

Unveiling the unconscious.

New approaches to the explanation of Russian foreign policy behaviour vis-à-vis the West.

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The paper proposes a new approach to the explanation of Russian foreign policy vis-à-vis the West, inspired by social and individual psychology. Western politicians have been confronted with a multifaceted and sometimes inconsistent Russian foreign policy behaviour throughout the whole post-Soviet period, the characteristic pattern of which is the (re)emergence of situational changes and shifts of positions on the part of Russian foreign policy-makers leading to conflicts in the relationship with the West. Such costly behaviour cannot always and necessarily be explained by 'rationally' well-calculated, strategic foreign policy decision-making. Rather, it seems to point to a human decision-making logic that lies beyond the traditional 'rationality' paradigm and draws our attention to theoretical approaches that are built around the notion of subjectivity and emotionality. New insights from individual and social psychology seem particularly fruitful for unravelling such 'un-rational' logics, their interplay with rational processing and discursive justification and their influence on international relations. It is argued here that once we make the 'un-rational' logic in Russian foreign policy behaviour visible, unveil the 'unconscious', we can better understand as well as positively influence the interaction dynamics in the overall Western-Russian relationship.

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