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Geopolitics of Ukraine – Russia Conflict

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Abtract

The attack on Ukraine by Russia on February 25, 2022 is potentially the onset of war in Europe on top of Russia's behest for an end to NATO's eastward expansion. The launch of the major invasion by Russia on Ukraine, that started with air and missile assaults on Ukrainian military targets before sending troops and tanks across the country's northern, eastern, and southern borders. On many fronts, the Ukrainian military fought back. The escalation in a years-long conflict between the nations has now triggered the greatest security crisis in Europe since the Cold War. Russia's attack on the country has also sparked an intense showdown between Western powers and Moscow.

Keywords: Euro-Atlantic, European Security, Cold War, Geopolitics

Introduction

If one item dominates the European security agenda, it is the Ukraine crisis. Though it has varied in intensity, there is still no end in sight to the process that started in late 2013. Policy analysts and scholars of international relations have all focused their attention on this situation. However, both face problems. Policy analysts are unable to draw long-term conclusions from current events as they are blinded by their daily, if not hourly, flow. Scholars of international relations superimpose, for the sake of consistency, theoretical frameworks that explain certain developments and processes, disregarding those that do not fit their paradigms. Then, in order to retain their explanatory power, they make concessions to other schools of thought that in turn reduce the consistency of their theories. In attempting to contribute to these exchanges and analyse what is of lasting relevance, I have to accept the constraints of my research. Yet while my analysis must rest on a certain world view, I seek to avoid being taken hostage by one school of thinking on international relations or another.

The task is difficult and closest to that of an investigative historian seeking not to analyse the past but to make projections of the future. What is the relationship between regional (European or Euro-Atlantic) developments and global ones? What bearing will the current crisis have on European security in a few years time? Will it reshape our thinking about various aspects of international security? Will we conclude that this was a turning point of history – the end of the post-Cold War era? Or will it appear as merely a little hiccough, after which we will return to

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"business as usual"? Will it result in a reshuffle of the roles of European and Euro-Atlantic institutions? Will it contribute to a rearrangement that unleashes unpredictable processes for the two countries directly affected, Russia and Ukraine? Last but not least, is what we may learn from the crisis fundamentally new?

The legacy of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union is one of the crucial factors for an understanding and an explanation of current affairs in the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for Ukraine and for Russian–Ukrainian relations. Russia regards Ukraine as a part of its own strategic orbit, while many Ukrainians want to liberate themselves from the Russian hegemony and advocate a closer cooperation with the European Union. This controversy culminated in late 2013, when Russian pressure led to a re-orientation of Ukrainian policy and a rapprochement with Russia. Russian–Ukrainian relationship was and is still characterized by an obvious asymmetry, a hegemony of Russia over Ukraine. Russia uses the Orthodox Church and the traditional dominance of the Russian language as instruments for its policy. Not only Russian historians, but also politicians and even the Russian President try to impose the imperial narrative on Ukraine. They are supported by a significant part of Ukrainians, who adhere to the ideal of a common Russia-led Orthodox East Slavic world. Other Ukrainian historians and politicians use the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian historical narrative with its national myths of liberty and of Ukraine's closeness to Europe in their struggle against the Russian hegemony. The on-going "War of memories" is of special interest. Both sides use and abuse history as a political weapon, and the controversies about the heritage of Kievan Rus', the interpretation of Mazepa, the Holodomor and WW II are not only academic, but also political issues. They reflect the struggle over the geopolitical and cultural orientation of Ukraine which is of crucial importance for the future development of the post-Soviet space and of Eastern Europe.

Background:

When analysing the Ukraine crisis, it is necessary to start with some facts and a short history of Ukraine. Ukraine is a large country with an official area of more than 600 thousand square kilometres and a fast declining population of currently between 42.5 and 44.5 million people, depending upon whether the population of Crimea is counted. Ukraine was in the south-west of the Soviet Union and now lies between three other former Soviet republics (Belarus, Moldova, and Russia) and four members of the European Union and NATO (Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia). Those seven states are Ukraine's land neighbours. Consequently, if we are ready to accept that the two groups of states are organized along different principles, Ukraine lies between two worlds. Ukraine, or, more accurately, a large part of current Ukraine, spent 337

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years as part of the Russian empire and then the Soviet Union. In fact, the borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) only became identical with those of independent Ukraine (as of 1 January 2014) in 1954, when Crimea became part of the Ukrainian SSR. Yet however much one might be tempted to conclude that there is a shared Ukrainian identity on the basis of this shared history, it is clear that people in different parts of the country think differently and are exposed to different media influences. Nor will the current high-intensity operation in the south-east of the country contribute to greater unity. (Gerhard Simon, 2014). A division between Kyiv and Moscow is also gradually emerging within the Orthodox Church.

Ukraine's economic and political performance since independence has not been particularly convincing. When independence was declared in August 1991, and confirmed in the referendum of 1 December 1991 with more than 92 per cent of the vote, Kyiv had only rudimentary experience in managing state affairs. In this regard it was in a similar situation to most other former Soviet republics, except for the Russian Federation, which had inherited the Soviet state apparatus. Hence, in the early years, Ukraine could attribute many of its problems to insufficient experience. However, the management of the state has never been more than partially successful. Ukraine went through various ups and downs. Phases of high hopes were followed by disillusionment, only to be followed by high hopes once again. Rein Muellerson has summed up the challenges Ukraine has faced: "Ukraine was on the edge of becoming a failed state even before it finally exploded [...]" (Rein Muellerson, 2014)

However, a few things have remained constant. (1) Ukraine's population has been in constant decline. Since independence, it has fallen from 52 million to 44.5 million (42.5 million excluding Crimea). There is no change in sight to this trend. The humanitarian crisis in south-east Ukraine is likely to contribute to further population decline due to the resettlement of many to the Russian Federation even if Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts do not secede. (2) Ukraine's total GDP is 337.4 billion US dollars while Russia's is 2,553 billion, making them the 42nd and 7th largest economies in the world, respectively, as of 2013.(CIA World Factbook) Ukraine does not generate high per capita GDP. In 2013, GDP was 7,400 US dollars per head (while in neighbouring Russia it was 18,100). (4) Ukraine is a corrupt state. In 2013, it ranked joint 144th (of 175) on Transparency International's corruption perception index (while Russia, which is also highly corrupt, was ranked joint 127th). (5) The political establishment is closely linked with oligarchic structures, whose interests also massively shape political decisions. Whether there is a general tendency towards deterioration as has been suggested ("all-pervading corruption […] has constantly increased from President to President, from administration to administration") or this is an exaggeration is open to question. What we can conclude for certain is that the situation has definitely not got better, and Ukraine's governments have

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betrayed the hopes of its people twice in the first decade of the 21st century: once just after the Orange revolution and then again during the final years of the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych.

Ukraine and Russia share hundreds of years of cultural, linguistic and familial links. For many in Russia and in the ethnically Russian parts of Ukraine, the shared heritage of the countries is an emotional issue that has been exploited for electoral and military purposes. As part of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second-most powerful Soviet republic after Russia, and was crucial strategically, economically and culturally.

The weakness of the Ukrainian state caught between two political systems has presented a challenge. This partly stems from the country's geographical position and partly from its geostrategic importance. As mentioned, Ukraine is a large state. It has the second largest population and the third largest territory in the former Soviet area. In addition, Ukraine is at the western edge of the former Soviet space that connects and separates Russia from the West. Ukraine is important as both a bridge and a divide. As Zbigniew Brzezinski concluded in 1997: "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. [...] However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its 52 million people and major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state [...]" (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 1997) Irrespective of whether one agrees with Brzezinski's point, it is important to note that Ukraine is of special importance for the Russian Federation. Russia's influence over Ukraine has been crucial to its sense of leadership in the former Soviet area. Whenever Russia has felt that Ukraine is not under Moscow's control, it has acted upon the matter. This was the case when Moscow directly interfered with the Ukrainian presidential elections in 2004, and also in 2014, when President Yanukovych, who had been ready to tilt towards Moscow again in the autumn of 2013, fell from power. These were the two cases when Russia's reaction was most visible, but there were many other instances in which Moscow acted more subtly.

Moscow has had difficult, testy relations with Ukraine ever since the two countries split off from the Soviet Union in 1991. The relationship with Kyiv is a sub-set of Russia's problematic relationship with the outside world at large following the Soviet collapse. In 2014 Ukraine became the touchstone of two decades of Russian frustration and insecurity, with tragic consequences. First Mikhail Gorbachev and then Boris Yeltsin wanted to be treated as an equal partner by the United States. However, the Soviet collapse meant that Russia was stripped of half its population, a third of its territory, and all its bloc of ideological allies and client states. In the 1990s, the loss of superpower status combined with economic collapse and an ideological vacuum to create a profound identity crisis in Russia. Yeltsin was humiliated by his

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dependence on loans from the West, and by NATO's decision to expand the alliance to include former Warsaw Pact countries. The bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO forces in 1999, in a bid to stop human rights violations in Kosovo, was a turning point. It underlined the geopolitical marginalization of Russia, unable to protect Serbia, its traditional ally.

