

RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY IDEAS AND PRINCIPLES IN POST COLD WAR ERA AND GEO-STRATEGIC APPROACH UNDER PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN

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ABSTRACT

The foreign policy of Russia experienced significant instability in the years after the Cold War and how to incorporate it into the Western system by maintaining the Russian legacy. The foreign policy of Russia is influenced by a complex interplay of historical legacies, shifting global dynamics, and domestic interests. This article focuses on analyzing the significant geostrategic policies of Russia in the 21st century under the influence of President Vladimir Putin which he used to make Russia a great power in the world. The main objective of Russian geostrategic policies was to regain control in Near Abroad, post-Soviet republican territories to project its power to the Europe and whole world. Hence, Russia is using different means and acting offensively to counter the influence of NATO or EU in the post-soviet Eurasian region, as in Crimea and Ukraine, part of Eastern Europe. In this way, this study will also contribute to learning about the geographic and geostrategic significance of Crimea and Ukraine for Russia. The article also analyzes the historical claims of Russia on Near Abroad states, its struggles for achieving ontological security, and international recognition of a superpower. A descriptive approach is used to analyze and describe the Russian grand geostrategy by exploring the different parameters of Russia and President Vladimir Putin's interests, values, and security in implementing these policies.

Keywords: Russia, Geostrategic policies, Vladimir Putin, Ukraine, Crimea

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INTRODUCTION

Russia faced a period of crisis both domestically and internationally after the Cold War. Numerous solutions were suggested to overcome the damage that Russia faced especially in the form of the disintegration of the Soviet Empire when the Cold War ended in the early 1990's. For that purpose, Russia adopted a grand geostrategy under the presidency of Vladimir Putin for the 21st century to regain or achieve all power in economic, political, and social aspects and prestige that Russia lost. Grand strategy, in its simplest form, can be defined as a state's intentional attempts to integrate political, diplomatic, military, and economic methods to achieve its national interests. Grand strategy is the reconciliation of ends and means and Russian geostrategic policies, likewise use different means to achieve its ends i.e., to pursue its national interests. Russia's geostrategic decisions are the consequence of a variety of factors, including geography, history, internal politics, society, and, of course, competition with other superpowers for global dominance but the ultimate objective is to protect national interests. Russian President Vladimir Putin, an autocratic and realistic leader, plays a dominant role in shaping the geostrategic policies of Russia. At first, Vladimir Putin was also pro-western in the early 1990's. But soon his perceptions changed and he became more realistic due to the anarchical nature of the world and defined the geostrategic approach accordingly which is basically to maximize its influence in the post-soviet states and contain the Western influence in the region. According to him, Russia needs to struggle to "win" its position in the international system. Russian geostrategy is defined by the struggle of Russia for its ontological or identity security throughout its history and to advance international recognition of a global power that is continuously refused by the West. The significance of Ukraine and Crimea in Eastern Europe and the increasing interests of foreign powers such as the US or NATO shaped the geostrategic policies of Russia under President Putin. The ultimate goal of Russia behind its geostrategic policies is to secure national interests i.e., a global power status for Vladimir Putin's regime and territorial, economic political, and identity security.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Shahzada Rahim Abbas argues that Russian civilization is different from Western civilization. Slavophiles claim that Russia is a part of Slavic civilization but neo-Eurasianist have broadened this concept by involving Eurasian communities with Russian Slavs. Russia maintained its spirit of Eurasianism by adopting communism in 1917 to restrict the influence of alien forces. The geostrategy of Russia is influenced by the heartland theory of Halford Mackinder and Nicholas J. Spykman's Rimland theory which signified the Eurasian region to become a global power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia aimed to reintegrate into the post-Soviet states in the Eurasian region. Current Russian foreign policy emphasizes the Eurasian hegemony in economic, political, and social spheres. Russia took economic initiatives in Eastern Europe and Central Asia for its influence as soft power. Russia facing challenges by NATO expansion in Eurasia with EU support. Russia found China's BRI to be a trustworthy partner but China's influence in the region also needs to be counterbalanced by Russia.¹

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN VISION OF THE WORLD

There was a post-Soviet Russian identity problem after the end of the Cold War, as several experts noted. The Soviet leadership had its idea of Russia's place in a multinational society. But with the fall of the USSR, that interpretation was no longer valid. Russian intellectuals approached the issue of Russian identity with a renewed sense of urgency. Everyone in Russia could be wondering, "Who are we?" & "Where is Russia going?"² As was the case in the past in Russia, a nation with an autocratic past and weak democratic structures, and a secular heritage of authorization of power by the Tsar, and more recently, Russian President Vladimir Putin, the head of state provided efficient

¹ ABBAS, S. R. (2020). Russian Geopolitics And Eurasia: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF RUSSIA'S ROLE IN EURASIAN INTEGRATION. *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues*, 24(2), 90–105.

