

## **Formulating a New Foreign Policy Approach toward Russia**

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**Hosted by CSIS & CPRDU**

### **Executive Summary**

On November 14, 2014, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), in partnership with the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding (CPRDU), hosted a high-level conference to discuss how the transatlantic community can formulate a new foreign policy approach toward Russia in light of Russia's annexation of Crimea and its destabilization of Eastern Ukraine.

The discussion included three panel discussions and two keynote addresses from European and U.S. officials and experts who examined the swift and dramatic change in Europe's security landscape, the impact of Russia's current and future actions in the region, and how the United States and Europe can develop new strategies and long-term policies towards Russia in order to help frame Russia's present and future motivations, attempt to predict its future behavior, and ensure the security and stability of Europe. The expert panelists also offered their perspectives on what transatlantic dialogue with Russia could look like in the future, and assessed the implications of Russia's actions thus far on the future of the international system. Key points raised during a rich and productive discussion are summarized below.

### **The Future of Dialogue and Understanding with Russia**

The conference began by assessing the current state of relations and affairs between the West and Russia and how the United States and Europe could reformulate their understanding of and interaction with Russia in the future. The United States and Europe have entered a new and unpredictable era of relations with Russia perhaps best reflected in the October 2014 Valdai Discussion Club's theme, "The World Order: New Rules or a Game without Rules?" At Valdai, President Putin stated that, "The ox may not be allowed something, but the bear will not even bother to ask permission," which strongly suggests that Russia's foreign policy approach will continue to be assertive and pro-active. Panelists noted that Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine were partly rationalized by the West's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and then Iraq in 2003, as well as the eastern expansion of NATO. However, it was argued that a number of other factors contributed to Russia's actions in Ukraine including the establishment of a more pro-European and pro-EU government in Kiev; Russia's own failures to reform its economic and political systems and create an appealing sphere of influence; and Russia's fears of successful reform in Ukraine which would be in stark contrast to Russian internal development.

In addition to these factors, there has also been a fundamental breakdown of common interests and the collapse of a common perception of political reality between the West and the Kremlin. Russia's cognitive framework stems from the following: Putin's return to power, the emergence of a nascent opposition movement in Russia and Russia's inability to economically reform; the belief in the inevitability of a confrontation with the United States based on the conviction that the underlying U.S. defense and security establishment is inherently biased toward expansion of hegemony, that Russia needs to be considered a great power equal of the United States, and that Russia is a prime target for regime change through Western engagement with Russian non-governmental organizations; the belief that Europe's natural resource poverty and economic interests will restore a policy of accommodation with Russia; and finally, a misreading of Ukrainian identity and the



international instability of elevating ethnicity and language over the traditional prerogatives of statehood and the sanctity of borders.

However, it is also important for the West to consider Putin's own views, since "Putin is Russia, Russia is Putin, and without Putin there is no Russia." For instance, Putin believes that Russia must have a seat at all international tables and that Russia's own views and interests are equally, if not more important than those of the West; Russia has the right to a sphere of interest in the post-Soviet space; Russia represents an alternative to Euro-Atlantic political and economic development and is a defender of traditional, conservative values; that warnings to the West regarding the use of military force and intervention (i.e. in the Western Balkans, Iraq, and Libya) were disastrously ignored; and the belief that the mismatch between Russia's political and ethnic borders is a serious threat to Russia's security. The domestic situation in Russia also offers some insight into the rationale behind the Kremlin's foreign policies. President Putin is the aging ruler of an aging system and therefore survival and consolidation of power are two primary motivators for his foreign and domestic policy choices. Since the average Russian citizen is more concerned with their daily lives, Russia's future economic development will determine to a large extent future public support for Putin and his regime.

### **Reconstructing Western Policy Approaches toward Russia and the Region**

While some experts argued that the policy of integrating Russia with Western organizations is dead and others pushed for a softer approach, there was consensus that as the United States and Europe formulate a new foreign policy approach toward Russia they would be guided by the same principles: consistency in policy, unity in approach, a strong reliance on fundamental norms and values, and a respect for international law. There is also an understanding that Russia presents a long-term challenge and the solutions to the new security environment will not be immediate.

