

RUSSIA'S SECURITY INTERESTS: DOMINATING UKRAINE

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Abstract - After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was forced to redefine many of its interests and domestic policies, including its security policy. The orientation of Russia's security policy is important for Russia, its neighbours, and the international community because, for the past several centuries, Russia's concept of security was synonymous with the concept of empire. Today Russia believes that regional power and influence are the keys to its long-term goals. This paper demonstrates that, motivated by its desire to foster and maintain power and influence, Russia's regional security interests are to create an exclusive zone of influence over the economic, military and political spheres of the CIS members such as Ukraine. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates that the success of Russia's security directives in Ukraine not only subjugates Ukraine to the pressures of Russia, but reminds the world that Russia is capable of acting as a great power.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War ushered in a new era of international politics. With the collapse of the bipolar world, in which states defined their world view by their relationship with the United States and the Soviet Union, many nations were forced to re-evaluate their security policies. Russia is one such country that endured enormous internal changes and as a result was forced to redefine its security policy. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union forced Russia to turn inward and fix the problems within its borders, Russia is now re-emerging as an actor on the international stage and is learning how to assert its political and security interests.

Russia believes that regional power and influence are the keys to its long-term goals. Therefore, Russia actively pursues its security and geopolitical policies by interfering in the affairs of former Soviet republics. Fundamentally, Russia's security interests are to create an exclusive zone of influence over the economic, military and political spheres of the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in order to re-establish its great power status (even if only as a regional great power) and project a strong image to the rest of the world. This directive often includes preventing CIS members from forming ties with the West and preventing North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement into Russia's perceived sphere of influence. Russia's security directives in action are obvious in its control over Ukraine's economy, military and domestic politics. The success of Russia's security directives in the Ukraine not only subjugates Ukraine to the pressures of Russia, but reminds the world that Russia is capable of being a great regional power.

Defining Security

For Thomas Hobbes, the essence of security is the preservation of life.¹ Therefore, for a state, the preservation of life is the preservation of the basic attributes that define a state, such as

¹ Richard Ullman, "Redefining Security," *International Security* 8 (Summer 1983): 133.

territory, population, sovereignty and government, as well as other highly valued attributes such as economic power, military strength, political clout or some alternate combination of values. Robert Ullman stipulates that security is also defined by the threats which challenge security.² For a state, threats may develop internally (such as civil war) or externally (from an outside actor/force) – but threat perception is always subjective. What one state deems as threatening may not warrant examination by another.

Russia's Security Policy – An Overview

The orientation and strategic course of Russia's security policy is an important issue not only for Russia, but for its friends, partners and rivals.³ For the majority of the past two centuries Russia's concept of security was synonymous with the concept of empire.⁴ With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of its superpower status Russia needed to discover what it was to simply be a 'country' – not an empire or a union. This lack of self-realization during the Yeltsin years culminated in Russia's uncertainty of its role in the modern international system.⁵ Russia is striving to re-build its great power status and, as such, perceives many of its neighbours and potential allies as a threat to its status and growth.⁶ Upon coming to power in 2000, Putin defined Russia's National Security Concept as a positive tendency for regionalism and multi-dimensional integration and a negative tendency for Western dominance – indicating his understanding that Russia is unable to achieve the majority of its strategic and security goals in the face of a Western-dominated world.⁷

While Russia accepts the necessity of a multi-polar world order because of its lack of superpower capabilities,⁸ at the regional level, "Russia is determined to rebuild its great power status by intensifying its ties to the members of the CIS."⁹ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's strategic and security directive is to secure an exclusive zone of influence (political, economic and military) over the whole area of the CIS so as to preserve Russia's military, political and economic interests.¹⁰ Marcin Piotrowski identifies three goals driving this directive. First, Russia's military goals necessitate Russian military presence in client states (like Belarus) which guarantee Russia's ability to extend its military into nearby areas (such as Eastern Europe, the Transcaucasus and Central Asia). Second, Russia needs to defend its security interests in countries critical of Russian policy and interested in NATO/EU membership (such as the members of GUUAM: Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova). Finally, as the leading member of the CIS, Russia must establish a common CIS position on armed Islamic extremists.¹¹ In this directive to secure an exclusive zone of influence over the whole area of the CIS, Russia is working to prevent any member of the CIS from integrating with the West and,

² Ullman, 133.