² Evans, A. B. 2008. "Putin's Legacy and Russia's Identity." *Europe-Asia Studies* 60 (6): 899–912.

strategies to numerous national challenges during times of profound crisis. Nearly all Russians expected a "strong hand" in the form of a leader to stop the internal conflict and win the respect of other major countries during the period of difficulties. As the first President of the newly established Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin made an effort to surpass Gorbachev by developing a Westernized image. Yeltsin's portrayal of reform was justified in theory as introducing elements of Western capitalism and democracy to Russia. But his policies were incredibly contradictory in practice. This is also the case with the current head of state of Russia when Vladimir Putin came to power. His personality proved essential to Russian domestic developments and strategic options at the start of the new century. According to Vladimir Putin, the world is characterized by a constant, dog-eat-dog struggle that puts people in a position where they will do anything to succeed, even if doing so causes harm to others. This is known as the Hobbesian view of the world, which explains that people naturally contend and fight for their interests, which is to dominate or control others and ask for respect from them. In Vladimir Putin's view, sustaining a competitive edge requires economic strength. Vladimir Putin's publications, before he was elected president of Russia, demonstrated his belief that economic development and modernization are essential for the state and may be facilitated by embracing Western economic tendencies. Russian President Vladimir Putin did not appear to be enthusiastic about integrating Russia's economy with the West, particularly the USA. Vladimir Putin's desire for stronger ties with Europe is made compellingly by the argument that the selected incorporation of European institutions will allow Russia to have a modern and rich society that will be more completely integrated into the global economy. Thus, despite being brought up in a communist worldview, President Vladimir Putin was able to quickly adapt to post-Soviet Russian democratic tendencies by picking up Western principles and incorporating them into his political expression.³ As a result, he maintained involvement

³ Ann-Sofie, V.R. Mikkel & B.S. Lars & H. Rune & P. Flemming & K. Johannes & B. Henrik & S.K. Kristian & D. 2014. *Putin's world*. Centre for Military Studies.

in the global economy as it was necessary for significant economic progress. Russian policies explain that a "greater role for the state" is required to cope with the benefits and difficulties that globalization presents for Russia.

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN AND 21ST CENTURY

Russian President Vladimir Putin writes in his "manifesto" written in 1999 that the beginning of the 21st century coincides with a profound shift in global trends in the last 20-30 years, coupled with what we term the post-industrial society. Russian President Vladimir Putin outlines the features of postindustrial society and challenges as a warning. He mentioned that these changes not only create opportunities to better human life but also new threats and challenges, including ecological disasters, criminal enterprises, drug addiction, and, most importantly, a widening gap between the developed world and the developing nations. Russian President Vladimir also saw the 9/11 attacks as different challenges that a different war is underway with international terrorism. However, the wave of terrorist attacks all across the Northern Caucasus was a persistent threat from Russia's "weak spot," i.e., Central Asia, which must be taken into consideration when evaluating this shift in perception which aimed to both address terrorist threats present in Chechnya's immediate neighborhood as well as to justify its military action there. However the new Head of State President Vladimir Putin also aware that new rules of the international system were being formed without Russia's involvement and the laws of the global system created after the Second World War and throughout the Cold War were fading.⁴ Russian President Vladimir Putin has committed to reviving the Russian people. He believed that rather than being a victory for democracy over communism, the

⁴ Secieru, Stanislav. 2006. *PRESIDENT PUTIN'S VISION OF RUSSIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY*. NATO Defense College.

consequences of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Empire were a defeat for Russia.⁵

The modern world is not, however, idealistic, harmonious, or flawless in the eyes of Russian President Vladimir Putin. In the unipolar system of the US, states are not open the door to their nation's integration into the international economic system. In his opinion, a combination of geopolitical and geo-economic aspects that are reflected in worldwide rivalry and competition for natural resources, capital, markets, and also global political and economic power, characterize the current international system. President Vladimir Putin concluded that none of the states in the present global order desired to fight with Russia while also having no desire to aid it and he urges that Russia must fight for and ultimately "win" its position in the international order.

PRESIDENT VLADIMIR PUTIN'S VISION OF GREATER EUROPE: AN EMPHASIS ON EASTERN EUROPE

To win its position in the international order, Eastern Europe plays a significant role in assisting Russia. Since 2001, Russian President Vladimir Putin has brought up the idea of a Greater Europe several times. President Vladimir Putin proposed a Greater Europe made up of two integration blocs. The first one is the Western bloc of the European Union. The second one is the Eastern bloc, which would include the newly formed post-Soviet Republics and Russia which would create a partially integrated zone of security, energy and economic cooperation, and human interactions. Russia would prioritize the development in Greater Europe's Eastern region so that the Eurasian integration would take precedence over pan-European integration. For this purpose, President Vladimir Putin promoted several major goals of Russia in Eastern Europe that are as follows:

⁵ Ann-Sofie, V.R. Mikkel & B.S. Lars & H. Rune & P. Flemming & K. Johannes & B. Henrik & S.K. Kristian & D. 2014. *Putin's world*. Centre for Military Studies.

1. Increasing Russia's potential by bringing in technology and wealth from Eastern Europe.
2. Enhancing Russian influence on European security, politics, and economies, especially through the development of cooperative relationships and asset exchanges.
3. Establishing Russian hegemony in the CIS region, gaining European recognition of this hegemony, and restraining US, Chinese, EU, NATO, and NATO-led economic and political expansion in the CIS region.
4. Reducing the US presence and influence in Eastern Europe.

