

Toward a “Reaganov” Russia: Russian Security Policy after Putin

Russia's military annexation of Crimea in early 2014, and the ensuing crisis in its relations with neighboring countries and the Western world, brought to the fore an age-old question that had faded from the central attention of policymakers: what are Russia's long-term foreign policy ambitions and military grand strategy? U.S. policymakers are more concerned at the moment about Vladimir Putin's immediate goals, and the associated possibility of further trouble in eastern Ukraine or elsewhere. That issue is clearly important. But for longer-term U.S. security policy planning, it is also essential to ask about broader underlying trends.

Where is Russia headed, now that it has regained some of its economic power and political confidence (despite the country's recent economic troubles) that was shattered at the end of the Cold War? For the foreseeable future, perhaps another decade, this question will be largely indistinguishable from the personal proclivities of Mr. Putin, who could remain president until 2024. But it is also useful to try to disentangle the differences, if any, between Putin and the broader Russian strategic culture in which he operates. This will be crucial for long-term U.S. strategic planning—and for setting realistic expectations about what we can anticipate, and work toward, in the Western relationship with the Russian Federation.

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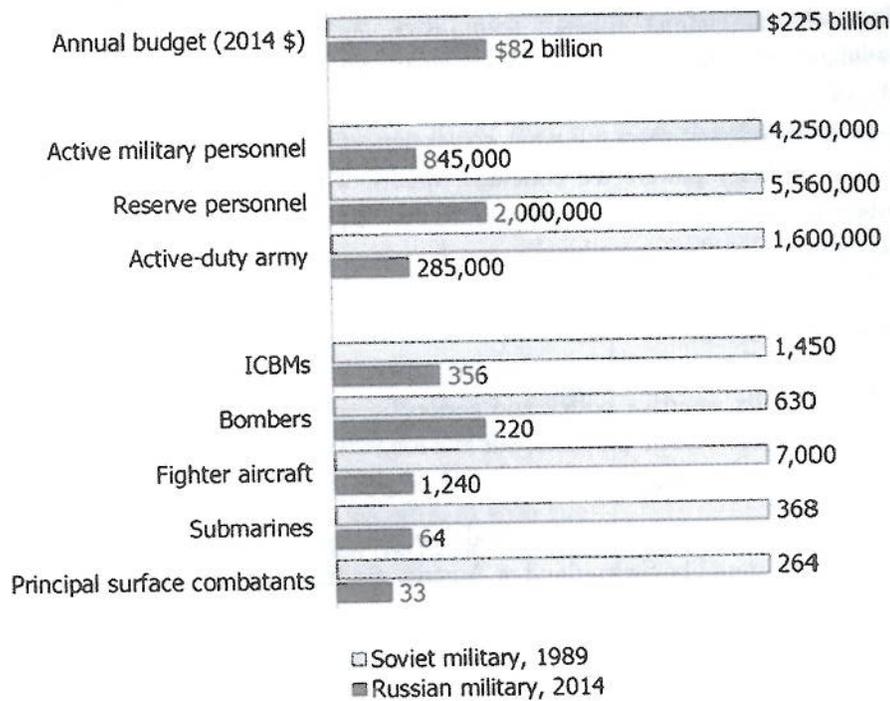
Russia's 21st-Century Roller Coaster

The decade of the 1990s was one of Russian decline. Putin is infamous in the West for calling the dissolution of the Soviet Union the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.¹ Clearly, that is a huge exaggeration by any fair standard. But for Russian nationalists, the 1990s were not only the decade in which the Warsaw Pact fell apart and the Soviet Union then dissolved; they also represented a period of extreme state weakness. The country's population was cut nearly in half; its military forces declined by two-thirds in size and four-fifths in funding; the economy went into free-fall. The Western world became more concerned about Russian weakness, possible state collapse, and loose nuclear materials than about any new aggression initiated by Moscow. The Chechen war raged off and on as well, and other parts of the former Soviet empire sometimes took up arms too, notably Armenia and Azerbaijan against each other. And of course, NATO expanded, not only up to the frontiers of the former Soviet Union, but right up to the Russian border, when the Baltic states were incorporated into the Western alliance in 2004.

Nonetheless, the early years of the new century brought a greater sense of stability inside Russia, as well as hopefulness in relations with the West, especially after the 9/11 attacks seemed to give Washington and Moscow common purpose. George W. Bush famously looked into Putin's eyes and liked what he discerned about the former KGB official's soul. Many people welcomed Russia's economic recovery and acknowledged the importance of its energy resources in an era of Persian Gulf instability.

