NATO-Russia Missile Defence Cooperation: An initiative for Liberal World Order or for NATO?

Paper prepared for the ISA Annual Convention in San Diego, California 1-4 April 2012

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Work in early progress – not ready for quoting!

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Introduction

The liberal world order (LWO) established after WW2 is said to be in crisis, and the institutions on which the order was built and has operated through are now said to be in need of change and reform\(^1\). As a result the American liberal hegemonic order has reached a turning point, where new bargains have to be forged if a liberal world order is to remain in place (Ikenberry, 2011:302). Moreover, as NATO has always been a cornerstone of the strategic bargain between the United States and Europe, and has functioned as an anchor for the multilateral restraints and commitments on which the order was built, NATO is – perhaps more so than other organizations – showing the effects of the changed conditions for LWO, and more urgently than most, in need of reform. Moreover, as will be shown in this paper, changes in NATO may well have important implications for the workings of LWO.

Most analyses on crisis and change in NATO focus on the internal workings of the Alliance and the changed security challenges to which NATO must adapt. To be sure these are important for understanding NATO in the 21\(^{st}\) century, but the focus on

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NATO and security challenges often overlooks the importance of the United States and the relationship of NATO and the US with LWO. This is curious because it has long been apparent that the position in the international system of the leading power (the US) has a profound influence on the internal workings of the Alliance. Moreover, a witnessed in the crisis during the Bush Administration, it matters a great deal to NATO how the leading power manages its hegemonic position and whether it maintains rule through consent, rules and negotiation, albeit within a hegemonic relationship. Therefore when the Bush Administration interpreted its unipolar position as an opportunity to change its leadership style from 'rule' based on consent, established rules and negotiation to command, bilateral relationships and a lack of negotiation, the effects in NATO were staggering leading to a deep sense of crisis and anxiety. The Obama Administration has returned to rule through consent, rules and negotiation with positive effects in NATO(1kenberry, 2011). Yet, although the tone is different, and there has been a return to the so called negotiated order, the position of the leading state in the international system is in question, which is a cause for concern and uncertainty in the Alliance. Within the setting of anticipated (and ongoing) relative decline of the leading state the Alliance has not been able to return to ‘the good times’ of the 1990s. The changes related to the position of the leading state are often un-articulated but seem nevertheless to have caused Alliance members to either fret about American loss of interest in the Alliance and possible withdrawal, or it has made some allies seem less inclined to contribute to operations that they do not rank as their own core national interests. Together, the changes point towards greater reliance on ‘coalitions of willing members and partners’ to solve specific problems, leading to a build-up of pressure for
fundamental change in long established practices within the Alliance and in patterns of relationships with other international actors.

This paper (and the panel more generally) focuses on NATO, and how NATO through its recent (November 2010) adoption of a new Strategic Concept appears to be working towards meeting new challenges by setting out new ways for the Alliance to be able to deal with the changed conditions of the 21st century. In particular the Strategic Concept elevates ‘cooperative security’ with partners and other relevant countries (Russia, China and India) and international organizations (EU, UN, African Union) to one of three core tasks (the other two being ‘collective defence’ and ‘crisis management’). This is in line with the foreign policy objective of the Obama Administration, to restore American liberal leadership in a ‘multipartner world’\(^2\). The new Strategic Concept can be seen as a document designed to produce the necessary change for NATO to be able to cope with new and anticipated changes and to lead to a ‘New NATO – a Version 3.0\(^3\) – which is an Alliance that is fit for the 21st century, and which fits within a changing liberal world order.

This paper focuses on just one particular aspect of the changes introduced in the new Strategic Concept, the (surprising) commitment to seek to establish a fundamentally altered relationship with Russia by actively seeking cooperation with Russia on missile defence. The paper focuses on missile defence cooperation because the initiative seems to hold a potentially significant political promise that, if successful,

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\(^2\) Secretary of State Hilary Clinton coined this phrase.

