



Transcript

Russia and the West

Norma Percy

Director and Executive Producer, Brook Lapping Productions, and Series Producer of *Putin, Russia and the West*

Dr Bobo Lo

Independent Scholar and Consultant

Sir Roderic Lyne

Council, Chatham House

Paul Mitchell

Series Director of *Putin, Russia and the West*, Brook Lapping Productions

Chair: James Nixey

Manager and Research Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House

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James Nixey:

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I think we'll start, I'm sorry we're a bit late already. Welcome to Chatham House, and happy new year, of course, this is no doubt the first of almost 500 events that Chatham House will hold in 2012. I'm sure you'll be at many more, but none will be as good as this, I'm almost certain. [Laughter]

Three years ago Norma Percy showed here excerpts from a film, *Iran and the West*. It was a huge success, it was a groundbreaking series, earmarked by the extraordinary access she had in Iran, and this is exactly replicated in this new documentary to be shown on BBC Two next Thursday and every other Thursday for the three weeks after that: *Russia and the West*. Tremendous access. We are going to see four excerpts from these four films tonight, it will look at Russia's relations with the West during 9/11 – or during and just after – during the Orange Revolution, during the Georgia War, and over ballistic missile defence some years later, bringing us up to date. Norma will explain about this in a bit more detail.

I will just say for now, please turn your phones off, ladies and gentleman, and enjoy the film when it comes on. Afterwards we will of course have a panel discussion, as you know. Norma will you please elaborate a little bit more on what we are about to see. And congratulations by the way on a terrific series of films.

Norma Percy:

Thank you, and I hope you all think so when you are finished. *Putin, Russia and the West* was commissioned by the BBC when we finished *Iran* in June 2009. So, why? Well, the first series that was commissioned when Brian Lapping left ITV and set up his own little company, and I went with him, was something called *The Second Russian Revolution*, which was the story of when Gorbachev came to power – well, it was commissioned to be about when Gorbachev came to power, but by the time it was finished it was the end of the Soviet Union. We were very, very lucky. I mean what we set out to do was to recreate what happens inside the rooms when the really big international decisions are taken. We'd done that a bit in the West, but off we went to the Soviet Union. The first Politburo member I approached, when I said, 'Can you tell me what happened in that Politburo when you selected Gorbachev, you know, tell me the way you told your wife that night?' And he looked at me with such horror at the very thought of telling his wife what happened in the Politburo. [Laughter]

That, well, we all sort of met. But we were lucky, because when we were there *glasnost* was taking hold, they got more and more open, and, really, by the end – the series went out in September 1991 – by the end they were telling you things that Western politicians would never tell about taking secret decisions. And then there was a coup against [Mikhail] Gorbachev, and we got sent back, and it ended up being eight one-hour programmes in which we filmed Gorbachev and [Yegor] Ligachev and all the top people, and it was very good, partly because of the cleverness of the BBC for choosing it at that time.

So, when we went in after, it turned out that Janice Hadlow, the controller of BBC Two, watched it when she was like sixteen. [Laughter] And she said, you know, 'What about Russia?' And we assembled an awful lot of the team that worked on *The Second Russian Revolution*; there was my colleague Paul Mitchell, who is with me on the stage, Brian, of course, a wonderful woman, Marsha [inaudible] who was [Maxim] Litvinov's granddaughter, believe it or not, and a Soviet dissident. I went up in the lift with her in Gorbachev's KGB with a couple of KGB operatives who said to her, 'Have you ever been here before?' She said, 'Well, only to be interrogated'. [Laughter] And she interviewed Gorbachev in the series, which always seemed to me to kind of symbolize for me the way the things went.

So there was Marsha, and Angus Roxburgh, who has written the series book, if you want to buy it later. So, we got the team together, and this time we weren't quite so lucky. I mean, *glasnost* was not happening, I mean, certainly you can argue that it was just secretive before and secretive after, or it got worse. So, what we did from June 2009, if I close my eyes and think about it, it's like sitting in a room in a flat in Moscow with Marsha trying to get us appointments, and us writing questions for interviews we never thought would happen. And we tried all our tricks, the usual thing, of course, is politicians want to get their story on record, but you have to convince them that everyone is doing it. So, we said to them we've got Condoleezza Rice, and we've got Colin Powell, do you want to tell your side of the story? But these were retired politicians, and Putin was president, Putin was prime minister, and he certainly wasn't retired. So, anyway, it was a long, hard saga, and what we got in the end, you will judge.

