

US Under Joe Biden Will Pursue Policy of “Countering” and “Encircling” Russia

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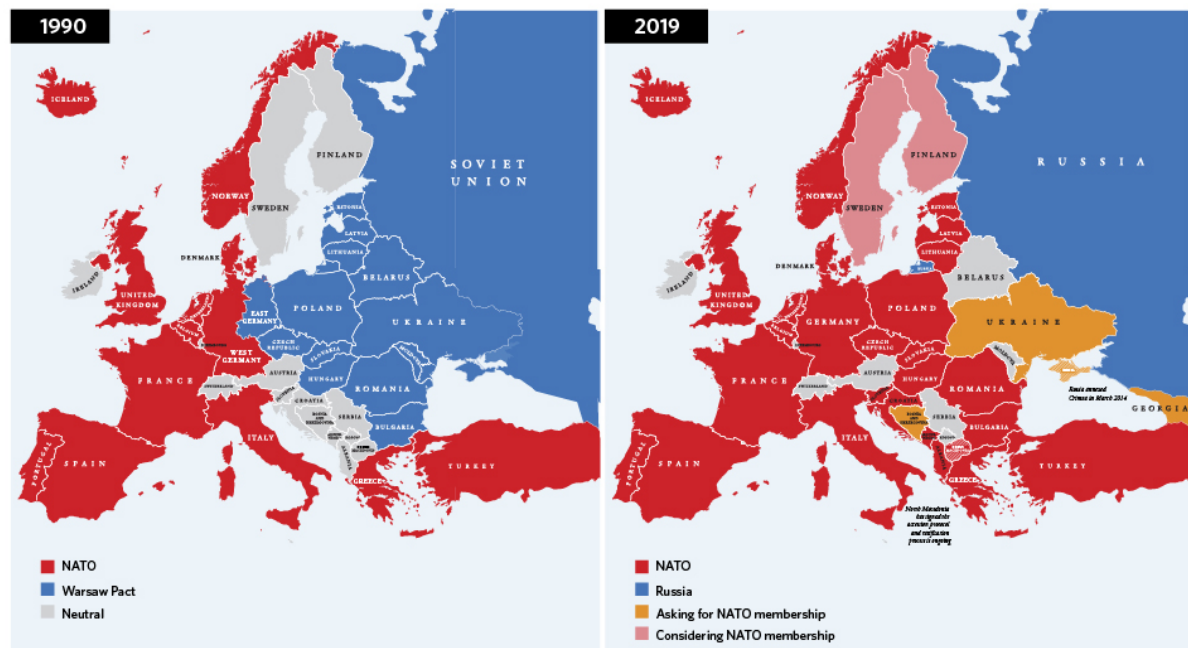
On Sunday, there were new street demonstrations in the Belarusian capital of Minsk. Last week, two British diplomats were declared “persona non grata” by the Belarusian government. They are accused of conducting “destructive activities” – most probably related to aiding demonstrators amid the Belarusian crisis.

Meanwhile, last weekend, the [ceasefire](#) in Donbass was, once again, breached twice. Tensions are on the rise in the East Slavic region of Europe. Moreover, tensions are rising in most – if not all – countries neighboring Russia. From a Russian point of view, its Western borders (south-western borders particularly) are facing neighboring countries at risk of instability, velvet revolutions and civil war, with civil war already the case in Ukraine since 2014 – or governments increasingly hostile to Russia. Georgia, for example is amid violent protests over the result of its elections and former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili – currently living in Ukraine – is seeking his political comeback and [appealing to Biden](#). It has been [NATO's ambition to further deepen its partnerships with Georgia](#). Likewise, in September, NATO troops took part in [provocative military exercises in Estonia](#), near the Russian border.

Under a Joe Biden presidency (Trump is contesting the election results, but Biden is most likely to take the oath), tensions will likely keep increasing. Biden has stated he will ensure that the provision of lethal weapons to Ukraine will continue. Ukrainian armed forces resumed combat operations in several “hot zones” across the Donbass region. At least one commander in the Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) – a disputed zone – was killed. Former Donetsk Defense Minister, Igor Strelkov, stated in an interview with Russian media, that Ukrainian offensives will increase, “especially after Joe Biden’s victory”. Former DPR Chairman Andrei Purgin said that if Trump’s administration employed “slow strangulation” against the Donbass region, Biden would use “more aggressive” methods.

MAPS 1 AND 2

Military Expenditures of Russia and Select Countries



SOURCE: Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, <http://en.riss.ru/>.

The Donbass region comprises of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, that are internationally recognized as a part of Ukraine, but are de facto the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics. The Donbass War, as it has been called, has been ongoing since March 2014, when protests in the aftermath of the Maidan Revolution escalated into armed conflict between forces from Donbass and the new post-Maidan Ukrainian government.

Even though [Trump's administration kept supporting Ukraine and donating war equipment to Kiev](#), since May 2019, Washington has not had a permanent ambassador in Ukraine as Trump recalled Marie Yovanovitch from her post. Biden is expected to appoint a high-profile diplomat for this position, after all he has engaged strongly with Ukraine. In fact, while he was Obama's vice-president, he visited Ukraine at least five times and had a key role in defining the US' Ukrainian policy. During the election, Biden condemned the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea after a referendum. He even described Russia as the main "threat" against the United States.

This is in line with US policy since World War II. At the end of the Cold War, the Iron Curtain fell, but NATO just kept expanding. In the end, it does not matter what flag is flying over the Kremlin in terms of ideology – for the US, rivalry with Russia is of a profoundly geopolitical nature: it is part of a struggle for the [Heartland](#), as Halford Mackinder terms it. US foreign policy remains to a large extent shaped by Mackinder's ideas about controlling the core of Eurasia to dominate the world. Trump's administration sought better relationship with Russia, even though relations worsened at times, especially when sanctions were signed by Washington against Moscow. Be as it may, his administration was quite a relative "set-back" in this particular anti-Russian tendency. But these days are over – in Biden's own words, "America is back".

Thus, the new administration will bring changes not only in US relations to Ukraine and

Eastern Europe, but to the entirety of Europe. Under Trump's administration, Poland for instance, had American support in initiatives that were not well seen by the rest of the EU. However, a Biden administration will likely push Poland deeper into a pro-Atlantic stance. Last month, Michael Carpenter, Biden's adviser on international relations, claimed that, as president, Biden will "unite NATO, support Poland's defence abilities, and prioritize the Three Seas Initiative", a forum of twelve states in the EU. Unlike Trump (who even often antagonizes Germany), Biden certainly wants a strong EU to "counter" and even "encircle" Russia.

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