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RUSSIA AND THE WORLD IN THE PUTIN ERA

**FROM THEORY TO REALITY IN RUSSIAN GLOBAL
STRATEGY**

Edited by

Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova

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Russia and the World in the Putin Era

This volume examines the role of Russia in the world under President Putin's rule.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated after the Cold War, Russia seemingly embarked on the establishment of a democratic political system and seemed intent on joining the liberal international order. However, under President Putin's rule, there have been dramatic shifts in Russian domestic and foreign policies, in order to re-establish itself as a great power. This book examines broad aspects of Russian political culture and threat perception, such as Russia's reaction to NATO expansion; its information warfare and energy policies; and its policy toward the Global South, especially the Middle East and Africa. The objective of the analyses is to explain the factors that influence Russian foreign policy and to show how and why Russian relations with the European Union and the United States have deteriorated so rapidly in recent years. The volume introduces an alternative approach to the standard realist perspective, which often underlies existing analyses of Russian policy – namely, the work offers a theoretical perspective that focuses on the Russian sense of identity and on ontological security.

This book will be of much interest to students of Russian foreign policy, security studies and International Relations.

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From Theory to Reality in Russian
Global Strategy

**Edited by Roger E. Kanet and
Dina Moulioukova**

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Preface

Over the course of more than 50 years, I was blessed by teaching and working with, as well as conducting research and publishing with, a large group of doctoral students at the universities of Kansas, Illinois and Miami. Many of them have gone on to excel in academic careers, others are leaders in business and other non-academic fields. This current book is dedicated to the generations of students, both graduate and undergraduate, who have challenged me and educated me over the course of those 53 years!

This volume is more than just dedicated to the students with whom I have worked over the course of four decades; it also includes the research of a small number of those former students. All of us have had a major research interest in aspects of Soviet and Russian foreign and security policy, among other topics. Given the dramatic shifts in Russian policy under Vladimir Putin, both domestic and foreign, the growing tensions between the United States and its NATO allies under Trump, the emergence of China as the major target of United States, policy under Trump, and the move toward U.S. isolationism,¹ a fresh look at Russia's role in the world is warranted. In this volume, we provide an informed, if partial, examination of that role.

Roger E. Kanet

Note

1 This isolationism has been illustrated during Trump's presidency by the U.S. withdrawal or planned withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Works and Relief Agency, the Iran Nuclear Deal, the World Health Organization, NAFTA, the Open Skies Surveillance Treaty and the Intermediate Range Nuclear Arms Treaty with Russia. See "Trump's Top Five Withdrawals from International Agreements," *TRT-World*, 29 Jun 2018. <https://www.trtworld.com/americas/trump-s-top-five-withdrawals-from-international-agreements-18543>; Andrew Joseph and Helen Branswell, "Trump: U.S. Will Terminate Relationship with the World Health Organization in Wake of Covid-19 Pandemic," *Stat*,

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Introduction: Russia foreign policy and the return to authoritarian roots

Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova

In 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated, the cold war came to an end and Russia seemingly embarked on the process of establishing a democratic political system and joining the liberal international order. Today, three decades later, the hostility that had characterized East–West relations for more than 40 years has reemerged between Russia and both the U.S.A. and Western Europe. What happened to bring about this dramatic turnabout? To what extent was this change largely the result of the Russian reaction to Western actions, such as the expansion of NATO into formerly Soviet space? To what extent does it respond to authoritarian developments in domestic politics in Russia since the rise of Vladimir Putin and his supporters to power and to their commitment to reestablishing the “Great Power” image of Russia that coincides with the centuries-old view of Russia under both the czars and Soviet leaders?¹

In the pages that follow, we examine broad aspects of Russian political culture and threat perception, Russia’s reaction to NATO expansion² and its information warfare and energy policies, as well as policy toward the Global South, especially the Middle East and Africa. The objective of our collective analyses is to explain the factors that influence Russian foreign policy and, in particular, how and why Russian relations with the European Union and the United States have deteriorated so rapidly and so significantly in recent years after the dramatic improvement visible in the 1990s after the collapse of the former U.S.S.R.

The first part of the volume, entitled “Sources and tools of Russian foreign policy,” examines broad aspects of Russian policy with an emphasis on those factors that influence that policy, the means of forecasting it and the threat perceptions of Russian foreign policy decision-makers. More specifically, in the first chapter, “Russia’s self-image as a great power,” Dina Moulioukova, with Roger E. Kanet, traces the long historical development of Russia’s view of itself as one of the dominant states in the world. Already in the late Middle Ages, Russia emerged as a major European actor. In most respects, the Russians’ view of themselves continued as that of a great power during both the late Imperial and the Soviet periods; this view has reemerged in Putin’s Russia.

In the second chapter, “Russian strategic culture and renewed conflict with the West,” Roger E. Kanet points out, as have many other analysts, that Russian strategic, or security, culture has for centuries been built on the self-perception of Russia/U.S.S.R. as a great power and on the idea that military power is essential to gaining and maintaining that status. Since he first came to power, Putin’s clearest message has concerned the continued greatness of Russia as an equal to other Great Powers in determining global affairs. A central question of this chapter concerns the reasons for the deterioration of relations between Russia and the West, which results from two interrelated developments: an external factor that derives from the West’s commitment to expand the liberal international order eastward and, on the Russian side by gradual, but ultimately dramatic, changes in Russian strategic culture in a much more assertive and aggressive direction that is built on the commitment to making Russia once again a “Great Power.”

In Chapter 3, employing aspects of behavioral analysis, Aleksandar Jankovski examines “Images and Decision-making in foreign policy: the case of Vladimir Putin.” The chapter makes three important contributions to the literature. First, it builds upon, and extends, the existing work on images in international relations by Richard K. Hermann and Michael P. Fischerkeller (1995) and Joshua D. Kertzer et al. (2014). More specifically, the chapter identifies some lacunae and retheorizes the concept “image” as it relates to Russian policy and more specifically examines the images of Vladimir Putin in his capacity as the principal decisionmaker of the Russian Federation. Finally, the chapter examines the decision to insert the armed forces of the Russian Federation in the internecine war in Syria.

In the fourth chapter of Part I, “Atlanticism in an age of great power competition: is Russia achieving its goals?,” Suzanne Loftus focuses on the impact of NATO members’ reactions to Russian policy initiatives. She notes that the transatlantic alliance is experiencing a variety of challenging strains ranging from a lack of substantial funding from allies that fail to meet the 2% target, to disagreements between the EU and U.S. political leaders, to different threat perceptions among allies on which security matters to prioritize on the European security theater. One of these different threat perceptions concerns Russia; while the former Soviet states on Europe’s eastern flank fear a Russian invasion or incursion and are supported by the U.S. with these views, western and southern European states do not share this urgency and are often found collaborating with Russia on business deals, energy and through political friendships. Russia in turn capitalizes on these pre-existing rifts and uses its cyber and hybrid tactics to encourage differing political views among allies in its favor. A weakened transatlantic relationship is a win for Russia.

The central concern addressed in the chapter examines how these differing views are likely to affect the health of the transatlantic relationship and subsequently the power distribution among the great powers today. This chapter argues that a divided alliance risks to weaken the transatlantic bond

and encourage shifting patterns and friendships among international actors. Unless the solidarity of the alliance is prioritized, this may be a critical, possibly existential, moment for NATO.

In the fifth chapter, Dina Moulioukova, with Roger E. Kanet, examines “The battle of ontological narratives: Russia and the annexation of Crimea.” She notes that the analysis of Russia’s annexation of Crimea represents a struggle between views about the relevant theoretical framework with which to examine Russian behavior, including ontological perspectives and emphasizes the examination of Russia’s – and to a lesser extent on Ukraine’s – sense of ontological security,³ which is carried out through selective activation and deactivation by both Russian and Ukrainian elites of their respective views on their countries’ biographic narratives.⁴ These narratives either rupture or consolidate the sense of biographic continuity⁵ of these two states through the “politicization of history” (Judah 2015, 66). This conflict, therefore, is not about history *per se*, but, rather, its selective interpretations by political actors to advance their own agendas. The standoff in Ukraine extends beyond military and economic disputes. It has been fought in the minds of people, where some beliefs are activated, used, and deepened, while others are ignored as inconvenient. In other words, what one believes about today depends upon what one believes about the past. Hence, without the embedded and routinized beliefs held by both Russians and Ukrainians, this conflict could not be pursued.⁶

Chapter 6, “The role of energy in Russian foreign policy” by Arsen Gasparyan, examines new energy opportunities (defined here as crude oil, refined products and natural gas), which provide effective ways to advance energy superpowers’ foreign policy objectives. Oil and natural gas are capable of providing producer states with internal order and external influence and are, thus, a source of relative power. This research examines how energy shapes the Kremlin’s foreign policy with a diachronic selection of the most important developments. It covers the period from 2000 until the present to demonstrate how widely Russian national security and diplomacy are affected by energy concerns.

In the second section of the book, Rajan Menon and William Ruger, in Chapter 7, and Charles Ziegler, in Chapter 8, respectively, assess “The Russian response to U.S. policies.” Menon and Ruger are concerned especially with “NATO, U.S. grand strategy and the Russian response,” while Ziegler focuses somewhat more narrowly on “The Russian response to U.S. sanctions.” As the former two point out, NATO was indispensable to containing the Soviet Union. But the collapse of the latter and the end of the Cold War did not lead to the dissolution of NATO. Instead, the alliance expanded from 16 members at its Cold War peak to 29 in 2020. The process began in 1990 when a unified Germany joined its ranks. Thereafter, the alliance expanded eastward, in stages, toward Russia’s borders. NATO expansion was not the sole reason for the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations; but it contributed significantly to that outcome. Champions of NATO expansion in the U.S. insisted that it was essential to maintaining

peace in Europe and promoting democracy in East-Central Europe, never mind the risks involved in guaranteeing the security of states adjacent to Russia's borders and Russian leaders' vociferous opposition to NATO expansion from the outset.

NATO enlargement cannot, however, be understood by focusing solely on Russia, or even on all of Europe. This chapter contends that the alliance's expansion reflects the continuing American commitment to global primacy, which, in part, is ensured by perpetuating Europe's dependence on the United States for an elemental need: security.

While Menon and Ruger emphasize NATO expansion as a major factor in U.S.–Russian relations, Charles Ziegler examines the place of economic coercion as the tool of choice in U.S. relations with Russia. The United States has utilized a broad range of targeted economic sanctions against Russia, starting with the Magnitsky Act of 2012. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russian covert support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, the United States and the European Union significantly expanded sanctions against Russian individuals and companies. These sanctions have impacted the Russian economy and contributed to a significant deterioration in what was already a troubled relationship between Russia and the United States. Yet, there is a general consensus that sanctions have had little, if any, impact in reversing Russia's actions in Ukraine or stemming human rights abuses. The effectiveness of sanctions is limited when target states are large and powerful, or when members of multilateral sanctions regimes have incentives to defect. Domestically, sanctions have led to a securitization of Russian foreign economic relations and import substitution measures to insulate the economy and protect the country's sovereignty and independence. Internationally, Russia is seeking out non-Western sources of trade and investment. This chapter assesses the international dimension of Russia's response to Western sanctions. After detailing the major sanctions regimes imposed by the United States on Russia, this study examines measures the Kremlin has adopted to undermine coordinated action between the United States and its European allies and attempted to minimize the impact of Western sanctions by reorienting trade and investment eastward, in the form of Moscow's pivot toward the Pacific region. The final section of the paper evaluates the long-term implications of resistance to sanctions regimes for U.S.–Russia relations and U.S. global economic hegemony.

Part III of the book, "Russian policy in the developing world," consists of Chapter 9 by Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova on "A comparison of Soviet and Russian foreign policy: ontological security and policy toward Africa" and Chapter 10 by Nuray Ibryamova on "Russia's expanding role in the eastern mediterranean opportunities and challenges." The first of these chapters, by Kanet and Moulioukova, seeks to analyze and compare the causes of Russia's engagement in Africa during the Soviet period and also under the Putin administration. The authors have two major objectives. The first is to study differences and similarities of Russia's engagement on the African continent during Soviet and post-Soviet years, while the second goal

of this research is to deepen our understanding of identity politics in alliance building. In particular, the chapter seeks to contribute to the literature on ontological security as a theoretical framework and to analyze the convergence of ontological narratives, in particular opposition to the West, as a basis for alliance building between Russia and African nations. The chapter is divided into three parts. It starts with a discussion of ontological security and its importance in international relations and alliance building. It then proceeds to analyze Soviet engagement on the continent during the Brezhnev era, when balancing the United States was a dominant concern. In the third part, the authors present their analysis of the current objectives that the Russian leadership has in Africa. In addition to geopolitical and business interests, the Kremlin utilizes its projection of power in the Global South as part of a great power discourse, an important part of the Russian biographic narrative, which is a tool to consolidate its legitimacy domestically.

In Chapter 10, Nuray Ibryamova examines Russia's enhanced presence in the Eastern Mediterranean region, with a focus on its growing military and diplomatic presence, in parallel with its continued participation in energy markets and exploration efforts. It argues that these activities have been essential to Russian efforts to expand its power in this strategically important region while simultaneously undermining the influence of the United States and Europe at a time when the West has been either reluctant to exercise leadership or consistent engagement. The chapter briefly discusses Russia's role in a number of conflicts in the area, including those in Syria and Libya, as well as its relations with other key countries in the region, such as Turkey and Egypt. Russia's standing as a regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean is considerably stronger compared to that even a decade ago, and can be seen as a stepping stone toward further expansion into the Sahel and Asia. Russia has achieved this regional power status through active diplomacy, military presence and activism on energy markets and explorations.

The eleventh and final chapter of the book, "The new great game: ontological factors in Western and rising powers competition in Venezuela," by Dina Moulioukova, with Karina Brennan, traces the evolving role of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean region and its implications for the West. Following its intervention in the Syrian civil war, which allowed Russia to become an important power in the region, Moscow has continued to expand its growing strategic ties with various regional actors. The discovery of hydrocarbons in the Eastern Mediterranean has further complicated the existing regional security dynamics. The natural gas pipeline, involving Greece, Cyprus and Israel, and backed by the United States, has the potential to challenge Russia's dominant position as a gas supplier to the European market. Russia's participation in various energy exploration projects has further intensified its role as a security actor, and a possible counterweight to the West in the region.

In a concluding section, the co-editors, Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova, "pull together" the main threads of the argument(s) presented in the prior chapters.

