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Russia Gone Rogue

The Fate of Ukraine and the Limits of Global Integration

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Throughout its difficult history, Russia has frequently come face to face with worst-case scenarios, producing an austerity that has left a deep mark on the Russian psyche. Whether bearing the weighty Tatar-Mongol Yoke of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, toiling under a feudal system of serfdom that lasted well into the nineteenth century, watching Moscow burn under the occupation of Napoleon's troops, or starving through Hitler's 900-day blockade of Leningrad, the masses scattered across its vast expanse have rarely known times of abundance. For much of its history, austerity in Russia has undermined accountability of the ruling elites to the people. The deprivations the First World War and the pressures of Russia's late industrialization brought down the autocratic Tsarist regime but replaced it with a brutal Soviet dictatorship that, contrary to the claims of its ideology, was neither accountable to nor representative of the people. The austerity of the late Soviet period, product of a decades-long economic decay, eventually brought down the Soviet regime as Soviet citizens demanded a better quality of life and the freedom to live as they wished. However, the openness and accountability borne of the Soviet collapse was short lived, as Russia's new government struggled to meet the high expectations of the people for the new political and economic system. In the famous words of Viktor Chernomyrdin, prime minister of Russia from 1992–1998, "we hoped for the best, but what we got was the usual." And so the traumatic, painful, and deep austerity of the post-Soviet economic collapse once again eventually ushered in a new regime as the people demanded order and stability at nearly any cost. The government of Vladimir Putin offered a tempting bargain to the country: order and stability in exchange for freedom and liberty. To avoid the worst, accept something short of the best. It was a bargain accepted by many, one which allowed Putin to build the authoritarian system he rules today.

Yet cracks have recently appeared in the system, and some (but certainly not all) Russians have begun to question the terms of the bargain. As memories of the austerity of the 1990s recede into history, is a restrictive regime that bears little accountability to its subjects really the best form of government for

Russia? The protests following the elections of 2011–12 showed that support for—or at least passive acceptance of—Putin and his regime is not as iron-clad as once was.¹ Though the fissures in the foundations of the regime may still be small, under the right conditions—perhaps another wave of austerity as the world continues to grapple with economic turmoil—these weaknesses could develop into major cracks that threaten the stability of the Russian polity, economy, and society.

It is informative to view Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian crisis of 2013–14 through the lens of domestic political stability and control as well. While Russia's intervention in Ukraine can be understood as the result of long-standing Russian perceptions of Western encirclement at the expense of Moscow's security interests, it has also provided an injection of popular support and legitimacy for Putin's rule that had been flagging since the 2011–12 protests. Putin's approval ratings reached an all-time high of 87 percent in August 2014, up from a low of 61 percent in June 2013.² This robust “rally around the flag” reaction to Russia's intervention in Ukraine has been fueled by increasingly nationalistic rhetoric from the government and has been broadcast by a pliant state-controlled media. Yet some warn that such boosts to popular support are always short-lived, and recent survey evidence suggests that Russians' support for deeper direct involvement in Ukraine is waning.³ If Putin's support begins to slide, particularly in conjunction with a sanctions-induced recession, there may be good reason to worry about who will get mauled by the wounded bear lashing out in desperation. There is little doubt that the victims of such a scenario could be Russia's neighbors as well as her own citizens.

To the degree that Russia's leaders may be increasingly focused on maintaining domestic stability as the fallout of the Ukrainian crisis continues, the ability for U.S. policy makers to engage with Russia on issues of national and international security will be greatly constrained. Despite some successes associated with the Obama administration's “reset” of relations with Russia early in the Obama presidency, domestic developments in Russia in recent years, as well as Russia's involvement in Ukraine have erected immense roadblocks in the bilateral relationship.⁴ With U.S.-Russian relations at their worst since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, there is little opportunity today to engage Russia on issues of central importance to U.S. security. This crisis comes at a time when the United States faces its most difficult global strategic environment since the end of the Cold War, and many of the greatest threats the United States faces require Russian cooperation if they are to be resolved. Bilateral engagement with Russia has always been a challenge, and that chal-

lenge that will only get steeper if the regime's grip on power is threatened. But to fully appreciate the domestic constraints faced by those who rule with little accountability from behind the Kremlin walls, and to appreciate how these domestic constraints have led to Russia's recent adventures abroad, it is necessary first to explore the process that brought the country and its rulers to their current position.