\(^3\) The reference to NATO in different versions (1.0; 2.0 and 3.0) was coined by the US Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder in a speech to the New American Foundation NATO, Afghanistan and Russia in Washington DC and quoted in ROGIN, J. 2010. Get Ready for NATO 3.0. The Cable, 29 October 2010. However, Daalder’s analysis is clearly influenced by Ikenberry’s characterization of different versions of LWO from his article IKENBERRY, G. J. 2009. Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order. Perspectives on Politics, 7, 71-87.
could lead to functional integration reminiscent of postwar European integration.
Oksana Antonenko and Bastian Giegerich (Antonenko and Giegerich, 2009) have identified the possible outcome as a ‘game-changer’, which would fundamentally alter the security dynamics of the Euro-Atlantic area. However, the proposal also contains a considerable danger of failure and increased friction (Kamp, 2011), as was made painfully clear in President Medvedev’s recent menacing statement suggesting that within the next decade the initiative will either lead to a full-fledged cooperation mechanism, or to another escalation of the arms race, where Russia will feel obliged to deploy new attack forces. Analysis on the initiative for cooperation on missile defence has so far concentrated on the possible outcome of the initiative between ‘game change’ and a return to an adversarial relationship.

Although the paper does not reject that altered security dynamics in the Euro-Atlantic area may be a possible (albeit optimistic) outcome and a good reason for NATO to agree to the cooperation, the paper suggests that the initiative to enter into cooperation on missile defence with Russia can also be seen as part of a grand scheme to secure the position of the United States as a Liberal Leviathan despite the prospects of relative decline and an anticipated softening of unipolarity as other powers challenge the unipolar position of the United States. I am not suggesting that the initiative in this way is a form of conspiracy, but merely that deeper concerns (though not easily explained in a public setting) than those expressed in the new Strategic Concept have been at play when formulating the initiative. In this paper the initiative is regarded in a broader perspective, as an instance of forging ‘practical and consensual functioning

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global rules and institutions’ (Ikenberry, 2011:10) through rule-based relationships that may last into an altered emerging security environment characterized by a relative decline of the United States and a softening (perhaps even end) to its unipolar position. This places the initiative for missile defence cooperation with Russia in a new light and suggests that the role of NATO is as a facilitator and back-up for the United States in its quest to secure its position in the new emerging security environment. In this conception NATO is used as a tool for supporting LWO in addition to being an expression of LWO.

G. John Ikenberry (2011) has outlined a number of strategies for maintaining the LWO in a world where the unipolar position of the United States must be assumed to be fading and where new powers are (re)emerging and challenges are growing. The paper analyses the essence of the new cooperative relationship between NATO, The United States and Russia within the context of a changing LWO by utilizing Ikenberry’s concept ‘strategies for rule’. In the book *Liberal Leviathan*, Ikenberry distinguishes between two forms of strategies for ruling by a liberal hegemon such as the United States; ‘rule through rules’ and ‘rule through relationships’. The first entails traditional multilateral commitments to rule-based governance as manifested in the relationship between the US and Europe and between the European states. The other has been more prevalent in the relationship between the US and Asia and is built around patron-client bilateral relations forming a ‘hub-and-spoke’ system with the United States as the hub (Ikenberry, 2011:29). Under conditions of unipolarity, Ikenberry suggests that the latter form of relationships – bilateral and forged in response to specific events and specific needs – will be the most common form of relationship. Such relationships will give rise to ‘coalitions of willing’ in which the US is the ‘hub’. Indeed, it seems that the latter kind of
strategy is currently in ascendance in most places – even in NATO as witnessed in the increasing use of ‘coalitions of willing’ (either members or partners) based on de facto bilateral agreements. Yet, the 2010 Strategic Concept made a commitment to commence institutionalized cooperation on missile defence with Russia, which seems to imply that the relationship with Russia is in the process of being elevated to a rule based relationship. To be sure, the relationship with Russia is complicated, and the suggestion for cooperation on missile defence is very ambitious and located within a sphere, where Russia maintains a considerable leverage. The paper therefore asks if the new rule-based relationship with Russia is undertaken primarily to produce a ‘game-change’ in the NATO/US-Russia relationship, or if it is designed to produce a relationship that in effect cements the leading position of the United States and ‘locks in’ other missile defence actors in a rule-based institutionalized relationship in an important area such as missile defence.

