Book Reviews

William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia – European Security Institutions since 1989*, New York, 2018.

During the negotiations leading up to the Treaties of Utrecht (1713), a series of agreements that concluded the War of the Spanish Succession and marked the end of great power status for the Dutch Republic, a French delegate reportedly sneered at his hosts “*Nous traiterons chez vous, de vous, sans vous*”. A similar feeling of being left out, of no longer being taken seriously with regard to the design of European security has been on Russia’s mind ever since the end of the Cold War. The question to what extent this sentiment is justified, and whether it is rooted in the policies of the West or in Russia’s own behaviour is still hotly debated, even though in the meantime Russia has returned to the geopolitical scene – with a vengeance, as some would claim. For obvious reasons, this debate is burdened by starkly opposing perspectives. One of its most striking features seems to be both parties’ differing starting points. Most Western narratives on the breakdown of the European order will begin with the short Russian-Georgian war in August 2008 and culminate in the 2014 Ukrainian crisis and subsequent annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in the Donbas region. Russians, on the other hand, will date back their litanies to the 1990s with NATO’s unsanctioned involvement in the former Yugoslavia and its first wave of enlargement. In short, it is an asymmetrical, difficult and acrimonious conversation. At the same time, it is important to keep addressing these issues. Not because it will yield consensus, but simply because a sober account of recent history may mitigate some of the strongest held convictions on both sides of the equation and pave the way for better times ahead.

Former US diplomat and scholar William Hill has delivered such a nuanced account of Russia’s place and role in European security institutions since the end of the Cold War. In his book “No Place for Russia – European Security Institutions Since 1989” he meticulously describes the developments within two Western institutions, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the

European Union (EU), and one pan-European institution, the Vienna-based Conference-turned-Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE and OSCE). One of the merits of Hill, who served as an OSCE Head of Mission in Moldova, is that he dwells extensively on this third platform, which in Western analyses is often neglected in favour of the first two – in itself symptomatic of the general approach to the organisation initially considered by Russia as its favourite post-Cold War venue for European security matters. Hill's story is that of Europe's 'interlocking' security institutions: a complex story that already in the 1990s prompted diplomats to quip about 'inter-blocking' mechanisms instead and that leads the author to argue "that neither Russia, the major European powers, nor the United States have been successful since 1989 in defining a place for Russia in the European or Euro-Atlantic security architecture" (p. 3).

We tend to think we are now (with China, Trump and Brexit) experiencing an acceleration of history, but Hill reminds us that around the end of the Cold War events were happening at breakneck speed. When the Berlin Wall came down within a year Western and Eastern Germany were reunited, and two years later the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union had been disbanded. Between June 1991 and June 1992 no fewer than 20 new countries emerged on the Eurasian continent. When a broad UN mandated coalition led by the US chased invader Iraq out of Kuwait and the West celebrated democracy and market economies as winning models it was no surprise that US president Bush in 1991 ventured to declare a New World Order. Earlier, in November 1990, CSCE Heads of State and Government had already drafted a Charter for a New Europe, with the lofty heading 'A new era of Democracy, Peace and Unity'. Understandable as this euphoric mood may have been, Hill concludes that "Russia did not fully embrace and assimilate these values" (p. 389) although the West, betting on the proclaimed democrat Yeltsin, wishfully chose to believe it did. Russia instead had to cope with an economy that came to a grinding halt, a social security system that stopped functioning, with the staggering number of some 25 million ethnic Russians living outside its new borders and with the prospect of further disintegration.

By that time, Washington had already decided it "would remain present and deeply involved in Europe, and NATO would survive as the primary means for the United States to do so" (p. 63). Hill describes the reinvention of the Alliance as a crisis management tool and the extent to which the Yugoslav crisis, too serious for the fledgling European foreign policy branch to handle, constituted a formative event in this context. In parallel, under the banner of 'cooperative security', NATO reached out to Europe's newly independent states, first with the establishment of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (soon to be

followed by the Partnership for Peace) and then by starting its process of enlargement. Hill understands that from Moscow's viewpoint this process, accompanied by the growing ambitions of the EU, looked like "moving the Cold War dividing line ... further to the east", although this "was not the stated purpose" (p. 103). In Hill's narrative, 1999 stands out as a particularly troublesome year for East–west relations. Circumventing the UN Security Council, NATO launched an air campaign against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over Kosovo (prompting Russian Prime Minister Primakov, on his way to Washington for a working visit, to turn his plane around over the Atlantic) and Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic formally joined the Alliance. Although that same year an OSCE Summit in Istanbul still managed to adopt a Charter for European Security, NATO members would refuse to submit the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (signed by 36 countries on the margins of the Summit and meant to replace the outdated 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty) to parliaments for ratification because of Russia's failure to withdraw smallish military contingents from Georgia and Moldova – stemming from conflicts in which, according to Hill, "rights and wrongs were not completely clear" (p. 386).

