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THESIS

**ANALYZING THE RATIONALES BEHIND RUSSIA'S
INTERVENTION IN UKRAINE**

by

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March 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the rationales behind Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to intervene in Ukraine through the lenses of neoclassical realism and prospect theory. The risk-acceptant decision to employ hybrid warfare in Crimea was fundamentally due to Putin's loss aversion. Since Putin frames his political decision-making reference point in the realm of losses, his decision sought to prevent the imminent losses of Ukraine's Russian-oriented government, Russia's influence in Ukraine, and Putin's own political power at home. It also sought to somewhat recover from the "catastrophic" loss of the Soviet Union's territorial possessions, population, and status. Putin exploited Western leaders' naiveté and vulnerabilities to prepare a geopolitical landscape wherein Russia could act without incurring excessive costs. Emboldened by Russia's large financial reserves and backed by Russia's seemingly irrational threats of cutting off essential European gas supplies and launching nuclear attacks, Putin correctly anticipated a limited economic sanctions response and a negligible military response from the West. Putin's decision furthered Russia's interests by acquiring Crimea, the strategically indispensable port of Sevastopol, and vast Black Sea region resources. Such action also thwarted the expansion of Western institutions in Ukraine and incited fervent Russian ethno-nationalism, boosting Putin's domestic approval ratings to an unprecedented level.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	anti-ballistic missile
CEO	chief executive officer
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EU	European Union
FSB	<i>Federalni Sluzhba Bezaposnosti</i> (Federal Security Service)
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezaposnosti</i> (Committee for State Security)
LNG	liquefied natural gas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UN	United Nations

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I. INTRODUCTION

Russia's 2014 military intervention in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea constituted a watershed in the post–Cold War European security order. From the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 to its 2014 intervention, Russia had shown some promise of cooperating with the West, such as its participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace program and the NATO–Russia Council. In 1994, Russia gave Ukraine security assurances in return for Ukraine's transfer of its Soviet-made nuclear weapons to Russia, providing for Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons as a non-nuclear-weapon state. Russia completely disregarded these assurances in its annexation of Crimea and continuing intervention in Ukraine.

As a result of its actions, Russia has faced significant international economic and diplomatic blowback. Why did Russia intervene in Ukraine and annex a part of its sovereign territory? What benefits did Russia hope to achieve that would compensate for the anticipated costs that it was bound to incur for its actions?

Understanding the Russian government's motives and decision making is important for United States, European Union (EU), and NATO policy makers as they deal with Moscow concerning the ongoing Ukraine crisis and potential further crises in the post-Soviet space. Central and Eastern European NATO member countries are justifiably concerned about Russia's actions in Ukraine, partly because some of them host sizable ethnic Russian minority populations. The crisis has substantially altered the post–Cold War security order in Europe and renewed the focus on collective defense readiness within NATO. The Allies have recognized the threat posed by an aggressive and emboldened revisionist Russia.¹

This chapter reviews the circumstances in Ukraine that precipitated the Russian government's decision to intervene in Ukraine and also provides an overview of the

¹ Michael Rühle, "NATO and the Ukraine Crisis," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 37 (2015): 80, doi: 10.1080/10803920.2015.1038925.

Russian intervention. Additionally, it surveys the relevant international relations theory literature. The thesis focuses on explanations for Russia's decision to intervene at different levels of analysis but concentrates on the actor responsible for the decision. It also assesses the extent of the actor's rationality—a major assumption of rational choice theory. Finally, it weighs the applicability of rational choice theory and an alternative psychological model known as prospect theory.

A. UKRAINIAN EUROMAIDAN AND RUSSIAN INTERVENTION

Prior to the crisis, two economic and political centers of gravity, the EU and Russia, attempted to pull Ukraine from its precarious balancing perch into their own orbits. Trapped in the middle, Ukraine continued to rely on both for its foreign trade. In 2012, the EU and Russia received 25% and 26%, respectively, of Ukraine's \$68 billion exports and provided 31% and 32%, respectively, of Ukraine's \$84.7 billion imports.² The constant tug-of-war between Ukraine's two major trade partners gave rise to a pro-Western movement in November 2013. After Moscow employed heavy-handed economic pressure, Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich reversed a decision to sign an association agreement with the EU, effectively moving Ukraine closer to Russia and away from the EU and the West. His decision led several hundred pro-EU protesters to gather at downtown Kiev's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti*, or Independence Square. Yanukovich was initially unconcerned about the demonstration, but when it failed to fizzle out, he employed repressive tactics by dispatching riot police to clear the square.³ Such action only fueled the fire of the opposition, causing it to grow rapidly. After increased violence that claimed the lives of an estimated 100 protesters, the Euromaidan movement culminated in the political collapse and flight of Ukraine's president on February 22, 2014.

² "Ukraine's Trading Partners: EU and Russian Federation Equally Important," Statistisches Bundesamt, Destatis, February 25, 2014, <https://www.destatis.de/EN/FactsFigures/InFocus/International/UkraineTradingPartners.html>.

³ Serhiy Kudelia, "The House That Yanukovich Built," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (2014): 28, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_democracy/v025/25.3.kudelia.pdf.

Amid the resultant political uncertainty and weakness in Ukraine, Russia made its move in Crimea through what has been termed *hybrid warfare*. “Little green men,” highly disciplined troops in uniforms without insignia who were later confirmed to be Russian soldiers, appeared in Sevastopol, Simferopol, and other Crimean cities. Additionally, Moscow employed elements of information warfare—including cyber attacks and propaganda—and economic coercion. On March 16, 2014, pro-Russian advocates in Crimea hastily organized a referendum for Crimea to secede from Ukraine and to join Russia. The referendum passed with a reported overwhelming Russian-oriented majority. On March 18, 2014, 24 days after Yanukovych’s flight, Russia formalized Crimea’s annexation into the Russian Federation. Russia has also clandestinely supported separatists in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine in their efforts to follow suit. Unlike their Crimean neighbors, however, they have not succeeded and the conflict in the Donbas continues to the present.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW: RETURN TO REALISM?

“The strong do what they can while the weak suffer what they must,” wrote Thucydides.⁴ Russia’s use of hybrid warfare against its weaker sovereign neighbor illustrates this point, raising the question: why did Russia do it? For the classical realist, understanding human nature and the world of competing interests, or rivalries over power, is essential in attempting to answer such a question.⁵ In his 1651 treatise *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes identified three principal causes of quarrel in the nature of man—competition, fear, and glory: “the first, maketh men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation.”⁶ He described the state of war that exists among men in the absence of a common civil power, which is apposite to the anarchic international structure in which all states find themselves. Centuries earlier, Thucydides

⁴ Thucydides, “The Melian Dialogue,” in *Conflict After the Cold War*, ed. Richard K. Betts (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 70.

⁵ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 3, 5, 11; Keith L. Shimko, “Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism,” *The Review of Politics* 54, no. 2 (1992): 286, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1407486>.

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, “The State of Nature and the State of War,” in *Conflict After the Cold War*, ed. Richard K. Betts (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 79–80.

attributed the causes of war to three of the strongest motives: fear, honor, or interest.⁷ The Spartans declared war on the Athenians in 431 B.C., he argued, because they “feared the growth of the power of the Athenians.”⁸ Historian Martin Wight expounds upon this argument:

Every belligerent has complex motives. . . . By fear we mean, not an unreasoning emotion, but a rational apprehension of future evil, and this is the prime motive of international politics. For all powers at all times are concerned primarily with their security, and most powers at most times find their security threatened.⁹

The idea of security, along with the anarchic international system, forms the bedrock of structural realism, or neorealism.

1. Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism

Unlike classical realism, which seeks to explain international outcomes as a result of the “forces inherent in human nature,” neorealism seeks to explain the same outcomes by focusing on the anarchic structure of state relations and how states seek to survive in such a system.¹⁰ A major critique of neorealism is that it cannot predict the behavior of individual states because its main unit of analysis is the system itself. Neoclassical realism seeks to fill the void. As Jeffrey Taliaferro observes, neoclassical realism predicts how states respond to anarchic imperatives: “Phenomena such as individual states’ grand strategies, military doctrines, foreign economic policy, alliance preferences, and crisis behavior fall within [its] purview.”¹¹ Instead of merely focusing on structural variables, neoclassical realism includes explanatory variables at the unit level.¹² Neorealism and neoclassical realism attempt to explain disparate results, namely international outcomes

⁷ Thucydides, in *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley, ed. Robert B. Strassler (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 43.

⁸ Ibid., 43, 49.

⁹ Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, ed. Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (London: Leicester University Press, 1978), 138–139.

¹⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, 4; Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking Under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security* 25, no. 3 (2000): 135, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2626708>.

¹¹ Ibid., 134.

¹² Ibid.

and the external actions of individual states, respectively.¹³ Both are divided into two competing camps that seek to explain the means of state survival in the anarchic system—offensive and defensive realism.

a. *Offensive Realism*

The point of discord between the two schools of offensive and defensive realism lies in whether states seek to maximize their power relative to others or if states seek to maintain the status quo in the anarchic international system.¹⁴ The main tenet of offensive realism is that states rationally seek opportunities to expand and maximize their power whether confronted by specific threats or not.¹⁵ Eric Labs differentiates between two types of expansion that states pursue: automatic and manual.¹⁶ Automatic expansion occurs when states are presented with an opportunity to cheaply and easily increase their relative power whereas manual expansion occurs when a state deliberately attempts to achieve hegemony, like Nazi Germany's attempt to dominate Europe during World War II.¹⁷ Labs explains that automatic expansion does not imply determinism but that "each bit of expansion is logical and rational in light of the incentives created by an anarchic international system."¹⁸ He also emphasizes that all states are not the same and that "stronger states are more likely to pursue expansion than weak states because, all other things being equal, they are more able to do so."¹⁹ The inclination of a major nuclear power like Russia to automatically expand when given the opportunity in Ukraine adds validity to the explanatory power of offensive realism, but it does not account for why certain states exhibit manual or automatic expansionist tendencies.

¹³ Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy," 134.

¹⁴ Eric J. Labs, "Beyond Victory: Offensive Realism and the Expansion of War Aims," *Security Studies* 6, no. 4 (1997): 4, doi: 10.1080/09636419708429321.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 12–13.

b. *Defensive Realism*

Defensive realism holds that states seek survival and maximize their security by maintaining the status quo. The anarchic international system provides little incentive for states to expand except when such actions address specific threats that undermine the status quo.²⁰ Robert Jervis describes how security dilemmas often develop when one state's increase in security leads to a decrease in the security of others.²¹ Taliaferro explains that "pairs of states may pursue security-seeking strategies but inadvertently generate spirals of mutual hostility or conflict. States often, although not always, pursue expansionist policies because their leaders mistakenly believe that aggression is the only way to make their states secure."²² According to the logic of defensive realism, Russian leaders truly believed that intervening in Ukraine would make Russia more secure because of the looming threat of a more Western-oriented Ukraine.

c. *Balance of Interests Theory*

A criticism of neorealism is that defensive and offensive realists alike have difficulty in explaining why some states tend to maintain the status quo while others tend to maximize relative power. Randall Schweller's balance of interests theory attempts to do just that by bridging the theoretical divide between offensive and defensive realists and traversing the continuum between neorealism and neoclassical realism. The theory attributes revisionist and status quo interests to unit-level variables. Schweller explains that status quo states seek to maximize their security and preserve the resources they control; revisionist states, on the other hand, "seek to undermine the established order for the purpose of increasing their power and prestige in the system; that is, they seek to increase, not just to maintain, their resources. For these states, the gains from non-security expansion exceeds the cost of war."²³ Schweller uses jungle animals to analogize

²⁰ Labs, "Beyond Victory," 9–11.

²¹ Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," in *Conflict After the Cold War*, ed. Richard K. Betts (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 425.

²² Taliaferro, "Security Seeking Under Anarchy," 129.

²³ Randall L. Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 24.

the types of behavior states exhibit based on their capability and interests, which range from unlimited aims for revision to strongly supporting the status quo. Wolves, foxes, and jackals represent states with varying degrees of revisionist aims while lions, owls, and hawks strongly support the status quo.²⁴ Frederick Schuman aptly describes why states might pursue such diverse interests:

States which feel humiliated, hampered, and oppressed by the status quo seek as naturally to modify it. Satiated states are therefore likely to appear “pacific.” They are committed to peace. They demand “security,” for they are content with the equilibrium which peace and security will perpetuate. Unsatiated states demand changes, rectifications of frontiers, a revision of treaties, a redistribution of territory and power. In so far as the fulfillment of these demands is resisted by status quo states, in so far as this resistance makes possible their realization only through coercion and conflict, such states appear to be “aggressive” and lacking in enthusiasm for peace.²⁵

Does Russia represent an unsatiated, limited-aims revisionist fox or a jackal that feels “humiliated, hampered, and oppressed by the status quo?”²⁶ Through the years, Putin has repeatedly expressed disdain for “attempts to establish a unipolar world,” and in 2005, he described the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”²⁷ Or was Russia’s intervention an effort to maintain the status quo as it was about to change through a more Western-oriented Ukraine?

2. Contemporary Realist Arguments

A survey of the contemporary neorealist thought pertaining to the Ukraine crisis provides answers to such questions. Defensive realist Stephen Walt argues that “major powers care a lot about security and are often ruthless in defending vital interests,

²⁴ Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances*, 84–89.

²⁵ Frederick L. Schuman, *International Politics: The Destiny of the Western State System*, 4th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948), 378–379.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Vladimir V. Putin, “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy,” President of Russia, February 10, 2007, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2007/02/10/0138_type82912type82914type82917type84779_118123.shtml; Vladimir V. Putin, “Speech at Military Parade on Red Square in Moscow to Mark the 70th Anniversary of Victory in the 1941–1945 Great Patriotic War,” President of Russia, May 9, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/49438>; Vladimir V. Putin, “Послание Федеральному Собранию Российской Федерации,” Official Site of the President of Russia, Kremlin, April 25, 2005, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/04/87049.shtml>.

especially close to home. . . . Great powers ignore international law when it gets in their way. . . . Relations between major powers [are] a ceaseless struggle for position, even when that struggle is waged for essentially defensive reasons.”²⁸ Walt contends that U.S. leaders failed to differentiate between Western power, with the subsequent promotion of its values, and Russian interests in Ukraine. As evidence of Washington’s agenda during the Euromaidan protests, he refers to the December 2013 incident when Victoria Nuland, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, handed out pastries to anti-government protesters in Kiev.²⁹ The Euromaidan visit by U.S. Senators John McCain and Chris Murphy that same month, wherein McCain told an anti-government crowd that he was there to support their “just cause” and that Ukraine’s “destiny lies with Europe,” provides further credence to the claim of Western interference.³⁰

Putin himself emphasized that the Russian intervention was intended to increase Russia’s security. He said that the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO “meant that NATO’s navy would be right there in this city [Sevastopol] of Russia’s military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia.”³¹ However illusory the conjured threat may have been before, it is practically inconceivable in the wake of Russia’s intervention.

Like Walt, fellow neorealist—albeit of the offensive variety—John Mearsheimer argues that NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and the West’s support for the pro-democracy Euromaidan movement were critical elements for provoking Russian aggression against Ukraine.³² “Putin’s pushback should have come as no surprise. After

²⁸ Stephen M. Walt, “No Contest: Obama Gambled that U.S. Power Would Trump Russia’s Interest in Ukraine. He was Wrong,” *Foreign Policy*, March 4, 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/04/no-contest/>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ John McCain, quoted in “John McCain Tells Ukraine Protesters: ‘We Are Here to Support Your Just Cause,’” *Guardian*, December 15, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/15/john-mccain-ukraine-protests-support-just-cause>.

³¹ Vladimir V. Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” March 18, 2014, Kremlin, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/new/6889>.

³² John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-wests-fault>.

all,” he reasons, “the West had been moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly.”³³ The venerable Henry Kissinger provides a classical realist perspective, stating that the policymakers of both the West and Russia are to blame: “Putin is a serious strategist—on the premises of Russian history. Understanding U.S. values and psychology are not his strong suits. Nor has understanding Russian history and psychology been a strong point of U.S. policymakers.”³⁴ As the trio of Kissinger, Mearsheimer, and Walt suggests, understanding Russian history and interests may provide contextual clues for analyzing Russia’s decision to intervene in Ukraine.

a. Spheres of Interest

Throughout its tsarist and Soviet history, Russia has been no stranger to spheres of influence. For most of the nineteenth century, the Russian empire engaged in a competition for influence known as the Great Game against its rival, the British Empire, in the Caucasus, Persia, and Central Asia.³⁵ In the 1860s, the Russian empire expanded into Turkestan, encroaching upon the British Empire’s crown jewel colony of India. “The British had already fought two Afghan wars to keep Afghanistan as a no-man’s land between Russia and India,” explain historians R.R. Palmer, Joel Colton, and Lloyd Kramer.³⁶ In the 1870s, expanding Russia “touched India itself but [was] kept away by an Anglo-Russian agreement, which allotted a long tongue of land to Afghanistan and so separated the Indian and Russian empires by 20 miles.”³⁷ As the last major act in the Great Game, Britain and Russia signed another treaty in 1907 that divided Persia into distinct Russian and British spheres of influence.

³³ Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault.”

³⁴ Henry Kissinger, “To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End,” *Washington Post*, March 5, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html.

³⁵ Dmitri Trenin, “Russia’s Spheres of Interest, Not Influence,” *Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2009): 12, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01636600903231089>.

³⁶ R.R. Palmer, Joel Colton, and Lloyd Kramer, *A History of the Modern World*, 9th ed. (New York: Knopf, 2002), 648.

³⁷ Ibid.

Much as its tsarist and Soviet predecessors jockeyed for influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modern Russia is doing the same in its post-Soviet space. As Dmitri Trenin argues, Russia's "current ambition is to become a full-fledged world power, one of a handful of more or less equal key players in the twenty-first century global system. Seen from that perspective, the former imperial borderlands of Russia are deemed to be both elements of its power center and a cushion to protect Russia itself from undesirable encroachments by other great powers."³⁸ Instead of spheres of influence, however, Russia seeks to maintain spheres of "privileged interest"—a phrase employed by President Dmitri Medvedev in the wake of Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia.³⁹ According to Trenin, the Russian concept includes specific economic, politico-military, and cultural domains within the states of its near neighborhood.⁴⁰

b. Critiques of Realist Arguments

Recognizing Russia's insistence on maintaining its interests from both structural and state perspectives does not completely explain its expansionist motivation. Indeed, a key critique of realism is that it fails to address the inner workings of states. As Aaron Friedberg explains, "Structural considerations provide a useful point from which to begin the analysis of international politics rather than a place at which to end it. Even if one acknowledges that structures exist and are important, there is still the question of how statesmen grasp their counters from the inside."⁴¹ Jack Snyder has expressed a similar criticism: "Realists are right in stressing power, interests, and coalition making . . . [but] have been wrong in looking exclusively to states as the irreducible atoms whose power and interests are to be assessed."⁴² Examining the internal dynamics of Russian politics can provide a clearer picture of the Russian decision to intervene in Ukraine.

³⁸ Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest," 4.

³⁹ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Claims Its Sphere of Influence in the World," *New York Times*, August 31, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/world/europe/01russia.html?_r=0.

⁴⁰ Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest," 3, 13.

⁴¹ Aaron L. Friedberg, *The Weary Titan: Britain and the Experience of Relative Decline, 1895–1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 8.

⁴² Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 19.

The critiques of the contemporary realist arguments for Russia's action in Ukraine share in Snyder's conclusion that "domestic pressures often outweigh international ones in the calculations of national leaders."⁴³ Michael McFaul, who served as the U.S. Ambassador to Russia from January 2012 to February 2014, argues that the NATO and EU expansion argument cannot explain the period of Russia's cooperation with the West from 2009 to 2012. "Mearsheimer's single variable of NATO expansion can't explain both outcomes," McFaul writes.⁴⁴ "For the real story, one needs to look past the factor that has stayed constant and focus on what has changed: Russian politics."⁴⁵ McFaul argues that Putin's fraudulent return to the Russian presidency in 2012, a return that triggered strong domestic discontent, was the factor that changed: "In an effort to mobilize his electoral base and discredit the opposition, Putin recast the United States as an enemy. . . . To sustain his legitimacy at home, Putin continued to need the United States as an adversary."⁴⁶ Stephen Sestanovich makes a similar argument: "Putin cultivates a mystique of cool, KGB professionalism, and the image has often served him well. But the Ukraine crisis has revealed a different style of decision-making. Putin made impulsive decisions that subordinated Russia's national interest to his own political motives. He has not acted like a sober realist."⁴⁷

Another counterargument to state-level realist interpretations is that the root of the crisis is a civilizational fissure between Russian and Ukrainian national identities. In 1993, Samuel Huntington emphasized the shared historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine and Russia, but identified "the civilizational fault line that divides Orthodox eastern Ukraine from Uniate western Ukraine."⁴⁸ He surmised "the possibility of Ukraine splitting in half, a separation which cultural factors would lead one to predict might be

⁴³ Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, 20.

⁴⁴ Michael McFaul, "Moscow's Choice," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014): 167, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2014-10-17/faulty-powers>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁷ Stephen Sestanovich, "How the West Has Won," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (2014): 172, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2014-10-17/faulty-powers>.

⁴⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 37.

more violent than that of Czechoslovakia but far less bloody than that of Yugoslavia.”⁴⁹ The roles of Russian and Ukrainian nationalism, which have been significant in the unfolding and continuation of the crisis, must be included in analyzing the rationale for Russia’s actions.

C. THE DECISION TO INTERVENE

As the preceding arguments demonstrate, many scholars assume Putin to be the sole decision-maker for the Russian state, but some contend that such a view represents an inaccurate impression of how Russia is truly governed.⁵⁰ To understand why Russia intervened in Ukraine, one must understand exactly who made the decision and who influenced it. Throughout its history, Russia has often been led by authoritarian leaders who have exercised patrimonialism, wherein government positions are filled not according to the objective Weberian legal-rational bureaucratic criterion of what one knows but according to the subjective patrimonial criterion of who one knows.⁵¹ Much as it did in the tsarist and Soviet bureaucracies, patrimonialism has dominated the post-Soviet Russian bureaucracy as Putin’s regime has become increasingly authoritarian. His own meteoric rise from obscurity in St. Petersburg in 1996 to appointment as Federal Security Service (FSB) Director, Prime Minister, and then acting President by the resigning President Boris Yeltsin in 1999 illustrates the capacity of the Russian government’s patronage system to accommodate the rapid advancement of the well-connected.⁵²

Several competing factions surround the Russian president and vie for his consideration and favor; among these groups are the economically market-friendly liberals, the politically pragmatic technocrats, and the hardline *siloviki*. Some compare the struggles for influence between the Kremlin’s factions to the “bulldog fight under the

⁴⁹ Huntington, “Clash of Civilizations,” 37.

⁵⁰ Ian Bremmer and Samuel Charap, “The *Siloviki* in Putin’s Russia: Who They Are and What They Want,” *Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2007): 83, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1162/wash.2006-07.30.1.83>.

⁵¹ Brian D. Taylor, *State Building in Putin’s Russia: Policing and Coercion After Communism*, (New York: Cambridge, 2011), 27.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 59.

carpet” description Winston Churchill devised for the infighting among the Soviet leadership.⁵³ Derived from the word for Russia’s force structures, or *silovye struktury*, the *siloviki* include the intelligence, military, and security organs of the state. The term is somewhat misleading, however, as it can represent either the cohort of uniformed force structure officials or the clan of top officials in the Kremlin—the faction that clearly wields the most influence within the president’s circle.⁵⁴

As Putin himself is a product of the city of St. Petersburg and the intelligence apparatus, a significant number of his political appointees are acquaintances and contacts from his two backgrounds, including many of the *siloviki*.⁵⁵ Ian Bremmer and Samuel Charap describe the *siloviki* clan as “an informal network of government officials and businessmen” who are more united by their similar interests and outlooks than by their backgrounds.⁵⁶ Their shared interests and policy preferences include establishing a highly centralized state propped up by the force structures, developing a strong state that plays a decisive role in the economy and nationalized strategic sectors, exploiting the wealth of the country’s natural resources, and endorsing the nationalistic views of Russian Orthodoxy.⁵⁷ Additionally, the *siloviki* seek to restore Russia’s international greatness by regaining the respect that the Soviet Union previously commanded, reintegrating economically and politically with the other former Soviet states as much as possible, and guarding Russia against the perceived U.S. and NATO threat that allegedly seeks to undermine Russia’s sovereignty and force its collapse.⁵⁸

Although the *siloviki* are intent on maintaining their influence and proactive in pursuing their collective interests, Russia’s lack of conventional power-projection capability limits the range of the Russian leadership’s foreign policy and security options, leading security scholar Pavel Baev to suggest opportunism and pragmatism as key

⁵³ Winston Churchill, quoted in Bremmer and Charap, “The *Siloviki* in Putin’s Russia,” 91.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *State Building in Putin’s Russia*, 64.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁶ Bremmer and Charap, “The *Siloviki* in Putin’s Russia,” 86.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

elements of Russia's foreign policy.⁵⁹ As uncompromising and influential as the *siloviki* may be, however, Bremmer recognizes Putin as the ultimate decision authority: "It's a mistake to ascribe too much of the current policy to people around Putin. The policy is flowing from Putin himself, rather than from his advisers."⁶⁰ Putin himself lends credence to his decisive role. In a state television documentary marking the one-year anniversary of Crimea's annexation, he recounts the all-night meeting from February 22–23 with his security service chiefs, during which they discussed Yanukovych and the situation in Ukraine: "We ended at about seven in the morning. When we were parting, I said to my colleagues: we must start working on returning Crimea to Russia."⁶¹ Later in the documentary interview he adds, "Our advantage—you know what it was? It was that I did this myself. It's not that I was doing everything so correctly, but that when heads of state direct something, it's easier for those working to carry it out."⁶² Such is the authoritarianism of Putin.

1. Rational Rationale

A major assumption of realist thought is that state decision-makers act rationally. In other words, when presented with a number of alternative courses to pursue, actors seek to achieve the outcome that yields the greatest expected benefits according to their preferences.⁶³ Such a process often involves assessing opportunities, risks, costs, and benefits. Fareed Zakaria explains that costs are simply the usual military and economic material costs while benefits are more difficult to discern: "Statesmen naturally see benefits in what they have done, but should include tangible benefits like bases and ports

⁵⁹ Pavel K. Baev, "The Evolution of Putin's Regime: Inner Circles and Outer Walls," *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 6 (2004): 10, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10758216.2004.11052187>.

⁶⁰ Ian Bremmer, quoted in Mikhail Bushuev, "Kremlin Hardliners Rule in Putin's Russia," *Deutsche Welle*, September 18, 2014, <http://www.dw.com/en/kremlin-hardliners-rule-in-putins-russia/a-17932564>.

⁶¹ Agence France-Presse, "Vladimir Putin Describes Secret Meeting When Russia Decided to Seize Crimea," *Guardian*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/vladimir-putin-describes-secret-meeting-when-russia-decided-to-seize-crimea>.

⁶² Paul Sonne, "Putin Details Crimea Takeover Before First Anniversary," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-details-crimea-takeover-ahead-of-one-year-anniversary-1426461255>.

