaczyński, who stood as the Law and Justice party's candidate to succeed his brother, seemed to give the lie to his well-deserved reputation as robustly anti-Russian by directing a YouTube video to the Russian people calling for reconciliation between the two nations. Even more remarkably for a politician who was hitherto unremittingly hostile towards Tusk's centre-right Civic Platform (CP) party, Jarosław also called for an end to what he called the war of Poles against Poles. The narrow victory of the CP candidate, former parliamentary Speaker Bronisław Komorowski, over Kaczyński seemed to confirm that Tusk's CP-led coalition government's policy of cautious *rapprochement* with Moscow would be strengthened, with the threat of presidential opposition now removed.

Is this really an outbreak of sweetness and light between Warsaw and Moscow? To answer the question, we need to look at Poland's intensely partisan politics and the factors influencing the conciliatory trend in Moscow.

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After the Kaczyńskis and their right-wing Law and Justice (LaJ) party came from behind to defeat CP in the 2005 parliamentary and presidential elections, they adopted strongly nationalist and anticommunist policies. In the absence of any explicitly communist political parties in Poland itself, their efforts were directed not so much against the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (usually known by its Polish acronym SLD – Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej) party that was previously in power and that had just been crushed in the elections, as against LaJ's post-Solidarity rivals in CP. When CP declined to join LaJ as junior partner in a new coalition, the Kaczyńskis began to denounce it more fiercely, claiming that only LaJ truly represented Solidarity, anticommunism and Polish independence. CP, they maintained, was little better than the post-communists, having in earlier incarnations helped the communists to survive and reinvent themselves as democrats and business tycoons.

LaJ saw much of what had happened since the victory of Solidarity in 1989 as a betrayal by sinister forces who had sold out to the communists and allowed them to take control of a post-communist establishment (*układ*) in which CP and others were culpably implicated. They vowed to purge these evils from the body politic by creating a 'fourth' republic (in contradistinction to the third republic: post-communist Poland from 1989 up to their victory), free of communist influence. On economic issues, however, they were nearer the Democratic Left Alliance, favouring retention of increasingly unaffordable social security entitlements and opposing efforts to privatise inefficient communist-era mega-enterprises.

Externally, LaJ was resolutely opposed to Russia and nearly all its works, seeing Putin's heavily ex-KGB leadership group as continuing most of the policies of the Soviet Union in a new guise. The Kaczyński twins were also prickly towards Germany, despite efforts by Chancellor Angela Merkel to maintain Berlin's policy of reconciliation with Poland. On one occasion, Lech Kaczyński took umbrage at a German newspaper article likening him and his brother to potatoes, cancelled his attendance at a trilateral summit with Merkel and French President Jacques Chirac, and demanded an official apology.

LaJ took a dim view of the European Union generally, regarding it as having abandoned the traditional values of the Christian (that is, Catholic) Church, and as a threat to Polish sovereignty. The Kaczyńskis also vigorously supported the efforts of post-Soviet countries like Ukraine and Georgia to build their future free of Russian influence and pressure. Strongly Atlanticist, and popular in President George W. Bush's Washington, the LaJ administration quickly became viewed with impatience and at times anger in Europe, as they used or threatened to use their veto against a variety of pending EU decisions that otherwise enjoyed a consensus.

In 2007 CP, led by Tusk, convincingly won parliamentary elections and formed a new governing coalition, ousting LaJ and its somewhat disreputable coalition allies, the League of Polish Families and the Self-Defence party. The League of Polish Families is a clerical, conservative party, more Eurosceptic and xenophobic than LaJ itself, and linked to the at times audibly anti-Semitic Radio Maryja radio

station. Self-Defence is a left-leaning, rural-populist party, headed by the notorious populist, Andrzej Lepper, who has on several occasions been charged with criminal offences.

Tusk quickly sought to mend fences with Germany and the European Union. Without conceding on basics, he also tried, as far as possible, to normalise bilateral links with Russia, which had taken a sharp turn for the worse under LaJ. Even before then, Polish–Russian relations had hit a low point when the SLD President Aleksander Kwaśniewski took a leading role in securing a re-run of the rorted presidential elections in Ukraine in 2004, which brought the pro-Western Orange leadership of Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko to power. Putin had overtly involved himself in the first presidential campaign on behalf of the pro-Moscow candidate Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions, and was furious with the revised outcome.

