

## К Р И Т И К А И Б И Б Л И О Г Р А Ф И Я

## STATE-OF-THE-ART REVIEW

DOI: 10.31857/S086919080001864-7

THE UK AND US ACADEMIC DISCOURSE ON RUSSIA AND EURASIA:  
A CRITICAL ENQUIRY

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*The article analyses the development of English-language scholarship on Russia and wider Eurasia from the 1990s onwards. It is particularly concerned with the combined effects of the marketisation of higher education and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 for language-based inter-disciplinary Russian and East European area studies, which in the past generated in-depth knowledge on different aspects of life in the USSR. It argues that advancing market fundamentalism and, especially, the collapse of Communism interpreted by Western political elites as the end of global bi-polarity and the triumph of US-led political and cultural universalism led to a drastic reduction in funding of Russian and Eurasian Studies and their increasing dispersal within a number of mono-theoretical academic disciplines. Consequently, we now witness the academic dominance of political scientists who tend to detach research phenomena from their historical and cultural contexts and to 'dissect' them so as to fit whatever mono-theoretical determinist model they happen to favour. They also prioritise deductive quantitative research methods over qualitative ones and rely on secondary sources in English as well as non-academic analytical reports, largely available online. A corollary has been a considerable overall deterioration in the epistemological quality of English-language scholarship on Russia and other countries of Eurasia, as well as its increasing politicisation.*

**Keywords:** USA, UK, Russia, Eurasia, East Europe, area studies, the Cold War, higher education, marketisation, research funding. C. 206–216. DOI: 10.31857/S086919080001864-7

**For citation:** Yemelianova G. M. The UK and US Academic Discourse on Russia and Eurasia: a Critical Enquiry. *Vostok (Oriens)*. 2018. No. 5. Pp. 206–216. DOI: 10.31857/S086919080001864-7

I begin by acknowledging the limitations of my analysis since, though many issues I discuss in this article are common to universities in English language-speaking countries, I derive my observations and assessments primarily from my personal experience of British academia in the period between 1992 and the present. On the basis of this experience I argue that since the early 1990s English-language scholarship on Russia, Eurasia and East Europe has undergone significant changes for three main reasons. One is economic, linked to the advancing marketisation of higher education. The second is the decline of a genuine research culture due to academics' enforced pursuit of the largely imaginary social, economic or political impacts of their particular research projects. The third and most important reason is the end of the Cold War and the ensuing reduction of funding for Russian and East European Studies (REES) and the dismantling of most REES departments and centres. The article begins with an overview of Russian/Soviet and East European Studies in the UK and the USA prior to the end of the Cold War. It then proceeds to analyse the implications for REES of market fundamentalism and the

associated audit and accountability culture in universities; of the increased dependence of academics on the research priorities of the EU and other leading external research funders; and, especially, of the end of the Cold War and the demise of the USSR.

## THE UK AND THE US SCHOLARSHIP ON RUSSIA AND EAST EUROPE BEFORE 1991

### THE UNITED KINGDOM

Contemporary Western English-language scholarship on Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia and wider Eurasia are rooted in the historical legacy of British studies on Russia and Eastern Europe<sup>1</sup>. These began, although on a very small scale, at Oxford University in 1869 and at Cambridge University in 1889<sup>2</sup>. In 1915 a Slovak intellectual Thomáš Masaryk (1850–1937), who later became president of Czechoslovakia (1918–1935), founded the first School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES) in London<sup>3</sup>. During World War I Russian Studies, again at a very modest level, were established at the University of Birmingham, receiving a further boost with the appointment in 1929 of Sergei Konovalov (1899–1982) as Professor of Russian (1929–1946)<sup>4</sup>. Compared to the Russian literature and Russian philosophy-focused SSEES, Russian Studies at Birmingham from the outset combined humanities and social science approaches, and therefore addressed the USSR's economics and politics, as well as its history. A pivotal role in advancing Russian/Soviet Studies at Birmingham University was played by the economist Alexander Baykov (1899–1963)<sup>5</sup> who came to Birmingham in 1939. After World War II Baykov established the Department of Economics and Institutions of the USSR, which began to offer undergraduate degrees (BA and BSc) in Russian Studies. The level and scope of Russian Studies remained, however, much smaller than, for example, American, French or German Studies. Thus, by the time of Baykov's death in 1963 the Department numbered only five members of staff and the yearly intake of students did not exceed a dozen. In the same year Russian Studies were reorganised into the Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES), which functioned as an inter-disciplinary language-based department until 2013. The main trigger for this re-organisation and the subsequent increased funding was the transformation of the USSR into a global nuclear power and the development of the Soviet space programme, symbolised by the launch of Sputnik in 1957.