Russian military recovery in the first instance meant fewer terrible accidents like the 2000 tragedy aboard the attack submarine *Kursk* (which sank with all hands after an explosion during a naval exercise), less danger of loose Russian nukes winding up in terrorist hands or of a brain drain of underpaid Russian weapons scientists heading for rogue nations, and stability (however brutally achieved) in Chechnya. The potential downsides of this Russian recovery seemed manageable, especially since Russia was now a democracy that limited Putin to two consecutive terms and enjoyed a civil society increasingly interested in working with the outside world in pursuit of common goals.

But towards the end of the decade, this narrative began to break down. The Georgia conflict of 2008 may have been the first unambiguous sign of trouble. This was followed by Putin's return to the Russian presidency, after a four-year stint as prime minister, and then the Ukraine crisis. A growing suppression of dissent and political debate at home, an ambitious military buildup, and then intense acrimony between Moscow and the West over Libya and Syria all reinforced this. To be sure, the Obama administration's Russia reset policy seemed to achieve certain specific successes in its early years, including greater

Figure I. Soviet v. Russian Military Indicators²

logistical access to northern entry points into Afghanistan to support the NATO war effort there, cooperation in sanctioning Iran and North Korea, as well as the conclusion of a New START Treaty in 2010. But the trendline was never clearly favorable, and the entire momentum of the reset clearly dissipated after the events of 2014. Nor can we pin the problem exclusively on Putin. His extraordinary popularity at home, symbolized by the happily tearful reactions of Russian parliamentarians when he explained the logic behind his actions in Crimea, showed that both resentments and aspirations run deep within Russia.

Given this environment, what comes next? In this paper, we seek to chart plausible future courses for the Russian state in its strategic and military dealings with the outside world. Our focus is not entirely on the immediate crises of the day, but just as much on the time period of the 2020s, when underlying realities about the Russian polity will likely dictate the behavior of

We cannot pin the problem exclusively on Putin.

the state and when Putin will eventually have to step down from power, if he has not already done so. Our approach is first to identify and explain eight notional and distinct Russian mentalities, worldviews, and foreign policy paradigms in conceptual terms. We then try to select from this list the most plausible grand strategies that the Russian state might follow in the years and decades ahead, and then ask what consequences these choices might have for Russian military power. We conclude, finally, with implications for Western policy, including how the outside world might try to influence the choices that Russia makes in the years ahead.

For analytical purposes, we arrange these eight distinct models of possible future Russian grand strategy along a single axis, reflecting varying degrees of relative liberal and peaceful thinking on one extreme, or degrees of nationalist and potentially assertive policy and action on the other. It is not a perfectly linear progression for all purposes, but as a rough first approximation it can serve as a helpful guide. Specifically, we would propose the following taxonomy:

- **Post-Westphalian Russia.** This model would see Russia behave as a liberal European state like Switzerland or Austria, disinterested in power politics and focusing its security policy narrowly on territorial self-defense.
- **NATO Russia.** With this paradigm, Russia would effectively seek to join the West.
- **Pro-Western Russia.** With this model, Russia would not join NATO but might associate more closely with the West in other types of security arrangements, such as a strengthened OSCE or a new type of Euro-Atlantic security community.
- **Minimalist Russia.** A minimalist Russia might not have the pro-Western outlook of the above possible strategies, but could still conclude that its own interests dictated a modest and restrained security policy as the state sought to maximize power through economic strength—with nuclear weapons constituting the main, relatively inexpensive linchpin of national military strategy.
- **"Reaganov" Russia.** A Reaganov Russia would be highly patriotic, and engage in military buildups and perhaps a certain degree of nationalist rhetoric, with a central goal of reasserting traditional military forms of state power—but with the twin goal of not employing that military power unless absolutely necessary. Just as Ronald Reagan rearmed the United States and gave the country a boost of confidence at home and on the world stage, with increased defense spending also providing at least a temporary economic lift, this vision for Russia would seek to establish and advertise Russian power without frequently sending forces into combat.