Notes

- 1 For discussions of this process, see Kozyrev (2019) and Kanet (2019, 2020). Robert Kagan (2018) treats the expansion of the Western liberal order during the cold war and the failure of the principles associated with that order to be established in post-communist Russia as the primary reason for the renewed confrontation between Russia and the West. President Emmanuel Macron of France has maintained that Western policies are likely the most important factor to explain the deterioration of Russian relations with the West. Rajan Menon and William Ruger (2020) develop this argument more fully, while Hannes Adomeit (2020) presents a persuasive critique of this view. See, also, Loftus (2021) for an assessment of the factors driving Russian policy in recent years.
- 2 See Kanet (2010) for a discussion of NATO expansion.
- 3 Giddens (1991) defines ontological security “as a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual.”
- 4 The biographic narrative is what Giddens refers to as the “narrative of the self”: the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others (Giddens 1991, 243)
- 5 Biographic continuity is a consistency and resilience of an agent’s biographic narrative (narrative of self). This consistency of self-narrative establishes a protective cocoon that guards over the self and its dealings with everyday reality and allows individuals to preserve “I” in shifting external contexts (Giddens 1991, 53). Biographic continuity, therefore, filters out many of the dangers, which, in principle, can threaten the integrity of the self.
- 6 Many analyses of Russian and Ukrainian policy emphasize geopolitical and neorealist theoretical perspectives on foreign policy, including that of Russia (Biersack and O’Lear 2014; Götz 2015, 2016a; Kuzio 2018; and Mearsheimer 2014). Others give much greater attention to ideology, psychological factors and issues of identity (Bukkvoll 2016; Hansen 2016; Kuzio 2018; Moulioukova 2017; Teper 2016). For an assessment of three questions about the sources and purposes of Russian policy that differ significantly from these broad theoretical approaches, see Götz (2016b). Götz asks whether Russian policy is mainly revisionist (with identity concerns a central factor); or, rather, is it a result of Western incursion into Russian “space” and, thus, a response to Russia’s sense of victimhood; or, finally, is Russia making trouble abroad in order to facilitate support and control at home as the political system becomes more authoritarian. Perhaps the broadest and most comprehensive brief introduction to the myriad approaches to the analysis of Russian foreign policy can be found in Forsberg and Pursiainen (2017).

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Part I

**Sources and tools of Russian
foreign policy**



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1 Russia's self-image as a great power¹

Dina Moulioukova with Roger E. Kanet

It would be naïve to attempt a comprehensive analysis of Russian identity in one short chapter, given that Russian identity is complex, multidimensional and broad. Identity is not a static phenomenon, but is rather in a continual process of formation and contestation. Yet, despite its manifold nature with regard to nation-states, there does seem to be a consensus on certain narratives that dominate a country's biographical discourse. One of them, in the case of Russia, is its self-perception as a great power (Adomeit 1995; Hopf 2002; Kanet 2007; Neumann 2008; Mankoff 2009). This self-perception as a great power – an important status position for the country – is one of the fundamental aspects of Russia's identity and its sense of ontological security. Indeed, the great power narrative ties together ontological² and physical security in the country's history. Historically, Russia's identity and sense of ontological security were constructed in response to its physical security needs. With time, repeated use of this biographical narrative of great power was embedded into Russia's sense of identity.

This unconscious ontological awareness on the part of Russian leaders made addressing physical security needs contingent upon the continuity of the country's biographical narrative of being a great power. Such a dependency constitutes an "ontological trap" that, at times, dictates Russia's foreign policy choices and threatens its physical security. For example, as Stephen Kotkin (2016) notes, Putin's foreign policy stance is less a reaction to external pressures and more a recurrent pattern driven by internal factors – embedded routines of the country's ontological security.

There are two important aspects of the construction of an agent's ontological security. First are the experiences that influence the formation of the agent's ontological awareness during its formative years. Second is the degree of routinization of these experiences. With time, this ontological awareness becomes further embedded through routine and practice that create predictability and allow agents to avoid anxiety about the unknown. The more routinized these experiences, the more embedded they become in the agent's ontological security and, thus, agents apply them less consciously when making decisions. Therefore, the experiences of the emerging Russian state in defending its physical security needs and projecting a position of

power created a basis for its ontological self-awareness as a strong power capable of projecting influence (great power). In addition, in order to become the basis of the country's ontological security, these experiences had to be embedded through habitual use.

Such routinization is subjective and prone to social construction. What is particularly important is that such social construction and routinization are determined by whoever serves as the custodian of the collective memory of a polity. Since memory is highly selective, the custodian determines what experiences should be further routinized (Prizel 1998). The custodian, therefore, has the ability and the power either to deepen the use of ontological practices or to erode them through disuse (Ledoux 2003; Burton 2009).

In order to demonstrate how Russia has navigated its foreign policy through an ontological security lens, several historical conditions must be analyzed. Thus, we shall proceed through a particular set of explorations. At the beginning is an overview of the importance that geography has historically played in determining the nature of Russia's physical security threats, both economic and geopolitical. Following that is an analysis of how Russia's response to these threats has affected the construction of its ontological security in three distinct and interconnected ways. First, Russia's ontological beliefs emerged in a consolidated state, personified by a strong leader as a guarantor of physical security and power status. This belief is important within the context of the historically communal nature of Russian society. Second, Russia's imperial identity has been shaped by physical security threats and the ways that they connect to Russia's power status. Unlike other empires, imperial expansion in Russia was taking place at the time of its emergence as a consolidated state. Imperial identity, therefore, is deeply engrained in the sense of Russia's ontological security. Third, the West plays a significant role in the content of Russia's ontological awareness as a great power.

Russia as a great power

Different analysts note that Russia's perception of itself as a great power is one of the crucial elements of its identity (Adomeit 1995; Neumann 2008; Thorun 2009). Among many possible narratives, one has been prevalent among Russia's leadership: discourse on great power status. Despite the fact that sources of greatness and their implications have changed significantly from civil and historical to geopolitical and economic, the discourse itself has remained consistent for the most part. Hopf (2002) notes the continuity of the great power discourse that survived not only the historical evolution of the country but also its ideological shift from the U.S.S.R. to Russia. In 1955, while the former Soviet Union considered itself to be a great power during the Cold War, it seemed to feel the need to reassure other states that, despite being a great power, it was not a traditional one ideologically. As Soviet Foreign Minister Semenov responded to the concerns of Egypt regarding its close relations with the U.S.S.R., "Egypt can be certain that the

Soviet Union isn't a crocodile which can suddenly unleash its jaws and gobble up Egypt" (cited in Hopf 2002, 200). In 1999, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this differentiation from other great powers was not at the top of the country's agenda. The great power discourse continued, however, maintaining its dominant position despite the country's ideological shift (Hopf 2002, 157).

Russia continued its great power discourse despite economic and political challenges after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1996, when the government's approval ratings were in single digits, Evgeny Primakov, as Russia's new Minister of Foreign Affairs, saw his primary role as strengthening the effort "to protect Russia's national interest" as a great power and having a policy that reflected this status (Primakov 1996). Despite their vocal disagreements on what it meant for Russia to be great, they concurred that it was "doomed to be a great power" by virtue of being Russia (Kozyrev 1994, p. 62).

While great power status is important for both Russia and the West, it seems that the two entities understand it differently. Some Russian scholars emphasize the perceptions of the Western states. For example, Krashennikova (2007) argues that the status misunderstandings and gaps between Russia and the West stem predominantly from systemic misinterpretations by the West of conditions in Russia. She goes on to claim that Western depictions are so distorted that Russians hardly recognize their country from the accounts presented in the West.

Other scholars center their arguments on perceptual inconsistencies of both agents. Forsberg (2014), for example, suggests that, conceptually, both actors have different understandings of what it means to be a great power. He attributes issues between Russia and the West to the gaps in perceptions of the factors that contribute to Russia's status. Therefore, while Russians consider some aspects of their country's identity to be status-enhancing, Western analysts consider them to be status-diminishing. Russia's great power status is tied to a variety of objective factors with an emphasis on geographic location (Leichtova 2014). Russia is the *largest country in the world*, and stretches over two continents. It is understood that security threats exist in border areas, as well as to Russia's political and economic interests. Russia's identity as a great power is, thus, closely connected with the Russian state geographically and geopolitically.

Along with Leichtova, Richard Pipes (1995)³ considers geography to be one of the crucial factors in the construction of Russia's perception of itself and the world around it, forming part of the country's ontological awareness. He ties this ontological awareness to the nature of Russia's geographically determined physical security, both economically and geopolitically. In the Realist School of international relations, great power status is closely linked to a state's ability to withstand threats and to project power. For Russia, the nature of physical threats has historically called for the consolidation of power into a strong centralized state represented by a strong leader capable of withstanding threats

and projecting power. In addition, geographically determined geopolitical influences from Asia further contributed to the establishment of a strong patrimonial state in Russia. While physical security threats prompted the ontological need for a strong leader, the communal nature of Russian society allowed it to embed further and to routinize this belief. The need for a strong leader in Russia, therefore, demands a guarantor of a strong state and great power status. The leader ensures external physical security to its citizens, while exercising unlimited domestic power. There is a continuity of this belief throughout Russian history. The political regime established in Russia between the 12th and 17th centuries, with certain modifications, has survived to the present day (Pipes 1995; Trenin 2002; Mankoff 2009; Tsygankov 2014). This regime, characterized by a strong, consolidated state, is therefore embedded in the notion of Russian identity. In pre-revolutionary times, the strong state manifested itself in Russia through an autocratic monarchy. In Soviet times, it was replaced by an equally strong Single Party state with a strong monopoly of power. In contemporary Russia, this notion has been constructed into a unique definition of sovereign democracy that, according to Andrei Tsygankov (2014), reflects the distinct nature of Russia's biographical continuity.

Another historically embedded characteristic of Russian authority is the network nature of its state. Conceptualized as a means of less formal interaction, networks, in general, link individuals and groups that share similar interests and allegiances. In Russia, the members of the networks do not operate from the outside, as could happen in the case of other countries' networks, but rather hold high-ranking positions within the state and are integral to it (Kononenko 2011, p. 6). Historically networks permeated almost all areas of policy in Russia. Currently, they influence and shape the relations between the federal center and the regions, foreign policy and the military. As a result, these allegiances cut across bureaucratic structures and defunct institutions, defining the current state of the country (Kononenko 2011). Hence, the policy-making rhetoric of a "strong state" and "national interest" is infused with "special interests" of the state-private actors.

In its present manifestation, the "*sistema*," as the current political regime is referred to by noted Russian political analyst Gleb Pavlovsky (2016), with its complex practice of decision-making and power management, comprises one of the core elements of the country's ontological security. The "*sistema*," for Pavlovsky, combines the idea that the state enjoys unlimited access to all national resources, both public and private, and that it turns people into operating resources in a breach of their rights. It is a "deep seated facet of Russian culture that goes beyond politics and ideology" and could persist long after the end of Putin's rule (Pavlovsky 2016, 14).

Its establishment in Russia can be traced to the country's response to economic security needs. Russia's geographic location compelled people who inhabited it to operate within a very narrow band of options. A harsh climate and the unequal distribution of rainfall are the major reasons why Russia has averaged one bad harvest out of every three with very low yields.

In addition, the highly unproductive and wasteful nature of Russian agriculture pushed the country toward constant agricultural expansion in the search for virgin lands. By placing more land under cultivation, Russia sought to practice extensive rather than intensive agriculture. Since the rich, desirable soil was in the steppes under the control of Turkic and Mongol tribes, the constant conflicts with these tribes often resulted from Russian colonists' pressure to secure physical survival. Colonization, therefore, became a fundamental feature of the Russian state, and has been considered by some Russian philosophers and historians to be its very essence. As noted by Kliuchevskii (1937) in *The History of Russia*, Russian history is the story of a country "which colonized itself." This process continued for 400 years, carrying the Russian population outward from the forest zone, mostly toward the east and south, and causing it to expand into areas inhabited by nations of other races and cultures.

A military organization under centralized rule became a necessity for carrying out expansionist policies crucial to Russia's economic survival (Pipes 1995, 20). Alexander Herzen, a well-known Russian populist, considered the strong state essential to overcoming Russia's economic challenges. However, Russia faced a dilemma: while its economic security required it to organize in a highly efficient manner, its economic capability made it challenging to do so. Pipes argues that the solution for the emerging Russian state was in the consolidation of power and the creation of a patrimonial regime personified by a strong autocratic leader (Pipes 1995, 21). While Russia's economic weakness could explain the country's reliance on autocracy, the nature of geopolitical threats to Russia made this reliance entirely rational (Tsygankov 2014).

Another contributing factor to the ontological need for a strong state, represented by a strong leader in Russia, is its geopolitical area. In the geographic sense, Russia lacks any defined boundaries that would separate it from its neighbors, granting it little protection from its enemies (Trenin 2002). In the East, the emerging Russian state was exposed to the advanced Asian empire of the Golden Horde that dominated the territories of the Slavic tribes for over two centuries. In modern times, most of the invasions that the country experienced came from the West, such as from Poland and Sweden. This had important consequences for a country that was very vulnerable at the times of its weakness, and unstoppable at the times of its strength (Trenin 2002). Such vulnerabilities required an authority capable of consolidating power and mobilizing resources to withstand these geopolitical threats. In other words, physical security threats shaped in Russia an ontological need for a strong leader capable of mobilization. This ontological necessity has survived through the centuries and is a final driver of current foreign policy in Russia. Stephen Kotkin (2016) notes that a strong state, willing and capable to act aggressively in its own interests is still considered to be the only guarantor of Russia's security.

This capacity for mobilization became a distinctive feature of autocratic rule in Russia, although it came with a price. Veljko Vujačić (2015) suggests

that Russian rulers established and embedded an intimate connection between external protection and expansion and internal subjugation. In other words, external threats to physical security initially called for personal sacrifice and, with time, this condition was used as a pretense to subordinate all strata of society to the patrimonial ruler. The idea of linking external threats to internal subjugation became embedded in the formative stages of Russian ontological security, beginning with the rule of Ivan the Great and his grandson Ivan IV, known as the founders of the Russian state. Unlimited political power allowed Russian rulers not only to defeat the weakened Mongol empire that had ruled the region for centuries but also to establish their sovereignty over other Slavic tribes (Tsygankov 2014). Such consolidation was possible because of the unlimited political authority and “divinity” of the ruler who gained independence from the church.

The mobilization of power in the face of physical threat has been routinized and embedded in Russian ontological security throughout the centuries by many rulers, such as Peter the Great and Joseph Stalin. Despite ruling at vastly different times, they both used consolidation of the state as a way to progress, while addressing external threats, real or perceived. Stalin’s rule could be characterized as one of terror against people considered disloyal to the regime, and it forced a modernization that cost millions of lives. Although extreme, his methods were a continuation of Russia’s ontologically accepted pattern. This pattern, characterized by a strong state and personified by a strong leader capable of mobilization in the face of external threats, often found the necessary support from citizens. This support continues to the present day. According to a recent poll by the Levada Center (2015), conducted at the end of 2015, there are twice as many people in Russia who view Stalin in a positive rather than a negative light, despite his historical record.

Another reason that Russians perceive a strong leader as an important element of great power status stems from the country’s Eastern history. Many analysts of Russia underline the profound effect that this Eastern influence played in Russia’s treatment of authority (Vernadsky 1963; Gumilëv 1990) in history. For example, they note that Mongol rule during the establishment of the Russian state in the 13th century could be considered an extremely important “shattering external event” (Pipes 1995, 54). Mongol Khans, therefore, became Russia’s first undisputed sovereigns. The Asian style of governance to which the formative Russian state was exposed had a profound effect on the country’s ontological security. Russia acknowledged the Mongols’ successful governance of their vast empire by incorporating their political and administrative institutions under Mongol (Turkic) names, such as *kazna*, or treasury. Mongol khans were absolute masters of Russia’s fate for more than two centuries. Under Mongol rule, Russian princes learned the mode of operation of absolute monarchy, of “authority with which one cannot enter into agreements but must unconditionally obey” (Sergeevich 1909, 34). More importantly, though, it was

under Mongol rule that Russians learned a concept of politics which limited the functions of the state to the collection of tribute (taxes), maintenance of order and preservation of security, but was “entirely devoid of any sense of responsibility for public well-being” (Pipes 1995, 75). Cherniavsky (1959) argued that the emancipation of Moscow’s princes from Mongol tutelage was not the liberation of Russia, but rather “a change of dynasty.” In this regard, the image of the khan was probably the most prominent in the idea of the Russian ruler “as a conqueror of Russia and its people, responsible to no one” (Cherniavsky 1959, 65–74). As a result of Mongol rule, Russia blended native and Mongol elements in a peculiar type of a political authority, the patrimonial state, that intensified once the Golden Horde loosened its grip (Pipes 1995, 57).