³ Marcin A. Piotrowski, "Russia's Security Policy," in *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives*, Janusz Bugajski ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2002), 59.

⁴ Mette Skak, "The Logic of foreign and security policy change in Russia," in *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin*, Jakob Hedenskog, Vilhelm Konnander, Bertil Nygren, Ingmar Oldberg, and Christer Pursiainen eds. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 84.

⁵ Piotrowski, 60.

⁶ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and Global Security Norms," *Washington Quarterly* 27 (Spring 2004): 63-77.

⁷ Piotrowski, 60.

⁸ Piotrowski, 62-63.

⁹ Trenin, 63-77.

¹⁰ Piotrowski, 63.

¹¹ Piotrowski, 63-64.

more specifically, the United States. Essentially, Russia dominates CIS members while promoting a multi-polar world in which it can choose to cooperate with the United States.¹²

The second goal in particular reveals that Russia's attempt to secure an exclusive zone of influence over countries which oppose Russian policies includes an inherent argument against NATO enlargement for both military-strategic and political purposes. Russia's military-strategic argument against NATO expansion is based on the desire to maintain the neutral corridor between NATO and Russia provided by the Central and Eastern European states.¹³ The political argument is based on the idea that NATO is a relic of a bipolar conflict and that any expansion of NATO is a step towards the international isolation of Russia.¹⁴ Furthermore, Russia postulates that NATO is not the proper vehicle for global security, pointing to the events in Yugoslavia as evidence of NATO's ineffectiveness at humanitarian intervention and promoting the use of the U.N. Security Council as the primary vehicle for maintaining international peace and security.¹⁵ Essentially, Russia's security strategy regarding NATO is focused on preventing a United States world order and European security system based on NATO.¹⁶

Russia's Influence over Ukraine

A study of Russia's involvement in the former Soviet republic of Ukraine highlights Russia's successes in creating an exclusive zone of influence in its region.

Economic Influence

In its efforts to ensure widespread control over Ukraine, Russia's leaders have created a Russia-dependent Ukrainian economy. Prior to Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections, the West was uninterested in investment in Ukraine. Various factors, such as restrictive regulations, corruption, and conflict within the government, drove Western investors away for much of Ukraine's sixteen years of independence.¹⁷ One example, the "Kuchma-gate" scandal in 2000, highlights the vicious circle of isolation that plagues Ukraine in its post-Soviet existence. "Kuchma-gate" revealed the corruption in Ukraine's government and resulted in Western governments' isolation of Ukraine's president – which was followed by Western investor's isolation of Ukrainian industry.¹⁸ As a result, Ukraine opened its economy up to an eager Russia and by 2002 forty to fifty percent of Ukrainian industry was Russian-owned.¹⁹

¹² Piotrowski, 74.

¹³ Aleksander Duleba, "Russia and NATO Enlargement," in *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives*, Janusz Bugajski ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2002), 155.

¹⁴ Duleba, 155.

¹⁵ Russia's global strategic-security arguments against NATO also included Russia-centric points: 1) that a NATO security force in Europe without Russia's membership would be unacceptable, 2) that the United States primary goal in NATO was to cause problems between Russia and the E.U. and, 3) that NATO's intentions are different from its potential (and Russia fears the growth of NATO's potential) For more see Duleba, 162.

¹⁶ For more on the strategic security arguments used by Russia against NATO see Duleba, 162.

¹⁷ Jakob Hedenskog, "Filling the 'gap': Russian security policy towards Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova under Putin," in *Russia as a Great Power: Dimensions of Security under Putin* (New York: Hedenskog, Konnander, Bygren, Oldberg and Pursiainen, 2005), 141.

