



## Putin's ambition to regain Finland, warns former adviser

By Robert Myles  
March 31, 2014

A former adviser to Russian [President Vladimir Putin](#) has warned the West is failing to understand Putin's world view and that the ambitions of Russia's head of state extend far beyond Crimea.

[Andrey Illarionov](#), a Russian economist who served as a senior economic adviser to Putin between 2000 and 2005, interviewed by Sweden's [Dagbladet](#), said unless steps were taken to stop Putin in Ukraine, Putin would seek to re-establish Russia's extent as it stood in Tsarist days by regaining Finland, Belarus and the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

Having served as Putin's personal representative to the G-8 group of industrial nations until he resigned in January 2005, Illarionov is in a unique position to assess how Putin views the world and how far Putin's ambitions extend.

Illarionov left Putin's inner circle of advisers in 2005 after becoming increasingly concerned at what he regarded the autocratic path adopted by the Russian president during Putin's first period in office from 2000 to 2008. Later in 2005, Illarionov [had declared](#), "This year Russia has become a different country. It is no longer a democratic country. It is no longer a free country."

In October 2006, Illarionov was appointed senior researcher of the [Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity](#) of the US libertarian think-tank the [Cato Institute](#) in Washington, D.C. Since then, he has [expressed dismay](#) at what he termed Russia's "new corporate state in which state-owned enterprises are governed by personal interests and private corporations have become subject to arbitrary intervention to serve state interests," as well as highlighting "new ways in which political, economic and civil liberties are being eliminated," in Putin's Russia.

Illarionov was critical of Western leaders who, he claimed, had failed to understand how Putin saw Russia's place in the world.

Referring to remarks [reportedly made](#) by German Chancellor [Angela Merkel](#) [Unlink] to President Obama that Putin had "lost touch with reality" shortly after the start of the Ukrainian crisis, Illarionov said it was Merkel and other Western leaders who weren't in touch with Putin's reality. The West had failed to realize that Putin saw the world as one where the West, fascists or

NATO were to blame for the Soviet Union's problems, bringing about the dismemberment of the former USSR.

The West's leaders, said Illarionov, seemed entirely to have forgotten that there are some leaders in the world who want to conquer other countries.

Illarionov pointed to Russia's previous incursions into the "frozen conflicts" in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia as being earlier examples of what had now taken place in Crimea. Russia was now attempting to destabilize eastern and southern regions of Ukraine setting up the pretext for self-defense forces taking control in these regions. Putin's goal, he said, was the installation of a pro-Russian puppet government in Kiev.

Asked if Putin could really threaten Finland, Illarionov said the country might not be on Putin's agenda for the immediate future but if the Russian president were not stopped now, sooner or later, the issue would arise. Finland's independence was granted by the Bolsheviks in 1917, but Putin, said Illarionov, had often talked of the communists and Bolsheviks making big mistakes. In Putin's world view, Illarionov said that the logic would run that since the Bolsheviks, in granting independence to Finland in 1917, had committed treason against Russian national interests, Russia was perfectly within its rights to take action to correct a historical wrong.

"Putin's view is that he protects what belongs to him and his predecessors," Illarionov said, adding, "Parts of Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic States and Finland are states where Putin claims to have ownership."

In this view of the world, sanctions against Russia might have the opposite effect to that intended. From Putin's standpoint, sanctions confirm the Russian president's belief that the world has it in for Russia. Kremlin propaganda, said Illarionov, merely reinforces the Russian people's view that Putin was right all along and that the West is the enemy attempting to encircle and impoverish Russia.

Some media reports have referred to [Finland not being a member of NATO](#) and, that being so, that the NATO doctrine of an attack on one being an attack on all wouldn't apply. The implication is that NATO could sit on its hands.

That, however, does not tell the full story for not only has Finland been a full member of the European Union since 1995, it's also an active participant in [NATO's Partnership for Peace](#) framework.

Within the Partnership for Peace, NATO and Finland cooperate on peace and security operations and have developed practical cooperation in a range of other areas, including education and training and the development of military capabilities.

While Finland remains non-aligned militarily, it can pick and choose areas of cooperation with NATO that match its own political objectives. In that context, and given that Finland is economically aligned with a number of other NATO members in the European Union, it's inconceivable in the event of any Russian threat to the country emerging, Finland would choose

to do anything other than align with an mutual defense organization that hardly constitutes a threat to Finland's very existence.

Any Finnish call for NATO assistance could simply not be ignored.