

# Return to spheres of influence?

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**Russia, Europe and the Ukrainian Crisis:  
What Has Really Changed?**



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# Resurgent Russia?

## *Why Russia remains important?*

*Impact on practically all global issues, due to size and geopolitical position, economy, and foreign policy ambitions:*

- Conflict resolution (Middle East; Afghanistan)
  - Terrorism (Caucasus, Central Asia)
- The future of the 'international liberal order' (BRICS)
- The future of European integration / Geopolitical competition with 'Europe' (European Union) – **the case of Ukraine**
  - Climate change & water
    - Energy
  - Authoritarianism

The Russian Federation: an autonomous, revisionist power in a Hobbesian World

# Russia's Foreign policy

*Agency (Yeltsin, Putin) and structure:*

*Double context:*

- (1) domestic resources
- (2) the international environment

# Boris N. Yeltsin (1991-2000)

## Local conditions ('the incredibly shrinking state')

- \* collapse
- \* desintegration
- \* political & econ. chaos ↘

## *Pro-Western FP*

## International environment ↗

- \* Cold War defeat
- \* Western supremacy / unipolarity

# Vladimir V. Putin (2000-2014)

## Local conditions

- \* strengthening the state / consolidation of state power
- \* natural resources / economic recovery
- \* undisputed leadership / political legitimacy



*Great Power Pragmatism*



## International environment

- \* oil and gas price hikes
- \* international terrorism
- \* end to Western 'hubris' (Afghanistan, Iraq, EU)

# Great Power Pragmatism

## *Features:*

- \* political regime, foreign policies and global status are intimately linked (Hobbesian or 'realist' worldview: anarchy, self-help, power maximization)

- \* sovereign, revisionist, assertive

V.V. Putin (July 22, 2014: 'Russia is fortunately not a member of any alliance. This is also a guarantee of our sovereignty. Any nation that is part of an alliance gives up part of its sovereignty.'

- \* by issue rather than by principle (ideology)

- \* ad hoc and reactive (strategic)

*Is it still: assertive, non-ideological, and ad hoc?*

# Russia's priorities

- Serving the regime's material interests and maximizing economic opportunities
- establishing greater security on Russia's periphery
  - \* protecting the well-being of ethnic Russians
  - \* sustaining Russia's global role

# Russia and the post-Soviet Area ('Near Abroad')



# Geopolitical features

*Volatile, under-institutionalized, non-democratic, challenged, geopolitically relevant*

- > weakly institutionalised (despite range of international organizations: CIS, Customs Union, CSTO, SCO)
  - > vulnerable to political engineering (authoritarianism)
    - > energy, terrorism
- > Russia's 'privileged' area, zone of influence – about hegemonic aspirations, 'soft' and 'hard' power
  - > 'Shared neighbourhood' and theatre of competition between Russia and 'Europe' (Ukraine); 'frozen conflicts' (Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia)

# The Ukrainian Crisis: What has really changed?

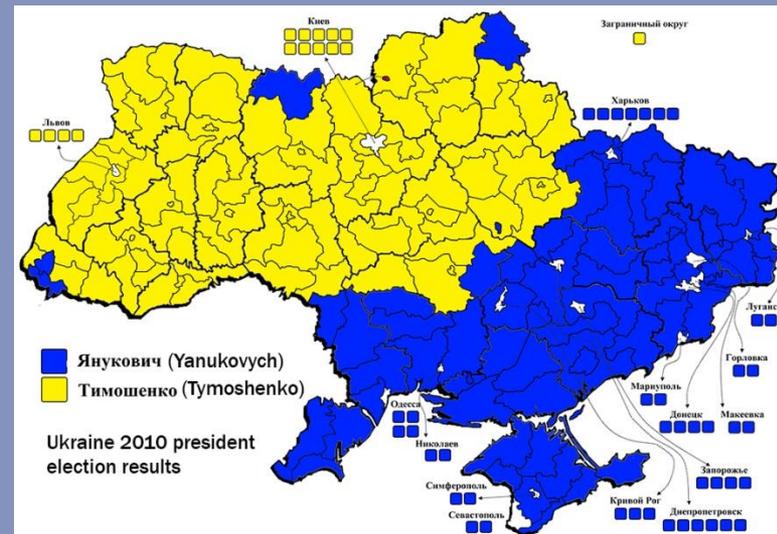
*Three dimensions:*

1. Global consequences
2. Russian foreign policy
3. Solving the Ukrainian Issue

# Ukraine: ethnic composition and political divide

‘Ethnic’ composition:

Political divide (2010)



# A very brief chronology

- November 2013: Yanukovich rejects EU deal; accepts \$ 15 billion Russian counter-offer
  - Maidan
- February 2014: Yanukovich – opposition – EU deal (21/2), collapse and (illegal) ‘regime change’
  - Ukraine turns Westward
    - Russia responds...

# The Ukrainian Crisis – competing geopolitical projects

## *Europe:*

- Western democratization effort: Coloured Revolution, 2004, Maidan, 2013 (Victoria Nuland: \$ 5 billion for ‘the future it deserves’ (December 2013)
  - Keeping NATO enlargement open...
  - European Union and the twin fallacy of
    1. the ‘win-win game’ and
    2. the ‘population – elite dichotomy’ (

# The Russian response...

## 1. Legitimate concerns (from a Realist perspective) and illegitimate means:

- Weak, fragile, unreliable, but crucially important: industries (East), transit, Customs Union, identity
  - A political-ideological and military threat in its backyard
- Crimea and Eastern Ukraine – to weaken and destabilize Ukraine and to frustrate its Westward turn

## 2. Or is there more to it?

- Strengthening authoritarianism
- Rising Russian nationalism / conservatism – ‘clash of values’
  - Losing the Europe connection...

# Solving the Ukrainian problem...

## *Scenario's:*

- \* War: immediate and massive Western military involvement and armed confrontation with Russia—dangerous and unlikely
  - \* Sanctions: sanction the Russian into submission—costly and unlikely
- \* Finland: internally democratic; externally neutral—attractive but unlikely, because of internal discord
  - \* Division: leave Eastern Ukraine to whomever wants it, and join the West—(un)attractive and unlikely
- \* Decentralization: devolve power and authority to regional and local levels—unattractive (because the preferred Russian option) but not unlikely

# Global consequences?

*'new era in global politics' (Liliya Shevtsova) / new 'Cold War'?*

Negative:

## 1. No 'New Cold War' (yet)

- The nature of conflict: regional rather than global, political rather than ideological and military, but the risk of escalation (events!, MH17)
  - Russia's ambitions and capabilities remain limited

## 2. Confirming / denying current trends in world politics

- emerging powers, Great Power competition and rivalry, non-polarity,

# A New Cold War?

*An end to the post-Cold War era in Europe:*

1. The return of Great Power politics to Europe
2. Russia from partner to adversary
3. From transformation and 'integration' to confrontation

# A new Russia?

*Russian foreign policy:  
is it still essentially assertive, non-ideological, and ad hoc?*

1. Aggressive and intimidating in its 'near abroad'; assertive and confrontational in global politics (Syria)
2. Ideological: the rise of Russian nationalism and the 'clash of values' (Alexander Lukin, Foreign Affairs, Russia): Western 'superiority', 'universalism', expansionism and 'relativist morality' vs. 'religious revival' and the 'independent power center Eurasia'
3. Strategic: more expansive and consequential definition of its 'national interest', openly challenging the US-dominated order

# European Union, etc.

## *Western policies and responsibilities*

The essential (dis)continuities of our 'Russia policy':

- Towards Russia: from 'integration through transformation', to cooperation and confrontation?
- Towards the FSU (shared neighbourhood): Democratization, EU expansion (Eastern Partnership, DCFTA), keeping the option of NATO enlargement open
  - The 'new' roles of Poland and Germany