

Loyal Guards of the Soviet Border



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Russian hard-line nationalists continue to blame the west, especially the USA, for the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 but realists understand this was entirely due to the corrupt and unworkable Soviet political system. Also, to the annoyance of many Russian nationalists the demise of the Soviet Union resulted in the independence of 15 former Soviet states and democratic elections in countries once dominated by the Soviet system further fuelled nationalist paranoia leading to a false narrative of Russia being deliberately humiliated by the United States and NATO which represent a serious threat to their nation, Russian culture and language. Although nothing could be further from the truth President Vladimir Putin continues to skilfully use these fears and uncertainties to further his own political ambitions and a return to a closed Soviet Society where the only 'truth' is from Kremlin propaganda.

Post-Soviet era: Resentment 'historical justice' and Putin's Russian 'inheritance'



Russia is a vast country with 11 time zones but is said to have the economic power of Spain which is appreciably lower than the United Kingdom and the EU and Russia's economic decline continues to accelerate since the western nations-imposed sanctions in Response to Russia's unprovoked invasion of Crimea, but the Kremlin is reported to be modernising its military forces.

Under the leadership of Putin Russia has shown a continued commitment to increase its military capability: there are said to be a million men under arms, thousands of new tanks, a hundred new military satellites; the development of next-generation weapons and the planned modernisation of its navy, but because of Russia's information war and Putin's military posturing it is prudent to question their increased military capabilities whilst at the same time remaining cautious. Apart from the continuous flow of Russian disinformation/misinformation few understand Putin's true intentions.



Former KGB officer, Vladimir Ussolzev, who worked alongside Putin at the notorious Stasi (Ministry of State Security) Headquarters in Dresden, then part of East Germany, described Putin as, "Pragmatic, someone who thinks one thing and says something else... Someone who was a complete conformist, who did not believe in any changes in his native country {Russia}..." Ussolzev recalls that after he was being critical of conditions in the Soviet Union Putin replied, "Contain your criticism of the Soviet Union and think about your family"

Ussolzev also claimed, since Putin became President he quickly passed a large share of the Kremlin's power to the intelligence services and Boris Nemstov, a member of the opposition party and a staunch critic of Putin said the Federal Council was responsible for all decisions regarding military action and the council did not approve the invasion of Crimea. Not only did Putin ignore the Russian Constitution, according to Nemstov, his unilateral

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decision was not challenged and added, the same can be said for Russian rearmament, modernisation and current restructuring of the armed forces, "Vladimir Putin only appears to be answerable to his trusted inner circle."



Statements from several people said to have known Vladimir Putin describe him as having a fanatical belief in the 'glorious past of the Soviet Union and Tsarist Russia'. Also, according to several commentators, for Putin and other extreme-nationalists these periods represents Russia's powerful military force which dominated Eurasia, and a strong political leadership which played a major part in international relations. Putin firmly believes Eurasia, due to 'historical rights', is his sphere of influence. According to Eve Conant, "Putin's view is that he protects what belongs to him and his predecessors... and Parts of Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States and Finland are states which Putin claims to have ownership".

Based on what Putin calls 'historical justice' and 'historical rights', in recent years his so-called inheritance has expanded and includes all countries formally under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. There have also been claims Putin's thinking is stuck in 1930's Europe.

Since coming to power in 1999 Putin has attempted to restore 'Soviet greatness' through various acts of political subterfuge and invading neighbouring countries which were once part of the Soviet system. For Putin, Russia's past along with its regional dominance is not a tool with which to create patriotism, it is a model he wishes to emulate in order to restore lost power and respect from the international community.

Military Expansionism and Custom Union

The Russian invasion of Crimea which Putin and his supporters claim is to "protect the Russian speaking minority" is not the first time Russia has invaded a former Soviet state. Following the demise of the Soviet Union Russian soldiers in the region of Transnistria in eastern Moldavia, declared their loyalty to Russia and remained to 'protect' the Russian speaking Moldavians. Russia now recognizes this regions' independence. In 2008 Russia used the excuse 'we need to protect Russian speaking people,' to invade Georgia. After capturing southern Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia declared them to be independent republics and troops are still in these Kremlin declared 'republics.