Tusk and his colleagues did what they could to smooth relations with Russia and to ease Moscow's politically motivated trade boycotts against Poland, notably by improving Warsaw's standing in Brussels and thus gaining greater support from EU leaders for Poland's position. The CP Government also sought to tackle the sensitive historical disputes that regularly inflamed bilateral relations by setting up with Moscow a joint Commission for Difficult Matters (*Komisja dla Spraw Trudnych*), a group of experts tasked with working towards accommodations on those issues. The most difficult of these was Katyn, about which Putin had again chosen to obfuscate the truth to punish Poland for its involvement in the Orange Revolution.

Whilst continuing, like all post-communist Polish governments, to support former Soviet republics in their efforts to join the European Union and NATO, the Tusk Government de-emphasised Poland's relationships with Ukraine and Georgia. At the time of the Georgian war in 2008, when Lech Kaczyński impulsively flew towards Tbilisi to express his solidarity with President Mikheil Saakashvili (and was widely reported to have tried unsuccessfully to persuade his pilot to land in the war zone), Tusk had tried to forestall what he saw as a quixotic mission. But on most issues, Tusk has stood firm against Russian pressure – notably the proposed US missile defence installations in Poland and the Czech Republic.

He also opposed Russia's Nord Stream project, which secured German assistance for building a gas pipeline under the Baltic that would partially bypass the existing gas transit lines in Poland, Belarus and Ukraine. This would threaten transit revenues and, indirectly, the energy security of all three countries. When completed, Nord Stream would make it easier for Russian 'energy diplomacy' to cut off gas flows to any of the three transit countries, while still delivering gas via Nord Stream to preferred customers like Germany. On the other hand, the Tusk Government has been prepared to negotiate a long-term extension of its gas supply contract with Moscow (the deal has not been finalised). For this and other policies Tusk has been severely criticised by the LaJ opposition as being soft on Russia, a dangerous criticism in Polish politics.

Despite LaJ's decisive loss in the 2007 parliamentary elections, as president in a situation of *cohabitation*, Lech Kaczyński used his constitutional powers to the maximum to block CP domestic and foreign policies for which Tusk had a fresher electoral mandate, but to which LaJ were opposed. Tusk patiently worked with or around the president, gradually improving Poland's standing in Berlin, Brussels and Moscow.

In September 2009, Putin accepted an invitation to attend the 70th anniversary of the Polish defence against Nazi forces of Westerplatte, near Gdańsk, in the early days of World War II. In doing so, Putin was in effect obliquely acknowledging that, because of the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, which secretly divided Eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union, Poland was left to face the German attack in isolation. Shortly thereafter, Soviet forces had invaded and occupied eastern Poland. At the Westerplatte ceremonies Putin spoke in a broadly conciliatory tone, though without fully recognising the validity of Poland's grievances about the period.

But the real breakthrough in Russian acknowledgment of responsibility for Soviet behaviour came with Putin's invitation to Tusk to attend a joint commemoration of the Katyn massacre on 7 April 2010. Putin spoke expansively at the ceremony, condemning the massacre and Soviet 'totalitarianism', though there were also some exculpatory accents. Following the crash three days later, he was even more forthcoming. And Moscow initially went to great lengths to involve

Polish officials in the investigation into the crash, no doubt fearing with good reason that sections of the Polish public were likely to blame Russian officialdom for the disaster.

For LaJ, the compromises with historical truth that the joint ceremony involved were unacceptable, and they maintained their sharp criticism of the government. President Kaczyński had not been invited to the joint commemoration and his ill-fated flight to Katyn on 10 April with many LaJ and military leaders on board looked like a riposte to Tusk for having accepted Putin's invitation to attend a joint commemoration. While the president's prepared speech, never delivered, contained one or two conciliatory accents towards Russia, LaJ leaders felt Moscow was still stopping short of full acknowledgment, and might again revert to denial and obfuscation.

