

## Ukraine - July 2014

Recent events notwithstanding, I think there are several compelling justifications for direct intervention in Ukrainian politics. The most obvious is geographic proximity, but our most important allies are close to Russia in more ways than one. Proximity functions through time as well, so it's important for current policy to draw wisdom from events precipitating the Cold War. Colleagues and friends have expressed a vague concern about the fighting in Ukraine but might not have a complete context to articulate an opinion. I want to talk about 3 points in this paper; historical context, Putin's motivations, and what we can do in response.

Russian, Ukrainian, Polish, and several smaller languages share a common Slavic root. The same is true for the overlapping genetic and cultural heritage that comprises the expansive population of the Slavic steppes. Russians have an uneasy and existential ambivalence towards Europe. Hundreds of years ago, Slavic culture was very similar to fiefdoms that organized Europe during the Medieval Era and before. But Russians use a different alphabet, currency, and version of Christianity while maintaining a roughly equal population. A few happenstances in the centuries leading up to Soviet Era could have resulted in Russia becoming the principal cultural power in Europe. Most of that influence reached out through the Balkans, Poland, and Ukraine.

Kiev was actually the first Russian capital, or rather the seat of power for the Kievan Rus as far back as the 9th century. Crimea (see [Crimean War](#)) was a crucial part of Russian influence that once reached as far as modern day Turkey. The ability to maintain a powerful Black Sea fleet meant dominion over trade throughout the Mediterranean. Eventually, the fiefdom of Constantinople broke away from Russian control, but kept the Orthodox faith in what became the Byzantine Empire, and even later the Ottoman Empire during the rise of Islam. Less restricted trade in the Med meant Rome and Carthage could exert their own territorial claims which would frame the political realities of the Middle Ages and ages to follow.

Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, both descendants of German nobility, refocused Russia towards European culture by establishing trade routes across Poland and Ukraine. St. Petersburg was made the capital for a time, fashioned in the style of French architecture and clothing. Holding on to power in the Slavic steppes required a strong mounted corp of Knights or Cossacks. Under Ivan the Terrible the Cossacks morphed into an elite bodyguard and later expanded their role into a secret police force while authority in Moscow solidified. During the

Soviet Era, the KGB filled a similar cultural and political function as Cossacks. It's common knowledge that Vladimir Putin was once an officer in the KGB, but I think it's short-sighted to dismiss his worldview as purely Cold War nostalgia without acknowledging his nationalist agenda.

Ukraine is now the path of natural gas and oil from Russia to Europe. Even during the recent conflict the trade agreements with Germany and the rest of the EU have remained lucrative. Putin, I think, is plagued by an old-world mentality towards Europe, while also being completely dependent on their sustaining trade. By annexing the middleman, Putin can make tons of money while selling a narrative of racial reunification to Russian citizens. Full-scale military confrontation in Europe is something of an unthinkable scenario, but let's not forget this century's success rate of appeasement strategies on the continent. I think there is a decisive way America can act to prevent the disaster, but it goes against most of my preferred domestic politics, like ecological conservation and sound economics.

We should 'spin the valve' on our natural gas and oil resources, fast-track drilling and fracking operations, build the damn pipeline and undercut Russian exports for one year. Even if OPEC responds, they would have to meet the same price. At the same time we 'spin the valve' at the printing press to devalue the American dollar, while opening NAFTA-like agreements with the EU. Not only do we stand to cripple the Russian economy, we stand a high chance of provoking heavy oil importers like China. If Putin feels the pinch from both sides, I believe he will buckle under the pressure. A friend of mine correctly pointed out that this is Reaganomics geopolitical strategy revisited.

A well-made execution of such plan may re-establish Turkey's position within NATO and influence negotiations with Iran. I'm uncertain that the cautious and prevaricating Obama administration has the courage or wherewithal to adopt such a bold course of action. As loathe as I am to admit it, I think this administration could do with a bit of GW Bush era straight talk and clear consequences. Unlike the Bush military strategy during the 2000's, I recommend a unilateral economic strategy more similar to Thatcher and Reagan. I know it seems more reasonable to tread lightly in the face of calamity, but when your hand might be forced anyway it's good to have an idea where you want to land.