

Understanding Russia

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Plan of the presentation

- **Perceptions** matter
- What **drives** state's behavior
- Russia in Crimea and Syria
- **Understanding Russia**
 - Identity matters
 - The objective of the current regime
 - Routinized identity believes as tools of regime consolidation



Russian annexation of Crimea & engagement in Syria

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAQvVLZozjA>

Crimea

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RIQ2SbHcsEE>

Syria

State's behavior in the international system

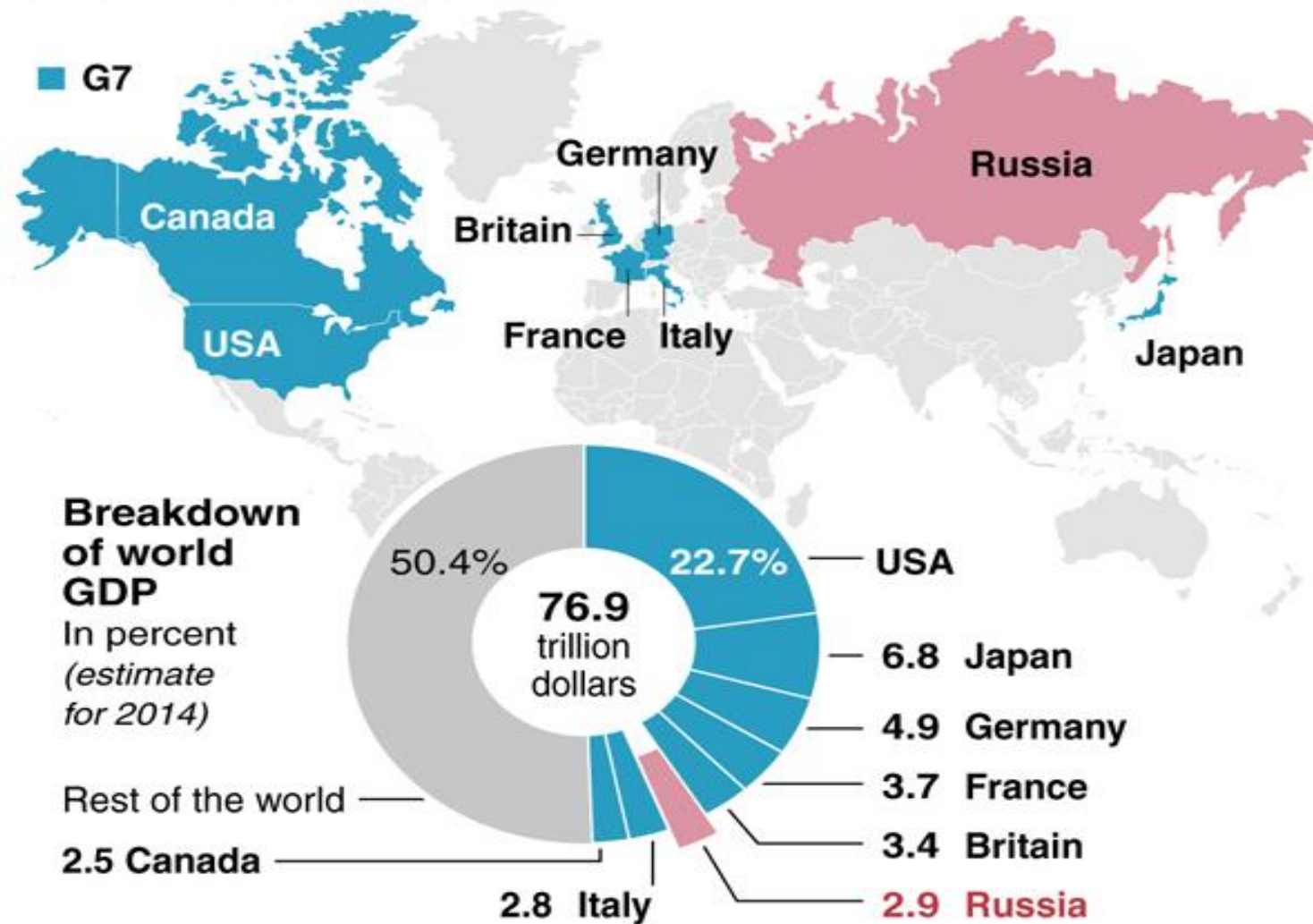
- Physical security (**survival**) – driving force behind state's calculations in foreign policy
- Physical security
 - **physical survival** is a driving goal of state behavior in international system
 - Contingent:
 - **material capabilities + ability to project power**
 - Status in the international system
 - calculate their foreign policy choices with this priority in mind