⁶³ Stephen M. Walt, "Rigor or Rigor Mortis?: Rational Choice and Security Studies," *International Security* 23, no. 4 (1999): 10.

and also—more warily—intangible benefits of prestige and glory.”⁶⁴ Reclaiming lost prestige and glory is a continual objective of the Russian governing elite.

The literature concerning the rationality of Putin’s decision-making is varied. Alexander Motyl writes that “no one can fully know Putin’s intentions. . . . If he is irrational—unable to correctly judge the costs and benefits of invading Ukraine because he is in thrall to some ideology or the pursuit of power—then it is safe to assume that he will continue his current course.”⁶⁵ Although Motyl cites Lilia Shevtsova’s and Andrei Illarionov’s arguments that Putin fits the bill of an irrational Eurasianist who seeks ideological victory, he concludes that Putin is probably rational: “The occupation of Crimea was a grand and glorious little war that raised Putin’s popularity with hyper-nationalists in Russia, cost no lives, and transpired quickly and relatively inexpensively. It might have turned Russia into a rogue state, but Putin could reasonably argue that ‘Russian glory’ was worth that price.”⁶⁶ Mearsheimer echoes this argument, calling Putin “a first-class strategist who should be feared and respected by anyone challenging him on foreign policy” while rejecting German chancellor Angela Merkel’s suggestion that Putin is less than entirely rational when she commented that he was in “another world.”⁶⁷

Not only must rational statesmen measure costs against benefits, but they must do so in a realm of fluid factors heavily dependent on how other statesmen will respond. Walt observes that “in security studies, formal rational choice theory usually means the use of game theory. Game theory is a set of techniques for analyzing individual decisions, in situations where each player’s payoff depends in part on what the other players are expected to do.”⁶⁸ Using a game analogy, Steven Rosefielde argues that authoritarian

⁶⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton: University Press, 1998), 20.

⁶⁵ Alexander J. Motyl, “Is Putin Rational? Probably. Here’s How to Work With Him,” *Foreign Affairs*, March 18, 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-18/putin-rational>.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault.”; Angela Merkel, quoted in Alison Smale, “Ukraine Crisis Limits Merkel’s Rapport With Putin,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/on-ukraine-merkel-finds-limits-of-her-rapport-with-putin.html>.

⁶⁸ Walt, “Rigor or Rigor Mortis?”, 10.

Russian leaders like Putin are not utility optimizers but “satisficers” who “perpetually maneuver and gather power like masters of ‘positional chess,’ so that they can pounce when opportunity knocks.”⁶⁹ Kimberly Marten also emphasizes Putin’s opportunism, but finds the analogy of judo more apt:

U.S. and Western leaders would love to know what Putin’s ‘endgame’ is. The term comes from chess, where the goal is to trap one’s opponent into checkmate after a long series of moves requiring strategic vision. But Putin has never claimed to be a chessmaster; he is a judo master. Judo is about immediate tactics, not long-term strategy. A judoka walks into a room, sizes up the opponent, probes for their weaknesses, and tips the other off-balance in a flash—causing the opponent to fall from their own weight. The victor in a judo match doesn’t have to be bigger or stronger than the opponent, just quicker and shrewder.⁷⁰

Another competing argument is that Putin’s decision to intervene in Ukraine was neither an act of strategic calculation or pragmatic opportunism but one of dilemmatic desperation. Putin has been known to frame problematic issues in a way that minimizes the action space and often only leaves one option to pursue.⁷¹ Recalling an early childhood experience during an interview, Putin recounts how he learned “a quick and lasting lesson in the meaning of the word *cornered*.”⁷² He describes how he often chased rats around with sticks on the stairs of his apartment building and how one once responded after he drove it into a corner: “It had nowhere to run. Suddenly it lashed around and threw itself at me. I was surprised and frightened. Now the rat was chasing me. It jumped across the landing and down the stairs. Luckily, I was a little faster and I

⁶⁹ Steven Rosefielde, “Cold Peace: ‘Reset’ and Coexistence,” *The Northeast Asian Economic Review* 2, no. 1 (2014): 41, http://www.erina.or.jp/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/naer21-3_tssc.pdf; The term “satisficing” refers to making decisions that result in less than optimal but satisfying and sufficient solutions for the decision maker. Satisficing is associated with the concept of bounded rationality, which highlights the difficulty of determining all possible decision outcomes and their corresponding probabilities, leading to the difficulty of obtaining optimality.

⁷⁰ Kimberly Marten, “Putin’s Choices: Explaining Russian Foreign Policy and Intervention in Ukraine,” *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 191–192, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2015.1064717>.

⁷¹ Flemming Splidsboel Hansen, “Framing Yourself into a Corner: Russia, Crimea, and the Minimal Action Space,” *European Security* 24, no. 1 (2015): 153, doi: 10.1080/09662839.2014.993974.

⁷² Vladimir V. Putin, et al., *First Person: An Astonishingly Frank Self-portrait By Russia’s President Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2000), 10.

managed to slam the door shut in its nose.”⁷³ Decades after this experience, during his March 18, 2014, speech, Putin promulgated the narrative wherein the West had cornered Russia in regards to Ukraine and Crimea: “Russia found itself in a position it could not retreat from. If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard. You must always remember this.”⁷⁴ Michael Rühle suggests that the EU’s association negotiations with Ukraine constituted the compressing force that threatened Putin’s concept for the Eurasian Economic Union: “In this sense, Putin’s decision to annex Crimea appeared like a decision made in desperation rather than out of a desire to enlarge Russian territory. Avoiding losses—and loss of face—appeared to have been more important than making gains.”⁷⁵ The impetus to avoid losses rather than make gains resembles a psychological decision-making model that serves as an alternative to rational choice theory known as prospect theory.

2. Prospect Theory

Psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky developed prospect theory in 1979 to account for deviations in empirical research wherein 60% of subjects did not behave according to the expected-utility theory’s assumptions and predictions of rationality.⁷⁶ Prospect theory posits that individuals maintain reference points from which they evaluate gains and losses. An individual’s reference point usually reflects the status quo, but sometimes it can represent a non-status quo expectation.⁷⁷ Most people tend to exhibit loss aversion, or, as Jack Levy puts it, “they overvalue losses relative to comparable gains, so that the pain of losses exceeds the pleasure from gains.”⁷⁸ Such a valuation of losses and gains affects decision makers’ risk propensity or orientation:

⁷³ Putin, et al., *First Person*, 10.

⁷⁴ Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” March 18, 2014.

⁷⁵ Rühle, “NATO and the Ukraine Crisis,” 82.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Power Politics and the Balance of Risk: Hypotheses on Great Power Intervention in the Periphery” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 2 (2004): 185, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2004.00368.x/abstract>; Jack S. Levy, “Loss Aversion, Framing Effects, and International Conflict,” in *Handbook of War Studies II*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 200), 194.

⁷⁷ Taliaferro, “Power Politics,” 185.

⁷⁸ Levy, “Loss Aversion,” 194.

individuals are more averse to risk when perceiving prospective gains but more acceptant of risk when perceiving prospective losses.⁷⁹

Prospect theory provides great potential for better understanding Russia's rationale for its Ukrainian intervention. Putin and his *siloviki* seemed more risk-acceptant as they faced perceived losses in terms of their geopolitical and economic interests in Ukraine as well as prospective losses in their domestic political support. Russians viewed Crimea from the reference point that it still rightly belonged to Russia, as evidenced by Putin's statement at the time of Russia's annexation of Crimea that "in people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia."⁸⁰ Additionally, Putin and other Russian leaders often lament the loss of Russia's prestige and status as a global superpower.

D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

This thesis focuses on the Russian government's decision to intervene in Ukraine. Using contemporary and historical journal articles, speeches, interviews, and books, the research examines the anticipated and actual benefits and costs through the lenses of neoclassical realism, rational choice theory, and prospect theory.

Based on the literature review, the main potential explanation is that Russian motivations consisted of a combination of gaining economic and strategic advantages, fulfilling national identity goals, and preventing the loss of the regime's hold on power. Economic and strategic advantages for Russia include protecting its post-Soviet sphere of interests in Ukraine, bolstering its Eurasian Economic Union while preventing the expansion of the European Union, diminishing the likelihood of NATO enlargement, acquiring oil and natural gas reserves in the Black Sea, and obtaining exclusive rights to the Black Sea Fleet port of Sevastopol. The means of preventing the loss of the regime's hold on power include advocating the Russian version of authoritarian "democracy," providing a distraction from domestic discontent with the government's failure to fulfill the social contract due to decreasing oil prices, and inciting fervent nationalism to bolster

⁷⁹ Taliaferro, "Power Politics," 187.

⁸⁰ Putin, "Address by President," March 18, 2014.

public support and prevent a pro-democracy “color revolution” from enveloping Russia.⁸¹ Such efforts also served to fulfill national identity goals through boosting Russian ethnic nationalism, fostering irredentism, and commemorating Russian and Soviet victories while projecting Russian military strength. Russia’s buildup of foreign currency reserves facilitated Russian leaders’ projection that it could withstand presumable repercussive economic sanctions. Russian leaders also anticipated that the seemingly irrational threat of risking an economically destructive gas war with Europe would dampen the severity of such sanctions. They also reckoned that another seemingly irrational threat—Russia’s willingness to engage in nuclear war to protect its gains in Ukraine—would inhibit a Western military response.

⁸¹ Pro-democracy movements in some former Soviet states culminated in the transfer of political power. With Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003, Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution in 2005, these movements came to be known as color revolutions.

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II. RUSSIA'S STRATEGIC GAINS

On the ruins of our superpower
There is a major paradox of history:
Sevastopol—the city of Russian glory—
Is . . . outside Russian territory.⁸²
—Russian Poet A. Nikolaev

The existential end of the political state known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics has been described with several different terms: dissolution, collapse, fall, disintegration, implosion, death, and—for many Russians—loss. Concomitant with the loss of the idea of the Soviet Union was the loss of strategic possessions, including lands previously controlled by the tsarist Russian empire. Many Russian leaders have maintained that these lost possessions, including Crimea and its access to the Black Sea, rightfully belong to Russia.

Putin demonstrated such thinking during his triumphant speech proclaiming Russia's formal annexation of Crimea. As Putin sorrowfully recounted, "Unfortunately, what seemed impossible became a reality. The USSR fell apart . . . It was only when Crimea ended up as part of a different country that Russia realized that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered."⁸³

This chapter seeks to explain the strategic and economic benefits Russia gained, or regained, when seen through the lens of prospect theory from the Russian perspective, that resulted from the decision to invade and annex Crimea. Chief among them are three main strategic outcomes: obtaining exclusive and unrestricted access to its strategic Black Sea Fleet port in Sevastopol, gaining a trove of undeveloped but valuable natural resources in the Black Sea area, and putting any notion of Ukraine joining NATO or the European Union to rest.

⁸² A. Nikolaev, quoted in Serhii Plokhy, "The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 3 (2000): 382, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/261026>.

⁸³ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," President of Russia, Kremlin, March 18, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>.

When the Soviet Union collapsed on December 25, 1991, many unanticipated questions regarding the status of personnel and the ownership of the assets of the then defunct Soviet military emerged. Attempts to preserve the Soviet military by creating the Commonwealth of Independent States Armed Forces gave way to the newly independent former Soviet republics' insistence on having their own independent militaries.⁸⁴ Much as a failed marital union presents unique issues of determining child custody and dividing property, the failed Soviet political union presented issues of determining the custody of the strategic and tactical nuclear forces and facilities found in Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine and dividing the naval assets of the Black Sea Fleet. Unlike a divorce settlement in a court mediated by a judge, however, the former Soviet states had no mediating authority to mete out equitable divisions of assets in the anarchical international system. Instead, they relied on negotiation, mutual assurances, and good faith.

In the new post-Soviet era, Ukraine found itself the possessor of the world's third largest arsenal of nuclear arms, after Russia and the United States. The newly independent state contained 45 strategic bombers, 176 intercontinental ballistic missiles, and roughly 1,900 nuclear warheads.⁸⁵ Concerned about the emergence of additional nuclear-armed states, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States entered into a security assurance agreement with Ukraine in 1994. In what is known as the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine agreed to give up its nuclear arsenal to Russia in exchange for respect for the "independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine."⁸⁶ London, Moscow, and Washington reaffirmed "their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine" and "their commitment to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their

⁸⁴ William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 376–387.

⁸⁵ Steven Pifer, Robert Einhorn, and Oleksandr Zaytsev, "The Budapest Memorandum at 20: The United States, Ukraine, and Security Assurances," The Brookings Institution, December 9, 2014, http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2014/12/09-budapest/20141209_budapest_memorandum_transcript.pdf.

⁸⁶ "Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994," Council on Foreign Relations, December 5, 1994, <http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/budapest-memorandums-security-assurances-1994/p32484>.

own interest the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantages of any kind.”⁸⁷ With such assurances given, Ukraine transferred all of its nuclear warheads to Russia by 1996.⁸⁸

While the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 helped resolve the issue of Ukraine’s nuclear arsenal, the division of the Black Sea Fleet between Russia and Ukraine proved difficult as talks dragged on for over five years in what amounted to be an international game of tug-of-war. Unilateral statements from both parties claiming sovereignty over Crimea and Sevastopol often caused negotiations to collapse.⁸⁹ A major breakthrough occurred in May 1997, the same month the NATO–Russia Founding Act was signed, through the signing of the bilateral Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership and a separate package of agreements that came to be known as the Black Sea Fleet Accords. The Friendship Treaty assuaged Ukrainian fears of Russia’s revanchist claims over Crimea by stipulating that both states “shall build their mutual relations on the basis of the principles of mutual respect for their sovereign equality, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, peaceful resolution of disputes, [and] non-use of force, including economic and other means of pressure.”⁹⁰

A. POST-SOVIET UKRAINE IN CONTEXT

According to the Black Sea Fleet Accords, the two states would divide the fleet’s assets 50/50 but allow for Russia to buy back some of Ukraine’s apportionment, which eventually resulted in an 82/18 fleet asset ratio advantage for Russia.⁹¹ Additionally, the two parties agreed on 20 years as the length of time Ukraine would lease naval ports in and around Sevastopol—a compromise shorter than the Russians’ proposal for 40 years

⁸⁷ “Budapest Memorandums on Security Assurances, 1994.”

⁸⁸ Hans M. Kristensen, Alicia Godsberg, Jonathon Garbose, “Ukraine Special Weapons,” Nuclear Information Project, Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/ukraine/>.

⁸⁹ Alexander Cooley and Volodymyr Dubovyk, “Will Sevastopol Survive?: The Triangular Politics of Russia’s Naval Base in Crimea,” PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 47 (2008): 2, http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/pepm_047.pdf.

⁹⁰ Christian Marxsen, “The Crimea Crisis—An International Law Perspective,” *Zeitschrift ausländisches öffentliches Recht und Völkerrecht (Heidelberg Journal of International Law)* 74, no. 2 (2014): 371, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2520530>.

⁹¹ Cooley and Dubovyk, “Will Sevastopol Survive?”, 2.

but longer than the Ukrainians' pitch for 5 to 7 years.⁹² The initial Ukrainian bid for the much shorter duration reflected Ukraine's hopeful but somewhat naive view that the leasing of the Ukrainian naval facilities and infrastructure was of a transitory nature. In the Ukrainian view, the lease would allow Russia time to build up its own naval port facilities on the Black Sea at Novorossiysk and eventually remove its naval assets completely out of Ukraine's territory.⁹³

At the heart of Russia's concessions in the 1997 Friendship Treaty and Black Sea Fleet Accords was a renewed effort to strengthen ties with neighboring former Soviet republics amid talk of NATO enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe. The day before these accords were signed, Russia jointly declared with NATO in the NATO–Russia Founding Act that they would work together “to contribute to the establishment in Europe of common and comprehensive security.”⁹⁴ Additionally, Russia agreed to “seek the widest possible cooperation among participating states of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] with the aim of creating in Europe a common space of security and stability, without dividing lines or spheres of influence limiting the sovereignty of any state.”⁹⁵ To the opposite effect, however, Russia's agreements with Ukraine over the Black Sea Fleet the very next day preserved and even increased its own sphere of influence within Ukraine. With accords providing for a large military presence in Crimea for the next two decades, Russia intended to forestall Ukraine's drift toward closer cooperation with NATO.⁹⁶

⁹² James Sherr, “Russia-Ukraine Rapprochement?: The Black Sea Fleet Accords,” *Survival* 39, no. 3 (1997): 40, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396339708442925>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 27, 1997, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Michael R. Gordon, “Russia and Ukraine Finally, Reach Accord on Black Sea Fleet,” *New York Times*, May 29, 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/29/world/russia-and-ukraine-finally-reach-accord-on-black-sea-fleet.html>.

1. 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Election

In the years following the signing of the Friendship Treaty and Black Sea Fleet Accords, Ukraine experienced a protracted crisis of identity, which in fact continues to the present, as to whether its future lies toward the West or with Russia. The 2004 presidential election illustrated the tension between these two dichotomous orientations through its opposing candidates: Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich. Yushchenko, who was from the western and predominantly Ukrainian-speaking part of the country, offered liberal ideas of European integration among other political and economic reforms. Yanukovich, in contrast, was from the eastern and predominantly Russian-speaking part of the country, which favored closer ties with Russia.

Although many in both the West and Russia tend to overestimate the significance that international politics had on Ukraine's 2004 election, most Ukrainians voted based on their preferences for domestic policy issues rather than foreign policy.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, external actors played significant roles in the eventual outcome of the election. Russia, for its part, threw its support behind Yanukovich and sought to achieve his election by applying the same strategies that had worked in achieving desired electoral outcomes in Russia. Moscow thus provided the Yanukovich campaign with political advisers, funding, and Russian media support that conveyed a pro-Yanukovich message.⁹⁸ The capstone of Russia's influence in its Ukrainian sphere came when Putin himself visited Ukraine the week before the election's first round was held on October 31, 2004. Journalist Jackson Diehl fittingly captured the sentiment at the time that surrounded Russia's not-so-subtle attempt to meddle in the politics of a sovereign state:

Imagine that an imperial-minded president resolved to intervene aggressively in a strategic country with a fragile democracy to ensure the election of a favored client. To do so, he summoned his nominee and publicly embraced him; channeled hundreds of millions of dollars to his campaign; arranged for television stations broadcasting in the target country to openly boost the favorite and slander his opponent; opened hundreds of polling stations in his own country so that "expatriates" could

⁹⁷ Nathaniel Copsey, "Ukraine," in *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures*, ed. Donnacha O. Beachain and Abel Polese (New York: Routledge, 2010), 35.

⁹⁸ Copsey, "Ukraine," 36.

vote; and, to top it off, scheduled a trip to the foreign capital three days before the election to stump in person. . . . Viktor Yanukovych, prime minister and presidential candidate in Ukraine, has humbly welcomed all this and more from Russian president Vladimir Putin—and Western governments have responded with a studied silence.⁹⁹

Western governments did play a quiet but significant role in the outcome of the election by supporting election monitoring by the OSCE.¹⁰⁰ Despite Russia's support for Yanukovych, no candidate achieved the required majority to win the election in the first round of voting, forcing a second round that was held on November 21, 2004. Exit polls from the second round revealed an eight percent lead for Yushchenko, but preliminary results released by the Central Election Commission indicated a Yanukovych victory.¹⁰¹ Putin, not expecting any outcome other than victory, phoned Yanukovych on November 22—three days before the Central Election Commission released the official results on November 24—to congratulate him on his convincing victory in the “fierce but transparent and honest contest.”¹⁰² The OSCE International Election Observation Mission found otherwise, declaring on November 22 that the voting “failed to meet a considerable number of . . . European standards for democratic elections.”¹⁰³

2. 2004 Orange Revolution

Spurred on by the OSCE's condemnation of the voting process, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians gathered at Kiev's *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) the same day to protest against the fraudulent election. Termed the Orange Revolution for

⁹⁹ Jackson Diehl, “Putin's Unchallenged Imperialism Moves to Ukraine,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 2004, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1028/p09s02-coop.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Copsey, “Ukraine,” 36–37.

¹⁰¹ Taras Kuzio, “From Kuchma to Yushchenko: Ukraine's 2004 Presidential Elections and the Orange Revolution,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 2 (2005): 41, [http://www.taraskuzio.net/Comparative Politics_files/electionorangerevolution.pdf](http://www.taraskuzio.net/Comparative%20Politics_files/electionorangerevolution.pdf). 29–44

¹⁰² Vladimir Putin, “Владимир Путин позвонил Виктору Януковичу и поздравил его с победой на выборах президента Украины,” Президент России, November 22, 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/32209>; The official results of the second round of voting, as reported by the Central Election Commission on November 24, 2004, listed Yanukovych and Yushchenko as receiving 49.46% and 46.61% of the vote, respectively.

¹⁰³ “Second Round of Ukrainian Election Failed to Address Election Irregularities and Lacked Transparency,” Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, November 22, 2004, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/56979>.

Yushchenko's campaign color, in which many protesters dressed, the peaceful mass demonstrations led Ukraine's Parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*, to pass a resolution that invalidated the election results and led the Supreme Court to call for a repeat vote.¹⁰⁴ Putin, as quoted in a *New York Times* article, expressed his disdain for a repeat vote on Russian state television that was also broadcast in Ukraine: "A rerun of the second round may also produce nothing. What happens then? Will there have to be a third, a fourth, a 25th round until one of the sides obtains the necessary result?"¹⁰⁵

Much to Putin's chagrin, however, Yushchenko won the repeat second round of voting on December 26, 2004. Evidence of Putin's long-harbored resentment for the West over the political loss for Yanukovych—and by extension, for Russia—surfaced during his Crimean annexation speech in March 2014: "In 2004, to push the necessary candidate through at the presidential elections, they thought up some sort of third round that was not stipulated by the law. It was absurd and a mockery of the constitution."¹⁰⁶

At the time, many Ukrainians did not regard the inauguration of Yushchenko's presidency in the wake of the Orange Revolution as absurd, but as a new dawn for their country. Instead of the drastic change that they thought "would lead them to the sunny uplands of liberal democracy, greater prosperity and swift integration into the Euro-Atlantic alliances," as Nathaniel Copsey describes, Yushchenko's time in office was characterized by disappointment as it mostly proved to be more of the same type of governing.¹⁰⁷ "When tectonic political shifts take place, through popular protest, the ballot box, by violent means—or indeed a mixture of these," Copsey explains, "disappointment always follows, which of course is only to be expected when there is so great a weight of public expectation."¹⁰⁸ Yushchenko did offer a major break with

¹⁰⁴ "OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report for Ukraine, Presidential Election: 31 October, 21 November and 26 December 2004," Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, OSCE, May 11, 2005, 31–32, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/ukraine/14674?download=true>.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Lee Myers, "Putin Backs Ukrainian Leader, Dismissing Call for New Runoff," *New York Times*, December 3, 2004, http://www.nytimes.com/2004/12/03/world/europe/putin-backs-ukrainian-leader-dismissing-call-for-new-runoff.html?_r=0.

¹⁰⁶ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Copsey, "Ukraine," 30.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

previous Ukrainian policy, however, in his stance toward Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea.

3. Shift in Ukraine's Stance toward Hosting Russian Black Sea Fleet

Yushchenko viewed Ukraine's hosting of the Russian military in Sevastopol as problematic for Ukraine's security and national interests.¹⁰⁹ The worth of the land and facilities in and around Sevastopol leased to Russia since 1997 for \$97.75 million a year was estimated to be in the billions of dollars.¹¹⁰ This disparity factored into Yushchenko's unsuccessful proposal in the spring of 2008 to allow Ukraine to settle its \$1.3 billion gas debt to Russia and then raise the rent price.¹¹¹ Ukraine was a close ally to Georgia, and during the latter's military conflict with Russia in the summer of 2008, Yushchenko vocally opposed having the Black Sea Fleet, which was being used to facilitate Russia's war efforts, based in Ukraine. Yushchenko even went so far as to threaten that the Russian ships might not be allowed to return to their Sevastopol port, although such a statement was a hollow threat given Ukraine's military weakness and international treaty obligations.¹¹² Yushchenko's posturing may have appealed to the Ukrainian nationalists in western Ukraine, but it also galvanized his opposition in the predominantly ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking regions.

Yushchenko's popularity fell during his presidency. His time in office was racked from the onset by economic crises and gas disputes with Russia, wherein Moscow frequently raised prices and cut off supplies to penalize the West-leaning government.¹¹³ He also had a political falling-out with his prime minister, Yulia Timoshenko, who played a role in the Orange Revolution. She later tempered her anti-Russian rhetoric and adopted a more Russian-friendly approach, forging a pragmatic relationship with

¹⁰⁹ Cooley and Dubovyk, "Will Sevastopol Survive?", 6.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 6.

¹¹³ Miriam Elder, "Orange Sunset as Ukraine Poll Heralds Turn to Russia," *Guardian*, January 9, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/10/ukraine-election-turn-to-russia>; David Gow, "Q&A: What's behind the Ukraine-Russia Gas Dispute," *Guardian*, January 7, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/business/2009/jan/07/ukraine-russia-gas-dispute>.

Russia's then prime minister, Vladimir Putin, to resolve some of the gas disputes.¹¹⁴ When Yushchenko ran for re-election in Ukraine's 2010 presidential election, he mustered only 5.4% of the vote in the first round compared with 24.8% for Timoshenko and 35.5% for Yanukovich.¹¹⁵

4. Russia's Preferred Man Elected and Russian Black Sea Fleet Lease Extended

Yanukovich went on to win the second round on February 7, 2010. Unlike in 2004, the 2010 election was devoid of Russian interference and determined to have been conducted under democratically sound procedures by the OSCE. Alexander Rahr, the program director of the Center for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia at the German Council on Foreign Relations suggested in a *Guardian* interview in 2010 that Russia did not "want to be in a situation like 2004, where they put all their eggs in one basket and lost Ukraine for some years."¹¹⁶ Although Yanukovich had supported Ukraine's efforts to join the EU to appease the interests of Ukraine's oligarchs, his election effectively derailed Yushchenko's plans and efforts to obtain Ukraine's entry into NATO.¹¹⁷ Yanukovich's victory was hence viewed in Russia as a victory over the West and a vindication for Putin's support for him in 2004.¹¹⁸ During a meeting with President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan, Prime Minister Putin displayed his democratically correct diplomatic skills, refined since 2004, when he commented, "I think today we can congratulate . . . Yanukovich on his presidential election victory. Today it was officially announced by the Central Election Commission. Let's call and congratulate him."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Elder, "Ukraine Poll Heralds Turn to Russia."

¹¹⁵ Luke Harding, "Viktor Yanukovich Wins First Round of Ukraine Election," *Guardian*, January 18, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jan/18/viktor-yanukovich-wins-election-round>.

¹¹⁶ Elder, "Ukraine Poll Heralds Turn to Russia."

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; "Viktor for the Blue Camp," *Economist*, February 11, 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/15501625>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ "Путин Поздравил Януковича с Победой на Выборах," *ТСН Вржае*, February 15, 2010, <http://ru.tsn.ua/ukrayina/putin-pozdravil-yanukovicha-s-pobedoi-na-vyborah.html>.