In the 2000s, on the foundation of a growing economy (thanks to rising world oil prices) Vladimir Putin forged a new Russian identity – that of a great power, able to stand up to the depredations of the U.S., the world's "sole superpower." The idea of Russia as a great power was something which resonated strongly with the Russian public, and which of course had deep roots in Soviet and Russian history. (Mankoff 2011; Trenin 2014) Ukraine was a litmus test of Russia's resurgence. With 46 million people, it was by far the largest of the states that had split away from Moscow's control in 1991, and it was strategically located between Russia and the West. Zbigniew Brzezinski famously argued that "without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire." (Brzezinski 1997, 46)

Ukraine's new leaders were keen to build a sovereign, independent country – even those who were Russian speakers and came from eastern Ukraine, such as Leonid Kuchma, president from 1994-2005. Ukraine joined the Commonwealth of Independent States, the loose association of 11 former Soviet states, but was wary of any closer military or political alliance with Russia.

Ukrainians complained that Russia never fully accepted their existence as a sovereign nation. Putin himself reportedly told President George W. Bush in 2008 that Ukraine "is not even a country." (Bohm, 2013) Ukrainians resented the policies of the Soviet era which were aimed at suppressing Ukrainian culture – above all the 1932 famine (the Holodomor) that followed Stalin's collectivization drive. Traditionally, Russians treated Ukrainians as a "younger brother," with a language and culture that were rooted in the countryside, and that were but a pale shadow of Russian civilization. Russia also objected to Kyiv's efforts to persuade the country's Russian-speakers, who amount to half the population, to adopt the Ukrainian language, and its refusal to legally protect the rights of Russian-speakers.

On the other hand, the two countries continued to maintain close economic ties. Russia remained Ukraine's largest trading partner, and much of Ukraine's export industry (focused on steel and chemicals) was based on the supply of cheap energy (principally gas) from Russia. (Balmaceda 2013) Russia in turn was dependent on Ukraine for the transit of half its natural gas exports to Europe, and Russia's defense industry relied on some crucial components from Ukrainian factories (such as the engines for ballistic missiles).

In the 1990s, Russia and Ukraine established a modus vivendi of sorts. Under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, brokered by the U.S., Russia recognized Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity – in return for which Kyiv gave up any claim to the former Soviet nuclear

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weapons which were still located on Ukrainian territory. In 1997 Kyiv gave Russia a 20 year lease on the Sevastopol naval base on the Crimea, home of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. In the mid-1990s Russian nationalists agitated for the return to Russia of Crimea, which had been given to Ukraine in 1954 to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine's unification with Russia. However, Yeltsin refused to give any support to this campaign, and it fizzled out.

Russia found itself bogged down in testy horse-trading with Ukrainian leaders over the course of the next two decades. Whether the leaders of Ukraine were "pro-Russian," such as Presidents Kuchma or Viktor Yanukovich, or "pro-Western," such as President Viktor Yushchenko or Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, the issues remained the same – above all, hard bargaining over the price Ukraine paid for Russian gas.

The fragile equilibrium between Moscow and Kyiv was threatened by the 2004 Orange Revolution, which saw the electoral defeat of Viktor Yanukovich – Kuchma's chosen successor and Russia's favorite candidate – at the hands of his West Ukrainian rival, Viktor Yushchenko. A wave of "color revolutions" in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) saw authoritarian leaders toppled by popular protests demanding fair elections. Putin saw this as an orchestrated campaign by the West to spread democracy – and pro-Western governments – into the post-soviet space. He took decisive steps to prevent this phenomenon from reaching Moscow, tightening restrictions on the opposition while creating pro-Kremlin popular movements.

The color revolutions came against the backdrop of the eastern enlargement of the two key Western regional organizations – the European Union and NATO. Putin became convinced that Russia was subject to a deliberate strategy of encirclement and containment by the U.S.

Russia's relations with the U.S. deteriorated after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which Putin bitterly opposed. Putin was further angered by the Western recognition of the independence of Kosovo in February 2008. Things came to a head in August 2008 when Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili sent his forces into the breakaway region of South Ossetia, killing several Russian peacekeepers in the process. Russia responded with a full-scale invasion, driving back the Georgian forces and going on to grant recognition to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In retrospect, we can see Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 as setting a precedent for what would happen in Crimea in 2014: Moscow used military force to change internationally-recognized borders.

In 2009 the newly-elected President Barack Obama tried to revive the partnership with Russia's new president, Dmitry Medvedev, launching a "reset" of relations with Moscow. This produced some positive results – a New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty was signed in 2010 and the U.S. started using the Northern Distribution Network across Russia to ferry troops and

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equipment into Afghanistan. However, relations deteriorated once more in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring, which Russia saw as yet another example of America's aggressive democracy promotion. Moscow was angered by the toppling of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya following NATO air strikes, and in 2012 vetoed proposed UN action to halt the Syrian civil war. In September 2013 Russia scored a diplomatic coup by persuading President Bashar Assad to decommission Syria's chemical weapons, allowing Obama to step back from his threat to attack Syria if chemical attacks continued. This showed that Russia and the U.S. could still cooperate where areas of common interest were found.

Cause of Conflict:

- **Balance of Power:** Ever since Ukraine split from the Soviet Union, both Russia and the West have vied for greater influence in the country in order to keep the balance of power in the region in their favour.
- **Buffer Zone for Western Countries:** For the US and the European Union, Ukraine is a crucial buffer between Russia and the West. As tensions with Russia rise, the US and the EU are increasingly determined to keep Ukraine away from Russian control.
- **Russian Interest in Black Sea:** The unique geography of the Black Sea region confers several geopolitical advantages to Russia. Firstly, it is an important crossroads and strategic intersection for the entire region. Access to the Black Sea is vital for all littoral and neighboring states, and greatly enhances the projection of power into several adjacent regions. Secondly, the region is an important transit corridor for goods and energy.

Protests in Ukraine:

- **Euromaidan Movement:** Euromaidan (European Square) was a wave of demonstrations and civil unrest in Ukraine, which began in November 2013 with public protests in Maidan Nezalezhnosti ("Independence Square") in Kyiv, Ukraine. The protests were sparked by the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an association agreement with the European Union, instead choosing closer ties to Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union.
- **Separatist Movement:** The Donbass region (the Donetsk and Luhansk regions) of eastern Ukraine has been facing a pro-Russian separatist movement since 2014. According to the Ukrainian government, the movement is actively supported by the Russian government and Russian paramilitaries make up between 15% to 80% of the separatists fighting against the Ukraine government.

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- **Invasion of Crimea:** Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine in what was the first time a European country annexed territory from another country since World War-2. The annexation of Crimea from Ukraine followed a Russian military intervention in Crimea that took place in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and was part of wider unrest across southern and eastern Ukraine. The invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea have given Russia a maritime upperhand in the region.
- **Ukraine's NATO Membership:** Ukraine has urged the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to speed up his country's membership in the alliance. Russia has declared such a move a "red line", and worried about the consequences of the US-led military alliances expanding right up to its doorstep. The Black Sea is bordered by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine. All these countries are NATO countries. Due to this faceoff between NATO countries and Russia, the Black Sea is a region of strategic importance & a potential maritime flashpoint.

US-Russia Relation in the Ukrainian Crisis in the 21st century: New Cold War?

A New Cold War? Up to May or June of 2014, experts still widely held the view that the deterioration of relations between the Russian Federation and the West did not resemble the Cold War. If the Cold War is defined as the opposition between two mutually exclusive and antagonistic models in socio-political, economic, and ideological terms, there is no reason to contemplate its reappearance. However, if we start out from a more permissive definition of the Cold War or the "Cold War structure", then it may be argued that there are similarities. A Russian specialist has already referred to this by stating: "We have entered a new cold war. However, this one will be more unpredictable than the previous bipolar one. The matter is not about Ukraine. Ukraine has only been a symptom. I do not have trust in managed chaos."[1] Officials are more cautious. Speaking to the UN General Assembly, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier only spoke of "old ghosts and […] new demons"[2], but his message was clear: The threat of "old ghosts" is very much present in our time. A similar though less

[1] Vladimir Orlov, Kak sobesednik na PIRy [In conversation about the PIR Center] in: Indeks Bezopasnosti, No. 110, Autumn 2014, p. 172, at: http://www.pircenter.org/media/ content/files/12/14115643880.pdf

[2] Federal Foreign Office, Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly, 27 September 2014, at: http://www. auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2014/140927_69_General_Assembly_ UN.html.

