

A study of russia on the world stage politics essay



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Russia is an important actor on the World stage and plays a significant role towards establishing a multilateral international community. As they strive for a more prosperous future in the international community they are faced with numerous challenges, such as break away regions, corruption and being ignored by states that count. The latter contributes to the issue of NATO inching closer to the Russian border. In addition, many critics of Russia's current position believe that Russia poses a danger to World peace. Their arguments are based on issues concerning democracy within Russia, verbal threats made by Russian officials threatening other states, the conflict with Georgia, disputes with Ukraine and Russia's opposing stance with the US on numerous issues, such as collaborating with Iran. But there must be recognition of some sort that a misconception of Russia exists in the West. It is highly important to note that all countries and actors pose a potential threat to World peace and that Russia is not exempt from this. But, Russia does not want to be seen as the enemy, nor do they want to be exploited. They are threatened by NATO encroachment and in order to establish themselves as fierce competitors their actions are viewed as threats to World peace. In Medvedev's words obtained from a RussiaToday news report: " we want to build a country with a strong economy that will satisfy our people: we want to triumph over corruption and poverty, and build good relations with our international partners" (Medvedev brushes aside critics). Thus, the argument being addressed in this paper is that Russia is not a danger to World peace when considering the current state of world politics.

Perception of Russia in the West

First let's observe the misconceptions and generalizations of Russia in Western society during Putin's era and how it has shifted over to the present. The West, predominantly the US misinterprets the end of the Cold War. Dimitri, in his article "Losing Russia," expresses that "Washington's crucial error lay in its propensity to treat post-Soviet Russia as a defeated enemy... victory for one side does not mean defeat for the other" (Simes, Dimitri). Russia has made progress to involve itself in international decision making, but the US has been taking a unilateral role. Russia has not broken international laws and presses for alternative missile defense systems and for new treaties concerning Nuclear Weapons. The unilateral approach is not acceptable and if Russia does not take on an aggressive foreign policy then the result will be insecurity in the international arena. Russia is needed for balance of power in the international community. The US cannot be the sole decision maker. Consequently, it is dangerous to allow one state or actor to dictate decisions affecting international policies.

In his article "Russia Leaves the West" Dimitri expressed that Russia welcomed Hamas leaders to Moscow when the West was isolating them. In addition, Russia offered financial support to the Palestinians during the time when Europe and the US were cutting their funds. Russia has also disapproved of placing sanctions on Iran for its uranium-enrichment program (Trenin, Dimitri). These actions have given Russia a bad name and the critics have not shied from stressing that such actions pose a threat to World peace. Nevertheless isolating such actors is also a threat to World peace. When a state or any such actor is cornered and gets the impression that they

have nothing to lose they will react with force. It makes more sense to cooperate with gradual improvement no matter how long it takes to resolve an issue than to risk instability by taking radical measures such as isolating a state or actor, which could provoke radical actions. Russia is not posing a threat to World peace as their actions oppose the US hegemony. They are creating balance in the international community. The US influences the international community more so than these actors, thus Iran or Hamas are dubbed as the enemies or threats to international security. Russia itself is viewed as a threat to World peace because of the overgeneralizations by Western leaders and their media. It seems as if the US is portrayed in good light as there is no strong opposition to their wrong doings. Even though numerous people oppose many US actions they have not faced fierce opposition in the international community. There has been a re-assertion of great power interests due to the struggles within the Kyoto Protocol, crippling of the International Court and the multiple crises within international organizations (Rosenberg 2005, p. 2). There is less and less of multilateral actions and more of unilateral ones. Thus, the recent actions coming out of Russia is just adding to the competitive international arena and not disturbing World peace.

NATO Encroachment

Since the collapse of the USSR, NATO has been expanding eastward towards Russia. New military bases and a new potential military build up are inching closer to the Russian border. But critics must recognize that Russia recognized the territorial integrity of all former Soviet countries and satellites and it is absurd that Russia would start a campaign to conquer these very

same states that for the most part peacefully gained independence. In BBC documentary "Should we be Scared of Russia" it shows the map from Russia's point of view. The map points out that the West does not view NATO expansion as a threat to Russia at all, but as Russia is witnessing former allies joining NATO and an alliance creeping closer to Russia they feel threatened. The West cannot expect Russia to not react.

When the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991 NATO's supposed existence also disappeared. Nevertheless, NATO started a process of expansion that continues to the present day. NATO is a vehicle for US-led use of force with military bases on all continents as described in the article "NATO's role in promoting Western imperialism." In addition, NATO has waged a brutal war in Afghanistan. With NATO's failure to establish peace in Afghanistan and stability in Kosovo and not to mention US's unpopular war in Iraq, which has destroyed the lives of 10's of thousands of people, it should not be much of a surprise as to why Russia is weary about NATO's encroachment. The organization has developed a nuclear first strike policy and "the fact that NATO is today openly engaged in aggressive military conquest and occupation jars with the organization's purported aims" (NATO's role in promoting Western imperialism).