- **Besieged Russia.** This concept for the country’s future would be akin to the Reaganov model, but focus less on patriotism or prestige and more on settling scores with enemies and adversaries, both real and perceived. Its means might be covert and coercive as much as violent, but it would not be a particularly friendly nation. It might be a less confident, less forthright, more devious, and in some ways more dangerous Russia than the possible Reaganov type. It is perhaps not unlike Russia under Putin in 2014 and 2015 to date.
- **Greater Russia.** This paradigm would continue in the same Reaganov spirit but go even further. It would seek specific opportunities to employ state power to reconstruct part of a greater Russian empire and demand a certain amount of influence with neighboring states—a Russian sphere of influence in a more classic, hard-power sense, akin to aspects of tsarist times. This might logically extend to lands where Russian speakers are in a majority, as with the eastern parts of Ukraine and the Baltic states. It could extend to sea as well, notably in the Arctic region. It might be thought of as “worst-case Putin.”
- **Brezhnevian Russia.** Even more ambitiously, this model of possible Russian behavior would hold as its ultimate goal a return to the power, status, and grandeur of Soviet times. Every effort would be made to maintain parity with, or leadership over, the United States in nuclear, missile, and space weaponry, while at the same time attempting to project power and influence. Regionally, this Russia would seek direct dominance of neighboring states where possible. While it would not in any medium-term vision literally adopt the “Brezhnev Doctrine” of ensuring that any country once controlled by Moscow would always remain within Russian sway, it might go beyond Crimea and parts of Georgia to seek greater Russian control, through direct military power or through nonmilitary coercion, in the central Asian republics, all of Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and even the Baltic states.

The notion that nation-states are becoming less relevant is popular only in some Western thinking.

Three Visions that Russia will Reject

Of these choices that Russia will make in the years to come, we would argue that three are particularly implausible—those at either end of the spectrum of possibilities, namely the Post-Westphalian Russia, a NATO Russia, or a Brezhnevian Russia. Russians will not endorse a post-Westphalian model for

their country or its future foreign policy because, in short, virtually none of them believe in such a progressive concept. The notion that nation-states are becoming consistently and steadily less relevant in international relations is a construct that is popular only in certain strata of Western thinking. Arguably, it had its heyday in Western Europe in the heady days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the European Union inspired great hope among many elites and publics alike. But as the EU, European economies, and European foreign policies have struggled in recent times, the idea that the nation-state system is weakening has taken a back seat even in much of liberal, prosperous, democratic Europe. It never held much appeal within Russia.

Russians are proud of their history, their nation, and their state. They also tend to think that the state is still very relevant for ensuring their security. They see a rising China to their east, a highly assertive United States and its allies to their west, and trouble to their south. They also have felt embarrassed and anxious over the decline in their nation's cohesion, power, and standard of living after the Cold War. They are not a people who will quickly dismiss the importance of the state; nor do they have many natural partners in building any post-Westphalian system, since they do not feel particular kinship to any other bloc of nations. Putin may exemplify this attitude most conspicuously, but his 85 percent average approval rating since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis,³ the generally favorable reaction of normal Russians to his assertiveness in the Crimea, and the general weakness of civil society and independent media within the country as a whole suggest that it is widespread.

A Russia within NATO might have been an option soon after the Cold War.⁴ Even though it was of course a Western creation, the moment after the fall of the Berlin Wall offered an opportunity for NATO to fundamentally redefine itself, with the possibility of transforming into the quintessential Eurasian–Atlantic security community. But after two decades, including NATO's wars in Kosovo and Libya—both badly viewed within Russia—and a prolonged period of acrimony over missile defense, together with the alliance's expansion up to the Russian doorstep (even giving consideration to inviting Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance), that day is gone. The alliance is seen as largely anti-Russian in membership, character, and purpose, again not only by Putin, but by most Russians.⁵

And finally, on the other end of the taxonomy, a Brezhnevian Russia is simply too ambitious and costly even for most Russian nationalists. Even if it somehow worked and achieved its goals, it would saddle Russia with several countries that are basket-case economies at present.⁶ It would risk war with the West and, at a bare minimum, a sustained period of renewed cold war and economic disengagement with most of the world's major economies, ones that would certainly sanction Russia severely over the aggressions that would come

with this type of grand strategy. And while the Russian people still can constitute a proud, nationalistic, and perhaps even somewhat imperialistic polity, they are no longer communist, with the ideologically driven expansionism that characterized Soviet history.

Five Plausible Paradigms for Russian Grand Strategy

If these three worldviews are out, we submit that all five of the others may vie for popularity and support within future Russian debates. We can expect all to have at least some pull on the greater collective Russian consciousness, as they are models and visions that Russians already understand and discuss, if not necessarily with the labels we employ. The more hardline variants are more consonant with Putin's recent behavior, and as such will surely have some influence in the years ahead. But they will not go unchallenged, and therefore we also discuss other outlooks on the world that may influence the future Russian polity. For our money, the Reaganov vision or something resembling it may offer the most likely scenario—and one with which the West can in fact coexist. That reality should help set our expectations about what kind of future to expect, and seek to promote. But first consider each in turn.