In this regard, Russia aims to focus on putting into action its primary concern project of Eurasian integration, which is based on organizations like the Eurasian Union or Customs Union.⁶

The revival of empire, global power status, and sphere of influence that Russia dramatically lost 30 years ago with the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991 are assets that Russia wants to bring back and President Vladimir Putin plays a significant role in getting back Russian prestige.⁷

SIGNIFICANCE OF CRIMEA AND UKRAINE FOR RUSSIA

In Eastern Europe, the main focus of our study is Ukraine and Crimea which have great significance for Russia because of Western increased influence in the region. The current East-West conflict over Ukraine has been drastically exacerbated by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. This turned what was primarily an economic and diplomatic issue, especially between the US and Russia, into a major geopolitical catastrophe.

Ukraine is a post-Soviet state, and Crimea is a peninsula on its northern Black Sea coast. In implementing Russia's geostrategic goals, these regions are important. Strong political,

⁶ Menkiszak, Marek. 2013. *Greater Europe Putin's vision of European (dis)integration*. October 10.

⁷ Ash, Timothy Garton. 2022. *Putin knows exactly what he wants in Eastern Europe – unlike the west*. 1 31.

economic, and cultural or social relations exist between Russia and Ukraine. Moreover, Russia also sees Ukraine as being crucial to its identity as there were around 8 million ethnic Russians in Ukraine and for its aspirations to become a global power.

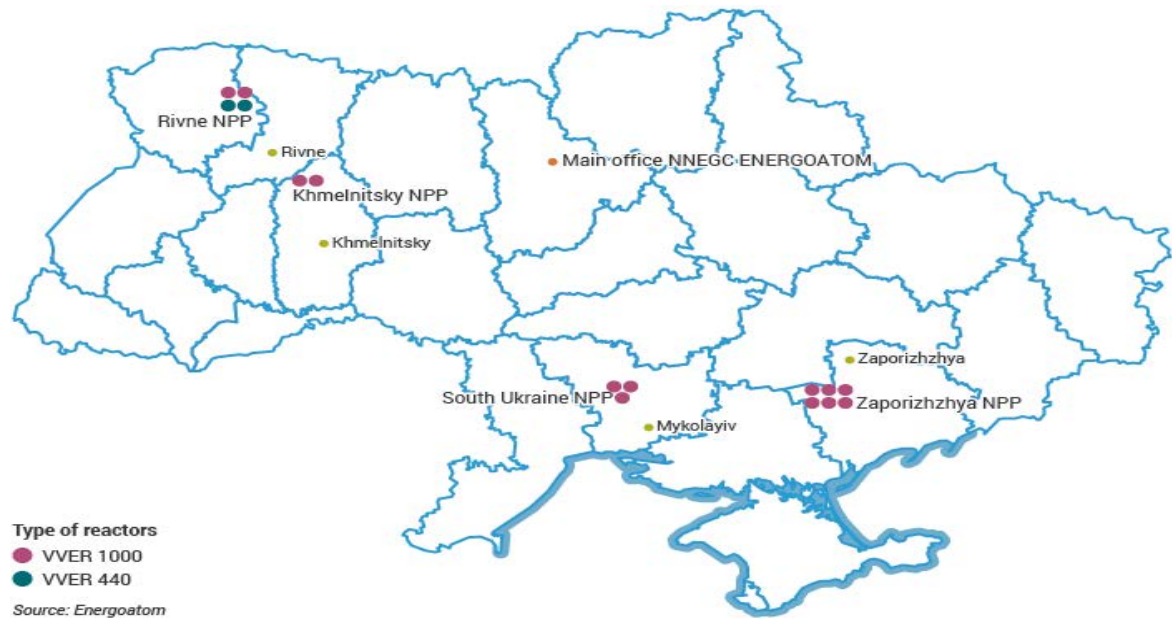
Important aspects of Ukraine and Crimea for Russia are as follows:

Rich in resources: In the east, where Ukraine is located, the geographical boundaries are mostly open and flat which makes Ukraine one of the most successful agricultural regions in the world.

In the east, where Ukraine is located, the geographical boundaries are mostly open and flat which makes Ukraine's agricultural lands contribute to the global agriculture sector. In 2020 and 2021, Ukraine was the sixth-largest wheat producer with an output of almost 27 million metric tons of wheat in the world, and also the top exporter of sunflower oil worldwide by producing almost 16 million metric tons of sunflower seeds. Also, this country is rich in oil, minerals, and Black Soil which adds a lot of wealth and in the Eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk basin contains significant coal reserves and mines. Around 1.5 million metric tons of crude oil, 62 million metric tons of iron ore, and approximately 24.4 million metric tons of coal were produced in Ukraine in 2019. Furthermore, due to the Chernobyl nuclear calamity in 1985, Ukraine became well-known all over the world. The nation also enjoys several nuclear power plants in addition to nuclear reactors and the nuclear energy also accounts for 45.1% of the total consumption of the country and is therefore at risk from military attacks. The biggest nuclear power plant in Europe is the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station in Southeast Ukraine. This is also in the top ten largest nuclear power plants in the World.

