

Russia Is Moving From Merkel to Mugabe

By [Alexander Golts](#)

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Russia's commander in chief was clearly displeased with the foreign policy results of the recent Victory Day celebrations. Geopolitically speaking, they demonstrated that Russia is a part of Asia, not Europe, because it was largely the leaders of Asian states who attended the ceremony.

And because of their peculiar "Asian" mentality, those leaders could pretend they "hadn't noticed" Russia's annexation of Crimea and Moscow's military foray into the Donbass. For their part, the leaders of states that had fought Hitler along with the Soviet Union refused to visit Moscow.

However, German Chancellor Angela Merkel had no choice in the matter. For her it was of fundamental importance that she come to Russia — arriving, however, a day later, on May 10 — using her visit to emphasize that, even 70 years later, the German people acknowledge their responsibility for the horrendous crimes committed by the Nazis.

President Vladimir Putin decided to get all he could out of Merkel. After their formal talks, he told her how much the German business community is suffering from the sanctions and of the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in southern and eastern Ukraine — that, by the way, Moscow itself had provoked and maintains.

But the chancellor held her ground. "Due to the criminal and illegal, under international law, annexation of Crimea and the military conflicts in eastern Ukraine, this cooperation has suffered a serious setback because we see in those actions a threat to European peace," she responded firmly.

The moment of truth came when Putin was asked about his attitude toward the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. Putin faithfully recited the version of events as described in every Soviet textbook. He said the Soviet Union struggled to create an anti-Hitler coalition in the late 1930s but that the treacherous Britain and France ignored those efforts.

Putin made no mention of the fact that the Soviet delegation had received clear instructions from former Soviet leader Josef Stalin to stall for time. According to Putin's version, the Soviet Union signed an agreement with Hitler in order to ensure its own security, and was largely successful in doing so.

The Russian president spoke as if there was no secret protocol between Hitler and Stalin regarding their plans to partition Poland — no doubt to ensure their own security. The head of the Russian state even indirectly justified those actions by pointing out that the Poles themselves were to blame: after all, before becoming victims of aggression they had taken part in the partitioning of Czechoslovakia.

This all shows that Putin has radically changed the position he took in 2009. At a ceremony in Gdansk, Poland commemorating the start of World War II, Putin said that any cooperation with the Nazis led to tragedy and all attempts to appease the Nazis "are inadmissible from the moral point of view and from the practical, political point of view are senseless, detrimental and dangerous," he said.

Perhaps six years ago Putin was simply reading the words of a liberal speechwriter and this time he was speaking from his heart. In any case, he is now clearly attempting to justify the actions of Soviet leaders.

However, Putin's arguments have no connection with reality. And contrary to what he and the culture minister now claim, Stalin's pact with the devil brought no security whatsoever to the Soviet Union.

By carrying out the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact — that is, by seizing part of Poland and all of the Baltic states, the Soviet Union lost its strategic buffer zone and found itself in direct contact with Nazi Germany. Soviet troops left the fortified borders and took up unreinforced positions.

And most importantly, Stalin believed in his secret agreements with the Fuhrer, and was therefore genuinely shocked when Hitler violated them. In 1941, millions of people paid with their lives for that misguided faith.

Interestingly, Putin seems to believe that today's "great powers" can reach a similar agreement. The only problem is that no international partners want to sign a pact with Moscow. And Merkel, to her credit, stood firm by referring to that previous secret protocol and explaining that such arrangements are now totally unacceptable.

In fact, I think it was not this meeting with Merkel, but another meeting that better illustrates the path Russia's future development might take. That meeting took place on May 10 with 91-year-old Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, whose advanced age and physical and political remoteness from the events of World War II did not prevent him from becoming an active participant in the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow.

The world's oldest state leader heartily greeted Putin in connection with his own inclusion into the club of Russia's friends — the club of countries victimized by the West. "Russia ... has stood firm against the pressure from the United States and Europe, which have imposed sanctions on your country," Mugabe said.

"We in our time also fought British imperialism and we had to take our land back from the British farmers. When we were successful in this effort, the United States, Europe and Britain imposed sanctions on us. You are fighting sanctions now, and so are we. The United States forms the summit of this imperialist pyramid, followed by Europe. For this reason, we must work together, and this made it all the greater a pleasure to watch the events yesterday, as they demonstrated Russia's revival," he said.

Keep in mind that when Mugabe was at the height of his presidential powers he told 5,000 British farmers — who fed not only Zimbabwe, but half of Africa — that they would have to immediately leave the country, as well as their land and their holdings in his country.

The Zimbabwean authorities then divvied up those assets, after which agricultural production ceased and the country began appealing to the United Nations for assistance. Inflation reached a world record high of 321 million percent (yes, 321 million — that is no typo), and the government put a new banknote worth 100 trillion Zimbabwean dollars into circulation.

And now the man responsible for that fiasco is beaming over "Russia's revival" that, to his thinking, is proven by the fact that the West has applied sanctions against this country. He might well have said simply, "Welcome to the club, Mr. Putin." After all, it is quite possible that the same fate awaits Russia.

The good news is that President Mugabe, like President Putin, installed himself as "ruler for life," and it is thanks to that longevity that Zimbabwe enjoys a certain degree of stability — albeit a somewhat hungry one.

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