Pro-Western Russia

Even if it is unimaginable that a future Russia would seek to join NATO—whether or not NATO would have it as a member, itself an unlikely proposition—it is not beyond belief that a post-Putin Russian state could look to mend fences and develop fundamentally compatible interests with the Western world, even as it remained somewhat aloof and separate. Several motivations could drive Russians toward such an outcome. Russia could seek to maximize its interactions with the outside world largely for the sake of economic growth and prosperity. It could also see a strong association with the EU or NATO as a useful hedge against Islamist extremism and China's rise. Put differently, to reach this mindset, Russia would not necessarily have to abandon all security fears, real or imagined, but would have to conclude that the greater dangers came from the south or east (or within) and could be more effectively checked with Western help. It would reflect a decision that may seem obviously correct to Western observers but is much harder at present for Russians, given the common view that NATO broke its word and took advantage of their weakness after the Cold War.

NATO expansion may someday be a more distant memory. If the Western world in conjunction with Russia can find a solution to ensuring Ukrainian and Georgian security (and that of other former Soviet republics not currently in the Western alliance) without offering NATO membership to them, it is possible that future generations of Russians will be able to declare a truce in this

A substantial Russian nuclear arsenal seems a given under any plausible future scenario.

geostrategic competition (as many Americans probably assumed they already had, prior to the events of 2014) and move beyond it. Time may heal some wounds.⁷

The essence of this kind of policy would be a return to the calmer days of NATO–Russian relations of the 1990s or the early Putin years—yet in the context of a confident and stable Russia. This dynamic could create new institutional mechanisms, or continue existing vehicles such

as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), NATO–Russia council, and UN Security Council (as well as a possible Russian return to the G8). Nuclear arms control might resume, missile defense negotiations could become less acrimonious, and strategic cooperation on issues like Iran, North Korea, and Afghanistan could outweigh disputes over any ongoing problems like Syria. The blocs might cooperate on peacekeeping missions and would presumably strengthen counterterrorism cooperation as well.

Minimalist Russia

A “minimalist Russia” might not be so pro-West. And yet, it might still wind up fairly benign in the international arena. If it concluded that it was not likely to be attacked or otherwise threatened, it could perhaps get by with a modest-sized army, navy, and defense budget, coupled with a substantial nuclear arsenal (something that seems a given under any plausible future scenario).

This Russian strategic outlook might receive momentum first and foremost from economic policy technocrats and business elites. The pragmatic emphasis would be on developing a competitive economy and improving the Russian quality of life—and, ultimately though implicitly, Russian national power as well. Russia would not act as a giant Switzerland in attitude or outlook. But it could resemble one in its military restraint, largely out of self-interest—however unlikely that might seem at present.

The belief that Russian security was threatened less by foreign foes and more by internal challenges could help motivate this paradigm. Since the National Security Strategy for Russia of 2009 emphasizes the importance of everything from economics to healthcare to the environment in its list of national security priorities, there is a predicate in modern Russian thought for leavening the importance given to more traditional measures of power and security.⁸

Reaganov Russia

What might be termed a “Reaganov Russia” would represent a proud, nationalistic state that in the Russian context might strike many as

aggressively motivated and inclined. But if in fact the Russian state could take pride in reestablishing itself as a successful status-quo power, it might not see the need for revanchism or other aggression—at least not on a large scale.⁹ It could pragmatically weigh its own interests across a wide range of policy options, often concluding that it should cooperate with the West on key strategic issues for its own well-being. Freed by greater self-confidence and pride from the kind of anger and pettiness that might come with the besieged Russia discussed below or that we have seen recently, it could make clear-minded and good decisions on matters where the West really needed its help—and about which there was no rational reason for a divergence of positions between Moscow and Western capitals.

Our use of the “Reaganov” label is not intended as a commentary on Ronald Reagan’s overall legacy in the United States. Our point is merely that if one reduces Reagan foreign policy to its component parts—a strong military, but rarely used; a confident United States that struck some as arrogant, but which was led by a generally affable leader and that became collectively more comfortable in its skin as the decade progressed;

and an economically successful nation with strong industries in various key strategic sectors—that could offer an analogy to a future Russia. If it channeled its patriotism into relatively benign actions like improving its armed forces and advancing in economic and scientific realms, the effect of such a Russia on the region and the world could be relatively innocuous.