In the wake of the disaster, the bilateral relationship took a sharp turn for the better. But the presidential campaign soon brought the pressures of electoral politics to bear at the Polish end. Within days of the crash there was an unseemly dispute over the dead president's funeral arrangements. It was announced that he and his wife would be buried in Wawel Castle in Cracow, the final resting place of many of Poland's kings and great national poets, but not hitherto its elected presidents. Opponents of the decision were reluctant to make the point sharply, given the stunned consensus that briefly prevailed after the crash. But for CP sympathisers, this was an unfair use of the period of national mourning by LaJ, with the support of the custodian of Wawel, the Archbishop of Cracow, to wrap the Kaczyńskis in the national flag and impart a Catholic blessing to LaJ's presidential campaign.

For Lech Kaczyński, regardless of whether, as many believed, he may have somehow pressured the pilot into landing in hazardous conditions, the crash was a huge posthumous boost to his standing. His chances of re-election had seemed decidedly slender as his approval rating dropped below 30 per cent. After the crash, polls indicated more than half found him retrospectively a great president. Riding on a wave of public sympathy, Jarosław began the campaign in a low-key mode, presenting himself as a born-again moderate but, as the shock of bereavement abated, he found his old pugnacious voice.

LaJ played into a strong Polish mood, which is inclined to see the crash as another example of murderous Russian perfidy. For Poles, Katyn will always be a powerful symbol of all they have suffered at Russian hands. The extraordinary circumstance of a 'second Katyn' again wiping out much of the Polish elite on Russian territory seems to many too fateful to be coincidence. Russian hostility to LaJ and the Kaczyński twins has always been obvious so, for those so inclined, it was not wholly paranoid to posit a motive.

Even the key sound sequences used in referring to the crash are irresistibly suggestive: *Katyn* and *katastrofa*, the first syllable of both of which, *kat*, is also the Polish word for executioner. Fragments of evidence have been adduced – not always plausibly for an outsider – to build complex conspiracy theories pointing to Russian involvement. Despite desperate Russian attempts to rebut such suspicions by involving Poland at every stage of the investigation, the conspiracy theories run on, with periodic baroque additions to adjust to new evidence. This is a state of Polish mind in which LaJ populism excels, and it seemed to pose a serious danger to the CP candidate, now President Komorowski, as his initial lead of over 20 per cent was progressively whittled away.

It also seemed to threaten the fragile bilateral *rapprochement*. Russian media, not noted for its objectivity on things Polish, began to react, with signs of another revival of the myth of Nazi involvement in the Katyn massacres. And there was initially strong Russian indignation about Polish statements that Russian security units had been involved in robbing one or more of the crash victims of their credit cards and using them for fraudulent purposes. The reports were essentially true, though the people involved were conscripts, not security officials as a Polish spokesman had erroneously asserted.

If CP, having scraped into the presidency, can maintain its control of the political agenda, the thaw may still be maintainable on the Polish side. But parliamentary elections are looming next year, LaJ again looks strong and mobilised in opposition, and the conspiracy theories about the crash and tensions over other bilateral issues are not about to die away.

Indeed, since the presidential elections, Jarosław Kaczyński has sidelined his moderates and sharpened his message further, accusing CP of 'criminal' responsibility for the death of his brother and the others who 'fell' (the military terminology is deliberate) near Smolensk.<sup>2</sup> LaJ supporters even speak of a conspiracy between Putin and the Tusk Government, and the party seems, in fact, to want to make the causes of the disaster the main election issue at local elections in October and the parliamentary elections due next year.

Meanwhile, Moscow's initially forthcoming attitude towards sharing documents has given way to a typical Russian obstructionism. As LaJ's approach to the issue has become more politicised, Russia has become less cooperative. Major plane crashes usually have a multitude of primary and secondary causes, as well as predisposing circumstances. Russian aviation has a poor safety record, and the airport at Smolensk was far from cutting-edge. Moscow's growing reticence suggests that their inquiries have revealed things to them that they would not like to see subjected to LaJ's remorseless and far from impartial scrutiny. A conspiracy seems highly unlikely, but in Russian conditions a cock-up is always a strong possibility. Their attempts latterly to stall the Polish investigators are bound to increase Polish suspicions. Jarosław Kaczyński is a skilled tactician, and the latest hardening of his line suggests he may be on to something. Even if the Russians are not hiding anything of great note, despite a rise in public support in Poland for *rapprochement*, the torrid political atmosphere will certainly keep relations with Russia under strain.