As we have already seen, Richard Pipes’s arguments help in understanding the uniqueness of the Russian state. He sees the distinctiveness of Russia’s political regime to the historical relationship between property and political power in the country. For Pipes, this is the main distinction that separates Western from non-Western regimes. For Western regimes, private property exists as a realm over which public authority normally exercises no jurisdiction. This sentiment developed as a result of an evolution of law and institutions that began in ancient Rome. During that time, the process of authority exercised as sovereignty and authority exercised as ownership split. Pipes’s main argument is that such separation in Russia occurred late in its history and was very imperfect (Pipes 1974, xxii).

Pipes argues further that Russia can be referred to as a patrimonial state, defined as a variant of personal authority, heavily based on tradition, but also claiming full emphasis on personal power (Weber, Henderson, and Parsons 1947). One of the characteristics of a patrimonial state is the fact that the economic element absorbs the political. Hence, the rights of sovereignty and those of ownership blend and become almost indistinguishable. This encourages the sovereign to exercise political power in the same manner as he/she uses economic power. In other words, the essential quality of Russian politics is its “proprietary” nature; that is, those who happen to be in power exercise their political authority in the same manner as economic ownership. One example of a patrimonial state, such as “sultanism,” is that those in authority maintain complete ownership of land and mastery over the people who reside on it. In patrimonial states, therefore, political authority is an extension of the right of ownership of the sovereign that extends both to the realm and its proprietors. There exist no formal limitations on political authority, and no individual liberties or rule of law.

The existing communal nature of Russian society has provided favorable conditions for further embedding the ontological need for a strong leader. A challenging climate made peasants rely on one another and discouraged individual farming. The collective nature of Russian labor influenced the structure of the peasant family and the village (Pipes 1995). As a result, the basic social unit of the ancient Slavs was a tribal community, related by

blood, which worked together as a team. With time, this community dissolved, giving way to an organization based on joint ownership of land, called a *mir* or *obshchina*.

According to Russian romantic nationalists, the “Slavophiles,” this peasant commune was a manifestation of the Russian people historically lacking the individualistic “bourgeois” impulses that are characteristic of the West. In Russia, the pride of an individual was traditionally derived from the pride of the group to which the individual belonged (Leichtova 2014, 28). Therefore, the need for individual rights in achieving self-fulfillment was long ignored and considered unimportant (Prizel 1998). Moreover, both Konstantin Aksakov and Mikhail Bakunin, the founders of Russian anarchism, concurred in considering the Russian people fundamentally apolitical (Vujačić 2015). Their deeply rooted religious beliefs allowed them to accept Christian postulates to “render unto Caesar the things that were Caesar’s” (Aksakov 1966, 230–252). The people, therefore, left politics and matters of external security to the state. These beliefs in the prevalence of communal needs over individual ones have been historically routinized and embedded in Russia’s ontological security. A November 2014 survey by Russia’s independent polling center, Levada Center (2014), confirmed this argument. In their answers to the question “in which country would you rather live: a country with social equality or a country where you have the opportunity to prove yourself and attain a more successful life?” an overwhelming majority of Russians (61% vs. 36%) chose the first option. Interestingly, these answers have remained consistent in the most recent poll in April 2020 when “A majority (65%) said they do not understand the essence of the proposed reforms” that were supposedly meant to modify the Russian political system in a more centralized direction (Levada Center 2020).

These communal tendencies and entrustment of political life to the state and its leader have been routinized in Russian perceptions of authority throughout the centuries. It has been historically embedded in ontological security to perceive a strong state as a guarantor of physical security and political stability. Many Russians, therefore, are in no hurry to abandon autocracy in favor of the competitive system of the West. Given Russia’s historical insecurities and economic weaknesses, this reliance is entirely rational (Tsygankov 2016, 6). Some analysts argue that the essence of Russian history has been in the subjugation of society to the ever-mightier state, personified by its leader – one of the pillars of Russia’s ontological security (Vujačić 2015, 257).

In conclusion, the continuity of the ontological narrative of Russia as a strong state could be seen in the current style of leadership under President Putin. The Russian president gained popular support by “rescuing” an ontologically embedded notion of Russia as a strong state. This is the notion that has been routinized throughout the country’s history as its “highest value” (Kotkin 2016, 8). The resurrection of this ontological continuity was especially important, given the “weakness of the state” that marked Yeltsin’s

presidency. This rupture in biographic continuity was one of the reasons Boris Yeltsin's approval ratings dropped to single digits in 1999 (Lipman 2016, 39). However, despite its ontological importance, the "strong state" narrative both enables and restrains the current regime. Analysts note that there is fear and a lack of certainty regarding the future of the country when Putin is gone. The Kremlin has "no clue" what they will do in their leader's absence (Pavlovsky 2016, 17).

Russia as an empire

Another aspect in Russia's ontological security lies in its ability to project power and address physical security needs through imperial expansion. As in the case of the strong state personified by a great leader, the pursuit of a Russian empire is closely tied to its physical space and history. In 2003, Putin noted that a country like Russia "was invariably confronted with the threat of disintegration...during all of its time of weakness". He also said that Russia "can survive and develop within the existing borders if it stays as a great power" (Putin 2003). As a result, there is a connection between an imperial geographic domain and Russian self-perception as a great power, where territorial vastness serves as evidence of moral magnitude and power (Leichtova 2014). The Russian philosopher Konstantin Leontiev (cited in Trenin 2002, 29) noted the almost fatalistic perception of Russia's expansionism when he wrote that Russia was "doomed to grow, even despite itself."

Both the economic and geopolitical grounds for Russia's expansionist policies have merged in its imperial conquest. In addressing economic threats, the overlap between imperial expansion and peasant colonization was virtually indistinguishable, where the "land hungry peasantry moved into new territories that sometimes predated and sometimes followed the ever-new frontiers of the state, blurred the boundary between colonization and imperial expansion" (Raeff 1971, 22–43). The country's expansionism, therefore, was a way to ensure that Russia's peasants received access to richer soil and to provide the means necessary for the survival of the Russian population.

Much as in the consolidation of power in a strong state discussed earlier, imperial expansion happened as a response to Russia's physical threats. This territorial expansion in Russia was the result of challenges to its security and physical survival (Trenin 2002, 33). The decision to become an empire was a reaction by the Russian state to its almost constant state of war, since Russia "was invaded more often and with more force than any other early modern empire" (Tsygankov 2012, 23). Thus, the logic of competition driven by the motive to survive made Russia wage war and forced it to expand its territory. Russians either had to perish or address their adversaries through force and then develop the seized lands to their advantage. The strengthening of borders, therefore, became the ground for colonization. Moreover, Russian security was inclined to move outward in the spirit of preempting external attacks.

Vernadsky (1963) attributed the emergence of imperial Russia to its interactions with Eastern tribes, specifically the Mongols. Together with Vernadsky, Kliuchevskii (1937) considered the colonization of the Eurasian plain and the rise of the Principality of Moscow as the most consequential events in Russian imperial history. Beginning with the consolidation of the state of Moscow under Ivan Grozny, Russia managed to expand at the rate of approximately 50 miles a day for hundreds of years, eventually covering one-sixth of the earth's landmass (Kotkin 2016, 2).

The main peculiarity of Russian imperial expansion was not only in its magnitude. Pipes (1996) argues that, ontologically, the Russian Empire differs considerably from other empires that existed in the past. While in the case of other Western empires, such as the Roman, British and Spanish, imperial expansion happened sequentially after the rise of the national state, but in the case of Russia, it happened concurrently and not in sequence (Pipes 1996). Hence, in Russia, the ontological consciousness of an empire came at the same time as the idea of a nation.

The early imperial expansion to the east started in the 16th century when Ivan the Terrible captured the Tatar cities of Kazan in 1552, and a few years later in 1556, Astrakhan, and incorporated the large number of people who neither shared the same religion nor spoke the same language as the Russians. This conquest took place only a few decades after Russia completed its own consolidation as a state through the gathering of the Russian lands. This process was a conscious drive by Moscow to annex neighboring territories. Within 200 years, Moscow's royalty increased its geographic domain by annexation through armed force or acquiring in other ways the territories of divided Slavic principalities. This process was completed with the absorption of Pskov in 1510 and Ryazan in 1521. Moscow, therefore, was still undergoing the process of domestic consolidation and, at the same time, inherited the imperial domain of two khanates a few decades later. Its imperial conquest, therefore, took place at the same time as its consolidation of the Russian state and the formation of its ontological awareness. As a result, the very idea of the imperial domain for Russia, unlike that of other states, is closely tied to its very identity as a state and its ontological awareness. This point is succinctly captured by Hosking in one of his review articles: "Britain had an empire, but Russia was an empire and perhaps still is" (Hosking 1995, 27). The campaigns of conquering Kazan and Astrakhan began Russia's expansion into Siberia, annexing a large Muslim population and turning Russia into a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state. This resulted in the formation of an imperial identity in Russia, concurrently with its national individuality.

Russia's drive to acquire new territories and new peoples and the constant process of defining and building an empire left the establishment of Russia as a state and a nation in a condition of perpetual change, eventually leading to a sense of incompleteness. As a result, the multitude of different ethnic groups, with distinct languages, cultural traditions, and religious beliefs that

were annexed to Russia, because of its expansionist aspirations, further complicated the definition of Russian identity.

The importance of imperial identity for the country's ontological security can explain Russia's extreme sensitivity to any issues related to its geographic influence, as these issues seem to attack its very core as a state. Such imperial beliefs have been further embedded and framed into deliberate discursive constructions by Russian emperors, such as Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. Peter considered imperial discourse to be targeted primarily at Russia's outside neighbors, namely the West. He attempted to assert Russia's position in the region. Conversely, Catherine the Great emphasized the size of Russia as a powerful empire and a tool for securing the safety and well-being of its citizens and stability in international relations (Leichtova 2014).

These crucial events of expanding and consolidating Russian territory, driven by Russia's physical security needs, had a profound impact on its ontological security. The external imperial expansion of the country was accompanied by a domestic consolidation of power that became characteristic of the Russian state, what Vujačić terms "a double triumph...over his own people and ethnically and religiously alien people – the leitmotif of imperial Russian history" (2015, 100). The transformation of Russia into an empire was, therefore, from the very beginning, closely connected to the subordination of all social strata to the patrimonial ruler.

Despite such subordination, imperial ontological awareness has been deeply rooted among the Russian population. Trenin (2002), in his book *The End of Eurasia*, argues for the centrality among Russians of the country's ontological awareness as a great power. In a poll of Moscow high school students, conducted when Putin became president in 1999, over 50% of the respondents said they favored the restoration of the Russian Empire within its Soviet-time or pre-revolutionary borders. The desire for territorial revanchism among Russian youth is alarming and could be easily explained. For many Russians, the former U.S.S.R. was not just an empire, but a state with a geographic magnitude that "was feared and therefore respected," noting the direct ontological connection between space and power in Russian identity (Trenin 2002, 27).

Ontological perceptions of Russian identity are not static, however. They are subject to constant change and reiteration. The role that physical space plays in the way Russians perceive its superpower status has fluctuated, as well. In answering the question, "What makes a country a superpower?" the size of the country was almost as important for Russians as respect and authority in the world and quadrupled in importance since 1999, coming ahead of civil rights as a chief goal (Levada Center 2014).

The role of the West⁴

Relations with the West also play an important role in embedding the content of great power discourse in Russian ontological security. Geographic

proximity to the European nations and their economic and geopolitical significance has been influencing Russia's ontological awareness for centuries in a number of different ways. First, the West has played an important role in determining the content of Russian identity. The West has historically served as Russia's Other, as a measure of determining and comparing Russia's uniqueness (Leichtova 2014, 28).

Russian and Western thought and culture seem to differ from each other in fundamental ways. Such a difference has been historically embedded through the work of Russian philosophers, historians and thinkers such as Tolstoy (1828–1910), Kireevskiy (1806–1856), Leontiev (1831–1891) and others. Unlike Western culture, Russian culture is characterized by the “predominance of synthesis over analysis, idealism over pragmatism, imagery over logic, intuition over reason, the shared over private” (Surkov 2006). Hence, the difference between Russian and Western perceptions seems to be irreconcilable on a fundamental level.

Moreover, the debate over the West's influence on Russian identity among Westernizers, Slavophiles and Eurasianists has been at the very core of the country's biographical narrative. Westernizers put an emphasis on Russia's similarity with the West and view the West as the most viable and progressive civilization in the world (“Westernizers” 2013). The emergence of this school can be traced back to Peter the Great's reforms. However, some authors argue that Russia's deep cultural connection to the West began from the time it adopted Orthodox Christianity and became a student of the Byzantine faith (Tsygankov 2012, 3). Europe has always been Russia's “significant Other,” figuring prominently in domestic debates. The West created the context in which Russia's rulers defended their core values. Westernizers believe that Russia has always been an integral part of the Western cultural mainstream (Prizel 1998, 160). No single work outlines the views of the Westernizers. Although they held different opinions, their sociopolitical, philosophical and historical views included a number of common features. All of them opposed the autocracy and serfdom. They were committed to facilitating the development of a capitalist system in Russia; they criticized serfdom, devised plans for its abolition and argued for the advantages of hired labor.

As a school of thought, Slavophilism emerged in the 19th century in response to Westernism (Tuminez 2000, 63). Unlike Westernizers, Slavophiles saw Russia as a unique civilization that combines the virtues of the Orthodox faith, Slavic ethnicity and communal institutions. They believed in the Messianic nature of Russia that was called to heal by the power of its example, both the social divisions inside Russia and the spiritual wounds of Europe which was ravaged by revolution and war (Billington 2004, 13). Slavophiles saw all of human history as a struggle between spiritual and material forces. Broadly speaking, they argued that Russian identity and destiny lay in faith and family and in the spiritual institutions of rural Russia. Slavophiles supported autocracy as the legitimate expression of Russian political power, since it was

founded on mutual trust between the sovereign and its subjects. As a result of the defeat in the Crimean War in 1856 and the feeling of humiliation that the Russian elite felt because of what they viewed as the betrayal by the European powers, Panslavism emerged as an external projection of Slavophile ideas. Briefly, Panslavism advocated for unity among Slavs with an ideological and political center in Russia. Panslavs formulated their image in contrast to “the Other” collective West or greater European powers. Danilevskii (1869), whose book on Russia and Europe became a symbol of Panslavism, argued about Europe’s intrinsic enmity toward Russia in the context of the Crimean War. He argued that Europe’s position was not a product of tactical considerations, but rather a deeply rooted enmity of Roman Catholic European civilization that sought to dominate the rest of the world (including Slavs). Danilevskii compared different civilizations to “living organisms,” comparing the conflict between them to nature itself and thus inevitable. Besides Danilevskii, other well-known Russian thinkers, Herzen and Bakunin, saw the West as the embodiment of a rational and cold *Gesellschaft* in contrast to the organic *Gemeinschaft* of Russia. Their rejection was not rooted only in the resentment of West’s bourgeois path, but it was also rooted in the hope that Russia’s backward people could, with time, become a source of Russia’s superiority.

