Divided Memory and the “New Cold War”
Thesis: The Rise and Decline of a Double-Edged Analogy

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During the last decade, renewed tensions between Russia and the West have inspired efforts to conceptualize current international relations in terms of a “new Cold War” (NCW). In this article, we explore the historical origins of the NCW analogy, its rise and decline in public discourse, and the terms of recent debates over its appropriateness. Whereas historical analogies are often employed to foster consensus, the NCW analogy is shown to be peculiarly divisive and double-edged—driving a wedge not only between proponents and their critics, but also between rival factions of proponents. Broadly, we suggest that analogies become double-edged, and potentially explosive, when they rely on divided memories of an earlier era.

Introduction

Once the preserve of cultural sociologists, historians, and social psychologists, the subject of collective memory has increasingly attracted the interest of scholars who specialize in politics, international relations, policy analysis, and related fields (Eder and Spohn 2005; Langenbacher and Shain 2010; Mälksoo 2009; Markovits and Reich 1997). The trend is not surprising. Indeed, it represents a natural extrapolation from the long-standing insight that representations of the past often become harnessed to the political projects of state, sub-state, and supra-state
actors. Today, it is widely accepted that collective memories are not an inherent property of groups and societies, but politico-cultural constructions of the past oriented toward present-day concerns. In the hands of political actors, collective memory work is about memory politics.

In this vein, one topic of increasing interest to political researchers is the use of analogic comparisons between past and present. Historical analogies are rhetorical devices which activate particular sectors of collective memories by framing current events as similar to or reminiscent of some paradigmatic period in the past. Through the lens of memory politics, the deployment of historical analogies can be seen as a tactical maneuver that capitalizes upon existing collective memories in order to justify (or, at times, to contest) specific objectives. Historical analogies commonly come to the fore when societies face new challenges. In times of external conflict, for example, leaders may deploy comparisons to periods, events, or persons that recall some past era of unity in order to mobilize, legitimate, orient, clarify, inspire, and console (Schwartz 1996).

Previous studies have also demonstrated how competition among different collective memories and historical analogies can become a source of dissension and conflict. Thus, conflict can occur when rival groups either tap into different collective memories or highlight different historical periods or events from the same collective memory in search of reference models for framing current affairs. To a large extent, such conflictual consequences follow logically from the premise that acceptance of any particular collective memory or historical analogy will be accompanied by internal solidarity, consensus, and unity around common goals and courses of action. In this article, we consider a recent example that directly challenges this premise—one in which endorsement of the same historical analogy gives rise to discursive conflict in its own right.

Specifically, our case study focuses on the public use of analogies to a “new” Cold War to interpret political and military developments in Europe. As a historical analogy, the expression “new Cold War” (hereafter NCW) represents a discursive device through which various social actors have sought to make sense of a new, complex state of affairs by highlighting perceived similarities to some previous event or period (Pehar 2001; Schuman and Rieger 1992). Although NCW is occasionally used merely for rhetorical flourish, the thesis of a “new Cold War” has been advanced in numerous books and articles by reputable scholars and journalists and, on occasion, even in speeches and interviews
by highly placed public officials. Not surprisingly, the NCW thesis has also occasioned considerable public controversy, attracting many critics along with proponents of various stripes. On the surface, the ensuing debate appears to revolve primarily around the degree of plausibility and practical desirability of comparing recent tensions between Russia and the West to those between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies during the Cold War. Is the present situation “really” like the Cold War or fundamentally different? In practical terms, are the interests of state actors and publics well served, or potentially undermined, by stressing the parallels? To this extent, positions in the NCW debate appear reducible to either affirmation or rejection of the analogy, on whatever grounds.

Yet, a closer examination of the NCW debate reveals peculiar properties of a NCW which distinguish it from the kinds of historical analogies that have received the most attention in the literature. While many previous studies acknowledge that historical analogies can produce dissension between advocates and critics, most nonetheless take for granted that collective identification and solidarity will be enhanced among those who embrace the same historical analogy. In contrast, we argue that NCW exemplifies what we call a double-edged analogy—one in which shared references to a previous conflict have the effect of producing or reinforcing divergent perceptions and interpretations of current affairs. Thus, what makes an analogy double-edged is precisely that it “cuts” twice. In addition to the first cut between those who accept or reject its appropriateness, a second cut divides proponents of the analogy themselves into opposing camps. Among NCW’s advocates, consensus that the current situation resembles the “old” Cold War results, not in solidarity, but in a dispute among rival narratives and recommendations.

We have chosen the NCW for our case study in part because it has been the subject of a debate in which political analysts have often participated, but whose distinctive characteristics as a historical analogy have received relatively little attention (Ciută and Klinke 2010; Sakwa 2008). In a broader way, the NCW analogy illustrates the dependency of conceptual orientations in the present on the ways in which prior history has been enshrined in collective memories. Thus, one of the more enduring cultural legacies of the Cold War has been its contribution to the global collective memory repertoire, supplying observers as well as lay publics with a convenient historical point of reference for interpreting international relations in the twenty-first century. As we further
discuss below, we believe that Cold War analogies divide because collective memories of the Cold War continue to reflect the clash of perspectives that characterized an earlier period of division. In other words, we see divided memory as a path-dependent variable that explains why certain historical analogies become double-edged.

In the rest of this article, we analyze the uses of the NCW against the backdrop of previous research on the instrumental uses of historical analogies and their politico-cultural consequences. Further, our case study enables us to address long-standing questions about the relationship between historical analogies and collective memory: What makes particular historical analogies thinkable in a given context? What accounts for their waxing and waning salience over time? What kind of impact can they be expected to have, on whom, and why? The next section begins by reviewing previous work on historical analogies, which highlights their solidaristic potential while allowing for competition among different analogies; it then elaborates our concept of double-edged analogies and introduces our case study of the NCW. Then we consider the foregoing questions in light of the theoretical reasoning employed in previous research, while a section on methods outlines how we operationalize these questions in the empirical analysis that follows. We begin the analytic section by exploring usage of “Cold War” and “new Cold War” in Anglophone discourse from the early post–World War II years to the present, then consider comparisons to German- and Russian-language sources from 2005–2015, as well as fluctuations in popular interest over the same period. After identifying two primary upsurges in use during the last two decades—one around 2008, the other in 2014—we proceed with a qualitative analysis of contributions by various commentators during these periods in order to identify the terms of the NCW debate. We conclude by drawing out the implications of our main findings for future work on historical analogies and collective memory.