This framework for the future Russian state might envision the defense sector providing technological innovations which could spin off to revive the Russian scientific and manufacturing sectors more broadly. The idea is Reaganesque in the U.S. tradition (though spinoffs from the defense world were perhaps even more notable in the United States in the decades just before Reagan). But it is also an idea advanced by defense official Dmitry Rogozin in today’s Russia.¹⁰

Besieged Russia

We perhaps need to say the least about this possible future path for Russia because it may most resemble the current mindset of President Putin. The notion here is that the wounds to Russian pride may be even deeper, and bitterness even more entrenched, than many have appreciated. Particularly if Vladimir Putin is able to get away with additional adventures in Ukraine, and if Russian economic growth does not suffer unduly, Russian voters and strategists may decide that there is room to make further mischief in the near abroad for

A “besieged Russia” may most resemble the current mindset of President Putin.

many years to come. It could feel besieged itself—and seek to make others, especially smaller neighbors, feel the same way.

By this vision, Russia would not relent, even though it could make various tactical adjustments and show restraint when temporarily expedient. It could at some future time pursue opportunities for expansion or at least seek to reestablish a strong sphere of influence in much of Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Georgia, while pursuing potentially hostile policies toward the Baltic states and perhaps Poland and other Central European states. The facts that Vladimir Putin may remain in office a full decade more, and perhaps also shape the selection of his successor, provide further grounds for believing that we cannot easily dismiss this model of a future Russia.

It is also possible that latter-day notions of a great-power Russia could reinforce this mindset. Harkening back to traditions of Russian thought that glorify its role as the great Slav nation, the heart of Eurasia, the bridge between East and West—this kind of Russia could be inspired by pride as well. It would build on the traditions of earlier Russian leaders like Peter the Great and Alexander II, and the thinking of intellectuals such as Alexander Dugin, Eduard Limonov, and Elgiz Pozdnyakov.

Such a worldview would not look fundamentally unlike what we describe in the Reaganov vision of the country. But it could be less benign in this case, as it would be intertwined with a sense of aggrievement. Dmitri Trenin describes this outlook as “post-imperialist” rather than imperialist or neo-imperialist, still quite assertive in goals even if different from traditional forms of great-power behavior in the means employed. Militarily, its signature behavior might be exemplified by the special operators in unmarked outfits in Crimea in early 2014—the “little green men”—in contrast to the classic infantry or tank invasion forces of earlier epochs.¹¹

Greater Russia

This concept takes the idea of a besieged Russia one step further. It postulates a Russian state that seeks not only to gain revenge and restore dominance over near-abroad states but to maximize national power in the traditional, imperialist sense more generally.

This could imply even more blatant and aggressive actions against the former Soviet republics in Europe. It could further include Russian expansionism into the Central Asian republics, where there are some significant ethnic Russian populations that could provide a Putin-like leader with pretexts for aggression.¹² It could also feature greater use of Russian naval power in the state's exclusive economic zones and beyond, to extract economic benefits through means such as mineral and hydrocarbon exploitation, extensive fishing, and dominance of Arctic shipping lanes as they open up due to global warming. (Indeed, some of

this is happening already under Putin, with the September 2013 occupation of the New Siberian Islands in the northern regions above Russia, and increased military maneuvers in northern seas as well.)¹³

This type of worldview and competitive international approach could also include further efforts to impede international collaboration on projects of importance to the West such as nonproliferation efforts against Iran and North Korea.

Implications for Russian Military Power and Defense Strategy

Some of these conceptual frameworks for Russian grand strategy imply a larger and more costly military posture for the Russian state; others would be less demanding. It is not axiomatic that the larger, more expensive Russian military would always be the more dangerous outcome for Western interests; what matters most for the West is arguably how Russia behaves internationally, and less so how it arms itself in peacetime, even if the subjects are clearly related.

We would identify two possible outcomes or endpoints for Russian military policy. Of course, as with the above conceptual paradigms, actual decisions might reflect a combination of the two, or a compromise between them, but it is still helpful to identify two distinct possibilities:

- Muscular Russia, with a military budget of perhaps 3 to 4 percent of GDP. This would be one of the higher spending ratios in the world. Russia would also retain a strong defense industry and commitment to excellence across many domains of conventional military capability.
- Nuclear-First, "Porcupine" Russia. Moscow would likely retain the goal of nuclear parity with the United States (just as in the muscular model) and ensure it was stronger than any state on its borders besides China (including with special and cyber forces). But it could otherwise adopt elements of what might be called a "porcupine" defense posture, in which the goal was less to have an offensive capability or even a robust defense for all national territory, and more of an approach to prevent any country from successfully seizing chunks of the state.

A "muscular" Russian military aligns most closely with the Reaganov or Greater Russia paradigms.