¹⁸ In 2000 it was leaked that President Kuchma had ordered the murder of a journalist. For details on the events surrounding "Kuchma-gate" see Taras Kuzio, "The Opposition's Road to Success," *Journal of Democracy* 16 (April 2005): 117-130 and Hedenskog, 141.

¹⁹ Hedenskog, 141.

Russia is the number one consumer of Ukraine's exports and, under the guidance of President Putin, has contributed to Ukraine's constant economic growth since 2000.²⁰ Furthermore, Russia is Ukraine's number one provider of oil and gas resources. With seventy percent of Ukraine's natural gas resources and ninety percent of its oil reserves imported from Russia, Ukraine is entirely dependent on Russia for its energy resources.²¹ In the early 1990's Ukraine had some power of coercion over Russia as Ukraine was an important transportation route for Russian resources. However, in September 2001 Russia built a new pipeline to Western Europe, which bypasses Ukraine completely – thereby offering Russia a significant bargaining tool over the Ukraine on issues such as tariffs on oil transportation.²²

Military Influence

Also in 2001, Russia negotiated its ongoing military presence in Ukraine by finalizing a cooperation treaty which gave Russia unlimited rights to organize military exercises, form joint naval units and produce joint weapons in the Ukraine.²³ These rights limit Ukraine's ability to actively participate in NATO partnership programs²⁴ and ensure that NATO's enlargement does not extend to the Ukraine. In addition, the creation of a Joint Command Desk of Russia and Ukraine to monitor the Black Sea also serves Russia's agenda in preventing any cooperation between NATO and Ukraine in the Black Sea area.²⁵

Political Influence

Stable and positive relations with Ukraine within the context of the CIS are a priority for Russia in the modern international order. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine followed the example of other Eastern European states and attempted to pull away from Russia's influence in 1992 by refusing Russia's Common Security Treaty and participating in the formation of GUUAM. Under the leadership of Leonid Kuchma²⁶ Ukraine advocated a 'multivector' approach to international relations which allowed for close relations with Russia without closing the door to the rest of Europe and the West.²⁷ Although the relationship between Russia and Ukraine deteriorated through the late 1990's, within Putin's first two years as president relations between the countries started to improve.²⁸

In 2001, Viktor Chernomyrdin (Russia's former prime minister) was appointed as ambassador to Ukraine as Putin explained, "the time has arrived when we have to seriously consider the development of relations with one of our partners – Ukraine." Chernomyrdin quickly reiterated the importance of a strategic alliance with Ukraine. "Ukraine is not a western

²⁰ Hedenskog, 138.

²¹ Hedenskog, 140.

²² Hedenskog, 140.

²³ Marko Mihkelson, "Russia's Policy toward Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic States," in *Toward an Understanding of Russia: New European Perspectives*, Janusz Bugajski ed. (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2002), 104.

²⁴ Mihkelson, 104.

²⁵ Mihkelson, 104.

²⁶ Kuchma was President of Ukraine from July 1994 to January 2005.

²⁷ Compared to Belarus whose only ally/partner is Russia because of President Lukashenko's extreme authoritarian rule. For more see Aleksandr Dugin, "Two Ukraines': The Geopolitics of a Crisis and the Map of a Civil War," *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 56 (December 29, 2004).

²⁸ These changes were the result of various factors including Putin's pragmatic leadership, the "Kuchmagate" scandal which revealed the highly corrupt nature of the Ukrainian government and economic growth in Ukraine due to increased exports to Russia. Hedenskog, 138.

country... it belongs to Slavic civilization... Hundreds of years living together makes Ukraine Russia's natural partner."²⁹ The appointment of one of Russia's most prominent and powerful politicians as ambassador to Ukraine signaled the importance of Russia's relationship with Ukraine to the world.³⁰ Furthermore, relations between the countries were aided by the participation of both Putin and Kuchma in various bilateral summit meetings during which they agreed to the increased cooperation and integration of their respective countries.³¹