Contributions of other theories

- **rational self-interested actor** is drawn from micro-economic theory
- Rational actors **apply cost-benefit analysis** to their calculation to determine the desirability of action.
- expected to **produce strategies** that most effectively advance an actor's aims
- *Objective nature* of **rationality (universal)**

Russia and the G8



Source: IMF

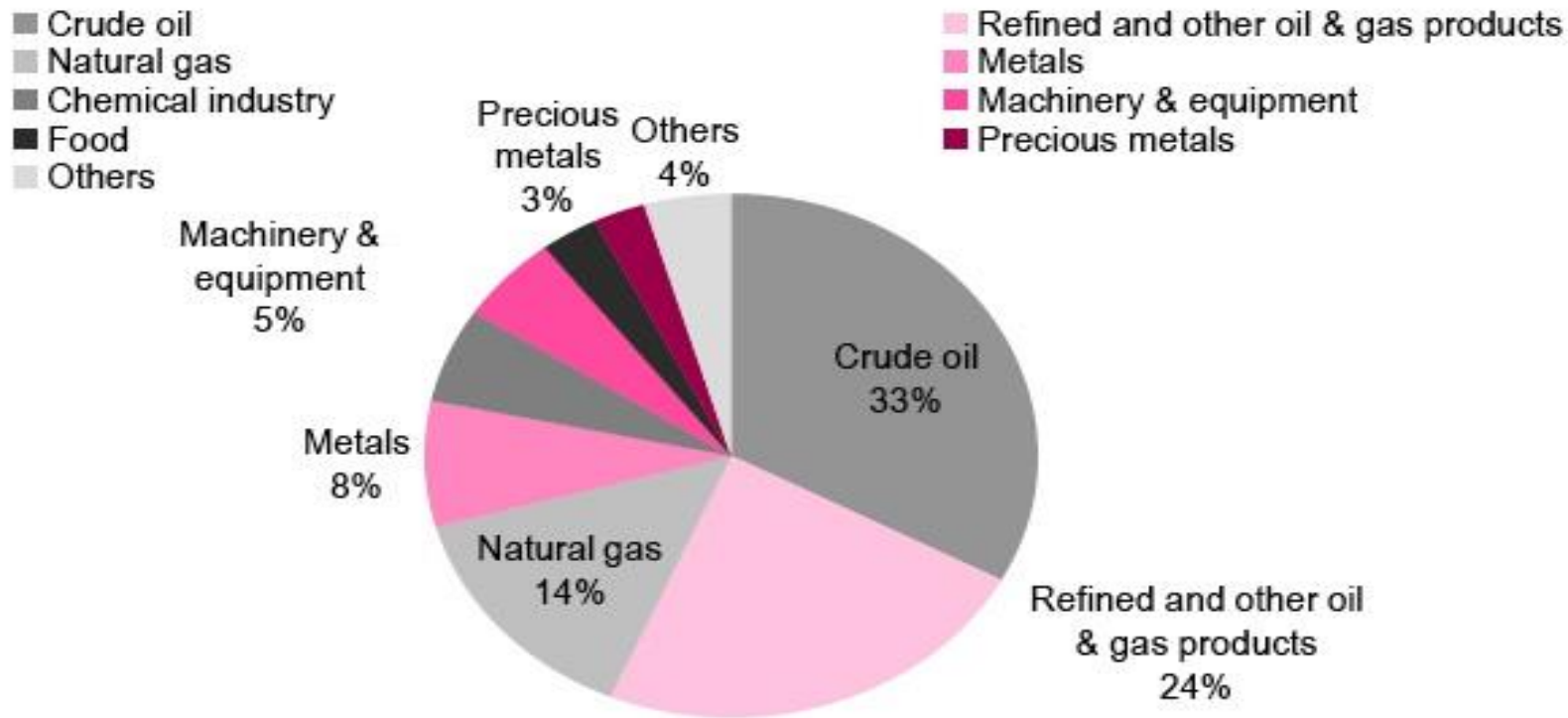
AFP

Capabilities: annexation of Crimea & Syria

	Crimean Annexation	Syrian Conflict
Dates	March 2014	September 2015 – ongoing
Price of oil	\$ 97.00	\$45.23
Ruble exchange rate to dollar	1\$=28 rubles	\$=66 rubles
Inflation rate	6.92	15.68
GDP	\$1,860.6 billion	(estimate) \$1,235.86 billion 18
Federal reserves	\$493.326 million	\$366.343 million

