

## Is Russia a status quo power?

*Ingmar Oldberg*



## **Executive summary**

This paper examines the issue whether Russian foreign policy since 1991 largely has aimed at preserving status quo in selected regions in the world or rather at revising the existing order. It is concluded that thanks to growing nationalism, coupled with stronger economy and military force, Russia in the late 2000s became more revisionist, especially vis-à-vis the post-Soviet states and Ukraine in particular. On the world scene Russia has become more assertive, openly challenging the present world order seen as dominated by the United States. It has turned more hostile to Europe, challenging the present security system there through the conquest of Crimea in 2014. In the Baltic Sea area, Russia tries to keep Sweden and Finland out of NATO and to boost its influence in the Baltic countries, while it mainly strives to maintain its dominating position in the Barents/Arctic region. In the Middle East Russia has resumed ties with Egypt and intervened militarily in Syria, thus claiming a more prominent role in the region than before. Another question is whether Russia has the capacity to reach its aims.

## **About the author**

Ingmar Oldberg is a research associate at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), where he is a member of the research programme Russia and its Neighbours. He is a long-time specialist on Russian foreign policy and has published a great number of books, book chapters and articles on Russia's global strategy and its relations with the Nordic and Baltic States, Ukraine, Iran and China.

## **Keywords**

Russia, foreign policy, revisionism, Ukraine, Europe, Baltic region, Arctic region, Middle East

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Domestic roots and foreign policy	1
Aims and actions in the CIS region	2
Russia between West and East	4
Russian ambitions in Europe	5
Russian ambitions in the Baltic Sea region	7
Ambitions in the Barents and Arctic regions	9
Russia in the Middle East	11
Conclusions and reflections	13

## **Introduction**

What Russia “is” and “wants” is almost a philosophical question, but the historical record is a good indicator. By giving an overview of Russian foreign policy since 1991, this paper aims to investigate whether Russia has largely aspired to maintain status quo, that is the present situation in world affairs, or rather purported to revise it.<sup>1</sup> Keeping the status quo is often seen as a defensive and peaceful undertaking, allowing for cooperation, but this may also take quite violent forms. Revisionism is here defined as a striving for changing the status quo in a substantial way in its own favour, which may include a return to a former state of affairs, seen as better than the present one. Revisionism sounds aggressive and verges on revanchism. It is a well-known fact that aggressors justify their actions with noble words about correcting an unjust situation, ultimately aiming at peace and cooperation. Inevitably the paper also deals with the issue to what extent Russia has managed to realize its ambitions.

The status quo issue is investigated by scrutinizing Russian foreign policy in selected regions as it has developed since the early 1990s, thus recording changes, turning points as well as reasons for these. It includes both political, military and economic aspects. ‘Russia’ (and other states) in this paper refers to its leaders and officials, and ‘policy’ includes both declared aims and actions performed or sanctioned by the state actors.

As a background the paper first analyses the status quo issue in Russian domestic policy, considering how this to a large extent determines the foreign policy. Secondly it proceeds to examine Russian foreign policy in the surrounding post-Soviet region, which is seen as vital to Russian security. Thirdly, the focus turns to Russia’s policy in the world at large and in relations with European NATO and EU countries, Russia’s most important partners. In the penultimate part, the paper zooms in on two neighbouring regions, the Baltic Sea and the Arctic regions, which are of key interest both to Russia and the Scandinavian countries. Lastly, attention is paid to Russian policy in the turbulent Middle East, where Russia has recently involved itself militarily for the first time in centuries. In the final section, some comparative conclusions and reflections on the future are made.

## **Domestic roots and foreign policy**

After the turbulent 1990s under President Yeltsin, when Russia experienced an economic crisis and political turmoil, the Putin administration has primarily fought to maintain stability and order at home through the concentration of political power and economic growth. Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy gradually became ideological pillars of state power instead of expansionist communism. Western democracy and rule of law were increasingly seen as threats to stability and to President Putin’s control of society, especially when East European and Baltic states formerly under Soviet/Russian control joined NATO and the EU in search of security and prosperity. Russia sees itself as a “sovereign democracy” and a centre of a separate Orthodox civilization, which needs not abide by Western norms and indeed is a model onto itself.<sup>2</sup> Putin characterizes himself as a conservative, relying on traditional values but aimed at development.<sup>3</sup>

Particularly after Putin's reelection as president in 2012, all forms of tangible political opposition were prosecuted, and (supposedly) political NGOs with economic support from the West were labelled foreign agents. The pro-Western revolution in Ukraine, Russia's closest and most important neighbour, in February 2014 was perceived as a direct threat to the Putin regime. Thanks to the state's complete control of mass media, the Russian conquest of Crimea and the backing for the Russian separatists in easternmost Ukraine gained wide-spread popular approval and increased Putin's popularity and power position in the country, while relations with the West sank to the lowest level since Soviet times. Thus aggression abroad may serve to maintain stability at home, at least in the short run.

Other pillars of present-day Russian statehood are the armed forces and the security services, which have steadily expanded ever since Putin took over in 2000, when the Russian economy started to grow as a result of rising world market prices for oil and gas exports. Since 2007 annual military expenditures have more than doubled. Partly, this can be seen as a recovery since the 1990s, when the Soviet Union fell apart and the armed forces were cut by half and fell into decay. This buildup should be viewed in relation to the European states, most of which have gradually reduced their military forces since the end of the Cold War. The Russian security sector nowadays takes the biggest share of the budget and a larger share of the GDP than in the United States despite slowing economic growth, thus maintaining a basis for a revisionist foreign policy. Furthermore, the military buildup, spurred by growing nationalism and anti-Western propaganda and blessed by the Orthodox church, is accompanied by a remilitarization of society. This expresses itself in ever more imposing military parades and celebrations. The Soviet victory in the Second World War is portrayed as Russia's main achievement in its history justifying an assertive foreign policy today.

## **Aims and actions in the CIS region**

When the Soviet Union fell apart in 1991, Russia had to recognize the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the other 14 Soviet republics, but it still tried to maintain and if possible restore most of its former control of them.<sup>4</sup> The countries are viewed as belonging to Russia's strategic sphere of interest. President Putin solemnly declared in 2005 that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the major (*krupneishei*) geopolitical disaster of the former century. Various means have been used to increase control and to keep other powers out of the region. In 1991 the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed with all of them except the three Baltic states. In the economic field, after several attempts at creating common institutions, a more serious Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) modelled on the EU was created in 2015, now encompassing Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. Russia has often used the delivery and price of energy as means to exert and maintain its influence, since most CIS states are dependent on Russia in this important regard.