In hindsight it is remarkable that despite all this friction, efforts were still being made to improve ties. In 1997 NATO and Russia concluded a Founding Act and a Joint Permanent Council; Russian units had served in IFOR in Bosnia and would even join KFOR in Kosovo (be it not under direct NATO command) and Putin pursued better relations with NATO from the very start of his presidency, among other things by agreeing to a NATO–Russia Council in 2002. Bilaterally, Putin had reacted swiftly to 9/11 by brokering the usage of Central Asian military bases that would facilitate US operations in Afghanistan, as he sensed a promising joint anti-terrorism agenda; support for which Putin felt he never got the credits he deserved. But every time there would be setbacks too, most notably with the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (again without UN approval) and a series of so-called colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan that Moscow believed were triggered by a West bent on regime change. As Hill describes, during these years NATO and the EU were strengthening their ties, for instance with the 2002 EU–NATO Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy. Despite tensions within the Trans-Atlantic community and European misgivings about the US Global War on Terror, Moscow came to consider these two expanding Euro-Atlantic institutions as working in sync towards a "Europe that is whole, free, and at peace" but that would not include Russia. In sum, Moscow was heavily frustrated with the "overall structure and hierarchy of the European security architecture": two treaty based organisations in charge of military, political and economic affairs and the one politically binding

organisation to which it did belong, the OSCE, dealing with second-order security issues, primarily concerning human rights issues 'east of Vienna'.

All these grievances about the West's perceived double standards, which Russian politicians had routinely conveyed as from the mid-1990s, were summed up by Putin in a notorious address at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, the same year Russia decided to no longer implement the CFE Treaty. And 2008 was still to come: when Kosovo unilaterally declared independence (immediately recognised by most Western states) and NATO, in an unprecedented manner, bluntly guaranteed membership to both Georgia and Ukraine during its Bucharest Summit. In 2008 it was also payback time. When Georgia's firebrand and pro-Western president Saakashvili started shelling the break-away region of South Ossetia, killing Russian peacekeepers in the process, Russian troops invaded the country and, after a hastily arranged ceasefire agreement mediated by the rotational French EU presidency, Moscow recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Georgia's other break-away region), in clear retaliation for Kosovo's newly acquired status. The Obama administration tried once more to 'reset' relations with Russia, but the fact that the State Department hadn't bothered to get the Russian translation of this slogan right (picking 'overload' instead of 'reset') was highly symbolic of this endeavour, which soon gave way to new animosities over the Arab Spring movements, interpreted by Russia as encouraged by the West, and further steps in Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU. This new phase of worsening relations would ultimately lead to the 2014 crisis of Ukraine and the stand-offs in the Middle East and Northern Africa with regard to Libya, Syria and Iran: crises that endure until this day.

Hill's tone is overall diplomatic and maybe one wouldn't expect otherwise from a former diplomat. Although he doesn't identify malign intent on the West's part he is, in conformity with the title of his book, critical of the way the European security architecture developed and exposes the "theoretical flaws in this construct" with NATO and the EU on one side and "only Russia left out on the 'other side'" (p. 383). This way, he opines that the West "may have contributed to the buildup to and the outbreak of this [i.e. the Russian-Ukrainian] conflict" (p. 383). Likewise, he states that Russia's influence in the former Soviet republics is "indisputable, inevitable, and in and of itself neither good nor evil" (p. 385). Indeed, Russia is no exception to the rule that great powers, even if they are no longer great in all respects, want to have a say (in a subtle manner or not) in their neighbourhood, especially if they maintain centuries-old ties with some of those countries. His final verdict is unequivocal, and tougher than his introductory findings: "The greatest failing of the West's strategic choice after the end of the Cold War is, of course, the exclusion, isolation, and

hostility of contemporary Russia" (p. 387). In his conclusion Hill makes another important point as well, when he states that NATO's and the EU's policies, including those with regard to enlargement, have been "institutionalized" and "bureaucratized" and operate on "automatic pilot" (p. 384). A pertinent observation, judging from the way a seemingly casual compromise during NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit (not granting Georgia and Ukraine Membership Action Plan status in exchange for an unspecified guarantee of membership) sent out a highly ambiguous message and, coincidence or not, was followed by two armed conflicts in Europe.

This study covers a period still largely dominated by the US-Russia relationship but anticipates the beginning of a new era in which European security "will need to be reformed, rebuilt, or perhaps even replaced" (p. 395). Well, maybe more than perhaps, given Hill's earlier remark that Trump's 2016 victory "has opened up the real possibility of a ... European security without the United States" (p. 382); an eventuality which will only reinforce the argument for finding a place for Russia. Hill has written a comprehensive and precise institutional account of post-Cold War European security. He might have produced a slightly shorter narrative, since his chosen method to consistently treat NATO, the EU and the OSCE separately against the background of events leads to a certain dose of repetitiveness, while his prose is not always as riveting. Still, we now have an authoritative handbook on recent European security history. Taking the dismal quality of current relations with Russia into account, this book is highly recommended to those who are still curious to find out how we ended up here, and who aspire to improve European security.

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