## Russia's stake in improved relations

While Tusk was the initial *demandeur*, Moscow has latterly had its own reasons for pursuing *rapprochement*. Recognising Poland's increasing strength within EU and NATO councils, it has accepted reluctantly that bullying Poland with arbitrary trade sanctions and threatening

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2 Back in power since 2015, LaJ is again trying to enforce public acceptance of the idea that those who died in the disaster 'fell' (*polegli*), as if on the field of battle, not in a tragic accident. Anna Dabrowska, 'Prof. Bralczyk: Słowo "polegli" w kontekście smoleńskiej to nadużycie', *Polityka*, 14 July 2016.

military exercises (staple policies towards former subordinates) had become counterproductive. Poland is now a country with which it needs to be circumspect.

The severe impact of the global financial crisis on Russia (where GDP declined by some 8 per cent in 2009) has reduced Putin's earlier swagger and inclined Moscow to rein in some of its adversarial attitudes towards the West. Moreover, US President Barack Obama's 'reset' policy seems to offer greater incentives and dividends for its doing so. With energy prices down, and its gas exports clouded by reduced European demand and major developments in gas extraction technology, Russia is again more conscious of its economic shortcomings. And the relentless rise of its giant neighbour, China, increasingly concentrates its mind.

More promisingly from Moscow's perspective, Poland's relations with Belarus and Ukraine have frayed under the pressure of President Alexander Lukashenka's oppression of the dwindling Polish minority in Belarus, and the policy chaos and occasional abrasive nationalism in Kyiv under President Yushchenko. Moscow was also pleased by Tusk's restrained approach to the Georgian crisis. If Poland was becoming less active in coaxing former Soviet republics in the direction of Brussels and Washington, this was a trend that Moscow wished to encourage.

More generally, President Dmitry Medvedev has been trying to sell a comprehensive revamp of European security aimed at weakening NATO and transatlantic unity, and hopefully giving Moscow an effective veto on regional security issues. So far Medvedev's proposals have had limited impact, but a number of European countries, notably Germany and France, seem ready at least to discuss them. At the Russo-German bilateral in Meseberg on 6 June 2010, Merkel and Medvedev agreed on a memorandum calling for the creation of a joint EU-Russian committee on security and foreign policy, to be chaired by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his asymmetrical EU opposite number, Catherine Ashton.

Certain prominent German figures and influential commentators in the United States are declaring that expansion of NATO may not have been a good idea, or proposing that Russia should be invited to join it. In return for modest help on key US priorities like Iran and Afghanistan, Russia is hoping that its gains in Ukraine and Georgia and its claim to a 'sphere of privileged interests' will be tacitly accepted in

Western capitals. In this broader context, having good relations with a one-time bitter adversary like Poland is a useful diplomatic asset for the Kremlin.

There is also a domestic factor at play in Moscow. While Putin remains the paramount leader, Medvedev has been pushing a kind of mini-perestroika, a campaign given some impetus by the difficulties caused for Russia by the GFC. Medvedev's amorphous 'modernisation' agenda includes a role for obliging Western investors to open their doors and pockets for Russia, despite the latter's often cavalier treatment of Western business partners under Putin. In parallel, Medvedev and others in the elite have been trying to reverse the recent trend towards partial rehabilitation of Stalin. These trends intersected with the Katyn commemoration and related events.

A sharp beam of light was shed on all this by the leaking in May 2010 of a document prepared by the Russian Foreign Ministry in response to a directive from Medvedev, which sets out the rationale for a new direction in external policies. Putin's KGB-led regime does not leak much, but this document looks plausible and its authenticity has not been disputed. *Russki Newsweek*, which published it, also ran an article drawing on sources in the Foreign Ministry, from which further plausible details emerge.

The main thrust of the document is that Russia should focus pragmatically on all its foreign relationships to advance its modernisation agenda. While all partners can contribute in some way (and a plan was developed for each), some are deemed particularly desirable, notably the European Union and the United States. The document calls in effect for renewed *détente* with the West to replace the 'new Cold War' of the second half of Putin's presidency. But the accompanying article emphasises that Putin and his own foreign policy team, led by Yury Ushakov, ambassador to Washington from 1999 to 2008, were closely involved in this change of direction; and that the damage wrought by the GFC was the catalyst.