**Historical Models, Double-Edged Analogies and Divided Memory**

The relation between historical analogies and collective memory has been widely studied in the realms of policymaking, journalism, and other contexts (Angstrom 2011; Berkowitz 2011; Brändström, et al. 2004; Edy 1999; Khong 1992; Le 2006; MacDonald 2002; Pehar 2001; Schuman and Rieger 1992; Schwartz 1996; Taylor and Rourke 1995).
There is substantial agreement in the literature about several aspects of historical analogies. First, most scholars agree that historical analogies represent a discursive trope through which some (usually well-known) event, period or configuration from the past is presented as a model for comprehending or clarifying particular events or states of affairs in the present. Thus, Pehar defines historical analogies as “a variety of metaphorical expressions that use an image of the past to shed some light on present or future affairs of mostly political concern.” As a variety of metaphor, “historical analogies represent an overlap between an image of the past (source) and an image of the present or future (target)” (2001, 117).

Second, although keyed to concerns in the present, the deployment of historical analogies presupposes and relies on prior constructions of collective memory. Thus, Brändström and colleagues posit that “a historical analogy is applied when a person or group draws upon parts of their personal and/or collective memories, and/or parts of ‘history,’ to deal with current situations and problems.” In this sense, they suggest, collective memories of the past are “like a giant database,” or virtual trove of potential analogs from which one can select to help make sense of the present (2004, 193; italics in original).

The role of historical analogies in shaping public opinion and policymaking around specific issues has been widely studied, most often in contexts involving military intervention (Angstrom 2011; Gibson 2012; Hemmer 2012; Khong 1992; MacDonald 2002; Morgenthau 1972; Noon 2005; Schuman and Rieger 1992; Schuman and Corning 2006; Schwartz 1996). A number of authors have called attention to the limitations and pitfalls of relying on historical analogies in policy analysis and other contexts (Jeffery 2009; Le 2006; Møller 2015; Morgenthau 1972; Yossef 2012). Most researchers, however, have been interested in the social functions and political consequences of historical analogies, irrespective of their epistemic value. In this literature, studies to date typically concur on the role of historical analogies in producing consensus and solidarity within a society or group. At the level of nations, for example, Pehar describes historical analogies as “an essential part of national narrative and national identity” such that “[n]ations tend to group around their most central and deeply rooted memories” (2001, 120–121). In a similar way, Schuman and Rieger argue that, for a historical analogy to function in the present, its source context must “be consensual enough that most people regard the event in a similar way, at least at some level of collective memory” (1992, 316).
Such views are not limited to scholars of a “functionalist” bent. Critical theorists who see collective memory as reflecting the perspective and interests of ruling elites (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Billig 1995) generally accept that the ruling ideas of a society may at times succeed in penetrating popular consciousness resulting in tacit consensus (“hegemony”), and that imagined communities often inspire self-sacrifice (Anderson [1983] 1991). To this extent, both schools of thought concur that collective memories and, by extension, historical analogies are intended to bring about consensus, whether or not they succeed in doing so in practice.

Nor does this consensual, solidaristic function of historical analogies necessarily exclude the possibility of conflict. Indeed, it implies that conflict becomes more likely to the degree that social actors or groups work with different historical analogies to interpret the same state of affairs. We refer to these as “single-edged” analogies insofar as the lines of division only “cut” along a single dimension—between those who embrace the analogy in question and those who reject it or favor a rival analogy. Although our terminology is novel, it is widely recognized that (single-edged) historical analogies often prove divisive. One way this may occur is if opposing actors or coalitions are drawing on different collective memories. Following the breakup of Yugoslavia, for example, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević compared the Kosovo dispute to the disastrous Battle of Kosovo exactly 600 years earlier (Judah 2010), while supporters of Kosovar independence likened Serbian “ethnic cleansing” to Hitler’s genocide in Word War II (Bates 2009; Steinweis 2005). Here, the rival analogies reflected the divergent collective memories of Serbs and Kosovar Albanians. At the same time, the function of each analogy on its own remained internally solidaristic, insofar as embracing it meant siding with others who did the same. Thus, international actors like the US and NATO who found the Hitler analogy more persuasive (especially in the wake of the 1995 Rwandan genocide) entered the conflict on the Kosovar Albanian side.

Rivalry between single-edged analogies can also arise within a national public, even one that shares a common pool of historical narratives about the collective past. Because collective memories are themselves heterogeneous and multilayered, different subgroups may come to opposing conclusions about some current event or circumstance if the parallels they draw come from different parts of the same collective memory. Thus, Schuman and Rieger (1992) found that, on the eve of the 1991 Gulf War, US respondents who grew up during or immediately
after World War II were more likely to draw a comparison between Iraqi President Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler, while respondents who came of age during the Vietnam era were more likely to view the prospect of US involvement in the conflict as analogous to US involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s. As expected, respondents who chose the World War II analogy were also more likely to support US military action to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait, while respondents who preferred the Vietnam analogy expressed weaker support or opposition. As in the Kosovo example, each of the two analogies remains single-edged—each by itself is still producing agreement among those who adopt it, while preferences for different analogies lead to contrasting conclusions about the wisdom of a particular policy option.

Up to this point, we generally concur with the mainstream of the literature, as far as single-edged analogies are concerned. What we wish to dispute is the assumption that social actors who agree on a particular analogy for interpreting a given event in the present will inevitably draw the same conclusions about those events. Under certain conditions, in fact, endorsing the same historical analogy can also do the opposite, namely, reinforce divergent perspectives on the present. We hypothesize that this occurs when an analogy is drawing upon divided memories (Herf 1997; Straughn 2007, 2019; Vinitzky-Seroussi 2002) of some event or period in the past in order to compare events of the present to an earlier polarized state of affairs.

A good example of a double-edged analogy comes from the Bosnian conflict of the mid-1990s. During the war, many Bosnian Serbs and Croats alike interpreted their dispute in terms of the Second World War. The result was not solidarity between the two ethnic groups, but mutual animosity, as militants in each ethno-national group identified opponents with their putative precursors—Serbian chetniks and Croatian ustaše, respectively—in World War II (Denitch 1996). Although both groups construed the current conflict as analogous to the same event in the past, the cultural memories on which they drew had been constructed from mutually opposing perspectives. As a result of tapping into divided memories of the same reference period, reciprocal deployment of the same historical analogy only hardened the battle lines between opposing groups and helped build support on both sides for intensified conflict by portraying it as a continuation or revival of an older one.