I. The Autocrat's Tightrope

When Boris Yeltsin resigned the Russian presidency on December 31, 1999, the country issued a collective sigh of relief. The announcement brought to a close a decade of chaos, disorder, and social, economic, and political trauma, most of which had been presided over by Yeltsin and his government. In the first several years following Russia's independence from the defunct Soviet Union, economic output experienced a precipitous decline on a scale far more severe than had been seen in modern history, including the Great Depression.⁵ Ordinary Russians suffered this economic dislocation while a new class of elites, to become known simply as "the Oligarchs," became increasingly powerful and prosperous by taking control (often through dubious means) of the privatized remnants of the Soviet economy. The state, confounded by political gridlock between Yeltsin and the Communist-dominated parliament, struggled to fulfill many of its basic functions. Not surprisingly, it was the Russian citizenry that suffered most from the brutal economic and political collapse that took place in the first several years of Russia's post-Soviet existence.

It thus comes as no surprise that after a decade of such trauma under Yeltsin—not to mention the tumultuous Gorbachev years that brought the Soviet state to its knees—the citizens of Russia welcomed, even demanded, a leader who could restore some semblance of order and stability to the chaotic reality that had characterized their lives for so many years. Their savior was none other than Vladimir Putin. Following a career as a midlevel KGB officer, Putin led a relatively unremarkable post-Soviet bureaucratic career in St. Petersburg, before being brought to Moscow as part of Yeltsin's presidential administration. Plucked from the Russian National Security Council to become Yeltsin's prime minister in August 1999, Putin quickly cemented a reputation as a strong, stable leader through a forceful execution of the second Chechen War. In short, Putin emerged as the anti-Yeltsin. With Yeltsin's surprise resignation in December, his antitype succeeded to the presidency according to constitutional procedures.

An implicit bargain seemed to be struck between Putin and the Russian populace: the regime would provide the order and stability that the country so badly desired, while Russia's citizenry would allow the regime to take the necessary measures to do so, even if it meant a reduction in the regime's accountability to the people and a ratcheting back of many of the liberties gained in the Yeltsin period. After all, Russians reasoned, freedom of speech is of limited use when one cannot put food on the table. And so, as Putin consolidated his power and brought order and stability to the country, Russians willingly witnessed the "creeping authoritarianism" that characterized the first Putin presidency. Russia's nationwide independent media outlets were brought under state control, Oligarchs who resisted Putin's warning to stay out of politics—men like Boris Berezovsky, Vladimir Gusinsky, and Mikhail Khodorkovsky—were de-facto exiled or imprisoned, and Russia's once-autonomous and influential regional governors were reined in after presidential appointments took the place of direct gubernatorial elections.⁶ Kremlin loyalists in these gubernatorial positions quickly became key players in the electoral fraud that produced favorable results for the Kremlin and its "party of power," United Russia.⁷ As United Russia gained a "supermajority" in the Duma with the ability to pass any legislation and amend the constitution, reforms in Russia's electoral institutions made it more difficult for small opposition parties and independent candidates to gain representation. Soon the Duma became more or less a rubber stamp for the Kremlin, as United Russia's *raison d'être* was support of President Putin. Any of these measures taken individually might not have been undemocratic or necessarily illiberal, but when considered as a whole, there was by 2008 little doubt among Russia experts that, during his eight years as President, Putin had succeeded in significantly rolling back democracy and liberal freedoms.

Russia's regime from 2000–2008 bore the hallmarks of a competitive authoritarian regime "in which formal democratic institutions exist and are widely viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state places them at a significant advantage vis-a-vis their opponents."⁸ Extensive public opinion research⁹ suggests that the Russian population accepted and even supported this trend away from liberalism and democracy during Putin's first presidency because they believed in what McPaul and Stoner-Weiss have described as the "myth of the authoritarian model."¹⁰ Though the authors argue that Russia's impressive economic performance in the 2000s came despite—and not because of—Putin's semi-authoritarian model, the fact remains that much of Russia's population in the 2000s credited Putin and his strong style of rule with the stabilization of Russia.¹¹ As such,

they believed that Putin had fulfilled his end of the bargain quite admirably and were less concerned about the authoritarian and illiberal direction the country had taken during his presidency.