So, I think we should probably look at the extracts. We chose one from each of the episodes so your appetite would be whetted for each of the...so you'll watch the whole series that starts on Thursday at 9 o'clock on BBC Two. The first shows, after 9/11, the relationship between Russia and the West at its very best, warmest. The second one, which deals with the Orange

Revolution, shows how it came under threat as America encouraged democracy promotion in the satellites, former Soviet satellites. The third is about war, it's about the Georgian War, it deals with 7 August 2008, which is either the day the war started or the day before the war started, depending how you look at it. And the fourth is from the [Barack] Obama and the [Dmitry] Medvedev period, and shows something of the really remarkable relationship between Obama and Medvedev, which led to a new START treaty. And now it looks brief, but a remarkable period of cooperation again.

James Nixey:

Okay, thank you, Norma. We'll try and make a graceful exit, and we'll be back in twenty minutes after the four excerpts.

[Film Excerpts]

James Nixey:

Right, ladies and gentlemen, I hope that has whetted your appetite both for the series itself in full, and also for this panel discussion. We're under some time pressure, so I'll very briefly explain what we are going to do now, and introduce the panel. Joining me, or joining Norma, in fact, is Paul Mitchell. He was the series producer, and he can actually answer some of your questions perhaps about the making of the film, the access he got, how he got it, what was left out maybe, it's your call.

But, first, we'll have presentations from two very authoritative voices on Russia today: Bobo Lo, on my left, is arguably one of the leading foreign policy analysts on Russia, he started out as a career diplomat and became an academic and scholar, but his career sort of peaked in the middle of the last decade when he was head of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House. [Laughter]

Sir Roderic Lyne, similarly, is well known for being our man in Moscow for the middle part of the last decade for four years, but, again, the most important part of his career was when he was a researcher in the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House some 25 years ago, and is now on the Chatham House council. Anyway, Bobo, I know you're going to talk more broadly first, so perhaps you'd like give us some eight to ten minutes of your thoughts on the film and the issues it raised.

Dr Bobo Lo:

Sure. Well, I thought the film was extraordinarily interesting, and I marvel at your access, let me just say that, so congratulations, in the first place. I thought the film was very interesting for what it said about Putin's view of the world, and of Russia's place in that world. So, I thought what I would do is just draw out some over-arching themes before making a couple of comments on each of the documentary episodes.

Among the key themes, I think the first theme that really strikes me is Russia's overweening sense of strategic entitlement; and you see this in its attitude towards the relationship with the United States, the emphasis on strategic nuclear parity, NATO membership without conditions, patrimonial attitudes towards Ukraine. And this links on to the second theme, which is the emphasis on respect; respect and disrespect. So, you have the demand for equality with the United States. You have this kind of privileged relationship with NATO where Russia is not just another European or potential NATO member state, it is equal to the totality of NATO. You have, on the negative side, this enormous loss of face over Ukraine and the Orange Revolution, and also a personal sense of outrage at the disrespect, alleged disrespect, shown by [Mikheil] Saakashvili towards Putin, and towards Russia more generally.

And this leads, naturally, on to the third point. Putin looks at the world, or really the Russian political elite look at the world as an international system dominated by the great powers. Yes, there are other players, there are multilateral institutions and there are smaller states, but it is the great powers that matter, and it's great power diplomacy that matters above all. And, so, there's an emphasis not on multilateral diplomacy, but multi-polar diplomacy, there's an emphasis on strategic partnership, strategic condominium, and strategic balancing. And going with that comes a natural faith in the primacy of hard power, so hence the emphasis, again, on strategic parity, on geopolitics, on force projection.