Context: Importance of Energy Sector for Russian Economy – 71% of exports

Figure 7: Russian export breakdown in 2013

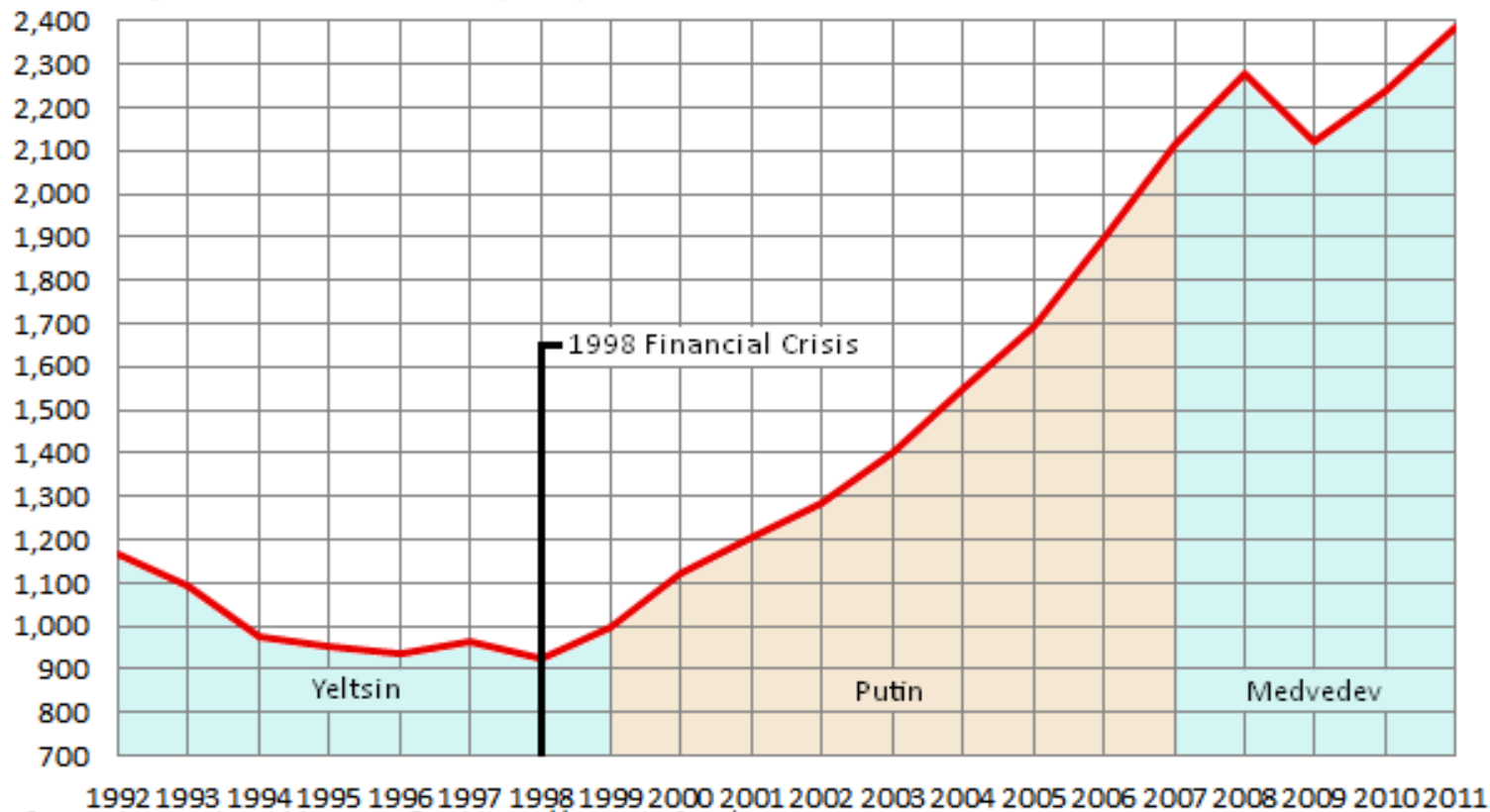


Source: Federal Customs Service

Importance of Energy - Economic

Russian GDP (PPP) Since Fall of Soviet Union

Billions of International Dollars (2008)