II. Cracks in the System

Such was Putin's popularity in 2008 when his second presidential term came to an end that he was able to engineer a seamless handover of power to his chosen successor, then-Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev. The Duma elections of 2007 and the presidential elections of 2008 represent perhaps the apex of "high Putinism," as the political machine built to support the "power vertical" (the central line of political authority flowing down directly from the Kremlin) executed its mission nearly flawlessly, thereby ensuring an electoral result favorable to the Kremlin.¹² In fact, Putin had drawn important conclusions from Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003 and Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004–5, wherein semi-autocratic incumbents or their chosen successors were swept from office following sloppily-executed fraudulent elections that allowed an opening for opposition candidates to take power. Instead, Putin would leave nothing to chance, maintaining tight control over a campaign and election that lived up to Levitsky and Way's archetypal competitive authoritarian regime.¹³ Rumors among followers of Russian politics both inside and outside the country suggested that the Kremlin had set an explicit target of approximately seventy percent of the vote total going to Putin's pick, Medvedev. Such a result would imply a landslide endorsement of what was then referred to as "Putin's plan" for the transition of power while avoiding the absurdly fraudulent appearances of electoral results common in authoritarian regimes, where the leader receives upwards of ninety percent of the vote. Dmitri Medvedev won approximately seventy-one percent of the vote total, a picture-perfect outcome for Medvedev and Putin alike.¹⁴ The machinery of electoral fraud "stuck the landing."

Putin maintained a strong stake in the outcome of the 2008 presidential election despite the fact that he was not allowed to run for reelection. Thanks to a peculiarity of Russia's constitution, while greater than two successive presidential terms was prohibited, a president could run for office for additional terms having sat out for one term. In other words, Putin would be eligible to run for president again in 2012. Thus, as many believed at the time, Medvedev was chosen as an obedient and relatively weak seat-warmer in the Kremlin who would voluntarily step aside to make way for a second Putin presidency in 2012. In the meantime the immensely popular Putin would maintain his public

profile as prime minister while holding what many believed were the real reins on power. The fact that Putin engineered and executed such a plan (for indeed, this is precisely the plan that was implemented in 2012) demonstrated his confidence in his hold over the political system. Rather than amend the constitution, which could have easily been achieved with United Russia's constitutional majority, Putin remained confident that he could formally vacate the Kremlin for four years, only to return again in 2012.

While public support in the Putin-Medvedev tandem remained high, undercurrents of dissatisfaction were building under the frozen surface of the Russian political sphere. Research shows that support for greater democracy in Russia had been building throughout Putin's second term (2004–8).¹⁵ As the painful memory of the traumatic Yeltsin era receded and the Russian economy took off, increased prosperity led to greater aspirations among Russia's growing urban middle class, particularly among younger generations who were less scarred by the chaos of the late-Soviet and early post-Soviet periods. As a result, some began to question the terms of the original exchange of stability for freedoms that was the foundation of Putin's early popularity. The validity of the bargain was further called into question by the financial crisis that began in 2008, which hit Russians particularly hard. After nearly a decade of continuous economic growth, the crisis ushered in the chill of economic austerity that had not been felt on a macro level since the chaotic final years of Yeltsin's rule. If the regime and its stage-managed "democracy" could no longer deliver prosperity, had it outlived its purpose? Was it time to reconsider "Putin's plan" and his illiberal competitive-authoritarian model of governance?

Perhaps the first serious cracks in the façade of regime support appeared in September 2011 when Putin and Medvedev answered the question that had held Russians captivated for months: who would stand for election for president in 2012? Would the long-suspected but never confirmed plan be enacted wherein Medvedev dutifully stepped aside, allowing Putin to run uncontested by anyone than the usual communist and nationalist token candidates? Or would the increasing friction within the tandem lead Medvedev to contest the election himself, with or without Putin as an opponent? The mystery was resolved when it was announced that Medvedev would step aside in favor of Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. In what was perhaps a serious misstep Putin noted to the delegates of the United Russia party convention, that the decision between he and Medvedev had in fact been reached "several years ago," and had not been revealed for reasons of "political expediency." This unashamed admission that the 2008 and 2012 elections were all part of the same predestined stage-

managed political theater in which the will of the Russian people mattered little touched a nerve in some spheres of society. The Putin-Medvedev tandem, however, did not fully appreciate the gravity of their situation at the time.

The Duma elections of December 2011 tapped into this simmering but growing dissent, touching off a wave of popular protest that took the Russian leadership (and indeed many Russians) by surprise. Rather than the convincing (or at least convincingly manipulated) display of popular support for United Russia in 2007, wherein the party of power won 64.3 percent of the vote, in 2011 the party won only 49.3 percent of the vote amidst widespread allegations of electoral fraud.¹⁶

In the Duma elections and the resulting mass protests that soon took place in Moscow and other large cities, two features stood out: first, it is important to keep in mind that the Kremlin's mechanisms for committing relatively sophisticated electoral fraud were quite developed and had performed admirably in 2007. The fact that Russia's leaders were caught off guard and failed to falsify enough votes to ensure a more comfortable showing suggests that they had systematically overestimated their own popularity in the run-up to the 2011 elections. The troubling conclusion to draw from this fact is that the Putin-Medvedev regime had become significantly out of touch with the country, a phenomenon that is often characteristic of authoritarian regimes where the absence of political competition prevents leaders from accurately gauging popular support.