And then we come to a theme that really permeates all four episodes, which is the emphasis on threats. Now, you have threats which are existential threats – 'we need to build up...we can't have theatre missiles...we can't have missile defence because it'll undermine our nuclear deterrence' – but the real threats are actually much less concrete, as viewed in Moscow. There's the fear of democratic contagion arising from developments in Ukraine; there's the concern about Russia's strategic displacement in its so-called sphere of interests, in its neighbourhood, whether its Ukraine or whether its the South Caucasus; and, more generally, there is the fear of being marginalized a in international affairs, where Russia is a bit player, it is

not getting the sort of recognition it feels it deserves. But, at the same time, when we think of Russia, we think of it sometimes as being a little unrealistic, but actually there is a strong streak of realism and pragmatism, and I think what we saw there, particularly after 9/11, was an acute sense of the possible, that Putin understood what Russia's limitations and possibilities were, and he knew who to back after 9/11.

And finally, under over-arching themes – personalities are always important, but the personal dimension is key in Russian foreign policy and in Putin's approach to the world. We see it in Putin's intense personal dislike of Saakashvili, the personal loss of face over the Orange Revolution, and also, at a more trivial level, the games playing in missile defence talks and so on, these sort of little diplomatic tactics.

So, just a couple of comments on each of the episodes. It struck me that looking at the Russian response to 9/11, you know, why did Putin make the sort of strategic choice that he did? Why was he conciliatory? And, thinking about it, I thought there were some good reasons for it. First, at the most basic level, you want to side with the winners. You know that the Bush Administration is going to get really serious, so you don't want to be on the wrong side. You know, you don't like the Taliban anyway, and you think they're going to lose, so clearly you are going to support the United States at some level. The second is that, you think, 'well, hold on, the United States is looking for allies here, there's a strategic opportunity for us to position ourselves as the reliable global partner of the United States, and through that re-centralize ourselves in the international system.' The third, a quite trivial point really, is Putin didn't actually have much choice because the central Asian heads had already agreed that they would host American bases. So, Putin saw the situation: 'well, I can't actually stop it, so let's make a virtue out of a necessity'. And the fourth, of course, is the point made in the documentary that the Americans might do what we haven't been able to do, they might crush the Taliban, who knows, we might get lucky.

But the problem here, and there are two issues here, is that Moscow and Washington eventually were divided because they had such fundamentally different views of their relationship. Because Moscow thought, 'well, we can be a real global partner to Washington', but for the Bush Administration, Russia was just another niche regional partner. So they had fundamentally different perceptions of what kind of relationship they were going to have. And another problem is the constant tension between geopolitical objectives, the sort of thing that Sergei Ivanov was worried about, and some of the security dividends. And at various times since 9/11 you've had security imperatives in

the ascendancy, but sometimes geopolitical concerns seem more real. So, it's a relationship that is based on this fundamental contradiction, and it's one of the reasons why it has lacked a certain sort of consistency.

A couple of quick comments on the Orange Revolution. There are several, many reasons actually, why Putin was so strongly opposed to the Orange Revolution. Again, at a principled level, as they say; an aversion to grassroots diplomacy, a fear of democratic contagion, as I've already mentioned. There is also the belief that Ukraine is not a real country, a sort of sense that...a notion of a sort of limited sovereignty for Ukraine. But, I think even more important than that is that fear of strategic displacement, this is a kind of area for potential Western subversion, this is... what you're going to have is a pro-Western country on Russia's doorstep, and in a country which, well, frankly, Putin believes should always have been a part of that Russian or Slavic heartland. And, of course, Putin invested so much personally – I mean, you saw that with the sort of telephone call to [Leonid] Kuchma – but also he was seen to invest so much of his own personality, his own personal commitment, and the thing is he ended up severely embarrassed.

Georgia War: two points to make here. There are really two key motivations in Russia's approach to the war. Now, at the most basic level, you want to give Saakashvili a bloody nose, you want to put the Georgians back in their place. But actually the real enemy, the real opponent here, is the United States. Because it is Moscow telling the United States, 'don't think you can do this kind of creeping influence in our neighbourhood. We have red lines, and you know what? We're going to enforce those red lines. You think we're weak, but actually we're a resurgent, powerful Russia, you'd better pay attention'. Just a couple of points here: Washington actually told Saakashvili not to get involved, we should emphasize that, but Saakashvili ignored them. And also, that you might think that perhaps support, or sort of Russian liberals we sort of lukewarm about the war... actually there was widespread support across the political spectrum in Russia for that military intervention.