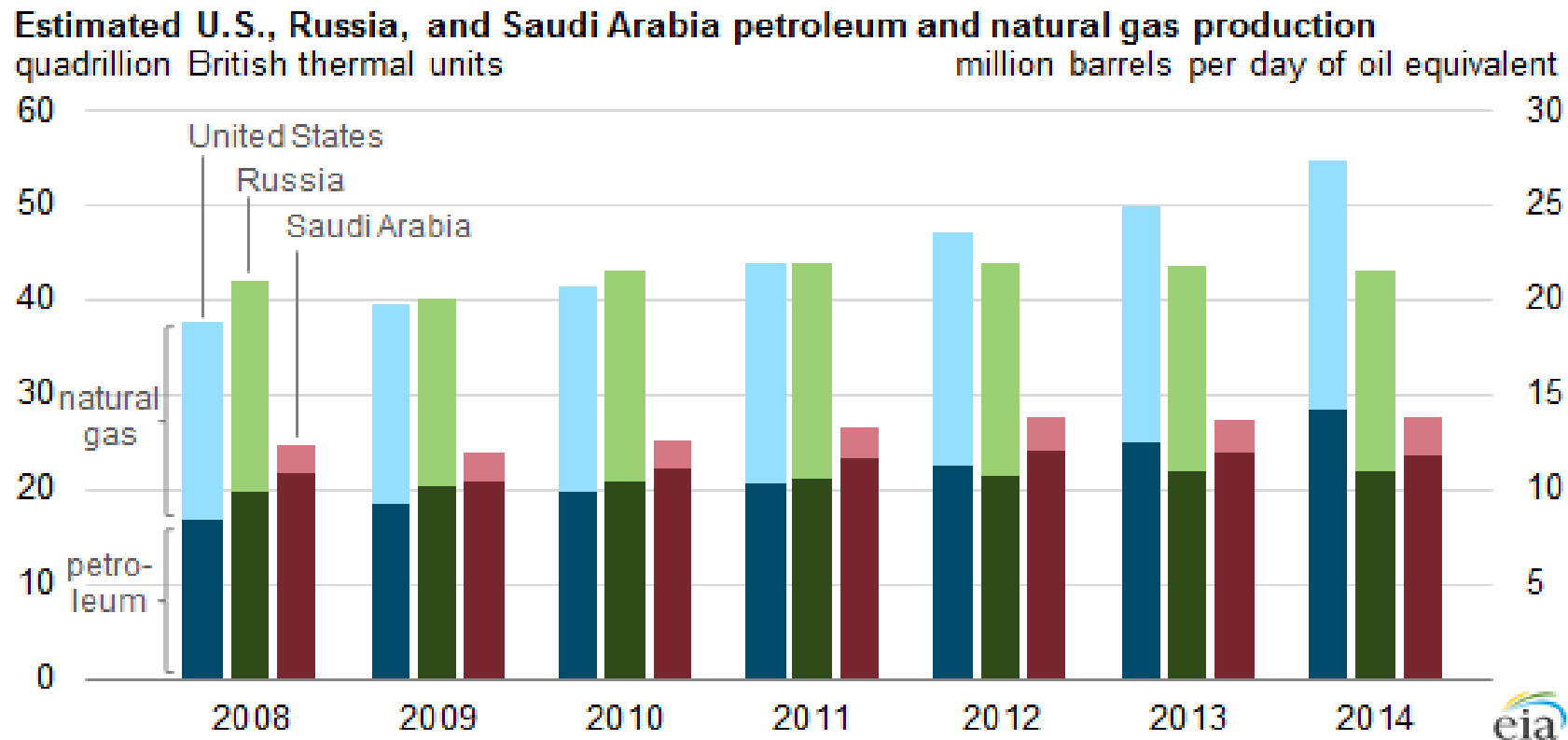


Virtual Economy

- Russian fuel and energy sector is this «value pump»
 - Drives economy:
 - **2014 - the non-oil sector current account deficit reached 11 percent of GDP**
 - **finances the security net to millions**
 - nonviable enterprises and **depend**
 - **on the state for heavily subsidized**
 - **health and educational systems**
 - Provide political and economic
 - **security** and stability

