

# **Russian Policy towards the South Caucasus**

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# Soft Power

- soft power - a power which influence others through cooptation rather than coercion. It has three major components: political legitimacy, economic interdependence and cultural values.

# Soft power in Russia's Grand Strategy

- **Westernisers** - pessimistic about Russia's use of soft power in the post-Soviet region.
- The role of the Russia, as Western nation, has to be the spread of western values and setting standards of liberal democracy.
- To only effective way how to address its regional problems is through multilateral institutions and cooperation with the West.

# Soft power in Russia's Grand Strategy

- **Stabilizers** - soft power is significant for achieving grand strategic goals of Russia. Key objective is greater security and stability in Russia's periphery, which can be achieved through economic modernization.
- The best way how to achieve grand strategic goals are transforming Russia into a "nation-civilization".

# Soft power in Russia's Grand Strategy

- **Imperialist** - military forces are key element, particularly in such conflict area as Caucasus is.
- The most effective way to achieve this objective is through supplying arms to secessionist territories, granting them status of independent states, giving Russian passport to those who is pro-Russian oriented and is willing of reunification with Russia and applying economic sanctions on politically “disloyal” states

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- How effective is a support of ethnic conflict in advancing Russian grand strategic interests?
- How effective is ethnic conflict as a tool for Russia's grand strategic interests in South Caucasus region?
- Is destabilizing of the region the good way to keep these states from NATO membership?

# Debate on Russia's Grand Strategy

After the collapse of the USSR there was apparent identity crisis and ideological vacuum.

*What happens after the demise of the Empire?*

# Russia's security interests – a sphere of influence

- Russia's threat assessment is different from other powers.
- Threat is coming from all directions:
  - the Caucasus, Central Asia, a dispute with Japan over Kuril Islands, a war of words with Canada over drilling right in the Arctic, deployments of US BMD systems in Poland and Romania, US warships in Black and North Seas and NATO further enlargement. Opinion that Russia's aggressive reaction in August 7-8 of 2008 was caused by Georgia's integration in NATO - is the well-known argument.



# Russia's security interests – a sphere of influence

- The Realpolitik of Russian leadership is rooted in the belief, that the world is composed by great powers – USA, China and Russia – and their “spheres of influence.”
- characteristic feature of global politics is to compete over these spaces.

# Russia's security interests – a sphere of influence

- “civilization unity”
- Russian speaking world (Russkij Mir)
- Russian Federation was proclaimed “as the locus of Russian national identity”
- protection of “near abroad” and opposing the NATO expansion

# Russian interests in South Caucasus

- South Caucasus represents a buffer zone between the Russian North Caucasus and the Islamic world.
- Area in which Russia feels threatened and there is a risk of rise of other regional powers, such as Turkey.
- Gateway for Russian influence in the Middle East and Central Asia
- pipelines and energy resources

# Russian interests in South Caucasus

- Russian strategy:
  - creation of the of satellite states, to control the extraction and transportation of energy resources, penetration economic influence, moderation of armed conflict and keeping the region out of Western influence.
  - keep Caspian pipelines under its control and overcome the diversification of energy resources to Europe.

# Russian interests in South Caucasus

- Russia's doctrine is based on "controlling the civilization role of the Russian nation in Eurasia", because "Russia is traditionally linked with the former Soviet republics, and now newly independent states, by history, the Russian language and great culture, cannot stay away from the common striving for freedom"

# Russian interests in South Caucasus

- Russian policy can be identified as a policy paradigm of “controlled instability” in the South Caucasus region the ultimate goal of which is to thwart the integration of this region into NATO and EU.
- Moscow strategy has been favored to use the stick, rather than to offer carrots, use threats and exert significant pressure, rather than offering rewards for compliance.

- Russian toolkit in advancing its grand strategic interests in the South Caucasus region is based on coercive means.
- The use of military is not effective and does not lead to determination of Russia's rule in this region and to the resolution of security dilemma.

- Russian security interests are based on the consumption that it is critically important to maintain a security belt in its periphery, which has to be created by satellite or even subordinate nations.
- Pro-democratic movements or so called “colored revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine where perceived by Russian analyst as chaotic and dangerous which could spread instability on Russia’s doorstep.