In our case study below, we argue that the NCW analogy has displayed much the same double-edged character—not only dividing
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opinions over its appropriateness in a given case, but also driving a wedge between people who accept the analogy as apt. We further hypothesize that the NCW analogy is double-edged because it activates divided memories of the Cold War. Because global collective memory of the Cold War remains divided, the contemporary implications drawn from the NCW analogy also diverge, depending upon the vantage point from which the present standoff is viewed.

Research Questions and Theoretical Expectations

The analysis that follows is guided by a set of empirical questions and theoretical expectations suggested by the existing literature on collective memory and historical analogies. Our first question is perhaps the most fundamental: When does a historical analogy become thinkable? As noted earlier, historical analogies presuppose and rely on prior constructions of collective memory about the period or event that will serve as the point of reference or “source” term in the analogy. Hence, it follows that the source period must be one that is sufficiently well known that allusions to it will be widely understood and that the period must be seen as having reached its conclusion before a “new” incarnation can be thought to have materialized. Historical analogies may also have expiry dates. Unless the reference period overlaps with the lifespan of at least some living generations, social knowledge of it must be reproduced in collective memory or else analogies to it eventually become unintelligible. In the present case, the idea of a “new” Cold War appears to meet these criteria of comprehensibility. For the time being, at least, it can capitalize on direct as well as transmitted knowledge of an earlier, more definitive Cold War—an era that, by most accounts, had effectively ended no later than 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. As we will see below, however, the precise moment when a particularly historical analogy first becomes thinkable cannot always be reliably inferred from its canonical end date. In the analysis, we therefore treat the issue of periodization as an empirical question.

A second question concerns the recurring salience of a historical analogy. Once a particular event or period has entered the collective memory repertoire as a potential point of reference for interpreting the present, it must still be activated in order to enter public discourse. When and why does a particular analogy become measurably salient? As noted above, historical analogies commonly arise when surprising new events destabilize orientations toward the present and future that
had prevailed just before. In such contexts, social actors search the collective memory repertoire and select reference events believed to render the present more intelligible. Following Schuman and Rieger (1992), we refer to the impact of ongoing events on contemporary memory practices, including historical analogies, as period effects. In general, a period effect means that an analogy has come to the fore because some event occurs that causes commentators and publics to tap cultural memory in search of suitable parallels.

What sort of current developments are most likely to invite comparisons to a “new Cold War?” On this issue, theoretical expectations will depend on how one answers a prior question that remains a subject of scholarly debate: How malleable are collective memories? If they are infinitely elastic and easily reinvented, as some have argued (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), then virtually any new event that arises can be compared with equal validity to any previous historical context. If, on the other hand, our knowledge of the past displays a large degree of stability or inertia from moment to moment (e.g., Schudson 1989), then the current state of collective memory will provide a baseline against which the plausibility of particular analogies can be judged.

Our own view is that both schools of thought have merit, and the more so when each scenario serves as a limiting case. On the one hand, analogies are by their nature selective, highlighting certain features which the objects compared are claimed to share in common while dismissing other features as incidental. On the other hand, a historical analogy is likely to strain credulity if it simply ignores the way that the historical reference has generally been portrayed in collective memory.

In the case of the NCW, the question of recurring salience becomes more tractable if we consider the distinctive place of the Cold War in global collective memory. As we discuss at the beginning of our analytic section, this period has acquired a core set of associations on which most present-day observers are likely to concur—that the Cold War represented an existential, bipolar conflict of global proportions, yet also one in which direct hostilities between the two nuclear superpowers and their allies in Europe were thankfully averted. In these respects, the Cold War differs from other previous conflicts that were mostly localized, rather than transnational or transcontinental, or else (as with the two World Wars) involved massive combat operations as well as quite different military alignments. On this basis, we hypothesize that new developments will most often invite comparisons to a “new Cold War” when the developments (a) are conflictual, (b) involve former Cold War
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adversaries or their perceived successors, (c) manifest in confrontation and buildup that stops short of open war, and (d) follow upon an intervening period of relative quiescence between the former adversaries. If our hypothesis is wrong, we should be able to observe anomalous upsurges in the salience of the NCW at moments when developments of this kind are not in evidence.

Finally, what of the impact of historical analogies once they have been deployed? What explains whether they are single-edged or double-edged in effect? As noted above, we hypothesize that historical analogies become double-edged when their advocates draw on collective memories about the same event, but view the present from opposing perspectives. Double-edgedness thus seems to entail a degree of reciprocity and, as it were, “collaboration” between rival camps of proponents. Hypothetically, a historical analogy could be mobilized by only one side, while the other side rejects it wholesale. In this counterfactual scenario, the analogy would remain single-edged—that is, cutting only between those who accept or reject its validity. In our analysis of the NCW debate, the empirical question is whether proponents of the analogy arrive at differing conclusions about recent developments in Europe because they are viewing contemporary events from reciprocally opposed perspectives, namely those of collective actors who are viewed as successors to the respective sides in the “old” Cold War.

Data and Methods

We begin our empirical analysis by examining the origins of the expression “Cold War” shortly after the Second World War and identifying the main features that came to be associated with it over the decades that followed. Given the malleability of historical periodizations over time (Zerubavel 2003; Le Goff 1992), we err on the side of caution and treat the timing of the Cold War’s perceived conclusion as an empirical question, which we address by exploring when the idea of a “new Cold War” first entered public discourse. To identify the sources discussed, we rely on traditional methods such as searches of online databases of scholarly articles, news media, and non-fiction books.