In the military field a Collective Security Treaty was signed in 1992 and turned into an organisation in 2002 (CSTO) on the model of NATO, now including Russia, Belarus,

Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This entails Russian military bases, arms export, joint forces and exercises. In the 1990s Russia supported the Tajik government in its civil war against the perceived Islamist threat, as well as Armenia in its war with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. By its sheer size Russia dominates the above organisations and all members are more or less authoritarian and depend on Russia for the maintenance of order and stability.

At the same time, all the CIS states want to become more independent from Russia and to different degrees seek balancing support from the West, even authoritarian ones like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Belarus. In 1997 Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova created a more Western-friendly grouping (GUUAM after the state initials) within the CIS. In 2009 these states (except Uzbekistan but plus Belarus) joined the Eastern Partnership programme, which aimed at more economic and political integration with the EU. Georgia and Ukraine had their democratic so-called Rose and Orange Revolutions in 2003 and 2004, respectively, and intensified efforts to join NATO.

Russia saw this as threats to both its internal stability and its security ambitions and resorted to violent measures. It used its military bases and/or “peacekeepers” in the separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, Crimea in Ukraine and Transnistria in Moldova as means of pressure against the central governments, and supported them economically and politically. When President Mikheil Saakashvili in August 2008 tried to restore central control of South Ossetia, Russia intervened and after a short war established both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in alliance with Russia. Russia here referred to the model of Kosovo, whose independence from Serbia had been recognized by the UN but been opposed according to the principles of territorial integrity and non-violence. Not even the CIS states recognized the new “states”.

This story was repeated on a larger scale in Ukraine in February 2014. The relatively pro-Russian and corrupt President Viktor Yanukovich, who had reneged on an Association Agreement with the EU, faced a mounting wave of opposition (often called Euro-Maidan). Finally he fled the country and the motley pro-Western opposition under new President Petro Poroshenko took power. Russian propaganda denounced this as a ‘fascist coup’, which might result in NATO taking over Russia’s naval base in Sevastopol. The Russian forces there together with local separatists quickly took control of the whole peninsula. After a staged referendum Crimea and Sevastopol then declared independence and were incorporated into the Russian Federation.

On top of this Russia fomented a rebellion against Kiev in Eastern Ukraine by supplying the local separatists with ‘advisors’, heavy weapons and special forces, At the same time strong armed forces held exercises close to the Ukrainian borders. The creation of “people’s republics” in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions has subsequently been used by Moscow to pressure the Kiev government into accepting federalization and neutrality status for the country. Instead, the Ukrainian government signed the Association Agreement with the EU and called for NATO membership. The failure to defeat the separatists by force in the summer

of 2014 has meant that the easternmost part of Ukraine now remains out of control from Kiev and is totally dependent on Russian assistance. A shaky cease-fire remains to this day with no solution in sight.

No less alarming is the fact that Russian foreign policy, spurred by the rising tide of nationalism, at least since the 2000s has included an ambition to protect Russian citizens and “compatriots” abroad. This mainly concerns post-Soviet states, where most Russian minorities live. Russia has thus supported these with financial means, through mass media and distribution of Russian passports.<sup>5</sup> The threat of “genocide” against Russians and the right of national self-determination were for the first time used as pretexts for the military intervention in Georgia in 2008. The “coup” in Kiev was claimed to threaten the Russian-speakers in Ukraine, especially in Crimea, where they constitute the majority, with forcible assimilation and even danger of life. Russia demanded that Russian should be declared as an official language beside Ukrainian even though or precisely because Russian probably still is the most widely spoken language. The right of self-determination (which had earlier been denied to Chechnya) was used to justify the armed intervention in Crimea and the support for the Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>

Russia’s ambition to limit the right of new post-Soviet states freely to choose allies, its will to protect Russians abroad, and its application of force clearly infringe upon the universal principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful means, which Russia in the past had recognized in several treaties and agreements. These Russian statements and actions must therefore be seen as obvious attempts to revise the status quo and increase Russian power in the CIS region. They cannot be explained away by growing US expansionism in the last several years.

## **Russia between West and East**

When the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union fell apart, Russian troops left Central Europe and the Baltic states, and military bases farther afield were dismantled. Instead Russia started to contribute more to UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions, for instance in ex-Yugoslavia and Africa. It supported the UN and NATO military involvement in Afghanistan since 2001, agreed to form the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in 2002 for cooperation on an equal footing against terrorism and for arms control, and participated in exercises with NATO. Russia joined (was admitted to) the G7 group of industrial states in 1997, the G20 in 2008 and the World Trade Organisation in 2011.

At the same time, Russia always emphasizes that it is and will remain a great power and strongly defends its position as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council with a veto power concerning the use of military power. Russia (and China) used this as a means to try and stop the NATO intervention in Serbia regarding Kosovo in 1999 as well as the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Russia helped to prevent UN sanctions for example against the dictatorships in Zimbabwe and North Korea, against genocide in the Darfur

province of Sudan and the Iranian nuclear programme, at the same time as it exported weapons to these (and many other) states.