Finally, a couple of points on START: I think the Russian negotiator there actually has it wrong... I mean, well, I'm sure he understands what the situation is. The point is not that missile defence will undermine Russia's strategic deterrent, that is actually not the case, but it is much more – again, I come back to this theme of strategic entitlement – he said, 'we have these two principles' – if you recall – 'parity and equality'. They mean essentially the same thing, so these are issues of principle, so it is about treating us with respect; it is about conceding, to some extent, to our sense of strategic entitlement. And the thing about strategic parity, it's not just about abstract

equality, it is also perhaps the one area where Russia can genuinely claim to be a global player, and so it is really the last bastion, in many respects, of the traditional Russian greatness. I'll leave it at that.

James Nixey:

Thanks, Bobo, terrific platform for discussion and we will get back to you in Q&A of course. Roderic, I know you wanted to concentrate perhaps on the third film and Russia's attitude to the post-Soviet space, so could I invite you to do so, please?

Sir Roderic Lyne:

Well, Bobo and I were asked to sort of turn up and give a couple of *ad hoc* comments on the film. And, of course, typically, Bobo has cheated and he's come out with several of pages of beautifully typed out, highly coherent thoughts, but I promise you I haven't. [Laughter]

The exam question that we were set in the flyer that you've all seen was that we will discuss the drivers of Russia's changing policy towards the West, and the outlook for relations beyond the next presidential elections in March 2012. Now, I don't know how much time you've all got? [Laughter] You could write a book on that, I won't. I just want to pick up on one aspect of the film because I think there are a lot of other things that people here will want to pick up on in discussion.

Whoever is in charge of Russia, whether it is in March 2012 or March 2020, one of the issues that is going to be difficult in Russia's relations with the West is going to continue to be Russia's relations with her immediate neighbours. That will be one of the key factors. Obviously, one of those neighbours is China – that's a story in its own right, and that is much more Bobo's story than mine. It is possible that Afghanistan will become a factor in all of this. But I want to talk about the former Soviet Union. It was interesting that in the first snippets we saw, Sergei Ivanov's careful reference to the 'commonwealth of independent states' was rendered as 'the former Soviet Union', which he went to great lengths to stop himself saying.

What this series reminds us of is that through bungling, really, on all sides, Russia and NATO achieved a spectacular train-wreck in Georgia in 2008. And there are a number of different elements to this. Condi Rice – in a bit of film that you haven't seen this evening, but you will see in the series, and she also describes this vividly in her memoirs – was taken out, after some delay,

to a meeting with Putin and the national security council outside Moscow, allegedly a birthday party for Dmitry Medvedev, it was all a set up. Finally, she gets Putin into serious conversation, and she says, 'Bush has sent me to tell you not to mess around with Georgia', and at this point Putin draws himself up to his full five foot six in his platform heels [Laughter], and so she stands up too, and of course she towers over him in her much higher heels, as she says in her book, and they eyeball each other. She then goes to Georgia, and, again, she relates this very well in her book, and she delivers the same message to Saakashvili, 'don't be provoked into conflict, and if you do, we won't be with you'. The trouble was that these warnings had been ineffective on both sides. And Condi, indeed, had been preceded by Colin Powell in delivering exactly the same message of restraint to Saakashvili.