The second surprising feature of the post-election protests was the fact that there were protests at all. Russians had been willing to look the other way when electoral fraud was committed in the 1999–2000, 2004–5, and 2007–8 electoral cycles. Explaining this puzzling reversal is beyond the scope of this chapter, though the answer is likely that the stability-for-freedom bargain had been undermined by the economic crisis that lasted throughout Medvedev's entire presidential term.

In any case, by December 2011, many in Russia were no longer willing to give Putin or his protégé the benefit of the doubt. A series of opposition rallies in Moscow in late 2011 and early 2012 represented the most significant incidents of mass protest in Russia since the troubled Yeltsin years in the 1990s, shattering the illusion of a Russian public content with its path of political and economic development under the strong control of the Kremlin.¹⁷ To be sure, many have noted that these protests did not extend beyond Russia's largest cities and that the percentage of the population that participated was relatively small and largely limited to younger, better educated members of Russia's still-

small middle class. Yet the boy who declared that the emperor was wearing no clothes had spoken: popular support for Putin's version of the social contract had been shown to be far from universal.

III. Maintaining Control

These cracks in the system only increased calls for greater accountability from opponents of Russia's increasingly authoritarian political system. In an attempt to quell the protests, President Medvedev offered some concessions in early 2012 that built upon other liberalizing measures he had introduced, often with public criticism from Prime Minister Putin. One such concession was the restoration of gubernatorial elections in Russia, a measure slated to go into effect in late 2012. Just as Putin had drawn lessons from the revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine that toppled undemocratic incumbents, so too did he and Medvedev draw lessons from the uprisings that swept across Middle East in what has become known as the "Arab Spring."¹⁸ Recognizing that harsh crackdowns on protesters could easily generate a backlash that only fueled the fires of opposition, in the lead-up to the presidential election in March 2012, the regime took a cautious approach, calculating that allowing the still-limited protests to proceed was less risky than the alternative. The gamble, characteristic of a pragmatism that has appeared at various points throughout Putin's decade of dominance, seemed to pay off: On March 4, 2012, Putin was elected as president with 63.3 percent of the vote. While such a result would be considered a landslide in most western democracies, it fell noticeably short of the 71.2 percent received by Medvedev in 2008 and the 71.9 percent received by Putin in 2004. Putin would maintain his perch above Russia's political apparatus but without the Teflon-like invincibility he once possessed.¹⁹

Despite winning the presidency (this time for a six-year term thanks to a constitutional amendment passed during Medvedev's tenure), Putin's election was characterized by continued protests and calls for greater accountability before and after his election.²⁰ Major protests were held in Moscow shortly after the election, and another series of protests occurred before his inauguration. Yet these protests did not unleash the kind of country-wide cascades of protest that would be required to bring down the regime as they did in the Arab Spring countries or the Soviet Union in its dying days.²¹ While some initially thought that Putin's pragmatic streak would lead to a grudging acceptance that a greater degree of political opposition would have to be tolerated, subsequent events revealed that Putin had not abandoned his authoritarian

instincts. Besides reversing many of the liberal reforms introduced during the Medvedev presidency, Putin has overseen a new reining in of opposition and protest activity, including the introduction of far harsher penalties for participation in unauthorized demonstrations. Additional restrictions on independent media and opposition Internet outlets have led many analysts to drop the “competitive” modifier in describing Putin’s brand of authoritarianism: Russia in 2014 is correctly understood as a case of consolidated authoritarianism.

IV. The Threat from Without: The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014

In November 2013, Viktor Yanukovych, the president of Ukraine, took a decision that—unbeknownst to anyone—would fundamentally alter the political geography of Eurasia and plunge U.S.-Russian relations to their lowest point since the depths of the Cold War. It was in that month that Yanukovych, under immense pressure from Moscow, announced that Ukraine would not pursue an association agreement for a free trade area with the European Union.²² This unexpected decision to reorient Ukraine eastward toward Russia and its own Eurasian customs union—away from Europe and the West—came as a shock to many Ukrainians, particularly those in the western portion of the country who have always considered them culturally closer to Europe than to Russia.

