

A Reality Check From Russia: Russian Public Opinion regarding Ukraine Crisis

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I've been in St. Petersburg and Moscow for the past two weeks. As for [the tragedy being played out in Ukraine](#), it's been surprising to find total uniformity of opinion from Russian citizens, including groups of our [CCI alumni](#). This is not due to "controlled media," since all I've spoken with check a multitude of media sources daily on Internet, including CNN. Their ages range from 25 to 55 years, generally they are the builders of Russia's middle class. It is not long-term support for Putin, because at least half of them weren't supporters of Putin previously. But today the situation has changed.

[Crimea](#)--they are adamant that Crimea has always been Russian; that Russia fought battles to keep Crimea in former centuries, and except for a small percentage of Tartars, Crimeans are ethnic Russians--and that Khrushchev turning Crimea over to Ukraine was just a fluke on paper of a discredited Soviet leader trying to impress his birthplace with his power. Many of our alumni vacation in Crimea (it has enviable warm weather), they claim they have never heard any language other than Russian spoken on Crimean streets, further that Crimeans are Russian Orthodox, and feel themselves to be Russian. I'm told that in 1991 when Yeltsin gave all areas outside of Russia their freedom, that the Crimeans declared themselves independent. Four months later, the bureaucrats in Kiev disagreed, and unfortunately Crimea has remained politically bound to Ukraine since. Our friends remind that as children they went to summer youth camps in Crimea and vacation there routinely as adults. [They have always considered Crimea a part of Russia as did the locals](#). Hence, when it became obvious that Kiev would no longer permit Russian as official language and rapidly began institutionalizing Western Ukrainian culture in Crimea, the locals balked. Our alumni add that Crimeans were grateful and excited to be officially rejoined with Russia. 

Sevastopol – city of the Russian glory in Crimea.

Is Russia's Intention to capture former Soviet territories? Russians were shocked, flabbergasted, that I would even inquire whether Russia's leadership would try to go into the Baltic countries, Poland or any of the former Soviet Republics. So I re-asked the question "What would you do if you saw on TV that Russia intended to move troops into one of these former Republics?" They grew quite agitated that I might feel it even a possibility. They were adamant that under no circumstances would Russia EVER be interested in having any of those countries under its control again. It was absolutely unthinkable to them.

Will Russia take more Southeastern Ukraine under its control? Absolutely not, was the speedy answer across the large room. They offered that Russia may help with reconstruction if and when this war comes to an end. But NEVER will Russia annex any of

Southeastern Ukraine's land. They say any information to the contrary is pure propaganda.

Russian/Ukraine history: Russians have always felt deeply related to Ukrainians -- indeed [Kiev was the very center of Rus'](#) - Russia's history and culture. Everyone I speak with here has close relatives living in Ukraine. The two countries have considered themselves of the same stock (except for Western Ukraine). Ukraine and Russia remind me of Siamese twins -- with main arteries, bone structures, and organs being shared. Cutting, breaking them apart destroys vital flows of manufacturing, trade, other critical infrastructures--in addition to the hearts and souls of the peoples involved with each other for some three hundred years. It's no wonder that many Ukrainian troops have defected and can't shoot each other when forced into battle.

✖ Ukraine has never been an independent nation of people welded together by ethnic bonds of its own. Western Ukraine, the European section which came under the USSR after WWII (formerly Poles, Austrians, Hungarians, and Germans), is now trying to force the rest of Ukraine, with US help, to separation with Russia and the joining of Europe. Southeastern Ukrainians, primarily ethnic Russians, refuse to give up their language and culture and be ruled by Western Ukrainians. This is the bottom line.

Western Ukrainians fought with the Nazis against the Soviet Union in WWII, and they have since despised Russia. They of course want to be joined with Europe. I've recommended all along that Ukraine be split into two cooperating states. Those who want to join Europe should be allowed, but they should not drag the Russian parts of Ukraine away from their trade and close cultural ties with Russia.

Ukraine, unlike Russia, has had terrible, corrupt leaders since communism imploded in 1991. Oligarchs (and political leaders who catered to Ukraine's oligarchs) have since run the country into the ground. Hence ordinary Ukrainians are deeply disappointed and angry that they have not experienced order, stability, or decent economic development as has Russia, Poland, Hungary and the Baltics. Ukraine is a failed state--the war between the West and the East sectors has further devastated the few hopes that remained before the conflict started.

ENTER THE MAJOR POWER

As far as I can tell a very slender but powerful minority in Washington decided years ago that Ukraine would be the prime place to challenge a future "come back" of Russia as one of several leading powers in the world. Archival material points out that the [neoconservatives](#) drew up a plan in 1992 that America had to be ready to take down militarily any country that would compete for its worldwide supremacy. It mentioned Russia which they felt would/could reorganize the union of former USSR republics. This minority gained momentum with both Republicans and Democrats in the Congress and the White House.

As with other countries (Iraq, Iran, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Central and South American countries) the first operation to accomplish is to demonize country leaders and destabilize the countries with the intention of regime change. It might be justifiable if the situations resulted in better living conditions and opportunities for the peoples of those countries, but unfortunately, none of them have turned out this way.

Victoria Nuland, the U.S. State Department chief diplomat in charge of Ukraine's future,

admitted our US taxpayers had put some \$5 billion into preparing Ukraine to align with the US and Europe --and not Russia. The result is the war that is now tearing Ukraine apart.

Russians reiterate continuously that their military is only for defensive purposes, that they will never start a war or take over another country, but they will defend their borders. With Russia's tragic history of being invaded by the Mongols, Napoleon, Hitler and others, that is understandable.

RUSSIA WILL NOT TOLERATE NATO ON THEIR BORDERS

Justifiably so. Can we imagine what our US military would do if the Russians were putting missile bases across Canada within instant attack distance of Washington--or for that matter across the length of Mexico's border with America? Or how would France feel if Germany decided to put weapons of mass destruction on their borders? No regional, let alone world power, would accept this without fighting back. Putin has, and Washington acts as if this is unreasonable, unthinkable.

My opinion is that Russia has shown remarkable restraint and cool headedness, all the while coming up with strikingly elegant solutions to defuse the dramatic situation south of their border.

Let us hope and pray that wisdom will rule in Washington--that tensions between Ukrainians will be tempered, the shooting will cease and a coalition of countries can begin helping Ukrainians survive the winter.

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