Finally, in its attempt to maintain a significant political influence over Ukraine, Russia intervened in the events leading up to and following Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections. First, in 2002 the Russian media fuelled allegations of a Western conspiracy to unseat Kuchma and install an anti-Russia, pro-United States government.³² By the time of the presidential elections in 2004, President Putin openly supported the campaign of Viktor Yanukovich, the heir to Kuchma's regime and the Russia-oriented candidate.³³ Moreover, Putin's own political team, was an integral part of Yanukovich's campaign machinery and as many believe, responsible for the "dirty tricks" that occurred during the campaign.³⁴ Finally, Putin was the first international president to declare Yanukovich the winner of the November 2004 elections – even when the rest of the world expressed concern over election conduct and Ukrainians protested the result.³⁵ All of Russia's political actions during this period were aimed at preventing Yushchenko's victory because a pro-EU, possibly pro-United States president was contrary to Russia's security interests in Ukraine.

Russia's military, economic and political activities in Ukraine are designed to keep Ukraine within Russia's sphere of influence and to maintain Russia's strategic advantage over its western neighbours. By monopolizing influence over Ukraine, Russia strives to maintain a buffer zone between itself and the West.³⁶

Is Russia Realizing Its Security Directives?

As defined earlier, Russia's security interests are to create an exclusive zone of influence over the economic, military and political interests of CIS members in order to re-establish its great power status (even if only as a regional great power) and project a strong image to the rest of the world. This directive includes preventing CIS members from forming ties with the West and preventing NATO enlargement into the region.

In terms of creating an exclusive zone of influence over Ukraine's economy, Russia succeeded by default – the lack of Western interest in Ukrainian industry in the period following

²⁹ Mihkelson, 102.

³⁰ As Yulia Timoshenko (one of Ukraine's most influential politicians) noted, naming Chernomyrdin as Russia's ambassador was like making him prime minister of Ukraine. Mihkelson, 101.

³¹ For example, in 2004 both Russia and Ukraine ratified an agreement on the implementation of a Single Economic Space. Although the space has yet to be created, this agreement signaled a willingness to integrate the economies of the two countries. Hedenskog, 144.

³² The funding for this campaign was provided by Russia's "Fund for Effective Politics" which is controlled by Gleb Pavlovsky, Putin's personal image-maker. Hedenskog, 140.

³³ In addition to Putin's verbal support, analysts estimate that Russia contributed approximately \$300 million to Yanukovich's election campaign. See Kira Latukhina, "The Russian Right Supports the 'Orange Revolution'," *The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press* 56 (December 29, 2004) and Paul D'Anieri, "The Last Hurrah: The 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections and the limits of machine politics," *Communist & Post-Communist Studies* 38 (June 2005): 231-249.

³⁴ Such as the poisoning of Viktor Yushchenko. See D'Anieri, 231-249.

³⁵ Dugin.

³⁶ Mihkelson, 113.

the collapse of the Soviet Union gave Russian investors the opportunity to takeover Ukraine's economy.³⁷ Although Ukraine built the Odesa-Brody pipeline in 2001 to transport oil from the Caspian region to Central Europe in an effort to decrease its dependence on Russian energy reserves, Russia found a way to Western Europe which bypassed Ukraine – and is no longer at the mercy of Ukraine's transportation pipelines. Furthermore, on January 1, 2006, Gazprom, Russia's state-controlled gas company shut-off gas supplies to Ukraine in its bid to force Ukraine to pay market prices instead of the previously used subsidized rates.³⁸ However, as many analysts suggested, Russia's actions were more likely a response (and perhaps punishment) to President Yushchenko's advancements towards NATO and the EU.³⁹ While turning off the gas pipelines does not physically prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and the EU, it is a not-so-gentle reminder of Ukraine's dependence on Russia and of Russia's ability to bring Ukraine and its economy to a stand-still if it counteracts Russia's interests.