As is the case with Panslavism, Eurasianism or Civilizationism depicts Russian ontological awareness as different from that of the West. The essence of this movement was in its view of the uniqueness of Russia. Eurasianists considered Russia as more of a civilization with unique ontological awareness, rather than as a nation. Such uniqueness, they argued, is reflected in Russia’s geographic, linguistic and historical background (Savitskii 2003, 653–699). Their motto, articulated by Savitskii (2003), was based on comparing any nation with the uniqueness of an individual person. Therefore, the Russian nation does not have to aspire to be like others, but rather it has to be like itself, with its own sense of ontological awareness and biographic continuity. Eurasianists saw a strong concentration of centralized power in Russia as one of the important features of Russian identity. They argued that such a form of state construction was inherited by Russia from prior nomadic empires and, in Russia, everything is to be done in the name of the state, in particular, its ruler. Therefore, Eurasianists attribute great importance to statism and see in it the foundation of Russian history. In their view of the West Eurasianists are largely skeptical of its importance for the future of Russia. They have argued that, despite the West’s might in a political and cultural sense, Russia’s integration into Europe has always been followed by the sense of its inferiority. Russia was treated as a European periphery with a sense of disdain from Europe for its backwardness. This, lack of acceptance of Russia as an equal among Western European powers plays an important role in the construction of the Russian biographic narrative and the basis of the country’s ontological awareness.

To be a great power, it is not sufficient for a state’s leadership to think of themselves in terms of being great. The attribution of status occurs when other states in the system, especially other great powers or members of influential

clubs of powers, perceive the status seeker as a great power. Because of its proximity to powerful European states, their recognition of Russia's status was essential for the external validation of Russia's self-perception as a great power. Domestically, such recognition enhances collective self-esteem and consolidates the population's approval for developmental goals. Internationally, great power status infers influence over other states in the system and, therefore, can enhance the physical security of a state. The external projection of power to the Western states was arguably one of the major reasons for Peter the Great's imperial expansion. Historically, Europe was also influenced by Russia. However, there was hardly any recognition of Russia as an equal in the international system. Instead, Europeans viewed Russia as a backward, almost barbaric, society with a repressive political system. For much of Europe Russia was the antimodel, the antithesis of what an enlightened society should be, as noted by the Marquis de Custine:

If ever your sons should be discontented with France, try my recipe; tell them to go to Russia. It is a useful journey for every foreigner: whoever has well examined the country will be content to live somewhere else (cited in Stent 2007, 404).

Russia's self-referential axiom of seeing itself as a great power has been present in Russian identity politics for a very long time. The persistence of the theme, and its intensity in Russian identity politics, leads one to conclude that Russia's quest for great power status has not been a successful one. For Neumann (2008), success would mean that the great power narrative would have formed part of the political debate, rather than being its substance. Recognition of Russia's great power status had to be acknowledged by other great powers, which historically for Russia have been the European states. This lack of recognition arguably introduced ontological anxiety over its great power status in Russia's biographic narrative.

Another important aspect of the role the West plays for Russian ontological security is in the attachment to the conflict between Russia and the West. As noted previously, Mitzen and Roe emphasize the importance of the relational aspect in the construction of a state's ontological security. According to them, ontological security, embedded in established routines, provides a sense of predictability and the avoidance of anxiety in international relations. Therefore, the routines that states have established, both domestically and internationally, may drive them to engage repeatedly in a difficult conflict. In this instance, even routines that are dangerous for survival can create the sense of ontological security and help to make the decisions of security seekers who are attached to the conflict rationale (Roe 2000; Mitzen 2006, 341).

In his book, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin*, Andrei Tsygankov noted three distinct trajectories in Russia's relations with the West: cooperation, defensiveness and assertiveness. He underlined that

Russia's resorting to assertiveness has been embedded in the country's ontological security through the centuries (Tsygankov 2012, 262). Most of the military conflicts in which Russia has been involved historically have been with the country's Western neighbors (wars with Poland in the 17th century; Sweden in the 18th century; the Napoleonic War and the Crimean War in the 19th century; Germany in World War I and again in the Great Patriotic War; and the Cold War). These conflicting relations were further embedded after the end of Cold War. Western states have contributed to the deepening of disagreements (Trenin 2002; Kanet 2007; Mankoff 2009; Tsygankov 2012, and others). One of the reasons for this was the insistence by the West that it had defeated the former Soviet Union in the Cold War (Razyvayev 1992). Moreover, economic aid promised by the West was not delivered to Russia, because of the West's assessment that Russian progress in economic reform and performance was unsatisfactory. Internally, however, it was perceived in Russia that a former Great Power had been reduced to the humiliating level of begging the West for handouts and caving into International Monetary Fund policies.

This humiliation has been one of the leading themes in the reconstruction of current Russian identity within the context of the country's relations with the West. It has been supported by a dominant narrative of a deeply embedded mistrust of Russia on the part of the West. The West holds the image of Russia as inherently expansionist and imperialistic. This narrative found a forceful representation in the idea of "sovereign democracy" as a comprehensive ideology designed to strengthen socio-political cohesion inside the country. Its main idea is that democracy is perceptual and would reflect differently the needs of distinct states at different times. More importantly, these needs are rooted in each country's ontological awareness through historical legacies and geopolitical conditions, taking away the monopolization of democracy by the West.

Fleming Hansen argues that the current Russian biographical narrative discourse of great power consolidates the state around Russia's traditional values and norms. These are formed in the context of the country's opposition to the West (Hansen 2016, 359–375). While some of the discussion is politically engineered and skillfully manipulated, it is nevertheless rooted in embedded perceptions that Russians have. These historically routinized perceptions have become an important part of Russian identity, its vision of itself, and its vision of the world. Attachment to the conflict with the West, therefore, provides a feeling of familiarity and predictability for the Russian population. Ironically, as argued by ontological security, conflict with the West brings internal identity coherence and biographical continuity for the Russian population. In present-day Russia, these fears have been used by Russian elites to consolidate the power in the face of external pressures and economic challenges.

Despite the embeddedness of Russia's "othering" of the West after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Kremlin sought to rupture the continuity

of this ontological narrative. Then, a new Russian state led by President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev realized one of their essential goals of ending decades of Russian isolation from the West (Kanet and Birgerson 1997). The emphasis was on the desire for Russia to abandon its Messianic ideology and become a “normal power” in the West-constructed international system (Tsygankov 2016). As a result, there was a substantial rupture in Russian biographical continuity that manifested itself in attempts to decentralize the power of the Russian state, to abandon its messianic and imperial ideology and to replace it with the aspiration to become a “normal power.” Hence, the geopolitical focus shifted from the historical spheres of interest in Russia’s near abroad and countries of the Muslim and Asian world to Western international institutions and Western states, in particular, the United States and the European countries.

However, the enchantment with the West did not last long. Moreover, the change in the balance of power in the international system left the United States as the uncontested hegemon. A number of actions that were taken by the United States and other Western countries have prompted Moscow to complain that the West had the tendency to dictate its own terms in the international arena. The West invited Russia to join it, but left the door only half-open (Trenin 2006). Therefore, the project of Russian integration into Western institutions was still-born from its interception.

There are numerous examples of such flawed integration. In the case of NATO, while other former Warsaw Pact countries were being drawn into the expanding West, Russia was offered new arrangements, but was kept at arm’s length. Moreover, with time, NATO deployed its military forces close to Russian borders. When Georgia and Ukraine expressed their desire to join the organization, this substantially added to the sense of Russia’s strategic insecurity. Despite the change brought on by the end of the Cold War, NATO security structures remained impermeable, as they became further enlarged and deepened, and preempted Russia from becoming a full-fledged member of the security community (Sakwa 2015). Especially unsettling for Russia were soft power projects, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), initiated by the European Union in Russia’s near abroad (Akchurina and Della Sala 2018). The chain of color revolutions has been perceived in the Kremlin as a blunt and aggressive encroachment initiated by the United States on the country’s historic spheres of interest. That brought a unified sentiment of Western deceit in Russian society that was quite damaging to the image of the West. Hence, instead of rupturing, ontological awareness became further consolidated around the country’s biographic signifiers of opposition to the West.⁵

The break in biographical continuity

As mentioned earlier, biographical narratives of a state play a significant role in a state’s ontological security. These narratives consolidate people as a

group by providing a compelling story. Such biographical continuity provides a sense of stability and confronts existential anxiety that helps one function as a social actor (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 325). These stories structure the image of who we are, as well as the world around us (Hankiss 1981). Embedded biographical narratives are deeply connected with a state's ontological security needs.

Narratives are selectively activated by political actors (Subotić 2016, 1). These political actors strategically manipulate shared cognitive narrative frames for their own political ends. For example, when Putin stated in 2005 that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was “the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century,” he was referring to a profound rupture in the country's biographical continuity, both domestically and internationally (Putin 2005). At the same time, this narrative was to serve as a justification for Russia's aspiration to reestablish itself as a great power and to reassess its relations with the West. Putin's suggestion was widely accepted by the Russian population, which struggled to come up with a coherent identity after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In the post-Soviet period, there was an initial desire to rupture such continuity by drawing a sharp line between the Soviet past and the non-Soviet present. This trend exhausted itself by the middle of the 1990s (Oushakine 2007, 452). Such a shift was caused by a variety of factors, both of an endogenous and exogenous nature. Internationally, Russia was stripped of its superpower status and mistreated by the West that proclaimed its victory in the Cold War. Domestically the financial default of 1998, the Chechen War, and the overall lack of social stability brought escapist sentiments that evoked a reflective nostalgia for Soviet times. As noted by Svetlana Boym, “the past in contemporary Russia has turned into a kind of perfect or future imperfect (both are clear deviations from Russian grammar). There was a great confusion about what is to be commemorated and what is to be forgotten” (Boym 1995, 152).

In the 1990s, both in government and in overall society, there emerged a demand for the kind of past that would make one proud. It seemed as though restoring the biographical continuity of greatness would compensate for the unsatisfactory present. The country was torn by domestic conflict and a weakening state; increasingly, it needed a unifying idea to preserve its integrity. Thus, the state became actively involved in the shaping of Russia's collective memory (Gorbachev 2015). During Putin's time in office, the state began actively reviving the continuity of the country's biographical narrative of great power. The biggest change from the immediate post-Soviet period was the erosion of the ideological line that separated pre-Soviet and Soviet pasts. The Russian government, as a most influential memory custodian, took a deliberate role in restoring the continuity of great power discourse. Eventually the terms “continuity,” “stability” and “conservatism” replaced the word “modernization” in Russian official rhetoric. Modernization implies a leap to the future through reforming the past, while nostalgia

selectively idealizes the past and preserves the historical continuity (Gorbachev 2015, 184). In addition, nostalgia could be perceived in different ways. For example, Boym (1995) explains aspirations for great power status, turning to old ideas of *sobornost'* (communal values) advocated in Russia in the past. In contrast, Oushakine (2007) considers nostalgia for Soviet times to be a form of “aphasia” – turning to old ideas in the absence of new ones. In her study, Boym (1995) gives an example of a New Year’s Eve show, *Starye pesni o glavnom* (Old Songs about the Most Important Things). In the show, popular artists performed Soviet-era songs against the background of a Soviet film. For Oushakine (2007), this show is a vivid example of “aphasia,” a meaning that permeates Russian society where, in the absence of new system-creating concepts, society reuses the old ones.

Another project on Russian television, *Namedni* (The Other Day), became a hallmark of post-Soviet nostalgia. The television version showed the period from 1961 to 2003 and the books cover the years from 1946 to 2010. The idea of the project was to comprehend the history of the period through personal recollections. Despite *Namedni* author Leonid Parfenov’s efforts not to evoke nostalgic sentiment, it became an important part of the project where history is overshadowed by memory and its images of the past (Gorbachev 2015; “The other Day,” n.d.).

The nostalgic domain of the series ends in 1991. The dissolution of the Soviet Union marks a distinct border, “a point of transition” from happy past to unsatisfactory present, forming a ground for nostalgic sentiments (Abramov and Chistiakova 2012). The stories of the 1960s through the 1980s produce much more positive emotions than the stories of later times. They exhibit coherence, consistency and a sense of predictability that marks that period and evokes memories and values that are familiar and, for the most part, pleasant to the majority of the current generation in Russia. With the beginning of *Perestroika*, such coherence fractures with a kaleidoscope-like style of narration, marking the breaking of the system (Gorbachev 2015, 188; “The other Day,” n.d). Therefore, despite its aspiration to address collective memory in a reflective way, *Namedni* could be seen as a powerful tool in the state’s overall effort to reconstruct a “common identity” signifiers. It helps create a nostalgic myth for older generations and it creates a continuity of the narrative among different generations. If the program is watched by the whole family, youth can be initiated into the attractiveness of the Soviet myth. The main reason for the program’s success, therefore, is its capacity not only to satisfy the collective nostalgic demand but also to reconstruct socially the narrative continuity of the myth that unifies the nation.

In sum, we have examined Russia’s exceptional position in the global system, one that is adopted by the country’s current leadership. This exceptionalism plays an important role in the construction of a great power discourse for Russian ontological security. The discourse has been historically embedded and supports the country’s biographical continuity. Subjective and perceptual Russian great power discourse differs from that

in the West. Initially conceptualized as the response to the country's physical security needs, with continued use it became embedded and comprised a part of Russia's ontological security. However, its rupture caused a profound identity crisis for the Russian people and the state. In recent years, the country's political leadership has been skillfully manipulating the great power narrative by selectively reactivating, for their political ends, discourses on "Russia as a strong state," "Russia as an empire" and "Russia in opposition to the West."

In other articles and chapters, we examine the interplay of ontological security in Russia's current foreign policy in four cases: the place of ontological security in competition with other actors in Venezuela for gas and for political influence in Africa, as well as in the Russian annexation of Crimea and engagement in Syria.⁶ These cases seek to reflect the activation of predominant ontological trends under Putin's presidency. Despite their similarities, they occur within the context of distinct material capabilities for Moscow and have different global reaches. While the annexation of Crimea occurred in the country's "near abroad," the competition for Venezuelan energy and the conflict in Syria and involvement in Africa had a more global outlook. In particular, the Crimean case study analyzes the ontological grounds for Russian intervention. Ontological narratives activated during this standoff have also been present, for the most part, in Russia's current policy in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea.