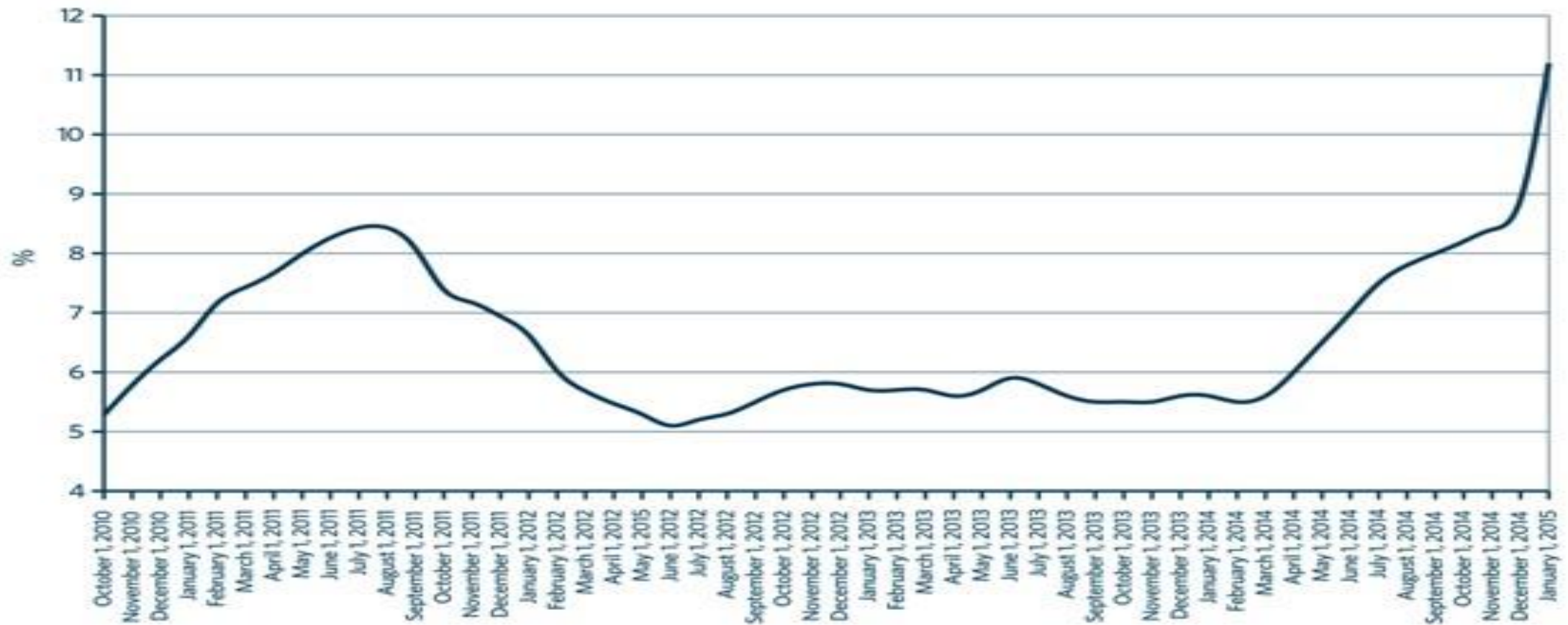


Decreasing share in global production: shale & LNG



Russian core inflation rates

Figure 1: Russia's Core Inflation Rate, as a Percent



Source: Federal State Statistics Service's official website, last accessed September 8, 2015, www.gks.ru.

Assumptions

Russian economy heavily depends on energy revenues

A light blue downward-pointing arrow indicating a logical flow from the first box to the second.

The fall in energy prices → ↓material capabilities + ability to project power

A light blue downward-pointing arrow indicating a logical flow from the second box to the third.

