

## Rapid Fire: Is the Ukraine Crisis the West's Fault? Part 2

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CATHINKA LERSTAD, AUG 27 2014

*This is the second of three blogs on the validity of John Mearsheimer's argument in his Foreign Affairs piece "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin". You can find the other posts on IR Theory and Practice as they are published.*

In the spirit of the realist tradition, Mearsheimer's attribution of blame for the Ukrainian crisis perpetuates an adversarial status quo. Yet, despite this deficiency, his argument does contribute an important point. In Western media, the Ukraine crisis has almost exclusively been ascribed to Russian aggression. Very little has been said about the role of the United States and its European allies in generating and sustaining the tense situation. Western media has thus arguably contributed to fuelling antipathy against Russia. Unfortunately, while his sympathies lie on the opposite end and his argument reveals another and critical side to the story, Mearsheimer fuels the conflict as well.

The conflict in Ukraine represents a difficult situation in terms of judging what is right and wrong. Putin's power-rhetoric has inflamed the situation, intensifying uncertainties about Russia's ambition. And despite Putin's assertions that Russia does not intend to expand into other parts of Ukraine or Eastern Europe, from a political standpoint, the United States and its European has had little choice other than to prepare for the opposite; that "Russia's annexation of Crimea represents a desire to resuscitate the Soviet empire."

What characterizes both the Ukrainian crisis and its media coverage is the lack of purpose on behalf of the various actors involved. The anti-Russian sentiment that has dominated the media picture lacks a clear intention regarding the media's role with regards to the conflict. The same lack of purpose characterizes both Russia's actions in Ukraine and the West's response to the Russian aggression. The intentions of all actors involved, and the dynamic between them, is unclear.

Regardless of how one interprets the events, however, accepting the status quo in relations between the East and West does not serve to ease the situation. Attributing blame does not promote dialogue. The Ukrainian crisis represents a dangerous and unpredictable situation generated by several actors. Perhaps striving to understand the purpose behind each action and how it promotes each actor's overarching goals may lead us closer to finding a solution. Accepting the status quo is certainly never enough.

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### About the author:

**Cathinka Lerstad** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health, Technology and Society at Gjøvik University College, Norway. Her primary research interests include collective security and global health in an international relations and international political economy perspective.