



# Russian Foreign Policy in the Former Soviet Republics and Beyond



University of Oregon, Undergraduate Studies  
Maryam Moghaddami, Professor Matthias Vogel

## Abstract

Historically an international and regional power, Russia once more dominates the headlines with Russian influence seen from Ukraine to the Balkans and even Bolivia. For many, Russia's rise to prominence and the concurrent conservative wave that has swept many countries in Europe and beyond serves as a chilling echo of the Soviet Union. While a lot can be said about how the modern day Russia resembles the former Communist country, one thing stands out significantly; Russia's influence in its surrounding countries.

One may recall the recent almost universally condemned annexation of Crimea in 2014 while others might even think back to the controversial takeover of South Ossetia in 2008. Though these events are notable for the violent conflict that followed them, they are far from being isolated incidents. For many years now Russia has been striving to exert control over the former Soviet Republics that crowd the Russian border. Though the international media tends to focus on Russian militaristic aggression, Russia also utilizes its significant soft power in Eastern Europe and Central Asia to further Russian influence over the countries in these regions and their peoples.

This project looks at the past history of Russia in relation to its neighbors and the current tactics used to exert political, economic, and cultural influence over these former Republics in order to better understand how Russia's increasing global authority is a reflection of its dominance within its sphere of influence.

## Politics in the Region

- Maintenance and expansion of military bases in key border countries (Armenia, Belarus, Crimea, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, South Ossetia, Tajikistan)
- Aversion to traditional warfare and use of special forces (spetsnaz) and military aid (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Crimea)
- Positioning of puppet or pro-Russia leaders and use of military force when said leaders removed (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan)
- Collective security agreements, CSTO (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan)

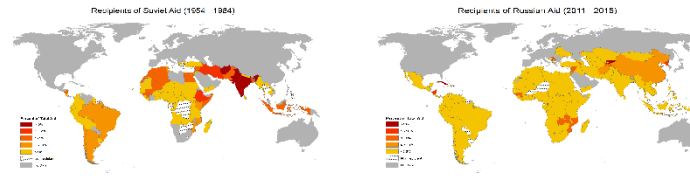
## Economics in the Region

- Economic partnerships, namely CIS (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) and EAEU (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia)
- Reliance on Russia as a trading partner or as a link to the EU and West (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan)
- Oil/gas diplomacy
- Economic incentives used to maintain dependence on Russia (price manipulation, low tariffs, debt forgiveness)

## Culture in the Region

- Large populations of ethnic Russians or Russian citizens leveraged in Russian interests (South Ossetia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Ukraine)
- Prevalence of Russian language and culture creates common link between nations
- Russia media influence extends to and affects local communities (Baltic states)
- Election hacking and media disinformation used to maintain local support of Russia (Estonia-2007, Ukraine-2014)

## от Ивана Грозного до Владимира Путина



## Sources\*

\*partial list

- Chinn, Jeff, and Robert Kaiser. "Russians as the New Minority: Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States." Westview Press, 1996.
- Fall of an Empire, The Birth of a Nation: National Identities in Russia. Routledge, 2018.
- Dilceen, Connor. "Russia's Undeclared 'New-Generation War On The West.'" The National Interest, The Center for the National Interest, 15 Nov. 2019. [nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-undeclared-new-generation-war-west-97126](http://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-undeclared-new-generation-war-west-97126).
- Martin, Terry. "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing." The Journal of Modern History, vol. 70, no. 4, 1998, pp. 813-861. JSTOR. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/235168](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/235168).
- Pamelamp@rice.edu. Samartian Review XVII.1: Andrazj Nowak. [www.rice.edu/~sarmatia/197Nowak.html](http://www.rice.edu/~sarmatia/197Nowak.html).
- "Russia Seeking to Gain Ground from Lost Soviet Influence." Anadolu Ajansi, [www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-seeking-to-gain-ground-from-lost-soviet-influence/1647085](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/russia-seeking-to-gain-ground-from-lost-soviet-influence/1647085).
- Slezkina, Yuri. "The USSR as a communal apartment, or how a socialist state promoted ethnic particularism." Slavic review 53.2 (1994): 414-452.
- Vakar, Nicholai P. "Russia and the Baltic States." The Russian Review, vol. 3, no. 1, 1943, pp. 45-54. JSTOR. [www.jstor.org/stable/125231](http://www.jstor.org/stable/125231).
- Wheatcroft, Stephen. "The Scale and Nature of German and Soviet Repression and Mass Killings, 1930-451." Europe-Asia Studies, vol. 48, no. 8, 1996, pp. 1319-1353. doi:10.1080/09668139608412415.

## The Soviet Era

- Soviet Era created a culture of interdependence between the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) and Russia
- Expansionist policies defined Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union
- Movement and resettlement within the borders of USSR resulted in the displacement of indigenous peoples and ethnic Russians outside of Russia's borders
- Military bases were spread out across the republics to guarantee protection while the local governments were firmly under Moscow's control
- Local industry developed with Russian help and grew to depend on it
- Core belief in "sovietization through russification" and Russian culture was imposed upon the people of all republics

## Politics in the World

- Maintenance and expansion of military bases in key countries (Eritrea, Syria, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen)
- Aversion to traditional warfare and use of special forces (spetsnaz) and military aid (Central African Republic, Libya, Sudan, Syria\*) (43% of military aid to Asia, 39% to Africa)
- Positioning of puppet or pro-Russia leaders and use of military force when said leaders opposed (notably Syria and threat of doing so in Venezuela)

## Economics in the World

- Reliance on Russia as a trading partner as counterpart to US interests and/or sanctions
- Trade agreement with China (2019) and Iran (2014)
- Oil/gas diplomacy
- EU (30.3% of crude oil, 38.7% of solid fuel, and 39.8% of natural gas comes from Russia)
- Provision of economic aid to developing countries to further relations and improve Russian strength in region
- Africa and the Americas

## Culture in the World

- Russian citizens leveraged in Russian interests (United States, United Kingdom)
- Russia media influence extends to and affects communities (influence of RT)
- Election hacking for results favorable to Russia (Germany-2015, Bulgaria-2015, OSCE/Austria, United States-2016, France-2017)
- Media disinformation used to maintain local support of Russia or create division that would make a strong response to Russia difficult (Facebook)