It was proposed that European military budgets must be increased, and coordination and projection of military capabilities, particularly between NATO allies, should be strengthened. It is essential for the United States and Europe to be pro-active in their responses, particularly since today's major threats are of an unconventional, hybrid nature and require nonconventional strategies. In this vein, the United States and Europe need to establish an effective European deterrence strategy, primarily through NATO, as well as a strategy of changing Russia's behavior in its neighborhood. Some also argued that the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales did not do enough in responding to Russia's assertiveness in the region and that NATO's 'red line' must be clearer and its members must be willing to defend it since NATO's credibility is at stake.

It was stated that U.S. policy will generally be to support Ukraine in its efforts to determine its own future; support and reassure NATO allies and partners; impose costs on Russia, including sanctions, for its actions while maintaining dialogue with Russia to de-escalate the crisis. It was also suggested that joint U.S.-EU policies could include cooperation on energy to help reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy supplies, strengthen anti-corruption efforts in Europe, develop a 'strategic communications' program to counter Russian propaganda, and support civil society and human rights movements in Russia.

While the United States and Europe should strengthen their cooperation and unity of purpose, it was also suggested that Europe and Russia should develop commonly-agreed transparency measures when responding to crises and should improve measures to build confidence in the region, particularly in the military sphere. Although 'business as usual' is no longer possible in the changing security environment, it is counterproductive to completely isolate Russia. Rather, the West should continue to foster people-to-people relations, attempt to improve communications with Russian citizens, and ensure that Russian citizens, especially the younger generations, have the opportunity to interact with the West.

## The View from the Region: Russia's Neighborhood and the Future of the International System

There is a strong nostalgia within Russia for a return to its former great power status and for international recognition of its historical contribution to world events which has contributed to President Putin's unwillingness to recognize Ukraine as a truly independent state. Other states in Russia's neighborhood, such as Georgia, are also feeling pressure from the Kremlin to align with Russia and not the West, and in some cases believe that the survival of their state is at stake. There is a general sentiment among these states that the survival of the Russian regime far outweighs the costs of the independence of its neighbors. It is becoming increasingly apparent that these two values are in conflict throughout the region.

Russian soft power is becoming less attractive to its neighboring countries following events in Ukraine as Moscow pursues its sphere of influence policy vision that is the Eurasian Union. However, growing economic vulnerability in the region, an absence of 'good governance' and a high prevalence of corruption, and the dominant role of Russian media make the region highly susceptible to Russian influences. Another challenge comes from a crisis in political and economic confidence in the West as it struggles to impose sanctions against Russia and support Ukraine economically. Therefore, it will be important for the West to construct a long-term policy framework for the type of Russia and Eurasia the West both wants and is willing to build.

In regards to the future of the international system as it was developed by the West in the aftermath of both the Second World War and the Cold War, a few key points were raised. First, Russia has developed a competitive, assertive, and belligerent policy approach that is greatly influencing Russia's foreign policy strategy. For instance, Russia seems to have the goal of intimidating Europe and fomenting unrest and divisions, particularly within the EU, and also the aim of separating Europe from America. In dividing the United States and Europe, Russia would undermine the notion of the Atlantic Alliance as a long-term, strategic player. Another key component of Russia's foreign policy approach is to revive fears of nuclear war as a way to intimidate the West. Putin's recent and repeated references to Russia's nuclear arsenal and its non-compliance with the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, as well as its exercising with tactical nuclear weapons raise concerns regarding Russia's future intentions. Second, Russia's increased use of rapid, unconventional, and hybrid warfare tactics, combined with a strategic information campaign, present numerous challenges to the West's ability to respond. Specifically, Russia is pursuing deliberate political, financial, and military attrition in Ukraine to raise the costs of sustaining independence from Russia's influence. And as a result, the transatlantic community will increasingly be faced with the growing costs of sustaining emergency measures to assist Ukraine, incurring the costs of sanctions against Russia, and increasing defense spending to deter Russian aggression at a time of economic fragility for Europe.

These considerable challenges to the transatlantic community reiterate the need for strong European and American leadership and closer transatlantic ties. For the foreseeable future, there will be an unstable period in European security where international legal norms and principles – such as territorial integrity and the sovereign's ability to protect the rights of its citizens – are not just simply rules that are no longer accepted but have been formally repudiated by the Kremlin. NATO allies and EU partners must be in constant dialogue regarding the nature of transatlantic-Russian relations and policies related to neighboring countries.