

‘REGROUPING’ OF RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The demands Russia presented to NATO and the US on 17 December 2021 indicated its long-term goal of changing the fundamentals of European security. Defeating Ukraine is an essential prerequisite for this.

Putin is focusing on creating a geopolitical coalition of authoritarian regimes whose common ground is to oppose the West, democracy and the rule of law.

The invasion of Ukraine ended the Russian foreign ministry’s hopes of playing a meaningful strategic role in the country’s foreign policy planning.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Russia’s full-scale war of conquest in Ukraine, which started in the early morning of 24 February 2022, shook the status quo of European security and is part of Putin’s broader goal of reshaping the European security architecture.

Putin revealed his real objectives on 17 December 2021 when Russia submitted a draft security agreement to NATO and the US, listing demands to change the fundamentals of European security, which also included Ukraine. The most important points were:

1. ending NATO’s “open door” policy
2. rolling NATO’s military deployment back to the 1997 line

On 24 February 2022, Putin began implementing his objectives with a full-scale military attack against Ukraine. Putin likely sees defeating Ukraine as a prerequisite for achieving his broader goals. Russia expected to defeat Ukraine in a matter of days. Things turned out differently because Russia had miscalculated. Russia’s systemic weaknesses – constant lying and stealing within the state apparatus – painted a false picture of the situation in Ukraine for the Russian leadership.

The demands presented to NATO and the US indicate Russia’s long-term goal of reshaping the European security environment into one where NATO would not have a leading role. With this in mind, the military pre-positioning of NATO allies in Eastern Europe, their immediate combat readiness, logistics and supply continuity is of utmost importance.

By now, Putin has made it very complicated for Russia to exit the war – from a foreign policy perspective, by illegally annexing regions of Ukraine, and in domestic policy terms, by declaring mobilisation in the country. Ukraine’s political and military capitulation remains Putin’s objective, and he will go as far as he is allowed to achieve it.

But the time frame has changed: a quick regime change has turned into a long war of attrition, with possible periods of low-intensity military action. In our assessment, Putin believes that Ukraine's resilience and Western support will break before Russia will. Still, in Putin's opinion, Ukraine has not yet currently suffered enough to reach breaking point. Part of Putin's defeat strategy is to systematically damage Ukraine's energy infrastructure during winter, and the goal is to destroy it. Continued military and economic aid from the West to Ukraine is therefore vital to avoid a humanitarian disaster for the civilian population, prevent new crimes against humanity, and ensure Ukraine's survival as a democratic state. European security in the medium term directly depends on the Ukrainians' will to determine their own future and Western unity in supporting Ukraine with all necessary means.

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According to our information, Russia is not ready to give up the territories it has occupied. It expects an exhausted Ukraine to sit at the negotiating table eventually. Once there, Russia expects to be able to present its conditions and, as a strong negotiator, come out of the situation on the winning side.



The 'Russian world' arrives in Mariupol. A theatre building in the city, where hundreds of civilians had taken refuge from the fighting, was hit by an aerial bomb.

Source: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies / AFP

According to our sources, Western unity in imposing sanctions has been an unpleasant surprise to the Russian leadership. Those under sanctions seek to use their connections in the West to get off the list, while those threatened with sanctions try to stay off the list. Russia wants the sanctions to end. The sanctions imposed on Russia are not inconsequential but directly affect Russia's ability to maintain its war machine and keep its economy functioning.

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Russia's losses in the war with Ukraine and its course for a long-term confrontation with the West will force Russia to accelerate a reorientation of its foreign policy. Putin is at war not only with Ukraine but with the entire Western value system as he is convinced that the future of international relations belongs to authoritarian regimes that divide global spheres of influence between themselves, including by using military power. According to the information available to EFIS, Russia is diverting its diplomatic resources from the West to focus its activities on other parts of the world. Undermining Western unity, including unity in imposing sanctions, remains Russia's main goal towards the West.

RUSSIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY'S DRESS CODE

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia has established rules on the proper appearance of its officials and on "creating a harmonious look".



Impeccably dressed but distracted by journalists, Sergey Lavrov has put his hands in his pockets.

Source: Russian Foreign Ministry Press Service via AP

The requirements for men are conservative – a dark blue or grey suit, with combinations of different jackets and trousers allowed, but only as long as the colours match. Pockets are purely decorative and not to be used for hands. Perfume must be used in moderation; hands and nails must be well groomed. No visible tattoos or piercings are allowed.



Breaking the rules: Maria Zakharova's dress appears to be shorter than allowed.

Source: Russian Foreign Ministry

The requirements for women are also conservative but more detailed. A female employee must have a conservative hairstyle appropriate for her age and position; longer than shoulder-length hair must be neatly styled, and dyeing in unnatural shades is prohibited. Daytime make-up must be understated, foundation must be applied in moderation, and bright make-up at work is inappropriate. Excessive mascara is prohibited, and skirt hems must be 5 cm above or below the knee.

Putin has his stakes on creating a geopolitical coalition of authoritarian regimes opposed to the West who mistrust Western policies and may take a stance against democracy and the rule of law. Russia sees the BRICS nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation members, and several Persian Gulf countries as promising partners. Its focus is on Iran and China, but anyone with historical, ideological or other conflicts

with the West is welcome to join. Russia's goal is to shift the common ground from political declarations and economic cooperation to military cooperation. Moderate success has been achieved – for example, cooperation between Russia and Iran for the weapons used against Ukraine. Russia will probably succeed in bringing other countries on board in 2023. Still, the expansion of Russian cooperation is hampered by the economic ties of the rest of the world with Western countries and their wider geopolitical and economic interests. Nikolai Patrushev, the secretary of the Security Council of Russia, plays a leading role in expanding Russia's security political ties, and he actively travels around Asia and the Middle East for this purpose. Russian officials and politicians also work daily, both bilaterally and in international organisations, to undermine the West, fight against Russia's isolation and sanctions, and expand and deepen global cooperation.



Nikolai Patrushev on a visit to Iran, 8 to 10 November 2022. Russia negotiates an arms deal with Iran that includes weapons to attack critical infrastructure in Ukraine.

Source: IRANIAN PRESIDENCY / AFP

'CANCELLATION' OF RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY

Russian diplomats' role in the West is reduced to a monotonous repetition of propaganda lies.

EFIS has witnessed how the invasion of Ukraine ended the Russian foreign ministry's hopes of playing a meaningful strategic role in the country's foreign policy planning. At least as much as the international community, Russian diplomats were also kept in the dark about Putin's plans to attack Ukraine. According to our information, they found out about it on the morning of 24 February through the media.

Confusion and bewilderment ensued, with no one having prepared any talking points in advance. Some decided to switch sides, but the vast majority succumbed to mental resignation and then acceptance, which in some cases turned into angry outbursts of patriotism. Russian diplomats' role in the West is reduced to a monotonous repetition of propaganda lies. Russian ambassadors, finding themselves in an information black-out, are regularly forced to improvise at international meetings. Since 24 February, Russian diplomats' new daily concerns include the anxiety of not knowing whether they will receive their monthly salary in their bank account or, if not, which colleague to borrow money from. Considering the shift of Russian foreign policy towards the Global South, Russia's diplomacy efforts may gain some new impetus in the near future but are likely to end in disappointment. In our assessment, the South and East cannot replace the West for Russia.