The nuclear power facility attracted Russia's attention, and it has even been under its authority since 2022.⁸

MAP 1. NUCLEAR FACILITIES IN UKRAINE



Source: World Nuclear Association

Superpower image of Russia: Several Russian leaders believed that the independence of Ukraine from the empire was a historical mistake. This poses a challenge to Russia's position as a superpower after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Many people would view Russia losing control of Ukraine permanently and allowing it to drift towards the West as a severe blow to Russia's prestige worldwide. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, saw the escalating battle with Ukraine in 2022 as a part of a greater conflict with Western forces, who he claimed were attempting to destroy Russia.

Crimea: The Crimean Peninsula's natural resources are worth \$10.8 billion. The Black Sea is thought to have abundant energy resources, many of which have a potential worth

⁸ Störk, Bálint. 2015. "Geopolitical situation of Ukraine." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 8 (3): 17–39.

in the trillions of dollars. Another vital economic channel for Russia that provides a direct connection to the world's markets is the Black Sea.⁹

MAP 2. NATURAL RESOURCES IN CRIMEA



Source: Platts Chornomor Naftogaz

The Black Sea is a key geostrategic site in the region for the Russian Federation, which keeps a watch on military and commercial ships there. Before Russia gained control of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, Ukraine possessed the longest Black Sea coastline. Sevastopol is home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which is vital to Russia and Russia benefits militarily from its presence in the region. Russia could participate in tactical moves, as it did during the Georgian-Russian conflict in 2008.¹⁰

As one of the biggest naval bases in the Black Sea, Sevastopol is home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet and Russia has a strong military presence. It also features a warm water port, a natural harbor, and extensive infrastructure. The Black Sea Fleet, based in Sevastopol,

⁹ Masters, Jonathan. 2022. *Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia*. 10 11.

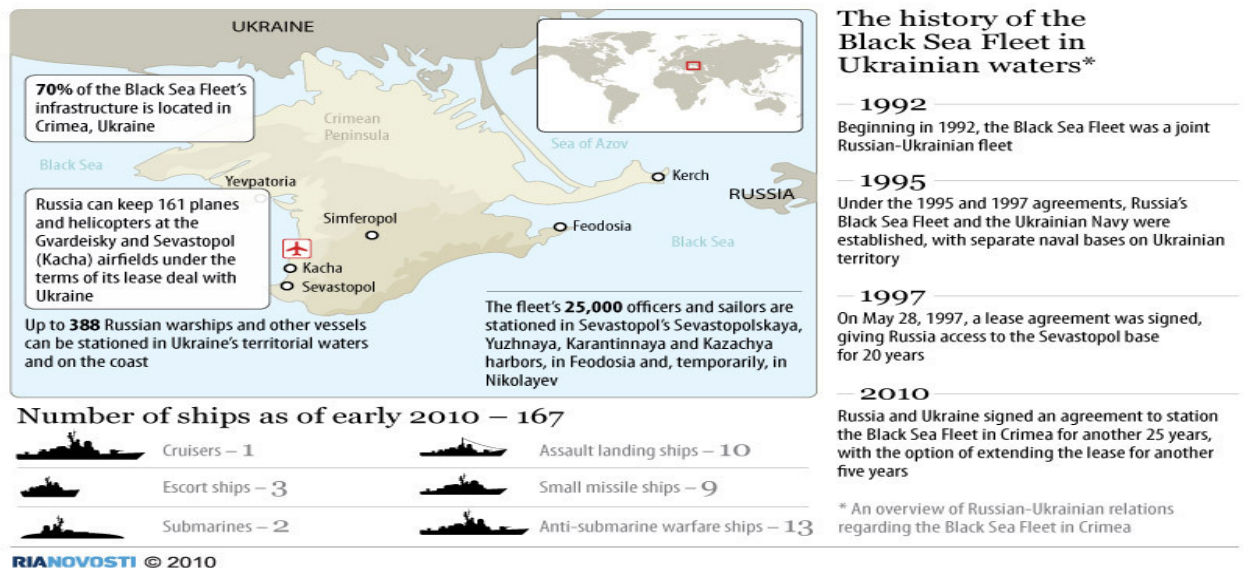
¹⁰ Störk, Bálint. 2015. "Geopolitical situation of Ukraine." *Security and Defence Quarterly* 8 (3): 17–39.

offers Russia the ability to assert control over the Black Sea and its surroundings and serves as a compelling symbol of Russian strength or dominance. It serves as the operational hub for Russia's recently formed Mediterranean Task Force. Russia's influence and position in the region increased as a result of the Task Force's continued activities in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Black Sea Fleet is still capable of defending maritime threats from other governments on the land to Russian interests inside the Black Sea. This also provides Russia with vital strategic defense capabilities as a result of holding sovereignty over Crimea.¹¹

MAP 3. BLACK SEA FLEET OF RUSSIA IN CRIMEA

Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine

The deployment of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea has been extended for another 25 years. Russia has the option to extend the lease by an additional five years



Source: Russian Council

Since 1853, Russia's geopolitical competitors have evolved little in the Black Sea area, with the US and NATO taking the place who altered European countries as the dominant ones. To counter NATO and US eastward expansion and their activities in the Central

¹¹ Montfort, H. Andrew Schwartz & Paige. 2014. *Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia*. March 18.

and Aegean Mediterranean, the military source is only Crimea for Russia and the ultimate objective is to gain entry and establishment of a military presence in that region.¹²

Trade and Energy: For a long time, Russia was the major economic or trading ally of Ukraine, but recently, things have changed radically. Before occupying Crimea, Russia sought to integrate Ukraine into its single market, such as the EEU. For many years, Russian consumers in Eastern and Central Europe received their natural gas through Ukrainian pipelines and Ukraine also gets most of its energy requirements supplied by Russia. The Ukraine is heavily dependent as a result. Late in 2022, despite the hostilities between the two countries, Russian gas still passed into Ukraine but the pipeline continued to be at severe risk.