The paper is divided into two sections. The first briefly outlines NATO’s new Strategic Concept and the proposal for cooperation with Russia on missile defence. The second section utilizes Ikenberry’s analysis presented in Liberal Leviathan for assessing the reasoning behind the suggestion, Russian likely responses and the significance for LWO.

Towards NATO-Russia Cooperation on Missile Defence

When NATO’s Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in November 2010 presented NATO’s new Strategic Concept Active Engagement, Modern Defence (NATO, 2010), one of the surprises in the new document was not only that the Alliance had
agreed to develop the capability to defend populations and territories (rather than just armed forces) against ballistic missile attack, but that NATO pledged to actively seek cooperation on Missile Defence with Russia. The point was reiterated twice in the document, stressing the strategic importance of NATO-Russian cooperation as a contribution to creating a common space of peace, stability and security, and listing other areas of practical cooperation between Russia and NATO including (apart from Missile Defence) counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics and counter-piracy.

Although the initiative was a surprise to most, it was clearly in line with the Obama Administration’s effort to ‘re-set’ the relationship with Russia and was part of a carefully crafted plan by NATO’s new Secretary General, which had been in preparation in close cooperation with the so called ‘Group of Experts’ under the leadership of Madeleine Albright\(^5\). The preparations took place even before Anders Fogh Rasmussen took up his appointment as NATO’s Secretary General in August 2009, and involved close consultation with non-Russian Russia experts and with Russian security experts\(^6\).

It must be said that the idea of a closer and more cooperative relationship with Russia was not new, as a study had been launched already in 2003 to assess the possible levels of inter-operability among the theatre missile defence systems of NATO Allies and Russia. However these early ambitions for cooperation were hampered by Russian concerns with the system planned by the Bush Administration, which included radar sites and missile launchers stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic, and which

\(^5\) The Strategic Concept was preceded by a report by the so called ‘Group of Experts’ led by Madeleine Albright. The report was based on extensive consultation among practitioners, scholars and other stakeholders. See EXPERTS, G. O. 2010. NATO 2020: Assured Security: Dynamic Engagement. Brussels: NATO.

\(^6\) This information is based on interviews with NATO officials on several occasions since 2009, and on conversations with Russian analysts who were in close consultation with Anders Fogh Rasmussen prior to taking up his appointment as Secretary General of NATO.
Russia saw as primarily aimed at their strategic arsenals. Neither the fact that only ten interceptors were planned in Poland - which is nothing in comparison with Russia’s huge strategic missile arsenal - nor the hint that the American defence effort was primarily directed against Iran, could alleviate Russian concerns\(^7\) (Kamp, 2011). In any case the general tone during the Bush Administration was not conducive to cooperation and by 2008, the Russo-Georgian War had put an end to all thoughts about cooperation. Throughout the Bush administration, cooperation therefore seemed unlikely, despite clear signals that a more cooperative relationship with Russia was desired.

With NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept it seemed that many of the issues that had hampered the Alliance during the Bush years were resolved and that the US, NATO and Russia were at long last on the way to more substantial cooperation on Missile Defence. The Obama Administration had already dropped the Bush administration’s plans for Ground Based Interceptors (GBI) in Poland and a radar installation in the Czech Republic, which was a system that was designed primarily for the protection of the American homeland, and based on bilateral agreements with Poland and the Czech Republic. By transforming the European Missile Defence system into an integrated part of NATO’s collective defence obligations, with a substantial American contribution, the European concerns about the Bush administration’s reliance on bilateral accords with Poland and the Czech Republic were mitigated, the system was no longer seen as primarily protecting the United States, and the substantial American contribution signaled a continued American commitment to Europe. In addition, a shared missile

\(^7\) The system that is now being proposed called the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) will focus at least initially on medium range threats for Europe coming from the Middle East – Iran in particular – and only in the longer run on intercontinental missiles threatening the United States. The interceptors will be deployed on ships – the Aegis cruisers – and will be able to cover all European NATO member states (to varying degrees).
defence system based on traditional notions of equal sharing of risks and benefits also
gave the alliance a new focus for cooperation looking beyond the conflict in Afghanistan.
It was even hinted that the sharing of missile defence might be a substitute for nuclear
sharing\(^8\) - or at least an additional form of burden and risk sharing in the Alliance, which
could contribute to the maintenance of alliance cohesion(Flockhart, 2010).