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coded message was delivered by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg who said: "NATO does not seek confrontation with Russia […] nobody wants a new Cold War".[3]

However, experts in Russian affairs remain divided. Although there has been a consensus that there is no Cold War in the sense of the one that existed between 1948 and 1989 or 1991, a different kind of Cold War could well be possible. Mark Kramer emphasizes three major differences: the absence of an alternative ideology, the incomparably weaker military might of the Russian Federation vis-à-vis that of the Soviet Union, and the nature of Russian society: Whereas the Soviet Union was a closed society, the Russian Federation is not. Strobe Talbott is of the view that this "Cold War" centres around "Great Russian chauvinism". Now, as during the Cold War, Russia exercises "tough oversight" over its (then the Soviet Union's) neighbours, though Fedor Lukyanov has identified important differences, namely in the fact that this oversight is not based on deterrence and is not global in ambition. Nevertheless, he concludes that, in bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and the West, a new Cold War is there.[4]

The two systems are different, first and foremost, in terms of their political systems. One is liberal, the other is not. One places the individual and his or her rights at the centre of policy-making, the other does not. One has the rule of law, the other on the whole does not. When illiberal regimes do have certain elements of the rule of law, they are either there to pay lip service to the expectations of the world at large or in order to position themselves in the world economy (by attracting foreign investment and providing conditions for international trade). And even though the liberal state is also compelled to interfere in the life of the individual – partly in order to provide for the state's own security and survival and partly to provide for the services the population expects – the foundations of such interference are very different. The conception of the state's role in illiberal/authoritarian/dictatorial systems is increasingly an etatism that allows those regimes to control the society and thus prolong their power. However, what it boils down is not only a set of principles but also good governance, including relatively low (or at least declining) levels of corruption. Declarations of democracy cannot compensate for massive shortcomings in governance. Hence for many, including Ukrainians, democracy demonstrates its superiority in daily life.

However, there is one major difference between the current situation and the Cold War rivalry, at least for the time being. The alternative system exists, but its ideology is not seeking to expand, or not yet.

[3] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO: a unique Alliance with a clear course. Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, 28 October 2014, at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_114179.htm.

[4] Cf. Chevo khochet Putin? Eksperty iz Rossii, SShA i Evropy otvechayut na voprosy The New Times [What Does Putin Want? Experts from Russia, the USA and Europe Answer Questions from The New Times], in: The New Times, 10 November 2014, at: http://www. newtimes.ru/articles/detail/89422.

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This may well be due to a realistic assessment of international power relations and the inferior "appeal" of such regimes. This may result in an inferiority complex and hence aggressive international behaviour. The liberal model, though not victorious, is certainly predominant, though some have argued that the liberal order is not suitable for the tasks states face in our era. Hence, even if it is not propagated, the "illiberal" model[5] (with its many variations) presents itself as an option. China in particular (but also a few other states, such as Turkey and Vietnam) appears to provide a viable alternative: It offers the combination of high economic growth and authoritarian politics. It is undeniable that this has some appeal among rulers that would like to perpetuate their hold on power. Russia may well belong to this group. However, its economic growth, unlike China's, is based on low-value-added production and exports.

In sum: Even if it is not a comprehensive alternative and tends not to actively seek to expand its influence, there is an emerging alternative organization of society that may find it difficult to coexist with a different system in the long run. Hence, it is not the absence of the alternative model but its non-expansionistic nature that gives us the impression that the current coexistence will not result in a Cold War-like relationship. It may instead result in a peaceful enduring rivalry.

Another difference to the Cold War is that military power and the use of force are not central to the current confrontational relationship. This may be due to various factors, including the obvious superiority of one party in the contest, a desire to avoid the nuclear brinkmanship that brought mankind to the edge of annihilation at least once during the Cold War, the fact that other fields provide more accommodating means for the rivalry to play out, and, last but not least, the fact that states tend to rely on their comparative advantage. Although the Russian Federation is implementing an ambitious military modernization programme, Moscow is well aware that armed forces are not the key in this conflict with other power centres of the world. However, Moscow has been sharpening its comparative edge with respect to other states of the former Soviet Union, including Ukraine.

There is one additional reason why the Cold War parallel may be tempting to draw. Many leading politicians of our time were raised during the Cold War. The Cold War is a common point of reference, and it may be tempting to use Cold War parallels. This is even more tempting when there are certain similarities. Hence, the two factors taken together, the fact that the Cold War is not too distant in history and that actors increasingly use it as a reference point for the interpretation of their actions, may result in a perception of a "Cold War-ish" situation.[6]

[5] See Fareed Zakaria, The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad, New York 2007 (revised edition).

[6] It is not surprising that an influential Russian commentator has already referred to the Cold War parallel, while many Western analysts emphasize major differences between now and the Cold War era. See Aleksandr Prokhanov, Zdravstvui, kholodnaya voina! [Hello, Cold War!], in: Zavtra, 7 August 2014, at: http://www.zavtra.ru/content/view/ zdravstvuj-holodnaya-vojna.

Where views differ fundamentally between Russian and Western assessments of the current conflict is over the reasons for the current situation. As the Russians like to say: "Kto vinovat?" – "Who is to blame?" Russia sees a world where some (above all the US-led West and NATO) constantly violate the interests of others. The Russian President expressed this in his address to the Valdai Club: "A unilateral diktat and imposing one's own models […] instead of settling conflicts […] leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos."[7] Russia's foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, echoed this view, calling attention to the fact that the "policy of ultimatums and philosophy of supremacy and domination do not meet the requirements of the 21st century and run counter to the objective process of development for a polycentric and democratic world order".[8] Russia also questions the sound judgment of the West. The title of a further speech by Lavrov makes this clear: "It is time for our western partners to concede they have no monopoly on truth".[9] For the Russian Federation, therefore, Ukraine is a battlefield but not the rivalry proper. The true rivalry concerns the orientation of countries in various parts of the world, but particularly states in Russia's vicinity, including states that were part of the Soviet Union. Russia finds further loss of influence unacceptable and is doing its utmost to stop it. Moscow is – possibly rightly – afraid that further loss of influence could, in the long term, threaten Russia's status in the international system. Tough rhetoric followed by, if necessary, tough actions may help Russia to compensate for its weaknesses in global processes.

Creating A Crisis

Imagine the American outrage if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico. The West's triple package of policies -- NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and democracy promotion -- added fuel to a fire waiting to ignite. The spark came in November 2013, when Yanukovych rejected a major economic deal he had been negotiating with the EU and decided to accept a $15 billion Russian counteroffer instead. That decision gave rise to antigovernment demonstrations that escalated over the following three months and that by mid-February had led to the deaths of some one hundred protesters. Western emissaries hurriedly flew to Kiev to resolve the crisis. On February 21, the government and the opposition struck a deal that allowed Yanukovych to stay in power until new elections were held. But it immediately fell apart, and Yanukovych fled to Russia the next day. The new government in

[7] Vladimir Putin Meets with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club. Transcript of the Final Plenary Session, 25 October 2014, at: http://valdaiclub.com/valdai_club/73300/ print_edition.

[8] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Address by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2014, at: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/CDEA7854FF002B5A44257D62004F7236

[9] Sergey Lavrov, It Is Time for Our Western Partners to Concede that They Have no Monopoly on Truth, Speech at the First Forum of Young Diplomats, Moscow, 25 April 2014, in: International Affairs, 4/2014, at: www.eastviewpress.com/Files/IA_FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTER_No. 4 2014.pdf.

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Kiev was pro-Western and anti-Russian to the core, and it contained four high-ranking members who could legitimately be labeled neo-fascists.

Although the full extent of U.S. involvement has not yet come to light, it is clear that Washington backed the coup. Nuland and Republican Senator John McCain participated in antigovernment demonstrations, and Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, proclaimed after Yanukovych's toppling that it was "a day for the history books." As a leaked telephone recording revealed, Nuland had advocated regime change and wanted the Ukrainian politician Arseniy Yatsenyuk to become prime minister in the new government, which he did. No wonder Russians of all persuasions think the West played a role in Yanukovych's ouster.

The armed conflict in Ukraine first erupted in early 2014 and quickly transitioned to a long stalemate, with regular shelling and skirmishes occurring along the front line that separates Russian- and Ukrainian-controlled border regions in the east. Since Russia launched a full-scale military invasion into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, fighting has caused over one hundred civilian casualties and pushed tens of thousands of Ukrainians to flee to neighboring countries—including Poland, a NATO country where U.S. troops are preparing to offer assistance.

In October 2021, Russia began moving troops and military equipment near its border with Ukraine, reigniting concerns over a potential invasion. Commercial satellite imagery, social media posts, and publicly released intelligence from November and December 2021 showed armor, missiles, and other heavy weaponry moving toward Ukraine with no official explanation. By December, more than one hundred thousand Russian troops were in place near the Russia-Ukraine border and U.S. intelligence officials warned that Russia may be planning an invasion for early 2022.In mid-December 2021, Russia's foreign ministry issued a set of demands calling for the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to cease any military activity in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, to commit against further NATO expansion toward Russia, and to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO in the future. The United States and other NATO allies rejected these demands and warned Russia they would impose severe economic sanctions if Russia invaded Ukraine. The United States sent additional military assistance to Ukraine, including ammunition, small arms, and other defensive weaponry.

In early February 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden ordered around three thousand U.S. troops to deploy to Poland and Romania—NATO countries that border Ukraine—to counter Russian troops stationed near its border with Ukraine and reassure NATO allies. Satellite

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imagery showed the largest deployment of Russian troops to its border with Belarus since the end of the Cold War. Negotiations between the United States, Russia, and European powers—including France and Germany—did not result in a resolution. While Russia released a statement claiming to draw down a certain number of troops, reports emerged of an increasing Russian troop presence at the border with Ukraine.