Throughout the Cold War and the first post-Cold War decade, CREES, alongside SSEES, remained among the leading Western academic and research centres on Russia/USSR and Eastern Europe, functioning as one of the main sources of scholarly expertise on Russia/USSR and East Europe for policy-makers, including from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). At its peak CREES had over twenty staff members

<sup>1</sup> This historical overview of Russian/Soviet studies draws on the lecture 'Soviet and Russian Studies' by Professor Julian Cooper within the MSc module 'Researching Russia and Eastern Europe', 2005–2010, Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES), the University of Birmingham, UK.

<sup>2</sup> In comparative terms, the number of staff in individual REES departments/centres in the UK and USA was relatively small. For example, in the UK, in the first half of the twentieth century it was typically around a dozen, while in the Cold War-associated 'golden age' it was around three dozens.

<sup>3</sup> In 1932 SSEES was transformed into an Institute within the University of London. In 1999 SSEES merged with University College London (UCL).

<sup>4</sup> Sergei Konovalov was born in Moscow into the family of a wealthy businessman who served in the Provisional Government as Minister of Trade and Industry. Konovalov came to the UK after World War I and studied at Oxford University.

<sup>5</sup> Prior to Birmingham Alexander Baykov was a member of the research group on the Soviet economy established in Prague in 1927 by Sergey N. Prokopovich (1871–1955), a former member of the Russian Provisional Government. Baykov fled Czechoslovakia after it was occupied by Nazi Germany in 1938.

specialising in Russian/Soviet economics, security, politics, society, history, literature and culture. It offered both undergraduate and post-graduate programmes and provided training in Russian, Polish and Ukrainian at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels. But even during that period the number of enrolled students barely exceeded two dozen per year. From the 1960s a number of other, smaller REES Departments or Centres were established in the UK, at the universities of Manchester, Glasgow, Nottingham, Leeds and Sheffield. In 1989 members of REES Departments/Centres formed the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) which since then has convened its annual conference at Cambridge University<sup>6</sup>. Similar associations were created in Germany, France, Sweden, Canada, Australia and Japan.

During the 1960s and 1970s CREES, SSEES and other REES Departments/Centres were characterised by theoretical and political pluralism and included adherents of Marxism, neo-Marxism (the Frankfurt School), social constructivism, French post-structuralism and neoliberalism. Such intellectual diversity and the prominence of left-wing critical theory were not specific to REES since they existed across the British humanities and social sciences during that period. Among leading academics who produced world class scholarship on Russia and East Europe during that period were, for example, Alec Nove (1915–1994), Bob Davies (b. 1925), Peter Wiles (1919–1997), Leonard Schapiro (1908–1983), Archie Brown (b. 1938), David Lane (b. 1940), Geoffrey Hosking (b. 1942) and Michael Kaser (b. 1926) – all of them fluent in Russian and working with primary sources, even if they were sparsely available. Even these scholars, however, suffered from Russia- or even Moscow-centricity and did not always pay sufficient attention to the non-Russian republics of the USSR and generally had no knowledge of their languages. At the same time, this period also witnessed the growing influence of other USSR-related theoretical models such as “totalitarianism” and “Kremlinology”, which largely emanated from US academia.