MAP 4. RUSSIAN GAS PIPELINE NETWORK PASSED THROUGH UKRAINE



Source: East European Gas Analysis, National Gas Union of Ukraine

Political sway: In 2004, Russia was eager to maintain its political influence in Ukraine after its favored political leader Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich lost to a reformist challenger as part of the Orange Revolution. After voters rejected the Orange

¹² Toucas, Boris. 2017. *The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History*. February 2.

administration in 2010, with the backing of Russia, Yanukovych was elected president of Ukraine and the main aim of Russia to support him was to secure influence throughout the former Soviet Union.¹³

To get its superpower position or carry out its geostrategic plans, Russian officials want to bring Ukraine, particularly Crimea, into an economic, political, and military zone under Russian control. Tensions occasionally developed in Crimea; the only region of Ukraine where ethnic Russians make up the majority of the population. Ukraine's administration wanted an independent political, social, and economic system without any Russian influence, especially after the Orange Revolution which is why they showed great interest in inclined with the West. Up to 96 percent of Ukrainians are in support of joining the EU, while 91 percent are currently in support of NATO membership and only 2% of people claim to have a positive attitude towards Russia, while 92 percent claim to have a negative one.¹⁴ That's why they seek to stop Ukraine from moving towards the West by fueling political unrest and encouraging economic problems, which would make it more expensive for the West to help Ukraine, which is also an essential Russian geostrategic goal. Russia is ready to pay a larger price than the US or the EU because Ukraine is more important to Russia and President Vladimir Putin than it is to the West.¹⁵

RUSSIAN INTERESTS IN UKRAINE AND CRIMEA

Russia under the presidency of Vladimir Putin has been characterized as a revisionist country that is enthusiastic to restore its past prominent role and power that it lost. For Gerard Toal, a professor of International Relations, "It was always

¹³ Masters, Jonathan. 2022. *Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia*. 10 11.

¹⁴ Palikot, Aleksander. 2022. *Hard-Won Unity: Polls Show Russian Invasion Is Transforming Ukrainian Self-Identity*. August 23.

¹⁵ GRAHAM, T., MENON, R., & SNYDER, J. 2017. "UKRAINE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE WEST: BUFFER OR FLASHPOINT?" *World Policy Journal* 34 (01): 107–118.

Vladimir Putin's intention to restore the Russian status of a great power in northern Eurasia. The end goal was not to re-establish the Soviet Union. But Vladimir Putin's desire to make Russia great again or a superpower.”

Russia strengthened its control over a key base on the Black Sea by capturing Crimea in 2014 and in this way, Russia was also able to contain the Western influence in the region. Russia can project power further into other regions such as in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and North Africa with a more advanced, powerful, and larger military presence there.

In many ways, Russia's abrupt invasion of the Crimean Peninsula was a great attempt to increase its influence on the Ukraine government which was more inclined toward the West. By leveraging Crimea and the instability Russia has sparked in Ukraine's eastern and southern areas. Russia intends to pressure Ukraine into adopting a whole different form of government that fulfills Russian interests. Federalization is a prospect that Russia prefers since it would allow Ukraine's regions as in extensive political as well as financial autonomy. This policy was promoted particularly by those who are dominated by ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who speak Russian. A significant separatist movement emerged in Crimea following the official dissolution of the Soviet Union. They rejected affiliations with Ukraine and moved closer to Russia and Crimean leader Yuri Meshkov, the self-declared leader of Crimea, tried to reintegrate the region into Russia. He also built strong political links with Russia but Leonid Kuchma, the president of Ukraine at the time, was able to settle the issue by enforcing a policy of moderation and by providing financial incentives to Crimean elites in return for their loyalty and support to Ukraine. Crimea was given autonomous status under the 1996 Ukrainian constitution. This included a 100-member parliament and regional leaders who functioned under the Prime Minister of Crimea. The territory was officially known as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Although its institutions only have a relatively small number of rights that mostly relate to administrative, social, and economic matters, and even the right to take legislative action is absent from the parliament. Russia used the internal disparities and unresolved issues in Crimea to influence Ukraine's strategic choices at the time. As a result, Russia began

promoting existing pro-Russian groups, media channels, political parties, and many more and the Russian strategy worked out very well that became evident in 2006 when a NATO-Ukraine military drill in the area was halted by a large group of furious Russians from Crimea. Throughout this time, extremely powerful pro-Russian sentiments continued to rule Crimea.¹⁶

In the wake of its invasion in 2022, Russia's strategic interests in Ukraine also got more and more risky. Russia has increased its negotiation power with Ukraine as a result of aiding the separatist rebels. According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainians and Russians are "one people" who have the same historical and cultural area". So, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not only to secure economic and political interests but also to secure Russian identity. This also shows Russia's struggle for ontological security and international recognition of global status.

INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION SEEKING

A basic psychological and social need is ontological security, which is the fundamental sense of continuity and stability in one's identity and worldview. Ontological security is fundamentally the belief that we live in a world that is predictable and trustworthy, where we are aware of who we are and feel in control of our lives. People and communities run the risk of being chaotic, uncertain, and experiencing existential distress in its absence. Ontological security is a shared concern rather than merely an individual one. In order to give their members a sense of predictability and belonging, nations, communities, and social organizations create narratives and institutions that stabilize collective identities. Social standards, cultural values, and historical continuity are frequently the foundations of these collective identities, giving residents a sense of "who we are" and "where we are going."

¹⁶ Wojciech Konończuk, 2014. *Russia's Real Aims in Crimea*. March 13.

Members of a society may lose faith in one another and social cohesion may break down when the ontological stability of the community is challenged, whether by war, economic collapse, or political unrest. From a geopolitical standpoint, ontological security can assist in explaining how governments behave internationally where the policies and relations with other states are shaped by continuity. A state may respond defensively or aggressively to restore its sense of identity and stability when its ontological security is endangered, whether by external interference, territory loss, or existential crises.

Russian ontological security and struggles for international recognition play a dominant role in shaping the perceptions of President Vladimir Putin who made Russian policies accordingly and also explains the causes and implications of Russia's increasingly changing and assertive foreign policy.

The notion of ontological security, often known as security of identity, emphasizes that it is crucial to have a strong sense of who you are to maintain your emotional and cognitive orientation to the outside world. This approach implies a fundamental interconnection between ontological security seeking at different levels including individual, social, and governmental levels. A state-society complex that is ontologically secure is one who's reflexively generated and explicit self-identification that is supported by historical roots is acknowledged at a certain historical point by relevant people at domestic and international levels.

Recognition ensures that the self-identity formed naturally is consistent with how other people see the state and society under evaluation. This harmony is necessary for the general perception of ontological security. On the other hand, rejecting a certain state or society as they understand it will damage and undermine the strong sense of identity and jeopardize its sense of ontological security. In this situation, a state will face a crucial foreign policy challenge. The main issue to face is how to uphold the prevailing collective self-image and secure international recognition of it to reduce the general public's sense of ontological insecurity.

CHALLENGES TO RUSSIA'S ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY

Russia's ontological security situation now is greatly influenced by history. Russia has always been referred to as "an indescribable entity" while being frequently described in imperial terms. In addition to facing various physical threats, Russia has struggled badly to create a powerful biographical narrative and international states. These difficulties have had a significant impact on Russian self-identity, ontological security, and ultimately on its foreign policy. It starts in Kyivan Rus's medieval era. When the Mongol-Tatar invasion occurred after 1237, the biographical narrative continued. Later, the state of Muscovy was established on the territory of North-East Rus in the second part of the 15th century after the Mongol fall. Muscovy's rulers adopted the imperial system of governance based on the notion of divinely appointed power as it expanded in both power and territory. They recreated a unified system called "responsive authoritarianism" to unite different communities as a single entity. It was difficult to create a self-concept that would explain how different conquered peoples and ethnic Russians fit together as a unified entity. The advent of nationalism in the late 18th century made it more difficult. This is like blending different nationalities in a single emulsion but maintaining their distinct identities. This further hampered Russia's struggle for a unified identity. Russia is the center of its civilization founded on moral superiority, Orthodox spirituality, and distinctive culture, not on the nationalism or democratic values of the West. This early resistance to the repetition of the West resulted in the rise of the Slavophile as well as Eurasianist movements that helped to sustain the Soviet empire in the middle of the 19th century. By adopting an assertive foreign policy toward the West and portraying Russia as greater and superior to the "decaying" West, Slavophiles and Eurasianists aimed to invert the Russian-Western relationship.

The desire to be acknowledged as a separate major power was greatly fueled by Russia's self-identification as a counter to Europe and, after 1945, the US or West. However, the foreign powers did not recognize Russia as a global power which was a sign of the ontological insecurity that persisted. The hostility of the West, which was continued by Western unwillingness to recognize Russia as a Western great power, played a significant

role in the formation of contemporary Russian identity. However, the Soviet Union remained ontologically unstable due to rivalry between imperial and national centers of identity. The emphasis on a single territoriality was an attempt by Soviet authorities to create a sense of unity.