There are still characteristically Putinist accents in the report. For example, it is recommended that special attention be devoted to the Baltic states: weakened as those economies are by the GFC, the document recommends that Russian companies should be encouraged to acquire as many key companies there as possible. In Ukraine,

widespread Russian acquisition of major industries is recommended; there and in Central Asia, the acquisition of companies from the former Soviet military-industrial complex gets special mention. In other words, despite the emphasis on economic modernisation, there is to be a strong strategic focus on restoring imperial influence where possible, in this instance by ‘banks not tanks’.

*Russki Newsweek* claimed that the shift in policy towards Poland, though within the framework of the new doctrine, was a special case. The Russian embassy in Warsaw had, according to *Russki Newsweek*, sent a telegram directly to Ushakov in Putin’s administration pleading for a new approach. Simultaneously, a senior Russian business executive of Polish ancestry had been lobbying Putin directly on behalf of Polish business colleagues. The embassy had reportedly argued that warmer relations with Poland were needed to enable Russia to achieve a breakthrough with the European Union, as Poland now had the standing within the European Union to frustrate Russia’s efforts. Putin was convinced, the article claims, and sent the Foreign Ministry a directive mandating a sharp change of policy towards Poland beginning with a joint ceremony at the Katyn memorial.

Better relations with the United States, Western Europe or Poland would obviously not be advanced by restoring Stalin to the pantheon of Russian statehood. Recognising this, Putin seems to have accepted the need for another adjustment to the party line on Stalin. But it was clearly a matter of dispute within the leadership. The durable and stridently nationalist mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, was keen for the 65th anniversary of Victory Day on 9 May to be celebrated with prominent posters of the great Stalin displayed on Red Square and elsewhere, as in the good old days.<sup>3</sup> This initiative would have strong support in the population at large, where Stalin continues to be revered by many, and his monstrous rule widely admired.

After some mixed signals, the push for Stalin to be honoured on Victory Day was quashed. The leadership decided to invite numerous representatives of the Western world to come to Moscow for the event and for units of their military to participate, unprecedentedly, in the parades. Poland was one of the invitees and accepted. Despite extreme

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3 See [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/7650172/Moscow-backs-down-from-Stalin-poster-plans.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/7650172/Moscow-backs-down-from-Stalin-poster-plans.html).

domestic pressure and conflicting events (a vital and threatening election in North Rhine–Westphalia) on the same day, Merkel also accepted. *Der Spiegel* reported that Merkel had made it clear she would not attend if Stalin was looking down on proceedings.<sup>4</sup>

The events surrounding the Katyn commemoration played an important role in making a flirtation with another partial Stalinist restoration very untimely. By denouncing the Katyn massacre publicly in the presence of Tusk and his delegation, Putin made it harder – though not impossible – for himself or anyone else to yet again revise Moscow’s line on Katyn or Stalin.

## A watershed moment for Poland?

Sustained warmer relations with Moscow would be at odds with some of the most basic maxims of Polish strategic thought. After the eighteenth-century partitions by Austria, Prussia and Russia that obliterated Poland from the map for over a century, Polish national leaders oscillated between revolutionary romanticism and realism. Periodic national uprisings broke out, particularly against the Russian imperial power, despite their predictably bloody endings. Poles fighting for independence often sought alliances with other would-be nations that shared their stateless condition – hence, for example, General Tadeusz Kosciuszko’s adherence to the struggles of the independence movement in the American colonies. They fought hopefully in wars or social upheavals of varying provenance under the banner of ‘for our freedom and yours’. The French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, the ferment of 1830 and 1848 – all were seen as opportunities to pursue the goal of independence.

More pragmatic nineteenth-century Polish patriots saw these struggles as doomed to disaster. Far better, they argued, to make an accommodation with the temporal power and seek to advance the national cause by ‘organic work’, developing Poland’s economic, educational and cultural resources without provoking retribution in unequal military struggle. This realist vs romantic debate continued in

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4 See Christian Neef & Matthias Schepp, ‘The return of Uncle Joe: Crisis-stricken Russians nostalgic for Stalin’, *Spiegel Online*, 6 May 2010, [www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-return-of-uncle-joe-crisis-stricken-russians-nostalgic-for-stalin-a-692971.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-return-of-uncle-joe-crisis-stricken-russians-nostalgic-for-stalin-a-692971.html).