Notes

- 1 This chapter builds primarily on the literature that, among other aspects of Russian identity, highlights the country's exceptionalism as one of the aspects of its ontological awareness. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia's leadership socially re-constructed the idea of Russian exceptionalism as one of the central narratives of the country's great power discourse. Historically, however, there has been no consensus among scholars on the core of Russia's ontological security. Many of the current generation of Russian history researchers reject the idea of organizing their analysis around one issue. As noted by Michael David-Fox (2015), the new generation of researchers rejects the primacy of anything as the single key to the "entire phenomenon." As a result, there has been extensive research and investigation debating the validity of Russian exceptionalism.
- 2 By "ontological security," we are referring to a state's ability to have answers to fundamentally existential and identity questions. When their actions are reproduced as routines, they create a sense of continuity and order (Giddens 1991; Della Sala and Akchurina 2019; and Steele (2008)). Ontological security is threatened by the *rupture of continuity*. This, as a rule, happens in critical situations or at the radical disjuncture of an unpredictable kind that affects substantial numbers of individuals and threatens to destroy institutionalized, "normal" routines (Rossdale 2015, 373). These situations produce anxiety and represent threats to identity. Unlike fear that is tied to a particular situation, anxiety comes from the challenge to one's identity (Giddens 1991).
- 3 Although Richard Pipes is one of the most prominent, but controversial, analysts of Russian and Soviet history of the cold war period (Grimes 2018), his insights

- concerning the emergence and nature of the Russian state, however, remain extremely relevant to an understanding of Russian history.
- 4 By the “West,” we are referring to the major European states that emerged after about 1600 and their extensions in the Americas and elsewhere globally. Even more important is the nature of the cultural and political systems that evolved in the “West” which included, among other characteristics, Christianity, democracy, human rights, individualism, rational thinking, capitalism, modern technology and scientific thinking.
 - 5 For an overview of the deterioration of Russian relations with the West since the 1990s, including the importance of Russian reactions to Western political and economic initiatives in post-Soviet space, see Kanet (2019).
 - 6 These cases are analyzed in two essays (Moulioukova, with Kanet 2020; and Moulioukova, with Kanet, n.d.; and in several chapters in this volume.

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2 Russian strategic culture and renewed conflict with the West¹

Roger E. Kanet

As many analysts have pointed out (Ermath 2006), Russian strategic, or security, culture has for centuries been built on the self-perception of Russia/U.S.S.R. as a great power and on the idea that military power is essential to gaining and maintaining that status. This self-image exerts a decisive influence on Russians' interpretation of situations in which they find themselves and how they define their interests. Furthermore, the self-image² also defines the means by which perceived Great Power status will be achieved or maintained. As Jack Snyder (1977, 8) noted almost half a century ago, strategic culture consists of the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other concerning nuclear strategy and foreign policy more generally.³

Since he first came to power two decades ago, Vladimir Putin's single clearest message has concerned the continued greatness of Russia and his commitment to ensuring that it once again be viewed by others as the dominant power in post-Soviet space, including Eurasia, and an equal to other Great Powers in determining global affairs. His wide-ranging attack on the United States and the West at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 represents a rhetorical watershed in Russian foreign policy. Putin openly proclaimed that Russia was once again a major international actor and would no longer follow the lead of the West in pursuing its security and foreign policy interests. He also indicated that Russians saw themselves as a pole in the international system separate from, and in conflict with, the West. This was quite a shift from the view of Russia as part of the Western-oriented community prevalent in official Russian security culture a decade earlier, although changes began to appear even before Putin assumed power. It was at roughly this time that Moscow also began to assert itself rhetorically in response to Western charges that it was corrupting or abandoning democracy (Putin 2007). Threats to Russian security were now identified as primarily external, not internal, as had been the view a decade earlier.

The charges and counter charges between Russia and the West that have become commonplace since the shift in Russian policy have contributed expanded military budgets and exercises,⁴ the denigration of past nuclear

arms agreements that require renegotiation or were scheduled to be cancelled (during the Trump presidency) (Weir 2020), the resurgence of Russia's activities throughout the Global South, and the direct intervention in the internal affairs of Western countries by the Russian Federation. These developments begin to parallel some of the most conflictual activities during the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West.⁵ Loosely, therefore, one can speak of an emerging new cold war between Russia and the West. In fact, at the 2016 Munich security Conference, then Russian Prime Minister Medvedev compared the state of relations to those in 1962 at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis and stated that "we are rapidly rolling into a period of a new cold war" (Medvedev 2016).

The central question of this chapter concerns the reasons for this deterioration of relations between Russia and the West from the euphoria of the early 1990s, when President George H.W. Bush (1991) spoke of a "new world order" and others envisaged the "end of history" (Fukuyama 1992) and the incorporation of Russia into the Western-dominated world order, to the confrontation of today. It results from two interrelated developments, one external to Russia and one internal to it. The external factor derives from the West's commitment to expand the liberal international order eastward by incorporating large segments of the former Soviet empire into the existing system via the exportation of liberal economic and political values and the expansion of both NATO and the European Union.⁶ This has been matched on the Russian side by gradual, but ultimately dramatic, changes in Russian strategic culture in a much more assertive and aggressive direction that is built on the commitment to making Russia once again a "Great Power." These changes, in turn, are partly in response to what the Russians view as growing and illegitimate challenges to their security interests resulting from that very Western expansion, and partly in response to internal threats to the political system that President Putin and his associates have created.

The turn toward the West followed by Putin's "great power" narrative

After the collapse of the U.S.S.R. challenges to Russian security were seen as result of factors inside the country. Should there be external challenges, they were to be dealt with in collaboration with the West. Russia seemed willing to work together with, if not join, the West. Europe and the United States, however, generally ignored most of Russia's interests and concerns (Cohen 2001). Rather, the West expanded its involvement in what had been the Soviet sphere of domination and attempted to limit Moscow's ability to re-establish its dominance in the region (Kanet 2015; Kanet 2018a; and Spechler and Spechler 2019). This expansionist approach, which included NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia and the incorporation of former Warsaw Pact states and Soviet republics into NATO, faced strong and

persistent opposition from Moscow and, no doubt, contributed to attitude changes in Moscow. At the same time, criticism was growing in both Brussels and Washington of political developments in Russia itself. In order to prevent the return of the Communist Party to power, the United States was deeply involved in ensuring the re-election of President Boris Yeltsin in 1996 (Goldgeier and McFaul 2003).

Russian attitudes and policies toward the West had begun to shift already in the mid-to-late 1990s.⁷ But, not until Vladimir Putin became president and surrounded himself with former members of the Soviet security services that Moscow's strategic culture and sense of national identity began to shift – back toward that which had dominated the U.S.S.R. and Russia for centuries. The Russian leadership decided that achieving security and foreign policy objectives on the basis of cooperation with the West was impossible. The official reaction to what they saw as growing challenges to core national security interests was a revitalized sense of national identity that questioned the European nature of Russia and tied Russia to a broader Eurasia. This view was joined by a growing challenge to the dominant position of the West, both in Central and Eastern Europe and globally, as Russia pursued the goal of re-establishing its position as the preeminent regional power across Eurasia and as a key global actor. Its response to this “Western encroachment” included a rebuilding of Russian military capabilities along with military interventions in Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine. These views of the West's hostility and threats toward Russia and its renewed commitment to being recognized as a “Great Power” comes across clearly in Putin's speeches to the Valdai Discussion Club three years running in fall 2014 through 2016 (Putin 2014, 2015, 2016). He reiterated Russia's refusal to accept as legitimate the post-Cold War international order which, in his view, is simply a set of rules imposed by the West – to its advantage – that the United States and other Western states themselves often do not follow.

In spring 2018, President Putin boasted about new and superior Russian nuclear weapons (Putin 2018). Soon thereafter the British government of Prime Minister Theresa May expelled 23 Russian diplomats in a first response to what it viewed as a Russian state effort to assassinate a former Russian spy on British soil (Asthana et al. 2018). A few days later the U.S. government charged Russia “with engineering a series of cyberattacks that targeted American and European nuclear power plants and water and electric systems, and could have sabotaged or shut power plants off at will” (Perlroth and Sangermarch 2018). Moreover, Russia's meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election dominated much of the political news in the United States after the inauguration of Donald Trump as president in early 2017 until the outbreak of coronavirus 19 (Isikoff and Corn 2018).⁸ All of this has occurred in a period of stringent Western economic sanctions placed on Russia in retaliation for the latter's occupation and incorporation of Crimea and intervention in the civil war in eastern Ukraine.

One result of these developments is the fact that Russia perceives itself as cornered by the Western powers. Already in 2005, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov told the Academy of Military Sciences:

Let us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people and organisations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation (Ivanov, cited in Blank 2017, 729).

In a similar vein, in an address to a conference on international security in May 2014, the current Defence Minister, Sergey Shoigu, referred to color revolutions as a new form of warfare developed by the West with the intention of undermining the defences of the Russian Federation and its allies (Papert 2014). In effect, by the time of the Ukrainian Crisis and the initial imposition of Western sanctions on Russia, military and security officials in Moscow saw the West engaged in a new type of warfare that justified a cyberwarfare response targeting electoral systems and essential economic infrastructure in the United States and the countries of the European Union.

Strategic culture and Russian foreign policy⁹

During the Soviet era a school of policy analysts emerged in the West that emphasized the importance of an “operational code” or “strategic culture” (Leites 1951; Snyder 1977). More recently, “strategic culture” has been revived as an important concept by constructivist-inspired scholars, who focus on the central point that strategic culture is a “negotiated reality” among political elites in a country (Lantis 2009). This means that strategic cultures are not static, but evolve over time as political leaders respond to their assessment of changes in threats presented by both the internal and external environments (Lantis and Howlett 2013, 81).

Writing in the early Yeltsin period, Stephen Blank discussed several points of importance in understanding Russian strategic culture. First of all, he described the relentless political and military struggle that he termed class struggle – that is, the underpinning of a new strategic culture that emphasised constant conflict with and threats from the outside world; this culture had characterised the Soviet state even after the death of Stalin (Blank 1993, 8). Although modifications occurred in the final decades of Soviet rule, Blank correctly questioned the lasting power of these changes (Blank 1993, 46). In fact, he raised the important issue of atavisms in Russian strategic culture, which is to say that segments of the Russian decision-making elite retained a commitment to earlier forms of strategic culture. Likewise, the Russian analyst Pavel Felgenhauer (2018) has argued that the military elite and other members of the security apparatus, the *siloviki*, who under Putin have dominated Russian security policy making, bring to the process attitudes and

values that were prevalent in the Soviet Union. In Mette Skak's argument, the Russian secret services and associated "power agencies" are *de facto* independent actors in the Russian Federation and have created what she terms a counterinsurgency state. The obvious question is "why" (Skak 2019).

The general argument on which the present chapter is based on the view that, during the 30-year history of the Russian Federation, the strategic culture that underlay the official Russian worldview returned to its Russian/Soviet roots and has become increasingly hostile to the outside world, especially that characterized by liberal political systems. Accordingly, the policies that emerge from this more hostile worldview have become more assertive and aggressive.¹⁰ This shift, in turn, is partly a response to Western actions and partly the result of domestic political developments within Russia.

From the Yeltsin honeymoon to Putin's policy shift

Russia's security culture immediately after the fall of the U.S.S.R. focused primarily on internal threats resulting from economic decline and societal problems (Military Doctrine 1993; National Security Concept 1997). External challenges to Russian security were to be addressed in collaboration with the West. Russia seemed willing to work together with, if not join the West. Europe and the United States, however, generally ignored Russia's interests and concerns (Cohen 2001; Kennan, cited in Friedman 1998) and expanded their involvement in what had been the Soviet sphere of domination and attempted to limit Moscow's ability to re-establish its primary role in the region.¹¹ At the same time, there was growing criticism in both Brussels and Washington of political developments in Russia itself. In order to prevent the return of the Communists to power, the United States was deeply involved in ensuring the re-election of President Boris Yeltsin in 1996 (Goldgeier and McFaul 2003).

Although Russian attitudes and policies toward the West shifted especially after Putin came to power.¹² This change in strategic culture was partly caused by the Bush administration's unilateral decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and other Western initiatives, which included the expansion of both NATO and the EU eastward; the decision of the United States to deploy an anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic; the EU's commitment to a new neighbourhood policy; and Western support for the "color revolutions" that challenged, even deposed, Moscow's allies in Kyiv, Tbilisi and Bishkek and brought to power groups committed to closer ties with the West.¹³

The official Russian response to what they saw as growing challenges to their core national security interests was a shifting sense of national identity and self-image that questioned the European nature of Russia and tied Russia to a broader Eurasia. This was joined by a growing challenge to the dominant position of the West, both in Central and Eastern Europe and globally, as Russia pursued the goal of re-establishing its position as the preeminent regional power across Eurasia and as a key global actor. In

other words, the shifting Russian reaction to the West that has impacted relations so strongly had its long-term roots in the Soviet views of the capitalist West and their more immediate roots in the Western interventions in former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. As indicated earlier, Russian opposition heightened with the decision of the United States to intervene militarily in Iraq as part of the “war on terror.” Moscow, as well as several U.S. allies, strongly opposed the intervention, which set the stage for the broader deterioration of Russian–U.S. relations (Ambrosio 2005).

Other developments reinforced the downward trend in Russia–Western relations, including the EU’s new neighborhood policy. Although Russian leaders strongly opposed NATO’s expansion eastward already from the 1990s, they did not initially oppose post-communist states joining the European Union. However, by the early 2000s, Russia recognized that EU membership for post-communist states would not only cut into markets for Russian exports, but was also part of a much more comprehensive Western economic-political-social approach to integrate East European states and societies into the Western world order and, thus, undercutting Moscow’s long-term interests in a region associated with Russian identity and status.¹⁴ The development of the European Neighborhood Policy (which aimed at tying six former Soviet republics closely to the EU, without granting them full membership), announced in 2004, along with visible support for the political upheavals in several post-Soviet states, referred to as color revolutions, are important factors in explaining the evolving tensions in Russia–EU relations. Viewed from Moscow, these were simply disguised efforts of Western governments and NGOs to shift the political orientation of these countries toward closer ties with the West.¹⁵ As Putin has noted more recently, “We see what tragic consequences the wave of so-called color revolutions led to. For us this is a lesson and a warning. We should do everything necessary so that nothing similar ever happens in Russia” (Putin, cited in Korsunskaya 2014). This quote also reveals the close connection between internal and external security in the eyes of the Putin government.

In short, by roughly 2005 the leadership in Moscow viewed the continued entrance of post-communist states into Western political, economic, and security institutions as a long-term threat to Russia’s commitment to re-establish its dominant position in Eurasia as well as to the Putin government’s hold on power. It was around this time, as well, that Putin publicly claimed that the collapse of the U.S.S.R. had been the most catastrophic geopolitical event of the 20th century and that he began asserting that NATO and the United States were serious threats to Russia and international security more generally.¹⁶

Russia vs. NATO and the EU: the gas wars and the war in Georgia

As noted earlier, President Putin’s attack on the United States and the West at the Munich represented a dramatic change in Russia’s Western-oriented

policy widespread in official Russian security culture a decade earlier. Threats to Russian security were now identified as primarily external. For example, in response to EU and U.S. criticisms of the quality of Russian democracy, the leadership in Moscow responded that Russia had its own form of “sovereign democracy” that placed special emphasis on the sovereignty aspect (Gould-Davies 2016). Russian democracy, therefore, could not be judged according to the criteria of the West, which were largely irrelevant to it (Herd 2009). It was also during this period that concrete Russian policy actions began targeting Western interests – often in response to perceived threats emanating from the United States and the European Union.

