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In this article Mark Kramer argues that the foreign policy of the Russian Federation (Russia) has been greatly affected by the Soviet legacy. As the legal successor to the USSR, the Federation was influenced by "Soviet-era foreign policy commitments, practices, and mores" (587). Although all former Communist countries have been impacted by the Soviet legacy in foreign policy, Kramer argues, "nowhere has the Soviet legacy in foreign policy been of greater salience than in Russia" (587). Drawing upon extensive primary and secondary sources, Kramer provides numerous examples to support his argument that the Soviet legacy on Russian foreign policy has been profound.

First, Kramer emphasizes the legacy of personnel and worldviews. He notes that the durability of the Soviet imprint on Russian foreign policy after 1991 is not surprising given that the personnel and institutional outlooks are slow to change. There is a high degree of continuity, as older generations of foreign policy professionals remained in their positions. Nearly all foreign policy officials in Russia received their training in the Soviet era. Kramer notes that "with time, some younger officials have joined the agencies in significant capacities, but the majority of the most influential foreign policy advisers are still holdovers from the Soviet period" (588). Perceptions that have persisted over decades resist radical change as "...institutional outlooks tend to persist for years" (589).

Moreover, individuals who were trained during the Cold War have perpetuated a Soviet-style outlook concerning Russia's great power status. In particular, Soviet-era thinking is plainly evident within the security agencies.¹ Kramer underscores that "The 'new thinking' in foreign policy under Gorbachev never took hold at the KGB" (588). Russian leader Vladimir Putin shares a popular Soviet-era idea that his country deserves the status of a great power. Most Russians have told pollsters that restoring Russia's status as a great power is Putin's greatest achievement (590).

In addition, foreign policy professionals trained in the Soviet era have maintained a Cold War mindset that views geopolitics through the prism of an East-West conflict. According to Kramer, "Under Putin, officials in the key foreign policy and national security agencies have fallen back even more heavily on Soviet era notions and principles, including an opportunistic reliance on anti-Westernism and xenophobia for internal control" (590). For example, Russia has continued the Soviet Union's practice of supplying weapons to countries hostile to the United States, including Venezuela. Kramer notes that "for Putin, the main appeal of selling weapons to Venezuela is that [Hugo] Chavez and [Nicolas] Maduro have flamboyantly defied US power" (606).

¹ Yevgenia Albats, *The State within a State: The KGB and its Hold on Russia—Past, Present, and Future* (New York, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994); Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York: Public Affairs: 2010).

He also highlights the geographic legacy that Russia inherited from the Soviet Union, writing, “geography does not determine everything, but the similar geographic constraints and endowments of the USSR and Russia are bound to cause Russian policymakers to approach many key issues in the same way Soviet leaders did” (592). Russia, like the Soviet Union, possesses long borders that are difficult to defend. Russian leaders consider their country vulnerable to attack, so they have made onerous investments to expand and modernize the military. According to Mark Kramer, “Russian leaders, like Soviet leaders before them, have seen their country as a great power that must possess a large army suitable for its size” (607).

The Soviet legacy concerning the borders of the union republics has greatly influenced Russian foreign policy since 1991. When the Soviet Union dissolved along the borders of the fifteen union republics, border conflicts arose between former union republics. While Russia’s disagreements with its neighbors over union republic borders include Estonia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, none has been as contentious as Ukraine.² Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev transferred the Crimean Peninsula, which was once a part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Crimea became part of independent Ukraine. Crimea’s contested status has fundamentally shaped the Russia-Ukraine relationship. Russia expressed concern over the status of the Russian/Soviet Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, while Ukrainian leaders objected to Russia’s lease and naval presence in Crimea. Putin used Ukraine’s Euromaidan Revolution of 2013-2014 as an opportunity to annex Crimea in 2014.

Kramer argues that the legacy of the USSR’s relationship with NATO has also shaped Russian foreign policy. Prospective members of NATO must resolve their border disputes before they are able to join the alliance. Russian aggression has constituted a deliberate policy to prevent former Soviet republics from joining NATO. Russia has supported separatists in Georgia’s regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and today recognizes the two Georgian territories as independent states. Following the Russian army’s lackluster performance against Georgia in 2008, Russia embarked on a series of military reforms to modernize its conventional armed forces. These improvements were on display when the country became involved in conflicts in Ukraine and Syria. Russia has also supported separatist forces in the Donbas region of Ukraine as well as the region of Transnistria in Moldova. Such border conflicts jeopardize NATO membership for these former Soviet republics.