So that was part of the train-wreck, and, of course, part of the reason for that was that when Saakashvili went to Washington, he'd hear that message from State, but then he'd go to other parts of the administration and some of the foundations outside where he would get the opposite message, and he chose which one to believe. There was this fascinating point in the film where Saakashvili says, 'Hopefully the international community would wake up, and would concentrate their efforts, and we would get some kind of a reversal. So, if I can only the Russians for a while in this conflict, the cavalry will come in and help me'. And, of course, that was a massive miscalculation on his part. So, the Americans miscalculated, Saakashvili miscalculated, the Russians laid a deliberate trap for him, he, equally, deliberately chose to fall into it. But then you look at the final score, and the final score was: farcical bungling by NATO, that appalling NATO summit which ended up with Georgia not being given the map, but being told you can come into NATO. A sort of tragic comedy, and the whole history of NATO enlargement, as you know, was a process in which there was never at any point strategic thinking at all, at least not since the very early stages, and you ended up with this complete disaster.

So that was one element of it, then the stupid miscalculations by Saakashvili: he loses the war, he advertizes himself as a rather unreliable, rather unstable leader, not somebody you want to be too close to, and he has to say 'bye-bye' to NATO. And then it was a failure for the Russians: they didn't topple Saakashvili, which was one of their war aims; they got into the highly embarrassing position they never intended to get into, at least the foreign ministry never intended to get into – [Sergey] Lavrov certainly not – of recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, with the support of Nicaragua and Hamas; and they ended up on the wrong side of international law and international public opinion. So, that's how not to do it.

So, two conclusions from all of that: given that you have got a whole mass of issues still to be resolved around the post-Soviet state, arising from one side or the other of that very sudden split and the end of the Soviet Union, it is clear to me that the West needs to pay a lot more attention not just over the next year or two but over the next thirty years to this whole nexus of problems. We need to think harder, we need to think more strategically, and we need to coordinate our thinking, and I see absolutely no sign of that happening. We have other preoccupations at the moment, but this one will come back at us at intervals during this period if we don't really think about this much harder than we are doing, and, indeed, find a way of talking to the Russians about it, whoever is in charge of Russia.

And, secondly, the question of hard power and soft power. Georgia was the most blatant, but far from the first use by the Russian Federation of hard power, in that I would count cutting off gas to Ukraine and Belarus or mounting cyber attacks on Estonia and so on also was hard rather than soft power in that broad definition. The Russians, of course, would say, 'Yes, but NATO has used much more hard power than we did in the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan'. But we've been telling the Russians, 'don't use hard power, use soft power'. What conclusions has Moscow drawn from that?

There's a very interesting book just out by Dmitri Trenin, and I mention this because I happen to have reviewed it in the next edition of *International Affairs*, in which Trenin argues that today's Russia is post- rather than neo-imperial, no longer pushing outward but looking inward. And, essentially argues they are converted to a version of soft power. That, of course, then raises the question as to what exactly are the acceptable parameters of soft power? Is the current extent of Russian interference in neighbouring states such as Ukraine within what we would regard the legitimate boundaries of soft power? How does it stack up in comparison to the way, let us say, the Americans use soft power, or other states too? That, to me, is an unresolved question, but the one we need, again, to keep an eye on, and think rather harder about than we are doing, and I will stop at that point.

James Nixey:

Roderic, thank you very much for (a) focusing, and (b) bringing us right up to date, where I'm sure most of the questions will be directed. We have serious pressures of time, ladies and gentlemen, for questions, probably fifteen minutes. If you wait for a roving mic, when I select you, we'll do it that way,

please stand up and give your name and your affiliation. So, if you'd like to indicate an interest.

Question 1:

I think we were all very surprised when we heard Kuchma say that Putin had proposed [Boris] Yeltsin to join the Ukrainian sort of round-table. Did you ask Putin why he did that? And did you have an corroboration that that actually happened. I mean, Kuchma can't always be taken as a trustworthy source.

Norma Percy:

It wasn't Kuchma...

James Nixey:

We'll just take three at a time, Norma, please. Anybody else? Questions? Yes, lady in the red at the top there.

Question 2:

Right at the beginning of episode one we have the Russians saying that they're going to give the Americans the coordinates of the training camps in Afghanistan in order to wipe everybody out, but as we know, this didn't happen, so did they give them the wrong address? [Laughter]

James Nixey:

Thank you, and the gentlemen just down here at the front, or second row there.

