



A NET ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENTS IN EURASIA SINCE THE START OF 2014

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FOREWORD

During the week of October 14–20, 2014, *Eurasia Daily Monitor* presented a series of special issues featuring net assessments of developments across Eurasia since the beginning of the year. Following Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity on the Maidan, and Russia’s ensuing cynical attack on the country and annexation of Crimea, the reverberations of these events have been felt far and wide across the post-Soviet space. Making sense of what has happened in the past ten months compelled Jamestown to take a step back and place the year’s events into a broader strategic context. The end result of our effort has been to commission a series of political landscape pieces by *EDM* contributors, which assess developments in Eurasia since the start of the year and anticipate where those regional trends may lead. The following compilation includes all the resulting articles published in *EDM* in mid-October 2014, as well as three other pieces, by Stephen Blank, Maksym Bugriy and Dumitru Minzarari, which had not been released until now. We hope that this collection can help to outline how the conflict over Ukraine has and is changing the security environment throughout Europe and Eurasia.



Glen E. Howard
President, The Jamestown Foundation

October 24, 2014
Washington, DC

RUSSIA—A NET ASSESSMENT SINCE THE START OF 2014

De-Modernization and Degradation: Russia's Domestic Situation Since the Start of 2014

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 181

October 14, 2014

By: [Pavel K. Baev](#)

Considering Russia's shocking transformation in the course of just half a year, it is easy to forget that last February the country was united in the joy of hosting the Sochi Winter Olympic games. The issues that dominated the political agenda at the start of the year—like growing outrage over rampant corruption or concerns about the violent instability in the North Caucasus—have all but disappeared from the present-day debates. At the same time, the issues that one would expect to be at the top of the agenda currently—like the deteriorating economic situation or the falling ruble—attract some expert opinions but by far less public worry. Indeed, in today's Russia, the basic trends of de-modernization and degradation are now beyond doubt.

Moscow's swift annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula generated an explosion of public triumphalism that has flattened and simplified rather than enriched Russia's political landscape. The regional elections in September were reduced to the pro-forma confirmation of the Kremlin-vetted candidates, and this year's vote registered particularly low participation. In Moscow, for that matter, a legislature entirely free of opposition figures was duly elected, even though, just one year earlier, the opposition blogger Alexei Navalny gained surprisingly strong support in the capital's mayoral elections. This growing irrelevance of domestic politics is aggravated by the Russian government's aggressive and poisonous propaganda, which has become a political force in its own right. Opinion polls show the population's apparent eagerness to subscribe to the simple solutions on offer: A strong majority of Russians consistently embraces the conflict with Ukraine and vouches that Russia is on the right course.

One figure stands in splendid isolation at the head of this course—President Vladimir Putin, whose approval ratings have reached the level typical for mature authoritarian leaders. After 15 years at the summit of power, and at just 62 years of age, he has established such dominance over other Russian elites that all speculations about a possible successor—so lively just a year ago, when he appeared at loss over how to address the steadily declining popularity of his regime—have now entirely ceased ([Moscow Echo](#), October 7). Even if this absolute concentration of authority addresses some archaic deformities in the Russian political psyche, it nonetheless distorts the workings of the country's huge bureaucratic machine, since all cadre or cash-flow decisions can only be taken at the supreme level and nothing is delegated. Putin's mood swings and idiosyncrasies—like his disdain for the Internet—overrule every bureaucratic preference for stability and quiet self-enrichment.

This super-concentration of decision-making is particularly harmful for economic policy because Putin refuses to acknowledge the reality of stagnation turning into recession. Alexei Kudrin, the only person who was able to insist on common economic sense, has been expelled from the Kremlin; German Gref, the designer of the first set of reforms at the dawn of the Putin "era," has been reduced to an eccentric contrarian; and court aides like Sergei Glazyev have learned to

deliver only the advice that the boss likes to hear ([Moskovsky Komsomolets](#), October 9). This explains such odd decisions by the Russian government as the enforcement of counter-sanctions (banning food imports from the West) that have inflicted great damage to Russia's own agriculture, not to mention spur inflation. Such "mundane" matters as the devaluation of the ruble (last week, the ruble reached the landmark level of 40 for one US dollar) attract scant attention from the president. But one figure continues to touch an old raw nerve—the international oil price, which has slipped below the minimum level the Russian state budget needs to support the country's generous social programs and re-armament goals ([Gazeta.ru](#), October 7).

The erosion of the relative prosperity of the urban low-middle classes may now proceed quickly because the higher-middle classes (consisting primarily of government bureaucrats and security services personnel—siloviki) not only refuse to diminish their earnings by reducing their corrupt practices, but in fact continue to boldly pursue ever more brazen embezzlement schemes. This shameless profiteering is tacitly approved from above, since Putin is primarily concerned with elite loyalty, and largely ignored by the wider public opinion, which is focused on the Kremlin-directed "patriotic" agenda ([Levada.ru](#), September 12). Alexei Navalny keeps his fierce anti-corruption campaign going, despite the pressure of his house arrest. He insists that public indifference is a transitory feature and that outrage will eventually return with a vengeance ([Slon.ru](#), October 9). Over the course of this year, Russia's liberal opposition was disheartened by the dominance of the triumphalist "Crimean" discourse and dismayed by the loud excoriation of a "fifth column." Yet, the relative strength of the Peace March, held in Moscow on September 21, showed that the political opposition is, nevertheless, once more readying itself to challenge the entrenched Putinist system.

Months of inflamed nationalistic feelings in Russia have included particularly harsh anti-Westernism. Anti-Americanism has returned to the high level registered in 2008 after the blitz-war with Georgia, but Russians' simultaneous pronounced anti-Europeanism is new. The national propaganda decries the European Union as a dysfunctional bureaucracy that mismanages its own economic decline, while at the same time, Europe is portrayed as the main driver of the Ukraine crisis—sponsoring its rejection of Russia's "big-brotherly" embrace. Such propaganda yields for the Kremlin politically useful delusions, but Russia's ties with Europe—unlike its quasi-friendship with China—go very deep. Therefore, former imprisoned Yukos CEO Mikhail Khodorkovsky has made the revival of these Russian-European ties one of the key messages in his newly-launched platform for public policy ([Open Russia](#), October 3).

As the intoxication with the Crimea "conquest" turns into hangover from "owning" the hard-won and entirely useless rump-Novorossiia (eastern Ukraine), Putin now faces the imperative to orchestrate a new victory in order to prevent a fast drop in his artificially boosted public support. In the awkward pause of the last few weeks, Russia's economic hardships have not turned really hard—and they may even be softened for most Russians in the coming months. However, the perception is crystallizing that the country is firmly moving on a downward economic trajectory. This perception has prompted a corruption frenzy among the moneyed bureaucracy, while inciting fervor among the nationalists, whose radical views are shifting into the political mainstream. But for many more Russians, seeing this apparently unstoppable downward trajectory brings up uneasy questions about the future of their country. Consequently, Putin

needs to make a new pro-active move somewhere before this question turns into a conclusion that the only aim of his leadership is to hold on to power, with no regard for the future of Russia beyond the end of his reign.

Crimea's Consequences for Russia's Non-Russians: Long-Term Nationalities Trends Within the Russian Federation

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 182

October 15, 2014

By: [Paul Goble](#)

Not surprisingly, most people have focused on the consequences that Moscow's Anschluss of Crimea has had for the people of that Ukrainian peninsula, for Ukraine, for Russia's relations with the West and for the international system as a whole. But some of the most serious long-term consequences of Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea could potentially affect the non-Russian peoples living within the borders of the Russian Federation. Five such consequential trends have been gradually developing this year and call for further scrutiny.

First of all, Vladimir Putin's move in Crimea has reopened an issue most had thought closed: the stability of borders both among countries and between them. Moscow's chief argument against the Chechens and other non-Russian nationalities interested in secession from Russia is that international borders cannot be changed. But now Moscow has changed them, and that action has triggered discussions about what non-Russians might achieve, with various activists drawing maps of a dismembered Russian Federation or speculating on whether the Chinese might move into Siberia as Russians have moved into Ukraine.

Most of these discussions are fanciful, at least for the moment, but they have also triggered concerns about changes in other borders: those within the Russian Federation. Putin's effort to amalgamate smaller non-Russian units with larger and predominantly Russian ones had stalled; however, there now are growing fears in many non-Russian areas that he may start that process up again, especially because such moves or even more radical ones toward the "gubernization" of Russia, would be extremely popular among Russian nationalists.

Again and again, both non-Russian activists and Russian commentators have pointed to such possibilities as among the most destabilizing consequences of Putin's opening of the Pandora's box that is Crimea ([colta.ru](#), February 20; [svobodnykaliningrad.com](#), September 23).

Second, in his effort to justify the Crimean Anschluss, Putin has insisted that Russian ethnicity or, more generally, being part of what he calls "the Russian world" is more important than citizenship. Such a position puts him at odds with the international order, which, since 1945, has been based on the primacy of state citizenship over ethnicity. Moreover, Putin's view undermines the stability of the Russian Federation itself—a country that formally defines itself as a multi-national state and whose population is one-quarter non-Russian.

From the point of view of many Russians and even more non-Russians, their country is on its way to becoming a Russian nation-state with minorities, rather than a multi-national federation in which no nation is supposed to enjoy pride of place at the expense of others. While Russians may welcome that as “the birth of a nation,” the non-Russians see it as giving carte blanche to increasingly authoritarian Russian officials to strip the non-Russians of their rights and reduce them to the status of second-, third- or even fourth-class citizens.

The first flash point of this new ethnic tension may be already occurring between Russians and Ukrainians. The latter nationality includes both the several million who have long lived in various parts of the Russian Federation, including in the Russian Far East, which Ukrainians call “the Green Wedge,” and the nearly one million refugees escaping the fighting in southeastern Ukraine. This new group’s presence has been imposing unwanted burdens on Russian officials and populations and intensifying anti-Ukrainian attitudes among Russians as well as anti-Russian attitudes among Ukrainians (nazaccent.ru, August 5; centrasia.ru, September 29).

More to the point, or at least with greater implications for new outbreaks of tension and even violence in the future, neither the Russian boosters of this idea nor the non-Russian opponents of it have been shy to talk about these possibilities and these risks (forum-msk.org, October 13).

Third, the absorption of Crimea has had the unintended consequence of pushing the Republic of Tatarstan toward its earlier post-Soviet role as the leader of the non-Russian republics. Following Crimea’s annexation, Moscow assumed that it could use the Volga Tatars as its agents to help absorb the Crimean Tatars. But that plan backfired. Instead of influence flowing from Kazan to Bakhchisaray (former capital of the Crimean Khanate), it has flowed in the opposite direction. Over the past year, Volga Tatars, the second largest nationality in the Russian Federation, have been increasingly taking up the cudgels for the Crimean Tatars. And some Volga Tatars even openly spoke about the way in which the formation of a second Tatar republic in the Russian Federation could open the way for a new effort to promote real federalism in the country (qha.com.ua, November 26, 2013; Window on Eurasia, May 24).

Fourth, the annexation of Crimea has intriguingly created a new language community within Russia, which together forms the sixth largest language group in that country. In a commentary on LiveJournal, for example, Dagestani writer Ruslan Salahbekov points out that the 250,000 Crimean Tatars now part of Russia share essentially the same language with 500,000 Kumyks almost 220,000 Karachai, about 115,000 Balkars, and 100,000 Nogai (salahbekov.livejournal.com, October 10). Their shared spoken language—“a unified system of dialects,” which has four distinctive written norms—will become a lingua franca for these peoples in the future, Salahbekov argues, allowing the ideas of the Crimean Tatars to pass into the other nationalities and further destabilize the situation in the North Caucasus where these other peoples live. Among those who have already been encouraged by this process are the Circassian nationalities who hope to copy the idea of one language, many peoples as they seek to re-energize their national rebirth.

But fifth and perhaps the most dangerous impact of the Crimean Anschluss on the peoples of the Russian Federation is the involvement of an increasing number of Russians and non-Russians on opposite sides in the fighting in southeastern Ukraine that was triggered by the annexation. Not

only is the experience of fighting in these areas giving some of those involved new skills in the use of violence, but there is growing evidence that it is radicalizing the feelings that led them to take part in the first place. Russian media outlets are already expressing alarm about what will happen when those who took part in the Donbas fighting return home, newly radicalized and convinced that violence is the only way to achieve their goals. And some in the North Caucasus are worried that the fact that Chechens have fought on both sides could open the way to a new wave of violence there (ng.ru, October 13).

Most of these trends are still below the radar screen or, if taken note of, dismissed as impossibilities. But one would do well to remember that only a year ago the possibility of a Russian annexation of Crimea was treated in exactly the same way.