## THE USA

Unlike in the UK, Russian/Soviet and East European Studies in the USA took off only after World War II in the context of the Cold War and were therefore from the start much more policy-oriented<sup>7</sup>. Among the first American centres was the Russian Center (from 1996, the Davis Center) at Harvard University, established in 1948 by Clyde Kluchholm (1905–1960). With the escalation of the Cold War, Soviet Studies in the USA became recipients of extensive government and non-government funding and, as noted earlier, began to exert considerable influence on REES in the UK and in other parts of the Western world<sup>8</sup>. Particularly influential in this respect became the RAND (Research and Development) Corporation, which was founded in Santa Monica in 1946 by the US Army Air Force and the Harriman Institute, which was created in the same year at Columbia University with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. Later on, Russia/Soviet Studies departments/centres were established in some major universities including Princeton University, the University of Chicago, George Mason University, Georgetown University, the University of Michigan and Stanford University.

From the mid-1950s the main conceptual framework for the study of the USSR and the Eastern bloc was ‘totalitarianism’, within which the USSR was treated as being on a par with Nazi

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<sup>6</sup> BASEES was formed on the basis of the merger of the National Association for Soviet and East European Studies (NASEES) and the British University Association of Slavists (BUAS), both of which were created in the 1950s.

<sup>7</sup> In the USA and to some extent in the UK, REES were also known as “Sovietology”. By contrast, in the USSR “Sovietology” had a pejorative meaning and was referred to as “bourgeois Sovietology”.

<sup>8</sup> On the general state and critique of the American social and political sciences in the twentieth century see: [Hofstadter, 1955].

Germany<sup>9</sup>. In this approach the USSR was regarded as a distinct form of polity and society which could not be subject to the “normal” methods of the social sciences. It was perceived as a socio-political system, in which field work was virtually impossible and no reliable data existed for both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Soviet people were typically depicted as a brain-washed, grey and militarised mass incapable of independent thinking. A central component of this approach was “Kremlinology”, according to which various aspects of Soviet and East European reality could be interpreted through deciphering changes in the Soviet leadership.

From the late 1960s the “totalitarian” analytical framework towards the USSR and East Europe was paralleled by social constructivist and other ‘normal’ social and political science paradigms. Among important figures responsible for this shift was, for example, Jerry F. Hough (b. 1935) who argued in favour of the applicability of Western social sciences towards the USSR and the Eastern bloc. Hough introduced a “pluralist model” for analysis of various Soviet and East European phenomena through the prism of a particular ‘political culture’ which was defined by the relationship between various “interest groups”<sup>10</sup>. By the late 1980s adherents of “totalitarianism” had virtually disappeared, replaced by those who favoured “normal”, that is “Western”, social and political science approaches to the analysis of various aspects of life in the USSR and East Europe. In political and economic terms the “normality” became widely associated with neo-liberalism, within whose theoretical perspective social, political and economic phenomena in the USSR and other socialist countries were treated as deviations or aberration from ‘normality’ and therefore needed to be rectified. By the end of the Cold War this approach had also become a presence in the UK and northern Europe<sup>11</sup>.

#### RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES IN THE MARKET CONTEXT

Throughout the 1980s, REES, along with American and British academia as a whole, began to experience the negative effects of advancing economic and political neo-liberalism associated with the era of Ronald Reagan (in office, 1981–1989) and Margaret Thatcher (in office, 1979–1990). In the context of the ensuing shift from market economy to market society, universities traditional autonomy and gentry-professional ethos became significantly undermined. Universities became included into a market model based on the centrality of the relationship between buyer and seller, while the role of government was reduced to that of a “regulator”. As a consequence, universities were largely turned into service providers which were run as business corporations by “managers in suits” whose primary goal was to maximise profit by ensuring the highest number of fee-paying students and the largest possible external research funding<sup>12</sup>.