Aesopian language into the communist era, with allusions to the many disasters and the occasional shining triumph of the past. And traces of it are still evident, especially in discussions of Poland's 'Eastern Policy' (*polityka wschodnia*).

'Eastern policy' has also been a bone of contention between LaJ and CP. Since at least Marshal Józef Piłsudski's time, many Polish strategists have dreamt of building a grand alliance with other nations in the marchlands between Russia and Poland as a common defence against Moscow. This strategic orientation is variously referred to as Prometheist, Jagiellonian (referring to the medieval Polish dynasty that ruled over the relevant lands) or Giedrojc's Eastern Policy (after Jerzy Giedrojc, the editor of the influential émigré journal of the communist era, *Kultura*, published in Paris).

Polish dissidents schooled in smuggled copies of *Kultura* were very influential in Solidarity's strategic thinking before and after the fall of communism. This led to early recognition by the first Solidarity Government of the independence of western republics of the Soviet Union, and strenuous efforts by Warsaw to bury the acrimonious feuds of recent history that had bedevilled Poland's relations with those peoples. The policy was extended also to former republics further afield like Georgia, which, after the Rose Revolution, was seeking acceptance into NATO and the European Union. Nearly all post-communist Polish governments have pursued this objective, including the former communists of SLD, to Moscow's great irritation.

Clearly there are echoes here of the romantic notions of 'for our freedom and yours'. Tusk's policy, by contrast, is more one of realism and 'organic work'.<sup>5</sup> While he maintained support for the eastern neighbours (for example, pushing successfully for a special EU program of assistance to them, the so-called Eastern Partnership), he puts greater emphasis on achieving whatever is possible from the bilateral relationship with Russia. This shift is exemplified by the

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<sup>5</sup> 'Organic work' (*praca organiczna*) refers to the tradition in Polish political theory and practice of working pragmatically towards socioeconomic development in the Polish lands rather than risking all in desperate efforts to seize back Polish sovereignty by revolutionary action. The idea developed in the 1830s following the crushing of the 1830 November Uprising against Russia.

personal evolution of the current Foreign Minister, Radosław Sikorski, once a strongly anti-Russian LaJ defence minister, now a member of CP and more moderate.

Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, for historical reasons, are key to this debate. Having with great anguish relinquished all claims to its pre-war territories there, including to cities like Vilnius (Wilno) and Lviv (Lwów) where Poles had once been dominant, Poland feels it is entitled to expect more reciprocity. The perils of this approach are illustrated by the Możejki case. In pursuit of 'our freedom and yours', the LaJ administration pushed through the purchase in 2006 by the big Polish firm PKN Orlen of the Możejki (Mazeikiai in Lithuanian) oil refinery in Lithuania in an effort to prevent it from falling into the hands of a Kremlin-controlled Russian firm, thereby, as they saw it, saving the Lithuanians from Moscow's potential energy blackmail.

Instead, the Polish owners themselves became the victims of the blackmail. When its bid for the refinery failed, Moscow refused to supply the refinery with crude oil, and to make the point clearer, successive 'accidents' were organised on the main supply pipeline from the east (which is still not repaired as of 2010), ensuring that Orlen had to obtain oil at greater expense elsewhere. Yet, according to Polish accounts, the Lithuanians have not supported the new Polish owners, who have sustained serious losses. At the same time, the surviving Polish minority in Lithuania continues to experience cultural discrimination, pushing them politically into the arms of the local Russian minority (with whom they are often assimilating).

In Belarus, all efforts by Poland and its EU partners through inducements and persuasion to reform the Lukashenka regime have achieved little. Recently, there has been another acrimonious dispute over repression of Belarus's long-suffering Polish minority. Though Lukashenka needs hedges against Russian domination, this has not benefited Poland, and Lukashenka's dictatorship continues unchecked.

In Ukraine, also, the Poles have felt that their support and friendship since independence, particularly during the Orange Revolution, have not been adequately rewarded. Their Orange allies did not make a success of their five years in power, but before losing it, caused Poland some grief through their repeated gas wars with Russia and occasional nationalist gestures. Now that the Orange leadership has been

supplanted by President Yanukovych, who is building a close strategic relationship with Russia and has ruled out NATO membership, Poland is again left alone on NATO's eastern front line.