Preparing for War Against the US on All Fronts: Russia's Defense and Foreign Policy

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 183

October 16, 2014

By: [Pavel Felgenhauer](#)

In a series of recently published interviews, President Vladimir Putin (kremlin.ru, October 15), Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev ([Interfax](http://interfax.ru), October 15) and national security council secretary Nikolai Patrushev ([Rossiyskaya Gazeta](http://rossiyskaya-gazeta.ru), October 15) have outlined Moscow's strategic vision of the world after the Ukrainian crisis, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Moscow-inspired proxy war in the southeastern Donbas region of Ukraine, and resulting punitive sanctions imposed by the West. The view from Moscow is uninviting—A new cold war with the West is in the making; Russia is under attack and will use all means at its disposal to resist, including the nuclear option. Putin accused Washington of deliberately provoking the Ukraine crisis by supporting extreme nationalists in Kyiv, which in turn ignited a civil war. “Now they [the United States] accuse us of causing this crisis,” exclaimed Putin, “It is madness to blackmail Russia; let them remember, a discord between major nuclear powers may undermine strategic stability” (kremlin.ru, October 15).

Under mounting Western pressure this year, Russian leaders have been repeatedly and unambiguously reminding the West of the ultimate weapon at Moscow's disposal—nuclear mutual assured destruction. The Russian military is also rearming and conducting massive exercises, preparing for a possible global war. The consensus view in Moscow within the political, military and intelligence community is that relations with the United States are beyond repair and, quoting Medvedev, there is no possibility of any new US-Russian “reset.” Moscow has come to believe that there is no possibility of any genuine détente with Washington until 2020 at the earliest. Indeed, National Security Council Secretary Patrushev's interview in the official government-published Rossiyskaya Gazeta newspaper has the title: “Second Cold War.” Patrushev openly describes the US as Russia's eternal foe and accuses Washington of planning for many decades to fully isolate Moscow and deprive it of any influence in its former dominions in the post-Soviet space. Patrushev announced (which seems to be an officially held policy opinion) that the US is today fulfilling a strategic plan to marginalize and destroy Russia—a

strategy that he says was initiated in the 1970s by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the then–United States National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter.

The US is now seen in Moscow as irredeemable and determined to destroy Russia, which must resist by reinforcing and rearming its military, investing in technological independence (the so-called import replacement or “importozamescheniye”), and by building a world-wide anti-US alliance. To that effect, over the past year, Moscow has been strengthening its ties with Beijing. In particular, Russia has been opening itself up to Chinese investment, seeking much needed hard currency liquidity in the Chinese banking system, as well as looking for Chinese technologies (including civilian, double-use and maybe eventually military) to replace those technologies, materials, components and investments that are not forthcoming from the West because of punitive sanctions. Patrushev, in his interview, confirmed that Russian strategic planners see in the future a divided multipolar world with increasingly scarce natural resources (oil, gas, food, clear water) where Russia could dominate resource-poor Europe (see [EDM](#), October 9). Moreover, Washington is believed to have deliberately provoked the Ukrainian crisis to reinforce the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and blackmail its allies into full submission. As Patrushev argues, Russia, in turn, must build alliances with non-European emerging powers like China, while working to undermine the Transatlantic link to liberate Europeans from US domination.

Patrushev spells out what most of the Moscow ruling elite believes: Europeans, as well as misguided Ukrainians will soon inevitably see reason and understand that without Russia and its supplies of various natural resources, they cannot survive; whereas, Russia can do without them thanks to its warm strategic embrace with China. Moscow will not withdraw from Crimea and will not give up on its attempts to prevent Ukraine from moving closer to NATO or the European Union. Actual fighting in the Donbas region may die down as the ceasefire line of control continues to be slowly and painfully established, but the overarching new cold war with the US will endure and Ukraine shall be a major battleground—though not the only one. Therefore, the Kremlin is preparing to fight the United States on all possible fronts to push back US attempts to “contain” Russia. In line with the plans reiterated this year, additional Russian forces will be deployed in the Arctic to fend off a possible US assault. Moreover, dozens of Cold War–era military bases and airfields will be reinvigorated across the whole of the Russian Arctic; troops will be deployed together with bombers and MiG-31 interceptors. In addition, new or reinforced military garrisons will be deployed in Crimea, Belarus and Kyrgyzstan ([Rossiyskaya Gazeta](#), October 15).

Thanks to months of sanctions and falling oil prices, the ruble is sliding against the dollar and euro. The Russian economy has continued to stagnate and may go into recession in 2015. A contraction in household income is also expected. The finance ministry is considering cuts in budget spending, but it seems defense expenditures will continue to grow. The defense budget in 2015 is planned to reach an all-time post–Cold War high of 4.2 percent of GDP or 3.3 trillion rubles (\$81 billion). In 2012, defense spending was 3 percent of GDP; in 2013, it reached 3.2 percent; and in 2014, it was 3.4 percent ([Interfax](#), October 16). Overall federal budget spending to finance Russia’s massive intelligence services and other militarized services is almost as big as the defense budget per se. And as the new cold war–type standoff widens in scope and the

Russian economy flounders, the Russian people will be increasingly paying for guns instead of butter.

But the population, which has continued to be fed vicious state propaganda—especially after the Ukraine crisis began to escalate—seems to agree with the Kremlin. According to the latest poll by independent pollster Levada Center, a majority believe Western sanctions are designed to punish the overall population, but the majority have not yet felt any sanction effect. Furthermore, some 60 percent agree that the property and assets of Western companies in Russia may be confiscated as a practical reply to sanctions, and 58 percent agree with a possible boycott of foreign produce. Fifty-nine percent believe that Western punitive sanctions and Russian countermeasures like the ban on Western food will, in fact, enhance Russia's economic development. And the vast majority of Russians—79 percent—are against giving up Crimea ([Interfax](#), October 16).

During all of 2014, Russia's rulers and most of the population seem to have been living together in a daydream. Consequently, Russian defense and foreign policy plans as well as the country's decision making apparatus have, for months, been based on little more than strange fantasies and outlandish assumptions. Yet, these fantasies are backed up by a formidable military machine, billions of petrodollars and a nuclear superpower arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. And this is a truly dangerous mix.

Myth and Reality: Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare' Strategy (Part One)

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 184

October 17, 2014

By: [Roger McDermott](#)

Russian commentators noted the significance of President Vladimir Putin's mid-October decision to order troops back to their bases after several months of high readiness in proximity to the Russia-Ukraine border. Military forces in the area were placed on high alert in the run-up to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in February 2014 and were maintained at such levels since. Although it may not signal the end of the crisis, and was most likely triggered by the agreement to hold a bilateral meeting between President Putin and his Ukrainian counterpart, Petro Poroshenko, in Milan, it presents an opportunity to reflect on Russia's use of military power during the crisis since the start of the year ([gazeta.ru](#), October 13).

Essential in such reflections on the success of Moscow's policy to annex Crimea, destabilize eastern and southeastern Ukraine, and fundamentally challenge post-Cold War European security architecture is the concept and mythology which developed around the phrase "hybrid warfare." At an early stage, following the sudden appearance of the "polite people"—denoting the Russian military deployment across the Crimean peninsula in late February and March 2014—this phrase came into Western parlance. In fact, "hybrid warfare" reflects two quite distinctive and misleading articles in the Russian media: one by Putin's close advisor Vladislav Surkov (under a pseudonym) and the other, written one year earlier, allegedly by the chief of the General Staff

(CGS), Army-General Valeriy Gerasimov. Surkov's phrase, in a futuristic piece written in March 2014, used the term "non-linear" warfare, marking something new in Russian conventional operations. While the term also appeared in the thinking expressed under Gerasimov's name in February 2013 (ruspioner.ru, March 12; Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer, February 27, 2013).

Surkov's phrase, following the surprise activities in Crimea, which marked Moscow's annexation of the territory, was seized upon by commentators in search of a convenient hook to make sense of rapidly unfolding developments. Moreover, many pointed to the holy grail of "non-linear" warfare, preferring the term "hybrid warfare" while appealing to the Gerasimov article from February 2013 in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*. Unfortunately, the search is somewhat misleading for a number of salient reasons: Gerasimov was only in the post for three months at that point. Second, he was not known for advanced thinking on future warfare developments. And finally, there is a long tradition established in the Soviet era of lower-ranking General Staff officers publishing under the name of the CGS. Consequently, those who rushed for easy interpretations of the Russian tactics used in Ukraine coined the phrase: "Gerasimov doctrine," as one explainer. However, many of the features of the Russian operations in Crimea, for instance, were put in place by Gerasimov's predecessor Nikolai Makarov (Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer, February 27, 2013).

The Russian Federation's aggression toward Ukraine swung between unconventional and conventional warfare. Russia absorbed Crimea and subsequently carried out operations to promote "rebel forces" in Ukraine in what appeared as a war for "Novorossiya" ("New Russia"—a historical name for lands occupying mainly southeastern Ukraine), with ever increasing gains on the ground for the pro-Russia elements within Ukraine's east. Russian actions ranged from the use of "polite people" or a new special forces mix in Crimea, to a threat of full-scale invasion by combined-arms units in the Donbas region—and included high-profile "humanitarian convoys" used to great effect (see [EDM](#), September 2). The actual use of Russian troops within Ukraine amounted to a relatively small force, compared to the high-readiness combined-arms units closer to the border. These operations themselves ranged from conventional through to special forces operations, combined with an ongoing information campaign aimed at destabilization Ukraine and combatting the West's narrative of the conflict (see [EDM](#), July 8).

Russian and Western commentators quickly lost sight of how the Crimea operation was handled and precisely why it was so effective. They overlooked the actual force mix that was utilized in conjunction with the Kremlin's mixture of hard and soft power to slice off part of the territory of a neighboring state and apply continued pressure on the government in Kyiv. Slogans about "polite people" and references to "non-linear war" masked the actual nature of executing such operations. By April 2014, Russia's political-military elite were so buoyed by the confidence of this experiment in harnessing hard and soft power that they were poking fun at leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) who were condemning Russian actions in Ukraine. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu dismissed the West's search for Russian military involvement in eastern Ukraine as like looking for "a black cat in a dark room," while offering admiration for Russian special forces, by acknowledging that such black cats are "smart, polite and brave" (see [EDM](#), April 23).

Blurring Russian military theory, doctrine, capabilities and force development with the opinions of Moscow media in a full blown information campaign became a matrix for explaining the on-the-ground activities of Russian units. But this explanation eclipsed many of the real themes present in the original “Gerasimov” article. These are worth noting in order to reach a proper understanding of the use of unconventional tactics to good effect in Crimea and later in destabilizing eastern and southeastern Ukraine ([EDM](#), June 17; [EDM](#), June 12).

The problem is that the Gerasimov article does not entirely fit Russian operations in Ukraine. Its context, with references to Russian thinking on future warfare as well as efforts to bolster military science and the domestic defense industry, are vital clues in the reading of the piece. A dominant theme in this discourse, reinforced by the need to stress continuity with the previous CGS, is the interest in both network-centric and non-linear warfare—themes present in the Armed Forces reform launched in 2008 and the subsequent military modernization to 2020. Moreover, these ideas and concepts were not developed in a vacuum; they were and are responses to and interpretations of military developments within NATO and elsewhere ([Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), February 27, 2013).

After outlining the complex nature of modern warfare and its blurring of war and peace, framed by references to conflicts around the world, the author outlined the nature of how wars have shifted toward some new form; these features were then delineated. This includes the “initiation of military operations” by line units in peacetime; “highly maneuverable non-contact operations” by inter-branch line units; destroying “critically important infrastructure” in a short time; “simultaneous effects” on line units and enemy facilities at depth; warfare in all “physical environments and the information space;” asymmetric and indirect operations; and the command and control of forces and assets “in a unified information space.” This did not represent a fully worked out hybrid warfare doctrine, and the operation in Crimea and later actions within the country do not entirely fit ([Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), February 27, 2013).

Myth and Reality: Russia’s ‘Hybrid Warfare’ Strategy (Part Two)

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 185

October 20, 2014

By: [Roger McDermott](#)

Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, and Moscow’s mixture of threatening full-scale invasion of Ukraine’s east combined with promoting separatism, analysts seized on an earlier article written by General Valeriy Gerasimov as offering a conceptual framework for those actions. Collectively, journalists quickly settled on describing this strategy by using the phrase “hybrid warfare,” though the original use in Gerasimov’s article was actually “non-linear” warfare (see [Part One](#) of this article in EDM, October 17; also see [EDM](#), September 17).

Gerasimov’s March 2014 piece ended with a call to reinvigorate Russian military science in order to modernize the military to fight 21st-century conflicts. He cited the great Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin, stressing that war is “extremely difficult to predict,” and that each

conflict has its own line of strategic behavior requiring a particular logic and “not the application of a pattern.” The point was not lost on the country’s foremost military theorist, Army-General Makhmut Gareev, the president of the Academy of Military Sciences. In an article in May 2014, Gareev called for the lessons learned from the success of the Crimean operation to be examined and acted upon by Moscow (see [EDM](#), May 6; [Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), February 27, 2013).

However, by May 2014, those lessons were difficult to distinguish as the application of hard and soft power that dislodged Crimea from Ukraine had been submerged in several concurrent narratives: ranging from the versions in the Russian and Ukrainian media, to Western interpretations. The search for the specifics of Russian non-linear warfare, consistent with existing military science, would therefore demand a defragmentation of these contradictory narratives. The actual force mix used in Crimea, which appeared to rehearse the use of forces assigned to an evolving rapid reaction force, also contained an element of interest to other Russian military theorists. This seemed to mark a transition in the use of special forces (spetsnaz) to a more clearly defined combat- rather than reconnaissance-based role ([RIA Novosti](#), May 16).