Furthermore, since the 1990s Russia has opposed the allegedly monopolar world dominated by the United States and advocated multipolarity. As it regained political, economic and military strength, it demanded more influence and respect in world politics.<sup>7</sup> In the latest foreign policy concept of 2013 Russia is described as “one of the influential and competitive poles in the modern world” promoting “a just and democratic system of international relations based on collective decision-making”. Western economic and political dominance is said to diminish, and global power more dispersed and shifting to the East. Russia is aware of its “special responsibility for maintaining security ...both on the global and regional levels”.<sup>8</sup>

Partly as a way to safeguard its security, partly as a counterweight to relations with the USA and NATO, Russia since the 1990s has improved relations with China. This led to a “strategic partnership” in 1996 and a friendship and cooperation treaty five years later, which entailed settlement of border issues, increased trade, specifically Russian arms export, and a common stance against US domination. As relations with the West impaired from the 2000s, joint military exercises were held and major energy deals reached, for example on a gas pipeline in 2014.<sup>9</sup> Together with China, Russia and four Central Asian states created the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001, which aims to strengthen mutual security, fight terrorism and separatism, promote trade and, in practice, to resist Western-type democratic changes.<sup>10</sup>

However, Russia has lost its position as the leading trade partner in Central Asia to China in recent years and is wary of becoming dependent on the Chinese giant, nowadays second only to the USA. Russia has long sought to establish a tripartite cooperation including India, an old friend of Russia. India and Pakistan are now moving from observer to membership status in the SCO, but both China and Pakistan have conflicts with India. As a counterweight to Western-dominated economic organisations Russia, China, India, Brazil and South Africa have also formed the BRICS “alliance”, which *inter alia* has decided to form a common banking system.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, Russia is dissatisfied with the present world order seen as dominated by the USA and tries to create a new one together with like-minded countries like China. As leader of post-Soviet organisations Russia gets prestige and power also on the global arena, but its recent violation of territorial integrity and promotion of ethnic separatism in Georgia and Ukraine have damaged its international standing even among its friends.

## **Russian ambitions in Europe**

As mentioned Russia in the 1990s started to cooperate with NATO. Moreover, as Russia became a (wild) market economy, it increased trade with EU states and became very reliant on energy exports to certain EU members. A partnership cooperation agreement with the EU was signed, a joint council formed and fields of cooperation delineated. In 2010 Russia



concluded a partnership for modernization (of Russia) with the EU.<sup>12</sup> It joined the Council of Europe in 1996 and has stayed there despite being condemned for the Chechen wars and the suppression of democracy and human rights. These steps can be seen as Russian recognition of a status quo situation with growing cooperation.

However, there were opposite tendencies. When several ex-Communist allies in Europe in the 1990s prepared to join NATO, Russia opposed this, while calling for NATO's dissolution like the Warsaw Pact was disbanded. Instead it advocated the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), in which all European states are members and have equal rights, as a common security forum. However, this failed. While the Western states started to use the OSCE to promote democracy in post-Soviet states, Russia wished it to concentrate on security issues. In 2007 Russia suspended its adherence to the treaty on limiting conventional weapons in Europe (CFE), one of the main achievements of the OSCE's precursor, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) founded by the Helsinki Final Act in 1975.

In 2008 President Medvedev launched the idea of a new European Security Treaty, which since then has become a centerpiece in Russian foreign policy. According to the draft treaty, the parties to it "should not undertake, participate in or support any actions significantly affecting the security of any other party, nor allow the use of its territory or any other party with the purpose of preparing or carrying out an armed attack against any other party".<sup>13</sup> The treaty was to be legally binding and apply to NATO's Eastern enlargement and the deployment of US missile defence in Europe. No mention was made of democracy or human rights as in the Helsinki Accord. Many Western states saw the proposal as revising the Helsinki Final Act and as an attempt to increase Russian influence in Europe. No sooner had Russia launched the idea than it violated it by intervening first in Georgia and creating two rump republics, then on a much larger scale by attacking Ukraine in 2014. The latter breach of trust induced the Western states to suspend Russian participation in the G8 and the NRC and resulted in mutual sanctions. It became the deepest crisis in Russian relations with the West since the Cold War.

Proceeding from the political to the military sphere, Russian efforts to undermine US hegemony and stop NATO from expanding into what was conceived as Russia's sphere of interest was accompanied by a more offensive military posture, based on growing capability. Already in 2007 the Soviet practice of patrols with strategic bombers over the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Arctic was resumed. The Northern Fleet started exercises in the Atlantic, and the Black Sea Fleet was tasked also to patrol the Mediterranean: After the conquest of Crimea the latter fleet acquired more resources and is now in a position to dominate the Black Sea as in Soviet times. Russia also resorted to nuclear threats against NATO countries. The downing of a Malaysian passenger plane with almost 300 passengers, mostly Dutch, over the separatist part of Ukraine in July 2014 greatly exacerbated Russian relations with Europe.

In the economic field Russia was also dissatisfied with the EU. It wanted to be treated as an equal partner even though its economy is much smaller and did not want to adapt to EU

norms and standards. Another problem is that the EU overlaps with NATO, which is seen as dominated by the USA and containing ex-Communist states highly suspicious of Russian intentions. Russia therefore staked on cooperation with the great EU powers, Germany, France and Italy, which generally were more friendly to Russia. When the EU started to reduce its dependence on Russian energy by liberalizing the market, introducing alternative forms of energy and other producers, Russia opposed this and decided to rely more on the Chinese market.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Russia opposed the EU's Eastern Partnership Programme with six neighbouring states, especially concerning Ukraine. When Russia took to arms against Ukraine, the EU responded by imposing economic and political sanctions, to which Russia retaliated with an embargo on foodstuff imports from the involved states and a policy of import substitution. Russia viewed its own intervention in Ukraine as a defence of the Russian sphere of influence, while the EU argued that it was up to Ukraine as an independent country to decide which way to go.

Finally, Russia has met the appeal of Western/European democracies not only with more repression and restrictions at home, but also with an information campaign abroad, which has been greatly intensified in connection with the war in Ukraine. "Soft power" was already mentioned in Putin's foreign policy concept of 2013 as a means along with diplomacy to increase Russia's authority in the world. Besides promoting the Russian language and culture, it aims to improve the Russian image abroad and present an alternative to Western media. To this end, many institutions and organisations have been created, including mass media such as the news agency Sputnik and the television channel RT (formerly Russia Today). The latter is now present in at least 30 countries and broadcasting in many languages.<sup>15</sup> Russia has also developed contacts with radical left and rightist groups in Europe, for instance the Front National in France, fomenting their hostility to the USA, the EU and exploiting the acute refugee crisis.

In sum, Russia's European policy has become more ambitious in recent years. In the Russian view, this is mainly defensive, but due to the increasingly hostile propaganda against Europe, not least regarding democracy, human rights and moral values, in combination with the increase of military activities, its policy must be regarded as overall revisionist, aiming to restore its influence in the direction of the situation in the Soviet days.