In late February 2022, the United States warned that Russia intended to invade Ukraine, citing Russia's growing military presence at the Russia-Ukraine border. Russian President Vladimir Putin then ordered troops to Luhansk and Donetsk, separatist regions in Eastern Ukraine partly controlled by Russian-backed separatists, claiming the troops served a "peacekeeping" function. The United States responded by imposing sanctions on the Luhansk and Donetsk regions and the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline a few days later. On February 24, during a United Nations Security Council meeting to dissuade Russia from attacking Ukraine, Putin announced the beginning of a full-scale land, sea, and air invasion of Ukraine targeting Ukrainian military assets and cities across the country. Biden declared this attack "unprovoked and unjustified" and has since issued severe sanctions in coordination with European allies targeting four of Russia's largest banks, its oil and gas industry, and U.S. technology exports to the country. The United Nations, G7, EU, and other countries continue to condemn Russian actions and vow to respond.

The US position

In the 1990s, the Clinton administration treated Russia as an emerging democracy, a friend and partner of the United States. Yeltsin was offered economic assistance to help with the painful transition to a market economy, and in 1998 Russia joined the G7 group of advanced industrial nations (which became the G8). However, Washington saw a security vacuum opening up in Eastern Europe in the wake of the Soviet collapse. It seemed logical to plug the gap by offering membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization – a defensive alliance – to the newly-democratic Central and East European countries that were eager to join. The victory of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's nationalist party in the 1993 State Duma election was a wake-up call that Russia could "go bad" and return to its imperialist ways. As early as 1994 President Clinton publicly supported the idea of expanding NATO membership. In order to join the alliance, applicants had to be democracies and willing to put their forces under NATO command (which meant learning English, buying compatible weapon systems, accepting NATO bases on their territory, and so on). In return, under Article V of the NATO charter the alliance pledged to come to the defense of any member state that was attacked. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, and seven other countries (Estonia,

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Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia) entered in 2004. Croatia and Albania also joined in 2009.

Russia objected to NATO expansion, pointing out that Soviet-led Warsaw Pact alliance had dissolved in 1991. NATO expansion meant that Russia was still seen as a potential enemy – although Western leaders insisted that this was not the case. Some steps were taken to create a special relationship between NATO and Russia. In 1997 the NATO-Russia Founding Act created a Permanent Joint Council in Brussels, and in 2002 the Rome summit created the NATO-Russia Council.

President George W. Bush was keen to enlarge NATO further east as part of his post-9/11 "Freedom" agenda. However, at the April 2008 Bucharest summit NATO's European members blocked Bush's plan to offer Ukraine and Georgia a membership action plan. (Stent 2014, 165-74).In consolation, they were told that the door was still open to NATO membership in the future – which redoubled Russia's determination to prevent such a development.

After the 1994 Budapest Memorandum that led to the denuclearization of Ukraine, U.S. policy towards Ukraine was mostly subordinate to U.S. policy towards Russia. Ukraine's transition to democracy and a market economy suffered from the same ills as neighboring Russia: the rise of a wealthy oligarch class who stifled competition, while colluding with a deeply corrupt political elite. There was a surge of optimism after the Orange Revolution in 2004, but that soon dissipated as the Yushchenko administration fell prey to the same kind of corruption and infighting that had dogged its predecessor.

The European Union position

The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe caught the European Union – and everyone else – by surprise. The EU itself was in the process of introducing of deepening social and economic integration, under the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which renamed the European Community the European Union. The 1995 Schengen agreement saw the abolition of border controls between participating countries, and a common currency, the Euro, was introduced in 1999.

In 1998 Brussels began accession talks with Central and East European applicant countries. Applicants had to be functioning democracies ("Copenhagen criteria") and harmonize their domestic legislation with the body of EU law (1,500 pages of the acquis communautaire). These conditions were more stringent than those for NATO membership: as a result Central-East Europeans started joining NATO five to ten years before they joined the EU. The decision to enlarge the EU was controversial. The living standard in the former communist countries was less than half that of the EU, and massive investment would be needed to bring their infrastructure up to EU levels. Existing EU members feared an influx of cheap labor from the new states, and that all the regional development funds would be diverted to the east.

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Nevertheless, a political consensus for enlargement did emerge. Germany pushed for enlargement as a way to stabilize its relationship with neighboring Poland – which accounted for 40 million of the 76 million citizens in the new states. Britain and Denmark supported enlargement as an alternative to "deepening" EU integration, figuring that it would be harder to agree on the creation of stronger federal institutions if there were 28 members instead of 15.

In 2004 10 new members joined the EU: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus. Romania and Bulgaria followed in 2007, and Croatia in 2013. Enlargement did contribute to a delay in deepening. A new draft EU constitution, introducing qualified majority voting, was rejected by referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005. It was not until 2009 that a watered-down version, the Lisbon Treaty, came into effect. The EU's eastern enlargement was a major advance for the cause of democracy in Europe. However, it came at a price. One problem was what to do with the countries lying outside the expanded EU. While there is still hope that the remaining countries in the Balkans (Bosnia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) will eventually join the EU, it was hard to see Belarus, Moldova or Ukraine joining anytime soon. They were even poorer than the new wave of member states, and they were far from democratic. Belarus was ruled by Alyaksandr Lukashenka, "the last dictator in Europe"; while Moldova was riven by the secession of the Russian-speaking republic of Transdniestria. With 46 million inhabitants, Ukraine was too large and too politically unstable to be a serious candidate for EU entry in the foreseeable future, although some EU states, notably Poland, thought that an action plan for membership should be on the table.

In the meantime, in 2003 the EU launched a new European Neighborhood Policy to provide a framework for cooperation with countries that were not going to be put on the membership track. The policy included 10 countries of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean (the "Southern Neighborhood") in addition to the Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The relationship with the post-soviet states was formalized as the "Eastern Partnership" at a summit in Prague in May 2009. (Korosteleva 2012; Korosteleva 2013)

Russia was invited to join, but declined, preferring to keep its more privileged bilateral relationship with Brussels. The EU signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia in 1994, followed up with an agreement on four "Common Spaces" in 2003. Since 1997 Russian and EU leaders have held biannual summits (suspended since January 2014). The carrot offered to the Eastern partners was "association status," which carries some of the benefits of membership such as the lowering of trade barriers and possibly the lifting of visa requirements. The granting of such benefits was conditional on partner countries respecting democratic values and the rule of law, and bringing their policies into line with EU procedures.

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With the Schengen visa-free zone challenged by a flood of refugees from North Africa, Brussels urgently needed to maintain secure borders to the east. Visa waivers would be offered in return for cooperation in tighter border controls and agreement on the return of refugees to the country from which they entered the EU.

In 2011 Brussels re-launched the European Neighborhood Policy, tying aid to benchmarks in economic and political reform — that is, more money for more reform and, presumably, less money for less reform. (European Union 2011) The EU spent 7 billion euros ($10 billion) on the ENP for 2011-13, but twothirds of the money went to the Mediterranean countries. Optimists argued that association status would stimulate states to improve their domestic governance. Cynics saw it as an empty gesture that had no real political or financial commitment from Brussels. One crucial factor that was largely ignored was Moscow's determination to disrupt and prevent the efforts of its neighbors to reach association agreement status with the EU. While the EU insisted that its Eastern partnership policy was just about establishing good relations with neighboring states, Russia viewed it through a geopolitical lens. (Gretsky 2014) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov complained that "What is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence?" (Pop 2009)

The Diagnosis

Putin's actions should be easy to comprehend. A huge expanse of flat land that Napoleonic France, imperial Germany, and Nazi Germany all crossed to strike at Russia itself, Ukraine serves as a buffer state of enormous strategic importance to Russia. No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance that was Moscow's mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine. Nor would any Russian leader stand idly by while the West helped install a government there that was determined to integrate Ukraine into the West.

Washington may not like Moscow's position, but it should understand the logic behind it. This is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory. After all, the United States does not tolerate distant great powers deploying military forces anywhere in the Western Hemisphere, much less on its borders. Imagine the outrage in Washington if China built an impressive military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico in it. Logic aside, Russian leaders have told their Western counterparts on many occasions that they consider NATO expansion into Georgia and Ukraine unacceptable, along with any effort to turn those countries against Russia -- a message that the 2008 Russian-Georgian war also made crystal clear.

Officials from the United States and its European allies contend that they tried hard to assuage Russian fears and that Moscow should understand that NATO has no designs on Russia. In addition to continually denying that its expansion was aimed at containing Russia, the alliance

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has never permanently deployed military forces in its new member states. In 2002, it even created a body called the NATO-Russia Council in an effort to foster cooperation. To further mollify Russia, the United States announced in 2009 that it would deploy its new missile defense system on warships in European waters, at least initially, rather than on Czech or Polish territory. But none of these measures worked; the Russians remained steadfastly opposed to NATO enlargement, especially into Georgia and Ukraine. And it is the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them.