In the UK, the first marker of the creeping marketization of higher education was the introduction in 1998 by the New Labour Government<sup>13</sup> of top-up student fees which were supposed to supplement universities’ public funding which had existed since the 1960s<sup>14</sup>. The

<sup>9</sup> Among seminal works of that period were, for example: [Brzezinski, 1956; Ahrendt, 1958; Friedrich, Brzezinski, 1958].

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: [Hough, 1969].

<sup>11</sup> For historical and political reasons the theoretical and methodological orientations of REES in Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland have been congruent to those in the UK and USA and differed significantly from those in the rest of continental Europe.

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth critique of the monetarisation of Higher Education in the UK see: [Collini, 2017].

<sup>13</sup> The concept of New Labour, as opposed to the traditional Labour Party, was introduced by Tony Blair (b. 1953) who served as UK prime minister from 1997 till 2007. It drew on the political philosophy of the “Third Way” by Anthony Giddens (b. 1938), which sought to synthesise capitalism and socialism. In practice, the New Labour Government’s policies represented a milder version of the neo-liberalist approach of the Conservatives.

<sup>14</sup> In 1960 the UK Government Anderson Committee introduced the system of mandatory student grants, which persisted until 1998.

next step was taken in 2004 by the same New Labour Government which allowed universities to charge undergraduate students up to £3.000 per year. In 2012, now under the Conservative-dominated Government, yearly student fees were raised to £9.000 and in 2017, to £9.250<sup>15</sup>. The authors of the new fee-paying system sought to establish a direct link between having a university degree and higher earning employment, and portrayed students as consumers who were encouraged to view their studies at university through the prism of “value for money”. Accordingly, universities started to repackage themselves as places of all-round university experience prioritising (especially in the humanities and social sciences) transferable skills (rather than specialised knowledge) and high quality student accommodation and sports and entertainment facilities<sup>16</sup>.

In the emerging market-place of higher education university managers, in their pursuit of students, have streamlined the courses on offer by reducing the number of those widely regarded as ‘hard’ (e.g. Russian and other foreign languages) and replacing them with shorter and less demanding courses, or American-style liberal arts programmes. Another aspect of marketization has been the increased recruitment of foreign students, especially from China, whose fees are twice or even higher than the fees of home students<sup>17</sup>. These highly profitable customers have been successfully “processed” through the educational system and granted degrees, in spite of some of them having an inadequate competence in the English language. This has been a contributing factor in the on-going inflation of university degrees. At the institutional level, there has been a persistent dismantling of academics’ professional and intellectual autonomy through the phasing out of tenured posts and an increase in the casualised short-term contract workforce; the attack on university lecturers’ trade unions; the dismantling of faculties and departments and their replacement by bigger managerial units – schools and colleges run by senior managers appointed from the top<sup>18</sup>.

At the scholarly level, marketization and – intertwined with it – quality assurance and accountability were behind the introduction in 1986 of a causal link between the perceived research quality of a particular university<sup>19</sup> and the funding it receives from dedicated funding bodies, such as The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); The Scottish Funding Council (SFC); The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and The Department for Employment of Learning of Northern Ireland (DfE). At the heart of this scheme, first named The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) but from 2014 the Research Excellence Framework (REF), has been the assessment of the research productivity of university affiliated academics every five years. The University of Birmingham went even further by introducing a Soviet-style five-year plan in both the teaching and research spheres.

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<sup>15</sup> The degree fees do not include the living costs paid by the majority of students, who tend to go to university outside their home town or city. The yearly living costs vary between £7.000 and £9.000. As a result, by the end of three years at university an average student accumulates a loan debt of up to £50.000. In the USA, where there is a similar system of student loans, the costs of obtaining a standard BA/ BSc degree are often even higher. Thus, yearly tuition fees alone there vary from around \$15.000 in public colleges to around \$30.000 in private colleges, while living costs are around \$10.000 per year.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that the dynamic of student-university relations in Scotland has been different following the abolition of university fees in 2007 by the Government of the Scottish National Party (SNP) within the wider process of devolution.

