

Russian Fears and Unipolarity

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Abstract

Though elements of realism pervade the narratives Russia and the United States put forward, the truth of the matter lies beyond the propaganda. On Russia's side, the government's fears of internal conflict and a revolution motivate the suppression of Ukrainian people and Russian control over Ukraine. But Russia is also motivated by the economic factors of control of pipelines, its own gas being a strong motivator for domination. In the end the reality is that the conflict is largely the result of economic motives rather than national security, the United States taking advantage of Ukraine as a proxy to obtain economic advancement as well as prevent Russia from exporting its own resources. Rather than truly fight for protection as a nation, the United States is making themselves and the entire world vulnerable to a larger scale conflict through conquest for economic power and the pursuit of capitalism under unipolarity.

Russian Fears and Unipolarity

The war in Ukraine is marred by narratives coming from all sides. The media landscape is rife with what feels like an endless stream of propaganda, making it hard to discern what is true. In a conflict with stakes as high as nuclear war, it makes sense that each nation wants to push their narrative the farthest. Unfortunately, this means that the stories we see are built on lies and half-truths, concealing the real reason for it all. While the tense history between the USSR (now Russia) and the United States is true, the narrative that our nation is currently in the same state of danger it once was is a falsification. Rather than the perspective offered by the mainstream narrative, the conflict at its core is most accurately explained by class system theory, where the elite of the United States's economic interests intertwine with Russian government's fears to lead us where we are today.

History of Russia and the United States

World War II took a great toll on Russia, with the country losing 27 million people in its defeat of Nazi Germany. Despite this loss, the United States government turned “on what was an ally during the war and made it to be the great enemy” soon after Nazi Germany was defeated, even going so far as to work with Nazis to develop “anti-Soviet technologies.” Economist and consultant to many post-Soviet governments Jeffrey Sachs states, “The United States was eager to cooperate and support. . .the central European countries that had been under the Soviet sphere. . .But when it came to the Soviet Union and then later to Russia, that remained an enemy, even at the end of the Cold War” (Breaking Points, 2024). Only mutually assured destruction prevented the two countries from directly attacking each other as the Cold War raged on between 1945 and 1989. In this time the red scare came into play, with the United States using any means necessary to “contain communist expansionism anywhere it seemed to be occurring” (History,

2023). The aim to destroy Russia and anything linked to communism became a deep-seated belief within United States foreign policy (Breaking Points, 2024).

Jeffrey Sachs states that at the end of the Cold War “my advice was help, help the Soviet Union, help Russia. . .because that's what I understand good. . .security to be. But all my recommendations were rejected” (Breaking Points, 2024) At the 1991 G7 summit, Russian requests for aid were denied. Then later that year economic advisor to the Russian president Yegor Gaidar requested a standstill on debt servicing. In an unusual choice, the G7 Deputies decided that Russia would be forced to pay off their debt as it came, with threats of aid being rescinded. This led to the country going into default in 1992, a massive crisis that the United States had no intention of resolving (Durden, 2024). Sachs asserts that leaders of the former Soviet Union were offering “normalcy” and a “vastly safer world”, but the United States “wanted domination”, which is why they along with the other Western countries allowed Russia to collapse (Breaking Points, 2024). Rather than enhance global security, the United States took the path of unipolarity.

Beyond Russia, the West focused on exporting its governing model to the post-Soviet states. Russia also had interest in its own role in these areas, which is why they viewed the EU and NATO involvement in Europe as “an element of the conflict escalation” (Iancu, 2016). Today we see Russia and the United States in what might be simply the continuation of a Cold War that never ended (Breaking Points, 2024).

Ukraine Before Euromaidan: A Back and Forth of Russian and Western Influence

Overall, the former Soviet states were vulnerable after the Cold War because of “low economic development but also by the lack of political unity of the governing elite as for the

direction of the country's development in future." Some elites favored the Western model which involved "profound political and social reforms", but others wanted to remain "anchored to the sphere of interest of the Russian federation." Western states were open politically to the former Soviet states as it could create regional security within Europe against Russia (Iancu, 2016).