To understand why the West, especially the United States, failed to understand that its Ukraine policy was laying the groundwork for a major clash with Russia, one must go back to the mid-1990s, when the Clinton administration began advocating NATO expansion. Pundits advanced a variety of arguments for and against enlargement, but there was no consensus on what to do. Most eastern European émigrés in the United States and their relatives, for example, strongly supported expansion, because they wanted NATO to protect such countries as Hungary and Poland. A few realists also favored the policy because they thought Russia still needed to be contained.

But most realists opposed expansion, in the belief that a declining great power with an aging population and a one-dimensional economy did not in fact need to be contained. And they feared that enlargement would only give Moscow an incentive to cause trouble in eastern Europe. The U.S. diplomat George Kennan articulated this perspective in a 1998 interview, shortly after the U.S. Senate approved the first round of NATO expansion. “I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies,” he said. “I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anyone else.”

The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine and instead aim to make it a neutral buffer. Most liberals, on the other hand, favored enlargement, including many key members of the Clinton administration. They believed that the end of the Cold War had fundamentally transformed international politics and that a new, post-national order had replaced the realist logic that used to govern Europe. The United States was not only the “indispensable nation,” as Secretary of State Madeleine Albright put it; it was also a benign hegemon and thus unlikely to be viewed as a threat in Moscow. The aim, in essence, was to make the entire continent look like western Europe.

And so the United States and its allies sought to promote democracy in the countries of eastern Europe, increase economic interdependence among them, and embed them in international institutions. Having won the debate in the United States, liberals had little difficulty convincing their European allies to support NATO enlargement. After all, given the EU’s past

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achievements, Europeans were even more wedded than Americans to the idea that geopolitics no longer mattered and that an all-inclusive liberal order could maintain peace in Europe.

So thoroughly did liberals come to dominate the discourse about European security during the first decade of this century that even as the alliance adopted an open-door policy of growth, NATO expansion faced little realist opposition. The liberal worldview is now accepted dogma among U.S. officials. In March, for example, President Barack Obama delivered a speech about Ukraine in which he talked repeatedly about "the ideals" that motivate Western policy and how those ideals "have often been threatened by an older, more traditional view of power." Secretary of State John Kerry's response to the Crimea crisis reflected this same perspective: "You just don't in the twenty-first century behave in nineteenth-century fashion by invading another country on completely trumped-up pretext."

In essence, the two sides have been operating with different playbooks: Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine.

Crisis in 2013

The EU began negotiations for a free trade and association agreement with Ukraine in 2008. However, after Yanukovich won election to the presidency in February 2010 he moved quickly to centralize political power and bring Ukraine back into Moscow's orbit. In April 2010 Medvedev and Yanukovich signed a deal to extend Russia's 1997 lease of the Sevastopol naval base for 25 years beyond 2017, in return for 30% cut in the natural gas price. In June 2010, the Ukrainian parliament voted to abandon NATO membership aspirations. In October 2010 the Constitutional Court overturned the limits on presidential power introduced in 2004. In November 2011 former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko was sentenced to seven years on spurious abuse of office charges (connected to the signing of the 2009 gas deal with Russia). In April 2013 the European Court of Human Rights declared Tymoshenko's sentence illegal. Yanukovich's actions left Brussels in a quandary. Some Europeans pushed for the introduction of sanctions on Ukrainian leaders and the suspension of talks on the creation of a free trade zone until Tymoshenko was released. Others argued that isolating Yanukovich would drive him further into the arms of the Kremlin. A similar tension between democratic principles and the logic of realpolitik dogged EU policy towards Belarus.

The EU's plan to open up the Ukrainian economy brought it into conflict with Putin's efforts to create a deeper economic union in the post-soviet space. This was a priority for Putin, who was determined to forestall the expansion of EU influence and the presumed democratization that would accompany it. In January 2010 Russia launched a Customs Union with Belarus and

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Kazakhstan, introducing tariff-free trade between the three countries. This was the precursor to the Eurasian Economic Union, to be launched in January 2015. In October and December 2013 Armenia and Kyrgyzstan agreed to join the Union. Putin hoped to persuade Ukraine to join the Union, but this would not be possible if Ukraine signed the free trade agreement with the EU.

The EU pressed ahead with its plans for Ukraine, despite misgivings over state of democracy and the rule of law there. The association and free trade agreements were initialed in Brussels in July 2012, and were due to be signed at a summit in Vilnius on 29 November 2013. However, European parliamentarians were insisting on Tymoshenko's release as a condition for final approval. In the course of the summer Putin increased the pressure on Ukraine – for example, in July Russia banned the imports of Ukrainian chocolates from the Roshen company (owned by the man who would later become Ukraine's president, Petro Poroshenko). On 21 November Yanukovych abruptly announced that he would not after all sign the association agreement in Vilnius, and the parliament rejected the EU's demand to release Tymoshenko. Yanukovych's refusal to sign the agreement triggered the Euromaidan protests, which spiraled out of control over the winter. It is unclear whether Yanukovych refused to sign the agreement because of the Tymoshenko issue, or because he was conducting a bidding war between Russia and the EU. EU Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle said Yanukovych had been asking for $27 billion in aid to sign the agreement. On 17 December Putin agreed to lend Ukraine $15 billion, and to cut the price of gas by a third (from $400 to $268 per 1,000 cubic meters). However, by then it was too late to prevent Yanukovych's loss of control of the situation on the streets.

International players (Russia, the EU and the U.S.) were heavily involved in the unfolding political conflict. Ironically, each accused the other of interference in Ukrainian affairs. The EU's Catherine Ashton and U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland encouraged Yanukovych and the protestors to reach a compromise, while Russia was pushing Yanukovych to hold firm. Russian propaganda portrayed Nuland as the architect of the protests, playing video of her giving out food on the Maidan square; boasting that the US had spent $5 billion on democracy promotion in Ukraine; and playing tapes of an intercepted 6 February phone conversation in which she discussed the composition of the future Ukrainian government. Putin advisor Sergei Glaz'ev opined that "the entire crisis in Ukraine was orchestrated, provoked, and financed by American institutions in cooperation with their European partners." (Simes 2014)

The collapse of the 21 February agreement in the face of insurgent demonstrators and the flight of Yanukovych was seen by Moscow as the point of no return. They assumed the new government would sign the association agreement with the EU, apply to join NATO, and revoke the agreement granting Russia the use of the Sevastopol base. Putin responded with force and vigor – annexing the Crimea and using surrogates to launch an insurrection in east

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and south Ukraine. Putin's decision to annex the Crimea on 16 March caught the international community by surprise. Recognition of national sovereignty and the inviolability of borders are central to the international state system, and since 1991 the Russian Federation (like the Soviet Union before) had been an ardent defender of these principles. The EU and U.S. responded swiftly with "smart" sanctions imposing asset freezes and travel bans on a few dozen politicians directly involved in the Crimean annexation. German industrialists doing business with Russia urged Chancellor Angela Merkel not to bow to U.S. pressure to introduce broader sanctions. As the surrogate war raged in east Ukraine, on 16 July the U.S. introduced "sectoral" sanctions on strategic corporations, barring them from long-term borrowing. The next day separatists shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17. This atrocity, and Russia's seeming unwillingness to help bring those responsible to justice, caused a groundswell of support for tougher action, particularly in the Netherlands and Germany. On 25 July the EU expanded its sanctions to an additional 15 top Russian government officials (though it was not until 12 September that they imposed sectoral sanctions). Putin responded on 6 August by introducing a one-year ban on imports of fruits and vegetables, dairy products and meat from countries that had imposed sanctions on Russia.

The political association agreement with the EU was signed on 21 March 2014, and the economic chapters on 21 June. Implementation of the economic dimension was postponed for a year as an incentive to Russia to help bring peace to East Ukraine. Negotiations in Minsk under the auspices of the OSCE resulted in a shaky ceasefire on 26 August, but agreement on a permanent solution remained out of reach. Kyiv refused to yield to Russian demands that Ukraine would abjure from NATO membership, and would grant full autonomy to the secessionists in Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia had suspended gas deliveries through Ukraine in June, which was not an immediate problem since demand is low in summer and Ukraine had ample reserves. Negotiations continued over supplies for the next winter. On 31 October Ukraine agreed to pay Russia $3 billion in arrears and $1.5 billion as prepayment for 2015 gas at a price of $378.

The Role of Europe in International Security

During the Cold War, Europe was the centre of global conflict and hence was an importer of security. On the Western side, security was imported from the US, whereas in the East, it depends upon whether we consider the Soviet Union to have been a European state or not. With the end of the Cold War era, Russia soon became a security exporter, contributing first to stabilization of its neighbourhood and, not much later, to areas further afield. This occurred in parallel with the sudden decline of Europe's need for military might to provide for its own

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security. While there have been armed conflicts, including civil (and then international) wars in the former Yugoslavia and in the Caucasus, the security perception of the overwhelming majority of the population in Europe has improved compared to the Cold War. The size of defence forces shrank, military acquisitions were postponed, and, according to some, a large part of Europe went on strategic holiday. There were a few exceptions, first of all in those states that have traditionally played a role in military power projection, such as France and the UK; then in those few that used the period of absence of threat to carry out modernization, including the Netherlands and recently also Russia; and finally in those states that had residual external threat perceptions, such as some of the Baltic states and Poland.