Muscular Russia

By a more militarily ambitious vision of its future, Russia would aim to have the strongest military in Eurasia by as many measures as possible—and stay as close

to both China and the European elements of NATO as it could, even in areas where it could not predominate. There are multiple potential motivations for this. Among our five most credible Russian national security visions, they would most closely align with the Reaganov Russia or the Greater Russia paradigms.

Relative to existing military plans, this approach would not require a dramatic increase relative to what was planned before the economic shock of 2014. It would imply sustained funding for an existing Russian military modernization agenda, with possible further increases for strategic nuclear modernization among other items not yet fully resourced in existing plans.

This approach might, as noted, imply spending at least 3 percent of GDP on the nation's armed forces. That could imply a total of perhaps 5 percent or more on all security capabilities including internal defense, an area of recent emphasis as well, in light of various internal challenges.¹⁴ This level of effort would exceed that of any major Eurasian power, and in fact would also exceed projected levels for the United States, as a percent of national economic output.

Because Russia's economy will remain so much smaller than that of the United States, China, or even Japan and Germany under any realistic extrapolation from today, such a higher level of military spending as a fraction of national economic power would not elevate Russia to general superpower status. But with this approach, Moscow would probably be able to retain its position as the world's third-highest military spender after the United States and China. And it may be able to create a sense of military momentum—over a period when U.S. and other Western defense spending may continue to decline—that Russia can seek to translate into favorable strategic outcomes, at least close to home.

Notionally under this approach, U.S. military spending in 2020 might total around \$500 billion to \$550 billion. China might tally around \$300 billion. Russia, depending on what has happened to its economy in the interim, might range from \$100 billion to \$150 billion annually, with several major U.S. allies and India ranking next on the list in the range of \$50 billion a year apiece.

With all of that money, Russia would still be hard pressed to maintain a military with full capacity to secure all its land borders through conventional forces alone. It would, of course, remain incapable of recreating the kind of military that the Soviet Union once possessed. A million-man force, up modestly from today's in size, would be a realistic ceiling on the total active-duty strength of the armed forces even with the resources presumed in this scenario.

But Russia could nonetheless aspire to several capabilities that would likely be within its grasp. Its nuclear forces, at least in size and megatonnage, could remain equal to the United States'. Its navy could grow big enough to challenge any neighbor in coastal waters, exclusive economic zones, and those parts of the

Arctic where the United States was not asserting itself. Its special forces, of the type seen in Crimea, could remain well-trained and well-equipped (as they might in the other option, too). Its aerospace sectors could receive enough funding to well endow Russian air and space forces, as well as make Russian companies competitive in many international arms export markets.

Maintaining adequate ground forces for this strategic posture from a modest and declining (and generally unhealthy) population would cause great troubles for the Russian state. A robust defense capability for Siberia would be out of the question. And to the extent Russia believes that NATO poses an overland threat, maintaining a strong defense in the European parts of the nation would also prove challenging when measured against the three-million-strong NATO militaries. As Americans, we find the idea of a serious NATO threat to Russia unimaginable. But that is our perspective as Americans, and may not accord with future Russian views.

Realistically, however, Russia would have options short of robust forward defense in the West and the East. It could probably sustain several divisions of strong maneuver forces that could seek to contest and counterattack any hypothetical foreign invasion force that tried to move significantly into Russian territory. Given the logistical challenges of invasion, even a huge Chinese military would for the foreseeable future have great difficulty sustaining a large fraction of its total armed forces in a distant locale in a place like Siberia. Only the U.S. military is truly capable of such long-distance power projection at scale today, and as noted, we would consider the idea of a U.S. threat to the Russian mainland unthinkable. Therefore, while a robust perimeter defense of the country may not be viable, Russia may be able—if it shares our assessment of plausible threats—to build a conventional military capability good enough to counterattack any hypothetical invasion force, particularly from China. When all the pieces are put together, this more expensive and capable Russian military may hold appeal to future voters and policymakers.

Under this vision for Russia's future military, the nation would remain a nuclear superpower and establish itself as the world's third-strongest military power writ large. It would retain considerable sway over strategic events near its borders. It would possess a strong arms export industry that, while not quite up to U.S. standards, could likely hold its own with many other nations for decades to come. And it might even elect to cooperate with China on some security matters, further reducing any perceived need to protect its Siberian borders.¹⁵

Nuclear-First "Porcupine" Russia

The above vision for a well-armed future Russian state will probably hold considerable appeal to the nation's future imagination. It accords well with many aspects of the country's history, outlook, and national sense of pride and

purpose. But it would also be very expensive. And this for a country with enormous problems: a shrinking and poorly educated workforce, a slipping status among the world's major scientific powers, and limited economic assets except in the realm of natural resources. Indeed, Russia is having trouble keeping the size of its military near the goal of 1 million active-duty troops today, partly due to demographic reasons.¹⁶ A large military would pose a serious strain on a state that continues to face major challenges.