Question 3:

Congratulations to Norma. This is a question really more for Bobo Lo and perhaps Sir Roderic as well. Much of the Western commentary about Putin, assuming that he will still be elected president in March, which is no longer as certain as it was, but probably more likely than not, is that he will take Russia back into a much harder stance than at least the promises, if not the actions, of Medvedev. Do either of you see the possibility of Putin becoming more liberal, more democratic? Choosing that route rather than returning to the

stance he took as Norma's film showed in numbers two and three of her series?

James Nixey:

Okay, thank you. Norma, do you have a quick comment first, and then I'll turn to Roderic and Bobo?

Norma Percy:

Fine, let me comment on one and two. It was the Polish president who said that, not Kuchma, who is rather a more... However, as all of our transcripts go to war studies archives, you can look it up and check it after the programme has gone out. As for the second question, I don't know the answer – trust you to ask a difficult question, maybe they did give the wrong ones.

James Nixey:

Okay, Bobo, why don't you take questions one and three?

Dr Bobo Lo:

Yes, on the coordinates of the terrorist camps, well, the thing is the US-led coalition did a pretty comprehensive military job in the first few months. They were militarily very successful, they may well have used some of that information from the Russians, but also you can't necessarily take that claim at face value. Just because the Russians said, 'Look, we did give those coordinates', it doesn't necessarily mean that they did. So, I think there's a lot of murkiness there, there really is no clarity on what is done or not.

On Putin coming back to power, I think it rather depends on the sort of domestic situation. If he feels he is able to consolidate domestically, then I don't really see much of a change in Russian foreign policy either way. There might be a certain toughening of rhetoric, but really no one wants to go back to the situation in the autumn of 2008, because that's a dangerously volatile relationship. You can criticize the West, you can criticize the United States, but you really can't afford that kind of deterioration. But what Putin will do is he will splice the West, he'll disaggregate the West, and he'll, for example, focus much more on relations with individual European powers that he regards as broadly sympathetic, specifically Germany and France, and he will try and maintain an essentially stable relationship with the United States, but I

don't actually see a great variation. Of course, if the domestic situation really unravels, or starts to, then I think he will be pointing the finger at Washington.

James Nixey:

Thanks, Roderic, anything to add?

Sir Roderic Lyne:

In 'reset', the Americans bet very heavily and it was a misplaced bet on Dmitri Medvedev coming to power, which he never did. [Laughter]. Reset achieved a lowering of the rhetoric, and in that time Russia has joined the WTO, which I think is a real gain, for everyone, and not an insignificant act. We also need to remember that in Putin's first three and a half years when the oil price was starting not much above \$10 and rising towards \$35 a barrel, he was predominantly a pragmatic modernizer. I'm not going to use the D-word. Will he go back to being that? No, I don't think, in the sense in which you mean it, of genuine democracy, I don't think he can possibly afford to because I think it will be the end of him. We will continue to hear about modernisation, there will be partial attempts at it, I think there might be some limited resumption conceded of regional elections by governors, but I think it is absolutely impossible for Putin, even if the oil price dropped back to \$35 a barrel – which, alas, it is not going to do – to become a genuine democrat or a modernizer.

James Nixey:

Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, if you don't catch my eye we're in danger of finishing on time, so please do.

Question 4:

Just on the Georgian War, and I was there at the time, so I remember it vividly. My memory of events is that at the time the Russians were roundly accused by all the Western press of having started the war, which, of course, they didn't, and it took a certain amount of time to establish who actually did start the war. Whereupon that utterly false story turned into this baroque notion of the Russians somehow trapping the Georgians into starting the war, which, I have to say, is not my experience of how foreign affairs worked, but

I'd be interested to know if you actually have any evidence of that conspiracy theory of how the war started?

James Nixey:

Thank you, lady standing up on the far left please.

Question 5:

Thank you. I just wanted to ask where Russia fits in the BRIC formation? Is this another kind of manoeuvre, but they seem quite anomalous in that grouping that is emerging as a kind of South-South counterweight to the United States and other powerful actors, particularly in the UN Security Council, where Russia will join the 'awkward squad' in opposing anything the US might propose relating to a human rights situation or some other controversial situation, such as in Syria?