The new system is known as the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA).
As implied by the name, the EPAA’s distinguishing characteristics are its fully European
location and its ability to adapt over time in line with the evolution of the perceived
(Iranian) threat (Mankoff, 2012). Unlike the former proposal, which was designed to
operate as part of the United States’ system, the EPAA is both wholly in Europe, and
focused on defending European territory from Iranian or Middle Eastern medium- and
intermediate-range missiles. It is also designed for deployment in four phases over the
decade to 2020\(^9\). Each phase will add new capabilities to the overall system, and can
be redesigned as necessary in line with the perceived evolution of Iran’s (or other
rougue states’) capabilities. However, it is precisely this adaptability – and especially the
contention that the fourth phase will be able to intercept Russian strategic missiles, that
worry Moscow(Mankoff, 2012:338).

Although the proposal for cooperation on missile defence was initially received
positively by Russia at the NATO-Russia Council meeting held in conjunction with the
Lisbon Summit, it seems that negotiations over the past year have become increasingly
bogged down in disagreements, where the two sides seem to communicate on different

\(^8\) This suggestion is however one that is not shared by all allies, although it was briefly alluded to in the report by the Group of
Experts.
\(^9\) However, although the fourth phase is envisaged implemented by 2020, this seems an overtly optimistic assessment of as yet
untried technology.
wavelengths and to continue to harbor traditional conceptions about each other and about the purpose of the cooperation (Kamp, 2011). For Russia, it seems that missile defence cooperation is seen primarily as a means for influencing NATO decisions and gaining technology transfers. In addition Russia was probably attracted to the initiative because it seemed to offer the opportunity to achieve some of the same ends that Russia had hoped to achieve with the 1990s OSCE suggestion for a more inclusive security architecture that could focus on threats emanating from outside Europe (Mankoff, 2012). NATO on the other hand, sees the prospects for building cooperation around areas where consensus can be achieved through the forum of the NATO-Russia Council in which all 29 members have to agree. The emphasis from the perspective of NATO is on shared risk assessments and other information sharing and transparency. The main sticking point however is on the structure of the missile defence system. While NATO favors establishing two separate but connected systems that would exchange missile threat data and assessments but be responsible for their own territory, Russia wants to see a single unified framework that would give it an equal say in decisions to launch interceptors. The single ‘sectoral’ system suggested by the Russians envisages a system divided into geographical areas of responsibility encompassing a joint center for maintaining missiles and command and control mechanisms. This however is utterly rejected by the United States, and as the system would envisage Russia in charge of for example Baltic defence, the proposal is a complete non-starter for Alliance consensus.

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10 Since the 1990s when NATO enlargements came on the agenda rather than the Russia suggestion of a security architecture based on the OSCE, Russia has consistently complained that it has been left out of the European security architecture. This is a position that seems likely to increasingly isolate Russia as it has few remaining possibilities for security cooperation – especially in a European context.
The rhetoric over the last 6-8 months has been rather negative. Whilst it may be that some of the more uncompromising rhetoric since the summer of 2011 has been influenced by the Russian Presidential election campaign, the current status is that Russia and the United States have failed to narrow their differences and stand practically no chance of reaching a compromise in time for the NATO summit in Chicago in May. The official NATO line is that they do not know if president-elect Putin will attend a NATO-Russia Council (NRC) meeting in Chicago, but the unofficial position is increasingly that such a meeting seems unlikely to take place. Nevertheless NATO is expected to declare an interim missile defence capability at the Chicago Summit, and NATO officials do not seem in the least concerned (or surprised) about the negative turn in the negotiations with Russia.\footnote{Based on several interviews and informal conversations with NATO officials either in NATO or on the occasion of visits to Copenhagen.}