STRUGGLE FOR ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY AND RECOGNITION IN POST-SOVIET RUSSIA

Early in the 1990s, several competing biographical narratives promoted divergent self-images but one thing in common was that Russia is a major power. But Russia was not to be incorporated into the core Western culture, from the perspective of the West. The basic foundation of the general sense of ontological security was shaken by the West's rejection to acknowledge Russia's great power self-image. The government-led biographical narrative began to take on Slavophile, communist, and Eurasianist self-images by the middle of the 1990s. This redefining of Russia as a bridge between Asia and Europe that also possesses distinct values and an identity superior to those of the West. With this adjustment to its self-description, Russia's foreign policy shifted from one of open rivalry with the West, notably the US, to a policy of non-collaborative and restricted partnership. By limiting American hegemony and promoting a great power balance in what Russia views as a multipolar international order, Russia hopes to win Western recognition of its great power position. As a significant Eurasian power, Russia views the former USSR region or the Near Abroad as its unique and important area of interest. In particular, the 2014 annexation of Crimea was seen as a sign of Russian revival and re-emergence in Russian society. Russian President Vladimir Putin used the term "Russkiy Mir," referred to as the Russian World or "the living space for the Russian-speaking world which

includes millions of people. It is a community that extends well beyond Russia itself." This defends the assertive foreign policy stance of Russia.¹⁷

GRAND STRATEGY OF RUSSIA

The art of balancing means and ends is known as grand strategy which entails deliberate activity. The emphasis on high-level issues of national concern and the extensive use of military, economic, political, social, and diplomatic means to further the national interests are characterized as a Grand strategy. Concerning the conduct of its first two post-communist Foreign Ministers of Russia, Andrei Kozyrev and Yevgeni Primakov, Russia has developed its foreign strategy but their policies are ineffective. Primakov declared shortly after taking office that he wanted to restore Russia's status as an independent state in international relations and put an end to Kozyrev's concern with the West at the sacrifice of the national interests of Russia.

Primakov's methods for attaining the stated objectives, however, proved to be overly expensive, and Russia quickly had to come up with a more cost-effective strategy for preserving the interests of the state. By the time Vladimir Putin arrived as the president of Russia in 1999–2000 when the political elite in the country had already agreed on the grand strategy for the nation. The joint consensus generated that had two key definitions of Russia's international strategic goals. The first one is the domination of Russia in the former Soviet Union and the second one is the worldwide influence as an independent power.¹⁸

¹⁷ Narozhna, Tanya. 2021. "Revisiting the Causes of Russian Foreign Policy Changes: Incoherent Biographical Narrative, Recognition and Russia's Ontological Security-Seeking." *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15 (2): 56–81.

¹⁸ Tsygankov, Andrei P. 2011. "Preserving Influence in a Changing World." *Problems of Post-Communism* 58 (2): 28–44.

Certainly, any rational leader would point out that every state acting within the framework of the international system of anarchy has this as its goal. The majority of realistic theories of International Relations are built on the premise that regime and territory "security" serve as the basic national interests. Russian geostrategic thinking shows how Russia views its security environment, the risks to that security, and lastly its means of obtaining security. The factors that led to this major geostrategic agenda included geography, culture, history, internal politics, and the rivalry amongst other global powers.

RUSSIAN GEO-STRATEGIC APPROACH

Russia under the presidency of Vladimir Putin developed a geostrategy in the 21st century for its security or to fulfill its national interests. For that purpose, Russia protects its ontological or identity security and regains its international recognition as a superpower. In this process, Eastern Europe particularly Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula plays an important role where the power politics of Russia is seen very prominently. That's why the region become a center of attraction for world powers in the 21st century.

The "territorial imperative," and even the desire of the Russian leadership, particularly President Vladimir Putin is to maintain power over the post-Soviet region as its sole "sphere of influence." It is the most significant factor in determining Russia's foreign policy and the key pillars of the Russian geostrategic approach are that Russia is a "heartland" state. This means that Russia is a link between emerging markets and that its unique circumstances dictate a particular style of politics, with its vast populated territory and ongoing occupation threat necessitating the establishment of a powerful central government. With a multipolar world, this strategy emphasizes the significance of Eurasia as one of the global centers of power.¹⁹

¹⁹ MONAGHAN, A. 2013. "Putin's Russia: shaping a "grand strategy"?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944* 89 (5): 1221–1236.

RUSSIAN GRAND STRATEGY “ENDS”

The "ends" that the Russian grand strategy aspires to are the primary goals and overall interests of Russia under the presidency of Vladimir Putin in the international system. If "national interest as security" is too broad to be effective, this can be used to split down that comprehensive national interest into numerous crucial aims that add up to a grand strategy. First, Russia wants to establish an exclusive and accepted sphere of influence over the former Soviet Union's territory to guarantee its social, political, military, and economic security. According to this vision, Russia would have a favorable position of influence over the international and internal policies of the nations under its influence. It also prohibits other powerful nations such as the US from pursuing spheres of influence that are solely in Russia's interests.

Secondly, in regions with many great powers, such as the Middle East, or without a single regional superpower such as the Arctic, Russia wants to take a strong position to make decisions and a strong voice on matters. In other words, it represents Russia as a world superpower with influence on a global scale.

The US also wants to maintain a dominant role in the post-Soviet zone and across the globe. So, the first two ends cause a lot of conflict between Russia and the US. The post-Soviet zone, where Russia is attempting to counter NATO influence in the Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula, is where this task is most vital. Russia needs to push the US out of the area to expand its sphere of influence in the region.

