



Putin's Vision of History and the Future of International Relations

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On 15 June, U.S. President Donald Trump confirmed earlier reports that he plans to reduce U.S. forces in Germany from around 34,500 to 25,000 troops. Although the decision is related to U.S.-German disputes, it undermines the policy of deterring Russia conducted by Trump's own administration and NATO. While the specifics and date of the drawdown are not yet known, the announcement of the plan and perspective of weakening U.S. military capabilities in Europe are already deepening transatlantic tensions.

Why has Putin has written now about World War II?

The text is another in [Russia's revisionist history campaign](#). To Russian elites, the USSR's victory over the Third Reich is key to their superpower ideology. It also serves to present Russia as an indispensable partner to the West and post-Soviet countries, and to consolidate society. Hence, Putin's comments on the war were published a few days before the Victory Day parade, rescheduled to 24 June because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and a dozen days before Russians vote on amendments to the constitution.

The text, which criticises, among others, Poland's interwar policy, was also published shortly after announcements about a planned meeting of the U.S. and Polish presidents in Washington D.C. on 24 June, during which they may discuss strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank. The publication of Putin's text in English is also meant to convey a wide discussion in the U.S., Israel, and Western European countries.

How does the article fit into Russia's historical policy?

The text repeats ideas propagated by Russian authorities for months now. According to Putin, the main reason for the outbreak of World War II—while also rejecting the impetus of the secret alliance between the USSR and the Third Reich—was the

appeasement policy of Western European countries towards Nazi Germany. In the text, Putin repeats the accusations that the leaders of the Second Polish Republic participated in the partitioning of Czechoslovakia, were anti-Semitic, and cooperated with Nazi Germany and stated that the Polish authorities contributed to the outbreak of the war. In attacking Poland, Putin appears to be trying to remove the odium of Soviet collusion and aggression at the start of the war and portray the USSR in a positive light during the entire war, emphasising its fundamental role in the victory over the Third Reich. The overarching goal is to demonstrate Russia's position in history as a country without which it is impossible to shape the international order.

What vision of the international order does Putin propose?

In his text, Putin criticised the League of Nations as an organisation that could not prevent interwar conflicts nor the outbreak of World War II. At the same time, in a contrasting and positive light, he describes the UN, which was formed after the war with the key role of the permanent members of the Security Council. Putin devotes special attention to the need for cooperation between the major powers, which obviously includes Russia, only through which it is possible to maintain

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world peace. He refers to the Russian proposals for UN reform, which, without specifying them in this text, include, above all, strengthening the role of the Security Council and maintaining the veto right for its permanent members. From the Russian perspective, increasing these powers will give the permanent members the right to make top-down decisions about other countries and is consistent with Russia's perception of international politics as a game of powers and the division of the world into spheres of influence. However, this is contrary to established international law and even the United Nations Charter, which assumes the sovereign equality of states.

What does Russia propose as a solution to avoid further international crises?

The text presents Putin's vision of how to avoid a future global conflict. The text reiterates the proposal to organise a conference similar to famous ones from history—Tehran, Yalta, Potsdam—of leaders of the nuclear powers who are permanent members of the UN Security Council. According to Putin, these five states have a special responsibility for the fate of the world. The four other countries responded positively to an invitation issued by the Russian president in Jerusalem in January. The details of the meeting, which is to take place in 2020, are being negotiated and the most important element of the talks is seeking solutions for current threats to world peace, including pandemics, and control over nuclear arsenals.