

# Russia and the Return of the Gendarme

Thursday 18 September 2014, by [BUKETOV Kirill](#) (Date first published: 17 September 2014).

**In this guest post, KIRILL BUKETOV of the Global Labour Institute [1] in Geneva comments on the nature of Russian imperialism. (Note: a gendarmerie is a military force that carries out police duties among civilian populations.)**

## People and Nature website

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Stalinists of all hues and colours are falling over themselves to praise Russia's course of action in Ukraine as an attempt to restore the Soviet Union, or create an altogether new entity capable of opposing the might of the USA and the imperialism of western Europe. Their arguments smack of nothing but sheer stupidity.

What Vladimir Putin has done in south eastern Ukraine simply put Russia back some 200 years and restored the country's status as the "gendarme of Europe" - which the Russian Empire achieved back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after sending a 140,000-strong punitive corps to crush the democratic revolution of 1848-1849 in Hungary.

The ruling elites of the West and the East try to use the conflict to their benefit. While western imperialism is quite pragmatic, motivated by the desire to secure its control over resources, the rationale of Russian imperialism is fundamentally different. Russia does not need control over somebody else's resources - it is quite content with those it has internally. But in order to be able to go on controlling them and disposing of them as it pleases, the Russian oligarchical elite requires a strictly authoritarian rule. Anything that threatens to undermine the regime is, therefore, suppressed, quickly and ruthlessly - be it the freedom of the press, a movement for fair elections, or the right of NGOs to operate freely. And emergence in the immediate geographical proximity of alternative systems - states whose governance is based on democracy - undermines Putin's regime, for they can sustain and inspire the dissident movement and popular unrest inside the country.

This is why Russia provides huge loans to Aleksandr Lukashenko's authoritarian regime in Belarus, and severely punishes those countries where it suspects the beginnings of democratic rule. Thus, in its time, Moldova was punished with the secession of Transdniestria. Then, more recently, Georgia paid with the annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and now the Ukrainian Maidan has been punished with the loss of Crimea.

At the same time, Russia does not have much use for those territories. It has more than its fair share of economically depressed areas of its own. It is the gendarme's logic at work: "Punish, and let others beware!" ... and weaken - so that without the annexed territories the democratic state would be unable to build a sustainable economy, so that - heavens forbid - no uncorrupt, free, and democratic state could appear at the borders of dirty-faced Russia.

That is the logic followed by Russian emperors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they sent punitive troops to Europe. Their Stalinist successors followed the same logic when they suppressed people's uprisings in eastern and central Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century - although the USSR, at least in its rhetoric, tried to picture itself as a non-capitalist society. Today's Russia can in no way be seen as an alternative to the capitalist system. It is different from the major capitalist powers only in the monstrous levels of workers' superexploitation supported by the blatantly repressive system of labour relations.

**Kirill Buketov**

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**P.S.**

\* <http://peopleandnature.wordpress.com/2014/04/24/return-of-the-gendarme/>

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**Footnotes**

[1] <http://www.globallabour.info/en/>