Within two months of his inauguration as Ukraine's fourth president, Yanukovich signed the Kharkiv agreement that extended Russia's lease on its naval base in Sevastopol for another 25 years in return for a 30% discount on gas imports worth up to \$40 billion.¹²⁰ Instead of expiring in 2017, the renewed lease would provide Russia's Black Sea Fleet with a home in Crimea until 2042. Journalist Luke Harding in April 2010 described the lease extension as "the most concrete sign yet that Ukraine is now back under Russia's influence following Yanukovich's victory in February's presidential elections. It appears to mark the final nail in the coffin of the Orange Revolution of 2004."¹²¹

B. GAINING UNFETTERED ACCESS TO SEVASTOPOL BLACK SEA FLEET PORT

When Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in early 2014, the status of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol for the next three decades was never really in jeopardy, thanks to Yanukovich's lease extension. Nonetheless, the transfer of Ukrainian power from pro-Russian Yanukovich to a then unknown but certain-to-be pro-Western type of government represented a stinging loss for Putin, who had personally gone to great lengths to install and maintain a Ukrainian leader compliant with Russian interests. In such a context, Putin perceived the end of Yanukovich's pro-Russian regime in Kiev in zero-sum terms, and his overvaluing of this loss contributed to the risk-acceptant decision to intervene in Crimea.

Russia's annexation of Crimea secured several significant strategic military benefits for Russia. First and foremost, it put the uncertainty about the future status of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol to rest, indefinitely. The action also relieved Russia of the obligation of having to pay rent, either in monetary or gas-discount form, to Ukraine for the use of the base for the length of the lease—a savings of over \$39 billion to say nothing of rent beyond the term of the lease.

¹²⁰ "Kharkiv Sellout," *Kiev Post*, April 22, 2010, <http://www.kyivpost.com/opinion/editorial/kharkiv-sellout-64760.html>.

¹²¹ Luke Harding, "Ukraine Extends Lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet," *Guardian*, April 21, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.

In addition to affording Russia exclusive ownership of one of the Black Sea's best naval bases due in part to Sevastopol's extensive infrastructure and natural harbor, Crimea's annexation released Russia from treaty restrictions and requirements.¹²² Before annexation, the type and number of Russian ships in Sevastopol were subject to Ukrainian consent, thus hampering Russia's plans to modernize its Black Sea Fleet.¹²³ Subject to such limitations, Russia planned to upgrade the port infrastructure at its other major Black Sea Fleet naval base in Novorossiysk, which included adding 15 piers to accommodate 30 ships at a cost of \$1 billion.¹²⁴ Unlike the port in Sevastopol, the naval port in Novorossiysk's Tsemes Bay is prone to 70 to 90 mile-per-hour *bora*, or northeasterly, winds that occur 30 to 40 days a year, mostly during the cold season from September to March.¹²⁵ During encounters with the *bora* winds, which are capable of inflicting catastrophic damage to ships and buildings, ships are forced to sail away from the harbor to prevent damage and avoid accidents.¹²⁶ Such inhospitable natural conditions necessitated complex and costly Russian engineering plans to construct high-tech barriers as part of building up Novorossiysk's naval infrastructure.¹²⁷ By annexing Crimea, Russia became free to not only upgrade its aging Sevastopol fleet with newer ships but also to add ships in accordance with its Black Sea Fleet modernization plans, thereby reducing the necessity of following through with its costly plans to build up the naval base in Novorossiysk.

¹²² Paul N. Schwartz, "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 18, 2014, <http://csis.org/blog/crimeas-strategic-value-russia>; Vladimir Socor, "Naval Basing and Maritime Borders in the Black Sea After Russia's Annexation of Crimea," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 11, no. 54 (2014), http://www.jamestown.org/regions/russia/single/?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42131&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=48&cHash=da21a8c025b5d63fdebbf52f55a98002—VPT4MvnF_To.

¹²³ Maksym Bugriy, "The Future of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Bases: Novorossiysk Versus Sevastopol," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 10, no. 157 (2013), http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=41327&no_cache=1—VibRnBCrTdQ.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Werner Alpers, Andrei Ivanov, and Jochen Horstmann, "Observations of Bora Events over the Adriatic Sea and Black Sea by Spaceborne Synthetic Aperture Radar," *Monthly Weather Review* 137 (2009): 1155, 1157, http://www.coastdat.de/cms01/cms01/imperia/md/content/gkss/zentrale_einrichtungen/bibliothek/journals/2009/alters_27366.pdf.

¹²⁶ Bugriy, "The Future of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's Bases."

¹²⁷ Alpers, Ivanov, and Horstmann, "Observation of Bora Events," 1157.

The strategic military benefits gained by Russia can be explained in realist terms. Offensive realists might keenly point out that Russia, by annexing Crimea, obtained freedom of action in the peninsula. Subsequently, the Russian navy, as it modernizes and adds to its fleet based in Sevastopol, can freely increase its power projection capability beyond the Black Sea into the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean.¹²⁸ Also, a Russian Crimea strengthens Moscow's military influence over Kiev. By acquiring a third front in the south, in addition to its northeastern and southeastern fronts, Russia poses a greater threat to Ukraine with future conventional seapower, airpower, landpower, and hybrid warfare.¹²⁹

Defensive realists might note that Russia's newfound freedom of action in Crimea allows for the deployment of nuclear arms to the peninsula and for the enhancement of its air defense capabilities.¹³⁰ Russia's annexation of Crimea also precludes the possibility of NATO sailors in Sevastopol. In his March 18, 2014 speech, Putin mentioned that Russia was "against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory" and that he could not "imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors." Providing a moment of levity, he continued, "Of course, most of them are wonderful guys, but it would be better to have them come and visit us, be our guests, rather than the other way round."¹³¹ He was perhaps referencing the September 1, 2008, instance when the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Dallas*, after delivering humanitarian aid supplies to Georgia in the wake of the Russo-Georgian war a few weeks earlier, anchored in Sevastopol to conduct joint theater security training with the Ukrainian Navy.¹³² A crowd of thousands of Russian anti-NATO protesters chanting "Yankees, go home!" prompted the crew's refusal to disembark into the same port city that moored several Russian ships used in combat operations conducted against

¹²⁸ Paul N. Schwartz, "Crimea's Strategic Value to Russia."

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014.

¹³² "U.S. Coast Guard Cutter arrives in Sevastopol, Ukraine," United States European Command, September 2, 2008, <http://www.eucom.mil/media-library/article/20463/us-coast-guard-cutter-arrives-sevastopol-ukraine>.

Georgia.¹³³ Such a visit now by a U.S. ship to Sevastopol truly is unimaginable in the wake of Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea.

C. ACQUIRING BLACK SEA OIL AND GAS ASSETS

The incorporation of Sevastopol and the Crimean peninsula into the Russian Federation has garnered much attention in the aftermath of the Russian intervention. Much less attention has been given to one of the major economic inducements benefitting Russia—a major portion of the Black Sea itself and its trove of undeveloped natural resources. Of the approximately 36,000 square miles of Crimean territorial waters in the Black Sea acquired by Russia (see Figure 1), the Ukrainian government estimates there are 2.3 million tons of oil reserves worth \$300 billion buried beneath the seabed, whereas other estimates put the potential value in the trillions.¹³⁴ European petroleum experts and analysts predicted in 2013 that exploration projects in Ukraine's Black Sea waters, which had "tremendous exploration potential," might produce "a game-changing shift for Ukraine, whose energy inefficient economy is being squeezed by high fuel import prices."¹³⁵ In May 2014, Putin's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, denied any connection between the energy resources that previously belonged to Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea. He claimed that "compared to all the potential Russia has, there was no interest there."¹³⁶ Russian actions showed otherwise.

¹³³ "U.S. Warship Met by Anti-NATO Protests in Ukraine's Sevastopol," *RIA Novosti*, September 1, 2008, <http://sputniknews.com/world/20080901/116450879.html>.

¹³⁴ John Biersack and Shannon O'Lear, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (2014): 258. doi:10.1080/15387216.2014.991340; William J. Broad, "In Taking Crimea, Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves," *New York Times*, May 17, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/world/europe/in-taking-crimea-putin-gains-a-sea-of-fuel-reserves.html>.

¹³⁵ Ken White, "The Black Sea Hots Up," *Geo ExPro* 10, no. 1 (2013): 29, http://assets.geoexpro.com/uploads/5c04c64c-caed-4d19-881b-711e3b7ca8ea/GEO_ExPro_v10i1_Full.pdf. 26–31

¹³⁶ Broad, "Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves."

Figure 1. Russian Black Sea Accessions from the Annexation of Crimea



Source: John Biersack and Shannon O’Lear, “The Geopolitics of Russia’s Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 55, no. 3 (2014): 258. doi:10.1080/15387216.2014.991340.

Immediately after the Russian intervention began, Crimean authorities seized and nationalized Chornomornaftogaz, Ukraine’s Black Sea energy development company whose name literally means “Black Sea Oil and Gas,” and its assets; following Crimea’s annexation into Russia, Gazprom, the Russian energy giant, incorporated Chornomornaftogaz.¹³⁷ In the years leading up to the intervention, Russia exerted

¹³⁷ Biersack and O’Lear, “Geopolitics of Russia’s Annexation of Crimea,” 258.

immense economic pressure on Ukraine through its gas and oil supply and pricing. Eurasian security studies expert Carol Saivetz emphasizes the significance of Russia's Crimean annexation, stating that it "deprives Ukraine [of] the possibility of developing these resources and gives them to Russia" and "makes Ukraine more vulnerable to Russian pressure."¹³⁸ Instead of the Black Sea energy resources being a game-changer for Ukraine, Russia's seizure of them severely tightened the vice on Ukraine's dependence on energy imported from Russia and augmented Russia's own economic interests. Much as Thucydides described the relations between the strong and the weak, in terms of energy security, Russia certainly did what it could while Ukraine suffered what it must in the zero-sum but high-stakes game for state economic lifeblood—oil and gas.¹³⁹

D. MINIMIZING THE PROSPECT OF UKRAINE JOINING NATO

Beyond the strategic military and economic benefits gained by Putin's decision to "return Crimea," the action also furthered Moscow's interest in reducing any prospect of NATO membership extension to Ukraine. NATO governments had stated in the April 3, 2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration that they welcomed Ukraine's and Georgia's NATO membership aspirations and that they "agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO."¹⁴⁰ The actual prospects for both nations to join NATO were low, however, due to the reluctance of several NATO member states that viewed their accession as antagonistic toward Russia.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Broad, "Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves."

¹³⁹ Thucydides' "Melian Dialogue" illustrates this realist concept in a verbal exchange between the Melians and Athenians during the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides wrote that the more powerful Athenians, while negotiating with and threatening the Melians—a weaker group that comprised a colony of Sparta—offered the following insight: "You know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." See Thucydides, "The Melian Dialogue," in *Conflict After the Cold War*, ed. Richard K. Betts (Boston: Pearson, 2013), 70.

¹⁴⁰ "Bucharest Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm.

¹⁴¹ David S. Yost, "The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's Intervention in Ukraine," *International Affairs* 91, no. 3 (2015): 520, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2346.12279/pdf>.

Russia's actions during the Russo-Georgian war in early August 2008—four months after the statement affirming that Georgia would become a member of NATO—served to reinforce the misgivings of some NATO member states. Several allies were reluctant to take on and provide collective defense for a prospective member state with significant unresolved security issues. Russia's freezing of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in Georgia has perpetuated the security uncertainty and state of political limbo not just for those regions, but for Georgia as a whole. Russia's 2014 intervention in Ukraine has had a similar effect in diminishing, if not eliminating, what little prospect existed for Ukraine to join NATO. On June 5, 2014 American scholar and former diplomat Steven Pifer told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “not pursuing a deeper relationship with NATO now seems an appropriate policy for Ukraine: deepening relations with NATO would antagonize Moscow, and there is no appetite in the Alliance to accept Ukraine as a member or offer a membership action plan.”¹⁴² Unlike its freezing of conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, however, Russia does not seem intent on freezing the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

While the situation in the Donbas is still unfolding, it seems that the Russian objectives in the area have changed since the onset of the conflict. Russia's initial covert support for the Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, mainly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, aimed to establish a widespread movement against Kiev's new trajectory toward the West.¹⁴³ Lawrence Freedman explains the range of Russia's initial motives: “At a minimum, this could put irresistible pressure on the post-Maidan Ukrainian government to back away from its pro-Western course; at a maximum, it could help reconstruct the old territory of Novorossiia, which might then attach itself in some way to Russia.”¹⁴⁴ Two ceasefire agreements later, it appears that Moscow for now has

¹⁴² Steven Pifer, “The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Statement for the Record: Ukraine, Russia and the U.S. Policy Response,” The Brookings Institution, June 5, 2014, 10, http://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Pifer_Testimony.pdf.

¹⁴³ Lawrence Freedman, “Ukraine and the Art of Exhaustion,” *Survival* 57, no. 5 (2015): 86, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2015.1090132>, (77-106).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

postponed the effort to reconstruct the historic Russian concept of Novorossiia in eastern Ukraine.¹⁴⁵

In the most recent ceasefire agreement—Minsk II—signed in February 2015, the separatist leaders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics no longer demanded independence from Ukraine but sought significant autonomy within Ukraine. Freedman credits the Minsk II agreement for elucidating Russia’s true objectives in the region: “getting Kiev to pick up the bill for social spending and economic survival for these territories, while allowing them to integrate back into Ukraine with a special, autonomous status and a veto on Kiev’s membership of the EU or NATO.”¹⁴⁶ In a June 2015 interview with an Italian newspaper correspondent, Putin admitted to Russia’s use of force in eastern Ukraine but attributed this to a noble but highly suspect objective: “All our actions, including those with the use of force, were aimed not at tearing away this territory from Ukraine but at giving the people living there an opportunity to express their opinion on how they want to live their lives.”¹⁴⁷ This self-determination assertion is merely a recycled argument that Russia had previously used to justify its interventions in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea.

Although much in the world has changed since the final scene of the grand 74-year Soviet experiment in 1991, several things within the minds of the Russian leadership elite have not. Among these is their reference point consensus that Crimea, Sevastopol, and a major portion of the Black Sea and its resources rightfully belong to Russia. This reference point, frozen in place as it has been since the end of the Cold War, also holds that Ukraine is an extension of Russia proper, to be influenced and controlled by Russia’s leaders. In their view, Ukraine can never be allowed to be party to a military alliance or other organization perceived as hostile to Russian interests. Perhaps this frozen reference point is why in 1994, as quoted in a *New York Times* article, Russian president Boris Yeltsin referred to the possible expansion of the then 16-member NATO as plunging

¹⁴⁵ Freedman, “Ukraine and the Art of Exhaustion,” 95.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin, Interview to the Italian Newspaper ‘*Il Corriere della Sera*,’” *Il Corriere della Sera*, June 7, 2015, http://www.corriere.it/english/15_giugno_07/vladimir-putin-interview-to-the-italian-newspaper-corriere-sera-44c5a66c-0d12-11e5-8612-1eda5b996824.shtml.

Europe into a “cold peace.”¹⁴⁸ The cold peace that describes the current state of relations between the leaders of Russia and the leaders of the United States and the 27 other member states of NATO has been kept frosty by the Russian leadership’s reference point, which has remained frozen in time since the end of the Soviet Union.

¹⁴⁸ Boris Yeltsin, quoted in Elaine Sciolino, “Yeltsin Says NATO is Trying to Split Continent Again,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/06/world/yeltsin-says-nato-is-trying-to-split-continent-again.html>.

III. SETTING THE STAGE FOR UKRAINE: U.S. AND RUSSIAN RELATIONS

The coming years will be decisive . . . for the entire world as it enters a period of transition and possibly even shocks.¹⁴⁹

—Vladimir Putin

When “little green men” invaded Crimea in February 2014 and took over its key government and military facilities, the action shocked many in the West. The leaders of EU and NATO member states, including U.S. president Barack Obama, until then had wholeheartedly subscribed to the notion of an enduring peace and security order in Europe. With the end of the Cold War, they viewed Europe as finally free from the incessant power politics and wars that had ravaged the continent for centuries. History had consigned the Marxist ideology in Europe to its dustbin. Many in Europe saw the end of the Cold War as the ushering in of a widespread peace and prosperity rooted in democratic-, rule-of-law-, and market economy-based liberal values.

Shocking to this liberal mindset were Russia’s brazen annexation of a sovereign European state’s territory and the rearranging of borders in Europe on March 18, 2014. Led by President Vladimir Putin, Russia was partly motivated to invade Crimea by a desire to assert itself as an independent actor on the world stage while securing its national interests. The Russians asserted that they were acting much like the United States had done around the world.

Putin’s decision to intervene in Crimea and eastern Ukraine was influenced by two major factors, among others: the failure of President Obama and his administration to accurately assess the mindset and intentions of Putin and his regime and, conversely, Putin’s accurate assessment of the propensity of Western leaders to not respond militarily to risk-laden conflicts. This chapter explores, to begin with, the political context of Obama’s and Putin’s understanding of each other from their first meeting in the wake of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. It also examines the attempted “reset” in U.S.-Russian

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Address to the Federal Assembly,” Official Site of the President of Russia, Kremlin, December 12, 2012, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/4739/print>.

relations based on the Obama administration's perceptions of Russia, the impact of Putin's pre-presidential background in his dealings with foreign leaders, and both leaders' positions on the Syrian crisis with regard to chemical weapons. Finally, this chapter discusses how this context contributed to Putin's decision to intervene in Ukraine and annex Crimea.

A. ROSE-COLORED GLASSES: THE BELIEF THAT THE PAST HAS NO PLACE IN THE PRESENT

Eight days after Putin gave his speech in Moscow on March 18, 2014, marking the official incorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation, Obama spoke in Brussels to leaders and representatives of the EU and NATO. Recounting the tumultuous and war-filled history of Europe, he contrasted the Western vision for Europe with a rival vision that seemed to have resurfaced from the time when an Iron Curtain had divided the continent:

The people of Europe . . . are more secure and more prosperous because we stood together for the ideals we shared. . . . Once again, we are confronted with the belief among some that bigger nations can bully smaller ones to get their way—that recycled maxim that might somehow makes right. . . . Russia's leadership is challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident, that in the 21st century the borders of Europe cannot be redrawn with force, that international law matters, that people and nations can make their own decisions about their future.¹⁵⁰

Russia's actions in Ukraine shattered Obama's ideal of an emerging liberal peace based on shared values and cooperation in Europe. Russia's actions also revealed the extent to which Obama had misunderstood Putin. A mere 17 months earlier, Obama found himself as the presidential incumbent competing for reelection against the Republican nominee, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney. In the midst of the campaigning, on March 26, 2012, Obama met with Russian president Dmitri Medvedev at a conference in South Korea. Unbeknownst to Obama, his microphone recorded an exchange with Medvedev in which he asked Medvedev to relay to Putin that he needed

¹⁵⁰ Barack Obama, "Full Transcript: President Obama Gives Speech Addressing Europe, Russia on March 26," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-president-obama-gives-speech-addressing-europe-russia-on-march-26/2014/03/26/07ae80ae-b503-11e3-b899-20667de76985_story.html.

more negotiating space on missile defense because the American election was coming up in November: “This is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility.”¹⁵¹ The same day, Mitt Romney discussed Obama’s “hot mike” comment with CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer: “If he’s [Obama’s] planning on doing more and suggests to Russia that—that he has things he’s willing to do with them, he’s not telling to the American people—this is to Russia, this is, without question, our number one geopolitical foe.”¹⁵² Nine months later during the October 22, 2012, televised debate between the two, Obama misquoted and ridiculed Romney for naming Russia as America’s biggest geopolitical threat: “You said Russia, in the 1980s, they’re now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because, you know, the Cold War’s been over for 20 years.”¹⁵³ Romney responded by clarifying that he had said that Russia represented a geopolitical foe: “Russia does continue to battle us in the UN time and time again. I have clear eyes on this. I’m not going to wear rose-colored glasses when it comes to Russia, or Mr. Putin.”¹⁵⁴

1. 2008 Russo-Georgian War

Based on his debate statements in 2012, Obama may have forgotten the circumstances involving Russia that surfaced during his first presidential election campaign in 2008. On August 8, 2008, then-Senator and Democratic Party presidential nominee Obama was vacationing in Hawaii when Russia invaded its Georgian neighbor. Three days later, Obama made a statement calling on Russia to cease its aggression and for the United States “to continue to push for a U.N. Security Council Resolution calling for an immediate end to the violence,” disregarding Russia’s status as a permanent member of the council with veto power.¹⁵⁵ Later in his statement, Obama mentioned how

¹⁵¹ Barack Obama, in Ewan MacAskill, “Obama Caught on Mic Telling Medvedev to give U.S. ‘Space’ on Nuclear Issue,” *Guardian*, March 26, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/26/obama-medvedev-space-nuclear>.

¹⁵² Mitt Romney, “Romney: Russia is our Number One Geopolitical Foe,” *CNN*, March 26, 2012, <http://cnnpresroom.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/26/romney-russia-is-our-number-one-geopolitical-foe/>.

¹⁵³ Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, “October 22, 2012 Debate Transcript,” *Commission on Presidential Debates*, October 22, 2012, <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=october-22-2012-the-third-obama-romney-presidential-debate>.

¹⁵⁴ Obama and Romney, “Debate Transcript.”

¹⁵⁵ Barack Obama, “Statement of Senator Barack Obama on the Conflict in Georgia,” The American Presidency Project, August 11, 2008, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=91078>.

Russia's actions in Georgia went against the ideal of the Olympics then being held in China: "The violence taking place along the Black Sea is just miles from Sochi, the site for the Winter Olympics in 2014. It only adds to the tragedy and outrage of the current situation that Russia has acted while the world has come together in peace and athletic competition in Beijing."¹⁵⁶ In a twist of irony, Obama would again mention the Sochi Winter Olympics while expressing concern about Russia's actions in another neighboring country—Ukraine—as a second-term president in 2014: "Any violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity would be deeply destabilizing . . . And just days after the world came to Russia for the Olympic Games, it would invite the condemnation of nations around the world."¹⁵⁷ For Obama, Russia's actions in Crimea removed the rose-colored glasses through which he had viewed Putin.

At the time of Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008, Dmitry Medvedev was the president of Russia, having entered office only a few months earlier in May. Putin, who had already served two presidential terms, was forbidden by the Russian constitution from serving an additional consecutive term and was instead serving as Russia's prime minister. This political arrangement came to be known as the tandem of Russian power sharing, although many—including Obama—correctly accredited the real mantle of power and authority of action to Prime Minister Putin.¹⁵⁸ Obama, having won the 2008 election, focused on "resetting" the deteriorating U.S.-Russian relationship after taking office in January 2009. In April 2009, Obama met with Medvedev in London, and in July he met with Putin for the first time while in Moscow.

2. Pressing the Overburden Button

If anything, the "reset" in relations got off to a shaky start. In March 2009, Obama had dispatched his secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, to literally press the reset button on relations with Russia. In Geneva, Clinton presented a red button with Russian and

¹⁵⁶ Obama, "Statement of Senator Barack Obama."

¹⁵⁷ Barack Obama, "Statement by the President on Ukraine," The White House, February 28, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/28/statement-president-ukraine>.

¹⁵⁸ Chris McGreal and Luke Harding, "Barack Obama: Putin has One Foot in the Past," *Guardian*, July 2, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jul/02/obama-putin-us-russia-relations>.

English labels to Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. After the two pressed the button together, Lavrov looked at it and told Clinton, “You got it wrong.” The red button—instead of being labelled *perezagruzka*, the Russian word for reset—had the Russian word *peregruzka*, which means overcharge, overload, or overburden. The two laughed it off while Clinton promised, “We won’t let you do that to us.”¹⁵⁹ Despite the well-intentioned gesture, the button itself would come to symbolize the difficulty in accurately understanding the other—an essential requisite for truly resetting relations.

Notwithstanding the diplomatic faux pas, Obama was hopeful that progress could be made with President Medvedev, as was evident in a joint statement offered in April 2009 that they were “ready to move beyond Cold War mentalities and chart a fresh start in relations.”¹⁶⁰ The week before meeting with Putin in July 2009, however, Obama charted a rocky start when he told a newspaper interviewer that Putin had “one foot in the old ways of doing business and one foot in the new.”¹⁶¹ He also emphasized the importance for Putin to “understand that the old Cold War approaches to U.S.-Russian relations is [*sic*] outdated—that it’s time to move forward in a different direction.”¹⁶² In effect, he was saying that Putin needed to understand the importance of moving past Cold War thinking—the same thing for which he would later chide Romney in the 2012 debate. Never one to be outdone, Putin responded to Obama’s criticism: “We are standing firmly on both feet and always look to the future. That is the peculiarity of Russia. That has always allowed Russia to move forward and get stronger. That will continue.”¹⁶³ As it turned out, both the United States and Russia would maintain their future footings with regard to a list of issues that pitted each state’s interests against its

¹⁵⁹ Angus Roxburgh, “Understanding the Kremlin: It’s the Words, Stupid,” *Guardian*, October 22, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/oct/22/understanding-vladimir-putin-russian-language-kremlin>.

¹⁶⁰ Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev, “Joint Statement by President Dmitriy Medvedev of the Russian Federation and President Barack Obama of the United States of America,” The White House, April 1, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2009/04/01/joint-statement-president-dmitriy-medvedev-russian-federation-and-president-barack-obama>.

¹⁶¹ McGreal and Harding, “Barack Obama: Putin has One Foot in the Past.”

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Gleb Bryanski, “Putin Rejects Obama Criticism Before Meeting,” *Reuters*, July 3, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/07/03/us-russia-putin-obama-idUSTRE56231J20090703>.

competitor's. Matters regarding Syria, Iran, ballistic missile defense, nuclear arms treaties, and Edward Snowden would impede Obama's hoped-for reset, and the Ukraine crisis would culminate its failure.¹⁶⁴

3. First Meetings, Impressions, and Assessments

With back and forth statements between the relatively inexperienced American president and the seasoned Russian prime minister the week before their first encounter, the political atmosphere was quite charged when Obama later met with Putin for a two-hour breakfast. At the start of the meeting, Putin expressed hope for positive relations after recalling the history between the two states with its "very many different occasions and events of different, shall we say, color. There were periods when our relations flourished quite a bit and there were periods of, shall we say, grayish mood between our two countries and of stagnation."¹⁶⁵ Both leaders used the opportunity to explain their views and assess the other in person. After the meeting, Obama offered his appraisal of Putin: "I found him to be tough, smart, shrewd, very unsentimental, very pragmatic. And on areas where we disagree, like Georgia, I don't anticipate a meeting of the minds anytime soon."¹⁶⁶ According to a senior U.S. official, the meeting improved Obama's assessment of Putin—he was "very convinced the prime minister is a man of today and he's got his eyes firmly on the future."¹⁶⁷ Obama was not the first U.S. president to experience a positive change in his assessment of Putin after meeting with him for the first time.

