

### Putin, his worldview, and his war aims

Vladimir Putin is a *gosudarstvennik*, a man of the state. This is the tradition of the Tsars and of Stalin. *Gosudarstvenniki* are not ethnic Russian nationalists. In their view, the Russian state extends well beyond core Russia (today's Russian Federation) and includes people who are not ethnic Russians. Individuals, subjects or citizens, must be loyal to the state and its autocrat, not to an ethnic national identity or idea.

I don't think Putin's worldview has changed. It has evolved toward a more extreme version of ideas he has always held.

Putin now holds absolute power, comparable to Peter the Great and Stalin. "Putin is Russia, and Russia is Putin." He is isolated and secretive, with only a few cronies. It is unclear who or what influences his decisions.

### Putin's worldview

1. Russia always has been, and always must be, a Great Power of the first rank.
2. Military power including the will to victory is the source of power of the Russian state.
3. The purpose of the economy is to support the state. Prosperity for citizens is not a primary goal.
4. The West is Russia's enemy. The West
  - Is weak and divided
  - Its ideology, liberalism, is tired, spent, a belief of the past
  - The West is decadent and has abandoned basic moral principles
  - Western ideas and influence are a virus which must be extirpated from Russian society.
  - Western leaders lack will and stamina to stand up to Russia.
5. The Russian state should span "the Russian world" and "Eurasia." "The Russian world includes Russian-speakers everywhere. Belarus and Ukraine are really part of Russia. It may include all the former Soviet Union and perhaps most of eastern Europe. Where "the Russian world" ends is ambiguous: no boundary is defined. (See Yudin, "Russia Ends Nowhere".)
6. The United States is the power blocking Russia. It is a hollow, hypocritical country. It must be discredited, divided, and taken down. China is an ally in this effort.

7. The Russian people are patriots who will rally around their state and its leader. They understand Russia's historical destiny. Russians believe in military glory and victory and will sacrifice for it.
8. The ideology of the future is national conservatism. This means traditional religion united with the state, traditional families and gender roles, military patriotism, and conformity and solidarity among citizens. The state must promote and ensure this ideology by "patriotic education" and incessant propaganda. True freedom consists in patriotic service to the state in conformity with others. Liberal individualism is a false ideology that creates division and unhappiness.
9. Russia's natural allies are other states and leaders and parties that support traditional morality, oppose the West, and are mindful of Russia's security interests. This includes most states of Asia and Africa, starting with China. Russia is "the military and strategic core" of this anti-West "human majority".

Western national conservative leaders and parties – Orban of Hungary, the German AfD, Trump - are also natural allies. They favor autocracy, promote traditional morality, and reject liberal values, international rules, and NATO.

10. In the conduct of world affairs, all methods are acceptable. There are no rules and no morality. There is no distinction between war and peace. An effective leader will use a shifting combination of methods – "information operations", international law, partnerships and alliances, subversion of other countries, bribery, threats, assassinations, and military operations. The goal does not change: greater power for the Russian state and defeat of its adversaries.

## Putin's aims for the "special military operation", February 2022

Install a Russian-controlled Ukrainian government. (Ukraine could be partitioned, fully occupied, or left to a Russian-controlled government without border changes, as in Belarus.)

Demonstrate Russian military power and will. Demonstrate Western and US weakness.

Prevent any further "color revolutions" guided by the West and roll back Westernization in Russia.

Make sure that Ukraine will never join NATO or the EU.

Split the West into resist and do-nothing factions, across and within countries. US, Germany, Italy, France as key targets. Create disunity in the West. Break up NATO.

Lay the groundwork for future expansion of Russian power and influence in Europe. (See draft treaties.)

Add Ukraine's economy and population to Russia's; re-create the Soviet industrial-agricultural-population base. ("Without Ukraine, Russia is a country; with Ukraine, Russia is an empire.")

In Ukraine, eradicate anti-Russian nationalism and Western contacts and influence and ideas. Re-educate Ukrainians to be Maloross, "Little Russians", loyal to the Russian state. Punish and repress Ukrainian nationalists and members of Ukrainian military and government resisting Russia. (See "*What Russia Must Do With Ukraine*".)

Become a great Russian leader who restored Russia's rightful place in world affairs and began re-gathering "the Russian world." (See "*The advance of Russia in the New World*".)

October 2024 update (all the original aims still apply)

Either win the war with Ukrainian capitulation or continue the war. Ensure military supplies from North Korea (munitions) and Iran (drones); keep China on side providing technology.

Maintain control over Russian society and economy; normalize a permanent state of war.

Outlast Western support for Ukraine. Limit Western aid with threats. Undermine Western aid by helping pro-Russian populists with information operations and political operations. Main targets: Germany, US, France.

Get international recognition of Russian conquests – the four annexed provinces plus Crimea - as part of a cease-fire (not a permanent treaty settlement).

Complete the reorientation of the Russian economy from Europe to Asia.

Continue Russian diplomatic gains in Africa and Asia. Convince non-Western countries that Russia is the champion of their interests against the West; move them from neutrality to a pro-Russian policy. Strengthen the China alliance but with Russia as an equal partner.

## Russia at war

The main instrument of Putin's rule is the Federal Security Service (FSB), successor to the KGB. They still call themselves "Chekists", after Lenin's Cheka.

Constitutional and legal niceties are observed, but there are no checks and balances. (Putin invented the playbook for takeover of a democracy by an autocrat.) The Duma is a rubber stamp. Courts are controlled by the FSB. Some opposition is allowed in local elections but Putin's candidates always win. As for real opposition, R.I.P. Alexei Navalny.

The state controls TV and tries to control social media and internet access. Opposition media do not exist.

Russians are bombarded by intense and extreme war propaganda. They are told their country is "at war with the West" and that "Russia will win". Soldiers are heroes. The regime does allow criticism that says Russia is not belligerent enough. Heavyweight experts regularly call for using nuclear weapons.

An organization or individual who receives money or information from abroad must register as a "foreign agent" and must publicize their "foreign agent" status. "Foreign agents" may be shut down. (Putin says this is modeled on the US Foreign Agents Registration Act.)

"Discrediting the armed forces" (that is, any public opposition to the war) is a crime punishable by up to 5 years in prison. Anti-war demonstrations are now very small and rare. Serious cases are prosecuted as treason.

Women are told to have more babies (they don't comply). LGBTQ+ people are demonized as subhuman. The Church leads this fight for "morality."

The borders are not closed. Russians may leave. Many did, when semi-mobilization was announced in September 2022.

"Kontraktniki", contract soldiers, are offered very high salaries and death benefits. Soldiers are also recruited from prisons. Commuting their sentences is now proposed in the Duma. There is also conscription but no general mobilization. The government promises that conscripts will not be sent to the front lines. The high casualty rate (called "meat operations") means Russia must recruit about 30,000 new front line soldiers a month.

Russia has excellent macroeconomic management: low debt, some but not extreme inflation, stable currency. Credit Elvira Nabiullina, head of the central bank, and Finance Minister Anton Sulianov. A squeeze is now on – high interest rates and inflation.

Russia's state budget depends on oil revenues and thus on the world oil price. The price has been falling, but the Middle East crisis may increase prices again.

Russia claims it spends 6% of its GDP on the military. The probable real figure is 8-10%.