Georgia

During the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August of 2008, Saakashvili the President of Georgia claimed that "this invasion, which echoes Afghanistan in 1979 and the Prague Spring of 1968, threatens to undermine the stability of the international security system." He also added

“ no country of the former Soviet Union has made more progress toward consolidating democracy, eradicating corruption and building an independent foreign policy than Georgia. This is precisely what Russia seeks to crush” (Morning Bell). In this Morning Bell article they also stress that Russia has supported separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia for years. Majority of Abkhazs and South Ossetians have been granted Russian citizenship, which is a step towards enacting an annexation of these territories. As a result there is fear that Russia is planning to redraw the borders of the former Soviet empire. In addition, Russia’s effort is not confined to Georgia. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin spoke about a division in Ukraine concerning the Crimea (Morning Bell). While discussing the issue of Georgia, Obama stated that “ a resurgent and very aggressive Russia is a threat to the peace and stability of the region” (McCain, Obama Debate Russia).

Nevertheless there are usually at least two sides of one story. After the outbreak of the crisis in Georgia, Russia’s NATO envoy, Dmitry Rogozin, accused the Alliance of encouraging Georgia to attack South Ossetia in an attempt to put Russia in bad light through a mass propaganda war. In addition, Russia’s Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, pointed out Georgia’s massive arms purchasing during the past several years and that Georgia has been making an attempt to use ‘ foreign specialists’ to train certain Georgian troops (Lendman, Stephen). In addition, Putin pointed out that there were Americans in the conflict zone and stated that they were “ doing as they were ordered, and the only one who can give such orders is their leader” (Russia faces more fallout over Georgia).

It is also important to note that the International Court of Justice in The Hague has rejected a request from Georgia to prosecute Russia over the conflict in the Caucasus (UN court throws out Georgian claims). Civilians of both sides were in danger during the conflict and the court also called for both parties to do everything possible to protect human rights in areas hit by the conflict. Thus, it would have been even more dangerous for human rights if Russia did not intervene to aid and protect its Russian citizens and peacekeepers in South Ossetia. It's reported that the BBC has discovered evidence that Georgia may have committed war crimes in its attack on its breakaway region of South Ossetia in August. Also, the research conducted by the international investigative organization Human Rights Watch points out indiscriminate use of force by the Georgian military and there is a possibility that targeting of civilians was deliberate. In addition, it is important to note that "indiscriminate use of force is a violation of the Geneva Conventions, and serious violations are considered to be war crimes" (Whewell, Tim).

Ukraine, NATO

Ukraine bids to join NATO. Many citizens that see themselves as Russians within Ukraine oppose this view. There are about 20 million Russians residing in former Soviet Republics and it would be ridiculous to expect Russia to abandon all interests concerning their citizens in the near-abroad. To think just because Russia has interests in these states does not mean they have intentions in expanding their borders. Hence, Moscow was the key enforcer in dismantling the USSR. Many of those that identify themselves as Russians in the Crimea would like to be part of Russia. Russian ships continue to be

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based in the port of Sevastopol, Crimea, but this could change once the lease ends in 2017. The Russian Black Sea fleet could be kicked out of its current position if Ukraine were to join NATO (Panorama).

Due to the conflict in Georgia many analysts fear that Ukraine is in danger. Opposition leaders, which are pro-Western leaders, came to power in these countries after U. S.-backed popular protests in 2003 and 2004. Their victories advanced an American strategy that seeks to expand NATO to include both countries. Although Moscow opposes NATO's eastward expansion, it cannot prohibit the United States from operating in these countries. Russian Emergency Minister Sergei Shoigu slammed Ukraine for its public support of Georgia during the conflict. He stated that " one week before these events, we send a column of humanitarian aid to Ukraine to help flood victims and the next we find they're offering military aid, arms for the destruction of civilians" (Makarkin, Alexei). It is not as if Russia wants to pressure Ukraine, but is in a position where it needs to pressure Ukraine. If Ukraine joins NATO it is highly possible that NATO missiles could be deployed. Ukraine is in a very difficult position due to its size and geo-strategic position where the country cannot remain neutral. It is hard for Ukraine to maintain a multi-vector policy and will ultimately have to decide between Russia and the West (Fedynsky, Peter). Russia is accused of exploiting Ukraine on this issue, making the issue escalate into instability in the region. But if Russia wanted instability in this region why would it send aid to Ukraine during the flooding? Although Russia does need to let Ukraine establish its own path, but is it really necessary for Ukraine to join NATO? From whom must Ukraine defend itself against? By analyzing this situation is

it really Russia who poses a threat to World peace or NATO and Ukraine? The West cannot just think Russia will not react to this type of provocation.

Conclusion

As a result, Russia is not a danger to World peace when considering the current state of world politics. Stereotypes of the USSR should not be associated with today's Russia. Russia has embraced capitalism and has gradually been experiencing further democratization. Russia offered financial support to Palestine so that the citizens would not have to endure suffering, while support was being cut by the West. Also, they welcomed Hamas and held a meeting in order to hear things from their point of view. Russia and Russians feel betrayed by the West. NATO is expanding towards their borders and almost anything Russia does is automatically a threat to World peace. Meanwhile, it would have been worse for human rights if Russia did not intervene in South Ossetia. Also, in attempts to counter what seem to be unnecessary threats from NATO they are only defending themselves. Russia symbolizes global energy security and is establishing itself as an important player on the big stage. Therefore, we should not fear Russia and a direction towards a more multilateral world is only healthy for the current system.