**POSITION PAPER ON RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

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**Overview: General Aims**

* ***Maintenance of the Putin System***. Domestic power is central; foreign policy is subordinated to this goal.
* ***Russian sphere of influence.*** Restoring something like the Soviet Union, not in the sense of reconstituting the USSR in constitutional terms but in terms of influence and control in a self-declared sphere of influence, previously called the ‘Near Abroad’
* ***Neutralizing Western ‘threats’.*** The main perceived dangers (threats to security) emanating from the West are not military but systemic (liberalism and democracy) and socio-economic, requiring in the Kremlin’s view a vigorous struggle against ‘color revolutions’. EU bigger ‘threat’ than NATO. That, among others, requires:
* ***Counteracting the Western-dominated*** liberal, democratic, rule-based international order and claiming that strong, authoritarian systems with ‘traditional’ values like that of Russia are superior.
* ***Restoring Russia as a ‘Great Power’*** (*velikaya derzhava*) in world affairs. Putin and power elite still smart under the perceived ‘humiliation’ of having ‘lost’ the Cold War. Nostalgia and pathology. Indication of that: The outcry in Moscow when Obama dared lower Russia’s status to that of a ‘regional’ power.
* ***Ruling out a US dominated ‘unipolar’ world***. In practice this means counteracting, limiting and frustrating US ‘designs’. Foremost example: Syria post 2011. This is related to:
* ***Weakening the West***. This means weakening NATO and EU. Splitting the United States from Western Europe. Another part of this is:
* ***Building close relations with China:*** “Strategic partnership” directed against USA. Regionally, to prevent extension of unwanted Chinese influence into the spheres of influence claimed by Moscow, notably in Central Asia.

**Instruments**

* ***Military power***
* At the ‘Great’ superpower level, in rivalry with the USA, the determined attempt to maintain and improve nuclear-strategic capabilities.
* In areas beyond neighboring countries, e.g. Syria, the build-up of (still modest) intervention capabilities and bases.
* Vis-à-vis the neighboring countries in the sphere of influence and in Europe adoption of a threat posture. Significant build-up of armed forces still more than a million men and women. Large-scale military maneuvers, such as the *Vostok* (East) military maneuvers. Spreading fear.
* ***‘Soft power’ instruments***
* Generally, they are weak. But in neighboring countries (in addition to military power) and in the Balkans the utilization of Russian minorities and Russian language and culture in accordance with the Russian World (*russkyj mir*)concept, institutionally led by Vyacheslav Nikonov, grandson of Vyacheslav Molotov.
* The ‘hard’ use of economic instruments, notably *oil and gas*, and institutionally the Eurasian Economic Union, that is, the achievement of, as Putin demanded in October 2011, a ‘qualitatively higher stage of integration’ beyond the customs union Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and, beyond that, the creation of ‘Greater Eurasia’ (Putin at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in June 2016).
* ***Propaganda, disinformation and destabilization campaigns***
* Well financed, tightly Kremlin controlled ‘news’ agency Rossiya Segodnya chaired by rabidly anti-Western Dmitry Kiselyov to spread the Russian narratives.
* The use of the internet (including hacking by GRU military intelligence) and fake social media (e.g. Internet Research Agency) to interfere in Western elections and enhance domestic conflicts (US elections, Brexit ,Catalonia).
* Cultivation of relations with and support for political parties and movements opposed to government policies (e.g. in Germany, the left-wing populist DIE LINKE and the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AFD).
* Cultivation of relations with influential Western politicians, current and retired, e.g. Gerhard Schröder and Edmund Stoiber in Germany, Wolfgng Schüssel in Austria and Silvio Berlusconi in Italy.
* Rewriting of history: 1- West always ‘hostile’ to Russia, it wants Russia ‘on its knees’ (Teutonic knights, Napoleon, Hitler, NATO); 2- glorification of both Russian Czarist and Soviet military successes. 3- No responsibility for outbreak of World War II, Poland co-responsible, Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact a ‘necessary and justified’ move by Stalin, no forcible imposition of control in Eastern Europe.

**Characteristics**

* ***USA*** is Putin’s frame of reference in terms of power and influence, not any European power’s domestic system and policies, e.g. Germany’s. No ambition or desire to become a normal major European player.
* Putin’s domestic and foreign policies are more and more ***like those of Brezhnev***: Reliance on military power and oil and gas to exert influence on world affairs while maintaining internal ‘stability’, i.e. de facto stagnation (*zastoy*).

**Evolutionary Perspectives**

* Fundamental, long-term: after (short) periods of liberal reformism ***always return to the three pillars of Czarist rule***: Autocracy, orthodoxy and (Russian) nationality.
* Current return to the triad, autumn 2011-Spring 2012: Abandonment of the Medvedev-style socio-economic ‘modernization’ drive with USA and Europe (‘modernization partnerships’) to ***national-patriotic mobilization on an anti-Western basis***.

**How to respond?**

* Since Western concessions and compromise will more often than not be interpreted as Western weakness, firmly ***stick to the current positions***.
* Since there is no contradiction between values and interests, firmly ***adhere to our values***.
* ‘Strategic patience’; ***no abandonment of sanctions*** prior to substantial change in Russian policies.