- Russia today is not the USSR of the cold war. It has no broad-based military posture and no explicit aggressive strategic doctrine. But it has nevertheless maintained a military presence in every neighbourhood state since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.
- Russian troops are often placed in areas blighted by secessionist conflicts – allowing them to be branded as “peacekeepers”. The presence of Russian troops limits the sovereignty of neighbourhood states, both directly – by denying states full control over their territory – and indirectly, by limiting their foreign policy options: states with Russian military bases can hardly envisage joining NATO, for example.

# Russian Troops

EaP Country	Approximated number of Russian troops in 2011
Armenia	3,214
Azerbaijan <sup>25</sup>	900
Belarus	850*
Georgia (Abkhazia & South Ossetia)	7,000
Moldova (Transnistria)	1,500
Ukraine	13,000

Source: author's own compilation based on data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies,<sup>26</sup> Klein,<sup>27</sup> Lukin,<sup>28</sup> Popescu & Wilson.<sup>29</sup>

\*Data for 2008; however, no changes were publicly reported

- Russia claims that it has a responsibility to ensure the security of Russian citizens, ethnic Russians and even mere Russian-speakers in its “near abroad”.
- But the war in Georgia led to allegations that Russia deliberately handed out passports to foreign nationals in order to create or bolster minorities it could then claim the right to protect: there are estimated to be around 179,000 Russian passport holders in Georgia.
- There are almost 160,000 in Azerbaijan, and 114,500 in Armenia. The existence of these “Russian minorities” in neighbourhood states gives Russia a potential excuse for involvement in conflict in any of these countries.

- Trade embargoes as political tools. It has banned wine from Georgia (since 2005) and Moldova (2005-07) when relations have soured, as well as Moldovan, Ukrainian and Georgian vegetables, meat and dairy products.
- The most comprehensive economic pressures were applied to Georgia after Tbilisi arrested four Russian spies in September 2006. Russia introduced a transport and postal blockade, closed Verkhni Lars, the only land border crossing between the two countries, and expelled several hundred Georgian workers.

- This last act raised concerns across the neighbourhood over Moscow's willingness to use the millions of migrant workers in Russia as leverage.
- Neighbourhood states fear that if they antagonise the Kremlin, Russia could introduce visa requirements, suspend money transfers or deport large numbers of workers, placing already fragile economic and political systems under huge strain.
- All the neighbourhood states are exposed to this risk. For example, in Azerbaijan no less than 70% of the income of the country's rural population comes from remittances. There are nearly 2 million Azeri migrants in Russia, compared to a total Azeri population of 8.4 million; if Russia forced even a small proportion of these migrants to return home, the social and political consequences for Azerbaijan could be devastating.

# Russian Hard Power

- Non-withdrawal of troops
- “Passportisation”
- Infrastructure takeovers
- Differential energy prices
- Oil and gas embargoes
- Trade blockades (wine, vegetables, meat)

- The wide array of hard power tools used by Russia shows its determination to achieve its foreign policy goals — but it also exposes the country's weaknesses.
- One thing the war in Georgia demonstrated was that other forms of Russian pressure — economic, political and ideological — had failed.
- What is more, while Russian embargoes, blockades and energy cuts may advance Russian interests in the short run, in the long term they actually diminish Russia's leverage by driving target states to diversify their economies or export markets.

# Conclusion

- Post-Soviet or post-imperial Russia did not experience a rebirth as a nation-state, like for example democratic Germany after the World War II or Kemalist Turkey. It did not shrink into a small fragment, as a memento of past imperial glory, like for example Deutsch-Oesterreich after 1918, which became the Republic of Austria. It created the Commonwealth of Independent States, which has however nothing to do with commonwealth except for the term itself. It has promoted a Russophobie in light of Russkiy Mir, but it has not been supported by attractive soft power components. Contrary to that, Russia's strategy was to use military power to protect its natural sphere of influence.



# Conclusion

- From Russian perspective the downfall of empire is recognized, but Russia has to remain a great power.
- The imperial élan has gone, however Russian establishment defines their country as a “great power”.
- Russia’s interests in former Soviet region are real, but we can claim that privileged zone in that area is a chimera.

# Conclusion

- Adopting a new role after 500 years as an empire, seventy years as an ideological warrior and over forty year during the Cold War period as a military superpower is not easy for Russia. Russia will never be able to restore the Soviet Union. Russian Federation today is in a position of post-empire rather than neo-empire.

- “No great power walks alone” and close allies, satellite nations are significant part of a great power’s armory.

# Russian Soft Power