Assumption: Russia is to project less assertive foreign policy (lack of resources to sustain)

Systemic pressures





To engage or NOT to engage

Economic

- Port of Tartus
 - Important strategic position
 - Seems to be mostly symbolic
- Long term economic interests – 20 billion investment
 - Offshore drilling - \$90 million project
 - Suspension of “Turkish Stream”
- Arms contracts
 - Gradual increase: 2d largest exporter
 - Syria has not been a reliable payee

Russia is **losing more** than gaining

Geopolitical

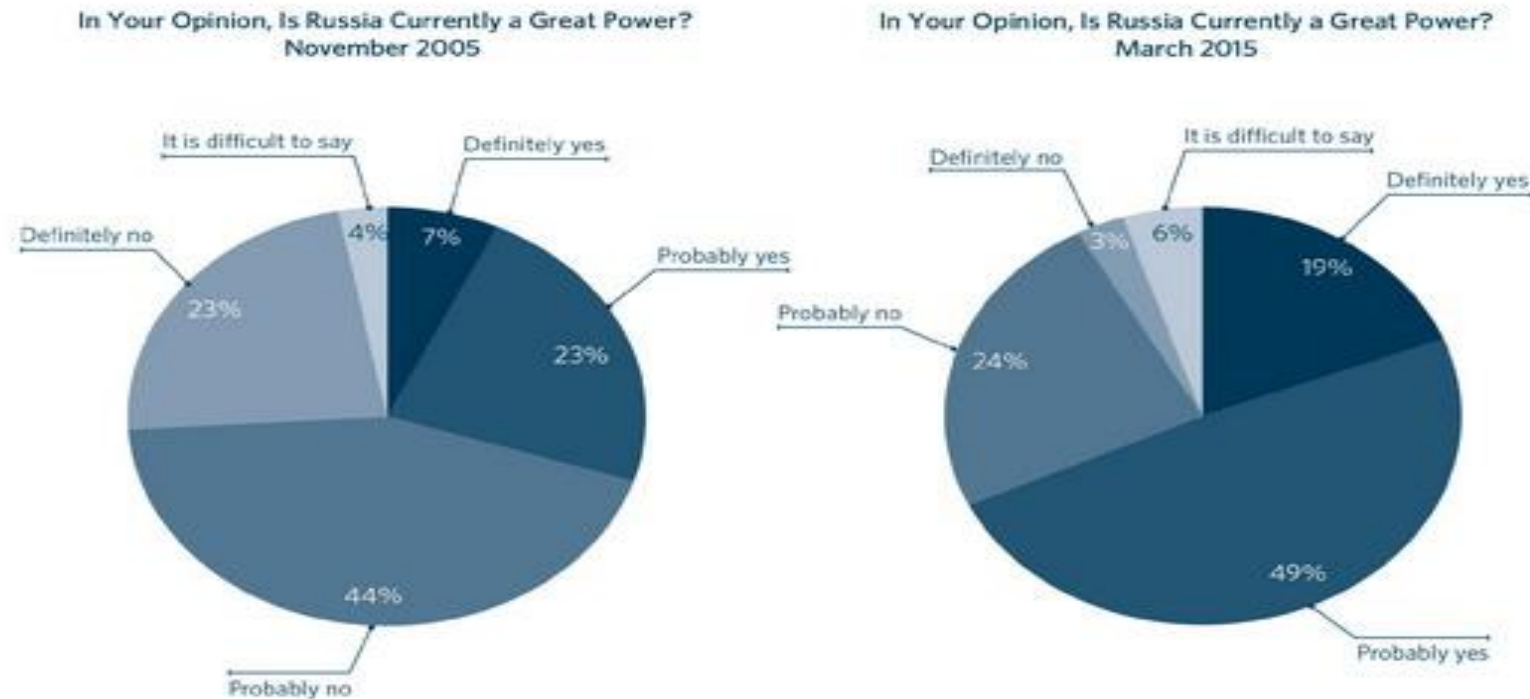
- **Lack of consensus:**
- “Fight against terrorism” – highly unlikely
 - 70-90% Russian led airstrikes mostly bypass the ISIS (Souleimanov)
 - 2016 announcement to pull out of Syria still controlled by ISIS (Kozhanov)
- Regional geopolitical interests
 - Attempt to align yourself geopolitically with Iran
 - Counterbalance US influence in the region
- Attempt to sift attention from Ukraine
 - Tweeter coverage of Ukraine decreased
- **Consensus:**
 - Geopolitical rivalry: the West (US) & Russia
 - Framing of Syrian engagement re-affirm: Russia – strong state capable to assert its interests