Russia's military influence in Ukraine also contributes to Russia's exclusive zone of influence over Ukraine. Although there are negotiations over the future of the Black Sea Fleet, and President Yushchenko has argued that Ukraine should have control of installations and facilities in Crimea that were not included in the agreement of 1997, Russia is not in danger of losing its Black Sea presence.⁴⁰ As Nikolai Kryukov advocates:

Russia's military presence in Ukraine, specifically the Russian Black Sea Fleet's presence in Crimea, is an objective necessity arising from the reality of the political balance of power in the world and the importance of defending Russia's national interests in this region, as well as in the entire world.⁴¹

Furthermore, Ukraine's accession to NATO (one of Viktor Yushchenko's long-term aspirations) is thwarted by the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea.⁴² In maintaining its military presence throughout Ukraine, Russia creates an exclusive zone of influence of which the West would be foolish to attempt to penetrate and which keeps NATO out of Ukraine.

Russia's political influence in Ukraine is a more complex issue. At the beginning of President Putin's term in office it seemed that Ukraine was on a path towards further integration with Russia – Chernomyrdin's appointment as ambassador and Putin and Kuchma's summit meeting indicated renewed relations between the two countries. Yet, in the aftermath of the Orange Revolution, one analyst claimed that "the loser in the Ukrainian revolution turns out to be Russia" because of the "dirty and cynical election campaign, in which official Moscow played a significant role, the Ukrainian elite's trust in all things Russian has been shaken substantially and lastingly."⁴³

Newly elected President Yushchenko quickly worked to orientate Ukraine to the West, with short-term goals of World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, as well as long-term

³⁷ As discussed earlier, by 2002, Russians controlled forty to fifty percent of Ukraine's economy.

³⁸ Michael T. Klare, "The Geopolitics of Natural Gas," *The Nation* 282 (January 23, 2006): 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁰ Nikolai Kryukov, "Evolution of Russian-Ukrainian Relations: The Legal Status of the Black Sea Fleet," *Military Thought* 15 (2006): 131.

⁴¹ Kryukov, 131.

⁴² Kryukov, 130.

⁴³ Stanislav Belkovsky, "Results of the 'Orange Revolution,'" *The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press* 56 (December 29, 2004)

goals of NATO and EU membership.⁴⁴ Membership in the WTO would give Ukraine a significant advantage over Russia (if Russia did not have membership); for example, in a potential trade dispute Ukraine would be in a position to put pressure on Russia. However, these changes in orientation may not last long if the 2006 parliamentary elections are any indication. The victory of pro-Russia Yanukovich's Party of the Regions (with thirty-two percent of the vote) was an unexpected but not inexplicable event – the Russian-speaking constituency in southern and eastern Ukraine that supported Yanukovich in 2004 did not disappear.⁴⁵ By supporting pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine, Russia ensures that its presence is felt in Ukraine's government and reminds Ukraine that it will not easily escape Russia's control.⁴⁶

Conclusion

The collapse of the Soviet Union forced many states, including Russia to redefine their policies within the modern international order. Today, Russia is re-emerging as an actor on the international stage and is learning how to assert its political and security interests. Russia actively pursues its security and geopolitical policies by interfering in the affairs of former Soviet republics. Fundamentally, Russian security interests are to create an exclusive zone of influence over the economic, military and political aspects of CIS members in order to re-establish its great power status (even if only as a regional great power) and project a strong image to the rest of the world. Russia's security directives are obvious in the former republic of Ukraine by Russia's control over Ukraine's economy, military and domestic politics. In dominating these areas of Ukraine, Russia shows itself, Ukraine, the Commonwealth of Independent States and the world that it still has what it takes to be a great power.

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⁴⁴ Despite the recent defeat of proposed WTO membership in the Ukrainian parliament, Ukraine is still capable of joining the WTO. Paul D'Anieri, "What Has Changed in Ukrainian Politics? Assessing the Implications of the Orange Revolution," *Problems of Post-Communism* 52 (September/October 2005): 82-91.

⁴⁵ Economist, "A freer choice, despite everything," *The Economist* 378 (March 30, 2006).

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