In June 2001, President George W. Bush first met Putin in Slovenia during discussions on the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty. Afterwards, Bush famously

¹⁶⁴ Douglas J. Feith and Seth Cropsey, "How the Russian 'Reset' Explains Obama's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, October 16, 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/16/how-the-russian-reset-explains-obamas-foreign-policy/>.

¹⁶⁵ Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin, "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Putin of Russia Before Meeting," The White House, July 7, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-putin-russia-meeting>.

¹⁶⁶ Barack Obama, quoted by Peter Baker, "Obama Resets Ties to Russia, but Work Remains," *New York Times*, July 7, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/08/world/europe/08prexy.html?_r=0.

¹⁶⁷ Josh Gerstein, "Obama Meets with Vladimir Putin," *Politico*, July 7, 2009, <http://www.politico.com/story/2009/07/obama-meets-with-vladimir-putin-024621>.

related how he got a sense of Putin's soul when he looked into his eyes.¹⁶⁸ Bush's vice president, Dick Cheney, described the encounter and its effects in his memoir:

The president was criticized for the remark, but I think it reflected the hopes of the time that Putin would be a different kind of Russian leader, one who would put his nation on a path to greater freedom. I must say I was never too optimistic about Putin. When I looked into his eyes, I saw an old KGB hand. I didn't trust him and still don't, but then I'm not given to trusting Russian or Soviet leaders.¹⁶⁹

According to former Vice President Cheney, the West had moved past the divisions of the Cold War, but Putin still longed for them and sought to "turn back the clock and do whatever possible to restore Russian power and influence."¹⁷⁰ Obama's vice president, Joe Biden, mostly agreed with Cheney's view in an interview he gave after returning from a trip to Ukraine and Georgia a few weeks after Obama's trip to Moscow in July 2009. He offered a candid and accurate evaluation of the political conditions in Russia: "They're in a situation where the world is changing before them and they're clinging to something in the past that is not sustainable."¹⁷¹ Both Biden and Cheney were correct in their conclusions, as was Obama in his initial 2009 statements before meeting Putin and attempting the reset—that Putin's outlook was and remains an issue of domain. In prospect theory, domain describes the realm in which decisions are made and whether that realm is perceived by an actor as characterized by gains or losses.¹⁷² Ever since coming to power in December 1999, Putin has perceived his domain as a realm of losses—Russia's loss of empire, prestige, lands, power, possessions, status, identity, and even citizens. Vice President Biden highlighted Russia's difficulty in dealing with the loss of its empire, its shrinking population, and its withering economy. He asserted that

¹⁶⁸ President George W. Bush used the following words to describe his first encounter with Putin: "I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy and we had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul."; Caroline Wyatt, "Bush and Putin: Best of friends," *BBC News*, June 16, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1392791.stm>.

¹⁶⁹ Richard B. Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold, 2011), 326.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 514

¹⁷¹ Joe Biden, quoted in Peter Spiegel, "Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend to U.S." *Wall Street Journal*, July 25, 2009, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124848246032580581?alg=y>.

¹⁷² Rose McDermott, *Risk-Taking in International Politics: Prospect Theory in American Foreign Policy* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press: 1998), 37.

the deteriorating conditions in Russia contributed to a significant shift in Moscow's thinking about its international interests—a shift that, Biden believed, made Putin and his associates more likely to cooperate with the Obama administration.¹⁷³

4. A False Image

Although many points of his assessment of Russia's conditions were accurate, Biden's—and by extension, Obama's—overarching conclusion that Moscow would be more inclined to cooperate with Washington because the Russians perceived the interests of both as converging, or, in other words, that the reset would work, proved to be way off the mark. Until “little green men”—Russian military personnel without insignia—appeared in Crimea, Obama and his administration had been caught in the cognitive trap of mirror imaging, or as Zachary Shore describes, assuming “consciously or unconsciously, that the other side will think and act like us.”¹⁷⁴ Russia's 21st century aggression against Ukraine and flagrant redrawing of borders in defiance of international agreements and law shattered the image of a new liberal era of peace and prosperity in Europe—an idea that Obama had projected as desired by all European leaders, including Putin.

In 1960, a former State Department planner, Louis Halle, warned against the natural tendency for policymakers to craft a state's foreign policy after their minds' preferred image of the external world rather than the world's actuality.¹⁷⁵ “In the degree that the image is false, actually and philosophically false,” he wrote, “no technicians, however proficient, can make the policy that is based on it sound.”¹⁷⁶ Obama's hopeful but somewhat naive image of the world—one of a time where, as he stated, “in 2009, a great power does not show strength by dominating or demonizing other countries” and “the days when empires could treat sovereign states as pieces on a chessboard are

¹⁷³ Joe Biden, quoted by Spiegel, “Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend to U.S.”

¹⁷⁴ Shore, *Blunder*, 162.

¹⁷⁵ Louis J. Halle, *American Foreign Policy: Theory and Reality* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1960), 316.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

over”—was proved false by Russia in 2014 in Ukraine.¹⁷⁷ In July 2009 Vice President Biden, while discussing the weaknesses of Russia, commented, “I think we vastly underestimate the hand that we hold.”¹⁷⁸ Instead of vastly underestimating its hand in 2009, the Obama administration failed to comprehend Putin’s mindset and motivations. As Shore suggests, “It takes a good deal of empathy to break the mirror of mirror imaging and sense what others are thinking and feeling. And it takes an imaginative leap to envision how a stranger’s circumstances might affect his actions.”¹⁷⁹ It takes an inordinate amount of empathy and a colossal imaginative leap for an American politician to understand the thinking of a former KGB operative like Putin.

B. THE IMPACT OF PUTIN’S BACKGROUND

Much like Cheney, the Brookings Institution’s Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy view Putin’s background working for the KGB as pivotal in guiding his decisions and actions as the leader of Russia. In their co-authored book *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, however, they go further in ascribing Putin’s *modus operandi* to the sum of his distinct life experiences. “Putin’s outlook,” they write, “has been shaped by many influences: a combination of the Soviet and Russian contexts in which he grew up, lived, and worked.”¹⁸⁰ Putin’s formative periods are varied and many. He grew up in a rough part of the city then called Leningrad. He trained for the KGB and served as a KGB operative in Dresden, East Germany, while secluded from the wholesale societal changes of Gorbachev’s reforms. He worked for the mayor of St. Petersburg as the “fix-it” man in the chaotic early 1990s. Finally, he went to Moscow in 1996 at the beginning of his meteoric rise that would make him Russia’s acting president on the last day of 1999. The identities that he formed from each experience shaped Putin into the actor he is today. Hill and Gaddy explain that the six identities of Putin that they analyze—the Statist, the

¹⁷⁷ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the New Economic School Graduation,” The White House, July 7, 2009, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-new-economic-school-graduation>.

¹⁷⁸ Joe Biden, quoted by Spiegel, “Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend to U.S.”

¹⁷⁹ Shore, *Blunder*, 181.

¹⁸⁰ Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2013), 14.

History Man, the Survivalist, the Outsider, the Free Marketeer, and the Case Officer—are not sequential but parallel: “They blend into each other and are not mutually exclusive.”¹⁸¹ Of the six, Putin’s identity as a case officer, or an operative, is perhaps the most important in understanding Putin the President.

In 2000, a Kremlin-commissioned biographical work titled *First Person: Conversations with Vladimir Putin*, which was based largely on personal interviews with Putin and his close associates, sought to provide the Russian public with a sense of who their new president was. In one of the book’s interviews, Sergei Roldugin, a close and long-time friend of Putin, offered some intriguing insight into how Putin sees himself. Roldugin recounted how Putin had years earlier told him that he worked for the KGB but did not give any details about what he did. Curious, Roldugin decided to press the issue and question Putin directly:

I asked him later, “I am a cellist—I play the cello. I could never be a surgeon. But I am a good cellist. And what is your profession? I know you are an intelligence agent. But I don’t know what that means. Who are you? What can you do?” And he told me, “I am a specialist in communicating with people.” With that we ended the conversation. And he really thought that he professionally deals with [or handles] people.¹⁸²

Hill and Gaddy describe the Russian phrase that Putin used—*spetsialist po obshcheniyu s lyu'dmi*, which means a specialist in communicating or working with people—as an essential skill for a KGB operative. “For the intelligence officer,” they explain, “the most important function of ‘working with people’ is to study the psychology of one’s counterparts. For the case officer, this is also a necessary step in recruiting and running an individual agent. It means studying the minds of the targets, finding their vulnerabilities, and figuring out how to use them.”¹⁸³ Although he left KGB service in 1990, Putin retained his ability to analyze his targets in order to find and exploit their

¹⁸¹ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 14.

¹⁸² Natalya Gevorkian, Natalya Timakova, and Andrei Kolesnikov, *От Первого Лица: Разговоры с Владимиром Путиным*, Президент России Официальный сайт, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/articles/bookchapter3.shtml>.

¹⁸³ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 185.

vulnerabilities—an aptitude that he even employs while dealing with other heads of state and government, including President Obama.

In contrast with Obama's openness in sharing his assessment of Putin, Putin has refrained from providing details about how he views Obama. Such silence on Putin's part is not by happenstance, however. As Putin indicated during a press conference after the appearance of uniformed but unidentified troops in Crimea, he understands the importance of reticence and disguising one's thoughts when occasion requires. When a reporter asked Putin about the possible repercussions of Russian military action in Ukraine as a violation of the Budapest Memorandum assurances, Putin responded: "Before making public statements, and all the more so before taking practical steps, we give due thought and attention and try to foresee the consequences and reactions that the various potential players could have."¹⁸⁴ He tactically diverted the discussion to questions about the constitutionality and ambiguity of Ukraine's Euromaidan movement. In so doing, he posed his own question to the reporter, whose response prompted a glimpse into Putin's often-concealed inner thinking. "You should join the diplomatic service; you'd make a good diplomat," Putin told him. "Diplomats' tongues, as we know, are there to hide their thoughts."¹⁸⁵ Putin the Diplomat not only knows how to hide his thoughts but also his ambitions.

One reason why Putin rose so rapidly from obscurity to the pinnacle of Russia's federal government is his ability to shape people's perception of him—he gets his intended audience to see him how they want him to be instead of what he really is.¹⁸⁶ Putin is also an opportunist with sharp eyes for circumstances that he can exploit to achieve his ends.¹⁸⁷ During his rapid ascent to the Russian presidency, as Hill and Gaddy note, Putin carefully observed those who might advance his career: "He studied them, strengthened his personal and professional ties to them, did favors for them, and

¹⁸⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Vladimir Putin Answered Journalists' Questions on the Situation in Ukraine," Russian Presidential Executive Office, The Kremlin, March 4, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6763>.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 5.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 12.

manipulated them. He allowed—even actively encouraged—people to underestimate him as he maneuvered himself into influential positions and quietly accumulated power.”¹⁸⁸ As the Russian leader, Putin operates in the same fashion with other state leaders.

C. A RED LINE IN SYRIA

The turbulent Syrian political landscape in the midst of the Arab spring and Obama’s reactions to it granted Putin an opportunity to capitalize on Obama’s perceived weakness to score political points as an international arbiter. After Syria’s president, Bashar al-Assad, responded to anti-government protests with draconian measures in April 2011, the United States and many other Western nations condemned Assad’s regime. In the following months, Washington and the EU applied several rounds of sanctions. Similar efforts at the United Nations were not unanimous, however, as Russia and China both vetoed a U.N. Security Council resolution that would have imposed sanctions on Syria. In August 2011 Obama called for Assad’s resignation, and in February 2012, due to the deterioration of stability within the country, Washington withdrew its ambassador to Syria and closed its embassy in Damascus.¹⁸⁹

A debate developed among Obama’s national security team concerning how to further respond to the situation. Earlier in 2011, the United States and some NATO allies and partners used military force to remove another Middle Eastern dictator, Muammar al-Qaddafi, in Libya. They did so by supporting Libyan rebels with an extended aerial bombardment campaign against Qaddafi’s forces. In October 2011, the rebels found and executed Qaddafi. As then Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta writes in his memoir, the situation in Syria was quite different from that in Libya: “Assad was much more heavily armed, the country was far less accessible, and among the military’s munitions were large storehouses of chemical weapons and modern air defense systems, the latter supplied by the Soviet Union and later Russia.”¹⁹⁰ After surveying a range of options, Obama chose to pursue a course of action that did not include lethal military intervention but did

¹⁸⁸ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ “Syria’s Crisis and the Global Response,” Council on Foreign Relations, updated September 11, 2013, <http://www.cfr.org/syria/syrias-crisis-global-response/p28402—p4>.

¹⁹⁰ Leon Panetta and Jim Newton, *Worthy Fights* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 448.

include providing training for moderate Syrian rebels. One of the factors that particularly concerned Obama was the cache of chemical weapons in Syria. As the fighting intensified and the casualties mounted, Obama emphasized where he stood on the issue on August 20, 2012: “We have communicated in no uncertain terms . . . that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing . . . the use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations significantly.”¹⁹¹ Obama thus drew a red line for Assad. Assad would soon test Obama’s resolve to back his words.

One year and one day after Obama’s warning against Assad’s use of chemical weapons, Assad’s regime used chemical weapons against its own people. According to a U.S. government assessment, the chemical weapons attack on August 21, 2013, by the Syrian government resulted in the deaths of 1,429 people, 426 of whom were children.¹⁹² Obama and John Kerry, who had replaced Hillary Clinton as Secretary of State, initially opted for a limited military response, but as Panetta recounts, Obama vacillated between response options and ultimately retreated by sending the decision to Congress—a move that was “an almost certain way to scotch any action.”¹⁹³ Obama had painted himself into a corner. For his ostensible display of weakness, Obama took a lot of criticism not only from his political opponents but also from within his own administration. Panetta describes the impact:

The result, I felt, was a blow to American credibility. When the president as commander in chief draws a red line, it is critical that he act if the line is crossed. The power of the United States rests on its word, and clear signals are important both to deter adventurism and to reassure allies that we can be counted on. Assad’s action clearly defied President Obama’s warning; by failing to respond, it sent the wrong message to the world.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹¹ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps,” The White House, August 20, 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>.

¹⁹² “Government Assessment of the Syrian Government’s Use of Chemical Weapons on August 21, 2013,” The Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, August 30, 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/30/government-assessment-syrian-government-s-use-chemical-weapons-august-21>.

¹⁹³ Panetta and Newton, *Worthy Fights*, 450.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Although Obama's dithering and inaction over Syria may have sent the wrong message to the world, it certainly sent a clear message to Russia. A receptive Putin understood that under Obama's leadership, the United States would not always act to deter or punish adventurism. Furthermore, Obama's self-created dilemma opened a window for Putin to interpose whereby he could benefit in two ways: gain political clout in helping Obama save face and prevent American military action against the regime of his longtime ally Assad. Putin's role as a staunch patron of Assad developed from the special relationship between Moscow and Damascus that dates back decades to the Cold War era. In addition to maintaining a naval base at Tartus in Syria and serving as the Syrian government's top arms supplier, Russia had propped up Assad's regime since the beginning of Syria's civil war—one of several obstacles that stood in the way of a true reset in relations between Russia and the United States.

In this context, Putin's political rescue of Obama, wherein he offered a plan to transfer possession of Syria's chemical weapons to the international community, came as a surprise. At the time, *Guardian* journalist Simon Tisdall described how "the White House, not Assad, was disarmed—it simply did not see it coming," and yet Obama seemed to accept Putin's plan "with almost embarrassing eagerness."¹⁹⁵ Throughout his post-KGB career, Putin did many favors, both big and small, for acquaintances and even strangers. He once described his rationale for providing the favors to a political figure, whom he helped escape from a scandal, with a response reminiscent of the moral from Aesop's tale of the lion and the mouse that "a kindness is never wasted."¹⁹⁶ Putin told him, "You never know who people might turn out to be."¹⁹⁷ Putin's throwing a lifeline to Obama in Syria also fits well with Hill's and Gaddy's argument that "Putin wants to have various means of making people feel beholden to him."¹⁹⁸ Not only did Putin's plan

¹⁹⁵ Simon Tisdall, "Putin's Deft Timing on a Syria Chemical Arms Surrender Plan Snookered Obama," *Guardian*, September 11, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/11/putin-syria-arms-surrender-snookered-obama>.

¹⁹⁶ "The Lion & the Mouse," *The Aesop for Children*, Library of Congress, <http://www.read.gov/aesop/007.html>.

¹⁹⁷ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 135.

¹⁹⁸ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 135.

make Obama feel beholden to him, but it seemed to reverse the traditional roles, at least temporarily, of idealist Obama and realist Putin with Putin taking the idealistic high road.

D. DO AS I SAY, NOT AS I DO

In the ultimate game of international one-upmanship, Putin bested his American counterpart with regard to Obama's red line on Syria's use of chemical weapons by preventing the use of force and opting instead for a peaceful means of resolution. For his efforts, Putin was later nominated for the Nobel Peace prize—the same prize that Obama won in 2009 after assuming the presidency. The *New York Times* quoted Iosif Kobzon, a member of the Russian Duma, who contrasted the two leaders' merits for the award:

Barack Obama has the title of Nobel Prize winner—the man who initiated and approved such aggressive actions on the part of the United States of America as in Iraq, Afghanistan, some others, and now is preparing for invasion of Syria. I think our president, who is trying to stop the bloodshed, who is trying to help resolve this conflict situation through a political dialogue, through diplomatic language, deserves this title more.¹⁹⁹

Although Putin has not won the prize to date, the view Kobzon expressed touched on a larger theme of perceived American hypocrisy and arrogance that evokes passion from many Russians, including Putin himself. The Russian president has often asserted that the American exceptionalism that has prompted U.S. interventions in sovereign states has resulted in a destabilized world. The March 18, 2014, Crimean annexation speech afforded Putin yet another opportunity to denounce what he perceives as American hypocrisy. “Like a mirror, the situation in Ukraine reflects what is going on and what has been happening in the world over the past several decades,” he said.²⁰⁰ “Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in the practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. . . . They have come

¹⁹⁹ Iosif Kobzon, quoted in David M. Herszenhorn, “Citing Efforts to Prevent Attack on Syria, Group Nominates Putin for Peace Prize,” *New York Times*, October 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/02/world/europe/group-nominates-putin-for-nobel-peace-prize.html>.

²⁰⁰ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, Kremlin, March 18, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>.

to believe . . . that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right.”²⁰¹

During the speech, Putin enumerated several instances of U.S.-led foreign interventions—Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya—and highlighted Washington’s selective use of U.N. Security Council resolutions when they advanced the American agenda. He specifically referred to the non-U.N. sanctioned NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 and the overstep of the 2011 U.N. Security Council resolution that approved protection of civilians in Libya but was subsequently expanded without authorization to include bombings that supported regime change.²⁰² Putin assuredly regretted Russia’s abstention from the Security Council vote on the resolution that authorized the NATO-led intervention in Libya.

E. ARROGANCE AND HUMILIATION

Aside from the perceived American exceptionalism and hypocrisy, Putin resents American arrogance and has accused Washington of trying to keep Russia down by not respecting its sovereignty and interests. As much of his thinking is carried over from that of Soviet leaders during the Cold War, comments made by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev provide understanding of Putin’s viewpoint. In August and September 1995, NATO allies bombed Bosnian Serb targets as part of Operation Deliberate Force. NATO allies informed Russian president Boris Yeltsin about their intentions only after the decision to conduct the bombings had already been made and the first bombings were imminent.²⁰³ In September 1995, former Soviet president Gorbachev commented in an interview that Russia’s weakness following the collapse of the Soviet Union had been exploited by the West.²⁰⁴ He stated that the policy of the United States and other Western European countries “is marked by a clear disrespect for Russia, as is shown by its failure to consult Russia on the issue of NATO bombings [in Bosnia] . . .

²⁰¹ Putin, “Address by President,” March 18, 2014.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 31–32; Valerie Pacer, *Russian Foreign Policy under Dmitry Medvedev, 2008–2012* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 32.

All this proves that some Western politicians would have liked to see Russia play second fiddle in world politics. . . . Whatever Russia's domestic problems, it will never reconcile itself to such a humiliating position."²⁰⁵ Russia's military actions in Georgia and Ukraine under Putin's leadership attest to the cogency of Gorbachev's assessment of Russian elite attitudes.

Almost twenty years later, Putin echoed Gorbachev's sentiments during his Crimean annexation speech:

They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.²⁰⁶

Putin framed the issue in Ukraine as one where an untrammelled Russia was acting to secure its national interests, much like the United States had acted on multiple occasions in the years leading up to the Russian invasion of Crimea. Attempts by the United States to condemn Russian actions were promptly met with accusations of hypocrisy. Putin's risk-acceptant decision to "start work on returning Crimea to Russia" may have been due in great part to opportunism, but his view of Western leaders, Obama in particular, and their perception of him must have figured into his calculations.²⁰⁷ The hybrid means of Russia's military action flew beneath the radar of the United States' and NATO's set reaction patterns.²⁰⁸ Putin's assessment on how far Russia could go without triggering a major U.S. and Western military response was correct—the invasion of Crimea did not turn the post-Soviet "cold peace," as described by Boris Yeltsin, into a hot war.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev, quoted in Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 32.

²⁰⁶ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014.

²⁰⁷ Agence France-Presse, "Vladimir Putin Describes Secret Meeting."

²⁰⁸ Heidi Reisinger and Aleksandr Golts, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defense," *Research Paper, NATO Defense College, Rome* no. 105 (2014): 11, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=426>.

²⁰⁹ Boris Yeltsin, quoted in Elaine Sciolino, "Yeltsin Says NATO is Trying to Split Continent Again," *New York Times*, December 6, 1994, <http://www.nytimes.com/1994/12/06/world/yeltsin-says-nato-is-trying-to-split-continent-again.html>.

F. DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

In the time since Crimea's formal annexation, hard questions for both state leaders have remained. For President Obama, the difficult question, as Angela Stent points out, is "how far the United States should allow its policies to be shaped by an acknowledgement of Russia's post-Soviet preoccupations and continuing suspicion of American intentions."²¹⁰ Stent reprises the words of German General Klaus Naumann, asking if the United States suffers from "'empathy deficit disorder' when it comes to dealing with Russia."²¹¹ Obama's vice president, Joe Biden, provided initial promise in answering this question by offering some enlightened wisdom in his 2009 interview. "It is never smart to embarrass an individual or a country when they're dealing with significant loss of face," he advised. "My dad used to put it in another way: Never put another man in a corner where the only way out is over you. It just is not smart."²¹² According to Putin, however, putting Russia in a corner with regard to Ukraine was exactly what the United States did when it interfered in Kiev's internal politics.²¹³ Obama's statements and actions—including his first meetings and assessments of Putin, the attempted reset in relations, the red line in Syria, and being caught unaware in the Ukraine crisis—provide a strong case that Washington does lack empathy when dealing with Russia.

For Putin, the difficult question is one that still looms since it was first posed by James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, the year before the collapse of the Soviet Union—can Russian leaders find a "non-chauvinist identity for themselves: a way of feeling good about themselves without feeling hostile to others?"²¹⁴ Russia's actions in Ukraine do not provide hope for answering this question in the affirmative, but they do highlight Russia's ongoing effort to reshape its post-Soviet identity. While Putin's

²¹⁰ Angela Stent, "US-Russia Relations in the Second Obama Administration," *Survival* 54, no. 6 (2012): 134, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2012.749635>, 123–138.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Joe Biden, "Excerpts: Biden on Eastern Europe," *Wall Street Journal*, July 24, 2009, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124846217750479721>.

²¹³ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President," Kremlin, March 18, 2014.

²¹⁴ James Billington, quoted in John B. Dunlop, "Russia: Confronting a Loss of Empire, 1987–1991," *Political Science Quarterly* 108, no. 4 (1993): 634, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2152402> 603–634

decision to intervene in Ukraine was largely motivated by the desire to assert Russia's sovereignty within its perceived sphere of interests and display its independent role in international affairs, it also represented a concerted effort to strengthen Russia's national identity and, in the process, shore up Putin's domestic support to keep him in power.

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IV. BOOSTING DOMESTIC SUPPORT AND FORGING A NATIONAL IDENTITY

Ukraine is my Homeland. Russian is my native language. And I would like to be saved by Pushkin. And delivered from sorrow and unrest, also by Pushkin. Pushkin, not Putin.²¹⁵

—Facebook post of an ethnic Russian in Ukraine

Stretched across the Kievan sky on a bluff that overlooks the Dniepr River, a glistening titanium arch frames a massive bronze statue of two Soviet workers beneath its span. One worker is Ukrainian, and the other is Russian. Together they hold aloft the Soviet Order of Friendship of Nations. The two nations share many historical and cultural ties to their ancestral state of Kievan Rus. The monument stands as an anachronistic relic of a bygone era, however. Time, with the assistance of Vladimir Putin, has withered the former Soviet friendship to its present post-Soviet adversarial relationship. At the root of such a deterioration in relations lies the complex and ever-present issue of both Ukrainian and Russian national identity.

For many who comprise the older Russian generations, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a traumatic life event. The Soviet Union, the world military and technological superpower that boasted the grand achievements of defeating Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War and reaching the cosmos first, disintegrated into oblivion. The entire Soviet system of principles and norms—the only system people had known their entire lives—vanished in an instant. Along with the loss of their Soviet identity disappeared their state-planned economy and communist government. Chaos reigned during the years following the USSR's collapse as the new Russian state's leadership struggled to fill the immense void.

Before its demise, the Soviet Union was a highly industrialized state, and many of its productive sectors were localized among its fifteen republics. Not only did its collapse sever the economic limbs of these sectors and render them inoperable, but the Soviet legacy also left the republics institutionally ill-prepared for the transition to market

²¹⁵ Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 351.

capitalism. Private property, market prices, and banks in the Western sense were all novel concepts to the former Soviet citizenry. At the time of Russia's economic transition, Russia's fledgling government struggled to establish its footing, battling its own weaknesses and seeking to enact democratic reforms while fending off resurgent communist attempts to return to power. In the ensuing turmoil, people witnessed unrestrained fluctuations of currency value and saw their entire life savings obliterated by hyperinflation. Lawlessness prevailed as rampant violence, alcoholism, drug abuse, theft, and corruption cast their dark shadows over society. Pensioners received no pension payments, and wage earners received no wages. For most Russians, the decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union, which saw a 40% decline in the country's economy and a complete financial collapse in 1998, was an emotional, distressful period never to be forgotten.²¹⁶

With the dawn of the millennium came a new Russian leader who promised to strengthen the state and forge a new Russian identity while preventing a slide back to the turbulent times of the 1990s. In the process, he would take measures to accumulate great power at the expense of those who elected him through ostensibly democratic means. The extent of the power and control he acquired was so vast that he would go to great lengths to preserve it. As Vladimir Putin's domestic support waned due to increasing levels of political discontent and opposition, he opportunistically used the political uncertainty in Ukraine following the collapse of Viktor Yanukovych's government to shore up his popularity. This chapter explains how, by committing the Russian military to its hybrid intervention in Ukraine, Putin's decision boosted his domestic support while simultaneously reinforcing the concept of a Russian ethnic identity. It reviews the background behind Putin's social contract of providing stability in exchange for political indifference, and clarifies how Putin reinforced Russia's hybrid democracy by consolidating executive power in the Russian government, media, and economy. It also reveals the increasing frailty of Putin's social contract, which led to mass political

²¹⁶ F. Joseph Dresen, "Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia," Kennan Institute, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/petrostate-putin-power-and-the-new-russia>.

demonstrations in 2011–2012, and contributed to Putin’s decision to intervene in Ukraine and endeavor to strengthen the ethnic Russian identity.

