From Euromaidan to the Donbass: Putin’s Misguided Adventure into the Ukraine

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Abstract:
Russia’s involvement in the Ukraine has proven counterproductive to their three strategic interests: high favorability, strong near abroad relations, and national power. As a result of Crimea, Russian global favorability has plummeted, relations with the near abroad are at a dismal low, and national power is in decline.

Russian global favorability has reached an all time low. Only 30% of nations hold a favorable view of Russian leadership. Of those which do, it is by slim margins. As a result of their involvement in the Ukraine, Russia has been suspended from numerous international organizations. Russia’s delegation was removed from both the G-8 and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Russia cannot become a global leader whilst on the periphery of global affairs.

Russia’s relations with their near abroad are at a dismal low. The Baltic nations have greatly increased defense expenditures in response to Russian hybrid aggression. Fear of Russian subversion has driven Finland and Sweden to step up integration and interoperability with NATO. The War in the Donbass has proven counterproductive to Moscow’s goal of productive and unified relations with the near abroad.

The Russian military hasn’t been immune to these economic woes. Russian defense expenditure was reduced by 5.3% in 2015. Modernization plans through 2020 have been notably scaled back due to insufficient funds. Fifth gen. fighter jet acquisition declined by 76%.

Conclusion
Russia’s primary goal in the 21st century is to establish itself as a global leader. To achieve these aims, Russia must maintain high global favorability, establish positive relations with the near abroad, and maximize national power through economic and military strength. In all three aspects, Russia’s involvement in Ukraine has proven counterproductive. Russian global favorability has plummeted, relations with the near abroad are at their lowest point in decades, and Russian economic and military strength is in decline. For Russian policymakers, their annexation of Crimea and subsequent hybrid war in the Donbass was not a foreign policy victory, but a strategic mistake.