Mass protests in Kyev and other Ukrainian cities built throughout late 2013 and early 2014, punctuated with violence as Yanukovych and his riot police struggled to bring the demonstrations under control. Despite agreeing to an E.U.-moderated compromise with opposition leaders in February 2014, Yanukovych fled to Russia on February 22 when it became clear that his personal safety was under imminent threat.²³ The protestors on the streets of Kyev—nearly a million-strong at times—celebrated a stunning victory.

So did Western governments. But the conflict was about to take a drastic turn for the worse. Fearing that Ukraine was on the verge of passing once and for all from Russia’s orbit, Putin seized an opportunity to take drastic action to restore Russia’s interests in Ukraine. On February 27–28, well-armed pro-Russian militants in Crimea began seizing key government facilities across the region. Over the next several days, regular Russian military troops executed the invasion and occupation of Crimea. On March 16, Russian troops watched over an independence referendum in Crimea that produced a dubiously high 97 percent in favor of secession from Ukraine in favor of union with Russia.²⁴ Russia accepted Crimea with a stroke of Putin’s pen on March 18. In doing

so, Russia achieved several important objectives: 1) it guaranteed a permanent home for the Russian Black Sea fleet in the Crimean city of Sevastapol; 2) it rectified the historical “mistake” made by Nikita Khrushchev in 1954 when he transferred Crimea from the Russian republic to the Ukrainian republic; and 3) it signaled that Russia was prepared to use military force and even violate sovereign borders to defend its sphere of influence in former Soviet states.²⁵

However, the conflict between Russia, Ukraine, and the West was not settled by this bold land-grab in Crimea. Inspired by the “success” of the Russian-backed separatist movement in Crimea, pro-Russia separatist movements arose in other regions and cities in eastern Ukraine, including Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Odessa. As the conflict dragged on, some of these protest movements evolved into armed insurgencies, of which the Luhansk and Donetsk rebellions have been the most violent. Throughout this period the Ukrainian military’s ability to score military successes against the separatists varied, a consequence partly of the poor training and supplies of Kyev’s forces and partly of significant Russian military aid for the rebels. It was Russian weaponry provided to separatists that was thought to have been responsible for the tragic downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MY17 on July 17, 2014 in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2014, there emerged a significant body of evidence that called into question Russia’s denial of a direct role in the conflict. Beyond supplying military and nonmilitary aid to rebels, evidence has shown that Russian troops have been active participants in the fight against the Ukrainian military in rebel-held areas. Moscow has seemingly increased its not-so-secret military activities in Ukraine whenever the advantage appears to be shifting in favor of the Ukrainian military, making it impossible for the government in Kyev under newly-elected president Petro Poroshenko to reassert state control over Ukrainian territory. Of particular concern is Russia’s apparent use of “hybrid warfare” in Eastern Ukraine, whereby Russian military personnel in unmarked uniforms use a variety of tactics and weaponry alongside native insurgents under a thin veil of plausible deniability.²⁶ To be sure, the former Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—now full NATO members with significant Russian populations—have been left to wonder how (or whether) NATO would respond under Article 5 in the event of Russian hybrid attack on their countries.²⁷

Though ceasefire agreements were signed in Minsk, Belarus in September 2014 and February 2015, these shaky agreements have been frequently violated, resulting in new waves of fighting. Throughout 2015, the fighting in Eastern

Ukraine has flared up violently at times as the Kyev government, the rebel fighters, or both seek to consolidate their territorial gains. A new urgency was injected into the conflict in February 2015 when it was revealed that the U.S. Government was considering sending lethal defensive weapons to Ukraine in its fight against the insurgents.²⁸ Though advocates of such a policy argued that such measures would raise Russia's costs of continued interference and thus serve as an effective deterrent,²⁹ others were skeptical that such weaponry would deter Moscow and many feared that such measures would exacerbate and escalate the conflict.³⁰ Though the Obama administration has refrained from sending weapons to Ukraine thus far, one can expect the debate to resurface in the event that large scale fighting breaks out again, as many expect it will.

As of this writing, Moscow seems to be little fazed by the increasingly restrictive sanctions levied by the United States³¹ and the European Union³² against Russian governmental officials and state-owned businesses in the financial and natural resource sectors. Indeed, Russia's response to the sanctions—an import ban on food from Europe and the United States—is likely to have a greater negative effect on the lives of average Russians than the West's own measures.