<sup>17</sup> Thus, in 2018/19 overseas undergraduate students, depending on the chosen course, will be charged between £16.230 and £23.885 per year, compared to £9.250, paid by home students.

<sup>18</sup> In this respect, the UK universities went even further than their American counterparts where faculties, departments and tenures have been largely preserved.

<sup>19</sup> Unlike in Russia and some other post-Communist countries, where universities co-exist with purely academic research institutions, in the UK and most Western countries universities combine teaching and research functions and there are no government-funded research institutes, comparable, for example, to those existed within the Russian Academy of Sciences before its reform in 2013. Now Russian academic institutions are subordinated directly to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education formed in May 2018.

Under the REF scheme, individual academics are required to submit their four research outputs for assessment by nominated peer-reviewers affiliated to 34 subject area panels. Those outputs are then ranked from 4 (the highest) to 1 (the lowest) and the aggregated ranking score of a particular university defines the amount of funding it receives from relevant funding bodies. Among the main assessment criteria in social sciences and humanities are an output's theoretical rigour and social and political impact. Given that REES, as well as other Area Studies are intrinsically inter-disciplinary, the research assessment emphasis on theoretical rigour tends to degrade them as theoretically deficient and pushes REES and other Area Studies academics to align themselves with a particular theoretical discipline, e.g. political and social sciences, foreign languages, history, geography, social anthropology, etc. Additionally, the requirement for research 'impact' forces many academics, in pursuit of a higher scoring, to prioritise policy-relevant or even policy-driven research. Another implication of RAE/REF-defined research has been a growing devaluation of teaching among academics since their career progression has been linked exclusively to their REF scoring and especially to their ability to attract external research funding.

### RUSSIAN AND EURASIAN STUDIES AFTER THE FALL OF THE USSR

The end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the absorption of East Europe within an enlarged Europe associated with the EU and NATO membership sent powerful shock waves across the inter-disciplinary REES and the social and political sciences. The collapse of Communism was interpreted by Western political elites as confirmation of the supremacy of the US-led political, social and cultural order, while REES members were widely charged with having failed to predict the demise of the USSR. With the shifting realities only a dedicated minority of REES academics have remained committed to the preservation of distinctive Russian and post-Communist Studies. Among these have been, for example, Valerie Bunce, George Breslauer, Christopher Reed, Richard Sakwa, and the aforementioned Bob Davies and Geoffrey Hosking. However, many supporters of traditional REES have been at advanced stages of their academic careers or approaching retirement. Some other REES members, such as Philippe Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, have embraced the so-called "transitologist" approach to the study of Russia and other post-Communist states. According to "transitologists", since the 1990s Russia and other ex-Communist countries have embarked on their natural transition to Western-type democracy along the same lines as other ex-totalitarian and ex-authoritarian states (e.g. Spain, Portugal and some Latin American states). However, the majority of REES academics, especially from the younger generation, have subscribed to the application to Russia and other post-Communist states of standard political and social science theoretical models with a particular prominence given to comparative politics.

At the institutional level, most REES departments/centres in the UK have undergone major re-organisation, including the complete closure of some and the dissolving of some others within various mono-theoretical academic departments. By the early 2010s there remained only two fully-fledged REES departments – SSEES in London and the Department of Russian, East European Studies at Glasgow University. As a result, many REES academics have been made to move to political science, economics, history, languages and other mono-disciplinary departments. Due to the political and international essence of post-Cold War changes most ex-REES members have become affiliated to departments of Political Science and International Relations while their home departments have at best been restricted to a purely symbolic existence on university websites. In order to reflect the new geopolitical realities, the names of these virtual and semi-virtual entities have been amended to such titles as Russian and Eurasian Studies, Central Eurasian Studies and Russian, European and Eurasian Studies.