A. A STRONG LEADER AND STABILITY

Many Russians consider Putin a strong leader who saved Russia from the chaos of the 1990s and brought stability—a point he himself often stresses. In his first address to the Federal Assembly in 2000, Putin declared, “Decades of difficult and unstable life are a long enough time to demand real changes for the better. . . . I am certain that we have enough sense and will. If this is so, there will be a result. And then we will have stability and national progress. Russia will have success and prosperity.”²¹⁷ Vowing to never again allow such chaos to return, Putin pledged to stabilize and improve living standards through a stronger economy.²¹⁸

Less than a year later, Putin already began claiming credit for the return to order: “The Russian economy experienced growth rates unseen in almost 30 years in 2000 . . . and people are finally being paid their wages and pensions on time for the first time in years. But this is all still not enough . . . Our people continue to have very low living standards.”²¹⁹ Putin’s claim that he was responsible for the economic turnaround is open to debate. Some argue that based on rising commodity prices, Russia would have still seen rapid economic progress no matter who the leader of Russia was at the time.²²⁰ Putin would never admit this assessment, however, as doing so would undermine his main claim to why he should continue leading Russia—his continuing fulfillment of an unspoken social contract with the Russian people.

²¹⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, July 8, 2000, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2000/07/08/0000_type70029type82912_70658.shtml.

²¹⁸ Richard Sakwa, “Political Leadership,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 33.

²¹⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia, April 3, 2001, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2001/04/03/0000_type70029type82912_70660.shtml.

²²⁰ Dresen, “Petrostate.”

1. Social Contract and Hybrid Democracy

As part of his social contract, Putin promised stability, predictability, and increased standards of living in return for Russian citizens' continued apathy towards and non-participation in politics.²²¹ Russian history and culture explain much as to why Russians have agreed to such a contract for stability, which, in turn, has prevented the full-fledged establishment of liberal democracy in Russia. As Yale Richmond observes, Russians are "likely to be defenders of the status quo. Their cruel climate, harsh history, and skeptical outlook on life have caused Russians to value stability, security, social order, and predictability, and to avoid risk. The tried and tested is preferred over the new and unknown, and with good reason."²²² This concept, aided by Russia's tumultuous tsarist and communist history, has habituated the Russian people to authoritarian rule. Richmond concludes that "the result has been a usually submissive citizenry, accustomed to—indeed expecting—direction from above, being told what to do and what to think."²²³ As part of the social contract, Putin and the state tell the Russian people what to do—or not do, politically speaking—and the state-controlled media tells them what to think.

In 1989, two years before the fall of the Soviet Union, George Kennan provided a prescient observation of the difficulty Russia would face if it ever tried implementing a truly democratic form of government:

Forms of government and the habits of governments tend over the long run to reflect the understandings and expectations of their peoples. The Russian people, like a number of other peoples of the Soviet Union, have never known democracy as we understand it. They have experienced next to nothing of the centuries-long development of the discipline of self-government out of which our own political culture has evolved.²²⁴

²²¹ Sakwa, "Political Leadership," 33.

²²² Yale Richmond, *From Da to Nyet: Understanding the Russians* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1992), 39.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

²²⁴ George F. Kennan, "After the Cold War," *New York Times*, February 5, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/02/05/magazine/after-the-cold-war.html?pagewanted=all>.

The “sovereign democracy” championed by Putin has served as an acceptable substitute for most Russians who have never known true democracy. Known by other names, names such as authoritarian democracy, vertical of power, managed democracy, or hybrid regime, the main defining characteristic of Russia’s form of governance is the same: it combines elements of a democracy—such as universal suffrage—that are overshadowed by autocratic elements.²²⁵ Russia, rather than being the dictatorship that many call it, is actually “an innovator and even a leading ‘global supplier’ in subverting democratic content without establishing full-fledged dictatorship,” as Nikolai Petrov, Masha Lipman, and Henry Hale contend.²²⁶ In their view, three main features characterize the Russian hybrid regime: a highly centralized government, formal democratic institutions, and substitutions of the democratic institutions by the centralized authorities.²²⁷

Maintaining a hybrid regime that portrays a democracy is useful to Russia’s leadership. The pseudo-democratic system allows the ruling elite to pursue the regime’s interests while professing to serve society’s interests.²²⁸ While many attribute the rise of the Russian hybrid regime to President Vladimir Putin, its foundations were actually laid by Russia’s first democratically elected president, Boris Yeltsin.²²⁹

B. FROM COMMUNISM TO AUTHORITARIANISM

Two major events precipitated the Russian hybrid regime’s emergence during Yeltsin’s era: the 1993 parliamentary confrontation and the 1996 presidential election.²³⁰ The first major event resulted in the somewhat weak presidential powers being greatly expanded. Having struggled for power with the Russian parliament since assuming the presidency, Yeltsin dissolved the parliament on September 21, 1993. After the parliament

²²⁵ Nikolai Petrov, Masha Lipman, and Henry E. Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy in Russia: Governance Implications in Hybrid Regimes* (Washington, DC: Carnegie, 2010), 4.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²⁹ Ivan Krastev, “New Threats to Freedom: Democracy’s ‘Doubles,’” *Journal of Democracy* 17, no. 2 (2006): 55, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jod/summary/v017/17.2krastev.html>.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

countered by voting to impeach Yeltsin and holed themselves up in the White House, Yeltsin sent in troops and tanks to dislodge them. Following an intense 10-day standoff and confrontation, Yeltsin emerged victorious on October 4, 1993. In the months following the crisis, the Russian Constituent Assembly passed a new constitution, thereby creating a new legislature with two houses, the Federation Council and the State Duma. Additionally, it dissolved the regional legislatures and dramatically shifted political power to the executive branch.²³¹ After the vote to pass the constitution, Yeltsin commented, “Russia needs strong power. Russia needs order. People are irritated at the impotence of the government. The constitution gives us an opportunity to install order in a legal way.”²³² The 1993 constitution significantly increased Russian presidential authority.

The second major event was the 1996 presidential election, which served as a people’s referendum that pitted support for Yeltsin’s reform policies against the desire to move back towards communism. Faced with such a monumental people’s decision, Yeltsin turned to the oligarchs and their television channels to flood the airwaves with pro-Yeltsin messages.²³³ Through the use of black propaganda—falsified documents, unsigned advertising, paid newspaper articles, dirty tricks, and disinformation—and mass media domination, Yeltsin defeated his Communist-party opponent Gennady Zyuganov 54.8% to 40.3%.²³⁴ The election served as a convincing example to Yeltsin and his elites of just how powerful and effective electoral manipulation can be.²³⁵

²³¹ Nikolai Petrov and Darrell Slider, “Regional Politics,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 66.

²³² Boris Yeltsin, quoted in Trudy Rubin, “Only Yeltsin can force reforms,” *Sun-Journal*, December 30, 1993, <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1914&dat=19931230&id=2V8gAAAAIBAJ&sjid=iGUFAAAAIBAJ&pg=4604,6583467&hl=en>.

²³³ David E. Hoffman, *The Oligarchs: Wealth and Power in the New Russia* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2003), 346.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 345, 358.

²³⁵ Krastev, “Democracy’s ‘Doubles,’” 59.

1. Undemocratic Succession

Yeltsin used the guise of democracy to transfer power to his chosen successor, Vladimir Putin. Impressed with Putin's loyalty to St. Petersburg mayor Anatoly Sobchak and hoping to be afforded the same after leaving office, Yeltsin completed Putin's meteoric rise from obscurity to preeminence. First appointing him as head of the Federal Security Service (FSB) and then as Prime Minister, Yeltsin resigned his presidency in 1999, causing Putin to become the acting president.²³⁶ On his first day in office, Putin pardoned Yeltsin for any infractions he may have committed and granted him immunity from any future prosecution. In the next few months, with the benefit of incumbency, access to oligarch Boris Berezovsky's Channel 1 television network, and manipulation of the second Chechen war, Putin collected 53% of the presidential election votes, far ahead of the second place candidate with 29%.²³⁷ As Yuri Levada argues, "the constitutional mechanism of rotation and transfer of power still operates according to the Soviet model: the authorities nominate their candidates, and the people approve them."²³⁸ Vladimir Putin's unprecedented rise to power validates Levada's claim.

2. Consolidation of Executive Power

Obtaining the presidency through elections that conveniently legitimized his office, Putin set to work molding the hybrid regime where Yeltsin left off. To consolidate power at the executive level, he created seven federal administrative districts to "realize the constitutional authority of the President of the Russian Federation."²³⁹ Specially-appointed presidential representatives would head each federal district and fill a seat on

²³⁶ Stephen Kotkin, "The Resistible Rise of Vladimir Putin: Russia's Nightmare Dressed Like a Daydream," *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 2 (2015), <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143037/stephen-kotkin/the-resistible-rise-of-vladimir-putin>.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Yuri Levada, "Limits and Options of Historical Choice: Some Remarks on the Course of the Russian Transformation," *Social Sciences* 34, no. 4 (2003): 25.

²³⁹ Vladimir Putin, "УКАЗ Президента РФ от 13.05.2000 N 849 'О ПОЛНОМОЧНОМ ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛЕ ПРЕЗИДЕНТА РОССИЙСКОЙ ФЕДЕРАЦИИ В ФЕДЕРАЛЬНОМ ОКРУГЕ,'" May 13, 2000, <http://base.garant.ru/12119586/>.

the Federal Security Council, thus increasing the president's ability to coordinate federal agency operations in the regions throughout Russia.²⁴⁰

Putin also instituted a party system wherein one party would dominate all others in elections and subjugate both the Federation Council and the State Duma.²⁴¹ The Unity political party had been the key to almost every winning coalition in the Duma during Putin's first few years in office. Putin's parliamentary managers engineered Unity's conglomeration with the Fatherland/All Russia party to establish the new dominant party, United Russia.²⁴²

Controlling the United Russia party enabled Putin to control the Duma, as party parliament members relied on the Kremlin to remain on the party list and maintain their seats.²⁴³ As for the Federation Council, in 2000, Putin succeeded in overhauling the process whereby Council members are chosen; instead of the regional chief executives and legislative officials filling the seats, the chief executives and the legislatures of the federal territories choose the Council members.²⁴⁴ As Thomas Remington notes, the Federation Council follows the Kremlin in lockstep, resulting in "guaranteeing overwhelming majorities for almost every piece of legislation that the Kremlin supports."²⁴⁵ With a loyal dominant party and control over both chambers of the legislative branch, Putin effectively extended his grasp on the federal government.

3. Harnessing the Energy Champions

Putin also moved to consolidate control over the large energy companies. In his 1996 St. Petersburg Mining Institute PhD thesis, a large portion of which was reportedly

²⁴⁰ Petrov and Slider, "Regional Politics," 69–70.

²⁴¹ Thomas F. Remington, "Parliament and the Dominant Party Regime," in *Return to Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 46.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 52–53.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

plagiarized, Putin argued for the creation of national energy champions.²⁴⁶ “Regardless of who is the legal owner of the country’s natural resources,” he wrote, “the state has the right to regulate the process of their development and use.”²⁴⁷ During his first few years as president, Putin enacted the creation of these national champions, overseeing the re-nationalization of former Soviet energy companies that the state sold during the massive privatization effort in the mid-1990s. He also seized the opportunity to rid himself of oligarchs and political foes who threatened the totality of his power.

In November 2000, after being threatened with imprisonment, Boris Berezovsky sold his shares of his company, Sibneft, at a fraction of their worth to fellow oligarch Roman Abramovich and fled to England; Abramovich, in turn, sold the shares to the Russian state.²⁴⁸ In October 2003, state authorities arrested Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia’s richest man, for tax evasion and fraud and sentenced him to ten years in prison while his oil company, Yukos, was completely dismantled.²⁴⁹ State-owned Gazprom acquired Berezovsky’s Sibneft while state-owned Rosneft acquired Khodorkovsky’s Yukos assets. Thus, Putin’s energy national champions were born.

In addition to the energy giants, Putin also moved swiftly to claim the privately-owned media assets through state-owned company takeovers. After much pressure, oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky sold his NTV television channel—the first privately-owned network—to Gazprom in 2001.²⁵⁰ Around the same time, Putin moved to close the deal on ORT, or Channel 1—the very network owned by Berezovsky that had helped Putin obtain office. Berezovsky recalled Putin as saying, “I want to run ORT. I personally am going to run ORT.”²⁵¹ When Berezovsky objected, Putin chided him: “You, you were

²⁴⁶ Ahmed Mehdi, “Putin’s Gazprom Problem: How the Kremlin Accidentally Liberalized Russia’s Natural Gas Market,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 6, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137615/ahmed-mehdi/putins-gazprom-problem>.

²⁴⁷ Marshall I. Goldman, *Petrostate: Putin, Power, and the New Russia* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 97–8.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 104.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁵⁰ Maria Lipman, “The Media and Political Developments,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 129.

²⁵¹ Hoffman, *Oligarchs*, 488.

one of those who asked me to be president. So how can you complain?”²⁵² Apparently Putin did not want to have the powerful Berezovsky—the kingmaker, founder of the Unity political party, and owner of Sibneft and ORT—near him as president and found a way to get rid of him.²⁵³

4. Controlling the Media and the Legal System

Although Russia’s three main television networks and multiple other forms of mass media are controlled by the state, a few independent media sources have been allowed to operate. Instead of snuffing them out, Putin’s regime has used them to lessen the perception that freedom of expression is restricted.²⁵⁴ Despite the important issues that the free and independent news outlets bring up, the benefits of independent journalism are marginalized by the lack of political competition and the bending of the judicial system towards the Kremlin.²⁵⁵ Additionally, the state’s manipulation of the media markets results in most of the population getting their information from the state-controlled media. In 2008, 88% of Russian citizens reported watching the news on state-owned Channel 1, whereas only 22% watched news on independently owned REN-TV.²⁵⁶ Consequently, most Russians are fed with Kremlin-sponsored propaganda that tells them how the state is actively providing stability, strong leadership, economic growth, and international prestige.²⁵⁷

Putin’s hybrid regime also uses the Russian legal system as an instrument to pursue its political will. Some describe the judicial process in Putin’s era as a dictatorship of law. In other words, Russia’s rulers today use the law to control society rather than use it as a mechanism for the state and society to mutually limit each other’s behavior.²⁵⁸ Kathryn Hendley provides two examples of legislation that illustrate how the system

²⁵² Hoffman, *Oligarchs*, 489.

²⁵³ Lipman, “Media and Political Developments,” 129.

²⁵⁴ Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy*, 17.

²⁵⁵ Lipman, “Media and Political Developments,” 135.

²⁵⁶ Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy*, 18.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 7.

“offers maximum flexibility to officials and minimal predictability to citizens.”²⁵⁹ In 2002, the government passed an extremism law to fight terrorism that outlawed political parties not in alignment with the Kremlin. It also passed a 2005 Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) law that made NGO registration requirements vague, thereby creating an effective way to dispense with the NGOs disagreeable to the government.²⁶⁰ Laws on embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering are also convenient tools for the ruling elite to usurp the power and wealth of unfavorable oligarchs and political enemies. Mikhail Khodorkovsky is perhaps the best-known example of Putin’s use of the legal system to rule by law rather than adhere to the rule of law.²⁶¹

5. Crony Capitalism and Corruption

Of all Putin’s reforms since assuming the presidency, his overarching success has been the centralization of executive power. The Russian mass media has portrayed Putin as a strong leader responsible for the stability of society and has attributed much of Russia’s success to his personality. His power structure at the highest echelon, though, actually consists of the group of elite loyalists comprised of crony oligarchs, political technocrats, some market liberals, and the *siloviki*. Several of the Russian billionaire oligarchs from St. Petersburg, as Andrew Kramer and David Herszenhorn write, “are members of a close circle of friends, relatives, associates, colleagues from the security services and longtime advisers who have grown fabulously wealthy during Mr. Putin’s . . . years as Russia’s paramount leader.”²⁶² Critics argue that these connections at the uppermost level of government have resulted in the theft of Russia’s prolific natural resources and illustrate the extent to which corruption pervades the government.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Kathryn Hendley, “The Role of Law,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 88.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy*, 7.

²⁶² Andrew E. Kramer and David M. Herszenhorn, “Midas Touch in St. Petersburg: Friends of Putin Glow Brightly,” *New York Times*, March 1, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/02/world/europe/ties-to-vladimir-putin-generate-fabulous-wealth-for-a-select-few-in-russia.html>.

²⁶³ Ibid.

6. A Stagnant Economy Propped up by Petroleum

Much as Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev discovered during the last few years of the Soviet Union, a social pact with the populace can only be maintained as long as the economy is producing the desired results.²⁶⁴ With its economy dependent on sales of its natural resources of oil and gas, Russia constitutes a petrostate. In 2008, Russian energy exports comprised 49% of the federal budget and 63% of Russia's total exports.²⁶⁵ Its hydrocarbon policies, as Lilia Shevtsova notes, have allowed Russia to "bully the West, and bludgeon neighbors such as Belarus, Ukraine, and former satellite states."²⁶⁶ High oil prices allowed Russia for years to maintain the performance of its economy and, by extension, its stability and security.

Putin's over-reliance on Russia's petroleum resources, however, has obscured the necessity of real—not illusory—economic reform. The result has been a stagnating economy with little genuine effort by the state at diversification. In the long term, Russia's economic vitality is dependent upon high global petroleum demand and prices. In the short term, however, Russia has been able to weather periods of low petroleum prices and other economic downturns due to the impressive foreign capital financial reserves it amassed during the high oil and gas prices windfall of the 2000s. Russia's stockpiling strategy, which boosted its financial reserves to a maximum of \$537 billion in December 2012, has come at a cost, though. Recent years of declining oil prices have caused Russia to burn through its reserves quickly. In December 2015, the country's reserves were down to \$368 billion—a net reduction of \$169 billion in a mere three years.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Sakwa, "Political Leadership," 33.

²⁶⁵ Lilia Shevtsova, "'Vladimir Putin,'" *Foreign Policy* no. 164 (2008): 35, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/08/think-again-vladimir-putin/>.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ "International Reserves of the Russian Federation," Central Bank of the Russian Federation, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/hd_base/Default.aspx?Prtid=mrrf_m.

C. A REGIME PRONE TO FISSURE

Even with short-term economic complacency, which is made possible by large but decreasing coffers of financial reserves and constant political propaganda broadcast by the state-controlled media, Russia's sociopolitical structure is prone to fissure.²⁶⁸ "When people start to take Putin's initial state-building achievements for granted," contend Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, "the governance problems that over-managed democracy generates are likely to become more pronounced and to erode popular support for the system's leadership."²⁶⁹ One such manifestation that attests to their argument was the 2011–2012 domestic protests, which served to remove the veneer of Putin's regime and reveal its cracks.

1. An Exit-Minded Russian Middle-Class

For most of Putin's first two terms as president and term as prime minister, he maintained high levels of approval despite clamping down on democratic freedoms while imposing increasing control over the Russian political system, legal system, media, and economy. Those Russians who had been interested enough to follow and assess political developments were mainly middle-class Russians well-off enough that they did not need to buy into Putin's social contract. Krastev refers to economist Albert Hirschman's general observation that people, when presented with the deterioration of goods or services, have two main options by which they can respond—exit or voice.²⁷⁰ Whereas voice entails the act of vocalizing one's discontent through protests, petitions, or complaining, exit is the act of switching to another product or service, withdrawing from an organization, or leaving a country.²⁷¹

For most people, exit is often used more than voice because it typically represents the path of least resistance, commitment, and time.²⁷² Middle-class Russians dissatisfied

²⁶⁸ Levada, "Limits and Options on Historical Choice," 22.

²⁶⁹ Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy*, 27.

²⁷⁰ Ivan Krastev, "Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 2 (2011): 14, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/Krastev-22-2.pdf>.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

by the corruption of the political and economic system in Russia are no different. Citing a Russian economist's figure that over two million Russian democrats exited the country during the 2000s, Krastev asserts that "Russia's demographic situation—its aging and shrinking populace—and Russia's weak national identity have made exit a very natural option for those who are disappointed with the regime. The emergence of an exit-minded middle class in Russia is at the heart of the regime's survival capacity."²⁷³ Krastev explains how this inclination to leave the country has helped Putin maintain his political support:

The people who are the most likely to be upset by the poor quality of governance in Russia are the very same people who are the most ready and able to exit Russia. For them, leaving the country in which they live is easier than reforming it. Why try to turn Russia into Germany, when there is no guarantee that a lifetime is long enough for that mission, and when Germany is but a short trip away? The opinion polls demonstrate that Russia's middle class prefers to work abroad and to come home to Russia during the holidays to see their friends and relatives. . . . The major reason why Russians are reluctant to protest is not fear; it is because the people who care most have already left the country or have resolved to do so in the near future.²⁷⁴

2. A Significant Change in Willingness to Voice Discontent

Notwithstanding the noteworthy number of Russian citizens who have exited or would rather exit the country than voice their dissatisfaction with it, a sizable opposition contingent has managed to exist, as was evident in the massive protests staged in Moscow from December 2011 to March 2012. Tens of thousands of people opposed to the reportedly manipulated 2011 Duma elections and the prearranged position switching in 2012 by Putin and Medvedev gathered in Moscow on multiple occasions, calling for free elections and a Russia without Putin.²⁷⁵ The *New York Times* quoted Russian journalist Yevgeniya Albats, who stated that the protests "proved that civil society does

²⁷³ Krastev, "Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism," 14–15.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁷⁵ Ellen Barry and Michael Schwartz, "Vast Rally in Moscow is Challenge to Putin's Power," *The New York Times*, December 24, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/world/europe/tens-of-thousands-of-protesters-gather-in-moscow-russia.html?_r=0.

exist and that this country is not lost.”²⁷⁶ Zinaida Burskaya, a 22-year-old Russian woman who participated in the protests, told the same newspaper that because “people have torn themselves from off their couches and have come here and are not apathetic,” she felt that what was taking place would “affect things over the next two to three years.”²⁷⁷ Little did she know how right she would be, although not in the manner she expected.

Opposition leader and blogger Aleksei Navalny, who was regarded by the Kremlin as largely responsible for planning and coordinating the protests, must have struck a nerve with his political dissonance. Navalny was subsequently jailed on a spurious charge for a 15-day period that spanned the protest on December 10, 2011.²⁷⁸ Freed in time for the December 24, 2011, protest, however, he told the gathered crowd that he saw that there were enough people there to take over the Kremlin: “We are a peaceful force and will not do it now. But if these crooks and thieves try to go on cheating us, if they continue telling lies and stealing from us, we will take what belongs to us with our own hands.”²⁷⁹ Having power taken from him is precisely what Putin fears most.

3. Putin’s Fear of Losing Power through a Color Revolution in Russia

The color revolutions of neighboring former Soviet republics—the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the 2005 Tulip and 2010 Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan—serve as vivid reminders to Putin of what may happen to governments when public discontent reaches a boiling point. For as much power as his political system grants him, Putin is limited by “what would spark an unacceptable level

²⁷⁶ Yevgeniya Albats, quoted in Ellen Barry, “Rally Defying Putin’s Party Draws Tens of Thousands,” *New York Times*, December 10, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/11/world/europe/thousands-protest-in-moscow-russia-in-defiance-of-putin.html#>.

²⁷⁷ Barry and Schwartz, “Vast Rally in Moscow is Challenge to Putin’s Power.”

²⁷⁸ David M. Herszenhorn, “Freed From Jail, Russian Blogger Drives Anti-Kremlin Movement,” *New York Times*, December 21, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/22/world/europe/aleksei-navalny-freed-from-jail-drives-anti-kremlin-movement.html>.

²⁷⁹ Barry and Schwartz, “Vast Rally in Moscow is Challenge to Putin’s Power.”

of public protest, not to mention revolution.”²⁸⁰ At the time of the December 2011 protests in Moscow, former Soviet president Gorbachev told a radio interviewer that Putin should give up his bid for a third presidential term.²⁸¹ Noting that he himself had given up his power voluntarily 20 years to the same month earlier, Gorbachev asked, “What’s terrible about it? . . . Then all the positive that he [Putin] has done would be safeguarded.”²⁸² For Putin, however, the loss of power would be terrible.

All of his efforts to centralize his personal executive power and fortify his authoritarian system have caused Putin to view his hybrid system as forming the rightful epitome of Russian presidential power. In line with the principles of prospect theory, Putin’s perceived loss of the status quo would be more painful than any pleasure he could derive from any gain, especially considering his vast accumulation of personal wealth. Additionally, as Hill and Gaddy note, without Putin, the hybrid system of governance he built would cease to function:

Only he can maintain the balance in contemporary Russian politics because he, personally, created the hooks and levers that compromise the central players and keep them in place. Vladimir Putin has ruled in the name of unity, of a united Russia. But the unity he has created is superficial and fragile. Putin did not solve the unresolved issues of the Russian and Soviet past that surfaced in the 1980s and 1990s. He merely suppressed them and papered them over with a pastiche of recycled Russian ideas.²⁸³

For these very reasons—fear of the loss of power and the inability of the system to work without him—Putin and his regime became more risk-acceptant in their decisions calculated to maintain the status quo. Instead of following Gorbachev’s advice to step away from power, Putin ramped up his efforts to retain it as he pressed forward with his 2012 reelection. Using crude and demeaning language, he labeled the numerous protestors as urban elites and provocateurs who were attempting to weaken Russia and

²⁸⁰ Petrov, Lipman, and Hale, *Overmanaged Democracy*, 11.

²⁸¹ Barry and Schwartz, “Vast Rally in Moscow is Challenge to Putin’s Power.”

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Hill and Gaddy, *Operative in the Kremlin*, 272.

usurp power.²⁸⁴ Further deprecating the protests, Putin propagated the rehashed narrative that the West, led by the United States, was responsible for inciting the political opposition. In a speech to a group supporting his presidential bid on December 8, 2011, he accused U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of giving political opposition leaders in Russia the signal to proceed: “[They] heard the signal and with the support of the U.S. state department began active work. . . . We have to protect our sovereignty. We will have to think about strengthening the law and holding more responsible those who carry out the task of a foreign government to influence internal political processes.”²⁸⁵

4. A Third-Term President

In the months leading up to the March 2012 presidential election, the Kremlin employed a hand in choosing Putin’s opponents while barring any candidate that had a moderate chance of success.²⁸⁶ Putin used his status as the prime minister, as Shevtsova describes, “to exploit a panoply of state resources ranging from television time to financial carrots and repressive sticks with which to bribe or intimidate voters.”²⁸⁷ The usual Kremlin antics of election rigging prevailed. The March 4, 2012, election result was a Putin victory in the first round with 63% of the vote, although independent sources claim that he actually garnered only 46%.²⁸⁸

On the eve and day of Putin’s re-inauguration as president on May 7, 2012, more protests against his return to the presidency took place. In what began as a peaceful rally on May 6, over 20,000 Russians gathered to express how they, in the words of one participant quoted by *The Guardian*, did not “want to live under Putin for the next 12

²⁸⁴ Stephen K. Wegren, “Introduction,” in *Return to Putin’s Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 11–12.

