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The New Divide: Competing Influences in Geopolitics and the New Cold War

By Nick McGargill

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The Ukraine is a prime example of a state that is located at the center divide of the geopolitical-fault lines where an overlap occurs in competing spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space of two emerging polarizing superpowers resulting in the crisis in Ukraine that began nearly a year ago. The term the 'Near Abroad' has been repeated detailed within the pages of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation since 1993 outlining Moscow's approach to foreign policy where the Russian Federation enjoys a special degree of privilege and respect in the post-

Soviet space; however, the Moscow's sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space is being increasingly challenged by the emergence of an opposing sphere of influence dubbed as the 'Eurosphere.' Since the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, shortly following the Russo-Georgian in 2008, the European Union has been aggressively pursuing an expansion of its enlargement agenda in the post-Soviet space in efforts to curb what Brussels views as increasing Russian aggression and encroachment to a free and democratic Europe. The conflicting interests and the competing zones of influence of the European Union and the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space have played a direct role in unfolding conflict in Ukraine signaling the beginning of the new cold war.

The Kosovo independence precedent marked the end of Russian influence in Eastern Europe and shifted the geopolitical-fault lines to the post-Soviet space thus reigniting frozen conflicts in the region warranting Russian military intervention to restoring stability to the region and defending the Kremlin's security and energy interests. Significant events following the US-led military intervention in Yugoslavia such as the disregard of the Two-Plus-Four Agreement signaled the receding extent of Russian influence with the expansion of NATO and the European Union to fill the power-void left in Eastern Europe has resulted in a growing rift of rivalry and misunderstanding between Moscow and the West. As a result, the language of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation was altered outlining the Russian government's willingness to take more forcible action to defend its interests in the post-Soviet space if not respected by the West. The recently drafted Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013 outlines the foreign policy goals and objectives of the Russian Federation which adapted a significant portion of the document regarding the post-Soviet space (or CIS-space) outlining the consolidation of Moscow's influence in the CIS-space under the umbrella of the Eurasian Economic Union. The expansion agenda of the European Union into the post-Soviet space is viewed by Moscow as a direct threat to Russia's interests and objectives warranting action from Russia to shift the geopolitical-fault lines out of the post-Soviet space thus reversing the expansion of the Eurosphere.

The Euromaidan Revolution ushered in a pro-European ultra-nationalist government in Kiev which warranted the response from the Kremlin to launch a military intervention in the Ukraine in order to secure Russian security interests and to halt what Moscow views as the expansion of the Eurosphere into the post-Soviet space. Following the Russo-Georgian War and the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute in 2008, the European Union has become increasingly wary of Moscow's motives and the monopoly Russia holds on energy supplies thus focusing their enlargement agenda to include the Ukraine and the former Soviet republics in the South Caucasus. The Kremlin views the EU Association Agreement as a soft-power tool used by the bureaucrats in Brussels to oust the pro-Russian government of then President Viktor Yanukovich who refused to sign the agreement in favor of closer relations with Russia while retaining Ukraine's independence. In the post-Soviet space where geopolitics and conflicting interests overlap a series of frozen conflicts creates a dangerous new game as the geopolitical lines of influence are being redrawn and shifting alliances cross over vital energy and security interests.

The incorporation of the Republic of Crimea into the Russian Federation secured the naval base at Sevastopol, home of Russia's Black Sea Fleet as well as to ensure that Russia's dominance in the Black Sea region remains unquestionable. Although the Budapest Memorandum gave

security assurances to the Ukraine, the Crimea is the most strategic geographical area in relation to the Black Sea which Russia will not tolerate the presence of NATO troops in an area which Moscow deems as vital to Russian security interests. After the incident at the Pristina International Airport in 1999, President Vladimir Putin shifted Russian foreign policy from a cooperative approach and adopted a more competitive approach to reflect the foreign policy approach of the West to what Moscow views as efforts by NATO to undermine Russian power and influence in the international community. Securing the Crimea and the naval base at Sevastopol in the eyes of the Kremlin is a strategic move in which protects Russia's security interests in the Black Sea region in the long term against the encroachment of the United States and the European Union into the Near Abroad.