Consequently, most REES BA/BSc and MA/MSc teaching programmes have been gradually phased out on economic grounds due to their relatively small student numbers. Individual modules within these programmes have been fragmented and turned into case-studies aimed at illustrating the validity of particular theoretical paradigms. For example, the analysis of the USSR during the Stalinist period has become detached from the broader Russian/Soviet history and included in courses on political authoritarianism, alongside some Latin American regimes which were formed under different historical and cultural conditions. Or the study of the post-Soviet labour migration of Central Asians and Caucasians to Russia has been de-contextualised and treated along the same theoretical lines as the mass migration to the West of the inhabitants of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, which have been devastated as a result of recent civil strife and external military intervention.

The withdrawal of the Russian language component from the teaching on Russia and Eurasia has led to the increasing inability of REES students to use Russian-language primary and secondary sources in their course reading and research essays and dissertations<sup>20</sup>. Instead, they have become overwhelmingly dependent on English-language secondary academic, as well as analytical and media sources, many of which have been far from objective politically. By comparison, in the USA, due to the higher total number of existing universities, the decline of REES has been less pronounced and REES language-based teaching programmes have persisted, for example, at Harvard University, Columbia University, Princeton University, Stanford University, George Mason University, the University of Michigan, the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and Smith College<sup>21</sup>. Another implication of REES fragmentation has been the emergence of a limited number of BA and MA programmes in Eurasian, Central Asian, or Caucasian Studies which include students' training in some of languages of Central Asia and the Caucasus, albeit without a parallel training in Russian. Such programmes are offered at Indiana University at Bloomington in the USA and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the UK. Unfortunately, graduates of such programmes are often unable to use primary sources in Russian and tend to treat various phenomena in these regions in isolation from their Imperial Russian and Soviet past.

At PhD level, there has been a similar decline in the number of researchers able to speak or read Russian and who have therefore increasingly resorted to researching Russia and other post-Communist countries without conducting any field-work, and on the basis of English-language secondary sources alone, especially those which are available online. Moreover, in political and social science departments, field-work has been implicitly discouraged in order to avoid potential clashes between its findings and prevailingly robust and neat theoretical constructions. Among the few remaining academic units that have retained language training and field-work as PhD pre-requisites have been history, human geography and social anthropology. However, their PhD researchers have been greatly outnumbered by political and social scientists. In the case of social anthropology, empirical findings have frequently been obscured by the chosen theoretical frameworks, often informed by the thinking of Michel Foucault (1926–1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) and other French poststructuralists.

At the same time, a notable number of PhD researchers of Russia and other post-Communist countries who originated from them and are therefore capable of using primary sources in their native languages have often been supervised towards a selective use of their empirical findings in order to comply with a particular theoretical model. Because of the USA-

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting that learning Russian and the other languages of the post-Soviet states have remained central among social anthropologists, though these constitute a small minority of Western academics dealing with Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

<sup>21</sup> Thus, by 2018 there were 166 degree-granting universities in the UK, compared to 4627 universities in the USA.

and Euro-centricity of these models various researched political and social phenomena in Russia and other former Soviet countries have been viewed as deviations from “normality”. It has been not unusual therefore that, upon return home, some of those who obtained their PhDs and MAs in the West, have been at the forefront of intellectual and political “deconstruction” of the existing “inferior” social and political order and its reconfiguration along Western lines. Among them has been, for example, Mikheil Saakashvili (b. 1967), a graduate of Columbia University in New York, who championed the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2004 and acted as Georgia’s president between 2004 and 2007 and later on, between 2015 and 2017, served as Governor of Odessa in Western-oriented Ukraine. To some extent, Western social and political science education and research training has had some characteristics of Western ‘soft power’ influence among future elites on the territory of the former USSR and the Eastern bloc.