James Nixey:

Thank you, and I think there is a seminar in Chatham House in the next couple of weeks specifically on the BRICS with Jim O'Neill, in fact, so you might want to listen to his views on that.

Question 6:

I was curious, in the very early showing, the I think semi-joking questions to Putin about joining NATO, but I wonder if one should take them a little bit more seriously in the sense that it always struck me as: Why did the West simply continue with NATO? I mean, keep the substance, but change the name, because obviously an organisation that was geared to prevent the countries behind the iron curtain attacking us was not actually very tactful for the Russians, and I wondered whether it was actually treated a bit too lightly? And I was also going to ask, if I may, I noticed the comment earlier about the Americans ten years ago were thinking of Russia not much more than, kind of, another country, and that's not quite the right words, but I wonder if that is not going slightly too far? I would have thought they were a bit more serious?

James Nixey:

Okay, same order, Bobo?

Dr Bobo Lo:

Gosh, well, yes, I feel that the Russians did get a bad press at the time, so partially I agree with you. However, they did try and provoke the Georgians, and there is a sort of fairly consistent record of various incidents, none of them quite serious enough in itself to cause a reaction, but a kind of cumulative drip-drip. And Moscow calculated that they were dealing with a fairly volatile individual, and if they kept chipping away that they would get a result, which they did. So, I do believe... I hesitate to call it, you know, a really well conceived, well thought out, detailed strategy, but I think that they thought, 'Yes, this could work'.

On BRICS, yes, well, even Jim O'Neill thinks BRICS is slightly dubious these days, but for perhaps different reasons than I do. I think that the BRICS is a nonsensical notion, and it is regarded as nonsense in the other BRICS. For example, in China they talk about BICS not BRICS. And by, whether it is competitive economies, dynamism, or virtually all World Bank indices, Russia is doing very badly and the other three, the main three, are doing fairly well. But, there is a very good reason to choose the BRICS, because the BRICS are associated with 'winners', and the West, the United States and Europe, are associated with 'decay', 'decline', 'passed it'. So, Russia is on and upwards with this dynamic grouping, the trouble is people don't believe it, and the BRICS don't believe it either.

On NATO, it is very interesting, I mean, what do you do though? Do you say to Russia you have an effective right of veto over who gets in? Because it's not NATO who encouraged the central and eastern European countries to join the alliance; far from it, there was a lot of reluctance within the organization. But the central and eastern Europeans decided that they really did want to join NATO because they saw it not as a military alliance against Russia, but as a post-Cold War security umbrella. And, frankly, can you blame them? Because the countries that have joined NATO from central and Eastern Europe are, for the most part, relatively stable, relatively prosperous. And the others who didn't join, for example in the Balkans, well, we all know what happened there. So, I think, personally, that NATO enlargement was a good thing, and I'm not sure you could have stopped Russia, that you could have allowed Russia to have a say. You can say, 'you can join NATO', as George Robertson said, but then Russia is saying, 'Well, we'll join NATO but we don't actually have to fit in the criteria because we're actually a bit better than you, we're a bit better than this'. And, so, how can you run a post-Cold War, a post-modern age of politics on that kind of nineteenth century basis?

James Nixey:

Roderic, very briefly, because I want to take three more questions afterwards.

Sir Roderic Lyne:

I agree with Bobo on the first two points and on the baroque notion that the Russians had something to do with the beginning of the war in Georgia. There was a long history to this, and for quite a long time they were saying, 'Saakashvili, make my day', until eventually Saakashvili made their day, and they were very quickly through that tunnel. But I wasn't there on the ground, I was actually in Sydney when that was happening, and that's a good place to observe a war from. [Laughter]

On Russia and NATO, I confess I've never been able to take this Russian membership of NATO as a serious proposition. I cannot conceive of circumstances, short of another thirty years of evolution, in which Russia could join NATO, and so I just think its not very serious politics.

James Nixey:

Okay, thank you.

Norma Percy:

Can I just say, for other evidence, watch programme three on 2 February because that is what we try and do, is present the evidence as you do. But I can say that as the team over the past three years the two questions that thoroughly exercised us the most were: who started the Georgian war? And, was Putin serious when he said would he join NATO?