While a number of armed conflicts demonstrated that military security had not become fully irrelevant in Europe, relatively little happened as a consequence. Not even the Georgia-Russia war served as a wake-up call to most countries in Europe. European states could refer to the fact that Georgia started the hostilities on the 7th of August, and Russian assertiveness was confined to the former Soviet area anyway. NATO certainly contributed to a perception of security that offered the feeling of a free ride to many European states. Moreover, the consecutive financial, banking, and economic crises, which have spilled over into a social crisis in Europe, did not make increased defence spending a realistic option. Ukraine has provided the necessary adrenalin and resulted in a general recognition of the renewed relevance of military security: Though military security is neither exclusive nor ultimate, it is a factor that cannot be ignored.

Will Europe now act in the field of military security, and what will it do? There has been pressure from two directions: (1) A number of states have felt exposed by the challenge to Ukraine's territorial integrity and are, understandably, afraid that Ukraine may only be the first step in a series of Russian territorial claims. These fears were confirmed by statements made by populist Russian politicians such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and by leaked reports from bilateral talks (between Petro Poroshenko and Putin and between Poroshenko and EU Commission President José Manuel Barroso). (2) The US also seized the opportunity to reassure the most concerned states, while reminding NATO member states of their reluctance to allocate adequate resources for defence and calling for them to increase their commitment.

What will happen next is unclear. The Baltic states and Poland could benefit from strong symbolic coupling of their defence with that of the United States. Such reassurances would carry the message that NATO and all its members are sincere about their commitments, including Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Even though it would be difficult to imagine Russia so badly miscalculating power relations as to directly challenge a NATO member, such

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a reminder may well be necessary to various audiences. It is important that: (1) The Russian political and military leadership is reminded of the geographical limits of its action radius. (2) The US political establishment and population is reminded that America has a commitment to its European allies. This is of particular importance after 15 years during which military security has been taken for granted in Europe, and in view of allegations about US retrenchment during the second administration of President Barack Obama. (3) Other NATO member states and their populations, including countries that feel directly threatened by Russia, would be reassured. It may be far-fetched to conclude that the US reassurance policy of spring 2014 and Washington's request that European NATO capitals either increase their defence commitment or live up to existing commitments are directly linked. However, it would have been very difficult for any member state to deny that allied solidarity requires increased defence spending and procurement. Defence economists may conclude that the call for NATO members to spend at least two per cent of their GDP on defence is ineffective, as it will not necessarily contribute to the improvement of defence capabilities. However, the symbolic importance of the increased defence commitment may well be important to all the audiences listed above.

What will follow is relatively easy to predict, particularly if we start out from two alternative scenarios. (1) If Russia retains its revisionist attitude or some other credible threat emerges on the horizon, declaratory NATO solidarity will last, and the cohesion of the Alliance may not suffer after the significant reduction of foreign troops in Afghanistan. There will be a "new glue" holding NATO together that goes beyond words. It may also mean that the member states will only selectively lag behind on the commitments they undertook at the Wales summit in September 2014. (2) If, however, the Ukraine crisis remains a one-off episode in European security, several member states will find one pretext or another to lag behind their commitments, and the age-old burden-sharing debate will be renewed once again.

It is essential that NATO is retained as a major forum for political exchanges. There are several reasons for this. Here, I would like to emphasize just one, which relates to the Ukraine crisis. The crisis has demonstrated that some NATO member states stretch free-riding to the limit. It is sufficient to mention those countries that wanted to weaken the resolve of the West when reacting to Russia's backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine. This may be more of an issue for the European Union. However, since four of those states are also NATO members, it may be important to take advantage of the different composition and the presence of the US at Alliance forums to deal with this issue. The US is one of the few international actors that can put pressure upon states such as the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, and Slovakia. Irrespective of which scenario prevails, it can be taken for granted that the relevance of military security will increase in Europe, and forums associated with it will gain in importance. The Ukraine crisis

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made it clear that the relevance of the European Union in military matters remains virtual at best and non-existent at worst. Time and again, the EU has relied on its strengths, ranging from sanctions to endlessly seeking (and occasionally achieving) compromise at the negotiating table.

The US and Western Europe concurred that undermining the territorial integrity of a state was unacceptable. However, there were differences in the interpretation of Russia's actions and in reactions to them. The West had every reason to be careful. For the last 25 years, it has advocated the right to self-determination and the emergence of new states on that basis, attributing less importance to respect for territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders. Thus, it created an imbalance between basic principles of international law. The decalogue of the Helsinki Final Act, the foundation and the single most important document of the OSCE, was applied inconsistently. Indeed, the West was able to present good arguments for this approach (oppressive regimes, ethnic cleansing, massive violation of human rights, etc.). If we take a "value-neutral" look at the matter, it is clear that interventions occurred in the name of the right to self-determination. Now, the West needs to understand that it has embarked upon a dangerous path. It would have been better to argue for a measured approach that would balance the principle of self-determination with the prohibition on the use of force against the territorial integrity and the political independence of a state. Maybe this lesson will be learned now. The Russian Federation will certainly not miss an opportunity to remind the West of what Foreign Minister Lavrov has already expressed in the following terms: The West is: "rejecting the democratic principle of the sovereign equality of states enshrined in the UN Charter and tries to decide for everyone what is good or bad. Washington has openly declared its right to the unilateral use of force anywhere to uphold its own interests. Military interference has become common, even despite the dismal outcome of the use of power that the US has carried out in recent years."[10] Though one may argue over whether it was the use of force that brought poor results or the subsequent post-conflict peace-, nation-, and state-building efforts that failed, there is certainly an element of truth to the claim that sovereign equality and the prohibition of the threat and use of force have not flourished during the last 15 years, but have actually weakened significantly.

Grasping Russia's motivations also requires empathy with a state that has lost every square kilometre it gained over the last three centuries. Gaining or regaining territory can be appealing, particularly in those parts of the world that live in the modern paradigm, in Robert Cooper's

[10] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Address by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 27 September 2014, at: http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/CDEA7854FF002B5A44257D62004F7236.

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terms[11], under which sovereignty matters, territory means control, and borders separate. The Russian Federation lives under this paradigm, and this has been exacerbated by a recent history of humiliation, as the French commentator Dominique Moisi put it.[12] Putin turned back the clock and helped many Russians to regain their pride. This is the source of his soaring popularity, which has reached levels that leaders of established democracies can only dream of. Yet there is a price tag to this popularity. In the short term, it is a very significant drop in the approval of Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation internationally.[13] In the longer run, as sanctions hurt Russian citizens in every stratum of the population, President Putin's popularity may become more volatile. Many in the former Soviet area share the view that this is the ultimate purpose of Western sanctions: To destabilize the Russian leadership and foster a change of regime or system. Whether this is a well-founded concern, part of an effort to generate solidarity in Russian society, or a symptom of a wounded psyche is open to question. It can be taken for granted that the coalescence of internal and external factors that fuelled the so-called colour revolutions of the last decade still reverberates (artificially maintained in part by Russian propaganda). Portraying Russia as a victim may help the Russian leadership to generate popular support domestically.

It is important to understand that Ukraine's offer of limited autonomy to the people of Donetsk and Luhansk was both very weak and poorly communicated. Kyiv was hesitant to accept the need to devolve power, grant these areas a special status, and respect Russian as an official language alongside Ukrainian. Furthermore, the "offers" made to those regions were very poorly communicated internationally. Hence, many people worldwide only saw the casualties in eastern Ukraine (the Donets Basin or "Donbas") and not the attempts to resolve the conflict by political means. Ukraine's armed forces have also performed poorly. Their problems with equipment and basic training have been highly visible. This has demonstrated that Ukraine's recent attempts at defence reform were foiled by corruption and ineffective management. Furthermore, Ukraine gave the impression that it did not care how many casualties it suffered or how much property and infrastructure were destroyed. That is why I would be tempted to call Ukraine's war in the Donbas a "Zhukovian" campaign. Memorably, Marshal Zhukov cared extremely little about casualties during the Red Army's advance from Khalkhin Gol to Berlin. While success on the battlefield can sometimes legitimize high casualty figures, including civilians, and the destruction of infrastructure and property, this was not the case in Ukraine's

[11] Cf. Robert Cooper, The Breaking of Nations – Order and Chaos in the Twenty-first Century, London 2004.
[12] Cf. Dominique Moisi, The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation and Hope Are Reshaping the World, New York 2010.
[13] Cf. Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, Russia's Global Image Negative amid Crisis in Ukraine. Americans' and Europeans' Views Sour Dramatically, 9 July 2014, at: http:// www.pewglobal.org/2014/07/09/russias-global-image-negative-amid-crisis-in-ukraine.

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Donbas campaign. It is unlikely that Kyiv's intention was to demolish Donetsk and Luhansk if Ukraine hoped to maintain sovereign control over those territories.