These conflicting beliefs within Ukraine manifested in the Orange Revolution of 2004. The protests against Russian backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich stealing the Ukrainian presidency created the possibility of electing Viktor Yushchenko, who was reformist. Just barely into his second term, The Orange Revolution caught Putin off guard. He had been "so confident of his ability to influence the outcome" that the night before the election he had lectured Ukrainians in Kyiv on the need to back his chosen candidate. This proved to be a bad decision, and one the Ukrainian people did not support. For Russia the Orange Revolution became an example of what would happen if grassroots efforts came to fruition, creating fears of what could happen within its own borders. In response, Russia began focusing on state-sanctioned Russian nationalism. The protests of the Orange Revolution were also viewed as an interference from the Western World in Russia's internal affairs, setting the stage for Russia's increasing confrontation with the rest of the world (Dickinson, 2020)

It is very possible that without the Orange Revolution we would have seen a more confident Russia take control of the Eastern European nations we see today. While the Orange Revolution of 2004 did not result in Russian military aggression, it still "remains a watershed moment that marked the end of the early post-Soviet era and set the stage for the Cold War climate that defines today's international relations" (Dickinson, 2020).

After the election of Viktor Yushchenko, the Ukrainian government began furthering policy toward integration with the EU and NATO. In April 2008, Kiev's leaders attended the

NATO summit, expressing officially “their will to adhere to NATO.” But European leaders did not show unanimous support and Russia expressed they would “undertake all steps” to prevent adherence of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO. Unfortunately infighting in Ukraine also proved problematic, eventually leading Yanukovich to make a comeback, winning the 2010 presidential race. Under Yanukovich the pro-Russian regime would not adhere to NATO’s process and dissolved the board that dealt with adherence to NATO. Yanukovich wanted larger social support, distancing Ukraine from “Euro Atlantic integration” in favor of the European one, which was then abandoned in 2013 (Iancu, 2016). But unlike the previous Russian controlled media landscape, social media was no longer subject to the level of government censorship that existed till 2004 (Dickinson, 2020). Though it may not be as overt, “Russia was much more powerful when Ukraine looked like an independent country but was a kleptocracy that [Putin] could pull the strings on.” (Gallagher, 2024). The newfound journalistic freedom later allowed for the Euromaidan uprising in 2014 that led to the Russian backed Yanukovich’s downfall. Ukrainian cultural identity was cementing itself as one separate from Russia (Dickinson, 2020).

Euromaidan

In 2013, Ukraine had to decide whether to “cooperate with the EU, or adhere to the Customs Union, where Russia [held] the dominant role” (Iancu, 2016). Protests began when at the last-minute President Yanukovich decided not to sign the European Union-Ukraine Association Agreement “despite said agreement passing the Ukrainian Parliament” (Kukharskyy et al., 2023). This decision was not one that had “support of the social majority” (Iancu, 2016). When the regime responded with brutal beatings in November 2013 for the mostly student protestors, everything intensified. New laws restricting freedom of the press and assembly came

into place in January 2014, resulting in the Euromaidan movement becoming one of a larger fight against government corruption and police brutality (Kukharskyy et al., 2023).

Euromaidan has been the subject of large amounts of propaganda. Russia has used false narratives about Euromaidan to “undermine its pro-democracy credentials” and further justify the Russian invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine (Dickinson, 2020). However, it is true that the US did invest a lot of money into Euromaidan through NGOs. While the protests were grassroots in many ways, it would be incorrect to state that there was no United States intervention (Breaking Points, 2024). Another subject of narratives is the involvement of ultra-nationalist groups in Euromaidan. The fact remains that there were symbols of Ukrainian Nazi collaborators abounding in Maidan square (Ragozin, 2019).

Ukraine Post 2014

After Euromaidan the new political powers supported European integration, which was the popular opinion in the Central and Western regions of Ukraine. But the Eastern parts and Russian administration supported the policies of Viktor Yanukovich, no longer President anymore. Pro-Western and pro-Russian forces, including ethnic Russians were activated by the divergences in direction of national policy. This created an environment where “the forces” were ready to take action on their opinions and disagreements with the direction the state went. (Iancu, 2016).

Soon after the Euromaidan protests, officials in Crimea realized that the hold Russians had over Crimea may not hold out. In March 2014 a vote was held, with 90% in support of joining Russia, and President Putin “made Crimea part of Russia.” Though Russia continues to state that the annexation of Crimea was legal and fair, it is still not recognized internationally due

to multiple suspicions of foul play. Suspicious behavior includes groups of unlabeled individuals with green uniforms and body armor appearing the same day that “Vladimir Konstantinov, speaker of Crimea’s regional parliament and a Russian politician, said he ‘didn’t rule out’ the peninsula’s ‘return’ to Russia.” These men “didn’t interact with locals or reporters”, and President Putin denied their presence. They appeared with Ukrainian military and the “interim government in Kyiv ordered Ukrainian servicemen in Crimea to leave without firing a single shot.” A Crimean Tatar protestor was also abducted and tortured for a week right before the election. There is also the fact that there were not many polling stations either (Mirovalev, 2024). The annexation of Crimea also violated the Budapest Memorandum, not respecting Ukraine’s borders. History also calls into question the Russian-ness of Crimea. The only reason Crimea is so Russian is because Crimean Tartars were genocided and deported “as recently as 1944”, then replaced by Russians (Kukharskyy et al., 2023). Today Russian authorities continue to “crackdown” on critics of the annexation. (Mirovalev, 2024)

