

**Good Evening Ladies and Gentleman** and can I first of all say Thank you to Uniting for Peace for having organised and for having invited me to speak at this event – an event whose subject matter cannot be emphasised enough as it is of paramount importance to every single person in this world today. Indeed, the deterioration in relations between the United States and Russia is, in my estimation, the most dangerous reality facing the world at this moment in time. However, that deterioration is not a surprise – at least not a surprise for any objective and enlightened individual with empathy.

Now, the hook of my talk is “action, reaction”. Action on behalf of the West, reaction on behalf of Russia. When a country is sidelined, has its views and concerns discarded, has its national security threatened, and observes its allies in the world being undermined and/or militarily attacked, sooner or later that country is going to respond. Indeed, that is human nature. The alarming degree of tension between the US and Russia is due to Moscow having had its face slapped over and over again by Washington since the 1990s. And the Russians are now responding. So in order to try and defuse the current standoff between the US and Russia, it is essential to learn about the Russian mindset and what has happened since the end of the Cold War.

The concept of national security resonates in a profoundly different way with a Russian as it does with an American or a Briton. Over a period of approximately 300 years, Russia was invaded by foreign armies on five occasions – and all five invasions came through Russian’s western borders. In 1605, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth invaded; in 1708, Sweden invaded; in 1812, France invaded; in 1918, Imperial Germany invaded; and in 1941, Nazi Germany invaded. Those invasions - and in particular the Nazi one, which involved a racial war of extermination against the Soviet Union, resulting in the deaths of 27 million Soviet people - has had a profound, a manifestly huge effect on the Russian mindset, making Russians extremely sensitive and alert to any potential threat to their homeland. If more people at the Houses of Parliament and in British mainstream media were aware of the unprecedented horrors which Russia endured and eventually prevailed over during the Great Patriotic War, which is the Russian name for the Second World War, then there might be more understanding shown to what the Kremlin is saying today about its security concerns in Europe and the wider world.

If we turn to the year 1992, we see that Russia, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, was in meltdown – politically, economically and militarily. The fabric of Russian society was torn to shreds. Russia had gone, overnight, from being a superpower to a country barely able to stand on its own two feet. For the US, which is the leader of the western world and

of NATO, the Russian decline provided a golden opportunity to achieve American global hegemony.

The Pentagon's Defence Planning Guidance of 1992, more commonly known as the Wolfowitz Doctrine, after its co-author Paul Wolfowitz, argued that: "Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union...We must maintain the mechanism for deterring potential competitors from even aspiring to a larger regional or global role." On Russia, the document stated that: "Despite its current travails, Russia will remain the strongest military power in Eurasia and the only power in the world with the capability of destroying the United States."

And so, to prevent "the re-emergence of a new rival", and in light of the Russian nuclear arsenal, the US began advancing NATO eastwards, in 1999 and 2004, taking the alliance to Russia's doorstep. That is something, which even the former Secretary of State James Baker acknowledged, was told to Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1990, by George H Bush, would not occur. American and British politicians rarely, if at all, consider how they would respond if a Russian-led military alliance was on their borders; for example, in Mexico, Canada or France.

Now, some of you in this room might be thinking: Yes but NATO is a defensive organisation. Well, in 1994 and 1995, NATO attacked the Bosnian Serbs, Russia's allies; in 1999, NATO bombed Serbia, a historic Russian ally; in 2003, NATO spearheaded the invasion of Iraq, who Russia had close relations with; in 2011, NATO intervened in Libya, which was Russia's eyes and ears in North Africa; and from 2011 to the present, the US, UK and France - all NATO members, of course - are attempting to overthrow the Syrian Government, which is Russia's eyes and ears in the Middle East. In short, Moscow, rightly so, views NATO as an aggressive organisation – and one that is used by Washington to prevent a rival power from challenging its global dominance.

We then have two events which are inter-connected and have resulted in the Russian strategic nuclear deterrent being threatened. In late 2001, the US withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, a cornerstone agreement for reducing tension between the US and Russia. The American withdrawal led to the formation by Washington of the Missile Defence Agency, which this year activated a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe which is aimed at Russia. How would the US react to a Russian missile defence system in, say, Mexico or Canada? We all know how the Americans responded to the deployment of Soviet ICBMs to Cuba.

Another dimension to the *cordon sanitaire* being established by the US on Russia's western borders is the training of, and supporting of, pro-Western groups in former Soviet republics, in order to bring forth pro-Western governments in these places. Georgia and especially Ukraine are two major examples of that. In the case of the latter, many of the Maidan activists in Kiev were trained by the Americans in combat, and this training took place in western Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania.

While I have already referred to the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya and Syria, it is necessary to emphasise that these countries are all of geo-strategic importance, they have all been subjected to NATO intervention, and they all had/have close relations with the Russian Federation. From the Kremlin's point of view, one after another of its allies have been targeted by the US, which the Americans are doing in order to weaken Russia abroad which will then help to weaken Russia at home.

However, in recent years, Russia has regained a lot of its lost superpower status and has begun to respond to the American threat. Action, reaction. And yes - let me make something very clear: Russia has a right to national security...something that many Western politicians and journalists seem to think that Russia is not entitled to. Russia has a right to be heard on the international stage, to not be encircled, to not have a

missile defence shield on its borders and to not have its allies in the world targeted.

So the US' action has been to try and encircle and weaken Russia, and Russia's reaction has been to increase its defence spending, modernise its nuclear arsenal, carry out large-scale military manoeuvres, and fight for the survival of its allies in the world. Action, reaction.

Now, we hear the American and British governments say that Russia is responsible for the tension. Well, as I have demonstrated, the roots of that tension go back to the 1990s, when the Americans began taking steps to keep Russia down in the world and the US up in the world. Did the Americans believe that Russia would countenance their country being encircled and weakened? How on earth were the Russians supposed to respond? Empathy was, and remains, absent in many American and British politicians.

In concluding, action, reaction, explains why Europe finds itself at the heart of a renewed and dangerous standoff between America and Russia: aggressive and selfish actions by America, and defensive reactions by Russia. If the current confrontation between the two superpowers is to be reduced, then Washington and its allies need to examine the policies they have been pursuing in relation to Russia since the 1990s,

and ask themselves how they would respond if roles were reversed.

Action, reaction is innate in all human beings. And unless the West starts to listen to and understand Russia's perspective, then action, reaction will continue and could very well lead to a situation in which the future of the world is teetering on the edge of the abyss.

**Thank you very much.**