By September 2014, Colonel-General Anatoly Zaitsev assessed the implications of the Crimea operation in terms of the role of commandos in both offensive and defensive modes, arguing that a modern army must be able to fight without a front line. Zaitsev’s thinking, in other words, follows the same dynamics as earlier discussions of Russian views on future warfare. The “generations of wars” theme recurs, with the ultimate focus placed on “network-centric” and “non-contact” combat. Zaitsev notes that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) intelligence missed everything concerning the Crimea operation, primarily due to Russian forces observing strict radio silence; Russia also made skilful use of the base in Sevastopol and military transport shipping from the Black Sea Fleet to redeploy personnel and equipment. Zaitsev then highlights the “sudden appearance of formidable, armed ‘polite people’ without insignia, where it was necessary to prevent an armed intervention” from local units ([Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), September 3).

For Zaitsev, one of the “lessons learned” from the Crimea operation was related to the use of Russian commando units to seal off key infrastructure as forces spread across the peninsula. Zaitsev states:

In particular, the concealed concentration and operational deployment of troops, not to mention the advance of any kind of major reserve, have become practically unrealizable. Under those conditions it is unrealistic to establish a major troop grouping such as at the level of a reinforced division on axes for delivery of the main and diversionary attacks. Taking a broader look at the actions of blocking subunits, their similarity to tactics of medium-size and small commando teams (we will call them partisan teams) will become obvious. Their ultimate mission clearly is to destroy critically important enemy facilities and disorganize or destroy [the enemy’s] troop support systems ([Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), September 3).

These actual successes, critical in avoiding the Ukrainian forces opening fire on Russian troops, were no accident but the work of highly specialised GRU (military intelligence) Spetsnaz forces

following strict orders. According to Zaitsev, this has implications for the future protection of critical infrastructure on Russian territory, including the protection of nuclear facilities ([Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), September 3). Part of the mystery surrounding the lack of response from Ukrainian forces in Crimea during the operation lies precisely in this area. Russian commando units sealed off local bases, cut communications, and operated under strict orders to avoid opening fire or, if needed, to fire above the heads of enemy forces. The Russian forces were also ordered to allow Ukrainian personnel to contact their families and offered preferential defection terms for Ukrainian troops switching to join the Russian Armed Forces—including the same terms and conditions but without taking the oath of allegiance (Author’s interviews, May 2014).

Thus, for the author of the March 2014 Gerasimov article (whether or not it was actually General Staff head Valeriy Gerasimov) or specialists such as General Zaitsev, the internal military discussion is about developing tactics and methods that reflect the fact that the very means and methods of modern warfare have fundamentally changed. This includes a Russian understanding of using “weapons of new physical principles” or technological advances that occur during armed conflict where one side gains battlefield superiority over the other by exploiting a more effective means to direct firepower. In this military theory, the discussion is about generations of warfare and moving to non-contact or network-centric methods. The Russian military has neither a developed nor agreed-upon doctrinal version of these concepts, let alone a fully worked out “non-linear” approach. Svechin’s dictum about war not being about the “application of a pattern” holds true for Russian military theory today. The point is that non-linear doctrine and its tactics are in a state of experimentation and evolution—hence, Moscow is unlikely to repeat precisely the same approach or pattern when non-linear warfare is used next ([Voyenno Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), September 3; see [EDM](#), May 6; [Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer](#), February 27, 2013).

These issues are important for NATO planners as they consider how to boost security in the Alliance’s East and deal with any Russian actions below the threshold of Article Five. This will also come into play as the force structure of the new “spearhead” takes shape—which is aimed at strengthening security in Central Eastern Europe and the Baltic States by consolidating the NATO Reaction Force and building it upon a rotational basing structure. NATO military planners require 18 months to two years to plan and develop new exercise scenarios, meaning that Moscow will see no more than token tinkering with the “spearhead” force until 2016. Meanwhile, however, NATO decision makers risk planning responses to a nebulous target, since Russia’s “non-linear” warfare methods—in embryonic use in Ukraine since the beginning of 2014—will likely witness further refinement.

EUROPE'S EAST—A NET ASSESSMENT SINCE THE START OF 2014

Caveat! Hic Ursus (Caution! Here Lie Bears): Developments in the Baltic Littoral

November 3, 2014

By: [Stephen Blank](#)

For the eastern countries of the Baltic littoral region—Russia, the Baltic States, Finland, Sweden, and Poland—the most critical event of 2014 happened outside this area. Specifically, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as its ensuing occupation of Crimea and Donbas (eastern Ukrainian region encompassing the provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk), greatly intensified the threat posed to all these European states by Moscow. And in the absence of an effective Western response, Moscow has attempted to intimidate them still further over the past several months. The most recent cases have been Russia's coordinated efforts to probe all of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) air defenses. On occasion, Russian military aircraft approaching European territory even shut off their transponders, risking a potentially serious incident with civilian airliners ([Interfax](#), October 29; [gazeta.pl](#), [Washington Post](#), October 30). Immediately before that, the region was gripped by the incident of an apparent Russian submarine in Swedish waters, thereby repeating a scenario from the height of the Cold War.

But these and all other such incidents going back to at least 2013 have long since become routine elements of a comprehensive multi-dimensional Russian strategy in the wider region. It has included aerial probes, deployments in Kaliningrad of the dual-capable Iskander missile, Zapad-2013 exercises targeted on this area, the invasion of Ukraine, other probes and threats directed against Finland and Sweden, the steady build-up of Russian regional military capabilities, threats against the Baltic States through attempts to exploit the Russian minorities living there, energy pressures, efforts at subverting political institutions in those states, etc.

This strategy uses all the instruments of power at Moscow's disposal—diplomatic, informational, military and economic instruments—to destabilize the area, keep local governments under pressure and attempt to discredit the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a reliable security provider. Thus, immediately after NATO and President Barack Obama publicly guaranteed the protection of the Baltic States, Moscow arranged an incident whereby it abducted an Estonian counter-intelligence officer, on September 5. Over the past weeks and months, Putin's revanchist and Nazi-like speeches have explicitly endorsed this strategy. His March 18, speech to the Duma justifying the Crimean operation explicitly defended the Russian government's claimed right to invade other states to protect the "honor and dignity" of Russian speakers in the so-called "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir) as well as ethnic Russians ([kremlin.ru](#), March 18).

This gamut of abovementioned Russian probes represent prima facie evidence of Russia's revisionist and even belligerent inclinations toward its neighbors. But they have not gone completely unanswered, despite the generally insufficient Western response. Over the past year, Lithuania has moved to free itself from the Russian energy threat by opening up a new liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal and negotiating with US producers for shale gas. This and other moves by local governments suggest that they are trying to make the European Union's Third

Energy Package—an anathema to Moscow—a reality, even if these European states end up having to pay extra costs for their energy. Also, over the past months, despite contradictory and hesitant, at times even inconclusive steps, the Scandinavian states’ drift toward greater regional defense cooperation among themselves and with NATO has become ever clearer. At the same time, since the invasion of Ukraine began, the North Atlantic Alliance has stepped up its air patrols and defense of the Baltic States and of Poland. Furthermore, Latvia’s October parliamentary elections showed that the pro-Russian Harmony Party actually lost seats. Although it remains the single largest party in the legislature, it is unlikely to have a major or perhaps any share in the next Latvian government.

Nevertheless, this assortment of measured Western responses to Moscow’s aggressive policies since the start of 2014 have not deterred Russia. Rather, Moscow has continued to escalate its threats against the Baltic littoral states and the Alliance as a whole. Neither have the West’s responses led Russia to reconsider its position on Ukraine. In fact, by invading Ukraine, Putin and his entourage reached several conclusions that are directly relevant to the Baltic States in particular and to the other Baltic littoral countries in general.

First, this war and its aftermath convinced the Kremlin leadership that the Putinist system is the only way to govern Russia, and it cannot succeed unless Russia is a great power—i.e., an imperial formation. Second, it became evident to Russian leaders that any wars Russia conducts in its neighborhood will (if necessary) be carried out on a constant basis using all the instruments of power enumerated above. Third, Moscow’s current aggressive policy has come to resemble a return to the full Leninist threat paradigm—though shorn of its social class vocabulary—whereby, Russia believes itself to be under threat from both inside and out. The Kremlin leadership believes that these domestic and foreign enemies’ shared goal is the destruction of the empire—and thus of the Russian state. And finally, stemming from the third aforementioned realization, the Kremlin is determined not to repeat what it believes was Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s greatest mistake: that by voluntarily renouncing the use of force, he was unable to save the regime’s power or preserve the Soviet Union’s imperial interests.

Ultimately, then, the lesson for the West is that all of Europe’s eastern Baltic littorals—not just the Baltic States, but Poland, Finland and Sweden—are now front-line states, whether they like it or not. Moscow’s activities in the last 18 months constitute what military analysts call an “unambiguous warning.” Yet, it is still unclear whether everyone understands that warning correctly.

Russia’s Push to the South: Geopolitical Developments in the Black Sea Region

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October 16, 2014

By: [Stephen Blank](#)

The strategic implications of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine far transcend Ukraine, Russia, Poland and the Baltic States. They also prominently include the entire

Black Sea littoral, including the Balkans, and even the Eastern Mediterranean. Historically, domination of the Black Sea opened the way to Russia's projection of its power into these areas, and recent events show signs that this process may be repeating itself again. Moscow's conquest and annexation of Crimea in February 2014 has set the stage for a new Russian drive to the south.

Since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, the Black Sea has become an area of competing naval powers as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) now maintains a fluctuating but constant military presence there. Indeed, a constant naval presence is arguably needed in the Black Sea to ensure the security of Ukraine and particularly Odesa, Ukraine's last remaining and crucial seaport. Furthermore, the Russian naval presence in the Black Sea, Russia's takeover of much of Ukraine's navy, as well as Moscow's acquisition of new naval bases and infrastructure in this strategic region all directly threaten Turkey—the other major local naval power of the Black Sea. Yet, over the last nine months, Turkey's reaction to the Russian invasion has been as muted as the Western response, if not more so.

Apart from the desire for warm-water southern bases, Moscow has also continued to obstruct efforts to bring all the Balkan states into NATO and the European Union. Moreover, over this past year, Russia has continued to economically pressure Moldova and even apparently entertained plans to tie Moldova and Ukraine together to the Russian Federation. Ukrainian sources report that during the current Russian-Ukrainian war, Moscow has widened the airport in Tiraspol, the “capital” of Moldova's breakaway Transnistrian “republic,” to permit the landings of military flights with heavier forces. Moreover, Russia has apparently stationed 2,000 spetsnaz (special forces) units in Transnistria and planned so-called “humanitarian intervention exercises” there in order to create and then exploit a pretext for intervening in Ukraine from this separatist Moldovan region. Since Odesa is only 80 kilometers from Transnistria, the operation would have aimed to bisect Ukraine and capture this strategically vital Ukrainian port city (Author's interview, June 19).

Allegedly due to NATO's reenergized military presence in Southeastern Europe, but actually in line with earlier ambitions, Moscow also has launched a major expansion of its Black Sea Fleet this year. In addition, it has been carrying out improvements to its air and air defense infrastructure—clear starting points for building up Russia's power projection capabilities into the Mediterranean and beyond (see [EDM](#), September 22). Indeed, Russia has sought military bases in Montenegro for its fleet, which would have provided it with a physical presence in the Adriatic Sea ([balkan.eu.com](#), December 20, 2013), and a base in Serbia for landward projection of power throughout the Balkans.

Similarly Russia's expanding presence in the Middle East stems, in no small measure, from its ability to project and sustain naval power in the Mediterranean from its bases and robust presence in the Black Sea—a capability and objective that will likely continue to grow if Moscow's conquest of Ukraine cannot be arrested and reversed. Already, Moscow has permanently reconstituted its Mediterranean Naval Squadron and repeatedly employed gunboat diplomacy to deter Western intervention in Syria and Turkish intervention in Cyprus (see [EDM](#), December 12, 2011). It has also acquired naval bases in Syria and Cyprus, as well as an air base in Cyprus. Other potential opportunities abound. Indeed, the new Egyptian government has said

it stands ready to allow Russia to build a military base either in the Red Sea or the Mediterranean (see [EDM](#), May 15; [Middle East Monitor](#), November 9, 2013; [Al-Arabiya](#), November 20, 2013). Such “power projection activities” represent attempts to gain access, influence and power with the aim of restructuring the regional strategic order (Henk Houweling and Mehdi Parvizi Amineh, “Introduction,” in Amineh and Houweling, eds., *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security, and Development*, Leiden: Brill, 2004, p. 15). And, as the British historian Niall Ferguson observed, “Russia, thanks to its own extensive energy reserves, is the only power that has no vested interest in stability in the Middle East” (Quoted in Gordon G. Chang, “How China and Russia Threaten the World,” *Commentary*, June 2007, p. 29).

In January 2014, Russia and the United States co-chaired the abortive Geneva-II conference in an effort to fashion a political settlement to Syria’s civil war. Indeed, Moscow’s unwavering support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and its insistence that al-Assad’s opponents essentially surrender as a precondition of progress helped torpedo the gathering. Since then, throughout 2014, Moscow has continued to steadfastly support the authoritarian Syrian leader against the US, even to the point of more recently opposing US air strikes on the Islamic State (formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria—ISIS). And the October capture by Free Syrian Army fighters of a Russo-Syrian electronic intelligence base indicated the depth of its collusion and of Russian intelligence activities throughout the Levant ([Haaretz](#), October 7).