Paul Mitchell:

In the sequence that was shown, the phone call between the Georgian foreign minister and the Polish foreign minister – and this gets kind of minute-by-minute – which took place as far as we can work out, on the afternoon of 7 August, before any attack had taken place, seemed to be the most convincing evidence that the Georgians had decided earlier that day that they were going to go in. That's the one thing that we had, and once we had it from the Polish side – thanks by the way to Wanda Koscia, the producer of that episode two,

sitting over there – we were able to put it to the Georgian foreign minister, who didn't like the question, at all. [Laughter]

Norma Percy:

Hang on, let's...I remember that we heard it first from Poland, but she did use the phrase 'restore constitutional order', which does make you think.

James Nixey:

Right, thank you Norma. Three final questions, the gentleman in the white shirt in the middle at the back, please.

Question 7:

Hi, thanks. I'm from Norway, and that leads me to ask a question about the Arctic. Could you quickly comment on the Russia and the West in the Arctic? And would you agree that Russia has a very different foreign policy in the north than they do in the south?

James Nixey:

Okay. Young lady at the front on the left here.

Question 8:

Thank you. I wonder if you could comment on the relationship between Putin and Medvedev, particularly given their somewhat wobble in the spring last year over Libya, when Putin called it a 'crusade', and Medvedev disagreed. And particularly what this means in the future and Russia's foreign policy towards Syria?

James Nixey:

Okay, and finally the lady at the front in the middle-ish.

Question 9:

Thank you. I am from Georgia, and I have one question not related from the war, but somehow related. It was mentioned here there was big progress in

Georgia joining NATO, and if not for the war we would have the map. So, what is our perspective now, what do you think?

And, one small comment, I have to say, I was also there during the war, and if our colleague here was there on the 7th, and he was probably there on the 5th, on the 6th, and we all know what was going on, and it was [inaudible], and bombing was going on everyday, and of course Saakashvili was provoked, and of course made himself provoked, but it was not something, it was not [inaudible].

James Nixey:

We just have literally five minutes, not even that, Roderic, please, if you would like to maybe start.

Sir Roderic Lyne:

I would include the Arctic in the nexus of problems around Russia's borders that is going to be an issue, of course, a different sort of issue to the one's we've been talking about – very different to Georgia – but, again, it is one of these problems to some extent bequeathed by the collapse of the Soviet Union that is an unresolved and increasingly important issue. It gets very technical, and I don't begin to understand the technicalities, but where there is oil and gas involved, it also gets quite serious.

James Nixey:

Bobo, Syria, and perhaps a little bit on Georgia/NATO.

Dr Bobo Lo:

Just a little quickly, from the Norwegian... Russia-West relations in the Arctic are actually excellent, and part of the reason is the Russian-Norwegian relationship is actually very good. It is not that Norway wouldn't, the Norwegians I know, are particularly pro-Russian, but they understand the limits and possibilities of the relationship. This is a relationship without any particular illusions on either side, and so it is quite practical, and it works.

Putin-Medvedev on Libya, partly it is just the classic case of good cop, bad cop. Partly it is lousy coordination in Russian policymaking, and partly it is sheer fakery. One point I should have mentioned earlier as an over-arching

theme is the disjunction between the virtual and the real. Sometimes there is a kind of [incoherent], a surface foreign policy, surface explanations for particular policies, and then there is the real stuff that goes on underneath. On Syria, frankly, because of what went on in Libya, and also because the reset has gone rather sour, the Russians will defend Syria for a long time to come, partly because Libya didn't really matter, Syria is Russia's closest friend in the Middle East; they have serious strategic, geopolitical, economic and frankly normative interests there.

James Nixey:

Thank you, Bobo. Ladies and gentlemen, we have to end it there; I am in enough trouble as it is. Thank you to Bobo and to Roderic for providing such insight, and for dealing with this flexible format; and, of course, to Norma and to Paul for this excellent four-part series, which again I encourage you to watch next Thursday, 9 o'clock, BBC Two.