To evaluate our expectations concerning period effects and salience, the next phase of our analysis traces the rise and fall of the NCW analogy in Anglophone media discourse from the early years of the “old” Cold War (as conventionally periodized) through the recent past using quantitative measures of the analogy’s use in a major US newspaper. For
this purpose, we counted the number of articles published in the New York Times in which NCW appeared between 1950 and 2015. Results were generated at five-year intervals by entering “new Cold War” into the search tool on the publication website (www.nytimes.com) after constraining the search to the period from January 1 of the first year to December 31 of the last year of each interval. The results were tabulated over the 65-year period and are displayed graphically in Figure 1.1

To discern finer-grained fluctuations in usage, we repeated our analysis of New York Times articles for the most recent decade at one-year intervals. For comparison, we determined how frequently references to a “new Cold War” appeared in selected newspapers in two other countries—the Russian Federation and Germany—as well as in one additional US newspaper over the same period (Figure 2). We chose the Russian Federation because of its substantive relevance as legal successor to the USSR and to assess whether patterns found in Western outlets were mirrored in the Russophone press. Germany was

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1. Years prior to 1950 produced no results and were therefore excluded. On occasion, the search hits reflected incidental usage, as when “new” is employed to modify the phrase it precedes (e.g., in reference to “new Cold War strategy” and the like), but such “false hits” were relatively infrequent. Most often, the phrase “new Cold War” was being used in the substantively relevant, nominal sense.
included for comparison because of its leadership role in EU expansion and because public debates over the expression “new Cold War” have been previously documented there (Ciută and Klinke 2010). For the other US outlet, we selected the Wall Street Journal—a national daily with circulation comparable to that of the New York Times. The selected Russian sources comprise three privately owned newspapers: Izvestia, Kommersant, and Nezavisimaia Gazeta. The two German dailies with the highest circulation—Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung—were selected. Searches in the foreign language papers employed the search tools in the online editions of the respective sources, and search phrases were entered in the relevant language (Russian or German). Finally, as an alternate measure of NCW’s over-time salience among Anglophone publics, we used Google Trends (www.google.com/trends) to track the relative frequency of “new Cold War” as a search term in Google.com searches from January 1, 2004.

2. The searches in German and Russian were conducted by co-authors, Straughn and Fein, with fluency in the respective languages.
Figure 3. Frequency of Use of “new Cold War” in Google.com searches, 2004–2015 (Source: www.google.com/trends).

to December 31, 2015. Overtime variations in the frequency of NCW searches (as a proportion of all online searches) are depicted in Figure 3. To determine whether popular salience reflects endorsement of the analogy, we also considered findings from Gallup polls conducted in 1991 and 2014 (Riffkin 2014).

In the concluding phase of our analysis, we address our final research question—what makes the NCW analogy double-edged—by reconstructing the terms of the NCW debate among authors of articles and books that have discussed the NCW during the decade ending in 2015. For our qualitative analysis, we rely on published, English-language sources that focus specifically on the topic of “the new Cold War.” We limit the analysis to English-language publications in order to keep the discussion concise. The resulting sample comprises articles published by peer-reviewed journals, policy think-tanks, public-issue magazines, and news outlets, as well as several book-length monographs. With respect to professional background, the authors discussed consist predominantly of scholars (active or emeritus), policy analysts, editors, and journalists.

The double-edgedness of the NCW analogy emerged inductively in the course of an exploratory analysis of these materials for the purpose of identifying the terms of debate (Fig. 4). The first axis we

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3. The sources were located by entering “new Cold War” as a keyword in search engines such as EBSCO, ArticleFirst, GoogleScholar, and Google.com. Although contributors occasionally employ cognate concepts such as “Cold War II,” searches using these terms generated very few non-redundant hits for the 2005-15 period, suggesting the alternative phrases nearly always occur in the context of discussing the “new Cold War.” Because our interest was in debates about NCW in the public sphere, we excluded commentaries found on personal websites, social media profiles, or user comment sections of online publications. We occasionally refer to speeches by public officials as events to which contributors have responded, but do not include them as part of our sample.
identified differentiates between those who endorse the NCW thesis that current relations between Russia and the West constitute a “new Cold War” (Fig. 4, Section I) and those who reject the thesis (Fig. 4, Section I). We coded the former cluster of authors as “proponents” of the NCW thesis and the latter as its “critics.” Further exploration suggested that the terms of debate defied reduction to a single dichotomy without obscuring an equally significant polarization among proponents, depending where they place responsibility for the current state of East-West relations—on Russia and its leaders or on Western actors (NATO, Europe, the US). For simplicity, we labeled advocates of the NCW thesis as “anti-Putin” proponents if they attribute these strained relations to actions and policies of the Russian government (Fig. 4, I-A) and as “anti-West” proponents if they present the “new Cold War” as resulting from actions by NATO, the EU, or the United States (Fig. 4, I-B). Noteworthy differences were also found on the critics’ side, chiefly between authors who reject the appropriateness of the NCW analogy altogether and those who allow that a “new Cold War” could potentially arise in the future (Fig. 4, Section 2). However, we found that such differences were of relatively little consequence for their assessments of current events or the policy recommendations they advanced. Thus, the second “cut” of the double-edged analogy primarily affects proponents of the NCW thesis—namely, those who frame the current state of international relations in terms of a “new Cold War.”
Trajectory of a Historical Analogy

From “Cold War” to “New Cold War”

While the precise origins of the term “Cold War” are disputed, the expression appears to have emerged in the immediate aftermath of World War II.4 Today, the Cold War proper is conventionally held to have persisted from the end of World War II to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The expression “Cold War” has come to connote the predominance of a bipolar international system divided between two global hegemons teetering on the brink of open war. Thus, the “cold” aspect refers to the fact that the US and USSR were not engaged in direct, traditional warfare, like that in the Second World War, but were instead immersed in a frozen conflict, fought via proxy forces, that could not be characterized as peace. The Cold War is seen as intensifying after the USSR acquired the atomic bomb and achieved nuclear parity with the United States in 1949 (Richardson 2010), with nuclear brinkmanship reaching peak intensity during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962. In the decades that followed, the threat of nuclear war, geopolitical competition, and ideological polarization were among signature features associated with the period (Scheibach 2009; Walker 2011).

By comparison, relatively little research has focused on the emergence of the expression “new Cold War” as a contemporary analog. In one of the few such studies, Ciută and Klinke (2010) examine its use in light of the theoretical and normative concerns of critical geopolitics. Through a case study of “new Cold War” terminology employed by German media and in think-tank debates on energy security, they link its rise in the German context to the gas crises involving Ukraine and Russia in 2006 and 2008. For the Anglophone public sphere, however, our preliminary examination of public uses of NCW since the 1940s reveals that the expression was already being employed at various times during the course of the Cold War itself, as conventionally periodized.