### **Russian ambitions in the Baltic Sea region**

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, Russia lost its dominant military position in the Baltic Sea region. The Baltic Sea Fleet was drastically reduced in the 1990s, and Kaliningrad became an isolated exclave. Russia accepted the independence of the three Baltic states, their joining NATO and the EU in 2004, albeit very reluctantly, and signed border and other agreements with them. Together with them Russia joined the Council of Baltic Sea States (1992) and other organisations of cooperation around the Baltic Sea. Its foreign trade across the Sea increased, in particular energy exports. The Kaliningrad region

increased trade with neighbouring EU states and benefitted from agreements on transit through Lithuania and a visa-free regime with Polish border regions (2011).<sup>16</sup>

When the Baltic states took steps to reduce their economic dependence on Russia, especially in the energy sector, Russia tried to maintain it, at the same time reducing its own dependence on transit by building new ports in the Gulf of Finland and the Nord Stream gas pipelines across the Baltic Sea to Germany. In defiance of the EU energy strategy Russia now wants to build a Nord Stream 2, mainly with German assistance, in order to replace transit through Ukraine. Russia has further nurtured its good relations with Finland, and it temporarily bettered those with Sweden after the latter had approved of the first Nordstream pipelines crossing its economic zone in 2009.

However, there are signs of Russian ambitions to change status quo also in this region since the 2000s. Russian military exercises in and around Kaliningrad grew in size and numbers. Missile and radar bases were installed there, including nuclear-capable Iskander missiles, allegedly in response to US/NATO plans to build a missile defence system in Europe. The Russian aggression against Georgia and especially Ukraine in 2014 added to the fears in whole Baltic Sea region. As the Baltic states called for strengthened NATO presence in the region, NATO air patrols were reinforced, more exercises were held and the USA placed small ground forces in each of the Baltic states and Poland. Sweden and Finland also stepped up cooperation with NATO, including exercises, joint forces and basing agreements, and their internal discussion about joining NATO intensified.

Russia reacted by stepping up its exercises in the Baltic Sea, by more violations of foreign airspace and waters, as well as hostile behaviour against civilian ships and aircraft in and over international waters. Little difference was made between NATO and non-aligned states. Sweden and Finland were warned that if they joined NATO, Russia would take “appropriate measures”. Preventing more NATO presence in the region and keeping Sweden and Finland out of NATO thus were primary Russian objectives, which can be seen as preservation of status quo, but this was combined with threats and hostile actions and meant limiting the free choice of sovereign states outside the CIS. This in turn can justifiably be seen as efforts to move forward and increase Russian influence in the region.

Russia further kept the territorial issue with Estonia open by lingering with the ratification of the border treaty signed in early 2014. Two days after President Obama visited Tallinn in September 2014, reaffirming the NATO pledge to guarantee the security of the Baltic countries, an Estonian officer was kidnapped across the border and sentenced for illegally crossing the border. He was later exchanged for Russian spies, but the event induced Estonia to decide (like Latvia) to erect a fence all along its border with Russia, officially in reference to illegal immigration. Russia protested arguing that as long as there is no ratified border, such a unilateral step has no juridical validity.<sup>17</sup>

In connection with the war in Ukraine Russia has further intensified efforts to win support and change the status quo in the Baltic and Nordic states and Poland by subversive activities,

cyber and information warfare, to which they are vulnerable, open democracies well-known to Russia as they are.<sup>18</sup> Estonia was exposed to a cyber-attack already in 2007 in connection with local Russians rioting against the removal of a Second World War monument.

Moreover, the three Baltic countries (as post-Soviet states) are primary targets of the above-mentioned Russian ambition to “protect” Russian citizens and compatriots abroad. In Estonia about 25 per cent identify themselves as Russian, in Latvia about 27 per cent and still more people are Russian-speaking. Most of them are now citizens, but in Latvia still about 300 000 have aliens’ passports. In Estonia about 100 000 persons are citizens of Russia, which grants them Russian pensions, visa-freedom and access to universities etc., thereby maintaining some links with Russia. In Lithuania the Russians are fewer than the Poles (5.8 and 7 per cent respectively), but the latter also speak Russian and cooperate with Russian organisations.

Ever since the 1990s Russia has accused the Estonian and Latvian governments of discrimination against the Russian inhabitants regarding citizenship, language and schools, first as a means to hinder their NATO and EU membership, then generally to undermine their legitimacy. Russia-friendly parties are of course propped up. In September 2014 the Russian Foreign Ministry threatened that it would not “tolerate the creeping offensive against the Russian language” in the region and promised “the most serious support” of the Russians living there. Through organisations like *Russkii Mir* and *Rossotrudnichestvo* Russia promotes its culture and defends its foreign policy in the region. The Russian TV channel *Pervyi Baltiiskii Kanal* captures wide audiences among the Russian-speakers. Also the Russian Orthodox Church is active among the Orthodox in the region. In the economic field, Russia has, besides trying to maintain its positions, tried to use its dominating position regarding oil and gas for political purposes through cut-offs and high prices.<sup>19</sup> The ultimate aim of these efforts apparently is to increase Russia’s influence in the Baltic states at the expense of their NATO and EU allies. Also here the Russian efforts may prove to backfire.

## **Ambitions in the Barents and Arctic regions**

Being the country with the longest coastline, the biggest population, the richest resources and the most extensive infrastructure in the Arctic, particularly in the (western) Barents region, Russia has a special interest in preserving its positions there. In contrast to the Baltic Sea region, no geopolitical changes have taken place there since Soviet times, but climate change and the shrinking ice cover are making the region more accessible for exploitation and transport. Since 2008 Russia has launched several plans, programmes and doctrines emphasizing the importance of the Arctic to Russia and the need to develop it.

The borders to the West were opened in 1991, and Russia joined the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) with the five Nordic states in 1992 and the Arctic Council (AC), also including the United States and Canada, in 1996. As an equal partner it has participated in these councils on economic, social, environmental and minority issues and signed binding international agreements on civil-military cooperation regarding joint search and rescue (AC 2011) and marine oil pollution preparedness and response (AC 2013).<sup>20</sup> After 40 years of

tough negotiations Russia in 2010 signed an agreement with Norway on delimiting the economic zones in the Barents region. It invited Western and Asian companies to use the Northern Sea Route from Barents Sea to East Asia and to help explore and exploit its rich oil and gas resources, for which the technological and financial resources were lacking.