The initial major confrontation with the European Union concerned the “gas wars” of 2006 and 2009 between Russia and Ukraine, which resulted in natural gas cut-offs to EU member countries in mid-winter. Between the two events the Russian military intervention in Georgia occurred in August 2008 (when the Georgian president decided to use his new NATO-built military to force the reintegration of secessionist territories). Moreover, Moscow imposed economic boycotts and carried out cyberattacks against new EU member states, with which Russia was in increasing political disagreement. All these conflicts were related to Russia’s determination to stop and, if possible, reverse further Western encroachment into what Moscow viewed as its legitimate sphere of influence (Kanet 2010a; Polese and Ó Beacáin 2011; Papert 2014).

In the case of the “gas wars,” the issue was the longstanding division over both costs of Russian energy supplies to Ukraine and Ukrainian transit charges for Russian gas being shipped to Europe. Until the Orange Revolution and the overthrow of the pro-Russian government in Kyiv, this issue had been resolved each year through negotiations. Now, however, with an EU-friendly government in Ukraine, compromise became more difficult and political confrontation ensued. The impasse resulted in a showdown in which Moscow accepted the political costs to its longer term relationship with the EU for the failure to deliver gas supplies, which resulted in the complete shutdown of gas flowing to Ukraine. Moscow’s objective was to make clear who was the more powerful actor in the dispute. As part of the commitment to re-establish Russian dominance in post-Soviet space, Russia could not appear to back down in the dispute with Ukraine, even if that resulted in long-term costs in relations with the EU. The EU, for its part, began a strategy of energy diversification to shift its reliance away from Russia – a strategy that contributed even more to the deterioration of relations (Umbach 2010; Moulioukova and Kanet 2017).

In many respects, the underlying issue that led to the five-day war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 had similar sources: Russia’s growing opposition to the shift of former Soviet republics toward integration into Western-dominated institutions after the color revolutions. The so-called Rose Revolution had brought to power in Tbilisi a government committed to closer relations with the West, including NATO membership and

expanded ties to the EU. From Moscow's perspective, these developments ran counter to Russia's goal of re-establishing a preeminent position within the former Soviet space. Even though NATO was not yet prepared to accede to President Bush's desire to admit Georgia in 2008, Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili decided that the refurbished military that NATO had provided through the Partnership for Peace Program could be used to resolve the longstanding frozen conflicts in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Ambrosio 2019).

For Georgia, the result was a disaster. Russian forces intervened and overwhelmed the new Georgian army; the secessionist provinces declared their formal independence, emulating the Kosovo example; and Moscow officially recognized their independence. The Russian military intervention sent a clear message to the Georgians, the Ukrainians and the Americans that after more than a decade of verbal opposition to NATO expansion, Russia was now in a position, and willing, to use military means to prevent further eastward expansion of Western political and security institutions, even if this meant a deterioration in relations with both the United States and Western Europe.¹⁷

Besides these broad negative developments in East–West relations in the first decade of the 21st century, several other factors contributed to the downturn in relations. Most of new EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe brought with them concerns and animosities toward Russia based on decades, or centuries, of past dealings (DeBardeleben 2009; Schmidt-Felzman 2014). Thus, it is no surprise that Russia's willingness to coerce and bully small neighbors revived serious fears among new EU members about the prospects for their long-term security. In 2007, for example, after the Estonian government moved a Soviet war memorial from the centre of Tallinn to its international military cemetery, ethnic Russians mounted street protests in Tallinn and outside the Estonian embassy in Moscow (Herzog 2011). This was followed by cut-offs in Russian oil and coal deliveries and a massive cyber-attack that virtually closed Estonia's information technology sector ("Bronze Meddling" 2007). In addition, after bilateral disagreements with Russia, both Poland and Lithuania used their veto power to prevent for more than a year and a half the negotiation of a new partnership agreement between the EU and Russia. At a joint meeting between the EU and Russia in May 2007, these and other issues split the two sides and precluded any meaningful agreement on issues deemed important by one or the other side (Dempsey 2007; Lowe 2007).

Thus, during Putin's second term as Russian President and into the Medvedev presidency, Russian relations with the European Union and with its major member countries deteriorated significantly. Russia no longer saw the EU as a largely irrelevant institution that it could easily bypass or ignore. Although the European Union lacked a unified policy vis-à-vis Russia during this period, the overall relationship continued to decline. Part of this can be seen in Russian challenges to the EU's claims to moral authority and

the charge that the EU had double standards concerning human-rights norms, the treatment of ethnic minorities and economic matters (Facon 2008; Neumann 2014; Kanet 2015). In terms of Russia's strategic culture, the leadership increasingly focused on security threats from the West and the ways in which it could deter those threats.

When Putin turned over the presidency to Dimitri Medvedev in 2008, relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union were at a low point as part of the general developments in East–West relations, but also for reasons independent of the Russo–American confrontation. Expanding competition for regional influence was a central feature of that confrontation. The four years of the Medvedev presidency did little to change the overall nature of Russia–EU relations. That said, Medvedev was able to pursue a somewhat more liberal foreign policy than that of his predecessor, and the two sides were able to reach agreement on several issues of mutual interest which we shall discuss in the next section (Trenin 2014; McFaul 2018, 76–238).

From the failed Obama–Medvedev “reset” to the Ukraine crisis

Although the Bush administration modified its rhetoric and some of its policies during its second term, bilateral relations with Russia never really improved after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. In part, this was the case because President Bush was also committed to the development of an anti-ballistic missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic, a policy which was strongly opposed by Moscow. Thus, when Dimitri Medvedev replaced Vladimir Putin as Russian president in spring 2008, U.S.–Russian relations remained strained. In fact, soon after President Medvedev took office, Russia intervened militarily in Georgia. It was also Medvedev who publicly argued that the post-Soviet space was a region where “Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests” (Kramer 2008).

Moreover, Russia began pushing for structural changes in the international system, leading to a spiralling of the East–West competition. For example, soon after the Russo–Georgian war in August 2008, President Medvedev proposed a new European Security Treaty – one based on quite different assumptions from those of the existing security architecture (Fernandes 2012; Lomagin 2012). The fact that the proposals was made immediately after the Russo–Georgian war and at a time when Russian foreign policy became increasingly militarized ensured that the West would not seriously consider the proposal (Kanet 2010a).

Soon thereafter, however, the United States launched its own approach to mend relations with Moscow. Already during his election campaign of 2008, Barack Obama had emphasised the importance of improving relations with Russia. In a speech in early 2009, Vice President Joe Biden called for a “reset” in U.S. policy toward Russia, a shift toward “co-operation and consultation” (Cooper and Kulish 2009; Moshes 2012; Biden and Carpenter 2018).¹⁸ Biden also stated that the “last few years have seen a dangerous

drift in relations between Russia and our [NATO] alliance. It's time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should work together" (Biden, cited in Sherwell 2009). The Russians had already announced their intention not to place missiles along the Polish border. When President Obama publicly announced later in the year that the United States was abandoning the development an anti-ballistic missile system pursued by his predecessor, relations between the two countries improved. Over the course of the next few years, Moscow and Washington made substantial progress in resolving several serious political and security issues. Most important by far was the final agreement on and ratification of the New START Treaty of 2010 that reduced by half the nuclear arsenal of both sides over the course of the next decade. Although the two countries had agreed to substantial arms limitations in 1992, the U.S. Senate had refused to ratify the treaty and the Russians withdrew from it after the U.S. abrogation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2002. Only the improvements in the tone and content of relations between the two countries after the "reset" made a New START agreement possible ("New START" 2010).

Other benefits that flowed from the improvement in bilateral relations included, for the Russian side, an agreement with the United States on the sharing of civilian nuclear technology (Rojansky and Torychkanov 2010), a greater U.S. willingness to support Russia's application for membership in the World Trade Organisation (Sestanovich 2011), and an implicit understanding that the United States would reduce what the Russians saw as "meddling" in its near neighbourhood.

In return, and despite continued Russian efforts to reduce the U.S. military presence in Central Asia, Moscow allowed supplies for the ongoing NATO operation in Afghanistan to pass through Russian territory. In fact, in April 2012, the two countries reached a formal agreement on this matter. The message of Moscow seemed to be that it must be the final arbiter of what the United States might or might not do in Central Asia. It was willing to facilitate NATO's war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, for its own purposes, but it would do everything that it could to prevent the emergence in the region of quasi-permanent U.S. military bases over which it did not exercise control.

Although Russia did not support the most severe U.S. sanctions against Iran, it did agree not to deliver S-300 surface-to-air missiles that Tehran had ordered ("Russia May Lose Billions" 2010). Increasingly, however, Washington and Moscow found it difficult to reach an agreement on the approach to Iran's presumed development of nuclear weapons. But the area in which the United States and Russia disagreed most strongly during the presidencies of Medvedev and Obama concerned support for the "Arab Spring." Although Russia agreed in the United Nations to support the establishment of a "no-fly zone" in Libya to protect the population from impending disaster at the hands of the Gaddafi regime, it strongly opposed the way in which the West used the approval to intervene directly to overthrow Gaddafi (Stent 2012). This reaction lies at the

core of Moscow's refusal to support efforts to force President Assad of Syria to relinquish power.

Overall, the three and a half years of overlap between the Obama and Medvedev administrations represented a period of modestly improved relations between the United States and the Russian Federation, despite continued disagreements and, at times, harsh mutual criticism. But, as Michael McFaul notes (McFaul 2018, 411–412), this cooperation is evidence that prior Western actions were not the primary cause of the virtually total collapse of relations after 2012. Domestic developments in Russia were the impetus to the dramatic deterioration of relations. Putin's announcement that he would run for a third presidential term in 2012 led to large-scale demonstrations against his return and a poor showing of Putin's party in parliamentary elections in late 2011 resulted in widespread governmental attacks on civil liberties and the expulsion or closure of many NGOs. This crackdown was complemented by a ramped up campaign of hostility toward the United States, NATO, the European Union and the West more generally. This was also the beginning of a revitalized and successful nationalist campaign within Russia intended to generate public support for the Putin government.¹⁹

Thus, when Putin returned to the Russian presidency in 2012, verbal sparring and direct conflict resumed and even expanded. In other words, although the "reset" had positive results, they were quite limited and did not carry over to several of the key areas in which the two sides have been at odds for most of the past decade and a half, including a U.S.-sponsored missile-defence system and U.S. support for democratisation in the post-Soviet space and, more recently, in the Arab world.

The Eurasian Union and the Ukraine crisis

In a series of articles published prior to the 2012 Russian presidential election, then prime minister and presidential candidate Putin laid out his new foreign policy programme that was now focused on "preserving Russia's distinct identity in a highly competitive global environment" (Putin 2011; Putin 2012). Abandoning the remnants of earlier efforts to integrate into the West-dominated international system, Putin emphasised the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Russian civilization and how it represents the core of a special Russian world composed of people (such as the Eastern Slavs of Belarus and Ukraine) who associate themselves with traditional Russian values. He also maintained that Europe had taken a negative turn from its historical model that existed prior to the 1960s and now embodied a "post-Christian" identity that values moral relativism, a vague sense of identity and excessive political correctness (Gessen 2014). Putin thus concluded that European countries had begun "renouncing their roots, including Christian values, an identity that values moral relativism, a vague sense of identity and excessive political correctness" (Gessen 2014). He

instead emphasised the values of old Europe, while also stressing Russia's unique ones rooted in the Orthodox Christian tradition. These values include marriage as the union between man and a woman, the sanctity of family, religion, the centrality of the state and patriotism (Trenin 2014).

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Putin's so-called "civilizational turn" is relevant to relations with the West, and the EU in particular, since it laid the ideological groundwork for Russia's changing security culture and its potential merger with post-Soviet states into a Eurasian political and economic union. Putin argued that Russia should be the center of a large geo-economic unit, or Eurasian Union, consisting of political, cultural, economic and security ties among the states that had emerged from the former Soviet republics. He asserted the importance of defending indigenous values in a highly globalized world and highlighted how this union promoted that path. This union stands in direct competition with the EU's European Neighborhood Policy and the incorporation of countries in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus into a broad EU-centered political-economic system. Putin's arguments also provide the foundation for the view that Russian identity and security are threatened by the West at almost all levels of interaction.

By the time of the presidential election campaign of 2012, policymakers in Moscow viewed the emergence of a special relationship between the European Union and other post-Soviet states – such as Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia – as a direct challenge to long-term Russian interests in the region and, by extension, a threat to the goal of re-establishing Russia's role as a principal player in international politics. In part, as noted by Mikhail Molchanov (2016, 2017), the confrontation between Moscow and Brussels results from the latter's decision that countries opting for involvement in the EU's Neighborhood Policy had to forego any special economic ties with other international institutions, such as the proposed Eurasian Union. In other words, since the EU insisted on an "all or nothing" approach from those to whom it offered "neighborhood status," the latter were forced to make a choice between a westward or eastward orientation.²⁰

Thus, when Russia began to push its Eurasian integration project, the geopolitical confrontation with the EU escalated.²¹ This is important for our understanding of the Russian explanation of their policy in the Ukraine crisis and its impact on overall relations with the European Union. In the words of Foreign Minister Lavrov (2014):

The EU Eastern Partnership program was also designed to expand the West-controlled geopolitical space to the east.... There is a policy to confront the CIS countries with a hard, absolutely contrived and

artificial choice – either you are with the EU or with Russia. It was the use of this approach to Ukraine that pushed that country...to a profound internal political crisis.

After Vladimir Putin resumed the Russian presidency in 2012, he moved forcefully to consolidate the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as part of his plan for re-establishing Russia's dominance in Eurasia. In the western portion of former Soviet territory this meant that Russia and the European Union were both actively courting six states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Russia initiated a major pressure campaign to "encourage" these countries to opt for EEU membership. For example, Moscow employed economic and security threats against Armenia, and it offered major loans to Ukraine as part of a membership package (Blank 2013). By summer 2013, it was clear that Georgia and Moldova were prepared to withstand Moscow's pressure and strengthen their ties with the European Union, that Belarus and Armenia would join Russia's Eurasian Union, and that Azerbaijan would remain outside both organizations. Ukraine, under the government of President Yanukovich, attempted to play off the EU and the EEU for as long as possible and eventually scheduled a signing ceremony with the European Union for fall 2013. When Yanukovich made a U-turn and announced in November 2013 that Ukraine instead would join the Eurasian Union (Grytsenko 2013), massive demonstrations against his government broke out in Kiev. As is well known, these demonstrations eventually resulted in Yanukovich's fleeing the country. A new Western-oriented government came to power in Kiev which, in turn, led to a Russian military intervention in Ukraine. This intervention included the absorption of Crimea and support for Russians and Russophone secessionist groups in southeastern Ukraine (for more on Russia's Ukraine policy, see Götz 2016; Tsygankov 2015; Malayarenko and Wolff 2018).