Russia also has substantial economic or energy relationships with Iran, Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Israel and is negotiating a huge energy deal with Iran that would effectively break the sanctions regime, despite Moscow being a major participant in the 5 + 1 talks on Iran’s nuclear program. Additionally, Moscow sells weapons not only to Syria but also to Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Egypt, and is negotiating a resumption of arms sales to Algeria and Libya. In doing so, Moscow fully grasps that many weapons it sells to Syria or Iran are passed on to Hezbollah and Hamas.

Clearly, the impressive scope and range of these above-mentioned Russian achievements—and many others—represent more than merely tactical flexibility and opportunism. The enduring strategic importance of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean has been underscored recently not only by this wider region’s growing importance as a source of energy, but also due to the perennial instability around these bodies of water, which has been exacerbated by Moscow’s aggression this year. Indeed, Russia’s activities introduce a new dynamic of unpredictability and challenges to security throughout the Balkans and the Levant. These policies also clearly indicate the scope of Moscow’s ambitions, if not yet its capabilities. And those ambitions will undoubtedly grow, given the weak Western response to the invasion of Ukraine and occupation of Crimea. Therefore NATO and the EU as well as the US cannot omit these areas and will have to move to include them in any genuine strategy if the West is to resist Russian imperialism.

Maidan's Ashes, Ukrainian Phoenix: Regime Change in Ukraine

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October 17, 2014

By: [Vladimir Socor](#)

The pro-Europe Maidan revolution in February and Russia's intervention in Donbas in April triggered two parallel processes of regime change in Ukraine. The world has focused on political transformation in Kyiv and in Ukraine writ large. But far less awareness exists of the nature of regime change in the Russian-occupied territory, where the Kremlin is experimenting with a more radical version of Putinism (see EDM, [August 1](#), [13](#), [15](#)).

Viktor Yanukovich's Party of Regions—long dominant in the central government and in Ukraine's east—has been removed from power by Western-oriented forces in Kyiv and by Russian forces in Donbas at roughly the same time. Such parallelism may seem ironic but cannot be surprising. That political force had practiced a “dual-vector” policy of balance between Russia and the West, a stance that became equally unacceptable to the Western-oriented Maidan coalition and to Russia's proxies in Donbas.

The internal political conflict jolted the Ukrainian state from its chronic dysfunction into temporary paralysis from January through April. The Kremlin exploited that momentary opportunity to seize Crimea and parts of Donbas (eastern Ukrainian region including the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk) from Ukraine. However, Russia's war of aggression inspired national and political cohesion among large parts of Ukrainian society, to levels not seen in two decades of independent statehood. This enabled the Maidan's revolutionary coalition to transition into government. Power shifts from radical to mainstream groups within the coalition facilitated this process.

On May 25, Petro Poroshenko was elected president with 55 percent of the votes cast in the first round. Although the voter turnout was relatively lower in the country's east, Poroshenko won by a landslide across regional and linguistic or ideological lines, to become the first national-consensus president of Ukraine (see [EDM](#), May 30).

Ukraine's internal political consolidation, albeit tentative, helped to contain Russia's military advances in Donbas, and thwarted the Kremlin's “Novorossiya” (“New Russia”—a historical name for lands occupying mainly southeastern Ukraine) project in the other provinces of Ukraine's south and east. Those provinces and the largest cities therein were traditionally the Party of Regions' strongholds. Local “oligarchs” and parts of the administrative-economic nomenklatura, long associated with the Party of Regions, closed ranks with the new government in Kyiv to stabilize the situation in Kharkiv, Mikolayiv, and in the Ukrainian-controlled parts of Donetsk province. The situation in the east and south dictated such alliances between the new authorities and entrenched holdovers at the province (oblast) level. In Dnipropetrovsk, the pro-Maidan “oligarch” Ihor Kolomoysky took over as governor, and extended his sphere of influence to the Odesa province. Those formal and informal arrangements enabled the administration and the economy to operate, and the police and security forces to counteract Russia's subversive activities in the would-be “Novorossiya” (see EDM, [March 6](#), [May 22](#), [September 8](#)).

It would have been unrealistic to expect the new government and new president to launch substantive economic and social reforms promptly upon taking power. Ukraine faced risks of state collapse in the late winter–early spring of 2014, and has found itself *de facto* at war with Russia from April to date (the armistice has yet to take hold, and if it does it may not last). To establish fully legitimate authorities after the regime change, Ukraine had to conduct a presidential election in May (see above) and will hold parliamentary elections on October 26. The government can count on a bare arithmetical majority in the incumbent parliament, thanks to the cooperation of some deputies from the Party of Regions. But that party as such has broken up into several groups, and most of those deputies decline to join a constitutional majority under the present government.

The broad coalition that originated on the Maidan has basically held together thus far, notwithstanding the diversity of political parties, social groups, and sectional interests within it. This broad range of forces includes: liberal intelligentsia and students (who had initiated the Maidan in late November–early December 2013 with a specifically pro-Europe agenda); sections of the actual and the aspiring middle classes (driving force of the 2004–2005, ill-fated “Orange Revolution”), exasperated after another decade of corruption and misgovernment; incumbent “oligarchs” squeezed by the Yanukovich “Family” (upstart businessmen in Yanukovich’s entourage); the three political parties of the parliamentary opposition (Batkivshchyna, UDAR, Svoboda) that took over the government on February 22 under Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk; various civil-society groups, mostly of liberal persuasions, that tend to distrust authority as such, including the new government; and radical-right paramilitary groups that ultimately forced through the regime change on February 22, among which the Right Sector is the most publicized and also the most overrated.

Internal tensions, inevitable in such a multicolored coalition, erupt with some regularity but are, as a rule, successfully contained. The halt to the Ukraine–European Union association process in late 2013 was the emergency that brought the pro-Europe Maidan coalition together. Russia’s war against Ukraine is the current emergency that holds this governing coalition together.

The balance of forces within the coalition, however, has shifted somewhat, reflecting the transition from revolution to governance, the necessities of defensive war, and the parliamentary election campaign. Thus, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk’s team has split off from Yulia Tymoshenko’s Batkivshchyna party; Vitali Klitschko’s UDAR became a close ally of President Poroshenko; and the violence-prone politicians of Oleh Tyahnybok’s Svoboda Party lost much of the disproportionate share of power they had initially enjoyed. The upcoming parliamentary elections can be expected to produce a pro-reform, pro-Western constitutional majority, and probably result in reconfiguring the governing coalition.

Ukraine, the Euromaidan and the EU: Kyiv's Course Toward Europe

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October 20, 2014

By: [Vladimir Socor](#)

Western powers lost control and, to some extent, lost comprehension of the situation in Ukraine during the Euromaidan mass protest movement and its aftermath. They then trailed behind the events throughout Russia's war against Ukraine to date. The European Commission's lame-duck status during most of 2014, Germany's attempts to fill the European Union's leadership vacuum, and the advent of a new Commission in October 2014, have compounded the policy confusion and drift.

Brussels had not anticipated Russia's economic countermeasures that compelled Viktor Yanukovich's government to backtrack on the association agreement with the EU. When that occurred, Brussels proved unwilling and basically unable to offset the impact of those Russian measures on Ukraine. The EU took the position that Kyiv's decision was a mistaken one, not in Ukraine's best interest, but that the president and government had been legitimately elected and were constitutionally empowered to take that decision. The EU intended to continue negotiations with Ukraine's incumbent president and government, hoping to sign the association agreement with Yanukovich at the EU-Ukraine summit due in April 2014.

The United States initially followed the EU's lead on Ukraine. At one point, US Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland held out the appeal of a "Europe from the Atlantic to Donetsk" (Testimony of Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, November 14, 2013). That was a rare example of strategic insight amid the unedifying Western debates. That definition of Europe embraced Ukraine in its entirety while excluding Russia, contrary to the "Europe from the Atlantic to Vladivostok" slogan that would marginalize the US while placing Europe, as well as Ukraine, in Russia's shadow. Donetsk was, of course, the epicenter of Ukraine's then-ruling authorities. But "Donetsk" failed to grasp the cooptation offer from Brussels or Washington.

Attending the EU's summit in Vilnius in late November 2013 as guests, Ukrainian opposition leaders Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko, and Oleh Tiahnybok announced on the spot that they would launch a regime change campaign in Ukraine through extra-parliamentary methods. That campaign soon materialized on the Maidan, contradicting the EU's policy at that stage (see [EDM](#), December 3, 2013).

As the Maidan (soon rechristened the "Euromaidan") grew in organized strength and numbers, and fighting with the police intensified in January–February 2014, Western governments and media reverted to the template of the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution in Ukraine. For all its subsequent failures, the 2004–2005 regime change had earned a title to legitimacy based on its peaceful character and not provoking the forces of order to intervene. By contrast, the Euromaidan deployed some violent groups of the radical right, equipped for combat and challenging the police. While the majority of Maidan demonstrators did not participate in violent actions, it was the combatant minority that determined the ultimate outcome through violence.

Some political leaders abroad, and many influential commentators, treated this process mainly in terms of revolutionary expediency.

Equating the Kyiv Maidan with “the people of Ukraine” meant ignoring the views and moods of large parts of Ukraine’s east. Insisting that the Maidan’s tactics had been peaceful and legitimate emboldened anti-Maidan (or anti-Western, or simply benighted) groups in Ukraine’s east to use mirror tactics against Ukrainian authorities during the initial stages of the secessionist movement. Defending the Ukrainian people’s (instead of the state’s) right of self-determination on the European choice made it easier for the secessionists (and Russia behind them) to claim self-determination for their own Russian choice.

Even before the end-game, Maidan’s political leaders had lost the ability to control the combat groups. The European Union, key European governments, and Washington had also lost their capacity to influence the end game in Kyiv. They were no longer acting in unison. Washington seemed to favor a change of government under opposition politicians Arseniy Yatsenyuk and Vitaliy Klitschko. However, Germany favored a compromise with the Yanukovych government and, indirectly, with Russia.

On February 20–21, in Kyiv, foreign affairs ministers Frank-Walter Steinmeier of Germany, Laurent Fabius of France and Radoslaw Sikorski of Poland brokered a compromise agreement between Yanukovych and the Maidan’s three political leaders. The Kremlin’s “human rights” envoy, Vladimir Lukin, witnessed the signing on President Vladimir Putin’s behalf, implying consent to the agreement. The Kremlin wanted to participate in the implementation process. The agreement’s salient provisions were: formation of a “coalition government of national unity” within 12 days (while the Party of Regions was the strongest by far in Parliament, pending parliamentary elections in 2017); a presidential election to be held by December 2014 (merely abridging Yanukovych’s tenure by three or four months, and not ruling out his repeat candidacy); joint investigation by all sides into the acts of violence; the opposition to unblock public spaces and hand over its weapons to the police (auswaertiges-amt.de, February 21).

In the event, the combatant Maidan overruled its presumptive political leaders who had signed that agreement; and the Maidan’s ultimatum resulted in toppling the president and government on February 22, for a conclusive regime change. This solution had the triple merit of: clearing the path for the new government to pursue the European association agenda, untrammled by ambiguous or unreliable coalition partners; shifting Kyiv’s overall orientation toward the West, after two decades of Ukraine’s “dual-vector” balance between Russia and the West; and henceforth, denying Russia the role of stakeholder in Ukraine’s political development.

Ukraine achieved the necessary clean break with Russia. The European Union and Ukraine signed the association agreement on March 21 (political agreement) and on June 27 (free trade agreement). President Petro Poroshenko described the signing as the most important since Ukraine’s 1991 achievement of state independence (Ukrinform, June 27–28, 2014). However, Russia initiated a war against Ukraine attempting to reverse that clean break; while the EU, under a new Commission and driven in part by Germany, seems uncertain about how to handle Ukraine at this stage.

Gains and Losses: Assessing the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

November 23, 2014

By: [Maksym Bugriy](#)

As the end of 2014 approaches, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is becoming increasingly ambiguous. The ceasefire between Russia-backed insurgents and the Ukrainian military, which was brokered in Minsk in September, has been violated numerous times (see [EDM](#), November 13). Meanwhile, Russia continues to send irregular forces, surplus weapons and heavy armor across the porous border to assist the separatists. At the same time, the Kremlin publicly avoids recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk “republics” ([Interfax](#), November 7), though it has abstrusely said it “respects” their November 2 election results (see [EDM](#), November 12). On a positive note, in late October, Russia, Ukraine and the European Union successfully brokered a natural gas deal that promises to ensure the free flow of energy supplies through the upcoming winter. Nevertheless, Ukraine now stands at a perilous crossroads, with Russia again massing military equipment at the border and shipping weapons, supplies and personnel across into war-torn Luhansk and Donetsk. Therefore, this is an important time to evaluate the directions the Ukrainian-Russian conflict could take from this moment on and how such developments could affect the regional policies of the United States and Europe.