Two of the earliest uses of the phrase “new Cold War” were in 1955 by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and in 1956 when the New York Times warned that Soviet propaganda was promoting a return of

4. The earliest recorded uses were in a 1945 Tribune article by George Orwell, in Walter Lippmann’s influential 1947 book The Cold War, and in a 1947 speech given by Truman advisor Bernard Baruch (Aronsen 1998).
the Cold War (NYT 1955; Jorden 1956). What could have made the idea of a new Cold War thinkable and salient less than a decade after the notion of a “Cold War” entered the public sphere? Though seemingly counterintuitive, this finding is consistent with our expectations concerning the role of period effects if we bear in mind that observers at the time could not have known how the Cold War would be periodized decades later. Under the circumstances, the unexpected reversal of the brief “thaw” in superpower relations after the death of Stalin in 1953 sufficed to inspire fears that the “Cold War” was being rekindled.

For similar reasons, the term emerges again following the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in 1980, whose assertive foreign policy agenda effectively ended the 1970s era of détente, with the publication of books by Tom Gervasi (1981), Noam Chomsky (1982), Stanley Hoffmann (1983), and others (e.g., Gettleman, et al. 1987; Hyland 1981; McNair 1988). Scattered mentions reappear during the early 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR resulted in an uncertain international system—in order to dismiss the prospect of a “new Cold War” (e.g., Serrill and Mader 1991; Talbott 1991), and soon afterward to warn of its looming danger (e.g., Christie and Hanley 1994; Deighen 1993).

5. Similar terms, such as “Cold War II” (Kim 1982; Targ 1986) and “Second Cold War” (Halliday 1986), were likewise used to denote “a new cycle of Soviet-American geopolitical rivalry” (Kim 1982: 11). Several of these authors came from the academic new left, notably Chomsky, Gettleman, Targ, and Halliday. Gervasi was a New York Times reporter known for his exposés on US arms sales.

6. In the same vein, a December 1993 Economist editorial surmised that: “Ever since Cold War I ended, it has been only a matter of time before someone would think up a sequel. The outlines of the new scenario are becoming clear. Cold War II lacks the compelling simplicity of the original, but it could turn out to be almost as frightening” (Economist 1993: 28). In fact, an earlier article the same year by Deighan (1993) already bore the title “Welcome to Cold War II;” precisely the same title was used a decade later by Trenin (2014).
of NCW in *New York Times* articles is infrequent (averaging 7.4 articles per interval) and shows relatively little over-time variation. From 1990 through 2005, however, the frequency of use is nearly three times as high as the previous baseline (averaging about 21 articles per interval) and increases markedly in the 2006–2010 period, when the frequency is six times as high as before 1990. The sharpest increase in frequency by far, however, occurs in the most recent period (2011–2015), when nearly 150 articles featured the phrase.

For a more nuanced picture and to assess the geographic generality of the most recent trends, Figure 2 focuses on the eleven-year period from 2005–2015 and incorporates data from additional news outlets in the US, Germany, and Russia. (For readability, results for the two German sources and two of the Russian papers have been combined in Figure 2). From this finer-grained depiction, we see, first, that the *New York Times* (NYT) results in Figure 1 for the last two intervals are largely a reflection of two rather localized bursts in 2008 and 2014, respectively. The pattern is closely mirrored in the results for the *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), with bursts occurring in the same two years (although the overall number of articles mentioning “new Cold War” is smaller than in the NYT). Second, a dual-peak pattern is also present in the combined results for the two German newspapers, as well as those for the Russian news sources, albeit with noteworthy differences with respect to the relative magnitudes of the two peaks and the timing of the first. In the German case, the first spike occurs some two years later (in 2010) than in the NYT and the WSJ. With the Russian news outlets, the timing and relative magnitude of the peaks differ noticeably between *Kommer-sant* and *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (K+NG) and *Izvestia*. In the former case, the initial peak in 2008, though in sync with those for the NYT and the WSJ, is somewhat modest compared to that in 2014. With *Izvestia*, the pattern is reversed, with the first peak substantially higher relative to the second. Moreover, the first spike in the number of *Izvestia* articles begins a year earlier, in 2007, than for most other sources and continues, decreasing only slightly, through 2008.

In spite of some variation between and within the three national contexts, the results in Figure 2 as a whole suggest that two main surges in frequency consistently appear internationally—the first around 2007–2008 or (at a lag) in 2010, the second in 2014. In all sources, moreover, the results indicate a lull in use from 2011 to 2013, as well as a moderate to steep decline from 2014 to 2015. These patterns are consistent with period effects triggered by high-profile international
events suggestive of heightened tensions between Russia and the West around the time of each burst, such as the lead-up to and emergence of the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and the ongoing Ukraine crisis that began in late 2013 and escalated in early 2014.7

Nor was media discourse the only sphere in which these events appear to have made an impact. As we see in Figure 3, this impact can also be seen in the rise and fall of popular interest in the “new Cold War” concept, measured by use of NCW as a Google search term. Here, too, the two largest spikes are around 2008 and 2014, with a smaller third spike appearing in 2015. The results are thus remarkably consistent with those for most news outlets in Figure 2.

In sum, the results in Figures 1 through 3 tend to support our expectations concerning the kinds of events and developments likely to produce period effects that render the NCW salient among authors and publics alike. What the rising prevalence of NCW in media discourse does not yet tell us, however, is how authors and Internet users are reacting to the analogy. While some authors may be affirming its relevance to the period events in question, others may be employing the corresponding expression for the purpose of critique. Meanwhile, Web surfers may be doing so simply out of curiosity.

For the latter spike, at least, results from a 2014 Gallup poll (Riffkin 2014) conducted a few weeks after the Crimean referendum confirm that popular approval of the NCW analogy was indeed relatively pronounced at that time. Asked whether they “think the United States and Russia are heading back toward a Cold war, or not,” fifty percent of US respondents answered “yes” (with 43 percent answering “no”). By comparison, just 25 percent of respondents in a February 1991 Gallup poll (following a failed coup by the Russian military), said they thought that the US and the Soviet Union were returning to a “Cold War,” while

7. Differences in the timing of the first peak suggest that the salience of period effects can also depend on local and regional factors. The lagged spike in 2010 for the German sources is a good illustration. Closer inspection of the search results shows that the large majority of hits come from articles published in the SDZ and mostly in the wake of the Munich Security Conference in February of that year. Other proximate events cited in SDZ articles from that year included reactions to events such as a forceful speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin and the proposed build-up of US defensive missile capabilities in East Central Europe. Although none of these events triggered measurable increases in NCW usage in the US or Russian sources, the events themselves meet the criteria specified in our period-effects hypothesis.
64 percent rejected the statement (Riffkin 2014). Such responses provide evidence of the first “cut” in a potentially double-edged analogy—one that runs between acceptance and rejection of the analogy for a given purpose.