The European Union and the United States introduced sanctions against Russia as punishment for its military intervention in Ukraine. Moreover, since Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for anti-government rebels in eastern Ukraine, the EU no longer considers Russia a strategic partner. For its part, the Kremlin has adopted increasingly tough rhetoric vis-à-vis the West. Official Russian security and foreign policy documents now present Russia as a state besieged by all conceivable means by the United States and its Western allies. For example, the 2014 Military Doctrine classifies both the deployment of strategic missiles and the deployment of strategic conventional precision weapons by the West as key military dangers to Russia. This doctrine and the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept also highlight the United States and NATO as potential enemies at a time of increased global competition and conclude that Russia needs to focus on the credibility of its nuclear deterrent and on conventional and non-conventional elements of conducting warfare (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2015; Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2016).²²

A new cold war and the Russian challenge to the liberal world order

More than half a dozen years after the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, Russia's military intervention, and the imposition of Western sanctions against Russia, little has changed in the overall relationship between Russia and the West. In fact, relations have worsened, as Russia has continued its intervention in Ukraine and has increasingly meddled in the domestic political affairs of Western democracies. Russia has proven to be more resilient than many in the West had expected and, despite the collapse in international energy prices and the costs associated with the sanctions imposed by the European Union and the United States, the Russian economy seemed to stabilize prior to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 with an annual growth rate of 1.5–2.5% (“Russia: Real GDP” 2020).²³ More important, the sanctions and the ensuing domestic economic problems in Russia have not influenced the political leadership to initiate a significant shift in Moscow's foreign policy. In fact, Moscow's assertive action in Ukraine, as well as more recently in Syria, have become an important part of the Putin regime's effort to re-establish Russia's role as a great power and thereby strengthen its political support among a large portion of the population (Berryman 2017).

As demonstrated in this chapter, Russian relations with the both the United States and the European Union have declined precipitously since the turn of the century. President Putin remains committed to re-establishing Russia's dominant role in regional and global affairs. As the 2015 Security Strategy states: “Strengthening the country's defence, ensuring the inviolability of the Russian Federation's constitutional order, sovereignty, independence and national and territory integrity” and “consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world” (Russian Federation 2015).

Given the Russian political elite's goal of re-establishing Russia's place as a global power, as well as its control over the Russian domestic political system, assertive nationalism has become an important instrument in accomplishing both of those objectives. The European Union, which a quarter century ago was viewed in Moscow as a benign actor, is now viewed as a competitor for influence in post-Soviet space and as an impediment to Russia's attempts to re-establish itself as the dominant actor in Eurasia and as a major player in global affairs. This competition, along with a possible domestic political challenge to Putin's leadership, lies at the root of the confrontation that exploded in Ukraine in 2013–2014 and that continues to sour relations four years later.

Prospects for a significant improvement in relations in the foreseeable future are not good, since the longer-term goals of Russia and those of the European Union contradict one another.²⁴ The Russian leadership's commitment to re-establish dominance across much of Eurasia is in direct conflict with the EU's objective of expanding its influence into the post-Soviet space

and the more general objective of maintaining the liberal international order that has been dominant for the past quarter century.

As various members of the Russian leadership have repeatedly made clear in recent years, Moscow does not accept the fundamental principles that underlie the current international system and will do whatever it can to undermine that system (Kanet 2018b). Military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine, cyber-attacks against a range of post-communist states (Imeson 2019) support for radical nationalist groups in EU member countries, meddling in the electoral processes of democracies in Europe and North America are all tactics that Russia has used to weaken the Western-dominated international system. The confrontation between Russia and both the United States and the European Union will continue until one side or the other abandons some of the objectives that have been central to its policy – in effect, to its sense of identity – something that was highly unlikely to occur until the election of President Donald Trump put virtually all aspects of U.S. foreign policy in question.²⁵

Before commenting briefly on the impact of the election and presidency of Trump let me return to the question about the factors that inform Russian foreign and security policy. As argued above, external factors – in particular Western efforts to extend its influence eastward into former Soviet-dominated areas – have been important, in particular since it has enabled Putin and other Russian leaders to point to Western actions as a threat to overall Russian security as part of the effort to consolidate domestic support. Officially Russian strategic culture has shifted from a focus on internal problems and potential collaboration with the West a quarter century ago to a concentration on foreign threats, virtually all of which supposedly emanate from the West. But, more important than Western behavior itself has been the commitment of the Putin leadership to retaining power and the use of that Western policies to build domestic support for an assertive foreign policy and more restrictive, even authoritarian, domestic control.

Donald Trump's impact on East–West relations

The election of Trump to the U.S. presidency and the internal chaos which largely he fomented for the following four years, called into question the nature of the U.S. political system (Gessen 2020), of U.S. relations with its long-term allies, as well as with Russia, and thus the future of East-West relations. His “America First” policy seemed to be driven by an “America alone” commitment.²⁶ His general ignorance of world affairs and his hostility to all international organizations that limit U.S. policy initiatives (Busby 2018), coupled with his refusal to take advice from experts, have resulted in unpredictable U.S. behavior on the international stage. While Trump was willing to initiate a trade war with long-term allies and to denigrate their leaders publicly, he praised the leaders of authoritarian states such as China, North Korea and Russia (Cillizza and Williams 2019).

Despite the extensive evidence of direct Russian involvement in the 2016 U.S. election that is confirmed by 17 U.S. intelligence agencies (Rosenberg 2017; Bump 2018), Trump denied the evidence, never expressed a negative word about Putin, and virtually justified Russia's occupation and absorption of Crimea (Caryl 2019).²⁷ In many respects, whether or not the Russians were instrumental in the election of Trump, they could hardly have been happier about the result. In his four years as president, he did more to undermine confidence in the United States to meet past commitments to the existing world order and its major institutions than the Russian leadership could have hoped for (Glickman 2017). The withdrawal from nuclear arms control treaties (including the INF treaty and that limiting nuclear development in Iran), the withdrawal from the World Health Organization and the International Postal Union, the denigration of NATO and the attacks on U.S. allies were but some of Trump's initiatives. His role in fomenting the abortive attack on the U.S. political system itself adds to this litany of actions that impacted on U.S. relations with Russia. Although it is impossible to predict the nature of the medium-, and long-term implications Trump's policies will have on relations with European allies and with the Russian Federation – even though he has been replaced as president by Joe Biden, who has begun to reverse these policies. But, given Trump's challenge to the long-term reliability of the U.S. commitment to global leadership, the impact of these policies is most likely to be negative from the perspective of regional and global stability and on the vitality, even continued existence, of the liberal international system that has been in place for the past seven decades.

Notes

- 1 This chapter draws on ideas developed in earlier of the author's publications (Kanet 2018b; 2019). This chapter also benefits from a chapter by Mette Skak (2019) concerning Russian strategic culture. For two excellent articles that the author read only after completing this chapter that make a similar argument – with less emphasis on Western expansion into Central and Eastern Europe -- see Adomeit (2020a; 2020b).
- 2 For an extended discussion of the nature and significance of self-images in Russia, see Petersson (2001). See also chapter 3 by Aleksandar Jankovski, in this volume.
- 3 In many respects, the concept of “strategic culture” shares many attributes with that of “ontological security,” as employed in chapter 1 and by some other foreign policy analysts (see Mitzen 2006; Subotić 2016).
- 4 On recent and planned expansion of Russian military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, see Schneider (2018), Gorenburg (2017), Götz (2016) and Oxenstierna (2019).
- 5 Complicating this picture of expanded confrontation between the two sides is the fact that, until the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons in April 2018, President Trump had been virtually unwilling to criticize Russia or President Putin to the point that the question arose of how he might be beholden to Putin. A confounding factor is also the increasing appeal in a number of EU countries

- and the United States of right-wing nationalism, as well as closer political relations with Russia (Shekhovtsov 2018).
- 6 Recent political developments across Europe – for example, in Hungary, Poland and Ukraine -- and the United States (especially during the Trump presidency) associated with refugee flows and the rise of more populist and nationalist domestic movements imply that the continued extension of liberal political institutions is no longer a central concern for either the European Union or the United States (Suzen 2018).
 - 7 Already, during the period of Evgeny Primakov as foreign minister, Russian policy shifted and the so-called “Primakov Doctrine” called for a return of Russia to the center stage of international politics (Rumer 2019).
 - 8 Phone transcripts of the conversations of Trump’s designated national security advisor with the Russian ambassador prior to Trump’s taking office clearly indicate the incoming administration’s commitment to improving relations despite Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the charges of meddling in the U.S. presidential election (Mazzetti 2020).
 - 9 This section draws upon the work of Skak (2019); see also Facon (2016–2017).
 - 10 This shift in Russian views can be tracked in the various versions of the Russian National Security doctrine, which have become increasingly paranoid and hostile to the outside world over the past quarter century. Pynnöniemi and Kari (2016), for example, refer to the Russian Information Security Doctrine of 2016 (Russia 2016), which expands on the alarmist National Security Strategy of December 2015 (Russian Federation 2015) as “a besieged cyber fortress” doctrine, noting its almost bellicose tone.
 - 11 For discussions of failed U.S. efforts to contain Russia’s political and economic return to Central Asia, see Kanet (2010b, 2015).
 - 12 For a discussion of the shifts in U.S. policy during the first decade after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., see Kanet (2001) and Papert (2014).
 - 13 Russian discussions of the color revolutions as a form of irregular warfare – carried out by the West -- are summarized in Papert (2014).
 - 14 Andrei Tsygankov and Seva Gunitsky (2018) discuss the importance of this relationship for the Russian sense of identity and use the term *derzhavnost’* to describe it. On Russia’s sense of identity, see chapter 1 of this volume. For a comprehensive examination of the Russian Federation’s relations with the West before the rise of Putin, see Tsygankov (2002).
 - 15 On Russian resistance to the color revolutions, see Polese and Ó Beacgáin (2011); on the West’s *de facto* manipulation of the color revolutions, see Roberts (2014).
 - 16 In a speech in 2005, President Putin famously stated, “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. For the Russian people, it became a real drama. Tens of millions of our citizens and countrymen found themselves outside Russian territory. The epidemic of disintegration also spread to Russia itself” (Putin 2005).
 - 17 For a discussion of Russian policy leading to the five-day war in August 2008, see Nygren (2011).
 - 18 For a detailed discussion of the “reset policy,” see McFaul (2018).
 - 19 After the incorporation of Crimea Putin’s approval ratings in Russia peaked at 87% in July 2015 (Nardelli, Ranin, and Arnett 2015).
 - 20 The dramatic deterioration of U.S.–Russian relations at this same time contributed to the general decline of the EU’s relations with Russia. For example, U.S. legislation passed in 2012 targeting Russian political leaders associated with President Putin for their presumed role in the death of the Russian civil rights lawyer Sergei Magnitsky received a very hostile response in Moscow (Seddon and Buckley 2016).

- 21 Richard Sakwa (2015a, 2015b) maintains that EU policy consistently attempted to exclude Russia from Europe. In his speech in Sevastopol justifying the occupation of Crimea, Putin (2014) argued that the West's actions in Eastern Europe, such as support for color revolutions and the NATO membership promise to Georgia and Ukraine, were offensive in nature to Russia and required a response.
- 22 On June 2, 2020, President Putin reaffirmed that Russia could use nuclear weapons in response to a nuclear attack or an aggression involving conventional weapons that "threatens the very existence of the state." This was presumably in response to indications that the United States was considering "the development of prospective weapons that could give Washington the capability to knock out key military assets and government facilities without resorting to atomic weapon" (Ischenkov 2020).
- 23 As of mid-2020, crude oil prices had dropped once again to about \$40 per barrel (Saefong and DeCambre 2020).
- 24 For a critical assessment of French President Macron's call for an improvement of EU relations with Russia, see Adomeit (2020c).
- 25 The decision by Trump in June 2020 to cut U.S. military forces in Germany by 25% is likely both to continue his policy of undercutting the NATO alliance and to be welcomed by Moscow (Crowley and Barnes 2020).
- 26 This basic isolationism is illustrated by the U.S. withdrawal or planned withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, UNESCO, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Works and Relief Agency, the Iran Nuclear Deal, the World Health Organization, NAFTA, the Open Skies Surveillance Treaty and the Intermediate Range Nuclear Arms Treaty with Russia ("Trump's top five withdrawals" 2018; Macias 2020; Finucane and Manion 2019; Joseph and Branswell 2020). For a perceptive discussion of the impact of Trump's policies on global economic and security orders, see Loftus (2021); see also, Löfflmann (2020).
- 27 More recently, in early June 2020, Trump declared his desire for Putin to attend the next G-7 meeting, despite strong opposition from U.S allies (Crowley 2020).

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3 Images and decision-making in foreign policy: the case of Vladimir Putin

Aleksandar Jankovski

Introduction

More than a half-century ago, Kenneth Boulding posited that “mechanical system” explanations of international politics yield but a “very rough first approximation to the immensely complex truth” (Boulding 1959, 120). Similarly, Richard K. Herrmann and Michael P. Fischerkeller have noted that “structural theory...remains sufficiently indeterminate and dependent on claims about actors and strategic situations that theorists are forced to make claims about the empirical setting at the foreign-policy level” (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 415). This indeterminacy inevitably brings theorists into the realm of images. Thus, Herrmann and Jonathan W. Keller write that “[i]n theories of foreign policy, perceptions—defined as constructions of reality in which decisions are taken—play a key role” (Herrmann and Keller 2004, 560). Moreover, inasmuch as theorists “cannot predict with confidence how actors will perceive and define strategic situations, [they] must explore these mental constructions [that is, images] empirically” (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 415).

In view of the importance of images for theorizing decision-making in foreign policy, this chapter’s contribution to the literature is fourfold. First, I retheorize the concept of “image” by delimiting the components that enter into its production. Second, I distinguish between foundational images and derivative images. Third, I connect the work on images with broader theorizing in International Relations. Namely, I propose that Hedley Bull’s “three competing traditions of thought” (Bull 1977, 23) are the best candidates for foundational images in world politics. Fourth, and finally, I map the foundational image of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin. The remainder of the chapter unfolds as follows: I briefly analyze the received wisdom and then retheorize the concept of “image.” In so doing, I delimit the components that enter into the production of an image. I then illustrate the value-added of retheorizing the concept by mapping the foundational image of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. At this point, I demonstrate the way in which

President Putin's foundational image informs his image of the Syrian Civil War. Finally, I round out the discussion.

Images in international relations theory: the received wisdom

The received wisdom from the literature on images proceeds roughly along the following lines: Boulding suggests that the first dimension of the national image is that of "simple geographic space" (Boulding 1959, 123); and, the "second important dimension of the national *image* is that of hostility or friendliness" (Boulding 1959, 124). Herrmann and Fischerkeller push beyond the friendliness/hostility dichotomy. They propose five ideal-type images derived from "three dimensions" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 426). The dimensions include, first, a decisionmaker's "judgment about the threat or opportunity that an actor represents....The second essential dimension of an image of another actor is relative power.... Finally, images of other actors include a cultural dimension" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 425–426). The *first* image is the "enemy image;" the "perception [here is] of another target that is seen as threatening [falling on Herrmann and Fischerkeller's dimension 1], roughly comparable in capability [dimension 2], and not too different in terms of cultural sophistication [dimension 3]" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 426). Perceiving another state as an "enemy" leads to a "foreign policy strategy" of "containment." The "main goal of [this] strategy" is to "deter," "protect and shield," "build [a] major alliance system," "protect geopolitical assets in [the] Third World from [the] target" state, and "protect [one's own] credibility as a major power/attractive ally for Third World [states]" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). Moreover, "the perceiver will seek to bridle the target's expansionist designs. It will not cooperate with the target in any substantial way since it perceives that the target would take advantage of cooperative initiatives. Furthermore, it will not directly attack the target because it perceives it as having a capability base similar to its own. This suggests a cautious, resisting strategy to counter the probes of the target" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 431).