Research on Russia and other post-Communist states by established academics has been equally affected by the aforementioned market fundamentalism, the demands of the REF and the institutional dismantling of REES. It has thus become increasingly dependent on the thematic priorities of the main national and international research funding bodies, many of which have reflected the political agendas of governments in the UK and other Western states. In the UK, as well as in the rest of Europe, the European Union (EU) and the European Council (EC) have exercised a particularly strong influence on research themes because of their lavish budgets and high institutional overheads<sup>22</sup>. The indisputable leaders among them have been the EC Seventh Framework Programme (FP7, 2007–2013) with a total budget of over 50 billion euros and the EC Horizon 2020 Programme (2014–2020), the budget of which exceeds 77 billion euros. Most of the EC- and EU-funded research on Russia and other former Soviet countries has been channelled towards the promotion of democracy, civil society, good governance, human rights, various aspects of the EU programmes of Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Association Agreement (AA), the NATO programme of Partnership for Peace (PfP), as well as towards the study of energy security risks, ethno-political conflicts and Jihadism.

Following the accession to the EU in 2004 by Poland and ex-Soviet Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania the EU has also prioritised research on perceived Russian military, political, informational and cyber aggression. Receipt of EU funding has been conditioned by the anticipated social and political impact of particular research on the ex-Soviet polity and the training of local researchers along Western theoretical and methodological lines. At the same time researchers from Russia, where there are many academically strong research centres on various post-Soviet regions, have been prohibited from direct participation in such projects. Overall, the outlined imbalance in funding priorities has accounted for a considerable reduction in politically objective empirical research on mainstream social, political and cultural phenomena in Russia and the wider post-Soviet space. Substantial funding has nevertheless been allocated for research on subculture, transgender, gay and other minority rights, and other issues which are arguably not central to Russian and the wider Eurasian socio-political and cultural discourses.

#### RUSSIA AND EURASIA THROUGH THE THEORETICAL PRISM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The steady post-Cold War dismantling of REES and their dispersal within social and political studies has occurred alongside a theoretical reconfiguration of International Relations (IR) and Security Studies (SS). In the UK, the chief shift within the main English School of IR<sup>23</sup> has

<sup>22</sup> University managers in the UK and other EU countries have been pressurising academic staff to apply for EU and EC funding which, if awarded, provides their respective universities with overhead payments of around fifty per cent of the amount of the total grant.

<sup>23</sup> The term ‘English School of International Relations’ is broadly applied to works by Herbert Butterfield (1900–1979), Martin Wight (1913–1972), Hedley Bull (1932–1985) and other leading IR theorists from the London School of



been from the previously dominant “pluralist” towards the ‘solidarist’ approach. While the former recognises the political and cultural diversity of humankind and consequently prioritises state sovereignty in international politics<sup>24</sup>, the latter places human rights over state sovereignty<sup>25</sup>. It is important to note that “solidarism” has made significant inroads into American political science and IR, which traditionally had been dominated by proponents of (neo)-realism and (neo)-liberalism<sup>26</sup>. The ‘solidarists’ strengthened their positions in 2005 when the UN General Assembly introduced the concept of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) legitimising international intervention in sovereign states on humanitarian grounds<sup>27</sup>. Arguably, “solidarists” have provided scholarly respectability for the US-led “international community” to conduct military “humanitarian” interventions in ‘uncooperative’ sovereign states with the ultimate purpose of regime-change<sup>28</sup>. Cases in point have been the Western-led military interventions in the former Yugoslavia in 1995, Kosovo in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2017–2018. It is not coincidental that the main targets of US-led ‘humanitarian’ intervention have been either ex-Communist sovereign states or their constituent parts, or former clients of the USSR. For some reason such intervention has not occurred in Saudi Arabia despite the latter’s dismal record on human rights, including officially endorsed beheading and stoning of its citizens and its indiscriminate mass killings of civilians in Yemen since 2015, or in Israel, which has been killing Palestinian civilians for over seventy years<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to “solidarism”, there have emerged other IR constructivist, neo-liberal and neo-realist theoretical frameworks, which have treated the US-dominated world order as a *fait accompli*. Of particular relevance for the present discussion has been the application to some parts of the former USSR of the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), which was initially developed by Barry Buzan [Buzan, 1991]. Accordingly, Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and some other parts of the former USSR, have been theoretically detached from the geographically and culturally common Eurasian space and re-attached to new geopolitical entities, dominated by the US and the EU. For example, the South Caucasus has been analytically separated from the wider Caucasus, Iran and Turkey and included in a newly constructed regional complex defined by powerful external influences emanating from the US, the EU and Russia<sup>30</sup>. Overall, the employment of RSCT and other deductively-driven determinist theoretical approaches to Russia and other post-Soviet countries has been problematic in the way that it involves an arbitrary selection of “convenient” variables while discarding those that prove “inconvenient”<sup>31</sup>. Some political scientists have gone even further along the path of political subservience by integrating NATO and other Western institutions of political and military domination within theoretical paradigms of international society and security governance, while downplaying or completely neglecting the role of the UN<sup>32</sup>.