But for Putin the annexation still remained a win. He was able to gain Ukrainian territory with the framing of salvation through the use of anti-Ukrainian media propaganda in Russia and Crimea. Ukraine became the example of instability of revolution once again (the first time being the Orange Revolution), instilling fear of rising against the regime in Russia. The annexation resulted in Putin’s dwindling approval rating rising to “an unbelievable 89 percent”, aiding in quelling any anti Putin sentiment in Russia (Ragozin, 2019).

Though the initial crisis in Ukraine may have been one of opposing political factions and “shifting of the national interest from the West to the East”, it has “transformed for the young Ukrainian state in that of defending the whole territorial integrity” (Iancu, 2016). Polls show that 80% of Ukrainians “reject territorial concessions to Russia” (Kukharskyy et al., 2023). One fear

that remains is that Russia will continue ethnic cleansing of Ukraine as they have in the past (particularly in Crimea) if they were to gain control of the nation. The “denazification” touted by Russian political advisors involves the killing of millions and “re-education” that would seek to take away the Ukrainian culture from Ukraine in favor of the “superior” Russian culture. Russia already has repeatedly claimed Ukrainian artists to be Russian while also representing Ukrainian culture as backwards, using different methods to suppress the use of the Ukrainian language in favor of Russian (Kukharsky et al., 2023). Russia may claim honest efforts for a better Ukraine, but it remains evident that they are motivated by efforts for homogeneity and a return to what once was. Russian economic motivators for taking over Ukraine are also suspect. Shale gas reserves in mostly Eastern Ukraine could be a competitor to the Russian Federation, so control over pipelines of that gas is a motivation for Russian control over Ukraine (Iancu, 2016).

Overall, the relations between Russia and the former Soviet states are a priority in policy for the Russian Federation. In the Strategy of the National Security of the Russian Federation in 2020 Russia asserted that it has overcome its crises of the 20th century, a state now capable of defending its national interests, but that NATO’s extension to the Eastern European countries is a serious threat to Russia’s national security. Russia accuses the United States of attempting to create a buffer area between the influence of the Western superpowers through Ukraine, strengthening its hold over Western Europe, impeding Russian-German cooperation and the “consolidation of the European unity” (Iancu, 2016). Russia’s accusations against the United States are not unfounded, as evidenced by the conflict surrounding Russian gas and the Nord Stream pipelines.

Nord Stream, Capitalist Interests, and the Western Elite

Russia's power over Europe is through its raw materials, particularly gas. But Russia's reliance on these exports is also its weakness, as it means they do not have a diversified economy. (Iancu, 2016). The Nord Stream pipeline between Germany and Russia strengthened the control Russia had over the export of its resources by creating more transit vectors, and the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would have done the same, expected to transit one quarter of Europe's annual gas imports when combined. The German-Russian relations also provide a point of stability between the East and West. Disruption of Russian gas transport to Europe through Ukraine has been an issue multiple times due to conflicts between Ukraine and Russia. It makes sense that this is such a large problem for Russia considering that as of 2018 "close to half of Russia's gas supplies into Europe transit Ukraine", further tightening Russia's need to have control over Ukraine. Support for the pipelines from the United States would make sense within the narrative of aiding in Ukrainian sovereignty, especially considering the Nord Stream 2 pipeline would reduce the need for Russian corporations in Ukraine, helping reduce corruption and strengthen Ukraine's independence from Russia. But the pipelines have been opposed by Washington since the George W. Bush administration (Shaffer, 2018). When the pipelines were destroyed, it makes sense that the CIA's claims that they were not aware of the planned destruction is highly suspect. The CIA is "keen to distance itself from anything that suggests a direct attack on Russia", despite the direct attacks Kyiv has orchestrated. As the only on the ground part of the United States government in Ukraine they cannot admit escalation of attacks on Russia. Instead, they can admit incompetence, that they were not aware of the plan, maintaining the illusion that it is Zelensky taking action that could expand the scope of the war, not the United States (Arkin, 2023). But it remains clear the United States is pleased by the outcome. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described it as "a tremendous opportunity to once

and for all remove the dependence on Russian energy and thus to take away from Vladimir Putin the weaponization of energy as a means of advancing his imperial designs” (Polychroniou, 2022).