To determine whether the NCW analogy is doubled-edged in effect, we must still determine whether those who agree that a “new Cold War” is in progress draw opposing conclusions about its causes and implications. To more clearly discern both “edges” of the NCW analogy, the next section takes a closer look at how individual authors and commentators have used the phrase “new Cold War.” What we will show is that increased frequency of use around 2008 and in 2014 coincided with the emergence of public debates over the analogy’s relevance to understanding the growing tensions between Russia and the West during the last ten years and, furthermore, that it places rival clusters of NCW proponents on opposite sides of an equally important divide. It should be stressed in advance that the goal of the following analysis is not to provide an exhaustive overview, but only to provide sufficient examples to illustrate the main areas of consensus and disagreement and thereby to bring both edges of the NCW analogy into view.

“New Cold War” as a Double-Edged Analogy: Terms of Debate

We preface our analysis of the NCW debate by noting one area of broad consensus among the large majority of contributors—critics and proponents alike. Regardless of where they fall on either dimension, commentators generally agree on certain connotations of the “Cold War” analogy—namely, that the expression recalls a dangerous, adversarial period, the nadir of the relationship between the United States and Russia. Nor is there any illusion of a literal return to the past. Rather, the “new Cold War” is understood as signifying a worsening of relations between Russia and the United States (often in partnership with NATO and the EU) that is reminiscent of previous relations between the Soviet Union and the West. To this extent, comparisons to the “old” Cold War provide contributors and their publics with a common point of reference, allowing all of them to comprehend the expression “new Cold War” as a way of dramatizing the potential gravity of the contemporary situation.

8. A notable exception is the critique of the NCW analogy by Charap and Shapiro (2015), who argue that some proponents view the period as one of “comforting predictability.”
In the rest of this section, we analyze the terms of debate along two principal axes. The first axis along which commentators part ways is over whether or not current conditions can indeed be fruitfully described in terms of a “new Cold War” at all, while the second axis distinguishes among advocates of the NCW thesis themselves (Fig. 4). Before contrasting the two camps of proponents with each other directly, we first review some of the recurring points of disagreement between NCW proponents and their critics.

First Cut: Is There a “New Cold War?” For proponents as a whole, perhaps the most compelling justification for the NCW thesis is the West’s efforts to expand NATO and the EU up to Russia’s doorstep, coupled with Russia’s desire to expand its influence in the Near Abroad. The resulting standoff is recognized by all proponents to be at the heart of the current tensions. As one of them puts it: “Ukraine’s civil war can best be regarded as a naked power struggle between Moscow and Washington in much the same way the Cold War’s civil wars in Eastern Europe, Korea, Congo, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia and Central America were surrogate battlefields” (Batchelor 2014). Proponents as a whole perceive a dynamic of reciprocal escalation in recent years, with the EU and NATO progressively enlarging membership in Eastern Europe, while Russia extends its military presence into former Soviet Republics which are not yet EU or NATO members.

One of the chief arguments among critics, in turn, is that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was swiftly deprived of its undisputed status as an economic and military superpower. In Bremmer’s (2014) view, Russia’s loss of strength eliminates one of four necessary conditions of a new Cold War. Similarly, Ashford regards Russia’s depleted military and economy as indicating that “Russia is no longer a great power, nor a genuine military threat to the United States” (2015). Writing in the wake of the Georgia conflict, Sadri and Burns likewise dismiss the NCW analogy on the grounds that “the current politics of the Caucasus region, particularly Georgia, is much more complex and sophisticated than the binary politics of the Cold War era when there were only two major political players” (2010, 138). Proponents, on the other hand, often counter that Russia continues to pose a sufficient threat to warrant comparisons to the Cold War era. Kroenig, for instance, defends the NCW thesis by maintaining that Russia can still achieve its foreign policy goals through “a combination of hybrid warfare and nuclear brinkmanship” in spite of its reduced military and political strength (2015, 53).
A related problem with the NCW thesis, according to critics, lies in the seemingly obvious fact that the two rival “blocs” no longer coalesce around opposing ideologies (see Charap and Shapiro 2014, 2015; Hryckowian 2015). As Hryckowian writes: “[T]he Cold War was foremost a war of ideologies. It was a struggle between the doctrines of capitalism and communism, mostly decided through the expansion of each side’s influence” (2015). Hence, the failure of communism brought a permanent end to the Cold War. As Stephens puts it: “For several decades, the world lived in the shadow of nuclear self-destruction. In 1989 communism lost. There is no going back” (2014). In contrast to communism, which promised a brighter future to populations both within and outside of Russia’s borders, the nationalism driving Putin’s policy strategy cannot be easily exported to non-Russian-speaking regions (Stephens 2014). Some proponents, in contrast, have countered that the Russian leader does have a coherent, exportable ideology which, though not as powerful as Marxism-Leninism, continues to dominate Russian politics. Lucas, for example, sees “Putinism” as reflected in the “Kremlin’s propaganda . . ., in which Russia is champion of cherished, age-old values, beset by a sinister and decadent West” (2008, xix).

A final point of disagreement between critics and proponents concerns the utility of the NCW thesis as a means of ameliorating the state of affairs it is meant to describe. Critics, on the one hand, often argue that tensions are unlikely to escalate on their own. As Dadak opines: “The recent resurgence of Russian expansionism, intimidation of former Soviet republics, and the challenging of US global dominance are most likely to backfire, and the likelihood of a new cold war is remote” (2010, 103). The greater risk, from the critics’ point of view, is that wide dissemination of the thesis could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Similar concerns can be observed as early as 2008. As noted in a previous section, NCW came to be widely employed following Russia’s military intervention in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of the former Soviet republic of Georgia. In addition to scholars and journalists, some public officials could be found employing NCW rhetoric. Responding to Western opposition to the annexation, then-President Dmitri Medvedev stated: “We are not afraid of anything, including the

9. Indeed, in his preface to the revised second edition of The New Cold War, Lucas states that he had in fact “underestimated the growth of Russia’s ideology,” which now centers on “the idea that Russia is a different (and higher) civilization, under attack from both the east . . . and an ignorant, arrogant and amoral West” (Lucas 2014: xii).
prospect of a new Cold War” (Traynor 2008). Around the same time, critics began cautioning against such rhetoric, seeing it as imprudent at best. Linn (2008), for example, urges that “the tone of this dialogue must not revert to cold-war rhetoric, and instead should find a constructive way to engage Russia’s leaders even as the tough actions are taken to gain Russia’s attention and constructive reaction.” Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, critics again worried that talk of a “new Cold War” could trap the West into an adversarial position with Russia, with potentially dire consequences. Thus, Pifer argues that the West “should not cite a Cold War straw man to frighten ourselves into a negotiation or unwise concessions,” and warns that doing so could risk “something far worse—a hot one” (2015). In a more pessimistic vein, Krickovic and Weber argue that a “new Cold War” though not yet upon us, could be virtually inevitable, “as talk in both capitals is dominated by the sort of Russia- and America-bashing, which prevents either side from developing an appreciation of the other’s security concerns” (2015).