Analysts and policymakers are often tempted to view the “Ukraine crisis” strictly through the lens of a broader Russian conflict with the US and, to a lesser extent, the European Union. Indeed, such an approach, in which Russia’s opponent is essentially defined as the United States, was openly endorsed by President Vladimir Putin in his Valdai Forum speech that he delivered in Sochi, on October 24 ([kremlin.ru](#), October 24). Based on such a reading of the situation, which is often portrayed as a “Cold War 2.0,” many of this paradigm’s adherents conclude that Russia is losing this conflict in both the economic and military realms. From an economic perspective, they argue, Russia is under intense pressure posed by the US and EU sanctions. And from a military perspective, Russia is losing this struggle because of the reinvigorated deterrence measures adopted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the Wales Summit. An alternative view, held by other observers who accept the “Cold War 2.0” paradigm, posits that Russia has actually been a victor in its conflict with the West. They tend to argue that Vladimir Putin was successful in annexing Crimea, and that the West will not be able to stop Russia from waging a full-scale war to gain more territorial control in Ukraine. Moreover, they note that Putin continues to threaten the Baltic States with subversive operations, which likely fall short of the North Atlantic Alliance’s Article Five threshold for an armed response. Thus, in their view, Russia could eventually succeed in splitting NATO and the EU.

The above approach to assessing the Ukraine crisis is partially correct, as it acknowledges the US and EU’s engagement in information and economic warfare against Russia. However, it ignores the fact that Ukraine is also a key military party to the conflict. Ukrainian forces are actively engaged in battles against the Moscow-backed insurgents and, often against regular Russian troops. Thus, albeit informally and up to a certain point, Ukraine is clearly acting as a security ally to the US and EU; whereas, Russia is clearly behaving as the West’s adversary.

The de facto war between Russia and Ukraine has not yet engendered a one-sided victory or defeat for either side. And this has been patently true regarding the annexation of Ukraine’s

Crimea. On the one hand, over the past year, Russia has succeeded in achieving control over Crimea. Yet, Ukraine has also retained some leverage by retaining complete land access to the peninsula. Moreover, Russia faces significant costs in terms of subsidizing local residents, investing in Crimea, as well as carrying out its planned military build-up there. In contrast, Ukraine does not have to bear these social welfare costs and it benefits politically from its refusal to recognize the annexation of a territory it had difficulty governing in the first place. The economic value of Crimean assets could be the subject of future bargaining between Russia and Ukraine. However, the strategic value of Crimea for Russia is constrained primarily by increased US naval presence in the Black Sea as well as by the costs to overcome its present naval inferiority to Turkey.

The situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk “republics” also presents both real costs and strategic opportunities for Kyiv and Moscow. On one hand, Russia has gained a military base on Ukrainian territory, which it can now use as a beachhead for further operations deeper into Ukraine. And Russia’s supply of “humanitarian assistance” and potential investment in rebuilding the rebel-controlled territories and subsidizing the population might even generate spillover for these pro-Russian incentives among the residents of neighboring Ukrainian provinces. But on the other hand, these Russian boons are undermined not only by the costs of rebuilding, but also of governing these quasi-states. According to Russian political analyst Georgy Bovt, Moscow needed “Donetsk and Luhansk elections [to occur]—the sooner, the better. And not only to [...] legitimize their rulers [...] but also to arrange control over these formations with the help of leaders that are ready to listen to Moscow” ([Gazeta.ru](#), November 3). Furthermore, Moscow appears reluctant to subsidize Donbas (eastern Ukrainian region that encompasses Donetsk and Luhansk provinces), even though it is naturally expected to do so. That said, in the short-term, Moscow is likely to continue to back up Donbas militarily in order to deter Ukraine from a possible offensive, while continuing opportunistic, subversive, and probably Federal Security Service (FSB)-led clandestine or proxy military operations throughout Ukrainian territory.

Over the course of 2014, the West has applied consistently more painful sanctions on the Russian regime. Russia met these with defiance and its own counter-sanctions, but it is unlikely to have the resources to be able to maintain this self-isolation from the West for long, especially in the capital financing sector. According to Konstantin Sonin of the Moscow Higher School of Economics, the growth of the Russian economy had virtually stalled even before the current period of international isolation and already had the appearance of a long-term crisis: Quarterly growth rates had been declining since the 2012 presidential elections, for instance. Sonin believes the underlying problem was the government’s inability to improve Russian institutions, which are essential for attracting investment to fuel economic growth ([Vedomosti](#), October 26). Relatedly, Ivan Timofeev of the Russian International Affairs Council writes, “But given Russia’s limited resources and the challenges it faces, it is diplomacy, not military force, which should be the key instrument of [Moscow’s] foreign policy” ([RIAC](#), November 5).

Meanwhile, with its Anti-Terrorism Operation (ATO) in the east mostly halted by the ceasefire in place since early September, Ukraine benefits from minimizing the costs of counter-insurgency and economic obligations to rebuild its uncontrolled territories in Donbas. The Ukrainian government now also has the potential option to use the momentum of fostering ties

with the US to reform its military. And as it works to pull itself out of its deep recession, the country could become a magnet for investments; increased interest is already observable in such important sectors as agribusiness, IT industry and alternative energy.

Yet, with Russia continuing to send threatening signals to the West, Ukraine is unlikely to join NATO or even closely associate with the EU anytime soon—or at least not until Ukraine’s domestic economic situation starts to look more attractive. At the same time, the country’s status within the “gray security zone” also harms the country’s European integration prospects. But if Ukraine is able to secure some tangible military successes against Russian and Russian proxy forces in the near future, Kyiv could gradually start to be seen as a proactive European security contributor. One way or another, the turbulent Russian-Ukrainian conflict that has raged on for most of 2014 is unlikely to end until all the interested parties—including, presumably, eventually also Russia—are able to come together in a genuine pan-European security agreement process.

Russia-Ukraine War’s Impact on European Energy: Developments in Europe’s Energy Security Strategy

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October 20, 2014

By: [Margarita Assenova](#)

The Russia-Ukraine war has presented the most serious threat to European energy security since the end of the Cold War. Almost half of the Russian natural gas delivered to European markets in 2013 crossed Ukraine—82.3 billion cubic meters (bcm) out of 167.5 bcm in total exported by Gazprom to Europe ([iea.org](#), March 4). Based on the experiences of the 2009 gas crisis, many European countries could suffer severe energy shortages this coming winter, if Russia once more cuts westward gas supplies. Such an interruption in the Russian gas supply, especially if prolonged, could cause economic damage and even loss of human life.

The unresolved payment dispute between Gazprom and Kyiv presented an additional challenge, especially after Russia suspended gas supplies to the Ukrainian domestic market in June. Although Russian and Ukrainian presidents, Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko, have reportedly reached a preliminary agreement on the gas price “through the winter,” during their meeting in Milan on October 17, this seems to be a temporary solution and the problems will likely resume in the spring ([Kommersant](#), October 17).

Over the past ten months, the prospect of another gas crisis has mobilized the European Union, its members and neighbors, which have already been seeking ways to limit dependency on Russian gas and find alternative supplies such as Caspian gas and liquefied natural gas (LNG). As the European Commission prepares to host another round of talks with Russia and Ukraine on the gas crisis on October 21, it is also devising plans to counter potential gas supply interruptions to Europe.

On October 16, the Commission released a study on the short-term resilience of the European gas system (ec.europa.eu, October 16). The stress test was conducted in 38 European countries, including EU member states and neighboring countries. It analyzed various scenarios, in particular a halt of supplies via Ukraine and a complete halt of Russian gas imports into the EU for a period of six months. The results confirm previous independent assessments that Central and Eastern Europe would be most affected. The main question, however, is whether the European countries would choose to cooperate with each other by sharing the burden of gas shortages, or would they prefer to each seek national solutions.

In the absence of cooperation, serious supply shortfalls of 60 to 100 percent could affect Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina (in both Ukraine transit and full Russian supply disruption scenarios). This picture can explain why the four Balkan states have been adamant supporters of the Russian-led South Stream natural gas pipeline, which aims to bypass Ukraine and deliver gas directly to the Balkans via the Black Sea. Their position has put them at odds with the European Union, which has said that the South Stream project falls short of EU competition standards.

The four Balkan countries have been among a group of several EU members (including Hungary, Italy and Austria) that have lobbied Brussels to endorse the South Stream pipeline project—thus, effectively dividing and weakening Europe. However, these four Balkan countries would benefit the most from cooperation through the integrated European gas infrastructure, which is in the last stages of development.

Although Romania would also be affected by gas cuts from Russia, losing about 40 percent of its gas supplies in wintertime, Bucharest never supported South Stream, considering it Putin's political project to undermine and bind Ukraine to Moscow.

Other countries threatened by severe shortages in case of a complete halt of Russian gas supplies to Europe are Lithuania, Estonia and Finland. Hungary and Poland would also be substantially affected, albeit to a lesser degree, by shortfalls of 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively. The EU Commission has assessed that through cooperation and sharing of gas supplies, the effects of a potential disruption could be significantly dampened in the most affected countries, particularly Bulgaria, Estonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia and Serbia (ec.europa.eu, October 16).

Russian President Vladimir Putin warned during his official visit to Serbia, on October 16, that gas supply cuts or reductions to Europe are possible: “There exist great transit risks. If we see our Ukrainian partners begin to tap our gas from the export pipeline system without authorization, like in 2008, then we, like in 2008, will cut supply consecutively by the stolen volume,” Putin told journalists in Belgrade ([ITAR-TASS](http://itar-tass.com), October 16).

But after the gas crises of 2006 and 2009, Europe is much better prepared. The integrated gas infrastructure is almost ready—including reverse flow capacity interconnectors that could be used to alleviate gas shortages. Despite protests by Gazprom, the interconnector between Slovakia and Ukraine, with a capacity of 27 million cubic meters of gas per day, has been pumping Russian gas back to the Ukrainian gas network since September.

The Iasi-Ungheni gas interconnector between Romania and Moldova was opened in August, although the pipeline is not yet operational. The Moldovan government plans to extend it to Chisinau with \$12.9 million in EU funding ([RIA Novosti](#), September 10). The Bulgaria-Greece and Bulgaria-Turkey gas interconnectors will be ready to supply the Balkans with gas from the Caspian Sea and other sources by 2016. In addition, storage capacities throughout Europe have also been expanded. Thus, soon Russia will no longer be able to leave Central and Eastern Europe out in the cold.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine since the start of 2014, has managed to accomplish two things in the gas sector so far: kill the South Stream pipeline project and steer the Balkans' attention to the Caspian Sea. After an unsuccessful campaign to convince the EU to support South Stream, both Bulgaria and Serbia have realized that this battle is lost. The EU's objections on the grounds of competition rules and non-compliance with the third Energy Package have not changed since 2013. But with the annexation of Crimea and subsequent war in Ukraine's eastern region of Donbas, the EU concluded that Russia is not capable of following any international rules, even those related to foreign territory and borders.

Bulgaria suspended South Stream in June, after the EU started an infringement procedure against Sofia for signing agreements with Russia that are not compliant with European legislation. Serbia, despite the show of love for Putin during his October visit to Belgrade, was also clear that the project would not go ahead without the EU's blessing, as Serbia would not jeopardize its chances of joining the bloc.

Meanwhile, Greece and Bulgaria have been shaping closer ties with Azerbaijan as the Southern Gas Corridor's construction advances. This past September, Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev signed an agreement with Azerbaijan securing gas supplies via Greece from 2018 (Natural Gas Europe, September 25). The Memorandum of Understanding between Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR and Bulgartransgas also includes the expansion of Bulgaria's only gas storage facility at Chiren—a surprising move that angered Gazprom, as the eastern Balkan country's small storage capacity made Bulgaria, together with Macedonia, fully dependent on uninterrupted Russian gas supplies. As other Balkan interconnectors are being built to link Bulgaria with Serbia, Macedonia and Romania, Azerbaijan could become the Balkans' main gas supplier in the near future.

Gray Clouds and Silver Linings: The Situation in Belarus

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October 15, 2014

By: [Grigory Ioffe](#)

Throughout 2014, four major phenomena have affected Belarus—the war in Ukraine, the formation of the Eurasian Union, a new thaw with the West, and a slowing of economic growth. These phenomena are inter-related. For example, slower growth is, to some extent, caused by Russia's and Ukraine's shrinking buying power in conjunction with the Ukraine crisis. Also, the

thaw in Belarus's relations with the West has arguably been caused by geopolitical considerations on both sides. The ongoing war in Ukraine has boosted fears of losing statehood among the Belarus's political elite and in the West alike; so the Western powers tacitly agreed to put democracy and human rights-related disagreements with Minsk on the back burner.

The events in Ukraine have had the most multifaceted implications for Belarus. Three such repercussions have been most obvious. First, Belarusians, who are well informed through a myriad of informal channels about everyday life in the two other East Slavic countries, Russia and Ukraine, began to value stability at home more than ever before. And they associated this advantage with their government in Minsk. Second, Belarusians began to value their country's statehood more than before; although an inadequate sense of national identity arguably remains their major vulnerability vis-à-vis putative moves by Russia. Third, Minsk has significantly boosted its stature by adopting a neutral stand in the Ukrainian conflict and by offering the venue for Russian-Ukrainian peace talks. Meanwhile, out of the sixteen most important events of September 2014, which were identified by the Independent Institute for Socio-Economic and Political Studies, nine have involved the various negotiations between Minsk and the West (Infofocus, September 2014). Such activity on Belarus's Western flank had not been recorded for a long time.