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Economics (LSE) and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. These are distinguished by their preference for the term “society of states” rather than “system of states” and by their emphasis on ideas, rather than material capabilities, in international politics.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller discussion of the pluralist approach in IR see: [Jackson, 2001].

<sup>25</sup> For a critique of the post-Cold War shift within IR in relation to Russia, see: [Allison, 2013].

<sup>26</sup> For an overview of (neo)-realist approaches in IR see, for example: [Waltz, 1979]; for (neo)-liberal approaches see: [Keohane, 1984].

<sup>27</sup> See more on RtoP in: [Bellamy, 2011].

<sup>28</sup> This approach is evidenced, for example, in: [Wheeler, 2000].

<sup>29</sup> At the time of writing, the most recent example of Western ‘humanitarian’ non-intervention was in Gaza on 15 May 2018, when the Israeli army shot dead over 60 and wounded over 2000 Palestinians. Instead, these killings were described by the US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley as manifestation of ‘great restraint’ [*Gaza: Nakba Day Protests...*, 2018].

<sup>30</sup> See, for example: [Oskanian, 2013].

<sup>31</sup> For a critique of the application of RSCT to the South Caucasus see: [Yemelianova, 2015].

<sup>32</sup> See, for example: [Webber, Hyde-Price (eds.), 2016; Sperling, Cottley, 2014].

The deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, which began in the late 2000s, has stimulated the development of Russia-related Security Studies (SS) within traditional IR. As a result, there has been a proliferation of new BA and MA Security Studies programmes which largely focus on Russia as a security threat. Research on Russia, conducted within the SS theoretical context, has been particularly susceptible to politicisation because of its greater dependence on government funding.

## CONCLUSION

The above analysis suggests that in the last three decades British and American scholarship on Russia and the wider Eurasia has been adversely affected by the comprehensive marketization of higher education, the dismantling of inter-disciplinary REES and the politically motivated research priorities of the major research funding bodies. Epistemologically, the marketization of universities, as observed by Stefan Collini, has promoted “an agnosticism about human ends and a consequent downgrading of reasons as opposed to preferences” and an increasingly “wider anti-intellectualism” of Western academia [Collini, 2017, p. 22]. The erosion of REES has undermined the previously dominant integrated, primary sources-based approach to researched phenomena in Russia and the wider Eurasia and led to its growing replacement by a variety of mono-disciplinary theoretical frameworks. As a result, a particular prominence has been acquired by political scientists who favour deductive quantitative research methods which enable them to generate quantifiable datasets which could be compared to those in other parts of the world. In their pursuit of REF-imposed ‘theoretical rigour’ they choose to deal with arbitrarily selected research variables while ignoring other theoretically inconvenient ones and the historical and cultural context which generated them. Most importantly, unlike REES specialists of the old school, many of their younger colleagues tend to do without field-work and/or primary sources in Russian and other languages of the former USSR and base their research on secondary sources in English and non-academic analytical reports, largely available online. The increased dependence of Russia- and Eurasia-related research on government policy towards these countries through the mechanism of the ‘impact factor’ and, especially, on the politically biased research priorities of some major research funding bodies has inevitably been conducive to its increased politicisation. The overall result has been a notable deterioration in the quality of British and American scholarship on Russia and other countries of Eurasia.

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