Proponents of the NCW thesis, on the other hand, believe that a “new Cold War” is already underway. From their point of view, accepting this reality is necessary precisely in order to find an appropriate response. Thus, even when they acknowledge the NCW analogy’s explosive potential, proponents are likely to insist that it is important to face the facts (Legvold 2014; Roskin 2014). Legvold, for example, remarks that “accepting the premise that Russia and the West are locked in such a conflict could lead policymakers to pursue the wrong, even dangerous strategies. Using such a label is thus a serious matter.” Nonetheless, he maintains, “it is important to call things by their names, and the collapse in relations between Russia and the West does indeed deserve to be called a new Cold War” (Legvold 2014, 74).

Second Cut: Who Started the “New Cold War?” If disagreement over the NCW thesis itself provides the first axis of division—that between its proponents and critics—the allocation of blame for the new state of affairs drives a second wedge between the two camps of proponents. For anti-Putin proponents, there is little doubt that the root causes lie in Moscow’s illiberal foreign policies: “Like the Cold War of old,” writes Kirchik, “this new conflict was initiated by Russia, which cannot tolerate independent and sovereign states along its borders” (2014, 38). Of recurring concern for this camp is thus whether Russia will continue to seek to expand beyond its borders, as it has in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, increasing the likelihood of armed conflict in NATO
member states, most notably Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, former Soviet Republics with sizeable Russian-speaking populations. Such fears, they note, have already led to troop increases on both sides of the Russian border, which are seen as reminiscent of Cold War standoffs (Kroenig 2015; Kirchik 2014; Legvold 2014; Lucas 2014).

Anti-West proponents, in turn, make similar observations, but lay the blame squarely on the West in view of its “encroachment” on Russia’s legitimate security interests in the region, warning that NATO’s continued buildup of forces in Central Europe and the Baltic states could compel an even more drastic defensive response on the part of Russia (Batchelor 2014; Carden 2015a, 2015b; Cohen 2014). Thus, writing in January of 2015, Carden attributes Russia’s then-recently announced revision of its military doctrine to “the expansion of NATO’s military infrastructure to the Russian borders,” as well as the actions of the Obama administration and of the new pro-Western government in Kiev which, Carden believes, “have conspired to shape the Russian government’s threat perception” (2015a).

Opposing causal attributions translate into further sources of disagreement. Perhaps the most conspicuous bone of contention concerns the different courses of action recommended. As noted above, both camps are advancing the NCW thesis to highlight the urgency of changing course in order to prevent escalation towards a “hot” war. However, anti-Putin proponents primarily call for a more aggressive foreign policy stance toward Russia on the part of Western actors, while anti-West proponents criticize such actions as themselves responsible for provoking what they see as essentially defensive moves by Russia, such as alterations of its national security policies and its interventions in the Near Abroad.

Competing causal narratives can also affect seemingly unrelated issues, such as the question of precisely when the “new Cold War” actually began. For example, those who view the NCW as a product of Putin’s desire to expand Russia’s influence commonly locate its onset at the rise of nationalism and authoritarianism following Putin’s election as President (e.g., Kroenig 2015; Lucas 2008) or as late as Russia’s annexation of Crimea (Legvold 2014). For Anti-West proponents, in contrast, the NCW can potentially be regarded as a continuation of the “original” Cold War. Thus, Cohen argues that the latter never really ended, citing the United States’ dismissive treatment of Russia after 1991, followed by the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU (2014; see also Cohen 2006, 2009).
Such disputes over periodization recall the ambiguities we noted earlier concerning the origins and surprising recurrence of NCW in Anglophone discourse during what we now think of as the Cold War itself. During this period, however, the analogy seems to have remained largely single-edged—introduced in the 1950s in order to sound the alarm about actions taken by the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and revived in the 1980s by commentators who feared that Reagan-era defense policies would provoke new tensions with Moscow. What we see in the most recent debates, is the reciprocal deployment of the NCW thesis by proponents who interpret renewed tensions from opposite points of view. It is this second “edge” of the NCW analogy that gives rise, in turn, to discrepant narratives and periodizations concerning the threshold between the “old” Cold War and the “new.”

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Our main goals in this paper were twofold: first, to explore how the expression “new Cold War” arose and sporadically recurred in response to specific kinds of period events over the course of many decades and then to show how the use of NCW in recent public debates exemplifies what we call a double-edged analogy. In connection with the first goal, our over-time analysis of NCW usage provided substantial support for our hypothesis that the periodic resurgence of the NCW analogy coincides with period events involving renewed conflict between the Cold War superpowers or their perceived successors. More surprisingly, however, we also discovered that the perceived threshold between the “old” Cold War and the “new” has been historically variable, with NCW discourse first appearing, then repeatedly recurring, long before what is now considered the end of the Cold War. In analyzing its re-emergence in the first decade of the new millennium, we identified a dual-peak pattern, coinciding with Russian interventions in the Near Abroad around 2008 and 2014 that proved transnationally robust while also reflecting localized variations in the timing and magnitude. For the Anglophone sphere, our qualitative analysis of NCW debates during this period suggests that these surges in use may also reflect the analogy’s controversial character—producing a growing number of both proponents of a comparison between the “new” and “old” Cold War eras and critics who reject the comparison as inappropriate or even dangerous.