Many Poles were particularly aggrieved by Yushchenko's awarding of the title of Hero of Ukraine to Stepan Bandera (1909–59), a Ukrainian nationalist and insurgent leader. While Bandera was in Nazi detention during the war, some of his followers were involved in massacres of Jews and ethnic Poles in the former Eastern Poland. Polish members of the European Parliament, led by CP deputies, responded angrily to the award by pushing through a resolution condemning Kyiv for the decision. This resolution led to a damaging breach between Poland and its erstwhile Orange allies, for whom Bandera, who was murdered in 1959 by a KGB operative in Munich, was above all a hero of Ukraine's national liberation struggle against Moscow.

As Yanukovych, much more pro-Russian than any of his post-1990 predecessors, strengthens his grip on Ukraine, the chances of Moscow gathering together most of the territory between itself and Poland in a Russian-led alliance of Soviet-nostalgic autocrats increase. There may not have been much Warsaw could have done to forestall this. But the Tusk Government may yet regret Ukraine's strategic reorientation.

While CP has not abandoned its eastern neighbours, it sees more to be gained economically and strategically by moving into the EU mainstream through such groupings as the Weimar Triangle with Germany and France. As the Tusk Government has trodden further along this path, its view of Russia has begun to shift towards the positive approach to Moscow typified by Berlin.

If CP remains in power and the crash investigation does not throw up major sensations, Poland's cautiously conciliatory policy will probably continue. But many Poles feel deep and historically well-founded suspicion towards Moscow. Issues will continue to arise that inflame bilateral tensions. LaJ will remain eager to exploit any such differences. For the moment, CP seems to have all the key instruments of power in its hands. But if it now finally tackles the painful economic reforms it has long proclaimed necessary, it could alienate the electorate and its coalition partners, and open the way for LaJ to return to government after next year's parliamentary elections.

## Russia: The limits to Slavic brotherhood

There are also some large ‘ifs’ on the Russian side. The residual logic of the Jagiellonian Eastern Policy will probably ensure that the Poles continue to look for ways to strengthen EU and NATO influence to the east – for example, as recently, by pushing hard for a stronger NATO military presence in the Baltic states and other eastern member countries that are regularly subject to Russian pressure. Poland’s eagerness to attract US assets into the country, such as this year’s Patriot missile deployment (a consolation prize for cancellation of the missile defence project), quickly led to angry questioning from Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov.

Moreover, Poland is eager to build up its own military capability, preferably with US military assets and technology, which Moscow also objects to. The Kremlin logic seems to be: we liberated you from the Germans and now we’ve apologised for Katyn and you’re still treating us as an enemy. Given the two countries’ joint history, it should hardly be surprising that Poland wants strong defences, but Moscow still has trouble accepting that its former satellites now wish to make their own sovereign decisions about security. Some Western commentators are sympathetic to Moscow’s point of view on such matters. So none of these irritants is likely to go away soon.

Russia has evidently had a change of mind about Poland, but it’s not clearly had a change of heart. The warm outpouring of sympathy among ordinary Russians after the crash was touching, but Russian policy is seldom shaped by popular sentiment, which Russian leaders see as something to be manipulated rather than followed. And they have formidable skills in this area.

On 22 July 2010 the official Russian paper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* published a forceful article by establishment commentator Sergey Karaganov, praising the decision to acknowledge Katyn, and declaring that ‘the whole of Russia is one big Katyn’. Karaganov called for all these unmarked graves of the victims of Stalinism to be given proper monuments, and more generally for a full reckoning with the evil legacy of Stalinism at home as well as abroad. Coming from the at times hawkish Karaganov, this seemed a clear and very welcome signal that the Kremlin has decided the time is ripe for another round of de-Stalinisation. But just a few days after Karaganov’s article appeared,

the Russian parliament passed a law strengthening the repressive powers of the KGB's domestic successor, the FSB (Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti – Federal Security Service) a measure that Medvedev has publicly claimed as his own initiative. And it was the same Karaganov who declared two years ago that the Poles had a 'Katyn complex' for which they should seek a cure.

