



What does Russia want?

I will tell you here what Twitter doesn't want to let me tell you there.

As you know, the situation in Ukraine is extremely volatile and things are literally changing by the hour. It is therefore futile for us to dwell on individual developments on the ground.

So today we will focus on the fundamental question, the one that many are asking themselves:

What does Russia want?

As we speak, Ukraine is a bit like a tree that hides the forest.

Let's try to take a step back to understand the posture, the position and the final ambitions of Russia, first of all for itself, but also for Ukraine and for the rest of the world.

Since he came to power, Vladimir Putin is perceived as one of the most fascinating actors on the international scene. We talk about him as a mystery, an enigma. He is presented as unpredictable and difficult to read...

And yet, it is quite the opposite.

Putin's intentions for Russia are very clear.

One only has to look at the geopolitical situation on a global scale to understand what is happening.

So let's discuss Russia's long-term objectives, its strategy and the fundamental reasons that led it to pursue this specific strategy.

Let's go back in time to the late 1970s. The world is then in the middle of the cold war, the standard of living of the Soviets is improving.

The USSR is at the peak of its influence. The country has a network of partners, of satellite countries all over the world.

But the relationship with the USA is then tense and hostile.

It is based on a form of balance based essentially on the concept of "Sphere of Influence".

The USSR represents the Eastern bloc, that of the communist countries or simply those who refuse to align themselves with the West.

On the other hand, the US encourages its allies who are fighting against communism, and tries at all costs to contain the Eastern bloc in order to slow down its progression.

While Washington could rely on the NATO military alliance, Moscow relied on an equivalent alliance, the "Warsaw Pact".

At this time the balance of power is relatively balanced. We therefore speak of a Bipolar world.

Two powers that act as geopolitical poles in their own right. It is a rivalry that stimulates competition, but also forces the US and the West to make concessions in international politics.

After all, the existence of a credible alternative to the West allows countries around the world not only to choose sides, but even more: to negotiate their allegiance to the fundamental interests of the state.

If Washington refuses to sell you weapons, there was always the USSR.

If the US threatened to overthrow your government, you could always call on the Soviets to help you.

Think about Cuba.

Think about Nicaragua.

Think about Venezuela.

Think about Iran.

These are just a few examples that illustrate the power and importance of the Soviet counterweight in a bipolar world.

The small countries could resist the overwhelming power of the West, but also against Moscow, since in both cases, they could count on a quasi-symmetrical support from the rival power.

Every action leads to a reaction.

Although it may seem paradoxical and counterintuitive, this relative parity between the two poles was globally beneficial for the world order.

It ensured that no one world power would establish a dominant position that would potentially allow it to abuse its influence, but more importantly, it allowed Moscow and Washington to push their own military boundaries.

This was done through the installation of spheres of influence in order to create a buffer zone against the enemy.

Thanks to NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the military line of contact was more than 1600 km (994.1939 miles) away from the Soviet capital, which allowed Russia to breathe a sigh of relief, since in the event of a military conflict, it would have had enough space to break up an invasion before it reached the heart of Russia.

Throughout the centuries, the Russian territory has been invaded by Hitler and Napoleon. Via the Caucasus, by the Ottomans. Or through Asia by the troops of Genghis Khan.

Each time, the enemy armies entered deep into the Russian plains to knock on the doors of Moscow.

Russia's borders are so vast that they are practically impossible to defend.

The only solution: The establishment of a sphere of influence, surrounding itself with a harem of satellite states.

The best defense for Russia is the way of influence rather than violence.

For the US, it is easy to dispense with the sphere of influence logic since the American continent is isolated by two oceans, making it virtually impossible to invade.

Russia, on the other hand, has more than two neighbors. It has 14!

Consequently, the notions of spheres of influence and buffer spaces are essential to national defense.

But all this collapsed with the end of the Cold War and the fall of the USSR.

The buffer republics broke up one after the other at a time when Russia was experiencing a period of deep instability.

The standard of living collapsed.

This was the moment when the US emerged as a hegemonic super power, marking the end of the Bipolar world balance.

For years, hardly anyone could seriously stand up to Washington.

The 1990s and early 2000s were the peak of US domination of the international system with no credible counterweight to its influence.

The Americans acted as kings of the world, invested with a confidence that, according to some, sometimes bordered on arrogance.

In particular through the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund. The influence of the US is spreading within the former Soviet republics.

These countries are still looking for a way to recover after the collapse of the USSR.

Worse still for Russia, not only does NATO continue to exist, but the alliance is expanding eastward to include new members, including several former countries in Moscow's sphere of influence, such as Poland.

For the young president Putin, who came to power at the beginning of 2000, the strategic picture was a disaster. He deplores the end of the balance of power and deeply believes that the world is less stable, and that states are less free in a system dominated by a single power.

In fact he goes much further, and publicly declares that the fall of the USSR is the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

What Putin is denouncing is not the end of communism, but the end of bipolarity. And the state of siege in which he claims Russia finds itself today.

By including Russia's neighbours in NATO, the US has pushed Moscow into a corner and brought the potential firing line directly to the Russian border.

Putin puts it into perspective when he says that Russia is a country with a knife to its throat. For him, this straitjacket must be broken and as soon as possible.

It's only here that we can finally answer the question we asked at the start of this piece:

What does Russia want?

When you take all this into account, you realise that it is actually very simple.

Putin wants to turn back the strategic clock to a world modeled on the Soviet sphere of influence in a multipolar world.

To do this, he must rebuild the great geopolitical pillars of the USSR:

Courting the former allies.

Reconstitute a sphere of influence around Russia.

The task is enormous.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that Putin's great game is already well underway.

First, you have the countries of Central Asia, which Putin has brought under Russian control through several vital energy, economic and security agreements.

Not only is Russia a key trading partner for the countries of the region, but it also provides a check on China's growing influence.

When demonstrations broke out in Kazakhstan a few months ago, it was the Russian army that restored order, at the request of the Kazakh government. Same picture if you closely study the case of Mongolia.

In Europe, Belarus has been planning to formally join Russia for at least 10 years, with President Lukashenko depending on Putin's support to keep himself in power.

Moreover, there are many examples in the world of former USSR allies that Putin is courting in order to rebuild the Russian sphere of power:

Venezuela

Nicaragua

Iran

Syria

North Korea

Putin has forgiven 73% of the debt owed to Russia.

Vladimir Putin's main geopolitical occupation has always been to return to a multipolar world by re-establishing the essential strategic foundations of the Cold War:

Energy exports.

Arms sales.

Hybrid warfare.

Sphere of influence.

So what we are seeing in Ukraine today is entirely consistent with Putin's global strategy.

He sees Ukraine as an essential buffer zone between NATO and Russia.

Article 5 of the NATO treaty promises that all allies are mobilised in the event of an attack on a member of the alliance.

Thus, Putin considers that a NATO country on its border directly and irresponsibly increases the potential for all-out war.

This is why, even as you read this, the Russian president is still calling for the withdrawal of NATO forces stationed in the Baltic states.

It has nothing to do with Ukraine, you have to understand the whole picture, it's the only way to identify what is really at stake.