Last but not least, undermining Euro-Atlantic unity, encouraging the EU and NATO's dissolution, and raising tensions between other global and regional powers are also the end of Russian geostrategy.²⁰

²⁰ Sivitsky, Yury Tsarik and Arseny. 2015. *RUSSIA'S NEW GEOSTRATEGY: Implications and Challenges for Architecture of International Security*.

RUSSIAN GRAND STRATEGY “MEANS”

The measures taken by Russia to accomplish its goals are referred to as the ‘Means’ of Russian grand geo-strategy. The fact that Russia has been able to pursue increasingly more aggressive means of accomplishing its goals because of its financial capabilities. The economy of Russia has increased since 2000 and is particularly significant in this debate. The 2000s saw a decade of significant economic development in Russia following a terrible decade of economic collapse in the 1990s. In reality, the primary factors limiting Russian economic development under President Vladimir Putin were the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, the drop in oil prices, and the sanctions following the Crimea invasion in 2014. The most prevalent reason for Russia's economic development is that Russian President Vladimir Putin's firm control over the country brought economic stability. A wider economic growth supported increased military spending. Higher GDP and higher defense spending rates led to higher defense expenditures. The pursuit of Russia's great strategic goals certainly extends well beyond military spending. Since 2014, when Russia intervened and took control of the Crimean Peninsula to weaken NATO's influence and protect its national interests, this strategy has become much more rigid due to the use of the military.²¹

Analyzing Russia's actions during the Ukrainian war in 2014 and 2022 requires taking into consideration a great power's goal to establish regional hegemony. To become a great power, a regional hegemon, and to create a sphere of influence to achieve the highest degree of security, Russia's main objective is to maintain a secure neighbor. A crucial country in Russia's security is Ukraine due to the geostrategic location of Crimea and the black sea, political, social, and economic interests where the offensive military measures of Russia can be seen.

²¹ Robert Person, 2019. *Russian Strategic Intentions*. May.

KEY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia has pursued geostrategic initiatives in the twenty-first century with the aim of reclaiming its position as a major power. Putin views the fall of the Soviet Union as a significant geopolitical disaster, and his policies show a persistent attempt to regain Russia's influence in the world, especially in its immediate neighbourhood. In this vision, Ukraine is a key component of Russia's cultural and historical identity, not just a geopolitical buffer state.

This deeper drive is explained by the idea of ontological security. Russia's operations in Ukraine aim to maintain a stable and cohesive national character in addition to protecting territorial integrity and posing military threats. Russia experienced an identity void following the Cold War, which sparked existential concerns. It was believed that Ukraine's growing Westernization, particularly following the 2014 Euromaidan demonstrations and the EU Association Agreement, posed a serious threat to the Russian narrative that portrays Ukraine as a "brother nation" in the larger "Russian world."

Foreign policy cooperation with the West was more practical in the early 2000s, as seen by Russia's backing of the United States following 9/11. But with Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004 and the invasion of Crimea in 2014, things became more complicated. From that time on, Russia's foreign policy became more aggressive and revisionist, driven by the perception that the West had overreached its legitimate sphere of influence.

Furthermore, Russia sees the EU and NATO as emissaries of Western liberal democratic ideas that contradict Russia's authoritarian-conservative paradigm, rather than merely as military allies or economic blocs. This has exacerbated a security conundrum: Russia views NATO expansion as an existential danger to its identity and regional dominance, while the West views it as a defensive measure. Consequently, strong foreign policy attempts to ensure ontological stability have instead made Russia more insecure, which has resulted in more sanctions, political isolation, and a protracted confrontation in Ukraine.

Ontological action meant to protect Russia's identity in addition to geopolitical goals like halting NATO growth. The grave risks are highlighted by Putin's rhetoric, which portrays

Ukraine as an artificial state with a long history of ties to Russia. The significance of symbolic and narrative control in Russia's foreign policy is further highlighted by his use of propaganda, hybrid warfare, and appeals to shared civilizational ideals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite all of its offensive activities and statements, Russia under the presidency of President Vladimir Putin is in a difficult strategic situation. It will probably fall short as a country if it keeps using military action to change the status quo and maintain its influence for the sake of defending ethnic Russian people and upholding unwilling buffer nations. As we can also see there is no clear victor in the Ukraine war till now. It ultimately undermines collaboration, trust building, and the capacity of Russia to address the global world. The best way to fulfill the Russian interests, President Vladimir Putin should use liberal or ideal means to fulfill realistic ends like the US.

President Vladimir Putin should adopt a policy of cultural diplomacy to show the soft power of Russia and should promote the Russian culture, values, and language in Russian-interested regions such as Ukraine to promote a positive vision and influence of Russia.

Since 2014, there has been little or no interaction between the two US and Russia on the official, military, political, and social levels. Restoring procedures, like bipartisan congressional delegations and involvement with Russia's State Assembly, would need to apply. Since 2014, the majority of Russian or US defense institutions have been competing with each other. A complete confidence-building and demystifying network of Russian and US communicators must be built to promote close collaboration.

To implement its geostrategic policies in Ukraine and Crimea, Russia should focus more on diplomatic means instead of offensive measures to overcome disagreements and for mutual interests. Furthermore, initiatives should be taken to build trust and close cooperation so that Western influence can be reduced in Ukraine and Russia can be ontologically secure.