

## Putin and Future of Russia

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### Abstract

This paper examines why Putin is dangerous to Russia and Russian people in long run. It will examine key foreign and domestic policies of Putin since he came to power in 2000. Evidences will be based on events of history that unfolded aftermath the collapse of USSR and certain predictions based on current state of Russia as a country, both politically and economically. Furthermore, this paper will suggest a solution that would serve the interest of both Russia and her enemy led by USA.

**Keywords:** Putin; Russian economy; NATO; Crimea; Syria; West and security threat

### Introduction

Politics is a process. Past events, in most of the cases, influence the decision makers of present. For past few years, Putin has been pursuing aggressive foreign policies. Annexation of Crimea has been serious among all. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, liberal democratic countries under the leadership of USA protested and reacted by imposing sanctions. Though public opinion outside Russia was unfavorable against the annexation, Russian people approved and applauded Putin for successfully gaining lost territory of Crimea [1]. This can be proved by the fact that Putin's approval rating skyrocketed after the annexation of Crimea. Many liberals accused Putin of breaking the international law without examining what made Putin make a dangerous move. Before Putin annexed Crimea, he would have foreseen accusations and sanctions from international community. He was well aware of cost. However, he knew west is handicapped to act meaningfully [2]. Because, policies of NATO instigated Putin to annex Crimea. NATO was formed in 1949 as a military alliance against USSR during the cold war. As a counter alliance, communist bloc formed Warsaw pact. When USSR got disintegrated in 1991, WARSAW pact ceased to exist. On the other hand, NATO kept on functioning and worse off, it expanded to former soviet states in Eastern Europe (of course on the request of home countries). West failed to live by her promise not to expand NATO beyond the unified Germany when Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland became members to NATO in 1999. Maintaining NATO as a military alliance after the dissolution of Warsaw pact couldn't be challenged with any logical reasons. But, expansion of NATO towards eastern European countries was a mistake. This was a shortsighted move and didn't carefully consider its implications. Without a doubt, presence of NATO in former states of Soviet Union would mean security threat to Russia [3].

Many realist scholars I believe would have expected Russia to react to this move sooner or later. It didn't occur sooner since Russia was not in position to react immediately due to domestic problems. For instance, Russia was politically not stable and her economy was just starting to improve. With Putin as president, he consolidated his powers and economy became stable. From the year 1999-2010, Russia's economy expended by 65.7%. Economic growth meant Russia had gathered enough resources to withstand western sanctions.

Though Russia annexed Crimea on the pretext of protecting Russian population, it wasn't the real reason. Putin merely emulated USA when later invaded countries like panama on the pretext of protecting their citizens. The real reason behind the annexation of Crimean peninsula is its strategic importance. Crimea was and it will always remain most

important naval base for the security of Russia. Before Ukraine became the member of NATO, it was necessary for Putin to not lose this important game which would be greatest security threat to his country. It was a rational move and timely, too [4].

Recent involvement of Russia in Syrian civil war is legitimate whatever the intentions are. Some scholars have suggested that the Putin is ingeniously trying to divert world's attention from crisis in Ukraine. Some referred Putin's support to president Assad as a means to gain public support at home. Both arguments may carry weight in her own rights. For instance, Putin's approval rating skyrocketed after Russia's involvement in Syria [5]. It is a fact known to all that we don't talk or talk very less about crisis in Ukraine now. I say Russia's involvement in Syria is legitimate for the same reasons as other countries led by United States of America- all the parties have vested interest in Syria. But, aggressive foreign polices pursued by Putin since 2014 is not a good news to Russian people in long run. Such reckless and seemingly bold policies may boost the morale of Russian leaders and people temporarily but for how long can it sustain? Is Russia as a country really in position to challenge west led by United States? Is Russia a confident player in the game? Fortunately, answer is "NO". Fortunate because, we don't want another cold war- an era of uncertainties and undesired races as it was in the cold war period [6].

First of all, let me state why Russia is not a worthy opponent to liberal democracies of west. Russian economy is not in good condition and many economists have predicted against the reasonable growth in years and decades to come. That is because; Russian economy suffers from structural problems. She heavily depends on natural gas and oil reserves. According to researches being done on natural resource reserves, it may last at most for next 30 years. To make matter worse, extraction and exploration of gases and oil has become extremely difficult due to lack of capital and up-to-date technologies. As a matter of fact, net profit from gas and oil in Russia has been decreasing and it is expected to run into losses. Of all problems concerning Russian economy, the biggest failure was its inability to trickle down to common

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people. When gas and oil business was lucrative for more than a decade, it only made the elites rich. In illiberal democratic country like Russia, president indeed is responsible only to few elites. Concept inspired by patron-client relationship and put to use by many dictators. Failure of Russian economy to trickle down will enable elites to maintain tight grip of power. Knowing this, president Putin has refused to liberalize market after he came to power. In contrast, he renationalized some key industries like oil and Gas Company, increased government's share in such industries, kept foreign investment to minimum and etc. some scholars say Putin's renationalization policies was tantamount to soviet policies of nationalization. However, I think this is a judgment based on little information base. Anyone in place of Putin may be tempted to do so and it's equally good for Russia as a country. Putin controlling key industries necessarily implies more power and influence. As a corollary, stable political condition in Russia prevents worst case scenario [7].

Stability of economy in 21 century is hugely dependent on inventions and innovations of new technologies. Russia as we know is a country inflicted by serious corruption and it isn't a knowledge based society. This is what pulls Russia down and down. Advancement in technologies at present age is more rapid than ever. If Russia is to become a worthy competitor of west, she cannot afford to lose in this particular field. As a matter of fact, we hardly hear of scientific and technological breakthroughs happening in Russia.

Russia's relation with neighboring countries is yet another factor that will never allow Russia to become a global power. In fact, it's safe to say that almost all the neighboring countries of Russia is suspicious of her intentions and policies. Critics may say countries surrounding Russia are small and weak. But, it would be wrong and miscalculation to underestimate their importance in critical times such as in war.

## But, There is a Way Out!

Despite Putin's madness, it is still not late for him to reflect back and give up his unrealistic ambitions. Liberal democratic countries led by USA, I believe, still will happily accommodate Russia in the international community without harming the interest of Russia [8]. By being a part of international community, not only will Russia gain more but also become a meaningful and responsible actor in solving international problems such as terrorism and climate change. Above all, Russian people will benefit from the merits of democracy and free trade which Russians dearly needs. Should Russia cooperate with west, it is definite that nation will thrive and people will prosper economically.

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