Missile defence is however, not the only form of cooperation currently being undertaken between NATO and Russia, although clearly cooperation on missile defence is by far the most ambitious and high profile project (Antonenko and Giegerich, 2009). The Lisbon Summit hosted one of the first meetings in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) following the so called ‘reset’ of relations after the suspension of activities in the NRC as a result of the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008. The reset relationship got onto a good start as (then) President Medvedev agreed to allow land transit to and from Afghanistan of non-lethal cargo (something that all NATO officials spoke enthusiastically about), and to establish a Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund to help the Afghan armed forces to maintain their helicopter fleet. In addition cooperation takes place in areas of military-to-military cooperation, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, counter-piracy,
crisis management, non-proliferation, air-space management, civil emergency planning and several other less ambitious areas of cooperation. These initial steps may be small, but politically and practically they are important and they suggest that change is underway in the NATO-Russia relationship despite the stalled negotiations on missile defence cooperation. Most importantly the increased level of cooperation in areas other than missile defence is a clear indication that the two former foes increasingly share the same security concerns.

At the same time however and despite the important steps towards a new more cooperative relationship between NATO and Russia, both sides are highly ambivalent about a new relationship and deep tensions continue to exist in both sides’ characterization of their relationship. For example the Russian Military Doctrine, published in 2010, identifies NATO expansion and the globalization of NATO’s role as the most significant threat to Russia (Mankoff, 2012). Moreover, in the public domestic rhetoric, NATO is still characterized as the enemy (Antonenko and Yurgens, 2010). Similarly, although NATO repeatedly states that it does not regard Russia as an enemy, but sees Russia as a strategic partner, the reality is that quite a few NATO allies do see Russia as a potential threat – a perception that has only been reinforced by the latest Russian threats to counter the EPAA missile defence with deployment of missiles in Kaliningrad. Moreover, if NATO really does see Russia as a partner, it is difficult to see why the cooperation must be based on two separate systems – rather than a unified system with delegated command to NATO. The relationship therefore remains complex and full of tensions, which are not easily resolved by simply looking at the empirical basis of the relationship and the reasoning put forward by those involved in the issue.
The question posed here is therefore if the relationship might be better explained with the help of G. John Ikenberry’s conceptualization of ‘strategies for rule’ used for renegotiating the relationship between the United States (through NATO) with Russia in a changing liberal world order.

**Rule through rules or relationships**

Missile defence has always been a highly charged topic both in the relationship between the Europeans and the United States and in their relations with Russia, as well as in the domestic politics of all the involved parties. The controversies surrounding the SDI project of the 1980s and the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2001, as well as the disquiet over the Bush Administration’s handling of the stationing of interceptors and radar in Europe have rendered the issue of missile defence highly charged. The agreements in the new Strategic Concept to not only adopt a missile defence, but to engage in cooperation with Russia must therefore be regarded as a remarkable – and puzzling - achievement.

On the surface it seems like the adoption of missile defence and cooperation with Russia is an attempt by the Obama Administration to repair the damage done to the Alliance during the Bush years and to make the Alliance fit for the 21st century, by making it better able to defend against some of the threats identified as new security challenges. Among these, the threat of missile proliferation and nuclear attack by rogue states or non-state actors has figured prominently in all risk assessments. Although Iran is not mentioned directly (on the insistence of Turkey), there is no doubt that the primary concern is a nuclear-armed Iran. However, although these considerations certainly are
valid, they could have been dealt with without the offer of cooperation with Russia. The fact that NATO did not ‘just’ adopt the EPAA system WITHOUT also offering cooperation with Russia does seem to suggest a more complex underlying agenda. It is suggested here that what is really (or also) at issue is a struggle to shape an important element of the strategic environment in a situation of declining relative power of the liberal hegemon. In such a situation the United States will need to renegotiate its relationship and strategic bargains with a number of international actors – including Russia.

According to Ikenberry, in order for the United States to maintain or reinstate its position as a ‘Liberal Leviathan’ it will need to search for ‘practical and consensual functioning global rules and institutions’ (Ikenberry, 2011:10). This will inevitably involve a greater degree of sharing authority among a wider coalition of different kinds of states, which will reduce the political autonomy of the dominant state. It seems that cooperation on missile defence with Russia is precisely an attempt to establish such ‘practical and consensual functioning rules and institutions’. Moreover, given that the American position as a unipole is likely to fade in the years and decades to come, Ikenberry suggests that rule through consent (rather than through balance or command) is likely to be the most advantageous position to adopt, even though it may be necessary for the dominant state to reduce its policy autonomy. On this point it is clearly in the interest of the United States to establish the ‘rules’ while it is still a hegemon and able to, if not command, then at least exercise a high degree of influence on the negotiated bargain. It does however beg the question of why the US should want to restrain itself on a policy area as important as missile defence. In addition, it is puzzling that the United States
has chosen to pursue cooperation on missile defence through the rule-based relationship of NATO, rather than through a bilateral relationship with Russia, which presumably would be less constraining on the United States, and which would better reflect the power inequalities between Russia and the United States.