Kyiv's decision to stop subsidizing the secessionist Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and to sever its relations with them may be emotionally burdensome for many Ukrainians. However, it is creating a situation in which the Russian Federation will have to take more responsibility for the region. Ukraine has thus pushed Donetsk and Luhansk into Russia's arms. This is the first time that Ukraine has created a trap for Russia and not the other way around. Moscow is forced to choose between extending Russian sovereignty to Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts or merely providing support and assistance. If Russia chooses the former, it will gain the territory but will face a difficult task in avoiding criticisms of imperialism. If it chooses the latter path, Russia will have to take responsibility for costs ranging from the current account deficit to supporting economic recovery. However, it is unclear whether Ukraine has a long-term strategy of "disposing of" Donetsk and Luhansk with the burden they represent, or if it only wants to punish the two areas for the vote in November 2014 that brought separatists to power. If Kyiv has such a long-term strategy, it will have to cease its military operations and accept that the territories are, in fact, lost.

Sanctions: A Message Short of Direct Military Confrontation

Western reactions to developments in Ukraine have revealed differences between the US and the EU. These are easy to understand. The US applies a different policy mix and is more likely to rely on coercion than the EU. Sanctions play a privileged role in US policy and are applied routinely. Although the EU has also applied sanctions in many cases, it always gives the impression that it would prefer not to have to. Behind this, there is a fundamental difference: The EU is a trading bloc, and more than 40 per cent of its total GDP comes from external trade. By contrast, foreign trade only accounts for 15.7 per cent of US GDP.[14] Furthermore, Russia is a major trading partner for Europe, not only as a source for the import of hydrocarbons and a market for high-value Western European products, but also as a major investment market, though this varies from state to state. Russia is thus considerably more important as a trading partner for the EU than it is for US.

The EU and its member states have introduced sanctions gradually, which has made it possible for the Russian Federation either to adopt measures to de-escalate the conflict or to reciprocate. The EU's sanctions consisted of a combination of: (1) measures against members of the Russian political leadership and economic establishment, including travel bans and freezing bank assets (later also applied to Donetsk- and Luhansk-based separatists); (2) trade restrictions; (3) investment bans accompanied by constraints on technology transfers. The measures were not supported by every member state, reflecting their national interests. The UK

[14] Cf. Eurostat, EU 28 exports and imports as a percentage of GDP by year (2013), at: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/File:EU_28_imports_and_exports_as_a_percentage_of_GDP_by_year.png

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and Luxembourg had problems with banking sanctions; France with trade, including the export of military items, and, in particular, with the suspension of delivery of two Mistral helicopter carriers. Germany, home to more than 6,000 companies that do business in Russia, had problems with sanctions on trade and investments. Last but not least, a few states were generally sceptical about whether sanctions would serve any purpose at all. Most prominently, the Hungarian prime minister said that "Russian sanctions shot in our own leg".[15] Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was of course warned by his partners of the danger of weakening EU solidarity, which gave him one more opportunity to pick a fight with the EU. It is apparent that a number of EU states have problems supporting sanctions against Russia. Interestingly, these are not the states that have been the prime losers of the sanctions policy. Hungary, in addition to its rhetorical opposition, even cut off its "reverse" gas supply to Ukraine and tried to set demands for solidarity with the EU sanctions regime. The Czech Republic had a different problem. President Miloš Zeman has a certain "predisposition" to be supportive of the position of the Russian Federation. Although the total damage caused to EU trade was estimated at approximately at five to six billion euros by mid-November 2014, certain economic segments and states have been particularly exposed.

In turn, the Russian Federation introduced sanctions of its own. Russian retaliatory measures, such as the banning of agricultural imports, hit some EU member states, including Poland and Lithuania, severely. However, most states, rather than trying to undermine the sanctions regime, tried their best to benefit from the EU fund created to compensate for the loss. Russia's sanctions were fairly limited, which is understandable in view of the asymmetrical economic power of the two sides, as well as Moscow's dependence on Western markets, investment, and technology. Their introduction was accompanied by declarations for domestic consumption that the country can withstand the sanctions, and that they would actually help domestic production and innovation. Such propaganda notwithstanding, it has become clear very quickly that the Russian economy will face difficulties in the long run. The first warning signals came from the Russian banking sector and from large enterprises that could not manage their finances without access to for eign resources. They turned to the government to help them out. The state did not really have much of a choice, and started to provide financial assistance from reserves and the state pension fund. The government has also contemplated increasing income taxes, which are currently very low (13 per cent). The Russian Federation was careful to avoid applying sanctions that would have really hurt, such as closing Russian airspace to foreign airlines or stopping the export of hydrocarbons. Moscow had no desire to enter a sanctions arms race, or to provide arguments to those in the West who wanted to introduce further sanctions against

[15] Orbán: Russian Sanctions "Shot in Our Own Leg", 18 August 2014, in: Hungary today, at: http://hungarytoday.hu/cikk/orban-russian-sanctions-shot-leg.

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Russia. Russian companies reacted to the sanctions by trying to draw the maximum benefit from the situation. One Russian oil company asked the government to help it out with more than 40 billion US dollars, while it turned out that it had more than 25 billion dollars on its books. The prices of certain foodstuffs soared in a number of regions. In response, the Russian government considered introducing (temporary) price controls for certain socially important products. However, as of November 2014, none has yet been introduced.

Damage to the Russian economy has been accumulating for a host of reasons. The fact that Russian companies and banks have been facing difficulties in refinancing loans has reduced the creditworthiness of the Russian Federation and put the rouble under pressure. The loss of value of the Russian currency has been steady. This has resulted, on the one hand, in increasing inflation, making imports more expensive. On the other hand, however, a weak rouble could help Russian exports in the long run. The massive drop in the price of crude oil, which may be heralding a lasting period of relatively low oil (and hence gas) prices, will reduce the profitability of some large Russian enterprises, thus shrinking the tax base. Irrespective of President Putin's reassuring statement that "the nation has enough resilience to weather the storm. Due to the dollar's rise, oil was traded higher than the Russian 2014 budget expected in the first half of the year, so the current low price won't force a correction"[16], the situation may be critical in the long run, as oil production costs are far higher in Russia than in a country like Saudi Arabia. At his annual press conference in December 2014, the Russian President reiterated that higher oil prices would return due to the growth of the world economy, and hence that Russia hoped to "bridge over" a difficult period that may last for a few years.[17]

Some find the EU sanctions insufficient and view their gradual introduction as a mistake. However, it was precisely the gradual introduction that has given the Russian Federation an opportunity to understand that the longer term consequences may well be difficult to bear. No access to capital, no new investment and hence limited access to critical technologies is a dangerous mix for Russia. The damage may go well beyond limiting access to Western consumer goods or subjecting a growing list of individuals to travel bans.

The situation has very clearly demonstrated that Western Europe and the Russian Federation are deeply interdependent in economic terms, and that Europe, even taking into account the hydrocarbon sector, does not unilaterally depend upon Russia. Russia badly needs the income

[16] At the press conference he held in Brisbane upon the completion of the G20 summit meeting on 16 November 2014, President Putin minimized the effect of declining oil prices. However, the Russian government is ever more frequently contemplating options by means of which funds could be liberated and resources collected to sustain the standard of living of Russian citizens. In an indirect recognition of this, President Putin pointed out at the same press conference that: "We will see what happens next year. If this continues, we'll correct our spending, but it won't affect our social obligations." Putin: Economic Blockade of E. Ukraine 'a big mistake', in: RT.com, at: http://rt.com/news/205931-g20- putin-press-conference.

[17] See President of Russia, News conference of Vladimir Putin, 18 December 2014, at: http:// eng.kremlin.ru/news/23406#sel=18:36,18:83

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from its trade surplus with Europe. The sanctions have also increased Russia's interest in growing its trade with partners that did not join the sanctions, while also seeking investment from such countries, above all China. In sum, both sides have fallen into a kind of trap. Although they may be able to afford the short-term losses, in the long run, they may induce processes that further contribute to the rearrangement of relations in the world economy. The Russian Federation, irrespective of the "smokescreen" (strategic partnership, best friends) it uses to cover the reality of Chinese-Russian relations, is not interested in further increasing its dependence on Chinese investment or trade. Lasting EU, US, and Japanese sanctions may precisely induce such dependence in the medium to long term. The investment deal signed on the "Sila Sibiri" ("Power of Siberia") gas pipeline followed by a further deal signed in November 2014 to supply China with 30 billion cubic meters of gas in the next 30 years (complemented by the sale of part of Rosneft's share of Vankorneft to the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation)[18] may bring relief to the Russian economy, but creates a lasting dependence. The entire situation illustrates that in economic terms the world has become polycentric.

Russia had high hopes that the EU sanctions would be lifted soon and regularly referred to an expectation that the EU would discuss them at the end of September 2014. Moscow pretends that the sanctions were introduced as a result of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and Russia's involvement in it – i.e. that they have nothing to do with Crimea, which is never mentioned. This is certainly smart diplomacy on Russia's part, enabling Moscow to act both resolutely and in a conciliatory manner by opening the door to the lifting of sanctions as if they had been imposed without just cause. Bearing in mind how complex and "thoughtful" EU decision-making is, it would certainly take some time to lift sanctions, particularly if Russia takes the line of Sergey Karaganov, according to whom "Western delusions triggered this conflict and Russians will not yield".[19] It is noticeable however, that the Russian Federation's proactive policy and long-term economic engagement with some EU member states has not been unsuccessful at dividing the EU. This is at least a partial success for Russia and a lesson for the EU. The EU has, however, been able to maintain the sanctions regime, gradually extending and expanding it as the situation has not improved on the ground.