In the military field, the forces and bases in the Arctic as elsewhere shrank significantly in the 1990s, inclusive of the Northern Fleet, Russia's biggest naval force and the only real one in the whole Arctic. Most forces were located on the Kola peninsula and represented a main asset in the strategic balance vis-à-vis NATO/USA. However, referring to the allegedly growing NATO threat in the region and backed by Russia's economic recovery, the reductions were in the 2000s stopped and replaced by modernisation, ambitious plans for a naval buildup, new bases and more and bigger exercises in the 2010s. The strategic airforce and the Fleet extended their activities to the Atlantic. In 2011 a decision was taken to establish two new Arctic brigades near the Finnish and Norwegian borders. In 2015 the aircraft carrier Kuznetsov was prepared to leave for Syria.<sup>21</sup> This buildup can be seen as returning to the *status quo ante* of Soviet times and was perceived as a growing threat in the neighbouring states, which had been disarming. However, most of it occurred on Russian territory and was connected with global strategy and problems. Some buildup plans in the Arctic may even be scrapped due to worsening economic situation since 2014 and diversion of assets to Crimea.

Russia also became more assertive on border issues. Since 2001 it claims 1.2 million square kilometers of the Arctic Ocean up to the North Pole, which is seen as a prolongation of the Siberian continental shelf. To mark the claim, a Russian submarine in 2007 placed a flag at the Pole 4,000 meters down, and in 2015 the claim was officially submitted to a UN Committee, based on investigations of the ocean floor.

Russia accepts the Svalbard Treaties of 1920, which means Norwegian sovereignty but allows signatory states to conduct economic activities. Russia is the only state except Norway to run a coal mine there (at Barentsburg). Claiming Svalbard is also a demilitarized zone, Russia criticizes NATO for violating this. Russia further disputes the Norwegian claim to a 200 nautical miles economic zone around Spitsbergen and its introduction of a restricted fishing zone, which has led to several incidents with the Norwegian coastguard, for instance in 2011, and diplomatic protests. In 2013 Russia seized a Greenpeace ship in international waters after the activists had protested against oil drilling in the Arctic by scaling a Russian oil rig. 30 people were arrested but later released after the International Tribunal of the Sea had ruled in their favour. In late 2015 problems occurred at the Norwegian land border, where Russia let hundreds of refugees from Syria and other states, some of whom had been in Russia for years, pass over without visas. (This also happened at the Russian-Finnish border.)

However, the Arctic differs from most other regions in that Russia, already possessing the dominant position, on the whole has stayed within its rights and expressly stakes on good neighbourliness and economic cooperation so as to develop the vast resources. Concerning its territorial claim Russia adheres to the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea and pledges it

will accept the verdict, though it may take time and require bilateral negotiations with other claimants. Cooperation in the Barents and Arctic Councils continues on the whole as usual despite tension between Russia and the rest concerning Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere.

## **Russia in the Middle East**

After 1991 Russia scaled down its support for anti-Western, socialist Arab regimes in the Middle East like Algeria and Libya. As its economy picked up in the 2000s, Russia instead focused on economic profit through weapons export and by energy cooperation, including with conservative Muslim countries like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. In 1991 the Soviet Union/Russia resumed diplomatic ties with Israel and more than one million Jews immigrated to Israel, so that Russian became the third most spoken language there. Trade and tourism expanded between Russia and Israel, partly as a result of a visa-free agreement in 2008. Russia became one of the main oil exporters to Israel, and Israel a major exporter of military drones to Russia. Russia also advocated a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and in 2001 formed the so-called Quartet with the USA, the UN and the EU to mediate in this conflict.

At the same time Russia hung on to its old allies Iraq, Syria and Libya with arms exports and energy cooperation. However, in 2003 its ties with Iraq, a major arms customer and energy partner, were broken as a result of the US-led invasion and the subsequent occupation until 2011.<sup>22</sup> In the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 Russia also lost its ties with Libya, its most important arms export customer in the region at the time, when insurgents toppled the Gaddafi regime in conjunction with NATO air assaults. President Medvedev did not veto the imposition of no-fly zone in the UN Security Council, but Putin soon lambasted NATO for illegally abusing it.<sup>23</sup>

However, Russia also took steps to reinforce its positions in the Middle East, partly exploiting the surging popular anti-Americanism in the region. It became an observer in the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (2005) and the Arab League (on the strength of the Muslim minority groups in Russia). The Foreign Policy Concept of 2008 mentioned the region as strategically important for Russia's national interests, and the Concept of 2013 promised to promote the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction and their delivery means in the Middle East, which mainly would affect Israel.<sup>24</sup>

The demise of the so-called Arab Spring gave Russia fresh opportunities to strengthen its positions in the Middle East. This was the case with Egypt, the most important Arab state, which had been an ally in Soviet days. When the Muslim Brotherhood regime was ousted by General al-Sisi's military regime in 2013, this impaired Egyptian relations with its main sponsor, the USA, and improved those with Russia. Agreements were reached on trade and investments in Egypt, including a nuclear power plant as well as military cooperation. In October 2015 Egypt decided to buy (mainly with Saudi money) the Russian equipment for the two Mistral helicopter carriers, which it previously had bought from France after EU

sanctions had stopped the sale of the carriers to Russia on account of Crimea.<sup>25</sup> In 2015 Russian tourists became the most numerous ones in Egypt, but this stopped when a Russian passenger plane was blown up over Sinai by a bomb, presumably planted by IS terrorists.

Russia further improved its relations with the Shia Muslim republic of Iran, which after the Khomeini revolution in 1979 had broken off its ties with the United States and was isolated by Western sanctions on account of its nuclear programme, the suspicion being that the aim was to produce nuclear weapons. Russia developed cooperation in the energy field and exported modern weapons systems to Iran, which became one of its best customers. It contributed to the Iranian nuclear programme, for example by constructing its first reaction plant at Bushehr, opposed international sanctions on Iran in the UN Security Council, and criticized US (and Israeli) threats to stop the programme by force. Iran was called a strategic ally, was invited to join the military CSTO organization. It became an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and a key partner of the Eurasian Union in the Middle East.

