



Online Discussion

Is Russia losing its Influence in Central Asia?

1400-1515 GMT/0900-1015 EST/1500-1615 CET/1800-19:15 (GMT+4)

Wednesday 6 March 2024 via Zoom

Regional Institute for Security Studies (RISS) is pleased to invite you to an online discussion analysing Russian influence and presence in Central Asia since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022.

In light of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, Moscow's global influence has been shrinking. Russia has always had a significant interest in Central Asia and has viewed itself as a dominant power in the region. The Russian President Vladimir Putin has traditionally considered Central Asia to fall within its so-called sphere of influence and regularly exerted pressure on the leaders of Central Asian states. Yet, Russia's war against Ukraine has significantly affected Moscow's image in the region against the background of China's rising ambitions.

Central Asian countries have largely remained neutral with regards to the Russian-Ukrainian war and avoided endorsing the Kremlin, with some leaders from the region becoming more proactive at seeking more independence from the Kremlin. For instance, the president of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declined Russian requests to recognise pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, whereas the president of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev recognised Ukraine's territorial integrity and pledged to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine.

In addition to Russia's political presence in the region, Moscow has been seen by Central Asian countries as a security provider - an image that has been heavily undermined in light of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) inefficiency and lack of credibility. Lately, Central Asian countries have been increasingly engaged with alternative partners in the security domain. However, despite the visible reputational damage, Russia still obtains important tools of influence in the region as well as soft power.

This online discussion with experts is aiming to address key questions to analyse to what extent Russia's economic, political and security posture has changed in the region since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The panel of experts will aim to address the following questions:

- What is Russia's strategic view on Central Asia?
- How is Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine affecting Russia's influence in Central Asia?
- Has Moscow done anything to strengthen its regional position in Central Asia since the beginning of the war in Ukraine?
- Has Russia's security and economic role changed in the region?



This event is funded by the Russia Strategic Initiative, U.S. European Command. The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense or the United States government.

Speakers:

Natia Seskuria - Director of Regional Institute for Security Studies (RISS)

Maximilian Hesse - Central Asia Fellow in the Eurasia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI)

Jeffrey Hawn - Researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science

Moderator: Dr Tatia Chikhladze - Senior Research Fellow at RISS

Biographies:



Natia Seskuria is a Founder and Executive Director of the Regional Institute for Security Studies (RISS) and an Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). Additionally, Natia holds an advisory position at Chatham House and is a lecturer in Russian politics. She has a broad experience in policy-making, strategic foresight and provides analysis on defence and security issues. In the past, she served at the Office of the National Security Council of Georgia and the Ministry of Defence of Georgia.

Natia's research focuses on Russia's domestic and foreign policy, in particular Russia's relations with its neighbours, strategic approach to occupied regions, relations with the West and the use of active measures. She also specialises in conflicts and security in

the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region and regularly contributes to leading academic journals and online magazines. Natia is a frequent commentator on major media outlets including BBC, France 24 and CNN.



Maximilian Hess is a Central Asia Fellow in the Eurasia Program at the Foreign Policy Research Institute and the founder of the London-based political risk firm Enmetena Advisory. Max has written for *The Financial Times*, *New Statesman*, *Al Jazeera*, *The Moscow Times*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The Telegraph*, amongst others. He is also the author of *Economic War: Ukraine and the Global Conflict between Russia and the West* published by Hurst and Oxford University Press in 2023.

His research focuses on the relationship between trade, debt, international relations, and foreign policy, as well the overlap between political and economic networks. Max's expertise has been quoted in outlets such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg*, *Rolling Stone*, *Der Spiegel*, and *The Financial Times*, and he is a frequent TV and radio guest on stations such as the *BBC*, *CNBC*, *NPR*, and *Channel 4*.



Jeff Hawn is a researcher and a doctoral candidate at the London School of Economics and Political Science's department of international history. He previously lived and worked in Washington DC, first as a Policy Correspondent for RCR Wireless and later as a global intelligence analyst for the private intelligence company Stratfor. Jeff also serves as a guest lecturer for undergraduate and graduate-level classes at American University on the topics of U.S.-Russian relations, terrorism, and open-source intelligence.

Jeff has written and published numerous articles on a wide range of topics. His PhD thesis *From Collapse to Crisis the Russian Constitutional Crisis of 1993* will be submitted in September 2024. He sees this research as a crucial starting point in establishing a firm foundation for the broader scope of study in understanding why Russia was not integrated into the Trans-Atlantic system after the Cold War, and what factors brought about the dynamics of the post-Cold War world order we are now contending with.



Dr Tatia Chikhladze is Senior Research Fellow at the Regional Institute for Security Studies (RISS) and Associate Professor at the British University of Georgia. Her research interests include Black Sea regional security, hybrid warfare, fight against serious and organized crime, critical infrastructure and resilience of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes.

She has extensive experience of working on senior analyst positions at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, the State Security and Crisis Management Council of Georgia and State Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, providing analysis on the security environment in the wider Black Sea region.

Tatia holds a PhD in Politics from the University of Bremen (Germany). Her dissertation focuses on strategies of post-Soviet authoritarian regimes for power preservation in times of political crisis.

For further information please email: tchikhladze@riss.ge or riss@riss.ge