This is not to say that sanctions have not had a significant negative effect on the Russian economy. A combination of western sanctions, plummeting oil prices, and a weak ruble put the brakes on the Russian economy in 2014 and sent it into contraction in 2015, with the World Bank estimating that Russia's economy would shrink by 3.8 percent in 2015 and 0.3 percent in 2016.³³ Particularly challenging will be Russia's inability to access crucial foreign capital and investment as a result of restrictions emplaced by the sanctions regime. Though this may eventually bring serious long-term pain to the Russian economy, in the short term sanctions have so far failed to have the desired coercive effect intended to alter Russia's actions in the Ukrainian conflict.

Even if sanctions—whether the West's or Russia's own—produced public backlash against the Kremlin's policies in Ukraine, Putin's autocratic regime would likely be unresponsive to such pressure. These facts highlight the limited coercive leverage the West has over Putin's Russia at this time, while any inclination for a cooperative resolution to the broader conflict seems to have evaporated.

V. Challenges to the United States

Today, U.S.-Russian relations are bad, but they could be worse. Contrary to what some commentators have argued, the current situation is not currently,

and is not likely to become, a “new Cold War.” Neither the West nor (especially) Russia have the resources to engage in the kind global competition for influence and arms race that characterized the ideologically-driven Cold War. Nor do they have the desire to do so. Because the current conflict over Ukraine is less ideological than the Cold War, it is more likely that the conflict’s trajectory will be shaped by the competition for interests rather than ideas. There can be little question that Ukraine’s fate affects Russia’s perceived security interests far more directly and deeply than it affects American interests. Put another way, Russia is likely to go much farther for much longer in defending its interests in Ukraine than the United States or European Union. Thus, we can expect for the foreseeable future constant and deliberate Russian pressure—whether overt or covert—against the Kyev government. Only when there is again a pro-Russian government in Kyev, as well as significant autonomy (if not de facto independence) for Ukraine’s eastern regions will Putin have a status quo to his liking in Ukraine. Until then, the friction between the United States and Russia will be immense, with little chance of meaningful cooperation on other key issues. Specifically, U.S. policy makers will have to wrestle with the following issues:

- Is there any evidence that sanctions are achieving their purpose of changing Russian state behavior? If not, will additional sanctions make a difference? Are the United States and European Union willing to bear additional costs to their own economies for the sake of punishing Russia?
- Should NATO consider membership for Ukraine or other post-Soviet states that seek the alliance’s support? What are the implications of the Ukrainian crisis for the future of NATO?
- What does Russia’s use of “hybrid warfare” mean for NATO in the twenty-first century? How would NATO respond to similar Russian tactics carried out in & against a NATO member given Article 5 obligations?
- Should the United States provide direct military assistance to the Ukrainian government in addition to the monetary assistance it has provided? What are the likely immediate and long-term consequences of such assistance?
- How should the United States seek to engage Russia on other areas of mutual and global concern, including nonproliferation, counterterrorism, drug trafficking, and crime? Specifically, how can we engage Russia in opposing Iran’s nuclear program, resolving the Syrian conflict, and countering ISIS?

- Opposing Russian actions in Ukraine potentially comes at the expense of the U.S. interests noted above and others. In the grand scheme of U.S. interests and strategy, is Ukraine worth that cost?
- In using force to redraw borders in Europe, some have argued that Russia has upset the entire post-WWII order based on the inviolability of sovereign borders. Is this true, and if so, what are the implications of this change?
- To what degree have U.S. policies (missile defense, NATO expansion) throughout the 1990s and 2000s contributed to the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's perceived erosion of security?³⁴
- What are the implications of an increasingly nationalistic Russia governed by an increasingly autocratic Vladimir Putin? Should the United States actively undermine his authority and seek to develop opposition forces in Russia?
- Russian public opinion opposes direct Russian military action in Ukraine, and signs of dissent have arisen as the bodies of the first Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine return for burial.³⁵ What are the implications for U.S. security if public opinion turns against Putin?

To be sure, the challenges facing U.S.-Russian relations are immense. Cultivating a cooperative, constructive relationship between Moscow and Washington has always been a difficult business, even during the high points of the bilateral relationship. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, many heralded a new era of mutually-beneficial relations as Russia would join an international society based on liberal economics and politics. Today, that dream is farther from reality than it has ever been in the last thirty years. Though the situation is unlikely to get better any time soon, actions taken in Moscow, Washington, and Kyev may very well make it worse.

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¹Dennis Volkov, "The Protesters and the Public," *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (2012): 55–62.

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