Russian-Ukrainian Conflict impact on India

The Russia-Ukraine crisis will drive up the cost of cooking gas, petrol, and other fuels for Indian households and businesses. Higher oil prices raise freight and transportation costs.

[18] Cf. Andy Tully, Russia, China sign new huge gas deal, in: Oilprice.com, 10 November 2014, at: http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Russia-China-Sign-NewHuge-Gas-Deal.html.

[19] Sergey Karaganov, Western delusions triggered conflict and Russians will not yield, in: Financial Times, 15 September 2014, at: http://karaganov.ru/en/publications/349.

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Depending on how long global oil prices continue high, the tensions may call the RBI's credibility in making inflation projections into question, as well as upset the government's budget calculations, particularly the fiscal deficit.

The rise in crude oil prices will boost India's oil import bills, and gold imports may rise again, putting pressure on the rupee.

India's petroleum product imports from Russia are only a fraction of its total oil import bill and are hence replaceable.

Alternative sources of fertilizer and sunflower oil, on the other hand, may not be as easy.

Exports to Russia account for less than 1% of overall Indian exports, but pharmaceutical and tea exports, as well as shipments to CIS countries, could face challenges. Increases in freight rates could also make overall exports less competitive.

The Russia-Ukraine crisis will send cooking gas, petrol and other fuel bills soaring for Indian households and businesses. Higher oil prices add to freight/transportation costs.

Depending on how long global oil prices remain elevated, the tensions could raise questions on the RBI's credibility in making inflation projections and upset the government’s budget calculations, particularly fiscal deficit.

The surge in crude oil prices will lead to an increase in India’s oil import bills, and gold imports could jump back up, keeping the rupee under pressure.

India’s imports of petroleum products from Russia are only a fraction of its total oil import bill and, thus, replaceable.

However, getting alternative sources for fertilisers and sunflower oil may not be as easy.

Exports to Russia account for less than 1% of India’s total exports, but exports of pharmaceuticals and tea could face some challenges, as will shipments to CIS countries. Freight rate hikes could make overall exports less competitive, too.

India made its first statement on the crisis articulated by Ministry of External Affairs’ official spokesperson Arindam Bagchi.

With key strategic partners on both sides, India can’t afford any hasty moves hurting its vital stakes. While there is concern about Russia’s “muscle-flexing”, New Delhi does not want to jeopardise its close military ties with Moscow, particularly amid the stand-off with China on the eastern border.

While it has stagnated in some areas and atrophied in others, the strongest pillar is defence. Although New Delhi has consciously diversified its new purchases from other countries, the

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bulk of its defence equipment are from Russia: Estimates say 60-70 % of its supplies are from there.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held informal summits with the heads of only two countries — Putin and China's Xi Jinping. Now Russia has emerged as a key diplomatic player amid the tension between India and China.

India's foreign and defence ministers have negotiated with their Chinese counterparts in Russia in the last year and half. Russia is also key to India's engagements in Afghanistan, after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

The US and Europe are both important partners from India's strategic calculus. Many American platforms have been used for reconnaissance and surveillance along the India-China border. Winter clothing for 50,000 troops has been sourced from these Western partners.

The West's approach towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 brought Moscow much closer to China. India has always felt that it was the West that enabled this with the anti-Chinese rhetoric from Washington and the collapse of oil prices, making Russia increasingly dependent on Chinese consumption. Western analysts see this as a "friendship of convenience" between two countries led by strongmen.

Beijing and Moscow, however, do not always see eye to eye with each other. China does not recognise Crimea as part of Russia, and Moscow, formally speaking, takes a neutral stance on Beijing's claims in the South China Sea.

Concerns for India

There is an Indian community in Ukraine, mostly students in medical colleges. The Indian Embassy in capital Kyiv has started collating information on them, as part of preparations for possible hostilities. As per government estimates, 18,000 Indian students were in Ukraine in 2020, but the numbers may have dipped due to Covid lockdowns and classes moving online

When Russia had annexed Crimea, India had expressed "concern" but also qualified it by talking of "legitimate Russian interests". Putin had thanked India for taking a "restrained and objective" stand, and called up the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to express his gratitude.

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Keeping in mind its ties with Russia, sources said, India hasn't issued any condemnatory statements as is being done by the Western powers. For now, New Delhi is hoping that the situation will be resolved by skilled negotiators on both sides. CIA chief William Burns has handled several such tough talks in his previous diplomatic roles, while on the other side is Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Major concerns for India

World War scenario: Any conflict- where the U.S. and its European allies are ranged against Russia will impact the whole world- economically and in terms of security, and India, as a partner to both Moscow and Washington will either have to take sides, or be prepared to deal with unhappiness from both sides.

S-400 delivery and US waiver: The crisis comes precisely as India's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile system is under way- and New Delhi hopes for a waiver of U.S. sanctions on this. Conflict will complicate both the delivery of the system, and the possibility of a presidential waiver.

Moves focus from China: Just as U.S. and Europe had grown more focussed on their Indo-Pacific strategy that puts India centre-stage, and India grapples with Chinese aggression and land-grab at the Line of Actual Control, and 100,000 troops along the boundary on both sides, the world's attention is diverted from China to Russia.

Brings Russia China closer- the Crisis will make Moscow more dependent on friends like China, and build a regional bloc of sorts that India is not a part of. In Beijing this week, the future seems evident- as India has announced a diplomatic and political boycott of the Olympic games- while Putin, Central Asian Presidents, and Pakistan PM Imran Khan are all in Beijing to stand in solidarity with Xi Jinping.

Energy crisis: In any conflict- Europe worries Russia will turn down gas and oil supplies- driving energy prices up. Already tensions have pushed oil prices up 14% in a month past $90 and analyst say they could hit $125 a barrel if the situation is not resolved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Putin will continue to leverage conditions and enabling tactics to manipulate the key drivers of conflict—regional instability, Russian regime stability, the West's response, and his own goals and objectives—to maintain Russian hegemony:

- **The legacy of Moscow's control over regional relations:** A driver of violent conflict following the breakup of the Soviet Union was the newly independent countries'

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inability to engage bilaterally to resolve interstate and intrastate tensions that Moscow brokered previously. The Putin regime today is seeking to retain or reassert its role as regional power broker to maintain hegemony.

- **Monopolization of the conflict narrative:** Moscow has successfully harnessed support for the war in Ukraine by turning the Maidan narrative on its head, arguing that Ukraine's political transition was a strategic move by the West to make Russia more vulnerable. This revisionist account of current events has allowed Russia to monopolize the conflict narrative throughout many neighboring countries. Governments with an already authoritarian bent have seized on that narrative to crack down on civil society, arguing that the West is manipulating popular movements to destabilize the region.
- **Closing of civil society space:** The space for civil society to operate and mature is rapidly closing in Russia and most neighboring countries. This strategy affects conflict dynamics in the region by closing societal outlets for dissent and government engagement. Without diverse social perspectives on many of the region's unresolved conflicts, autocratic regimes control the conflict narratives, hardening societal opinion against their resolution to deflect any focus on internal issues.

To mitigate the risk and reality of violent conflict—the primary threat to the region's democratic consolidation—and to offer foreign assistance within the limitations of new regulations on civil society activity in many countries of the region, Western strategies should aim to degrade Russia's ability to create the conditions that foment regional conflict.

• **Create civil society space.** Create regional hubs in countries with vibrant civil societies, such as Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova, to provide within-region assistance, counteract Russia's attempts to direct regional relations, and challenge the narrative that civil society is a Western imposition by demonstrating that it is organic to the region.

Encourage civic participation. Where the space is closing for civil society, first, organize educational exchange programs in those spheres that are still open, such as technical education (e.g., engineering, public administration, environmental science) for young professionals; second, in these educational programs, incorporate curricula on establishing and managing participatory processes; and third, nurture concepts, methodologies, and habits of civic engagement, which still remain at a minimum in many post-Soviet countries.

• **Diversify regional economies.** Many of Russia's neighbors rely on remittances from citizens working in Russia. With Russia's economic downturn, migrants will be sent home, and many sectors in neighboring countries that rely on strong trade relations with Russia will be hit hard. It will be necessary to provide economic diversification programs to vulnerable communities. At the same time, provide conflict resolution and peacebuilding skills to manage dislocations.

In the process, influence the narrative about Western sanctions by minimizing their effects on Russia's neighbors and help stave off unrest that might result from economic stresses.

In sum, the relationship between regime type and foreign policy is less clear than many appear to assume. That is a crucial point, because a major contributor to conflict has been the West's desire to spread democracy (assuming that in doing so they are also spreading peace) and Russia's desire to prevent it (assuming that in doing so it is preventing states from aligning against it). Both policies rely on the assumed links between regime type and foreign policy, and both therefore rely on flimsy foundations. Ironically, breaking the presumption of a link between regime type and foreign policy might help ratchet down tensions here and elsewhere.

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