An analysis of the Belarusian economy by Alyaksandr Sinkevich, an independent analyst and business owner, has revealed three negative and three positive trends. The negatives include the effects of a) the war in Ukraine (causing a shrinking trade exchange, flows of refugees, and the threat of technological and other man-made catastrophes); b) the war of sanctions between Russia and the West and c) the industrial stagnation that has already lasted two years. In regard to the sanctions war, Belarus's position resembles that of the Netherlands during World War I, believes Sinkevich. The country was able to avoid the hostilities and bloodletting but still suffered a setback in its domestic wellbeing (belbusiness.belarusinfo.by via facebook.com/a.sinkevich, October 6).

Paradoxically, the three positive trends Sinkevich points out also include one implication of the war of sanctions: specifically, Belarus's agricultural exports will be able to partially compensate what Russia declined to purchase in the West, and Belarus's industry is going to partially replace the Ukrainian contractors that contributed to Russia's military industrial complex. The second positive development has been Belarus's new role as a trade mediator between the European Union, Ukraine and Russia—three parties that sometimes decline to cooperate directly due to face-saving considerations. And the third positive has to do with Belarus overcoming the potash crisis of 2012–2013. Just during the first half of 2014, production and export of potash increased dramatically. In addition, in November, in the village of Obchak, 10 kilometers from Minsk, Citroen and Peugeot are launching new assembly lines. Initially, workers at these plants will assemble only 2,500 cars per year, but ensuing sales to the EEC market will result in expansions to these facilities (belbusiness.belarusinfo.by via facebook.com/a.sinkevich, October 6).

On October 9, the Belarusian parliament ratified the three-party agreement about forming the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)—earlier also ratified by Moscow and Astana. This was a culmination of a lengthy process of mutual coordination among the three partner countries and, possibly, the beginning of a long journey still ahead. Some obstacles on the way to the

ratification of the EEC agreement have been overcome to the benefit of Belarus. Specifically, the frontier-free market that the three countries have been ostensibly creating was not without exemptions. For example, Belarus was still required to transfer to Russia's budget the export duties on refined oil products exported to any country but Russia itself. In 2013, this amounted to \$3.4 billion. The duties were to be phased out by 2025. First, Belarus compelled Russia to agree to Belarus reducing its payment by \$1.5 billion as early as 2015 (see [EDM](#), May 14). Subsequently, when Russia came up with the idea of the so called tax maneuver—i.e., gradually reducing export taxes on refined oil while increasing the tax on mining (TOM), which includes oil extraction—Minsk stated that this would make Russia's oil more expensive for Belarus and wrested an even more critical concession. Specifically, already in 2015, Belarus will not transfer any export tax for refined oil to Russia, and further talks will be held to compensate Belarus for the growth in the TOM ([Belta](#), October 10).

Predictably, in the Belarusian opposition media and in parts of the Russian media as well, such a victory by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka was immediately interpreted as the result of blackmail ([Salidarnasts](#), October 8; [Proved](#), October 9). Nonetheless, the fact that Russia has repeatedly made such concessions to Minsk testifies to Russia's keen interest in the formation of the Eurasian Union and in the realization of the idea, long propagated by some influential Russian analysts, that geopolitical aspirations cannot be satisfied unless they are paid for ([Russia in Global Politics](#), October 22, 2013).

On October 10, Lukashenka proceeded with his diplomatic advancement by presiding over the Commonwealth of Independent States' (CIS) summit in Minsk and making some provocative statements, notably about the inadmissibility of resolving "the Ukrainian issue somewhere in Berlin or in Milan"—that is, outside the CIS ([tut.by](#), October 10). At the same time, Belarus continued to undermine Russia's stand on Ukraine. For example, Andrei Makarevich, Russia's veteran rock star, who has been accused of betraying his country after performing (on August 12) in a part of eastern Ukraine controlled by the Ukrainian army and whose scheduled concerts all across Russia have been cancelled, was allowed to perform in Minsk and Vitebsk. Moreover, the main Belarusian government newspaper praised his concerts and castigated the anti-Makarevich campaign in Russia ([Belarus Segodnya](#), October 6).

The year is still not over, but it is safe to say that Belarus—a country with low international name recognition and a cliché-ridden image—has successfully raised its stature and become a purveyor of good news on several occasions in 2014.

Government Moving Closer to the People: Moldova's Political Environment

November 18, 2014

By: [Dumitru Minzarari](#)

The anticipation of the November 30 parliamentary elections has profoundly affected, directly or indirectly, all major political events in the Republic of Moldova since the beginning of this year. Perhaps most tellingly, the European Union and Moldova rushed to sign the EU Association

Agreement (AA) well ahead of the elections, on June 27—a decision at least partially compelled by Chisinau’s wish for the Moldovan electorate to have time to see the political-economic agreement’s initial effects on the domestic situation. However, this urgency was itself influenced by, among other things, the Gagauz referendum, which was held on February 2. This plebiscite, organized by the local Gagauz authorities with financial support from a Russian businessman, showed extreme distrust of the EU among certain segments of Moldova’s population (see [EDM](#), February 5).

The referendum proved to be a wake-up call for politicians both in Chisinau and in Brussels, suggesting that not all Moldovan citizens necessarily perceive European integration to be an absolute good. Additionally, the Gagauz vote not only challenged the authority of the central government of Moldova (as the referendum was conducted in breach of Moldovan law), but it also highlighted how little ordinary Moldovans actually knew about the opportunities that closer integration with the EU could offer the country. It became obvious the government needed to rephrase its message away from the ornate political rhetoric used so far, and begin using clear language that would touch upon the basic needs of the citizens. A belated massive information campaign thus started in Moldova, involving both governmental and non-governmental organizations, which delivered information about the European Union to the citizens in the regions ([publica.md](#), February 20).

Yet, in addition to this unintended positive outcome of the Gagauz referendum, there were also several negative ones. Among the most potentially harmful consequences of the plebiscite may be the precedent it sets for Moldova’s other regions, signaling to them that Moldovan law can be challenged with impunity under certain conditions. As a result, the risk that such challenges may be repeated has been increasing—particularly given the perceived low costs of doing so. A potentially worrisome signal was the recent decision of the People’s Assembly of Gagauzia (the autonomous region’s local parliament) to create a local Coordinating Council for Broadcasting (Consiliul Coordonator al Audiovizualului—CCA). An unnamed member of the Gagauz Republic’s authorities revealed to the press that the decision aims inter alia at restoring broadcasting in the region of Russian TV channels that were blocked earlier by the Moldovan CCA for violating national broadcasting procedures ([jurnal.tv](#), November 4; [politik.md](#), July 4). Moldovan experts believe this move by the Gagauz autonomy’s government defies national legislation ([timpul.md](#), October 24).

Tensions in Moldova’s relations with Russia, which were publicly recognized in an interview by Moldovan Prime Minister Iurie Leanca in May of this year (see [EDM](#), May 23), reached their peak when Russia passed new agricultural sanctions against the small country. Introduced gradually by Russia in July (see [EDM](#), July 23), as a response to Chisinau’s signing of the EU Association Agreement, the sanctions entered into full force in September ([jurnal.md](#), September 1), affecting over 30 percent of the Moldovan workforce. Yet, in addition to the agricultural ban’s obvious political and social pressure on Moldova ahead of the country’s elections, these Russian punitive measures generated some unintended positive side effects for Chisinau.

By being forced to respond to the sanctions, Moldova’s authorities were offered the opportunity to showcase the government’s support for the Moldovan agricultural sector in a time of need. In particular, the government reserved over \$10 million in partial financial compensations to many

affected farmers ([prime.md](#), August 14). While not everyone whose business was affected could be pleased, this interaction between the government and Moldovan businessmen allowed for their closer communication. The government was obliged to help the farmers learn to transition and reorient their exports toward new markets in the European Union, which otherwise would not have happened.

Russia's sanctions over this past year also pushed the EU to provide more trade benefits to Moldova and its agricultural sector, even though it triggered quarrels in the European Parliament ([agora.md](#), November 6). Without the Russian embargo, Moldovan agricultural businesses would have had a harder time entering the EU and other Western markets. This is both due to the Moldovan producers' reluctance to invest in reorienting their established supply chains, and because of otherwise more stringent trade barriers to their products in the West.

Since the start of 2014, the tensions and armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia also affected Moldova, although in less obvious ways. On the one hand, war in a country next door did not compel Chisinau to begin heavily investing in its armed forces, nor did it substantially change the Moldovan army's combat mission or readiness (see [EDM](#), October 31). Instead, Moldova was faced with Russian pressure to allow Moscow to participate as a third party in Chisinau's talks with Brussels regarding their AA implementation procedures ([RIA Novosti](#), October 10). Notably, after Moldovan President Nicolae Timofti rather bluntly criticized the Russian sanctions on Moldovan exports, ([publica.md](#), October 11), his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, suggested that Moldova follow Ukraine's lead. By that comment, Putin seemed to suggest that, like Ukraine and the EU did earlier this year, Moldova should accept Russia's request that it suspend the implementation of the economic part of the Association Agreement until 2016 ([gazeta.ru](#), September 13).

Putin evidently viewed the caveat of pushing back implementation procedures in the bilateral EU-Ukraine negotiations as a sign that Europe is willing to indulge Russia in such talks with all its neighbors in the post-Soviet space ([vesti-ukr.com](#), June 26). Expectedly, Russia would like to repeat this policy in the case of Moldova—apparently hoping to be able to encourage a delay in the implementation of Moldova's Association Agreement with the EU to buy time as it attempts to draw Chisinau back into Moscow's orbit. Unlike European policymakers, the Russian leadership appears to understand that any social process can always be reversed.

THE CAUCASUS—A NET ASSESSMENT SINCE THE START OF 2014

Circassian Activists Seek Allies as Ukrainian Refugees Are Resettled in the Region: The Situation in the Northwest Caucasus

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October 14, 2014

By: [Valery Dzutsev](#)

The Sochi Olympics and issues related to the refugees from Syria have dominated the political discourse in the Northwest Caucasus for most of this year. The surprising Russian-Ukrainian crisis has also had reverberations in this part of the Caucasus. Hostility between Kyiv and Moscow prompted the Circassians to seek the Ukrainian government's recognition of the actions of the Russian Empire against the Circassians as "genocide." As always, some pro-Moscow Circassians rejected help from Ukraine, but the majority of Circassians supported the appeal to the Ukrainian leadership signed by Circassian activists from the North Caucasus and the diaspora ([politika09.com](#), August 7).

On February 7, the first day of the Winter Olympics in Sochi, a group of unaffiliated Circassians staged a small public protest in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria, but the protests were quickly suppressed ([natpressru.info](#), February 7). The security services conducted surveillance of well-known Circassian activists, but this proved insufficient to observe the emergent self-established groups, which quickly organized via social media to stage surprise public protests ([kavpolit.com](#), February 7).

A police general with expertise in combatting organized crime and insurgency, Yuri Kokov, replaced the previous governor of Kabardino-Balkaria, Arsen Kanokov, in December 2013. Kokov was formally confirmed as the head of Kabardino-Balkaria by the parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria in October 2014. Kokov's leadership style is far less public than his predecessor's. The change in the republican government, as in the other violent republics of the North Caucasus, resulted in a decrease in insurgent activities. The pacifying effect of a fresh governor indicates that the conflict in the North Caucasus is political, and reintroducing direct elections in the region would make insurgent leaders far less appealing to the disenfranchised parts of the population. Insurgency-related violence did not dissipate in Kabardino-Balkaria completely, however, nor did the claims of abuse of power by the police disappear.

On August 1, a well-known Kabardino-Balkarian journalist, Timur Kuashev, was found dead in the suburbs of Nalchik. The 26-year-old journalist was known for his moderate political views and a certain degree of popularity with Muslim youth. At the same time, Kuashev was close to Maksim Shevchenko, who is an earnestly pro-Kremlin journalist ([kavpolit.com](#), September 8). The killing of Kuashev may have come as result of different factions of the Russian government competing for influence over policy issues in the region. In another possible case of young popular Muslims being eliminated, the deputy mufti of North Ossetia and the imam of Vladivkaz's mosque, 32-year-old Rasul Gamzatov, was killed on August 16 ([Kavkazsky Uzel](#), August 18).

Despite the direct link between popular political representation and political stability in the North Caucasus, Moscow appears to be increasingly reverting to direct rule in the region. Under the pressure from Moscow, all the republics in the northwestern Caucasus one by one have adopted changes in their legislation to replace the direct election of governors with appointment by the Russian president. True to the traditions of imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, the contemporary Russian government has indulged in informational warfare, putting forward several mutually exclusive statements about the North Caucasians. The message of the Russian propaganda was that North Caucasians “are not ready for elections.” At the same time, Moscow pretended the North Caucasian republics themselves chose to reject direct elections for governors. In reality, Moscow’s insistence on appointing governors in the North Caucasus and allowing ethnic Russian regions to choose their governors indicated that Moscow could not reliably control the electoral processes in the North Caucasus. This essentially means that the North Caucasian republics are better equipped for a contested political process than many ethnic-Russian regions, where opposition has been all but eliminated and elections yield the results desired by the Kremlin.