²⁸⁵ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Miriam Elder, “Vladimir Putin accuses Hillary Clinton of encouraging Russian protests,” *The Guardian*, December 8, 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/08/vladimir-putin-hillary-clinton-russia>.

²⁸⁶ Lilia Shevtsova, “Implosion, Atrophy, or Revolution?” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 3 (2012): 20, <http://www.journalofdemocracy.com/article/putinism-under-siege-implosion-atrophy-or-revolution>.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

years” but wanted their “children to live without Putin.”²⁸⁹ The protests took a violent turn, however, as protesters clashed with police in riot gear by throwing rocks and beer bottles at them. The riot police, as journalist Miriam Elder described at the time, “responded with an overwhelming use of force, beating the crowd with batons and dragging people into waiting arresting vans, sometimes by the hair.”²⁹⁰ Authorities arrested over 250 people, including opposition leaders Alexei Navalny and Boris Nemtsov. Putin’s press secretary, Dmitri Peskov, describing the conduct of the police as mild, told the media that he would have liked them to act more harshly: “Protesters who hurt riot police should have their livers smeared to the asphalt.”²⁹¹

The energy behind the protests from December 2011 to May 2012, which some have called the “Snow Revolution” because of the white ribbons worn by protesters, seemed to have melted with the heat of the summer.²⁹² Instead of continuing with the forceful methods it had used to deal with the May 2012 protests, however, the Kremlin used a softer approach—passing a series of seemingly liberalizing bills in the Duma. The legislation was merely a cosmetic remedy designed to assuage the growing political discord, however, for it had no mitigating effect on the hybrid government’s power.²⁹³

D. PUTIN’S NEED FOR A DOMESTIC DIVERSION

The mass demonstrations in Moscow as he endeavored to reassume the presidential helm showed Putin how fragile his domestic political support was. Putin’s approval rating dropped from an average of 75% throughout his terms as president and

²⁸⁹ Miriam Elder, “Vladimir Putin’s Return to Presidency Preceded by Violent Protests in Moscow,” *The Guardian*, May 6, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/06/vladimir-putin-presidency-violent-protests-moscow>.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ellen Barry and Michael Schwartz, “Arrests and Violence at Overflowing Rally in Moscow,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/07/world/europe/at-moscow-rally-arrests-and-violence.html>; Kathy Lally, “Putin team taunts demonstrators,” *The Washington Post*, May 8, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-team-taunts-demonstrators/2012/05/08/gIQA XufoAU_story.html.

²⁹² Graeme Robertson, “Protesting Putinism,” “The Election Protests of 2011–2012 in Broader Perspective,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 60, no. 2 (2013): 11, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.2753/PPC1075-8216600202>.

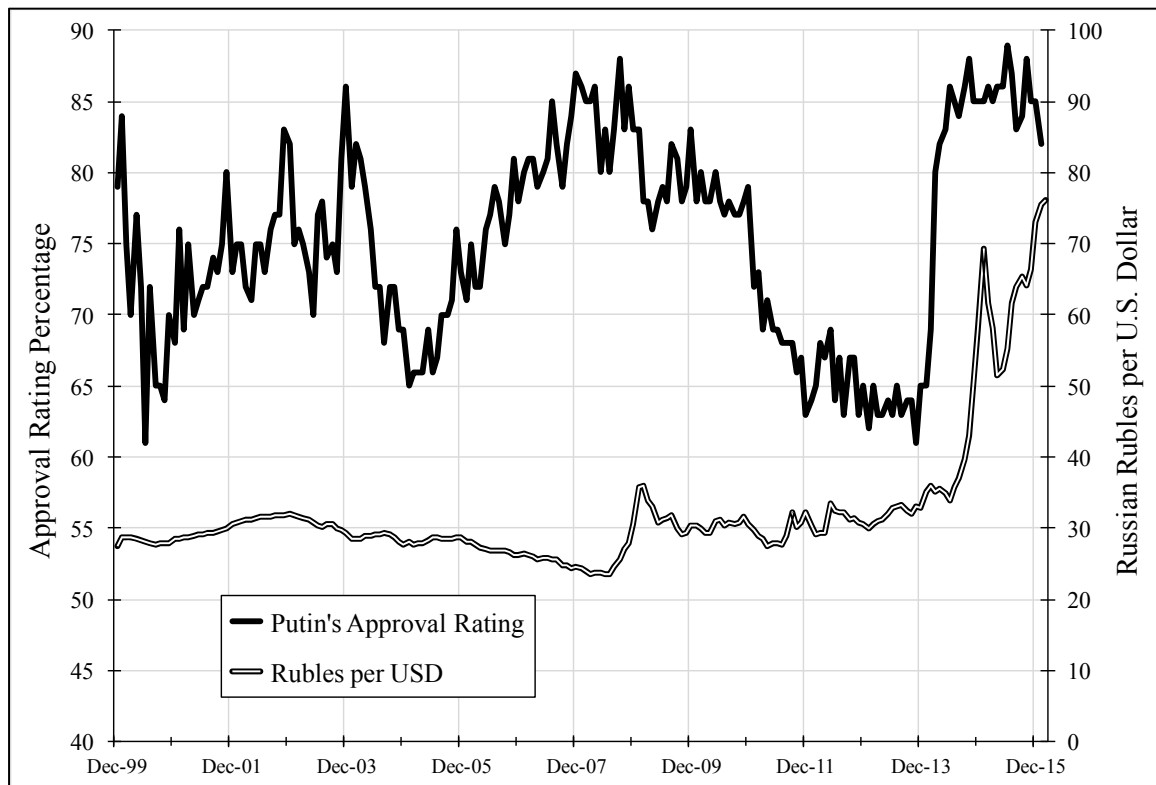
²⁹³ Shevtsova, “Implosion, Atrophy, or Revolution?” 25.

prime minister to a low of 63% in December 2011—a figure around which it would founder for the next two years (see Figure 2).²⁹⁴ “As always in Russia, when the authorities feel pressed,” explains Shevtsova, “they repeat the old ‘besieged fortress’ refrain and launch a search for enemies at home and abroad.”²⁹⁵ Putin soon found the enemies and diversion he needed. The ongoing competition between Russian and EU economic initiatives in Ukraine set the scene. The Euromaidan movement and Yanukovych’s subsequent flight from office comprised the moment. The new Ukrainian government with its American and European backers, in Putin’s narrative, played the role of enemy. By making the decision to intervene in Ukraine, Putin not only extended his grip on his personalized political power but renewed his efforts to forge a new Russian identity by awakening nationalistic sentiment.

²⁹⁴ “Approval of Putin Index,” Yuri Levada Analytical Center, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/indexes-0>.

²⁹⁵ Shevtsova, “Implosion, Atrophy, or Revolution?” 25.

Figure 2. Value of the Ruble and Putin's Approval Rating During His Time in Power



Source: "Approval of Putin Index," Yuri Levada Analytical Center, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/eng/indexes-0>; "USD/RUB—U.S. Dollar Russian Ruble," Investing.com, accessed February 14, 2016, <http://www.investing.com/currencies/usd-rub-historical-data>.

1. A New Russian Identity

For most of the 20th century (1917–1991), the Russian identity was inextricably linked with the Soviet identity. Communism, multinationalism, military strength, and scientific and technological achievement were all facets of the Soviet identity that practically disappeared overnight for millions of Soviet citizens upon the collapse of the USSR. Burdened by a flailing economy and a dysfunctional government, Boris Yeltsin struggled to find an identity for Russia to replace its Soviet predecessor.²⁹⁶ A major difficulty lay in the fact that the Russian Federation does not constitute an ethnically homogenous nation-state. An identity built purely on ethnic Russian nationalism would

²⁹⁶ Peter Rutland, "Petronation? Oil, Gas, and National Identity in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 31, no. 1 (2015): 70, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2014.952537>.

present difficulty in sustaining the federation, which is composed of many minority republics, including Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Tatarstan. One need only recall the Russian experience with the Islamic Chechen republic to see the fracturable threat to Russia's federal integrity that ethnic nationalism can produce.

With the multiethnic nature of the Russian Federation in mind, Yeltsin promoted the Russian civic identity as embodied by the adjective *Rossiyskiy*, which connotes the Russian state, as opposed to a *Russkiy* national identity based on Russian ethnicity.²⁹⁷ When Putin took over after Yeltsin, the national question remained unanswered. In an address known as the millennium message that he made shortly before assuming the presidency in 1999, Putin rejected the idea of a state ideology but presented his form of the Russian idea that would produce unity.²⁹⁸ He defined the pillars of his idea as economic and social stability, traditional Russian values, a belief in the greatness of Russia, the renewal of a powerful Russia, and a strong state.²⁹⁹ Describing traditional values as patriotism, he said that it was comprised of “feeling pride in one's country, its history and accomplishments” and that it was the source of courage and strength when “free from the tints of nationalist conceit and imperial ambitions.”³⁰⁰

During his first few years in office, Putin remained notoriously ambiguous in terms of defining Russia's identity. Yuri Teper describes how Putin “inconsistently combined diverse civic, ethnic and even some imperial components of Russian identity, without fully committing to any of them.”³⁰¹ As part of his statist vision for Russia as a great power, he relied heavily on nostalgic elements from tsarist and Soviet history, such as tsarist-era Kremlin guard uniforms and revamping the Soviet anthem with updated lyrics to serve as the Russian national anthem.³⁰² “For a time,” Teper explains, “this

²⁹⁷ Rutland, “Petronation?” 71.

²⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Russia at the Turn of the Millennium,” December 30, 1999, <http://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/Putin.htm>.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Yuri Teper, “Official Russian Identity Discourse in Light of the Annexation of Crimea: National or Imperial?” *Post-Soviet Affairs* (2015): 4, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1060586X.2015.1076959>.

³⁰² Ibid.; Rutland, “Petronation?” 70.

policy enabled the Kremlin to retain space for significant political maneuvering and maintain broad public appeal, without the need to fully confront the highly controversial issue.”³⁰³

As ethnic and religious minority migrants from the Caucasus and Central Asia continued to flow into Moscow and other large Russian cities as the performance of the Russian economy improved, Russian ethnic nationalism and xenophobia grew. Preparing for his reelection campaign in January 2012, Putin addressed the diametric civic and ethnic national issue. In an editorial titled “Russia: The National Question” that he wrote for a Russian newspaper, he expressed concern that “attempts to preach ideas of building a Russian ‘national’ mono-ethnic state go against our entire thousand-year history.”³⁰⁴ Putin continued to blur the identity issue by denouncing European multiculturalism while describing Russia as a “multiethnic civilization with Russian culture at its core.”³⁰⁵ In essence, Putin merely continued to conflate and obfuscate the identity issue in an effort to allay the constituent concerns in a Russia that, he said, “is neither an ethnic state nor an American melting pot.”³⁰⁶

In view of Putin’s endorsement of the Eurasian Economic Union, many Russian nationalists became dissatisfied with Putin for not standing up for ethnic Russians while pushing for a Soviet-type union to the detriment of Russia.³⁰⁷ The participation of Russian nationalists in the 2011–2012 protests against the government catalyzed Putin to abandon his ambiguous stance on Russian national identity. As noted previously, the political instability in Ukraine in late 2013 granted Putin the opportunity to move forward with building a new Russian identity with a particular emphasis on Russian ethno-nationalism. Teper summarizes the result of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the narratives put forth by the Putin regime through the state-controlled media:

³⁰³ Teper, “Official Russian Identity Discourse,” 4.

³⁰⁴ Vladimir Putin, “Россия: Национальный Вопрос,” *Независимая Газета*, January 23, 2012, http://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Rutland, “Petronation?” 71.

The nation replaced the state as the primary reference point for constructing Russianness. Previously, the Kremlin promoted the greatness of the state as the focus of an all-Russian identity. During the crisis, by suggesting Russia's moral obligation to protect fellow *Russkiye* beyond its state borders and the need to reunite the divided *Russkiy* nation, Russia was unprecedentedly positioned as the nation–state of *Russkiye* and the champion of the Russian national cause. . . . After years of sitting on the fence, the Kremlin has reinvented itself as an active and initiating player in the nationalism field.³⁰⁸

The idea of nationalism usually conjures up thoughts of love for one's own nation, but the term, as Robert Gildea points out, was first used by Abbé Augustin Barruel, a French Jesuit priest, in 1798 to indicate hatred of a foreigner.³⁰⁹ National ties between people may include any combination of a common ancestry or homeland, a shared sense of history or destiny, or a common religion or language.³¹⁰ Gildea, maintaining that a common language helps express the soul of a people, quotes an 1882 lecture by Ernest Renan: "To have common glories in the past, a common will in the present, to have accomplished great things together, to wish to do so again, that is the essential condition for being a nation."³¹¹ The new Russian identity narratives that have been broadcast from Russia's intervention in Ukraine have highlighted the protection of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers from hated "fascists" in Ukraine in conjunction with the glorification of the past Soviet victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War. The narratives have also celebrated the success of the Russian military in reclaiming Crimea and Sevastopol—the city of Russian military glory—while extolling a rebuilt Russian military capable of conducting warfare from the hybrid to the nuclear level. Additionally, the narratives have promoted the restoration of Russian greatness and the triumph of Russian values over their decadent Western counterparts.

³⁰⁸ Teper, "Official Russian identity discourse," 15–16.

³⁰⁹ Robert Gildea, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800–1914*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 52.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 310.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

2. The Crimea Effect

The domestic reception of Russia's actions in Ukraine was significant. By advancing the narrative that Russia's intervention in and annexation of Crimea was to ostensibly protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers against a hostile enemy, Russia experienced a tidal wave of nationalism that boosted Putin's popularity to unprecedented levels. Putin's approval rating jumped from 61% in October 2013 before the annexation in March 2014 to a post-annexation level of 86% in June 2014 (refer to Figure 2).³¹² Alfred Evans provides an explanation for the phenomenon: "In a society in which distrust of the public sphere is pervasive, one of the best ways to motivate people to cooperate in the pursuit of common interests is to arouse them to defend themselves from an immediate threat."³¹³

The theme espoused by Putin and his media was the threat of encroachment of Western powers, institutions, and values. Rutland explains that Putin chose to pursue the Russian national identity in terms of security rather than economic well-being: "Putin had apparently come up with a national narrative that had deep emotional resonance for the Russian people. Unfortunately, his actions were anathema to Russia's neighbors, and may well prove politically and economically unsustainable."³¹⁴ The situation in Ukraine presented itself as an opportunity both to regain some of what Russia had lost upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and to prevent the loss of his personal power. Overvaluing these two loss-averse prospects, Putin made the risk-laden decision to intervene in Ukraine even though such action would likely burden the Russian state and its populace with significant international political and economic costs.

³¹² "Approval of Putin Index."

³¹³ Alfred B. Evans, Jr. "Civil Society and Protest," in *Return to Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain*, 5th ed., ed. Stephen K. Wegren (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 118.

³¹⁴ Rutland, "Petronation?" 72.

V. RUSSIA'S FOREIGN RESERVES AND ITS SEEMINGLY IRRATIONAL THREATS THAT EMBOLDENED PUTIN

Ukraine genuinely is a brotherly country in our eyes, a brotherly people. . . . We worked with Mr. Yushchenko and Ms. Timoshenko, though they were considered to be completely pro-Western politicians. . . . Yes, we sometimes had fierce debates on economic matters, but we did work together.³¹⁵

—Vladimir Putin

In February 2014, the world channeled its attention to the Winter Olympics being held in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi, Russia. Only a few months earlier, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that described the purpose of the games as an effort to build “a peaceful and better world through sport and the Olympic ideal.”³¹⁶ In this respect, Sochi’s selection as the host city designed to foster international peace was paradoxical.

Less than twenty miles from Sochi stretches the border between Russia and Abkhazia—the Russian-backed separatist region locked in frozen conflict with Georgia. Less than 300 miles southeast of Sochi is Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, which found itself attacked by Russia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war over the status of South Ossetia, another Russian-backed separatist region within Georgia, and Abkhazia. Less than 300 miles in the other direction from Sochi is Simferopol, the administrative seat of Crimea. While at the Sochi games that were intended to promote peace, Russian president Vladimir Putin made the decision to employ hybrid warfare to invade and annex Crimea. Several factors emboldened Putin to undertake such a risk-laden action, the first of which was the high level of Russia’s foreign currency reserves—assets that would help Moscow withstand predictable Western economic sanctions. The seemingly irrational dual threats of economic and nuclear retribution, which would mitigate against

³¹⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” President of Russia, October 22, 2015, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50548>.

³¹⁶ “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on 6 November 2013,” General Assembly, United Nations, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/9.

the severity of the Western sanctions and preclude a Western military response, also encouraged Putin's decision. This chapter explores the contextual background of Russia's international relations during the 2014 Winter Olympics, its energy and economic relations with its European neighbors, and its strategic nuclear messaging during the crisis in Ukraine.

A. 2014 WINTER OLYMPICS

To ensure the 2014 Winter Olympic Games would increase Russia's prestige on the world stage, Russian leaders went to extreme lengths. They poured 51 billion U.S. dollars into Olympic construction projects—the largest sum ever spent on a set of games.³¹⁷ The exorbitant construction expenses were not without critics, however. Russian opposition leaders Boris Nemtsov and Leonid Martynyuk lambasted the corruption in the Russian government's preparation efforts. In their independent report "Winter Olympics in the Subtropics," they claimed that \$25 to \$30 billion, or 50–60% of the cost of the Olympics, was embezzled.³¹⁸ "The Winter Olympics in Sochi is [*sic*] Putin's personal project. He believed that the Olympic Games will be his triumph and . . . a recognition of his indisputable leadership, both in Russia and in the world," they wrote.³¹⁹ Rather than receive triumphal recognition of his leadership, Putin instead received the cold shoulder from several of the world's heads of state and government.

Absent from the opening ceremony of the games on February 7, 2014 were French president François Hollande, German chancellor Angela Merkel, U.K. prime minister David Cameron, and U.S. president Barack Obama. Although they refrained from providing specific reasons for skipping the ceremony, political disagreements over an array of Moscow's policies were undoubtedly the cause. Frustration with Putin had continued to build for multiple reasons, including his role in the contest for economic

³¹⁷ Owen Gibson, "Sochi Games Held Up as a Symbol of Olympic Extravagance and Waste," *The Guardian*, February 5, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2014/feb/05/sochi-games-olympic-extravagance-cost-winter-russia>.

³¹⁸ Boris Nemtsov and Leonid Martynyuk, *Winter Olympics in the Sub-Tropics: Corruption and Abuse in Sochi*, trans. Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, 9, http://www.putin-itogi.ru/cp/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Report_ENG_SOCHI-2014_preview.pdf.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

influence in Ukraine between the EU and Russia, his domestic record on human rights, his support for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, and his granting asylum to Edward Snowden, who was criminally charged and wanted by the U.S. government for espionage. Notwithstanding the absence of the British, French, German, and U.S. leaders, many other leaders managed to attend. Chinese president Xi Jinping, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev, Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko, and even Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, who was embroiled at home with the Euromaidan protests at the time, were present.

Although Putin surely resented the snubbing he received from key Western leaders, he played up the event as an opportunity to engage in a constructive dialogue with those leaders present. Touring Sochi's Olympic Village a few days before the games began, Putin suggested that the gathering of leaders would be akin to a mini-UN summit at which he could "talk to colleagues about [issues such as] security, economy, the Middle East . . . Afghanistan, Syria, Ukraine, lots of them."³²⁰ The presence of UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon added to the air of international cooperation and furthered the impression of Russia's arrival with prestige on the world's stage.

B. CUSHION OF FOREIGN CURRENCY RESERVES

While the world focused its attention on Sochi during the Olympics, Putin focused his attention on Ukraine and Crimea. Meeting with his advisors in Sochi, Putin made an economic inquiry that would shape the fateful decision he would soon make regarding Ukraine. According to two officials, Putin asked his staff if Russia could withstand the economic repercussions that might arise should Russia take Crimea.³²¹

³²⁰ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Howard LaFranchi, "Western Leaders Stay Away From Sochi Olympics. Snub to Russia?" *Christian Science Monitor*, February 7, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Olympics/2014/0207/Western-leaders-stay-away-from-Sochi-Olympics.-Snub-to-Russia>.

³²¹ Evgenia Pismennaya, Ilya Arkhipov, and Brad Cook, "Putin's Secret Gamble on Reserves Backfires Into Currency Crisis," *Bloomberg Business*, December 17, 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-17/putin-s-secret-gamble-bet-on-ukraine-backfires-in-ruble-crisis>.

With Russia's international financial reserves at a level slightly less than half a trillion dollars, he received an affirmative answer.³²²

A short time later, on February 22, 2014, Vladimir Putin convened a secret meeting with his Security Council in Sochi that continued until seven the next morning—the day of the Olympics' closing ceremony—to discuss Yanukovych's flight from power and the situation in Ukraine. The group scrutinized possible Russian recourses, weighing the prospective costs and benefits of the available options. Armed with the assurance that Russia could withstand the probable economic sanctions because of its massive financial reserves, Putin ordered the “little green men” to “start working on returning Crimea to Russia.”³²³

Had it not been for the cushion of reserves that the Russian Central Bank had accumulated during the prosperous times of high oil prices (see Figure 3), Putin might not have decided to press ahead with his hybrid military foray into Crimea.³²⁴ As former British ambassador to Russia Tony Brenton contends, the level of Russia's financial reserves has served “as a proxy for Russian strength” that has factored into Moscow's formulation of foreign policy.³²⁵ “Part of Russia's international self-confidence has undoubtedly been the strength of the reserves,” states Brenton.³²⁶ When Russia conducted its military operations in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, its reserves were at the highest level Russia has ever accumulated—\$596.6 billion.³²⁷ Just as this factor had spurred on Russian leaders to act in Georgia in August 2008, Russia's level of reserves in February 2014—\$498.9 billion—emboldened Putin to act in Ukraine.

³²² “International Reserves of the Russian Federation,” Central Bank of the Russian Federation, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/hd_base/Default.aspx?Prtd=mrrf_m; Pismennaya, Arkhipov, and Cook, “Putin's Secret Gamble.”

³²³ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Agence France-Presse, “Vladimir Putin Describes Secret Meeting when Russia Decided to Seize Crimea,” *Guardian*, March 9, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/09/vladimir-putin-describes-secret-meeting-when-russia-decided-to-seize-crimea>.

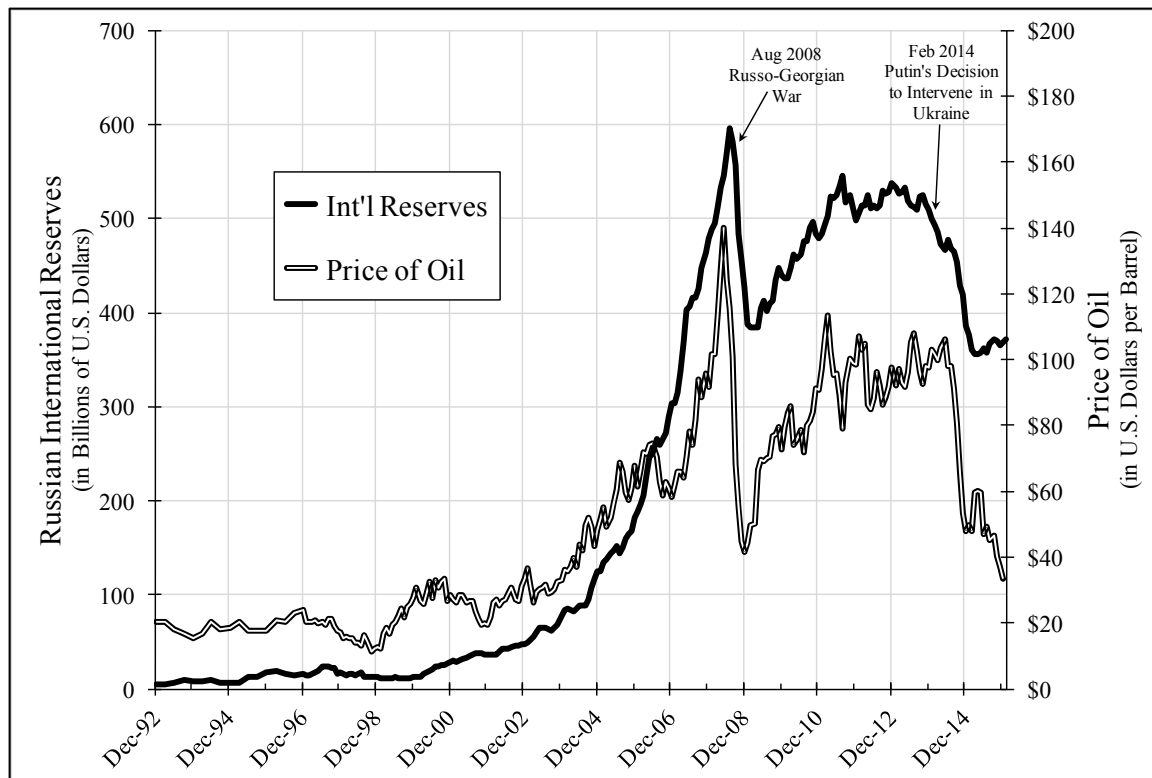
³²⁴ Pismennaya, Arkhipov, and Cook, “Putin's Secret Gamble.”

³²⁵ Tony Brenton, quoted in *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ “International Reserves of the Russian Federation.”

Figure 3. Russia's International Reserves and the Price of Oil Since the Fall of the USSR



Sources: "International Reserves of the Russian Federation," Central Bank of the Russian Federation, http://www.cbr.ru/eng/hd_base/Default.aspx?Prtid=mrrf_m; "Crude Oil Prices: West Texas Intermediate," Federal Reserve Economic Data, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, <https://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/series/DCOILWTICO/downloaddata>.

C. RUSSIA'S GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE

Another factor that mitigated the possible costs and risks in deciding to intervene in Ukraine was the Russian leadership's assessment of the extent of the influence Russia wields among many European states because of its role as a major energy exporter. In 2009, Prime Minister Putin commented that "Russia enjoys vast energy and mineral resources which serve as a base to develop its economy; [and] as an instrument to implement domestic and foreign policy. The role of the country on international energy markets determines, in many ways, its geopolitical influence."³²⁸ A large portion of

³²⁸ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Roman Kupchinsky, "Energy and the Russian National Security Strategy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 95 (2009), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35006&cHash=1065c5482b#.Vsa5R5MrKH0.