Beyond this stance not fitting into the narrative of Ukrainian sovereignty, opposing the gas lines does not make sense when you take into consideration European foreign policy in general. German administration has strong support for the pipelines. Historically sanctions on Russian gas to Europe have caused rifts between the United States and Europe, such as when Ronald Reagan sanctioned companies engaged in building the pipelines between Europe and Russia. This is all further intensified considering Europe also now relies on gas imports more heavily than before, with Germany closing their last nuclear plant (Shaffer, 2018). Noam Chomsky describes the loss of cheap Russian gas as “the most dramatic hit to the European economy”. Beyond just gas, Russian minerals are also an important import for Europe, especially when it comes to efforts to switch to renewable energy. It “remains an open question whether European leaders will be willing to supervise Europe’s economic decline” as the United States continues to get their demands (Polychroniou, 2022). “Real power means you can get what you want without having to exert violence” certainly applies to the United States’s control over Europe (Gallagher 2024). Through NATO the United States can keep Europe under their thumb to advance their own interests (Polychroniou, 2022).

But the question remains, what are those interests? Why would the United States oppose the pipelines? The opposition of Russian “imperial designs” Antony Blinken mentions have less of a foothold when considering that without the export of gas the Russian economy takes a massive hit. But when considering United States economic interests, the stance makes sense. Gas from the United States is more expensive than Russian gas, so European countries normally do

not have an incentive to import American over Russian (Shaffer, 2018). With Russian sanctions and the hit to the Nord Stream pipeline, the more expensive American gas has become a partial replacement for the cheaper Russian gas (Polychroniou, 2022). The fact that the United States does not have to take responsibility for this reliance is just an added benefit.

This is not the first time that the United States took the opportunity to destroy Russia's economy for capitalist interests. In the 1990s corporations from the United States took advantage of post-Cold War Russia which "sucked hundreds of billions of dollars out of the country". The results were devastating with the number of Russians in poverty increasing from two million to sixty million "in just a few years" and life expectancy plummeting. Putin became involved, putting an end to the "national catastrophe" the West created in Russia and "they never forgave him for it" (Gallagher, 2024).

Corporate-financier think tanks have been pumping out anti-Putin policies for two decades. One such think tank is the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR), of which two of Kamala Harris's foreign policy experts have had stints at. CFR's funders include Bank of America, BlackRock, JP Morgan Chase, and Apple among many others. Just the CFR's corporate affiliations span far and wide, not to mention the many other think tanks who have additional corporate affiliations. These think tanks then steer foreign policy towards their own financial interests, rather than the good of the country (Gallagher, 2024). For example, hundreds of billions of dollars of American money are going towards many of these corporations as Ukraine receives weaponry and equipment. Beyond the current taxpayer money being spent there is also the potential future money that will be spent on corporations such as JP Morgan Chase and BlackRock as they profiteer during the reconstruction of Ukraine (Greenwald, 2024). In the end

it is evident that it is the corporations who are controlling our political landscape, the basis of class system theory.

Ukraine as a Proxy

Another tenant of class system theory is that the more powerful entities are taking advantage of the poorer states. When Victoria Nuland and Boris Johnson vetoed the diplomatic peace treaty between Ukraine and Russia because of the stipulations that Ukraine not have weaponry that could be used against them, it was because they knew the United States would not be the one suffering from it (Greenwald, 2024). According to Jeffrey Sachs “Ukraine could not win this war” and “it is a disaster that was largely caused by the United States. . .the U.S. locked Ukraine into this disaster” (Breaking Points, 2024).

Efforts to diminish American presence in the conflict with Russia are not due to giving up on wanting a regime change in Russia. They just do not want “Americans dying in a direct confrontation”. Just like under the Obama years where the United States “lead from behind”, Ukrainians and Russians are the ones dying, not Americans. Among European countries calling for troops in Ukraine the United States--as the (sometimes) withholder of weaponry--can appear as a reasonable aid to Ukraine, rather than a ruthless power-hungry nation using a less powerful country’s destabilization for their own agenda (Gallagher, 2024). The United States committed a “ghastly gamble” with Ukraine, but will have no accountability for it (Polychroniou, 2022). As the areas around Russia become destabilized, the United States’s goals of world domination and destruction of any chance of bipolarity become a possibility (Gallagher, 2024).