However, when Iran was revealed to have withheld information on its nuclear programme and continued uranium enrichment, also Russia was worried. It halted arms deliveries and partook in sanctions against Iran and in UN Security Council negotiations with Iran.<sup>26</sup> These finally led to an agreement in July 2015, according to which Iran vowed to reduce its nuclear programme under IAEA supervision, in return receiving relief from Western sanctions. This in turn allowed Russia to resume the export of air defence missiles and nuclear technology to Iran.

Russia's closest ally in the Middle East since Soviet times is Syria. It has extensive trade with Syria, not least arms export, and retains a naval base at Tartus, its only one on the Mediterranean. When the Arab Spring reached Syria and the civil war broke out in 2011, Russia, like Iran, supported the Alawite (Shia-related) President Bashar al-Assad and vetoed all UN resolutions aimed at his removal, when he brutally suppressed the opposition and caused millions of people to leave their homes.<sup>27</sup> In 2013, as the United States threatened to attack Syria because of its use of chemical weapons against the rebels, Russia suggested and won approval for a UN mission to remove and destroy these weapons, thereby averting the attack.

When the Sunni rebel groups, most notably the Islamic State (IS or Daesh ) then advanced and in 2015 seemed close to take Damascus, Russia stepped into the war to save al-Assad's regime— for the first time intervening militarily outside the former Soviet sphere since the Afghan war, thus emulating the controversial US example. Russia sent major battleships to the Tartus naval base, established an airbase at Latakia and in late September started to bomb nearby areas held by “terrorists”. Also long-distant missiles in the Caspian Sea were set in. In cooperation with Syria and Iran, the Russian General Staff established an information and security centre in Bagdad, and was allowed to fly to Syria across Iraq.<sup>28</sup> At the same time President Putin called for a broad coalition with the Western states against the IS, and Russia participated in conferences with Western states on ending the war in Syria.<sup>29</sup> Besides saving

al-Assad, Russia apparently aspired to an important role in solving this conflict and break out its diplomatic isolation in Europe. Another reason for the Russian involvement was the fact that many IS fighters also hark from Russia and Central Asia, representing a threat, if they go home.<sup>30</sup>

The crux of the matter was that the Western states already had a coalition with Sunni Arab states and were fighting and bombing the IS both in Iraq and Syria. They insisted on the removal of al-Assad, sooner or later, on account of his responsibility for the enormous destruction and bloodshed wrought on his own people. Russia on the contrary wanted to defend a legal president against “terrorists” in cooperation with Iran and Shia units from other states, clearly aiming at achieving a military victory.

Furthermore, Russian bombing mainly targeted enemies of al-Assad backed by the US or Turkey rather than the IS. This finally led to a clash with Turkey in November 2015 after Russian aircraft had violated its airspace and bombed Turkmen villages in Syria. When Turkey shot down a Russian attack aircraft, Russia responded sharply by demanding an excuse and imposing broad economic sanctions, including a stop for Russian tourism and visa-freedom for Turkey, by intensifying its war effort and supporting the Kurds in Syria, Turkey’s main headache. Thus while assuming a greater, military role in Syria and the Middle East, as the democratic Arab Spring receded, Russia’s good relations with Turkey, a very important neighbor and trading partner, were harmed. However, only time will show whether Russia will be able to maintain, enlarge or lose its foothold in Syria.

## **Conclusions and reflections**

The above exposé shows that in Russian foreign policy (like that of other big powers) , the aims of preserving the status quo of a given time and of improving/revising it are most often mixed to different degrees, depending on regions and issues, and shifting over time. The domestic policy of preserving political stability and Putin’s political regime are combined with or even promoted by an activist or aggressive foreign policy, aiming at increasing Russian influence and revising the present world order.

Yet, this is no strict rule and may hinge on economic capacity. In the turbulent 1990s, when Yeltsin both sought to reform Russia and restore order after the Soviet collapse, Russia had little capacity and ambition to change the world order, but rather wanted to join it. Since the second half of the 2000s a tendency to a more revisionist foreign policy can be discerned, which in 2014 culminated in the conquest of Crimea. Now it remains to be seen, to what extent Putin will retain his popularity and support for costly military engagements abroad, especially in Ukraine and Syria, if the Russian economy continues to sag and these engagements drag on with little success. But the regime may last long through propaganda and repression. Throughout history the Russian people has repeatedly endured hardship and sacrificed bread for glory.



Comparing Russian policy in different arenas, one must conclude that revisionism has been especially evident with regard to the other independent post-Soviet states. Most remarkably, Russia has resorted to military force, changed borders and supported separatists vis-à-vis its closest and most important neighbour Ukraine, in the process infringing on international principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act adopted by the Soviet Union. A deep rift between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples has emerged.

On the world scene, Russia continues to proclaim itself as a great, if not a world, power also after the Soviet collapse and strongly defends its position as one of the five veto powers in the UN Security Council. At the same time it opposes the allegedly monopolar world dominated by the United States and demands more influence and respect. In order to do so it seeks support from China and other great powers with similar interests. Russia thus wants to revise the world order in its favour, but another matter is to what extent it has the strength and authority to do much about it in practice. Other nations such as China seem to have a stronger claim.

With regard to Europe, Russia in the 1990s seemed to accept status quo and established good relations with the EU and NATO. However, when several post-Communist states decided to join NATO and the EU, Russia became more hostile and in 2008 launched the idea of a new European Security Treaty. Most European states rejected it, since it aimed to give Russia a legal means to prevent further NATO enlargement and seemed to revise the Helsinki Act. In the same year Russia violated the Helsinki principles on sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-violence by invading Georgia. Even more serious was the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, which led to the worst crisis in Russian relations with Europe since the Cold War.

Fear of Russian ambitions was also fomented by its military buildup and exercises, while most European states reduced their forces. Russia further launched an information campaign, aimed at defending Russian foreign policy and attacking Western democracy, human rights and moral standards. Different from Soviet times, Russian politicians forged ties with radical rightist groups in Europe, who were hostile towards the USA, NATO and the EU and who opposed the massive flow of refugees and immigrants. European weakness and splits were exploited to increase Russian influence.