The other question raised by the proposal is why the weaker state – in this case Russia – should be roped into a rule-based relationship whilst the rule-defining hegemonic power is still strong. It might well be that Russia’s rejection of the offer of cooperation is a calculated position to not let themselves be locked into an institutional arrangement at T1, as they might be able to negotiate a better bargain at T2 or T3 when the power asymmetry does not favour the leading state quite as much (Ikenberry, 2011:106)\(^\text{12}\). Alternatively and as mentioned earlier, the harsh rhetoric may also simply be connected to the Russian Presidential campaign and the need in Russian domestic politics to look strong – and certainly not to be ‘pushed around’ by the US. This is particularly so as Russia actually has few options open to it, which may explain NATO officials’ relaxed attitude to the meager results achieved so far, as they have good reason to have confidence that Russia will eventually agree to some form of cooperation. The problem for Russia is that it is no longer clear where Russia ‘fit in’ in a new world order. In strategic terms, a rising China faces Russia on the east that it seems unlikely to be able, or willing, to enter into any strategic bargain with, and to the South Russia faces the same concerns as the West about regional instability and

\(^{12}\) It could be said that precisely in the area of strategic nuclear arms, the two are relatively even through the strategic nuclear balance. However Russia is determined not to get involved in a competition on missile defence technology.
militant Islamism. In reality therefore, Russia has no other option than either to stay alone or to gradually move towards the West, as and when its domestic politics will allow it to do so. Although this could be a while given the public discourse about NATO as the prime security threat, Russia is in as much of a vulnerable position for change as the United States is, and faces the same security challenges as the West. What Russia seems to be willing to ‘hang on’ for until T2 or T3 is a more integrated position in the European security architecture than the current proposal of two separate systems is promising, and failing that a change in both the domestic situation and perhaps in the international environment that will make it clear to Russians that there really is no other alternative than to cooperate with NATO – even on the terms set by NATO and the US. A nuclear-armed Iran could be such a triggering event.

Conclusion

This paper has focused solely on the initiative for cooperation between NATO and Russia on missile defence. In reality however, the situation is much more complicated and several issues are closely connected and determining for whether, or when, the already happening cooperation between NATO and Russia might be expanded to also include cooperation on missile defence. These issues include future arms control negotiations on Non-Strategic Nuclear Weapons (NSNWs) and a possible reopening of negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). However, despite the differences and despite the sometimes harsh rhetoric, NATO (the US) and Russia share more security concerns today than at any point earlier – including the risk of a recurrence of (more) instability in Afghanistan, escalation of regional conflicts in the vicinity of Russia
and Europe, proliferation of WMD and of missile technology and threats posed by non-state actors and disruptions to access critical infrastructure as well as environmental risks and natural disasters (Antonenko and Giegerich, 2009). On all counts NATO (US) and Russia are already cooperating in some form – granted in very limited ways, but nevertheless suggesting a movement towards a new era where the relationship with Russia seems set to move in the direction of a rule-based relationship.

It therefore seems fair to say that although much of the cooperation has been initiated as a result of NATO’s new Strategic Concept, that the real impetus behind the Strategic Concept and Russia’s willingness to engage in cooperation in the NRC is real and anticipated power shifts in the international system, which makes it imperative for the United States to renegotiate new bargains with a wider set of actors – including Russia – to maintain its position as the Liberal Leviathan. Russia is ‘playing ball’, albeit reluctantly, because the very same changes in the international system look set to increasingly isolate Russia, unless it strikes a strategic bargain with the United States – in this case through NATO.

MANKOFF, J. 2012. The politics of US missile defence cooperation with Europe and Russia

*International Affairs*, 88, 329-347.