By the start of 2014, the Russian government had contained the small flow of Circassian refugees from Syria. Again, Moscow preferred to act quietly, and instead of openly antagonizing the Circassians in the North Caucasus, it stopped issuing visas to the Circassian refugees, shut down Circassian organizations and made the lives of the estimated 1,600 Circassian refugees from Syria extremely difficult (circassianrepatriation.com, accessed October 14). Meanwhile, ethnic Russian refugees from Ukraine have clearly received preferential treatment from the government. Each of the republics of the North Caucasus have accepted at least hundreds of refugees from Ukraine, providing them with food, shelter, healthcare and even jobs. Adygea, with a population of less than 500,000 people, has received over 2,000 refugees from Ukraine by the start of August and the refugees continued to arrive (rg.ru, August 6).

Some Circassian activists have started grumbling about the Russian government’s biased treatment of Circassians from Syria, and the contrast between their situation and that of the Russians from Ukraine became glaring. Resettling Ukrainian refugees in North Caucasian republics known for their endemic unemployment suggests the Russian government may be carrying out a social engineering project that involves resettling as many ethnic Russians in the region as possible to try to change the ethnic balance in these territories, which are increasingly becoming the homogenized homelands of North Caucasian ethnic groups.

Circassian political activism remained alive after the Sochi Olympics, and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis gives the Circassians hope that they will receive more support from neighboring countries. Georgian recognition of the Circassian “genocide” in 2011 gave a significant boost to the Circassians’ hopes that Moscow will start taking their demands seriously. The Russian government’s denial of the problem has done little to address Circassians’ concerns, so frictions between the central government and Circassian activists are likely to continue.

The Epicenter of the Insurgency: The Situation in the Northeast Caucasus

Publication: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 11 Issue: 182

October 15, 2014

By: [Mairbek Vatchagaev](#)

The ongoing transformation of the armed Islamic opposition in the North Caucasus is one sign of the deepening crisis in the region. The transformation is taking place against the backdrop of the establishment of a military center for the militant movement in Dagestan proper ([Kavkazsky Uzel](#), September 17). In 2014, Dagestan became the political center of the armed resistance movement after the confirmation of the death of Caucasus Emirate leader Doku Umarov and following his replacement by Dagestani Sheikh Abu Muhammad (Aliaskhab Kebekov) ([Kavkazsky Uzel](#), [gazeta.ru](#), March 18; [kavkazcenter.com](#), July 24).

Observers who follow events in the North Caucasus could not explain the rebel attacks in the area of Pyatigorsk and Volgograd at the end of 2013 and the insurgency's apparent lack of interest in launching an attack during the Sochi Winter Olympics—an extremely high-profile event that was actually held in the North Caucasus. Nothing happened despite a vow made by Umarov in the month of July the year before that his organization would disrupt the Olympics in Sochi by any means possible ([novayagazeta.ru](#), July 3, 2013); Russia managed to hold the Games fairly successfully. When reflecting on why no attacks occurred at the Sochi Olympics, one can conclude that the new leader of the North Caucasus insurgency who replaced Umarov may not have approved of terrorist attacks in which civilians might suffer. Specifically, Abu Muhammad, the new head of the Caucasus Emirate, may have opposed suicide bombings and hostage-taking ([Kavkaz Uzel](#), July 2), and he, thus, could have vetoed rebel plans for attacks during the Olympic Games in Sochi.

With the change in leadership of the Caucasus Emirate the period of Chechen dominance of the North Caucasus armed resistance came to an end. Umarov, in his final years, was merely a symbol of the unity of the North Caucasian militants. The current leader is not only a symbol, but very active socially: for example, he responds to questions posed by followers ([YouTube](#), May 24), makes bold statements about whom to support in Syria ([izlesene.com](#), June 23), gives sermons and publishes them online ([YouTube](#), March 24). The new insurgent leader Abu Muhammad does not need a religious advisor. As a graduate of Islamic institutions in Tunisia and Syria, he can afford not to pay attention to those who might reproach him for a poor knowledge of Islam. This was the weak side of Doku Umarov, who was forced to have someone by his side to help him in understanding Islamic norms.

To improve his position outside Dagestan, the new insurgent leader Abu Muhammad forced the leaders of the national jamaats across the region to pledge allegiance to him—not once but twice. The jamaats of Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria swore their allegiance to Emir Muhammad for the first time when news arrived about Doku Umarov's death. The second time they pledged allegiance to the new insurgent leader was in spring–summer 2014. The new emir of the Caucasus Emirate may have wanted to make sure he had the backing of local rebel groups before making declarations about the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS—hence renamed the Islamic State) in Syria and about the need to refrain from terrorist attacks. However, he is not the only one who can preach Islamic norms to the militants of the North Caucasus. Abu Usman

Gimrinsky (Magomed Suleimanov), the emir of the Mountainous Sector and qadi of Dagestan, also has started to make frequent statements via the Internet (vdagestan.com, June 1).

While the attention of researchers is riveted on militant attacks, they ignore the possible transformation of the Islamic armed underground of the North Caucasus through its merger with the Salafists who currently reject violence.

The past 15 years of war in the North Caucasus has shown that, above all, Russia values statistics. The rapid decline in the number of attacks by the militants in Kabardino-Balkaria and Ingushetia over the past several years is presented as a victory over the Salafists, which is not the case. From an insurgency standpoint, the North Caucasian militants simply have learned how to avoid casualties in its fight with the Russian security services. For example, Chechen authorities in Grozny rushed to declare the final defeat of the Chechen militants after Doku Umarov's death ([RT](http://RT.com), April 4).

However, the Chechen militants published multiple videos that refuted the government's claim and proved that their emergence from the underground is only a matter of time ([YouTube](http://YouTube.com), August 21). According to one Chechen rebel emir, there are 70–80 militants in the republic, which is not a small number given the fact that they have to live in the mountains. The suicide attack in Grozny on October 5, the Chechen capital's City Day, ([RIA Novosti](http://RIA_Novosti.com), October 5), suggests there are groups that do not subordinate themselves to the leader of the North Caucasus militants, Abu Muhammad, who disapproves of such attacks. This lack of subordination is probably caused by the impossibility of establishing a reliable link between the insurgent leadership and the local Chechen militants.

The Dagestani jamaat is divided into sectors, which in turn are subdivided into local jamaats. Overall, there are hundreds of militants in the republic. Unlike the Chechen militants, few Dagestani rebels have to live in the mountains or forests; instead, they reside in regular settlements or urban areas. The number of Dagestani rebels does not decline despite the Russian authorities' weekly reports that they have been eliminated.

Meanwhile, Russian officials continue to pressure the relatives and friends of the militants, which only expands the ranks of the armed resistance and of those who reject Moscow's policy in the North Caucasus. Making the conflict worse are the arrests of popular Salafist preachers (vdagestan.com, October 9), the burning down of houses and harassment of villagers to force them to betray the militants (vdagestan.com, October 1), the destruction of houses belonging to relatives of those who have joined the underground movement (vdagestan.com, August 1), and so on.

Thus, 15 years since the start of the second Russian-Chechen war, Moscow could come up with nothing better than launching a terror campaign against all those who do not accept its policies in the North Caucasus. Moscow has failed to recognize that it bears greater responsibility for this conflict than the armed Islamic underground movement. And time is on the rebels' side, not Moscow's.

Few Successes and Many Disappointments: Developments in Georgia

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October 14, 2014

By: [Vasili Rukhadze](#)

To date in 2014, Georgia has not experienced anything as cataclysmically destructive as the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. However, this year has not been particularly successful either. And prospects are low that this negative trend will improve much in the coming two months, before the year is up.

One positive development has been the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union, which Georgia signed on June 27 ([Civil Georgia](#), June 27). Although, the AA falls far short of membership prospects for the country—something that most Georgians ardently desire—it still is a significant step forward for Georgia in terms of deepening its economic and political ties with Europe.

However, even this positive event was overshadowed by months of bickering between Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili and President Giorgi Margvelashvili about who should attend the AA signing ceremony and actually sign the agreement. Constitutionally ill-defined and overlapping foreign and domestic policy functions created fertile ground for constant conflict between the two offices. This conflict encompasses a host of issues ranging from who is to represent the country at foreign forums, to undermining each other's policy agendas (see [EDM](#), September 18). In fact, the quarrels between the president and the prime minister became one of the political trademarks of this year, and they show no signs of abating for now. Rather, the rift between Garibashvili and Margvelashvili is widening and more likely will deepen in the next year—something that Georgia, which remains ravaged by a myriad of economic and political problems, can ill afford.

Indeed, Georgia struggles with multiple problems: among the most painful are a poor economy, mass poverty and high unemployment ([data.worldbank.org](#), [geostat.ge](#), accessed October 14). In this year too, the government failed to address any of these economic issues. In the third quarter, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by just 5.2 percent ([tradingeconomics.com](#), accessed October 14), a rate that was essentially too low to be felt much in a country where the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita stands at only \$3,570. The government's continued failings in economic development policy have noticeably dimmed the Georgian population's euphoria and high hopes for a drastic improvement of the country's socioeconomic condition. The expectations brought on by the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition's ascent to power have quickly devolved into massive disappointment and growing public apathy. In April, GD's popular support stood at 42 percent ([Civil Georgia](#), August 27), certainly not a good sign for a coalition that won a landslide victory in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

In order to appease an increasingly disgruntled public, this year the government continued its criminal prosecution cases against high-ranking officials who served during Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency under United National Movement's (UNM) rule. As UNM still remains widely unpopular because of its alleged power abuses while in government, the prosecution of former high-profile bureaucrats continues to resonate well with the electorate. The question is,

however, how long the public will remain satisfied with just televised court hearings and when it will demand real actions from the authorities to address the country's multiple socioeconomic and political ills.

The government has not been especially successful in charting Georgia's foreign policy course either. Aside from the above-mentioned signing of the Georgia-EU association agreement, the authorities have nothing much else to show. The Georgian government's loudly acclaimed normalization of ties with Russia in fact hit a wall this year. It is true that since GD took power, the majority of Georgian wines and agricultural products have returned to the Russian market after having been banned since spring 2006. However, the most pressing bilateral issues, such as the question of Russia's continued occupation of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain unresolved. Georgia has not registered any progress in this regard. Thousands of Russian occupying troops are stationed in the regions and can be quickly deployed to attack the rest of Georgia should Russia again deem it necessary. Furthermore, Moscow has not stopped issuing its habitual threats and warnings toward Tbilisi ([Civil Georgia](#), October 9)—certainly not a sign of improving relations between the two countries.

In its relations with Moscow, the Georgian government was not helped by its especially cautious or, to put it more bluntly, servile tone toward the Kremlin in regard to the Russian military intervention in Ukraine. Tbilisi never openly condemned Russia as the aggressor. Instead, in its watered down statements, the Georgian government chose to emphasize the need to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and for a peaceful resolution of the conflict—hardly a novelty for anyone. Certainly, the deep Georgian-Ukrainian ties deserved more than this.

Furthermore, the government's much heralded rhetoric of developing people-to-people contacts with ethnic Abkhaz and Ossetians did not seem to materialize either. In fact, in August, a radically anti-Georgian and pro-Russian new separatist regime, led by former KGB officer Raul Khajimba, took power in Abkhazia (see [EDM](#), September 3). After threatening to expel ethnic Georgians still living in the region, Khajimba vowed to tighten Sukhumi's policies toward Tbilisi and stated that he would close down four of the five crossings from Abkhazia to the rest of Georgia ([Civil Georgia](#), October 4).

Overall, this brief analysis of the current year clearly shows that the Georgian government's policies in 2014 have actually been in tatters. The Georgian authorities, however, do not seem to take notice of this fact. More disturbingly, the government has, so far, not shown willingness or the capacity to revamp and readjust its policies in the face of its own failures. It is highly unlikely that it will do so either before the year is through or even beyond.

CENTRAL ASIA—A NET ASSESSMENT SINCE THE START OF 2014

Macroeconomic Problems Overshadow Foreign Policy Agenda: The Situation in Kazakhstan

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October 16, 2014

By: [Georgiy Voloshin](#)

The past nine and a half months of 2014 have been dominated in Kazakhstan by the worsening macroeconomic situation, which has prompted the government to move forward with some unpopular measures while embarking on a set of far-reaching reforms. In February, the National Bank of Kazakhstan announced a 20-percent devaluation of the domestic currency, the tenge, which was previously devalued by a quarter in early 2009 at the height of the global financial crisis ([tengrinenews.kz](#), February 11). Rumors about a new devaluation had actually been circulating in the country since the summer of 2013, but the government repeatedly brushed them aside as “irrelevant,” instead praising Kazakhstan’s macroeconomic stability.

One year ago, in October 2013, the shutdown of the giant oil deposit at Kashagan, located offshore in Kazakhstan’s sector of the Caspian Sea, was widely evaluated by local observers as a bad sign for the authorities. While it was initially expected that commercial production could be reestablished by the end of 2014, the Ministry of Economy finally acknowledged this April that Kashagan might stand idle until at least early 2016. In the same month, President Nursultan Nazarbayev accepted the resignation of his prime minister, Serik Akhmetov, whom he had picked in September 2012, only to replace him with his predecessor, Karim Massimov ([kapital.kz](#), April 2). The latter had earlier led the government in difficult times between 2007 and 2012, as Kazakhstan was trying to weather the consequences of the global economic meltdown, including a drastic fall in industrial production.