The Euromaidan Revolution resulted in the acceleration of the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union which President Vladimir Putin views as the soft-power instrument in which to counter the expansion of the Eurospace and other foreign intrusion into the post-Soviet space as well as formulate Moscow's vision of a multipolar world order. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has laid claim to its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space in which has been increasingly challenged by Western governments and the Chinese seeking to import foreign sources of natural gas outside the influence of the Russian Federation. The Russo-Georgian War is a prime example of conflicting geopolitical overlap centered around the fulcrum of petroleum politics where the western owned BTC pipeline threatens Russia's monopoly of energy supplies and influence in the post-Soviet space. President Vladimir Putin's vision of the Eurasian Economic Union is to incorporate the former Soviet republics under the umbrella of an informal EU-style confederacy in order to align a common foreign policy in line with the Russian Federation thus ensuring Moscow's dominating influence in the post-Soviet space and as well as ensuring Russia as world supplier of energy and natural resources.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013 further expands on the existence of designated spheres of influence in the world outlining Moscow's vision of a multipolar world contrary to Washington's vision of maintaining the unipolar world order at the helm of the United States. In response to the increasing presence of US military forces and the construction of a missile defence shield in Eastern Europe, the Russian Federation has increased military spending annually over the past 15 years to improve Russia's defensive capabilities to counter what Moscow views as American efforts to undermine the Russian Armed Forces. Speaking during the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev sternly warned that the inability of the international community to resolve security issues pertaining to Russia's interests due to the growing mistrust in relations and the lack of dialogue between the Moscow and the West has shifted Russian foreign policy from a cooperative approach. The incident at the Pristina International Airport marked the beginning of a gradually expanding rift of rivalry and misunderstanding in which Moscow views as a betrayal by the West thus propelling a pursuit of the security dilemma in terms of foreign policy.

The modern world finds itself on an all too familiar path where in the absence of cooperation in foreign affairs there exists competition thus spawning the existence of a series of quasi-proxy wars in Syria and the Ukraine as a result of this destructive course of action that threatens pitting Russia at odds against the West. The expansion of the Eurosphere into the post-Soviet space has shifted the geopolitical-fault lines across the Ukraine warranting a response from Moscow to

protect its security interests by incorporating the Crimea and into the Russian Federation and supporting the separatists in Donbass to counter western encroachment into Russia's own backyard. As a result of the presence of American military installations in Eastern Europe and western efforts to channel natural gas supplies along pipelines beyond the reach of Russia, Moscow has shifted attention to accelerating the development of the Eurasian project in efforts to consolidate Russian influence in the post-Soviet space and secure the Russian Federation as a world supplier of energy and natural resources. Relying on relations with China, President Vladimir Putin intends for Russia (in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union) to rebalance power in order to realize the vision of a new multipolar world order.

The 27th of November 2014 will mark the one year anniversary of the Euromaidan Revolution for the Ukrainians, but to the world the day will mark an event where the world shifted into a new geopolitical era where competing spheres of influence and conflicting interests will become common in the framework of a multipolar world. The construction and the evolution of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation over the years has mostly been dependent on the actions taken by the United States' and the European Union's approach to foreign policy thus resulting in the actions taken by Moscow today in the Ukraine. These opposing and competitive foreign policy agendas was wisely summarized by Nigel Farage, Member of the European Parliament: *"If you poke the Russian bear with a stick he will respond, and if you have neither the mean nor the political will to face him down that is very obviously not a good idea."* Where there exists competition in the absence of co-operation in foreign policy there exists rivalry and misunderstanding, and unless there are real efforts reserve course in foreign policy in the international community to construct an existence of cooperation in the absence of competition in foreign policy then the new cold war has begun.