An Argument Against Realist Theory: The United States's Aggravation of Russia

One of the many narratives the United States is pushing is that the conflict with Russia is also an issue of United States national security. This argument begins to falter when considering the fact that Russia is losing far more than the United States. There are no United States armed forces being killed and no United States land being fought over, but Russian lives lost number in tens of thousands and missiles are being sent towards Russian military bases and pipelines are being destroyed. The United States has the upper hand over Russia they fight in a proxy war while Russia is in war (Gallagher, 2024).

The United States was the reason the peace deal between Ukraine and Russia would not go through, escalating tensions between the United States and Russia. The fact that the reasoning for this choice had to do with withdrawing weaponry being used against Russia demonstrates a lack of consideration for Russia's own national security (Greenwald, 2024). This choice could only go one way: escalate the conflict. But it does make sense when considering the United States is "upping the chaos" around Russia in failed efforts to destabilize it and cause the downfall of Putin. The United States would "likely prefer a world on fire" instead of accepting there may be another multipolar world; even if it means increasing tensions between two nations with nuclear weaponry (Gallagher, 2024).

President Joe Biden asserted that the United States and Kyiv would not threaten Russia or the survival of the Russian state to avoid Putin escalating the conflict. As a result, Russia should respond without escalating to beyond Ukraine or resort to nuclear weapons (Arkin, 2023). But the United States has ignored Russia's security concerns before, like when they favored integrating Ukraine into NATO, breaking promises to Russia about not expanding NATO (Breaking Points, 2024). Overall, the United States has ignored diplomacy completely as an

option, leading to the current tragedy we face today (Polychroniou, 2022). Since the beginning of the conflict Nord Stream has been destroyed, destabilizing Russia's relations with Germany and their economy overall. Just recently, the United States backed missile attacks into Russia. Though most were intercepted with fragments hitting military facility. This marks a serious intensification of the conflict between the United States and Russia (Aggarwal, 2024). Prior to this attack "talk of nuclear weapons [was] mostly in the West" and Russia had echoed the "universal position" of nuclear states: that they would only resort to nuclear weapons in the face of a threat to survival. The statement did become more dangerous when parts of Ukraine were annexed, extending what Russian survival could mean (Polychroniou, 2022). But now the new nuclear doctrine of Russia states that Moscow could "unleash a nuclear strike if subject to an attack by a nonnuclear country that has the support of a nuclear state", reflecting the updated state of the conflict according to a Kremlin spokesman. The same spokesman asserts that Washington was pouring "oil on the fire" and creating more tension. The new doctrine indicates that the United States supplying non-nuclear missiles to Ukraine could result in a nuclear attack from Russia. Matt Miller of the State Department says that "[d]espite what Russia says, neither the United States nor NATO pose any threat to Russia" echoing a narrative Washington continues to put forward, one which does not hold up in the face of United States missiles being sent into Russian territory (Aggarwal, 2024). Economist Daniel Ellsberg refers to nuclear weapons as constantly used "just as a gun is used in a robbery even if it is not fired" (Polychroniou, 2022). Provoking one of the only other nuclear weapon possessing nations in the world to the point of them changing their stance on nuclear weapons is not the action of a country trying to protect its national security.

China

One cannot consider the conflict in Ukraine without considering China. Fears of China's economic power have mounted over the years within the United States government. Tariff wars between the United States and China continue to mount, striking fears that the red scare will come into fuller swing. Anti-communist sentiment remains in the United States, The Committee on the Present Danger, a group against the dangers of the Soviet Union in the 1970s and 1980s, gaining some relevance within the Trump administration with their assertion that the Communist party in China must be overthrown (Swanson, 2019). Though the two countries went their separate ways after the fall of communism within Russia, the United States's pursuit of power has driven China and Russia together, making a failure to control Russia even more intolerable. If Russia comes out of the conflict in good condition, China will have access to Russia, and the United States will be on thin ice with both economic powerhouses, leaving the American elites out to dry (Gallagher, 2024). Though the days of the Cold War are over, the struggle between those labeled "communist" and those labeled "capitalist" remains strong.

The conflict in Ukraine was entirely preventable in the form it takes today. Multiple opportunities for diplomacy in many forms occurred, and few were taken. Continued acts of escalation occur and tension mounts as talks of nuclear warfare become more common. In the end, nobody is a winner besides the American elite, no matter who gains control of Ukraine. Billions of American dollars fund the perpetuation of a war with seemingly no end, tens of thousands of Russian soldiers are dead and Russian economic prospects remain bad, and millions of Ukrainian citizens are displaced with tens of thousands of dead. It is not clear what the result of this conflict for Ukraine will be but one this does remain clear: the forces that control Washington will stop at nothing for a profit.

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