June 13	June 13	Sept. 13	Sept.15	Oct. 15
I follow the current events in Syria attentively	8	16	15	23
I know a bit about the current events in Syria, but I don't follow them closely	52	57	54	64
I know nothing about the current events in Syria	39	27	30	11

	Sept. 15	Oct. 15
Entirely approve	11	15
Somewhat approve	28	38
Somewhat disapprove	8	15
Entirely disapprove	3	7
I am not interested in the Russian government's policies towards Syria	33	18
It is difficult to say	17	8

Do Russian's Consider Russia to be a great state - PUZZLE

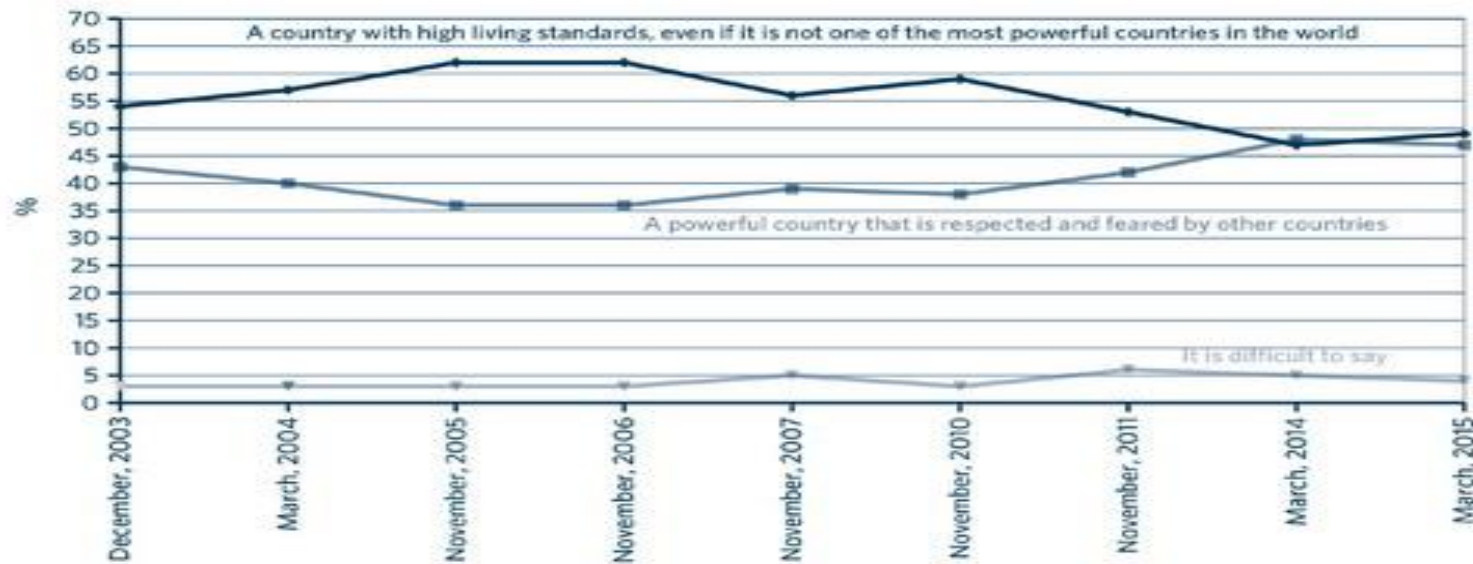
Figure 5: Is Russia Currently a Great Power, in Russians' Opinion?



Source: Levada Center, "Pozitsii Rossii na mezhdunarodnoy arene" [Russia's position in the international arena], March 23, 2015, www.levada.ru/23-03-2015/pozitsii-rossii-na-mezhdunarodnoi-arene.

What kind of country do Russians want to have

Figure 4: What Kind of Country Do Russians Want Russia to Be?