It is entirely plausible that Russian military capability might become smaller and less expensive if that were seen as consistent with the country's core interests. Indeed, such a military would be perfectly consonant with not only the Pro-Western Russia or Minimalist Russia discussed earlier, but even certain variants of a Besieged Russia. By maintaining a viable nuclear force, good (if small) special forces, and modest conventional forces, Russia could still do many things on the broader regional stage. If content to pick on the likes of Ukraine and Georgia—countries with military budgets measured in the single billions of dollars per year—then Russia would have no particular need to work so hard at being the world's #3 military power. Spending the rough equivalent of \$50 billion or so a year, depending on the exchange rate—around say 1 percent of likely future GDP—might suffice. (To see why, note that even the United States, with far higher personnel and other costs, spends less than \$10 billion a year on its special forces and some \$15–20 billion annually on its offensive nuclear forces.¹⁷ Russia could excel in these areas of military power for a combined price tag of perhaps \$20 billion a year, leaving \$30 billion to fund a less excellent but hardly insignificant conventional military force.)

With that type of military spending level, Russia could maintain a military of around half a million troops or a bit more, a nuclear force with 1,000 or more strategic warheads, a modest navy (in each of four main ports according to the historical norm), and enough capacity for high-tech weapons production to keep alive at least a moderately healthy and advanced defense industrial base. With this model, Russia would still be a nuclear superpower. It could still have a larger army than any NATO European state. If it felt confident in its relations with China or at least confident in the effectiveness of its nuclear deterrent vis-à-vis Beijing, this kind of posture might seem adequate. And it could still assert itself in northern waters simply by using a mid-sized navy to patrol and protect seas that are within its exclusive economic zone as reflected in the Law of the Sea Treaty.

There is much to like about this kind of strategic posture for Russia as well. Future Russian strategists and politicians can be expected to consider and debate it, even if one cannot predict with any confidence that it will become the consensus choice.

Predictions, Implications, and Possible Responses

In light of all the above, which scenarios are most likely for future Russian policy? Our goal is to look beyond the immediacy of Vladimir Putin’s 2015 thinking—recognizing of course that his influence will remain very powerful for some time to come in Russia—and gauge more structural and ideational factors that are likely to influence future Russian leaders as well. The point is not to imply that Putin does not matter, or that history is shaped only by forces larger than individual leaders. Clearly, Putin has single-handedly changed much about the world and Russia’s relationship to it, especially in recent times, and he remains a force to be reckoned with. But we are interested as well in which elements of Russian thinking this domestically popular leader is simply personifying or highlighting—and which might therefore endure beyond him.

A Russia that might seek to join NATO, or that might reflect a post-Westphalian outlook toward the nation-state, seems a very remote possibility at best. That type of outcome reflects a liberal worldview that has fewer adherents than ever, perhaps, within Russia today, and the trend seems due to far more than just Mr. Putin. On the other extreme, an expansionist Russia echoing elements of Brezhnev’s Soviet Union offers far too little benefit for the likely costs and risks.

As for the remaining options—a Pro-Western Russia, a Minimalist Russia, a Reaganov Russia, a Besieged Russia, or a Greater Russia—it is harder to be so confident about which will weigh most heavily in the Federation’s future strategic culture. But a genuinely pro-Western state seems an increasingly remote possibility, certainly for the relatively near future, given the rallying around Putin since 2014. A Minimalist Russian national security strategy seems a likely outcome only if Russia, a proud and ambitious nation, decides to seek status and respect through excellence in economic and other nonmilitary spheres, rather than risk self-destruction through excessive militarization. A Greater Russia would cut itself off from the world, through even deeper economic sanctions than have been imposed since the Ukraine crisis of 2014, and seems rather remote as a prospect, even if not entirely out of the question.

A genuinely pro-Western Russian state seems an increasingly remote possibility, even after Putin.

As such, our money is on the remaining two options: 1) a state whose foreign and security policy outlook resembles a Reagan-era United States, characterized by a high degree of patriotism, a degree of favoritism for the nation’s armed forces in national policymaking, and yet restraint in the actual use of military force as an instrument of foreign policy; and 2) a

besieged Russia that generalizes and sustains the kind of approach to foreign policy showcased by Vladimir Putin in 2008 and again since 2014, opportunistically rather than as part of a consistent strategy of neo-imperialism (as a Greater Russia model might imply).