In examining recent NCW debates, we noted one area of broad consensus: virtually all observers stress the differences between the “old”
Cold War and the “new,” irrespective of whether they accept or reject the NCW thesis. Indeed, both proponents and critics often cite the same points of contrast in order to defend their conclusions. This finding highlights a characteristic feature of historical analogies: their appropriateness cannot be adjudicated empirically as either “true” or “false” (see for example, Black and Johns 2016, 227–228). Rather, the decision to employ them (or not) tends to be determined by the practical inference to be drawn from the comparison. In many cases, even the desired ends are essentially the same (e.g., de-escalation), with disagreement limited to the question of whether the NCW framing is useful or counterproductive for attaining them. Paradoxically, however, the NCW thesis is at once polarizing and unifying among its proponents themselves. Thus, the claim that a “new Cold War” is underway can appeal equally to those who regard Russia as a dire and growing threat and to those who see Russia primarily in a defensive role and urge Western powers to favor diplomacy over sanctions.

It would be tempting to reduce disputes along our two axes to disagreements over foreign policy doctrine—between hawks and doves, realists and internationalists, right and left, and so on. Such ideological cleavages no doubt explain some of the variation among the positions taken. Anti-Putin proponents of NCW, for instance, are often more hawkish than anti-West proponents and some NCW critics. However, foreign policy doctrine alone cannot fully explain why the NCW analogy is double-edged. Along the first axis, it fails to account for the presence of both hawks and doves among critics and proponents alike. Along the second axis, it sheds little light on why proponents with opposing policy perspectives choose to frame the current standoff between Russia and the West in terms of a “new Cold War” in the first place. In principle, a debate over causes and potential remedies could be (and often is) conducted without resorting to such historical analogies. A more likely reason that the NCW analogy becomes double-edged, we suggest, is that proponents are seeking to capitalize on cultural memories of the “old” Cold War precisely in order to defend reciprocally opposing attributions of responsibility for the rising tensions between Russia and the West.

Our findings suggest a number of promising avenues for future research. First, as with every historical analogy, the period of reference is multivalent and potentially susceptible to novel applications. For instance, relations between Russia and the West are not the only circumstance to which the “new Cold War” has referred. Since the early
1990s, there have also been instances in which the same expression was used to characterize relations between the United States and China (Kristof 1991) or even Iraq (Milholin 1992). Yet, it is equally revealing that reference contexts which exclude one or more of the original Cold War adversaries generally fail to generate discernable upsurges in use similar to those we observed around period events involving both Russia, on the one hand, and representatives of Western powers, like NATO, the EU, and the United States. Thus, while the collective memory of the Cold War is indeed malleable enough to facilitate analogies to a wide range of events and contexts, there appear to be limits to its pliability, as well, once analogies to the Cold War stray well beyond its canonical associations. Thus, it would be of interest in the future to explore the conditions under which historical analogies can be dislodged, in whole or in part, from their associations with specific historical actors and applied to later circumstances which feature at least some new entrants.

Second, although our quantitative analysis included news outlets from Germany and Russia, as well as the US, our qualitative analysis of the NCW debate was limited to Anglophone sources and publics. Yet, it seems likely to us that the transnational resonance of NCW discourse is, at root, the result of a divided global memory of the Cold War that has been reproduced within and across the respective public spheres. In future research, it would be valuable to further explore the diffusion of NCW discourse within and across national public spheres, as well as its potential for producing transnational alliances and cleavages.

A further avenue concerns the declining salience of the NCW analogy since 2014, as shown in our quantitative results and signaled in our paper’s subtitle. Consistent with our emphasis on period effects, we believe it most likely reflects the subsequent emergence of events, such as the refugee crisis and terror attacks in the Mideast, Europe, and North America, among many others, that compete with the Ukraine conflict for public attention.\(^10\) We suspect nonetheless that the debates over the NCW thesis have not permanently vanished. In the next few years, intervention by Russia and by Western actors in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or elsewhere may hold the potential to rekindle debates like those we have discussed.

\(^{10}\) The unusually congenial relationship between US President Donald Trump and President Putin, despite ongoing investigations of suspected attempts by Russia to influence the 2016 Presidential election, likely plays a role as well.
Equally fascinating, meanwhile, is the degree to which all of the many previous “new Cold Wars” have been forgotten. As we saw, the NCW is a trope, or genre of memory (Olick 2007) with a long history, one that begins long before what we now think of as the end of the Cold War proper. Yet, it is a memory genre without genre memory (Olick 2007). Previous declarations of a “new Cold War” seem to have little direct or conscious influence on the arguments of today’s NCW purveyors or their critics. This suggests that the deployment of historical analogies tends to remain firmly wedged in the narrow window of the present. When new troubling events come along, observers tap their generational memories for salient parallels from the past, but not necessarily for prior uses of the same analogy.

Given the perishability of generational memory, however, it is conceivable that, over the longer term, the resonance of the NCW analogy will decline through cohort replacement. In the Gallup poll mentioned above, agreement that “the United States and Russia are headed back toward a Cold War” increased monotonically according to the age of the respondents (Rifkin 2014), suggesting that NCW is more likely to resonate among those old enough to personally remember the Cold War and its formal conclusion than among those born later.

In general, we expect that the perceived relevance of a particular historical analogy for interpreting new events will tend to decline as the period which serves as a reference model recedes into the past, and younger cohorts no longer remember it. Alternatively, it is also possible that cultural memories of the period will continue to be reproduced, or even revived, through the memory work of public actors. If so, then analogies to the Cold War could maintain or reacquire relevance in the future. Whether their consequences prove to be double-edged would then depend, in turn, on the degree to which the analogies are harnessed to narratives that have been constructed according to reciprocally opposing views, or alternatively, in a way that recognizes and contextualizes the diversity of experiences and perspectives.

If the former scenario were to re-emerge, our analysis in this paper suggests that divisions along the second axis—that generated by the reciprocal deployment of the same analogy by proponents who adopt opposing standpoints—will possess the greater potential to propel conflict beyond the realm of purely discursive disputes. In contrast, a preponderance of critics relative to proponents along the first axis may serve as a brake against escalation. In the present case, peculiarities of the reference
period may be placing further checks on the NCW’s explosive potential. One signal feature of the Cold War was precisely the recognition on both sides of the existential stakes involved. It is, in part, for this reason that analogic comparisons to this period are nearly always accompanied by calls for restraint, even if the concessions envisioned fall disproportionately on one party or another, depending upon the observer’s viewpoint. Agitators who instead wish to galvanize support for armed conflict by likening contemporary rivals to mortal enemies from the past may find that other reference periods are better suited to the purpose—in particular, those which recall a period of virtually unrestrained military mobilization.

References


Divided Memory and the “New Cold War” Thesis


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