A variation of this theme can be discerned on a smaller scale in the Baltic Sea region. While Russia in the 1990s lost its dominating military position here and accepted the independence of the three Baltic countries, in the 2000s, partly as a reflection of growing tension with NATO, it started to rebuild its military force. The Russian aggression in Ukraine induced the Baltic states and Poland to call for NATO reinforcements and intensified the discussion on joining NATO in Sweden and Finland. Russia reacted by holding more exercises in the Baltic Sea, and violated foreign airspace and waters, whereby little difference was made between NATO and non-aligned states. True, the opposition to more NATO presence and to NATO enlargement in the region can be seen as an ambition to preserve the status quo. But this is combined with military buildup, threats and hostile actions. This must

be seen as efforts to increase Russian power over sovereign states outside the proclaimed sphere of interest in the CIS region.

This is particularly evident with respect to the three small Baltic states. Russia keeps the border issue vis-à-vis Estonia open, and the countries are quite exposed to Russian subversion, cyber and information warfare. Russia has stepped up its support for the large Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia while accusing the governments of discriminating against them.

By contrast, in the Arctic and Barents region, Russia mainly conducts a status quo policy, since it already has a dominating and unchallenged position there. Even if the military forces are superior and expanding, sea incidents have taken place, and extensive claims are made on sea territory, Russia makes strong pledges to abide by international law here and engages in and invites international cooperation to develop trade and energy resource exploitation. Whereas Western powers and companies have become less interested in such cooperation due to the Ukrainian crisis and sinking energy prices, China remains an interested partner in the Arctic region.

Regarding the turbulent Middle East, Russia in the 1990s accepted to restore relations with Israel and began to cooperate with even the most conservative Arab nations. It lost its old allies Iraq and Libya as a result of US and NATO interventions, but it improved relations with the Shia republic of Iran, a state isolated by the West due to its nuclear programme.

The demise of the Arab Spring so cherished by Western democracies offered Russia fresh opportunities in Egypt, when the military returned to power there. Russia further strengthened its ties with its closest ally Syria. Together with Iran, in the first place, it defended President al-Assad in the bloody civil war against various opposition groups, while Western states wanted to remove him. When al-Assad's regime seemed threatened, Russia intervened with military action unseen outside the Soviet bloc since the war in Afghanistan and called for a coalition with Western states against "terrorists", obviously aspiring for an important role.

However, the Russian air forces more targeted opposition groups supported by the West than the Islamic State, the declared main enemy. When a Russian aircraft violated Turkish airspace, it was shot down, whereupon Russia imposed far-reaching economic sanctions on Turkey. In assuming a key military role in Syria, Russia thus sacrificed its hitherto good relations with a more important neighbour.

To conclude, Russian foreign policy in most of the regions under review has become mainly revisionist, posing a challenge especially to the surrounding states. The military conquest of Crimea, which seems irrevocable, epitomized this tendency and had serious repercussions in relations with a number of states. Partly this revisionism stems from internal factors, partly from an ambition to seize on opportunities or events such as the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 and the military return to power in Egypt or the war in Syria. When Russia in some cases appears to defend status quo, as with regard to Sweden and Finland regarding NATO membership, it often does so in counterproductive ways, actually pushing these states closer to NATO. The strategic aim of Russia's status quo policy is naturally to defend positions

where it is strong as in the Arctic, and the aim of revisionist policy is to increase influence in important regions such as the CIS, where it has the ability to do so and when opportunities arise. The mix in each case is managed by pragmatic choices. Results cannot be foreseen. Sometimes, there is an unexpected windfall as with Egypt, sometimes clashes of interests occur as Russia's choice between Syria and Turkey. The big dilemma for Russia, however, is whether it will persist in trying to challenge European neighbours and the United States with high ambitions and surprise actions or return to a more cooperative policy in a status quo mode.

## Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> See Ingmar Oldberg, *Russia's Great Power Strategy under Putin and Medvedev*, UI Occasional paper, no 1, 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> Oldberg, *Huntington's "Clash of Civilisations" and Russia*, UI Brief, no. 1, April 2004, p. 3.
- <sup>3</sup> Leonid Polyakov, "Conservatism" in *Russia: political tool or historical choice?*, Russie, Nei.Visions No. 90, quote on p. 6, December 2015, [www.ifri.org](http://www.ifri.org), retrieved 12 Jan. 2016.
- <sup>4</sup> For this section, see chapters in S. Frederick Starr, Svante E. Cornell (eds.), *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, Washington D.C, Stockholm-Nacka 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> Mike Winnerstig, *Tools of Destabilization, Russian Soft Power and Non-military Influence in the Baltic States*, FOI, December 2014.
- <sup>6</sup> See also Oldberg, "Anschluss 1938 och 2014. Likheter och skillnader", *Östbulletinen*, no. 2, 1014, pp. 3-7, [www.sallskapet.org](http://www.sallskapet.org).
- <sup>7</sup> Kaczmarek, *op. cit.* pp. 49 ff. He considers Russian foreign policy as revisionist since Putin's Munich speech in February 2007.
- <sup>8</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", *Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 12 February 2013, [www.mid.ru](http://www.mid.ru), retrieved 11 Dec. 2013. Compare with 2008 concept in Oldberg (2010) pp. 2-3.
- <sup>9</sup> Märta Carlsson, Susanne Oxenstierna and Mikael Weissman, *China and Russia – A Study on Cooperation, Competition and Distrust*, FOI, June 2015, pp. 13 ff, 56 ff.
- <sup>10</sup> More on this in Oldberg, *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Powerhouse or Paper Tiger?* FOI, Stockholm, pp. 13 ff.
- <sup>11</sup> Russian relations with Japan, another Asian giant, are tense, because Japan is allied with the USA and raises claims on four Kuril islands, which the Soviet Union took over in 1945.
- <sup>12</sup> More on this in Anke Schmidt-Felzmann, "The EU's relations with Russia: off balance and beyond repair?" In Bakardieva, Engelbrekt, Kjell et al. (eds.) *The EU's Role in Fighting Global Imbalances*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar 2015, pp. 208 ff.
- <sup>13</sup> "The draft of the European Security Treaty", 29 November 2009, *President of Russia*, [www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152](http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152), retrieved 4 November 2015.
- <sup>14</sup> More on this in Schmidt-Felzmann, pp. 212 ff.
- <sup>15</sup> See Winnerstig (2014), especially Gudrun Persson's chapter, pp. 17 ff.
- <sup>16</sup> Oldberg, *Kaliningrad's difficult plight between Moscow and Europe*, UI Papers, no. 2, 2015.
- <sup>17</sup> Elena Chernenko, Viktor Khamraev, "V estonskom zabore ne khvataet storony", *Kommersant*, 1 Sept. 2015; Iuliia Latynina, "Zakhvat zalozhnikov v ramkakh gibridnoi voyny", *Novaia gazeta*, 31 Aug 2015. See also Oldberg, "Rysk-baltiska gränskonflikter och historiens betydelse", in Johan Dietsch et al. (eds.) *Historia mot strömmen. Kultur och konflikt i det moderna Europa*, Carlssons, Stockholm 2007.