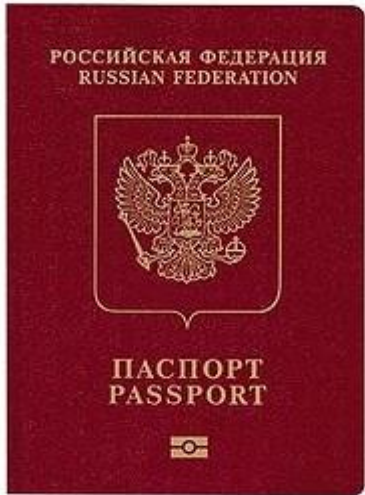


Source: Levada Center, "Bol'shinstvo rossiyan schitayut Rossiyu velikoy derzhavoy" [Most Russians consider Russia a great power], March 24, 2015, www.levada.ru/24-03-2015/bolshinstvo-grazhdan-schitayut-rossiyu-velikoi-derzhavoi

Great power

- Definition
 - Realists: **material capabilities + ability to project power**
 - You know great power when you see it (Waltz)
 - Less tangible factors (Morgenthau) – bearing of prestige
 - Moral dimension (Durkheim)
- Definition Volgy
 - **Objective**
 - **Unusual capabilities** to pursue interests in interstate relations
 - Military
 - Economic
 - Unusually **broad and expansive foreign policy** beyond its immediate neighborhood
 - Seeks to influence course of international affairs
 - Subjective/Perceptual (divergence of perceptions)
 - Endogenous
 - Self-referential: think of itself being great
 - » Consolidate population approval behind developmental goals
 - Perception could differ from exogenous attribution
 - Exogenous
 - Recognition by other states
 - Maybe inconsistent with capabilities & status: overachievers & under-achievers

Russian identity



- **Complexity** of Identity
- **Dominant themes:** Russia – self-perception as a **great power**
 - Persistence of the theme - historically embedded
 - **Change sources of greatness**
Civilizational/ideological/geopolitical/economic
 - Divergent perceptions on status
enhancements/diminishing Russia & the West

Russian physical security needs

- Understanding of greatness:
 - Ability to **address physical security needs**
- Geography (physical security needs)
 - Geopolitical:
 - Lack of defined boundaries: **exposure to physical threats**
 - East – Golden Horde, West – Poland, Sweden, etc
 - **Economic**
 - **Harsh climate** - call for agricultural expansion
 - Economic security called for **consolidation of power**
- History (Mongol conquest in formative years)
 - exposure to Asian style of governance
 - Role of the state: 1) collection of tribute, 2) order, 3) security, 4) devoid of responsibility for well-being
 - Patrimonial state – (Pipes): complete ownership economic + political domain

Russia as a strong state & empire

– In response to physical security needs - interconnected

- **consolidate power** in **strong state** personified by strong leader

- Embedded & routinized in history: Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Stalin, Putin, etc...

- **expand** – to absorb security threats – **imperial expansion**

- External protection/expansion=internal subjugation

- Imperial expansion – concurrent with consolidation of the state

- Deeply embedded in ontological awareness

Russia & the West

- Definition of the West
- West
 - Important – determine content of Russian identity
 - Significant “Other”
- Identity debates:
 - **Slavophiles**
 - unique civilization distinct from the West
 - Russia’s distinctness: faith, family, spirituality
 - Support for autocracy
 - **Eurasianists**
 - Distinct from the West
 - For centralization of power
 - Importance: Eastern influences
 - Lack of acceptance of Russia as an equal
 - **Westernizers** – emphasis – Russia’s similarity with the West
- Attachment to the conflict – Mitzen
 - Embedded conflicts with the Western neighbors
 - Further embedded during the Cold War
 - Internal identity coherence and biographic continuity

Break in biographic continuity – Russia as a great power

- Dissolution of the Soviet Union
 - Break in continuity of greatness
- 1990 – identity crisis
 - Search for the past that would make one proud
- Role of Russian government
 - The most important custodian of collective memory
 - Restoring biographic continuity of greatness
 - Avoidance of anxiety
 - Stability/continuity replace modernization
- “Aphasia” – turning to the old ideas in the absence of new ones (Boym)

Pressures & state responses

- Exogenous pressures **“trauma”** (Kinvall)
 - situations produce **anxiety** and represent threats to identity
 - Response(Kinvall)
 - **Rupture** of biographic narrative
 - **Consolidation** around biographic signifiers
 - Falling on the ***embedded ways of routines*** – a way to combat anxiety
 - Nationalism



Activated themes of Russian ontological awareness

- Russia as a **strong state** personified by a **strong leader**
- Russia as an **empire**
- Russia's relations with **the West**
- **PTSD** – Dissolution of the Soviet Union, loss of great power status



Conclusion

- At the time of external pressures – Russia consolidates around its routinized identity believes
- Objective of current regime– survival
- No objective factors to support viability
- Re-constructed and maintained idea of great power

not all
That's Folks!