Russia's international trade revenue flows into the state in exchange for the hydrocarbon resources—oil, natural gas, and other petroleum products—it pumps out. In 2013, Russia grossed \$356 billion in oil and natural gas revenue, which constituted 68% of its total export revenues.³²⁹ Customs duties on oil and gas exports, combined with taxes on mineral extraction, produced 50.2% of Russia's 13 trillion ruble (approximately \$406 billion) federal budget revenue in 2013.³³⁰ The same year, crude oil accounted for \$174 billion, or 33%, of Russia's total export revenue.³³¹ Petroleum products provided \$109 billion, or 21% of gross export sales, while natural gas exports produced \$73 billion, or 14% of total export revenue.³³²

Because most of its federal budget (and the commercial revenue of companies with close ties to the Kremlin) comes from the sale of crude oil and other petroleum products, Russia has displayed a vested interest in sustained high oil prices. Some have even suggested that Russia's support for and export of arms to Iran, Iraq, Libya, Sudan, and Syria over the past decade has been part of an effort to keep oil prices high by maintaining a destabilized Middle East.³³³

³²⁹ "Oil and Natural Gas Sales Accounted for 68% of Russia's Total Export Revenues in 2013," Today in Energy, U.S. Energy Information Administration, July 23, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=17231>.

³³⁰ "Annual Report on Execution of the Federal Budget (Starting from January 1, 2006)," Federal Budget of the Russian Federation, Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation, <http://old.minfin.ru/en/statistics/fedbud/>.

³³¹ "Oil and Natural Gas Sales."

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Writing about the return of Russia to Middle East politics with its open support of Syria and unwillingness to join other states in pressuring Iran in 2006, BBC Russian Service chief editor Konstantin Eggert wrote, "There are a few motives attributed to the Kremlin: First the new Russian ideology, assuming a partial revenge for Russia's defeat in the Cold War; secondly, a new self-confidence due to high energy prices; third (which, perhaps, gives much to conspiracy theorists), the desire to maintain instability in the Middle East with the aim of maintaining high oil prices."; Konstantin Eggert, "Возвращение или Турпоездка?" *BBC Russian*, August 4, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/russian/russia/newsid_5244000/5244282.stm; Alex Vatanka and Richard Weitz, "Russian Roulette—Moscow Seeks Influence Through Arms Exports," *Jane's Defense Review*, <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1193365>.

1. **Gazprom—Russia’s Ultimate Geopolitical Tool**

Europe has been the main importer of Russia’s energy resources. In 2013, Russia provided 29% of the EU’s oil imports and 22% of the EU’s total oil consumption.³³⁴ The same year, Russia raked in \$283 billion of crude oil sales—70% of which went to Europe—and other petroleum products abroad.³³⁵ Even though Russia’s export of natural gas abroad—90% of which went to Europe—provided only \$73 billion in export revenue, natural gas has been the ultimate hydrocarbon tool that Russia employs to implement its foreign policy. Unlike oil, whose abundance of global suppliers has contributed to the overall decline of oil prices and provided Europe with more flexibility in choosing its energy trade partners, natural gas for much of Europe is provided by only one supplier—Russia.³³⁶ In 2013, Russia provided 39% of the EU’s natural gas imports, or 27% of its natural gas consumption.³³⁷ The majority of Russia’s gas exports is through Gazprom—one of Russia’s energy champions. The Gazprom behemoth maintains 72% of Russia’s and 17% of the world’s natural gas reserves and produces 72% of Russia’s and 12% of the world’s gas output.³³⁸

In 2003, as Putin celebrated Gazprom’s 10th anniversary at a reception, he dismissed speculation about breaking up the energy giant, talk of which had been circulating at the time. “Gazprom, as a strategically important company, should be kept, and has been kept, as a single organism,” he said.³³⁹ “Gazprom is a powerful political

³³⁴ Peter Kiernan, “Russia, The European Union, and Energy Security,” *The Fuse*, May 30, 2015, <http://www.energyfuse.org/russia-the-european-union-and-energy-security/>.

³³⁵ “Russia: International Energy Data and Analysis,” U.S. Energy Information Administration, accessed February 20, 2006, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS>.

³³⁶ Transporting natural gas is more difficult than transporting oil. While oil can be moved via pipeline, ship, train, or truck, natural gas must either be pumped through a pipeline or shipped in liquefied form (LNG) at an approximate temperature of -160 degrees Celsius. The latter is a technologically challenging method that requires extensive port infrastructure to accommodate LNG ships and results in gas that is roughly twice as expensive as that sent via a pipeline.

³³⁷ Kiernan, “Russia, The European Union, and Energy Security.”

³³⁸ “About Gazprom,” Gazprom, accessed February 20, 2016, <http://www.gazprom.com/about/>.

³³⁹ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Catherine Belton, “Putin Says Gazprom Too Powerful to Break Up,” *Moscow Times*, February 17, 2003, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/putin-says-gazprom-too-powerful-to-break-up/240360.html>.

and economic lever of influence over the rest of the world.”³⁴⁰ As a lever, Gazprom has two instruments whereby it makes its influence felt: reward or punishment. As Randall Newnham explains, the Kremlin uses Gazprom to dangle “petro-carrots” or threaten with “petro-sticks” to gain compliance with its policies:

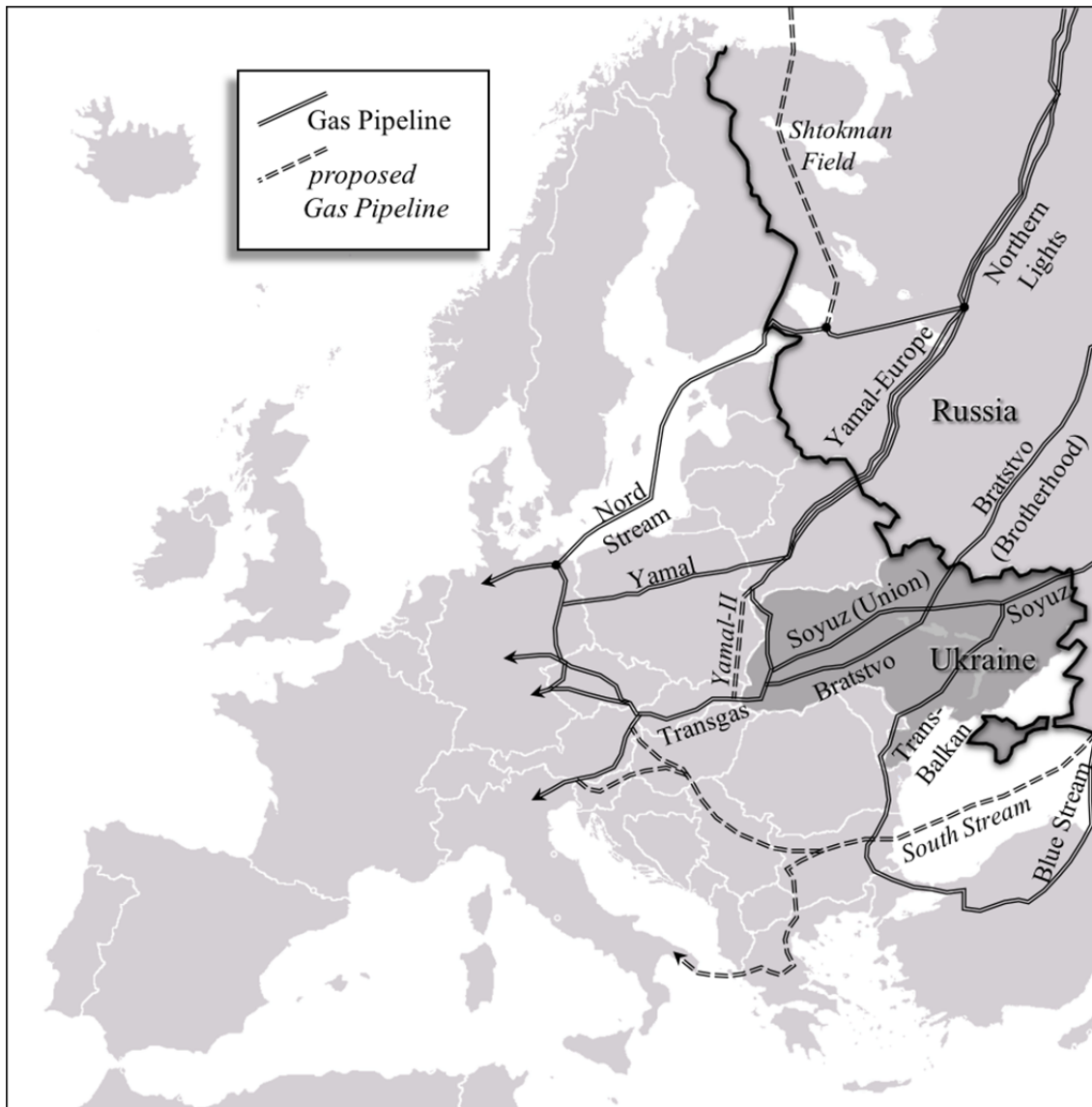
States such as Georgia, the Ukraine and the Baltic States have been punished with supply interruptions and higher prices after their governments turned toward the West. Conversely, those who remained friendly to the Kremlin—such as Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine before 2005, and the tiny statelets [such as] . . . Abkhazia . . . and Transdniestria—have been granted ample oil and gas at subsidized prices.³⁴¹

To deliver its gas exports to Europe, Gazprom operates a network of pipelines that extends westward from Russia to the EU and Turkey (see Figure 4). The Nord Stream pipeline through the Baltic Sea and the Blue Stream pipeline through the Black Sea carry Russian gas directly to Germany and Turkey, respectively. In contrast, the Yamal pipeline traverses Belarus and Poland while the Soyuz (Union), Bratstvo (Brotherhood), and Trans-Balkan pipelines traverse Ukraine. Although Russia has used its ironically named gas pipelines as levers to influence its former Soviet brother states of Belarus and Ukraine, the latter states have some influence of their own. Given that the pipelines lie exposed across the transit states’ land, the Russian gas that flows through them is susceptible to their physical control. The result has been a double-edged sword for Gazprom and the Kremlin—cutting off gas supplies to a transit state entails the risk that the transit state will retaliate by cutting off or siphoning from the flow of gas to customers downstream. Such was the case during multiple wintry occasions referred to as the “gas wars” of 2006 and 2009.

³⁴⁰ Putin, quoted in Belton, “Putin Says Gazprom Too Powerful to Break Up.”

³⁴¹ Randall Newnham, “Oil, Carrots, and Sticks: Russia’s Energy Resources as a Foreign Policy Tool,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2 (2011): 134, doi:10.1016/j.euras.2011.03.004.

Figure 4. Major Natural Gas Supply Pipelines from Russia to Europe



Adapted from Samuel Bailey, "Major Russian Gas Pipelines To Europe," November 15, 2009, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Major_russian_gas_pipelines_to_europe.png.

2. The Gas Wars of 2006 and 2009

The first gas war was widely regarded as an act of Russian retribution for Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution and Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko's re-orienting of Kiev's policies toward the EU and NATO. On January 1, 2006, Gazprom used the petro-stick by cutting off the supply of gas to Ukraine after it raised the price of gas from \$50 per 1,000 cubic meters to \$230—a price increase that Ukraine refused to

pay.³⁴² Ukraine, which was experiencing a record level of gas consumption due to an unusually severe winter with temperatures below 30 degrees Celsius, responded by diverting some of the gas being pumped downstream to other European states for its own use to cope with the extreme cold.³⁴³ Austria, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, and Romania each experienced decreases of 25–40% in their Russian gas supplies until Gazprom restored the flow to Ukraine two days later.³⁴⁴ Russia and Ukraine resolved the price dispute by agreeing on a price of \$95 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas for the next several months.³⁴⁵ This short-term agreement was but a prelude to many more disputes to come.

As gas prices continued to rise in subsequent years, Russia repeatedly attempted to achieve parity among the contracted prices for Belarus, Ukraine, and the rest of Europe (see Figure 5). With the significant decrease in oil prices in 2008 cutting into Russia's export revenues and the global financial crisis the same year as a backdrop (refer to Figure 3), the stage was set for another imminent showdown between Moscow and Kiev. While the second gas war, whose effects were more severe than the first, would damage both Russia and Ukraine economically, the rest of Europe would haplessly suffer collateral damage.

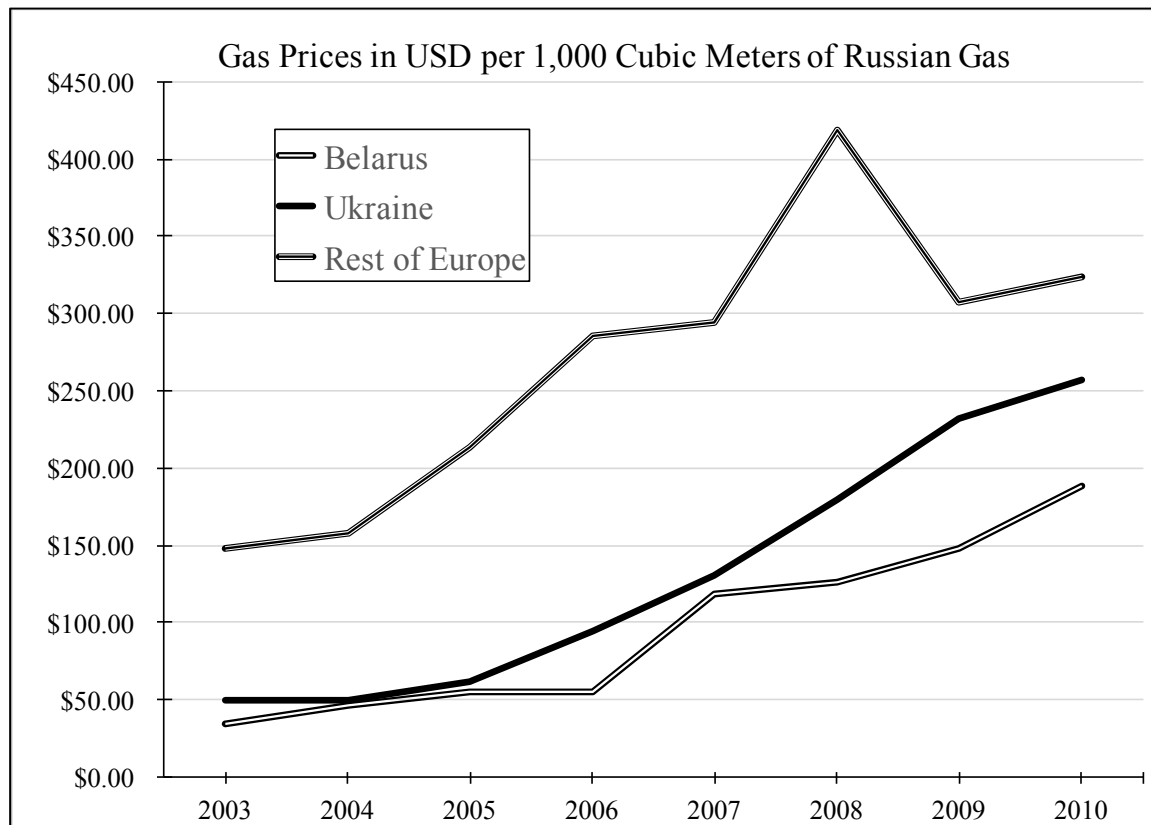
³⁴² "Ukraine 'Stealing Europe's Gas,'" *BBC News*, January 2, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4574630.stm>.

³⁴³ "Ukraine Takes Extra Russian Gas," *BBC News*, January 24, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4642684.stm>.

³⁴⁴ "Ukraine 'Stealing Europe's Gas,'" Newnham, "Oil, Carrots, and Sticks," 140.

³⁴⁵ "Ukraine Takes Extra Russian Gas."

Figure 5. Gas Price Disparities between Belarus, Ukraine, and the Rest of Europe



Source: Simon Parini, “Russo-Ukrainian Gas Wars and the Call on Transit Governance,” in *Dynamics of Energy Governance in Europe and Russia*, ed. Caroline Kuzemko, Andrei V. Belyi, Andreas Goldthau, and Michael F. Keating (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179.

On January 1, 2009—exactly three years after the first gas war, Gazprom again cut Ukraine’s supply share of gas in response to another row over gas prices and Ukrainian gas debt. Ukraine paid \$1.52 billion in gas arrears to Russia—all of its debt according to Ukraine, but only part of its \$2 billion debt and fines according to Russia.³⁴⁶ Additionally, the two states disagreed over a new gas price. Ukraine had been paying \$179.50 per 1,000 cubic meters, but Gazprom insisted that it pay the market price of \$418 that the rest of Europe had been paying.³⁴⁷ The day after Gazprom stopped providing

³⁴⁶ Tanya Mosolova and Pavel Polityuk, “Wrapup 3-Ukraine Says Repaid Gas Debt, Russia Says Not Yet,” *Reuters*, December 30, 2008, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/russia-ukraine-gas-idUKLU15776220081230?sp=true>.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

Ukraine's share of gas, other European states reported decreases in their respective gas pressures.³⁴⁸ A Ukrainian official, referring to the fuel gas needed to operate the pipeline, insisted that automatic "interruptions independent of people" for the EU were likely due to Russia's withholding of Ukraine's share of supply.³⁴⁹

On January 6, 2009, at the behest of Russian prime minister Putin, Gazprom reduced the gas pressure intended for the rest of Europe by a compensatory amount commensurate with how much it alleged Ukraine had stolen.³⁵⁰ A day later, Gazprom shut off the gas flow completely. To provide for its own needs, Ukraine's state-owned gas company, Naftogaz Ukrainy, operated the pipeline in reverse, closing off its pipelines between Ukraine and Russia, to supply its major population centers in eastern and southern Ukraine from its gas reserves in western Ukraine.³⁵¹

As the standoff continued, the urgency for the EU to help resolve the crisis, which adversely affected the inhabitants and economies of 18 European states, grew dramatically. Some of the most severely affected countries in Europe—Bulgaria, Slovakia, and non-EU member Moldova—sent their own delegations to Moscow, as journalist Ian Traynor commented, "to plead with their former imperial overlord for mercy and for fuel to power the radiators for millions of households."³⁵² The EU stepped in and brokered a deal on January 12, 2009 that stipulated the resumption of Europe's supply of gas while allowing for EU monitors to observe the flow in both Russia and Ukraine.

Notwithstanding the accord, and much to the European Union's consternation, the flow of gas to Europe was not restored. Each side blamed the other. "We opened the tap,

³⁴⁸ "Ukraine Warns EU of Gas 'Problem,'" *BBC News*, January 3, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7809450.stm>.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ "Russia to Cut Ukraine Gas Supply," *BBC News*, January 5, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7812368.stm>.

³⁵¹ Simon Parini, "Russo-Ukrainian Gas Wars and the Call on Transit Governance," in *Dynamics of Energy Governance in Europe and Russia*, ed. Caroline Kuzemko, Andrei V. Belyi, Andreas Goldthau, and Michael F. Keating (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 179.

³⁵² Ian Traynor, "Europe Left to Beg and Rage as Russian Gas Row Drags On," *Guardian*, January 14, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/15/russia-ukraine-gas-row>.

and are ready to supply gas, but on the other side, the tap is closed,” remarked Putin, attempting to absolve Russia of culpability.³⁵³ Putin added, “Nobody, no transit country, has the right to use its transit location to take other customers hostage.”³⁵⁴ At the same time, Naftogaz claimed that Gazprom deliberately opened an incorrect pipeline that would have forced the Ukrainian gas company to cut supply to a large portion of Ukraine.³⁵⁵ The European Commission was unable to verify the validity of either party’s allegations because the EU observers had not been granted access to gas supply control centers in either country. The president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, expressed his frustration with both countries’ prime ministers in separate phone conversations. After a “robust” discussion with Putin, Barroso commented that the situation was “getting close to a breaking point. There is a feeling that Putin is being duplicitous, to put it mildly.”³⁵⁶ Despite the EU leadership’s vexation, there was little else it could do but coordinate the efforts of EU countries and unitedly continue to implore Moscow for a resolution.

The EU had its opportunity at an emergency international gas meeting in Moscow called for by Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. Although Russia originally intended the meeting to be a summit for the EU state leaders, those leaders declined to attend due to a Czech EU presidency request. The Czech Republic, which held the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, desired the EU to speak with one voice by sending only the EU’s selected delegation.³⁵⁷ Despite the EU’s best efforts, no definitive outcome was reached during the talks on January 17, 2009. Fortunately for the

³⁵³ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Peter Walker, “Putin Accuses Ukraine of Holding Europe Hostage Over Gas Row,” *Guardian*, January 14, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jan/15/ukraine-russia-gas-gazprom-naftogaz>.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*; Gazprom’s deputy chief executive, Alexander Medvedev, even suggested that the United States, which had signed a partnership agreement with Ukraine in December 2008, was coaxing Ukraine’s pro-Western government to defy Russia: “It looks like they are dancing to music that is orchestrated not in Ukraine; they are dancing to music orchestrated elsewhere. I am making reference to the agreement between Ukraine and the United States.”; Alexander Medvedev, quoted in Philip P. Pan, “European Union Says Russia, Ukraine Violated Accord on Gas Shipments,” *Washington Post*, January 14, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/01/13/AR2009011300285.html>.

³⁵⁵ Walker, “Putin Accuses Ukraine.”

³⁵⁶ Traynor, “Europe Left to Beg and Rage.”

³⁵⁷ “‘Gas to Flow’ After Moscow Deal,” *BBC News*, January 18, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7834796.stm>.

Europeans, however, a five-hour bilateral negotiation session between Putin and Ukrainian prime minister Yulia Timoshenko, which took place later that evening and lasted into the next morning, resulted in an agreement. Emerging together at 2:30 am, they jointly announced the details of the accord: gas would be sold to Ukraine at the European price with a 20% discount for 2009 and at the full European price the following year. Meanwhile, Ukraine would continue to charge Russia the same transit price for gas destined for Europe as it had in 2008. With these terms set, Russia and Ukraine fully restored the flow of gas to Europe on January 21, 2009—two weeks after the flow to Europe had been cut off and 20 days after the gas war began.

3. European Energy Vulnerability

The 2009 gas crisis had grave implications for Ukraine and the rest of Europe. Some experts estimated that the episode cost Gazprom between \$1.1 and \$2 billion—roughly \$100 million per day—in lost revenue, whereas the cost to Ukraine was at least \$100 million in lost transit fee revenue.³⁵⁸ Although Ukraine lost much less than Russia in absolute financial terms, the relative economic and political costs to Ukraine were much higher. Timoshenko's acceptance of the deal on Putin's terms infuriated Yushchenko, who criticized the terms as a defeat wherein the price Ukraine agreed to pay for gas was too high and the price agreed to charge Russia for gas transit was too low.³⁵⁹ The gas deal drove the wedge in the two former Orange Revolution allies' relationship even deeper. The increased gas prices would prove to be unsustainable for Ukraine's flailing economy in recession. Poor economic performance and political discord contributed to a decline in support for the Orange government and a victory for the Russian-leaning Viktor Yanukovich in the February 2010 Ukrainian presidential election. Immediately upon entering office, Yanukovich negotiated a gas price discount

³⁵⁸ Polya Lesova, "Russian Gas Starts Flowing via Ukraine to Europe," *MarketWatch*, January 20, 2009, <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/russian-gas-starts-flowing-via-ukraine-to-europe>.

³⁵⁹ "Russian Gas Reaches Europe Again," *Reuters*, January 21, 2009, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-russia-ukraine-gas-idUKTRE5091KI20090121?sp=true>.

in exchange for extending the lease of Ukraine's Black Sea Fleet port in Sevastopol to Russia for another 25 years.³⁶⁰

For the EU, the 2009 gas crisis revealed the extent to which it was dependent on both Russia and Ukraine for its gas and how little leverage it had in resolving the issue. In the wake of the incident, European Commission president Barroso enumerated the EU's lessons learned: the importance of solidarity and the cognizance that action must be taken to avoid similar occurrences in the future. "New Year's is for fireworks and celebrations, not gas crises. This cannot become an annual event," he stated on January 20, 2009.³⁶¹ "This painful episode is a sharp reminder that the EU needs to take energy security seriously . . . to ensure that our citizens are not left in the cold. . . . We have to be serious about diversifying and investing in Europe's energy security future."³⁶² One such investment was in a new gas pipeline—the Nord Stream—that bypassed transit states yet still came from the same major supplier—Russia.

The motives behind building and operating the Nord Stream pipeline, which carries gas directly from Vyborg, Russia to Greifswald, Germany under the Baltic Sea, have been questioned. During the lengthy process to get the project approved, Gazprom's CEO Alexei Miller claimed that the "new export route . . . will increase Europe's energy security."³⁶³ Alexander Ryazanov, the former deputy CEO of Gazprom, offered a more candid explanation: "It is a rather expensive undertaking, because it is political. But of

³⁶⁰ As for Timoshenko, she became a political prisoner in October 2011 after a judge convicted her of exceeding the powers of her office when she signed the gas deal with Putin in 2009. During her trial, Viktor Yushchenko testified against her. Evoking condemnation from the EU, the judge sentenced Timoshenko to seven years in prison and demanded that she pay the \$186 million that Naftogaz Ukrainy claimed it lost because of the deal. One of the EU's stipulations for signing the association agreement with Ukraine was the release of Timoshenko and other political prisoners. Timoshenko asked the EU to forego demanding her release if it meant the association agreement would be signed. The post-Euromaidan *Verkhovna Rad* (Ukrainian parliament) voted on February 22, 2014—the same day as Yanukovich's flight and Putin's decisive meeting—to release her from prison. She ran for president and lost to Peter Poroshenko (12.8% to 54.7%) during the first round of voting in the May 2014 presidential election.

³⁶¹ José Manuel Durao Barroso, "Statement of President Barroso on the Resolution of the Ukraine-Russia Gas Dispute," European Commission Press Release Database, January 20, 2009, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-09-12_en.htm?locale=en.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Alexei Miller, quoted in Ariel Cohen, "The North European Gas Pipeline Threatens Europe's Energy Security," *Background*, no. 1980 (2006): 6, <http://www.massbach-world.de/media/116800689f529cf2ffff831aac144225.pdf>.

course, we need this pipeline in order to exert pressure on Belarus and Ukraine.”³⁶⁴ Russia sought to complete the pipeline to reduce its own dependence on unreliable transit states, like Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine. When the pipeline commenced operating in September 2011, Russia became more flexible in its capacity to use its petro-sticks against its former Soviet neighbors—Ukraine, above all—without having to worry about interruptions in supply to other clients downstream.

Germany, for its part, also wished to reduce its dependence on the gas transit states and prevent future disruptions in supply. In so doing, however, Germany increased its dependence on Russia as the gas supplier. Faced with the dilemma between upholding its liberal political values, which would entail holding Russia accountable for its energy blackmail tactics, and promoting its geo-economic interests by forging ahead with the Nord Stream pipeline, Germany chose the latter. Upon doing so, Berlin disregarded Moscow’s reputation as an unreliable partner—the label it was given during the 2009 gas crisis—and its manipulative behavior toward Ukraine and the rest of Europe. Alexander Kotlowski explains the impact of Germany’s political willingness to favor its economic interests:

The interlocking of German and Russian interests on an economic and political level is profoundly unsettling in Poland, Ukraine, the Baltic States, and some other Eastern European countries. . . . Regardless of general public reservations vis-à-vis Russian investments, the German energy conglomerates involved in the Nord Stream consortium are—not surprisingly—motivated primarily by the economic aspects of the pipeline and have complete disregard for the political consequences of the project. Nevertheless, the active role of the German government in securing financing for the Gazprom joint venture, combined with the engagement of the former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (who made his preferences to Russia clear) as a Gazprom representative on the Nord Stream Board of Directors, accentuated the political rather than the purely commercial dimensions of the project.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ Alexander Ryazanov, quoted in Martin Malek, “The EU as a ‘Target’ of Russia’s ‘Energy Foreign Policy,’” in *The European Union—A Global Actor?* ed. Sven Gareis, Gunther Hauser, and Franz Kernic (Toronto: Barbara Budrich, 2013), 238.