In September 2014 Bob Ainsworth, the former British Defence Secretary said, "Vladimir Putin is as dangerous as Stalin and is much more of a threat than ISIS...{Islamic State} No leader of a major power has behaved as overtly aggressive since Stalin in the post-war period, and sadly, Putin would be very pleased with the comparison"

After Putin publicly announced the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century and proclaimed the right to act on behalf of all Russian minorities living in other countries, Ainsworth compared Putin with Hitler and in 1938 Hitler made similar claims after seeding Sudetenland!

Putin's belief in his right to act on behalf of all Russian minorities, restoring Russia's 'glorious' Soviet and Tsarist past, and blaming the west for their demise are common themes in his extreme nationalist interpretation of history.

To address Russia's ailing economy whilst at the same time restoring a degree of Russian prestige and dominance within their region of interest, in July 2010 Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan created a Custom Union. Putin was keen to include Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. After Kyiv decided the

far larger EU was more beneficial to their national interests and applied to join, the Custom Union was no longer a viable economic initiative. In response to this set back Putin used a common Soviet reaction to non-compliance – military aggression to force change.

In March 2014, Putting described the annexation of Crimea as correcting an 'historical injustice' and declared Russian compatriots, wherever they live in the former Soviet States as being part of a single Russian nation. This clearly suggests justification for other military incursions to ensure 'protection'

Disinformation/misinformation, political coercion and threats of military aggression are throwbacks to the Cold War era. Soviet style rhetoric has now been mixed with a modern narrative designed to promote tsarist terminology, the revival of Soviet symbolism and mythology. In Ukraine we also see the sponsorship of terrorism under the guise of separatist military formation as part of Russia's proxy war against the legitimate government in Kyiv.

Apart from Russia's current military engagement in Ukraine we also see other Soviet Cold War Tactics including Kremlin instigated and coordinated conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; the use of Gazprom as a political tool and promoting the right to protect Russian speakers abroad and many other examples can be used to illustrate Russian aggressive expansionism.

Revisionist history



At the time of writing it is widely claimed the distortion of history is now compulsory reading for school children and textbooks reinforce Tsarist and Soviet beliefs that the intrinsic value of the state is more important than the individual which means the interests put forward by the Kremlin takes precedence over its citizens.

Putin's beliefs of historic injustices, protecting the Russian speaking minorities in other countries which represent one nation; his resentment of the western nations and NATO who he continues to blame for the demise of the Soviet Union; and his continued attempts to turn the clock back to tsarist Russia and the mythical glories of the Soviet Union; provide the excuse for military aggression. Unfortunately, it appears these views are also shared by a large number of Russian nationalists.

Russian approach to silencing opposition

Among the most prominent figures alleged to have been assassinated include:



Boris Nemstov, a vocal critic of Putin, who was in the process of organising a protest march against the invasion of Crimea, was shot dead in Moscow, near the Kremlin.



Anna Stepanovna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist, writer, and human rights activist known for her opposition to the Second Chechen War and President Putin.



Alexander Litvinenko, assassinated in London to allegedly prevent him exposing Putin's links to organised crime.



Ivan Ivanovich Safronov, a Russian journalist and columnist who covered military affairs for the daily newspaper Kommersant, died after falling from the fifth floor of his Moscow apartment building. His apartment was on the third floor!

The unpredictable and seemingly irrational Vladimir Putin, who takes every opportunity to remind the world of his nuclear arsenal should not be underestimated and his irrational belief in his 'inheritance' of former Soviet states and the need to address 'historical injustices' can only be achieved through the use of subversion and military aggression. The main concern is that nobody knows how far Vladimir Putin will go to turn back the clock to Russia's glorious past, or whether he truly believes he must honour his 'inheritance' by becoming one of the Loyal Guards of the Soviet Border.

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