Of these two options, the Reaganov option—while it may not lead to a lower level of military spending—is in fact more benign. It implies a more self-confident and self-satisfied, and therefore less truculent, outlook toward the world by Moscow. It suggests a national outlook that would seek to calculate its interests abroad rationally and reasonably, and make decisions accordingly.

This could be good news, and a desirable result, for Washington. The West and Russia would appear, in objective terms, to share most global interests on matters ranging from nuclear nonproliferation to counterterrorism to shaping China's rise in benign ways. Thus, a Russian strategic perspective that cleared away emotional baggage and allowed a relatively clear-eyed assessment of when and where to cooperate with outside powers should produce a Russia that was easier to deal with. If highly sensitive issues like NATO expansion and missile defense could be managed, this could lead to a world in which the Russian state retained a distinctly different character than Western nations—and one that seemed off-putting and somewhat unappealing to many liberal perspectives—but one too with which core interests could be mutually pursued. It may just be the best we can hope for.

Notes

1. "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, speech by Vladimir Putin, April 25, 2005, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2005/04/25/2031_type70029type82912_87086.shtml.
2. *The Military Balance 1989-1990* (Oxford, England: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1989), pp. 32-37; and *The Military Balance 2014* (Oxfordshire, England: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014), pp. 180-186.
3. "Approval of Vladimir Putin," Levada-Center, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/>.
4. Angela E. Stent, *The Limits of Partnership: U.S.-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 264-265.
5. For one perspective on Russia and Kosovo, see Strobe Talbott, "Vladimir Putin's Role, Yesterday and Today," *The Washington Post*, March 21, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/vladimir-putins-role-yesterday-and-today/2014/03/21/3d2b34c6-af85-11e3-95e8-39bef8e9a48b_story.html; for some of Putin's views on missile defense, U.S. conventional force modernization concepts like prompt global strike, and the broader correlation of forces, see "Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly," speech by Vladimir Putin, December 12, 2013, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/19825>.

6. See Robert M. Gates, "Putin's Challenge to the West," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303725404579460183854574284>.
7. For a similar argument about the importance of the passage of time in Russia, albeit one written before the crises of 2014, see Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia, the Post-Soviet Space, and Challenges to U.S. Policy," in Timothy Colton, Timothy Frye, and Robert Legvold, eds., *The Policy World Meets Academia: Designing U.S. Policy Toward Russia* (Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2010), p. 49.
8. Gudrun Persson, "Security Policy and Military Strategic Thinking," in Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Pallin, eds., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2013* (Stockholm, Sweden: FOI, 2013), p. 72.
9. See James Sherr, *Hard Diplomacy and Soft Coercion: Russia's Influence Abroad* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2013), p. 57.
10. Dmitry Adamsky, "Defense Innovation in Russia: The Current State and Prospects for Revival," *IGCC Defense Innovation Briefs*, University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, January 2014, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0s99052x>.
11. Robert Legvold, "Russian Foreign Policy During Periods of Great State Transformation," in Robert Legvold, ed., *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century and the Shadow of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 109-121.
12. John E. Herbst, William B. Taylor, and Steven Pifer, "When Sanctions Aren't Enough," *Foreign Policy*, March 31, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/31/when-sanctions-arent-enough/>.
13. Stephen J. Blank, "Enter Asia: The Arctic Heats Up," *World Affairs* (March/April 2014), p. 23, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/enter-asia-arctic-heats>
14. Stephen J. Blank, "Introduction," in Stephen J. Blank, ed., *Politics and Economics in Putin's Russia* (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 2013), pp. 1-34; and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, "Statement for the Record: Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community," by James R. Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, January 29, 2014, p. 23, <http://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/testimonies/203-congressional-testimonies-2014/1005-statement-for-the-record-worldwide-threat-assessment-of-the-us-intelligence-community>.
15. Leslie H. Gelb and Dimitri K. Simes, "Beware Collusion of China, Russia," *National Interest* (July/August 2013), pp. 5-10, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/beware-collusion-china-russia-8640>.
16. Marta Carlsson, Johan Norberg, and Fredrik Westerlund, "The Military Capability of Russia's Armed Forces in 2013," in Hedenskog and Pallin, eds., *Russian Military Capability*, pp. 37-39.
17. See Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), *National Defense Budget Estimates, FY 2015* (Office of the Undersecretary of Defense, April 2014), http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2015/FY15_Green_Book.pdf; and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *The Science of War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 15.