So while it would be wonderful if we were about to witness the final exorcism of Stalin from Russian public life, it may still be too early to sound the hosannas. Since Nikita Khrushchev's sensational but selective denunciation of Stalin in 1956, Moscow has passed through numerous phases of de- and re-Stalinisation. If the Kremlin judged it desirable in six months' time to unwind the Russian people's increased awareness of what had been done in their name at Katyn or anywhere else, this would not be beyond its capacity.

Russia remains unhappy with the loss of its empire after the collapse of communism and eager to reverse as much of that as it realistically can. At a minimum, it would like to restore control over Belarus and Ukraine and some other parts of the old Soviet Union, while striving for a dominant influence in most of the rest. The Kremlin probably accepts that the countries of Eastern Europe will retain their independence, but it would certainly hope to increase its influence there by a mixture of courtship, economic penetration, occasional threats and coercive energy diplomacy. The attitude to Poland before the recent warming of relations reflected that approach, and is unlikely to alter permanently as a result of it. While Russian leaders are friendly towards Poland at the moment, they do not typically regard smaller neighbours with great respect, seeing them as less than fully 'sovereign' in the special meaning that Russian discourse gives to that word.

In Europe, more generally, they are working in traditional mode to divide Europe from the United States and, within Europe, to aggravate divisions by cultivating links with those European countries that are more pragmatically or even warmly disposed to them, and isolating those that are not. They want to revise the post-communist European security system in their favour, and have grounds for thinking that some European governments will be prepared to meet them part of the way.

Despite Medvedev's efforts to 'modernise' Russia and his occasionally trenchant criticisms of the state of the nation, the strength of his commitment to serious reform remains unclear and, in any case, he is unlikely to be able to make his writ run far. Opinion polls regularly show that a large majority of Russians believe he does not have the decisive say in the direction of his nation's affairs and it is hard not to agree with them.

Despite its current tilt towards the West, Russia seems likely to remain, at least for some time yet, the relatively closed, enigmatic and authoritarian system that it has nearly always been and that Putin has largely restored. The GFC has probably now done its worst, but while there has been some slight weakening of Putin and Medvedev's stellar popularity ratings, the system still looks pretty secure. If Putin chooses to return to the presidency in 2012, he could have a further 12 years in office in which to consolidate his 'power vertical' at home and extend it to the former republics. Russia's corrupt oligarchic economy meanwhile seems as far from genuine market reform as ever.

Across Russia's western borders things are broadly similar. While it is experimenting with economic reform, Belarus is not becoming any more democratic; and Lukashenka is under growing attack from Moscow, which wants to discipline him or replace him with someone more amenable. In Ukraine, Yanukovich looks well on the way to restoring a more authoritarian system than has existed at any time since before perestroika. And Moldova, though turning westward again after elections, is under severe pressure from Russia (now with support, not opposition, from Ukraine). Moscow has slapped another boycott on Moldovan wine (wine constitutes 40 per cent of its total exports), and continues to manipulate the issue of its client regime in the secessionist territory of Transnistria. Further afield, in Georgia, heedless of credible (by regional standards) elections that President Saakashvili's party wins easily, Moscow has been overtly grooming two opposition politicians as his potential successors.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 5 July visit to Tbilisi and her public statements calling for Russia to withdraw from the territory it is occupying in Georgia may have reassured Tbilisi and disappointed Moscow (though reaction there was muted). Soon after, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner chose Bastille Day to visit Tbilisi, where he also called for a Russian withdrawal. But Russian forces remain within

40 kilometres of the Georgian capital, and Georgia's dismemberment appears to have been tacitly accepted by most Western leaders. More generally, in pursuit of 'reset' or 'strategic' or 'modernisation' partnerships, both the United States and the European Union seem, for the moment, disposed to take Russia as they find it. Poland may be moving part of the way towards a similar accommodation.

Like the Polish–Russian *rapprochement*, and for similar reasons, any new *détente* between Russia and the West will remain insecure while the values gap continues as at present, or widens, as it has done for most of the time under Putin. Until Russia confronts its Stalinist past squarely and consistently, and draws the necessary conclusions from doing so, its relations with the United States and much of Europe may continue to oscillate between the fragile and the fraught.

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