³⁶⁵ Alexander Kotlowski, “Russian Energy Strategy and Transit Routes in Eastern Europe—A View from Warsaw,” *Oil, Gas, Energy, and Law* 7, no. 2 (2009): 14–15, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1416761>.

In November 2011, German chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian president Dmitry Medvedev cheerfully opened a ceremonial Nord Stream valve together during the pipeline's inauguration. The display underscored how Germany's foreign policy and economic decisions tend to favor amiable relations with Russia. On the outward appearance, Germany's approach to Russia seems voluntary, but a closer inspection reveals how necessity is actually the driving force. In 2013, Russian gas imports comprised 45.8% of Germany's total gas consumption.³⁶⁶ Not only are Germany's leaders fully aware of their country's dependence on Russian gas, but so too are Russia's leaders. In a 2010 *New York Times* article, Judy Dempsey wrote about Putin's recognition of European dependence on Russian energy:

In an angry and often sarcastic speech to the top German industry chiefs at a business forum in Berlin, Mr. Putin lambasted the European Union, insisting that Brussels should consult Moscow over planned energy legislation. At one stage, he mocked the Europeans, saying if they did not want gas or nuclear energy, then they would have to rely on Russian firewood. "How will you heat your houses?" Mr. Putin asked. "You do not want gas, you do not want to develop nuclear energy. Where will you get your heat from then? From firewood? Even for firewood you will need to go to Siberia. You do not even have wood."³⁶⁷

D. THE SEEMINGLY IRRATIONAL THREAT OF A GAS WAR WAGED AGAINST EUROPE

Many Germans dismiss the idea that Russia would engage Germany and the EU in a gas war. Citing how Russia's economy is just as dependent on energy export revenues as are the European economies on Russia's energy imports, they reason that Moscow taking such action would be tantamount to Russia's economic self-destruction. Sigmar Gabriel, Germany's economics minister, while admitting that there is no reasonable alternative to Germany's gas imports from Russia, insisted that there would not be a need to look for alternatives: "Even in the darkest hours of the Cold War, Russia

³⁶⁶ "Supply, Transformation, and Consumption of Gas—Annual Data," Eurostat, February 17, 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>; "Imports—Gas—Annual Data," Eurostat, April 29, 2015, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

³⁶⁷ Judy Dempsey, "Putin Chides E.U. Over Energy Policies," *New York Times*, November 26, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/27/world/europe/27iht-putin.html>.

kept to its contracts.”³⁶⁸ Vladimir Chizhov, Russia’s ambassador to the EU, likewise mocked the notion of Russia employing its natural gas weapon against the EU as “horror stories that have their origin in political fantasy.”³⁶⁹ For many European states, however, their gas vulnerability coupled with Russia’s history of using gas as a foreign policy tool constitutes a horror story grounded in reality.

The degree to which each European state depends on Russian gas is as varied as the European states themselves (see Figure 6). Germany’s energy security vis-à-vis Russia is moderately vulnerable compared to other European states. Although it receives a large portion of the gas it consumes from Russia, Germany also has a modest gas storage capability that would allow it to survive a disruption of Russian gas for several months. A number of other states, some with conditions similar to Germany’s, are also moderately insecure: Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia, and Romania. Most West European states—Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom—import little to no gas from Russia and are, thus, much more energy secure. In contrast, most East European states are energy insecure. Two states—Estonia and Finland—receive all of their gas from Russia and do not have any gas storage capability. Until recently, Lithuania had a similar complete gas dependency on Russia, but the country has taken steps to diversify its import sources. Having constructed and opened an LNG (liquefied natural gas) terminal at the end of 2014, Lithuania now imports 20% of its gas from Norway and plans to import gas from the United States.³⁷⁰ Other Eastern European countries—Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, and Slovakia—have some gas storage capacity, but still import between 85% and 100% of the gas they consume from Russia.³⁷¹

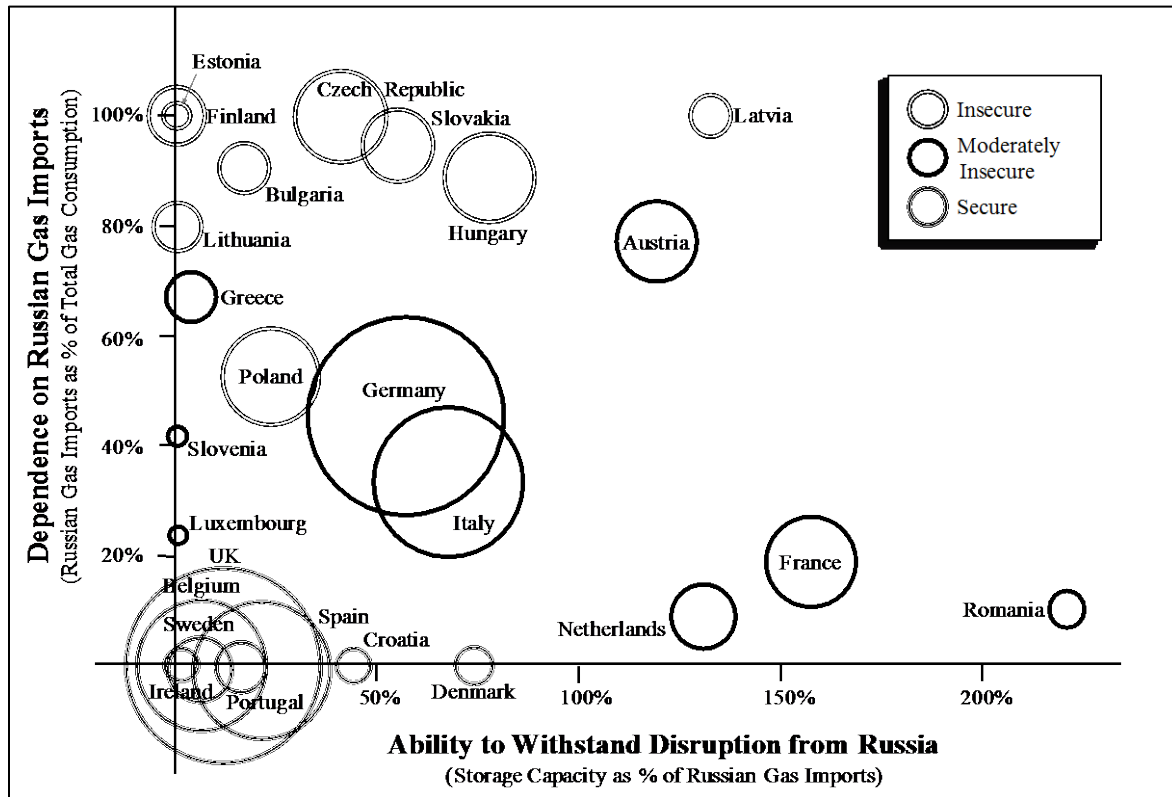
³⁶⁸ Sigmar Gabriel, quoted in “Germany’s Russian Energy Dilemma,” Deutsche Welle, March 29, 2014, <http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-russian-energy-dilemma/a-17529685>.

³⁶⁹ Vladimir Chizhov, quoted in “Germany’s Russian Energy Dilemma.”

³⁷⁰ “Lithuania Puts Plans to Import LNG from the United States on Hold for Now,” Reuters, January 13, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/lithuania-usa-lng-idUSL8N14X3IZ20160113>.

³⁷¹ Chi-Kong Chyong and Vessela Tchernova, “Europe’s Vulnerability on Russian Gas,” European Council on Foreign Relations, March 17, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europes_vulnerability_on_russian_gas.

Figure 6. EU Member State Energy Security and Vulnerability to Russian Natural Gas



Adapted from Chi-Kong Chyong and Vessela Tchernova, "Europe's Vulnerability on Russian Gas," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 17, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europes_vulnerability_on_russian_gas.

Russia's leaders understand the various levels of energy security among EU member states. They have also sought to exploit these differences, striving to develop Russia's bilateral energy relationships to undermine the cohesiveness and strength of EU energy policy and the European Union as a whole. Russia demonstrated this effort during the 2009 gas crisis when it tried to "continue playing the Europeans off one against the other," as Roman Kupchinsky explains, by calling for an international gas summit with individual EU member state representation.³⁷² In the face of Russia's dominant energy position, EU leaders stressed then and have continued to stress the importance of

³⁷² Roman Kupchinsky, "The 18-Day Gas War—Why Was It Fought? Who Won?" *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 6, no. 12 (2009), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=34374&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=27&cHash=fb2aa84bb3#.VtDltZMrKHp.

speaking with one voice. Despite claims that a scenario wherein Russia cuts its supply of gas to Europe is unlikely, the EU, nevertheless, conducted a hypothetical stress test in October 2014 to gauge how prepared it was in the event such a worst-case scenario came to fruition. Günther Oettinger, the Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for energy, discussed the findings: “For the very first time, we have a complete picture of the risks and possible solutions. If we work together, show solidarity and implement the recommendations of this report, no household in the EU has to be left out in the cold.”³⁷³

While the official EU narrative painted a comforting picture of resiliency through cooperation, reports of the actual findings in the classified report are ominous. In the event that Russia cut off its gas supply, Germany would likely prioritize the needs of its protected customers—households—over industry. Wolf Richter examines the potential economic impact:

Industry would lose much of its electricity as power plants that aren’t deemed indispensable would have to shut down. Forget heating those manufacturing plants, or turning on the lights, or booting up the robots. . . . Production would plunge. Layoffs would soar. The supply chain would collapse. A cut in gas supply would generate enormous economic costs. . . . With this move, self-destructive as it might be, Russia could lay waste to Germany’s industrial power, at least for a while, and it would wreak havoc that would then ricochet around the world as German export orders would remain unfulfilled, and as imports would grind to a halt. The costs would simply be too large to contemplate.³⁷⁴

The use of harmful threats and actions to attain the foreign policy goals of Russia’s leaders was clearly demonstrated in the gas wars, but the tactic of intimidating and exploiting fears extends to the personal interactions of Russia’s leaders with their foreign counterparts. In 2007, German chancellor Angela Merkel met with Putin at his residence in Sochi to discuss energy trade matters. With Merkel seated next to him, Putin

³⁷³ Günther H. Oettinger, quoted in “Gas Stress Test: Cooperation is Key to Cope with Supply Interruption,” European Commission Press Release, October 16, 2014, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-1162_en.htm.

³⁷⁴ Wolf Richter, “Leaked: What Happens to Germany if Russia Turns Off the Gas,” *Wolf Street*, October 21, 2014, <http://wolfstreet.com/2014/10/21/leaked-what-happens-to-germany-if-russia-turns-off-the-gas/>.

residence in Sochi to discuss energy trade matters. With Merkel seated next to him, Putin called in his large black dog that ran up to Merkel and sniffed her as Putin commented, “I’m sure it will behave itself.”³⁷⁵ The chancellor, who had a pre-existing phobia to dogs from a dog bite she suffered in 1995 that was known to Putin, appeared visibly distressed during the encounter.

Much like Merkel’s uneasiness over Putin’s dog, Europe has also been uneasy over the uncertainty of Putin’s level of restraint and the rationality of his actions. Not only did the 2009 gas crisis demonstrate how important Putin’s political objectives in Ukraine were to him, but it also revealed to the rest of Europe and the world just how irrational he could be. Such was the message he intended to send. Russia showed that it was willing to bear the cost of ruining its reputation as a reliable trade partner and lose billions of dollars in gas revenue over a seemingly insignificant matter—a price dispute with Ukraine. The threat that Russia could and would be willing to do so again was even articulated by Putin himself in February 2015. Speaking about how gas supplies to Ukraine could be suspended if it failed to prepay for its contracted gas, Putin warned that “This may create a threat to transit to Europe, to our European partners. We hope that gas supplies will not be interrupted. But this does not depend on us, it depends on the financial discipline of our Ukrainian partners.”³⁷⁶ Such a threat was clearly understood by the millions of Europeans whose gas supplies had already been cut once when they had needed them the most.

In the wake of Russia’s invasion of Crimea in February 2014, Merkel questioned Putin’s rationality, commenting that she was uncertain that “he was in touch with reality” as he seemed to be “in another world.”³⁷⁷ Thomas Schelling explained the rationality behind desiring to appear irrational in his eminent 1960 work, *The Strategy of Conflict*:

³⁷⁵ Vladimir Putin, quoted in George Packer, “The Quiet German,” *The New Yorker*, December 1, 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/12/01/quiet-german>.

³⁷⁶ Vladimir Putin, quoted in Zachary Davis Boren, “Ukraine Crisis: Putin Will Cut Gas to Europe Unless Russia is Paid by the End of the Week,” *Independent*, February 26, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-putin-will-cut-gas-to-europe-unless-russia-is-paid-by-the-end-of-the-week-10071475.html>.

³⁷⁷ Angela Merkel, quoted in Peter Baker, “Pressure Rising as Obama Works to Reign in Russia,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/03/world/europe/pressure-rising-as-obama-works-to-rein-in-russia.html>.

Even among the emotionally unbalanced, among the certified “irrationals,” there is often observed an intuitive appreciation of the principles of strategy. . . . A careless or even self-destructive attitude toward injury . . . can be a genuine strategic advantage. . . . One of the advantages of an explicit theory of “rational” strategic decision in situations of mixed conflict and common interest is that, by showing the strategic basis of certain paradoxical tactics, it can display how sound and rational some of the tactics are that are practiced by the untutored and the infirm.”³⁷⁸

E. ANOTHER SEEMINGLY IRRATIONAL THREAT—NUCLEAR WAR

The messaging of Putin’s irrationality—his clear willingness to sustain self-damaging economic costs when threatening Europe’s energy security—has served as a useful deterrent against the West pursuing some of its more severe economic response options in the wake of Russia’s invasion and annexation of Crimea. Putin was aware of this, and it factored into his decision making regarding intervention in Ukraine. In a like manner, another irrational threat intended to deter the West’s military response options during Russia’s Crimean intervention, also factored into Putin’s calculations. The threat, which would overshadow the entire crisis in Ukraine, has been Russia’s possession of and willingness to use its arsenal of nuclear weapons to defend its hybrid military actions and gains.

During the October 2014 Valdai conference, which was held in Sochi but eight months after the Winter Olympics, Putin commented that “We are sliding into the times when, instead of the balance of interests and mutual guarantees, it is fear and the balance of mutual destruction that prevent nations from engaging in direct conflict.”³⁷⁹ Later in his speech, he touted the nuclear brinkmanship of a seemingly irrational Khrushchev during the Cold War, implying that post-Soviet Russia demands the same level of respect: “We had such brilliant politicians like Nikita Khrushchev, who hammered the desk with his shoe at the UN. And the whole world, primarily the United States, and NATO thought: this Nikita is best left alone, he might just go and fire a missile, they

³⁷⁸ Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 17.

³⁷⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” President of Russia, October 24, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46860>.

have lots of them, we should better show some respect for them.”³⁸⁰ Immediately after the “little green men”—Russian forces without insignia—appeared in Crimea, Putin backed up his nuclear insinuations with increased levels of Russian nuclear force activity and state-controlled media propaganda. Such provocative action elicited a response from NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that contrasted sharply with Putin’s words:

Russia’s recent use of nuclear rhetoric, exercises and operations are deeply troubling. . . . President Putin’s admission that he considered putting Russia’s nuclear forces on alert while Russia was annexing Crimea is but one example. Russia has also significantly increased the scale, number and range of provocative flights by nuclear-capable bombers across much of the globe. From Japan to Gibraltar. From Crete to California. And from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Russian officials announced plans to base modern nuclear-capable missile systems in Kaliningrad. And they claim that Russia has the right to deploy nuclear forces to Crimea. This will fundamentally change the balance of security in Europe. We learned during the Cold War that when it comes to nuclear weapons, caution, predictability and transparency are vital. Russia’s nuclear sabre-rattling is unjustified, destabilizing and dangerous.³⁸¹

F. THE WEST’S RESPONSE

Unwilling to risk the escalation of a military response, the EU and the United States responded to Russia’s actions in Crimea with varying levels of diplomatic and economic sanctions. Diplomatic measures included cancelling the EU-Russia summit and isolating Russia from the G8 summit that was scheduled to have been held in Sochi in June 2014 but was held instead as a G7 meeting in Brussels. Other sanctions ranged from travel bans and freezing the assets of targeted individuals, who were deemed responsible for violating Ukraine’s territorial integrity, to trade embargos against specific sectors like finance, energy (extraction technology to target Russia’s untapped oil reserves in the Arctic), and defense.³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” October 24, 2014.

³⁸¹ Jens Stoltenberg, “Adapting to a Changed Security Environment: Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, May 27, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_120166.htm.

³⁸² “EU Sanctions Against Russia over Ukraine Crisis,” EU Newsroom, http://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/eu_sanctions/index_en.htm.

The most prominent international trade casualty resulting from the West's response to Russia over its actions in Ukraine was the Mistral amphibious ship deal. France had planned to sell two amphibious assault ships to Russia for \$1.5 billion in what would have been the first major arms import deal for Russia since the end of the Cold War. The ships, named *Vladivostok* and *Sevastopol*, were designed to deliver soldiers, armored vehicles, and tanks from littoral waters to shore using the four landing barges and 16 helicopters that each can carry. The former Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, commented once that the Russo-Georgian war would have been over in "40 minutes instead of 26 hours" had the Russian navy possessed one of the Mistral ships in 2008.³⁸³ French president Hollande suspended delivery of the ships in September 2014 over the crisis in Ukraine, and France later refunded Russia's money and sold them to Egypt. In a twist of irony, Putin's decision to engage in operations that "reacquired" the port city of Sevastopol came at the cost of never acquiring the Mistral ship *Sevastopol* and its sister.

Since June 2014, Russia's economy has floundered as the ruble has greatly depreciated against the dollar. The effect that EU and U.S. sanctions—measures designed to alter Russia's policies and behavior in Crimea and eastern Ukraine—have had on Russia's economy is subject to debate. While a 2015 study found that "the impact of the conflict on Russia may be amplified by the sanctions imposed by Western countries," its main conclusion was that "the bulk of the depreciation is caused by the decline of oil prices" (refer to Figures 2 and 3).³⁸⁴

Whatever the effect that Western sanctions may have had on Russia's economy, Putin has remained defiant over Russia's actions concerning Crimea and the rest of Ukraine. In an interview with a Serbian newspaper in October 2014, he even doubled down on them. Responding to a question about the economic sanctions that were

³⁸³ Ariane Chemin, "France-Russia Warship Deal in Choppy Waters Amid Sanctions Against Putin," *Guardian*, October 10, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/10/france-russia-warship-putin-sanctions>.

³⁸⁴ Christian Dreger, Konstantin A. Kholodilin, Dirk Ulbricht, Jarko Fidrmuc, "The Ruble Between the Hammer and the Anvil: Oil Prices and Economic Sanctions," *DIW Berlin Discussion Paper* no. 1488 (2015): 15, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2617202>.

designed to isolate Russia, he warned that the “the economic health of Europe and the world can be seriously undermined.”³⁸⁵ Later on he expressed his hope that Western leaders would “understand the futility of attempts to blackmail Russia and remember the consequences that discord between major nuclear powers can bring when the strategic stability of the world is at stake.”³⁸⁶ In his 2015 Valdai address nine days later, he affirmed that “Russia is not going to get all worked up, get offended or come begging at anyone’s door. Russia is a self-sufficient country. We will work within the foreign economic environment that has taken shape. . . . Pressure from outside, as has been the case on past occasions, will only consolidate our society.”³⁸⁷

1. Billions of Dollars and No Sense

At the all-night meeting with his security council in Sochi on February 22, 2014, the eve of the Winter Olympics closing ceremony, Putin postulated that the twin threats of economic and nuclear destruction issued respectively against the EU and NATO would have the desired effect. The EU’s collective energy security vulnerability due to its dependence on Russian gas would temper the severity of sanctions leveled against Russia, and Russia would be able to withstand the lesser sanctions with its billions of dollars in foreign capital reserves. Additionally, Russia’s strategic messaging of its willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend its actions in Ukraine would preclude any military response from NATO. The risk-laden decision that Putin made was a gamble that he was willing to take because of his aversion to the loss of a pro-Russian government in Kiev, among other reasons. The gamble in Ukraine to achieve his goals seems to have paid off in the short term, but the long-term sagacity of such a gamble remains to be seen.

³⁸⁵ Vladimir Putin, “Интервью Газете ‘Политика,’” Президент России, October 15, 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46806>.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” October 24, 2014.

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VI. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis explored the rationales behind the decision by Russia's political leaders to breach the territorial integrity of a sovereign state and acquire a major portion of it. Russia's actions contravened its own security assurances given to Ukraine in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum and the 1997 Russo-Ukraine Friendship Treaty to respect its neighbor's sovereignty and border integrity. Additionally, Russia's actions elicited strong condemnation from Western governments, resulting in Russia's isolation from the West and economic sanctions designed to penalize Russia's government. When the decision to invade Crimea was made, these costs that Russia's leaders were willing to bear were determined to have been outweighed by the benefits Russia stood to gain through its actions.

A military invasion and annexation of part of a modern European state seemed unfathomable to many Western leaders before Russia engaged in its shocking hybrid warfare in Crimea. Russia's actions resurrected the idea of international political realism in the West, which many deemed to have been dormant since the dismantling of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Meanwhile, Ukraine remained fixed between the two competing strains of Western liberalism and Russian despotism. The jockeying between the West and Russia in fostering a favorably oriented Ukrainian government, as well as the attempts by both to include Ukraine in their respective institutional spheres—the EU and NATO or the Eurasian Economic Union—placed Ukraine in a precarious geopolitical position.

Given such a geopolitical landscape and Ukraine's post-Euromaidan reorientation, the application of neoclassical realism, with its emphasis on both system- and domestic-level variables and its assumption of rationality based on expected utility maximization, is useful in explaining Russia's reasoning for its Ukrainian intervention. A more plausible and durable exposition of the rationales influencing Russia's leaders, however, can be obtained by combining the lens of neoclassical realism with that of prospect theory.

For Vladimir Putin, the reference point for Russia's interests remains inexorably linked to the interests of the Soviet Union. Putin considers the demise of the Soviet Union an immense loss. His inability to make psychological peace with its end has caused him to perceive Russia's current domain as one of losses. Such a worldview has reinforced his strong tendency toward loss aversion, or as Hersh Shefrin describes it, "get-evenitis."³⁸⁸ The speech that Putin gave when officially incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation on March 18, 2014 oozed with resentment for the West. This speech revealed not only how closely the neoclassical realist paradigm aligns with his foreign policy but also the extent to which he is consumed by get-evenitis. J. M. Goldgeier and P. E. Tetlock describe why Putin's actions in Crimea were perfectly justifiable in his own mind:

Those who are less fixated on the world that is—and prone to give more weight to counterfactual worlds that could or should have been—are predisposed to be more sympathetic to redistributive claims on behalf of have-nots. Rather than viewing such claims as illegitimate, greedy, and self-serving bids for gain, they see them as just attempts to undo losses imposed by exploitative . . . nations.³⁸⁹

Russia's opportunistic intervention in and annexation of Crimea served as a convenient method for Putin to prevent the complete loss of Russia's sphere of influence in Ukraine to the West and the loss of his popularity and power at home. At the same time, it afforded Putin a way to recover, at least to some extent, from the loss of the Soviet Union and to reconcile, to a certain degree, the discrepancy between the world that is and the world that, in his mind, should have been—and should be.

Putin's frame of reference and loss aversion caused him to be more risk-acceptant in undertaking military action in Crimea. His duplicitous exploitation of Western leaders' naiveté and vulnerabilities prepared the geopolitical landscape in which Russian action in Ukraine could be taken to gain the intended benefits for Russia without incurring

³⁸⁸ Hersh Shefrin, *Beyond Greed and Fear: Understanding Behavioral Finance and the Psychology of Investing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107.

³⁸⁹ J.M. Goldgeier and P.E. Tetlock, "Psychology and International Relations Theory," *Annual Reviews Political Science* 4 (2001): 85, <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.polisci.4.1.67?journalCode=polisci>.

excessive costs. Backed by Russia's seemingly irrational threats to cut essential gas supplies to Europe and to launch nuclear attacks, Putin correctly anticipated a limited economic sanctions response and a negligible military response from the West. Emboldened by Russia's large sum of financial reserves, he reckoned that Russia would be able to withstand whatever limited sanctions would result.

By annexing Crimea, Putin furthered Russia's interests in acquiring not only this peninsula, but also the strategically indispensable Russian Black Sea Fleet port in Sevastopol and the vast natural resources in the Black Sea region. Such action also prevented the expansion of Western institutions and influence in Ukraine. At the time of its intervention in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin issued several narratives that incited fervent ethno-nationalism and Russian patriotism: accusing the West of foreign intervention hypocrisy, vilifying the West for its involvement in Ukrainian affairs, and justifying Russia's hybrid actions in Crimea as a humanitarian intervention to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers. The resulting level of Putin's domestic approval was unprecedented—a perplexing development given the massive political protests that were held against him in Moscow and other cities but two years earlier in 2011–2012.

A. BEYOND UKRAINE

After the West isolated Russia and applied sanctions in response to its military actions in Ukraine, Putin would not wait long before thrusting Russia into another military exploit abroad—the complicated and dynamic conflict in Syria. While a full understanding of Russia's rationales to intervene in Syria requires further analysis, the likely explanations are related to Russia's rationales for intervening in Ukraine, as argued in this thesis. Possible explanations include exploiting the opportunity to divert negative global attention from the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, extracting Russia from its isolation by forcing the West to cooperate in deconflicting military efforts in Syria and seeking a peace settlement, and preventing the loss of a client by propping up a severely weakened Assad regime. Additionally, Putin's move may have been motivated by the desire to elevate Russia's international status by displaying its modernized conventional

military capabilities. Domestic considerations were also likely to have factored into Putin's calculus. Russia's actions in Syria allowed Putin to appear tough on terrorism, provided a new enemy for Russian nationalism to be kindled against, and maintained Putin's high approval ratings.

This thesis has demonstrated the explanatory power that neoclassical realism, supplemented by prospect theory, has in analyzing Russia's rationales for intervening in Ukraine. The combined analytical framework is also apposite for interpreting Russia's actions in Syria. For Western policy makers, the application of such a framework can assist in anticipating Russia's likely rationales for actions that seek to weaken the West, as long as Putin remains in power, by undermining its strength, solidarity, and credibility. Such probable opportunistic action is not limited to the terrestrial domains of Ukraine, Syria, and other countries and areas replete with Russian interests—the Baltic states, Belarus, Moldova, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Arctic. It also includes the dynamic political, economic, maritime, celestial, and cyber domains of the former Soviet Union and the West.

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