Under Strain: A Robust Russian Foreign Posture Despite Limitations

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Recent Russian Successes

- Frozen Conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, Armenia/Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia
- Action and Mediation in Syria
- Nuclear Arsenal Modernization
- International Projects

How is Russia able to act so forcefully abroad when its actions should be constrained by Western sanctions and low oil and natural gas prices? What factors explain this disparity between expectations and reality?

Western Sanctions

- Exacerbated issues already present in the Russian economy
- Did not result in the intended political outcomes, i.e. Russian foreign policy toward Ukraine was unchanged

Sino-Russian Relationship

- Relationship management efforts have helped to mitigate the political tensions created by Russia’s relatively weaker political position post-2014 in an atmosphere of European animosity
- Cooperation in the energy sector is indicative of a strategic partnership the Russians desire
- The Russians and the Chinese have similar views around the international order that imply that they should be treated and allowed to act with great power status

Dependence on Natural Gas and Oil

- 36% of Government Revenues, 67-70% of GDP
- Collapse of the Ruble
- Loss of Western Funding for Difficult Extraction Projects

The Perils of Being a Petrolestate

Russia is paying the price for being one of the world’s most oil-dependent economies.

Western Abdication

- Russia is more committed to enacting policy and enforcing its interests in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia than the West, particularly the United States

Russian Soft Power

- The Russian government hopes to inspire stability and community between post-Soviet states, and to inspire disunity in the West
- Narratives of a “Russian World” and Regional Organizations promote community in Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- Russian energy relationships with Europe and support of European political parties on the extreme left and right sow internal Western consternation