- <sup>18</sup> Winnerstig (ed.), passim, Matthew Czeka, "Russia's hybrid war against Poland", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, volume 12:80, 29 September 2015, [www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org), retrieved 5 May 2015.
- <sup>19</sup> Winnerstig (ed.) 65 ff, 199 ff.
- <sup>20</sup> Oldberg, *The role of Russia in Regional Councils. A Comparative Study of Neighbourhood Cooperation in the Baltic Sea and Barents Euro-Arctic Regions*. Institute of International Affairs (Reykjavik), 2014.
- <sup>21</sup> Valery Konyshchev and Alexander Sergunin, "Is Russia a revisionist power in the Arctic?", *Defense & Security Analysis*, 2014, pp. 1 ff.; Märta Carlsson & Niklas Granholm, *Russia and the Arctic. Analysis and Discussion of Russian Strategies*, FOI, March 2013, 26 ff.; "Avianosets "Admiral Kuznetsov" vosstanovil boesposobnost", *Tass* 13 Oct. 2015.
- <sup>22</sup> Oldberg, "Ryska lärdomar av Irakkriget", *Internationella studier*, no. 4, 2003, pp. 25 ff.
- <sup>23</sup> Margarete Klein, *Russia and the Arab Spring*, SWP Comments, no 3, February 2012, pp. 2 ff; Carolina Vendil Pallin (red.) *Rysk militär förmåga I ett tioårsperspektiv – 2011*, pp. 68 f.
- <sup>24</sup> Prezident Rossii, *Kontseptsii vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii*, 12 July 2008, p.13, [www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/07/204108.shtml](http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/07/204108.shtml), retrieved 11 Aug 2008, ;Concept (2013), p.7. Note that only Israel possesses nuclear weapons in the region.
- <sup>25</sup> Christopher Harress, "Russia Egypt \$1b Mistral deal", *International Business Times*, 19 Oct 2015, [www.ibtimes.com/russia-egypt](http://www.ibtimes.com/russia-egypt), retrieved 24 Nov. 2015, President of Russia, "Press statement following Russian-Egyptian talks", [http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press\\_conferences/50184](http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/50184), retrieved 23 Nov.2015.
- <sup>26</sup> Oldberg, "Russian-Iranian security ties", pp. 283-292, Andrej Kreutz, "Russian relations with Iran and Iraq", pp. 83-93, both in Marat Terterov (ed.), *Russian and CIS Relations with the Gulf Region*, Gulf Research Center, Dubai 2009.
- <sup>27</sup> Klein (2012), pp 4 f.
- <sup>28</sup> Nussaaibah Younis, "Iraq should fear Russia's help", *International New York Times*, 13 October 2015.
- <sup>29</sup> President of Russia, 70th session of the General Assembly, 28 Sept. 2015, p. 5, [www.en.kremlin.events/president/news/50385](http://www.en.kremlin.events/president/news/50385), retrieved, 1 Oct. 2015; "Responses to journalists' questions following the G20 Summit", 16 November 2015, [www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press\\_conferences/50704](http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/50704), retrieved 23 Nov 2015.
- <sup>30</sup> President of Russia, "Responses to journalists' questions following the G20 Summit", 16 November 2015, [www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press\\_conferences/50704](http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/50704), retrieved 23 Nov 2015; Jakob Hedenskog, Erika Holmquist, "The threat of the Islamic State to Russia's North Caucasus and Central Asia", FOI, *RUFS Briefing*, no. 28, 1 Sept. 2015.

## **UI Papers**

UI Papers are working papers and similar manuscripts reporting the results of research related to UI's focus areas. UI Papers are written by UI researchers, visiting researchers, or other researchers wishing to publish with UI (authors are occasionally invited based on their international profile and research reputation). UI Papers enable researchers to publish and register the results of research projects fairly swiftly while retaining the rights to publish in other outlets if so desired. Research quality, readability, and relevance are the main criteria for publication. UI Papers may also include in-depth policy analyses, which are rigorously researched but less ambitious in terms of theory and scientific methodology.

## **UI Briefs**

UI Briefs are short commentaries (typically ranging from 2-10 pages) on international issues, events or trends related to UI's focus areas. They are written by UI staff, UI visiting researchers, or other researchers associated with UI. UI Briefs do not require adherence to strict academic conventions (thus, the traditional 'essay' or the journalistic 'opinion-editorial', and the policy-oriented 'policy brief' fits in this category). References and footnotes are typically rare in UI Briefs. Relevance and readability are the main criteria for publication.

Editor of this issue: Martin Kragh, Head of the Russia Programme, UI.



# UI Paper



## WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT UI?

The Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) is an independent platform for research and information on foreign affairs and international relations.

The institute's experts include researchers and analysts specialized in the field of international affairs. While maintaining a broad perspective, research at UI focuses on unbiased scientific analysis of foreign and security policy issues of special relevance to Sweden. UI as an organization does not take a stand on policy issues.

The UI research department produces a number of publications to facilitate engagement with policy and research communities in Sweden and beyond. Each type of publication is subject to an in-house planning and approval process including quality control. UI Papers are reviewed by senior staff at the institute. They solely reflect the view of the author(s).

Please contact our customer service, or visit our website: [www.ui.se](http://www.ui.se), where you will find up-to-date information on activities at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). Here you can also book event tickets, become a member, buy copies of our magazines, and access research publications. Also, join us on Facebook! You can get in touch with us through email: [info@ui.se](mailto:info@ui.se) or **+46-8-511 768 05**



---

### SWEDISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Visiting Address: Drottning Kristinas väg 37, Stockholm  
Postal Address: Box 27 035, 102 51 Stockholm  
Phone: +46 8 511 768 05 Fax: + 46 8 511 768 99  
Homepage: [www.ui.se](http://www.ui.se)