Russia also inherited the Soviet Union’s dispute with Japan over the Kuril Islands, which the Soviet Union annexed at the end of World War II. Despite frequent attempts to resolve the conflict, a compromise agreement appears unlikely. The border with the People’s Republic of China (PRC) near Hunchun along the Heilong River remained contested too, although Putin made unpopular concessions in 2004 and 2008 in an effort to strengthen ties with China. As in the Soviet era, Russian foreign policy under Boris Yeltsin and Putin has looked to both Asia and Europe, depending on the circumstance. In recent years, Russia has forged ties with China and India as counterweights to US power.

For centuries Russia has possessed a dual European-Asian identity, but its orientation has been largely westward. During the Cold War, Soviet foreign policy focused primarily on the United States. Although the USSR developed close ties with the PRC prior to the Sino-Soviet split in the late 1950s, Europe remained the primary orientation of its foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s. Another legacy of the Soviet era that impacted Russian foreign policy is the westward orientation of Russia’s gas pipeline network. Russia remains highly dependent on the European market for its natural gas exports.

As in the Soviet era, Russian foreign policy has been influenced by the country’s energy and arms exports. Kramer notes that “Russia’s export structure, like the USSR’s, is based mainly on arms and energy” and that “the pressure to earn hard currency thus ensures that arms transfers will remain a salient instrument in Russian foreign policy in the years ahead” (605). Russia inherited about 70-80 percent of the Soviet Union’s vast military weapons industries and continued the Soviet legacy of

² Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2013); Mark Kramer, “Russia’s Great-Power Ukraine Strategy,” *National Interest* (25 August 2014); Serhii Plokhy, *The Lost Kingdom: The Quest for Empire and the Making of the Russian Nation* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

maintaining arms exports as a source of hard currency. Since the 1970s, the Soviet Union and then Russia has been, together with the United States, the largest suppliers of weapons to the developing world.

The Soviet imprint on Russian foreign policy was to some degree inevitable. Kramer writes, “Russia’s designation at the end of 1991 as the ‘legal successor state’ to the Soviet Union was another obvious contributor to the durability of the Soviet legacy” (607). Russia inherited the Soviet Union’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which it has used, like the USSR, to influence or obstruct US foreign policy. Yet he argues that Russia has benefited more than its predecessor from being one of the five permanent members of the UN security council: “Because Russia still has fewer alternatives than the Soviet Union did to hinder and thwart US actions, Russia’s permanent seat on the UN Security Council is considerably more important, in relative terms, for Russia than it was for the Soviet Union” (600-601).

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Russia’s nuclear capability and the Kremlin’s perception of an East-West conflict have profoundly influenced Russian foreign policy. Russia inherited the Soviet Union’s massive nuclear arsenal and has sought to modernize and expand its nuclear capabilities. Like the Soviet Union before it, Russia has used its nuclear weapons as a cornerstone of its foreign policy and as evidence of its great power status. Another legacy of the Soviet past is the perception among Russia’s political and military leaders that the country is engaged in an existential conflict with the United States, NATO, and the EU.³ Like its Soviet predecessor, Russia seeks to constrain US and NATO power.

Finally, the notion of ‘spheres of influence’ is a prominent legacy of the Soviet past. Since 1991, Kremlin leaders have emphasized the need to establish a ‘multipolar world’ in which Russia maintains privileged interests and exercises freedom of action within its ‘spheres of influence.’ Putin possesses a Cold War worldview in which great powers have the right to exercise ideological, political, and military control over their less-powerful neighbors. Kramer describes this dangerous Soviet legacy as follows: “Although Russian hegemonic power in the [Commonwealth of Independent States] does not have the same sort of ideological overlay that Soviet power did in the Warsaw Pact, Russian leaders have embraced their own version of the Brezhnev Doctrine... [T]he underlying approach envisages a hegemonic state that enjoys an unfettered right to exercise dominance over its smaller neighboring states” (604). The perilous consequences of the Kremlin’s Soviet-era mindset are strikingly evident in Ukraine.

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³ Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines Between War and Peace* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Angela Stent, *Putin’s World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (New York: Twelve, 2019); Brian D. Taylor, *The Code of Putinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).