It is unclear whether Akhmetov was relieved of his duties because of the dire situation at Kashagan. But this explanation cannot entirely be ruled out. Bringing Massimov back to the prime minister’s office from the presidential administration could be a means for Nazarbayev to better defend Kazakhstan’s posture vis-à-vis foreign members of the North Caspian Operating Company (NCOC), which is developing Kashagan. In October 2008, the Massimov cabinet successfully negotiated a series of amendments to the 1997 production-sharing agreement, under which the NCOC has been obliged to bear 100 percent of the costs necessary to restart oil production, should the consortium fail to launch it by October 1, 2013. Thus, while the Kazakhstani government waits impatiently for Kashagan to be kick-started, it at least does not have to foot the bill for the replacement of damaged pipelines, estimated at over \$2 billion ([dnews.kz](#), January 16).

Unsurprisingly, Massimov’s return to the top of the government and the little time he has had since then to bring about positive macroeconomic changes have been insufficient so far to turn the tide as quickly as some initially expected. Kazakhstan’s GDP growth plummeted in the first half of 2014 to 3.9 percent, down from 5.1 percent in January–June 2013, owing to the simultaneous effect of neighboring Russia’s economic slowdown and the increasingly volatile

international oil price. In response to these negative developments, the government drafted, the parliament voted for, and the president endorsed in mid-June a new law aiming to ensure better protection of foreign investors' business interests. For foreign companies involved in the implementation of strategic and socioeconomically sensitive projects, the newly adopted law notably guarantees corporate and land tax exemptions of up to ten years, stable long-term fiscal rates for other taxes, investment subsidies, as well as the right to hire a foreign workforce without permits (zakon.kz, June 12).

So far this year, given the urgency of improving the macroeconomic fundamentals, foreign policy has remained largely on the sidelines of domestic politics. However, on May 29, Kazakhstan hosted a high-level meeting in Astana, attended by President Nazarbayev and his Russian and Belarusian counterparts, Vladimir Putin and Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The three presidents signed the founding treaty of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which is set to replace, as of next January, the trilateral Customs Union, in force since July 2010. After Kazakhstan was clearly caught off guard by Russia's annexation of Crimea in March and its continued support of the rebels fighting government forces in eastern Ukraine, it has since sided against its own will with Moscow, implicitly recognizing the fake referendums first in Crimea and then in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces (akorda.kz, May 29).

Yet, the deepening standoff between Russia and the West can hardly leave the Kazakhstani authorities completely unmoved. Russia currently remains Kazakhstan's second-largest trading partner behind China and controls most of the trade with its northern regions. Moreover, Kazakhstani oil has historically been exported to foreign markets via Russian-controlled routes such as the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC). In fact, there are growing fears in Astana that the sectoral sanctions imposed by Western countries upon Russia's energy sector could hit Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon industry, thereby putting an additional strain on the country's efforts to reestablish economic growth at a level above 6 percent per year (vz.ru, October 14).

Although there is pretty much no chance that Kazakhstan might attempt during the last two and a half months of 2014 to reconsider its partnership with Russia and Belarus within the EEU, it has already shown some signs of its willingness to actively re-engage in a more multi-vector foreign policy. On October 9, Nazarbayev met in Brussels with the outgoing chairman of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso (newtimes.kz, October 9). They proudly announced the finalization of bilateral (Kazakhstan–European Union) talks for the signing of an enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA). Kazakhstan will be the first country in Central Asia to have successfully negotiated this type of accord. Furthermore, Astana seeks to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) as soon as possible and needs Western support to overcome the remaining obstacles. Therefore, Astana can be expected over the coming months to cautiously seek increased relations with partners beyond Russia.

Defending Uzbekistan's Sovereignty in Face of the Ukraine Crisis: Developments in Uzbekistan

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By: [Umida Hashimova](#)

The involvement of Russia in the current turbulent situation in southeastern Ukraine most likely did not surprise Uzbekistan's government, as it saw the parallels with the wars in Georgia in 2008 and in Transnistria in 1990. For President Islam Karimov, the situation in Ukraine most likely reconfirmed that Vladimir Putin is not one to shy away from military actions to keep the countries of the former Russian Empire and later Soviet Union under Moscow's sphere of influence. According to experts, Karimov believes the issue of protecting Russians abroad is merely an instrument or tactic being used as a pretext for Russia's interventions, including military.

No matter how great Uzbekistan's fears are regarding the threat to its indivisibility and sovereignty due to Moscow's aggression, for economic reasons, this Central Asian republic will not shut the door completely on Russia—at least not abruptly. After all, the Russian Federation remains Uzbekistan's largest bilateral trade partner. Neither does Russia want to lose Uzbekistan. In fact, the last speech by President Karimov, during the most recent Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) summit, called for finally launching the CIS Free Trade Zone (FTZ) ([press-service.uz](#), October 10), a Russia-driven project aimed at canceling import tariffs and export duties, which Uzbekistan signed on to as the ninth participant in May of 2013 (see [EDM](#), October 4, 2013). In the same speech, Karimov described the FTZ as a union that does not distress domestic markets—an oblique criticism of the forthcoming Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Furthermore, he added an overt criticism, calling the EEU a union without foundational precepts.

Notwithstanding the economic and political pressures exerted by Russia, Tashkent is doing everything in its power to stay outside Moscow's sphere of influence. As Uzbekistan's biggest bilateral trade partner, Russia can indeed pressure a recalcitrant Tashkent by cutting back investments and bilateral trade. The country most able to help Uzbekistan avoid full submission to Russia is China, which has started to economically eclipse Moscow's influence in Uzbekistan and the rest of Central Asia. And this past August, in the latest China-Uzbekistan bilateral meeting in Beijing, the two sides approved a five-year development plan and agreed to give priority to building line D of the China–Central Asia natural gas pipeline ([xinhuanet.com](#), August 19). Whether it was coordinated or not, Uzbekistan will be phasing out its supply of natural gas to Russia, and redirecting it mainly to China by 2021 ([RIA Novosti](#), October 8). Furthermore, even with China as the leading economic alternative, over the course of the past nine months, Uzbekistan has been actively reaching out to new investors and markets to expand investment opportunities with Europe (Latvia, Spain), South Korea, Japan and Turkey ([jahonnews.uz](#), September 26, June 18, May 28, July 15; [press-service.uz](#), August 6).

Tashkent's caution in expressing its opinion on the Ukraine situation was seen in its clear, though vaguely worded, call in May for the respect of state sovereignty and a non-military resolution to the conflict (see [EDM](#), May 2, 2014). Tashkent's abstention in the March 27 United

Nations General Assembly vote on the status and results of Crimea's March 16 referendum sent an even stronger message of disapproval of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Karimov recently revisited the Ukraine issue during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting of the heads of member states in Dushanbe, September 18, where he supported the Minsk agreement on the resolution of the situation in Ukraine (see [EDM](#), October 3). In the same speech, he said that peace should be reached between Russian and Ukraine by way of negotiations ([press-service.uz](#), September 19), thus recognizing Russia's full-fledged participation in the confrontation. However, at this month's meeting of the heads of the CIS, the Uzbekistani president expressed an ambiguous opinion in which he voiced his irritation at the absence of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, who supposedly was expected to have attended the summit (Ukraine is still a member of the CIS, and was the only country represented by an ambassador rather than its head of state). President Poroshenko's presence could have resulted in greater clarity to the Ukraine problem, Karimov said, adding that while the Ukrainian president frequently visits European countries, only a few CIS leaders have so far met Poroshenko in person ([press-service.uz](#), October 10).

Watching the developments in Ukraine unfold over the past year, Uzbekistan's government has been occupied with the problem of trying to pursue a politically independent path from Russia. But considering that Uzbekistan is virtually alone in its region, with nearly all of its neighbors closely allied with or dominated by Moscow, the country is attempting to figure out how much longer it can retain the strength and resources to push back against Russian influence.

Fears of a Tajik Maidan: The Ukraine Crisis's Impact on the Domestic Situation in Tajikistan Since the Start of 2014

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By: [Mark Vinson](#)

The Euromaidan protests that took place during winter 2013–2014, in Ukraine, have cast their shadow over Tajikistan. The short-term effect of the protests (particularly the Russian response), along with the increasingly violent and intractable nature of the civil war in Syria, makes comparable protests unlikely in Tajikistan in the near to medium term. However, this has not kept some from trying.

Earlier this month, the opposition figure Umarali Quvatov called for protests to take place in Dushanbe on October 10. Quvatov, the exiled leader of the now banned opposition organization "Group 24," enjoys limited popularity, and the protests failed to materialize. Despite Quvatov's lack of broad appeal, the government responded to his call by beefing up security in the capital and blocking websites and text message services. Some media outlets reported that President Emomali Rahmon even invited 800 Chinese troops into the capital to help suppress potential protests, although it remains unclear if these allegations are true or simply misinformation emanating from Quvatov and his camp (BBC Tajiki, October 13).

Perhaps more interesting than Quvatov's call for protest or the government's reaction to it was the fact that the protests were condemned by nearly all of Tajikistan's domestic opposition, including former civil war military commanders such as Mirzohuja Ahmadov, opposition political parties such as The Islamic Renaissance Party, and prominent clerics such as Hoji Mirzo (Ozodi, October 8, 10, 11). Generally speaking, anti-government protests are not favorably viewed by most Tajikistanis. They are typically seen as a prelude to chaos and violence as witnessed in the case of Ukraine and Syria or even Tajikistan's own recent history. In 1992, anti-government demonstrations were the proximate cause of Tajikistan's civil war, a fact that weighs heavily on the collective consciousness of Tajikistanis both because of the extreme violence and destruction caused by the war and because the regime's propaganda machine will not let anyone forget what they consider to be the self-evident lesson of that episode, namely: opposition leads to anarchy, obedience leads to peace.

Incidents this past year in the semi-autonomous region of Gorno-Badakhshan (see [EDM](#), April 29) have demonstrated that the regime is willing to use lethal force to suppress public displays of dissent, which may further dampen the appetite for protest. One of the most widely cited reasons for the unlikelihood of protests is the fact that a significant percentage of Tajikistan's military-age men live in Russia as migrant laborers. If this diversion of manpower does prove to be a crucial factor in forestalling protest movements in Tajikistan, it might prove a pyrrhic victory for the regime for three reasons:

First, over the long run, the domestic economic hardships that drive Tajikistani laborers to Russia in search of work may exacerbate their underlying grievances against the regime. This would particularly be the case if a sudden change in Russian migration policy led to quotas or deportations that drastically reduced the number of Tajikistani migrants. Despite its reliance on cheap labor, Russia has a long history of threatening such actions as a way of extracting concessions from Dushanbe. A sudden and large repatriation of Tajikistani migrant labors with no means of supporting their families would have negative consequences for regime stability.

Second, long-term mass labor migration has considerable effects on Tajikistani social—and by extension—political dynamics. While regionalism, entrenched patronage networks, and loyalty to local strong men have hampered Rahmon's ability to fully consolidate power in a centralized government, the existence of local power brokers do at least provide him with a finite (and familiar) number of interlocutors to deal with in times of crisis. Recent history is replete with examples of Rahmon using a combination of threats and inducements to compel local strong men to bring themselves (and their constituents) into line. Mass labor migration, however, may erode traditional patronage networks and regional identities, thereby degrading the ability of local strong men to "deliver" their constituents. The aforementioned Mirzohuja Ahmadov, who rejected calls for domestic street protests in Tajikistan, is a prime example of the trajectory of a regional war lord—turned Rahmon ally. A reader response to an interview with Ahmadov on Radio Free Europe's Tajik-language website, however, is indicative of the potentially evolving sentiment of migrant laborers: "Mr. Ahmadov, do not speak for all of the Gharmis, I am a migrant in Moscow and I support Umarali Quvatov one hundred percent" (Ozodi, October 11). "Gharmis" refers to people who live in, or trace their lineage back to, the region of Gharm in Tajikistan.

And third, the process of de-regionalization and the leveling of local political hierarchies could be a force for good as it opens the door for competing political and religious ideas. However, recent reports of Tajikistani citizens being radicalized in Russia and recruited to fight with the Islamic State (formerly known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria—ISIS) show how dangerous ideas can also metastasize in these communities (RFE/RL, October 2; see [EDM](#) August 7, 2013).

Since the start of the anti-government protests in Ukraine, and the ensuing Russian invasion of the country, the Ukraine crisis has raised a great deal of apprehension inside Tajikistan. And in large part due the population's distrust of mass protests as a spark for anarchy, combined possibly with the large number of young Tajikistani men working in Russia, so far mass protest movements have not materialized. Yet, the country's economic reliance on labor migration to Russia, the political effect of mass labor migration on traditional patronage networks, as well as concerns of greater ease of extremist ideology spreading through inter-mixed uprooted communities could help reverse this situation over the long term. All these factors call for more careful scrutiny, as it is possible that the reasons that have made Euromaidan-style protests in Tajikistan unlikely in the short term could lead to more radical and violent opposition in the medium to long term.

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