The *second* image is the "degenerate image;" this is the "image of another state that is seen as representing a great opportunity to exploit [dimension 1], and that is similar in capability [dimension 2], but suffering from cultural decay [dimension 3]" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 426). Perceiving another states as "degenerate" leads to a foreign policy of "revisionism." The goal of this strategy is to "rollback and deter," build [a] major alliance system" and "protect geopolitical assets in [the] Third World from [the] target [state] and attract new allies" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). The perceiver "will likely initiate a direct attack on that target" since it views the degenerate states as "disorganized, chaotic, anarchic, and lacking the will to defend itself" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 431). The *third* image is the "colony image;" this is the "ideal case in which a subject believes

there is a great opportunity to exploit a target [dimension 1] actor who is both weaker [dimension 2] and inferior in terms of culture [dimension 3]" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 426). This leads to a foreign policy of "intervention." The goal of this strategy is to "ensure existence of cooperative client regime" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). Thus, "attributes of the colony image grant to the target inferior capability and describe a divided polity where the progressive elements are threatened by the subversive elements. The observer associates its own strategic goals and objectives with the progressive forces and feels compelled and able to intervene to protect them" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 431).

The *fourth* image is the "imperialist image;" the "ideal case of a subject seeing intense threat [dimension 1] from a state that is much more powerful [dimension 2] but not culturally superior [dimension 3]" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 426). This image leads to a foreign policy of "independent fortress." The goal of this strategy is to "reduce target control," "deter target intervention or compel its exit," "gain support against target," "reduce target's role in region" and "reduce [the] target's access to resources" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). Thus, "[i]n an imperialist image, the target is attributed superior capability and considered to be motivated by a desire to dominate the actor through a local client regime. Because the imperialist target is seen as having vastly superior capability, direct attack on the target is not considered likely to be successful. Instead the observer is inclined to attack the client regime and raise the costs of the imperialist's involvement through terrorism and other forms of resistance" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 431). And the *fifth* image is the "ally image;" this is the ideal case of a subject seeing "opportunity through mutual interest" (dimension 1) with a state that is of "comparable capability" (dimension 2) and of "comparable culture" (dimension 3) (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). This image leads to a foreign policy of "institutional cooperation." The main goal of this strategy is to "enhance combined capability and mutual confidence in common action," to "enhance third-party contribution to common cause already institutionalized between subject and target [states], to "reduce third-party threats" and to "reduce number of power instruments tied down in auxiliary theaters and enhance positive resource contribution made by [the] target's peripheral relations" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 430). Moreover, perceiving a state as an "ally" means that "it perceives the target as somewhat altruistic, defensive in orientation, and willing to cooperate for mutual gain. Toward this end, the actor will put forth policies designed to enhance the well-being of both actors, expecting the other to reciprocate. Over time the actor will seek to institutionalize this cooperation" (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 431).

Given (i) the five images, (ii) the strategies that emerge from those images and (iii) a dyadic relationship between them, there are 15 possible "international interactions." Two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. If actor A perceives actor B as an "enemy" and adopts a strategy of

“containment,” and if actor B also perceives actor A as an “enemy” and adopts the same strategy, then the expected international interaction in this dyadic relationship will be one of “tit-for-tat reciprocity” and “occasional crises.” If actor B holds a “degenerate” image of actor A – and adopts a strategy of “revisionism” – and if actor A holds an “ally” image of actor B – and adopts a strategy of “institutional cooperation” – then the expected international interaction in this dyadic relationship will be one in which “Actor A bandwagons with acts that appease actor B” leading to an “alliance under B’s hegemony” (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 435).

In its present state, the literature on images stands as an impressive theoretical edifice. Still, it is my view that the literature suffers from two principal defects. *First*, it *undertheorizes* the very concept which it seeks to account for. Specifically, the literature does not *systematically map* the components that go into the construction of images. And *second*, the literature does not distinguish between foundational images and derivative images. I address both lacunae in the next section.

Mapping images: the theory revisited

The literature’s principal shortcomings, as I just argued, are (i) that it does not systematically *map* the components that go into the construction of images and (ii) that it does not distinguish between foundational and derivative images. I address these omissions in this section. In subsections 1 and 2, I briefly delineate the two assumptions on which I build a modified theory of image-construction and map out the constituent components of images in subsection 3.

A great deal of theoretical purchase can be gained by a closer examination of the concept “image.” An image has been defined as a “structured piece of information-capital” and “the total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure of the behavior unit or its internal view of itself and the universe” (Boulding 1959, 120–121). Alternatively, it has been defined as “a subject’s cognitive construction or mental representation of another actor in the political world” (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995, 415). It is a “knowledge structure that constrains the decisions that [a decisionmaker] can make” (Beach 1993, 148). Finally, an image may be thought of as “the world as it exists in the mind of the perceiver” (Duelfer and Dyson 2011, 75). These definitions capture much of the essence of images. The existing scholarship, however, does not systematically investigate the components that enter into the production of an image. Which components make up the “total cognitive, affective, and evaluative structure” in Boulding’s definition? Which components go into the production of the “subject’s cognitive construction or mental representation” of the world? Which components go in the construction of the subject’s “knowledge structure?” And, which components make up “the world as it exists in the mind of

the perceiver?” Finally, are these foundational or derivative images? These are the lacunae that I propose to fill in this chapter before turning to a discussion of Putin’s views of the world and the resulting foreign policy decision making.

1. *Every social action must be understood from within.* I begin from the assumption that all social action must be theorized from the vantage point of the social actor who undertakes it. Human beings are “cultural beings” endowed with the ability to “take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance” (Weber 1949, 81; quoted in Ruggie 1998, 856). Thus, “sentience makes a difference.... When units are sentient, how they perceive each other is a major determinant of how they interact” (Buzan 2001, 476). All of this is to note “that social reality does not fall from heaven, [rather] human agents construct and reproduce it through their daily practices” (Risse 2004, 3). Consequently, this “locate[s] the problem of explaining social action in an interpretative setting, which requires us to specify that there is meaning both in the behavior of others and in the account which the acting individual takes of it.” Thus, every social “action must always be understood from within” (Weber 1968; quoted in Adler 1997, 326).
2. *Active Organism.* The second assumption builds on Immanuel Kant’s dictum that reason “must approach nature in order to be taught by it: but not in the character of a pupil, who agrees to everything the master likes, *but as an appointed judge, who compels the witnesses to answer the questions which he himself proposes*” (Kant 1922 [1781], 691; emphasis added). Sentient beings – the constructors and reproducers of social reality – are active beings. Taking a deliberate attitude towards the world and lending it significance is an active, not passive, process. It is a process of a Kantian “judge” compelling nature to answer questions that she, the judge, sees fit to ask. It is a process of theorizing (see below). Individuals theorize, for they wish to understand the world about them. Central to this chapter’s approach, therefore, will be the “notion of [an] active organism which seeks from the world the information it needs to pursue its chosen course of action” (Arbib 1992, 2). On this view, “[p]erception...is not a passive process of receiving information but an active process of constructing reality” (Duelfer and Dyson 2011, 76).
3. *Images.* Given that individuals are sentient beings who take a deliberate attitude toward the world and lend it significance; given that they are constructors and reproducers of social reality (assumption 1); and given that individuals are active organisms (assumption 2) – Kantian “judges” – means that it “is what [individuals] think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines [their] behavior” (Boulding 1959, 120). Importantly, it is imaged as “knowledge structure[s] that *constrain the*

decisions that [individuals] can make” (Beach 1993, 148; emphasis added). What individuals think the world is like – their image of the situation – is the way they make sense of the world. And this sense of the world – this image of the world – constrains what individuals see as instrumentally (im) possible and morally (in)appropriate actions. *Images, therefore, drive behavior.* To theorize decision making means to recognize that decisions individuals make are determined by their own images of the world.

To develop the theory of image-formation, I start from the premise that the construction of an image begins with the articulation, by a sentient and active organism (a Kantian “judge”), of ontological/metaphysical,¹ normative/moral and instrumental questions.² Some such questions may be, “Who am I? What is the nature of human nature? In what strategic situation do I find myself? Who are the other actors in this situation? What space do I occupy in the puzzle that is this strategic situation? Which gambits are available to me in the strategic situation in which I find myself? Which gambit maximizes my utility? What is morality? Is a particular course of action moral? If my optimal (on instrumental grounds) gambit is immoral, should I take it?” The *process* of working out answers to such questions is the process of *theorizing*. And, the *result* of the process of theorizing is the production of ontological/metaphysical, normative/moral and instrumental *theories*. Theories, in turn, are composed of beliefs and principles. I will define beliefs as stored answers to ontological/metaphysical and instrumental questions. And, I will define principles as stored answers to normative/moral questions (these definitions are developed more fully in the following discussion). Finally, I shall think of an image as the sum total of these theories.

In view of the foregoing, I define an image more formally as a complex of theories, which theories are the resultants of the process of thorough working out by an active social organism of ontological/metaphysical, normative/moral, and instrumental questions regarding a phenomenon – or classes of phenomena – in the organism’s milieu. Moreover, images “may be correlated with others in a rich web of associations” and “may also have horizontal connections with [images] on other issues” (Larson 1994, 20). I shall, therefore, also distinguish between foundational images and derivative images. I shall think of an image as foundational if (a) for its construction an image does not depend on another image and (b) it enters into the construction of other, that is, derivative images. Put otherwise, derivative images are constructed from beliefs, principles and other, foundational images (see following discussion).

Having defined images as complexes of theories, and theories, in turn, as composed of *beliefs* and *principles*, it is essential to closely delimit these two concepts. As constraints of space necessitate but the briefest of expositions, I shall here make only eight points and reserve the balance of my discussion for subsequent work. *First*, I begin by noting that the “content of cognition”

is most commonly defined in terms of “what individuals *believe*, that is, their *declarative knowledge*” (Young and Schafer 1998, 67; emphasis added). Key to understanding cognition, therefore, is the concept of *belief*. While I endorse the idea of cognition as defined in terms of beliefs, below I will cast doubt on the idea that the construction of images can be reduced to declarative knowledge. *Second*, belief is a “fact or proposition represented [in the mind], or the particular stored token of that fact or proposition...; belief is the state of having such a fact or representation stored.” Therefore, when an individual “learns a particular fact” she “acquires a new belief” (Schwitzgebel 2019). Still, in a nod to prospect theory, learning of a new fact need not lead to the acquisition of a new belief. Consequently, learning a new fact need not lead to the formation of a new image.

Third, more than simply “facts or propositions represented” in the mind, I will also maintain that beliefs also include stored mental representations of causal mechanisms and arrays of gambits that the individual perceives as available to her.

Fourth, propositions are commonly defined narrowly as declarative sentences that can be either true or false, but not both. This, however, is problematic for theorizing image-construction. Consider the statement that the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century (see *Reuters*, March 2, 2018). This statement is not a proposition in the strict epistemological sense. It can be true and false at the same time, depending on the individual who is making the argument. Surely most Latvians or Georgians – or Western foreign-policy decisionmakers for that matter – do not share in President Putin’s assessment. Nevertheless, it is a belief and, as such, it is a component in the construction of the image that some decision-makers hold. Consequently, I will define propositions more broadly to include statements that would not count as propositions in the strict epistemological sense. Moreover, we recall that individuals act on the basis of “their image of the situation. It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behavior” (Boulding 1959, 120). Thus, the belief that an individual holds of the catastrophic geopolitical consequences of the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., will, *all else equal*, be a component in the construction of her image and, in the final analysis, will inform her behavior.

Fifth, the foregoing discussion of beliefs brings in its train a discussion of declarative knowledge as it relates to the production of images as complexes of theories. “Most contemporary [analyses] of knowledge...treat knowledge as a species of belief” (Schwitzgebel 2019). These analyses generally define declarative knowledge (not unproblematically) as *justified true belief*. On this account, one may say that she *knows* that something *is* only insofar as the stored token of a proposition is *true* and she is *justified* in her belief that the proposition is true. The declarative knowledge approach, however, is unduly restrictive from the standpoint of theorizing the construction of images. Beliefs that are not true (beliefs that do not correctly capture the true state of

the world) are also components in the production of images and inform decision-making. After all, “[p]erceptions of reality, whether accurate or not, become reality in a decision maker’s mind, and he or she has no other basis upon which to act; thus these perceptions or images necessarily influence policy” (Young and Schafer 1998, 79). Indeed, one concept important to theorizing in International Relations Theory (IRT) is that of misperception, or the “gap between the world as it actually exists and the world as it exists in the mind of the perceiver” (Duelfer and Dyson 2011, 75). But the only way that misperception matters in the process of decision-making is if “the world as it exists in the mind of the perceiver” drives behavior. Thus, the argument here is that *images drive behavior* irrespective of whether or not those images as complexes of theories correctly capture the true state of the world. “It is what we think the world is like, not what it is really like, that determines our behavior.” We would be well-served, then, to not only use a broader definition of propositions but to also jettison reliance on declarative knowledge. Therefore, *I claim, more generally, that decision-makers have beliefs, or stored mental representations of facts, which may be true or not, and which in part help construct the images they hold.*

Sixth, I expand the definition of beliefs to include causal mechanisms and arrays of gambits that the decision-maker views as available to her. That is, in addition to being stored mental representations (tokens) of facts, beliefs also include stored mental representations of (i) causal mechanisms and (ii) gambits. Respecting (i) the sentence “It is raining” is a proposition and my having a mental representation of this proposition amounts to a belief. The same is true for the proposition “The pavement is wet.” Additionally, the sentence “I believe that if it rains the pavement will be wet” – a statement that proposes a causal relationship leading from rain to the wetness of the pavement – is also a belief. As with beliefs of facts in general, beliefs about causation can be wrong. That is, the belief that plan p^* will bring about ideal state s^i may well prove to be wrong inasmuch as, when realized, p^* does *not* bring about s^i .

(ii) Individuals may hold instrumental beliefs, or beliefs with respect to arrays of gambits that they think are available to them, along with payoffs for each gambit at the terminal nodes, as seen in extensive games. Instrumental beliefs are answers, and here I borrow from the literature on the operational code, to such questions as, “What is the best approach for selecting goals or action to advance one’s interests? What is the utility and role of different means or tactics for advancing one’s interests” (Young and Schafer 1998, 70)?

For the discussion of instrumental beliefs, I rely, to a considerable degree, on the analysis by Lee Roy Beach of “trajectory” and “strategic” images. Note that Beach refers to these as images. That is, he argues that an individual’s cognitive universe is composed of value *images*, trajectory *images*, and strategic *images*. Here, I depart from Beach’s analysis. For my part, I see images as *complexes* (or *composites*) of beliefs, which I define as mental

representations of propositions (broadly understood), causal mechanisms and arrays of gambits available to the individual. The last two, causal mechanisms and arrays of gambits, are not unlike Beach's trajectory and strategic images. Moreover, my understanding of principles tracks closely Beach's articulation of value images (see following discussion). In the theory articulated here, therefore, a trajectory belief "represents what the decision maker hopes he, she, or the organization will become and achieve. Goals can be concrete, specific events (landing a contract) or abstract states (a successful career). The goal agendum is called the trajectory [belief] to convey the idea of extension, the decision maker's vision of the ideal future" (Beach 1993, 151).

Strategic beliefs are composed of "the various *plans* that have been adopted for achieving the goals on the trajectory" belief. A plan, in turn, is an "abstract sequence of potential activities beginning with goal adoption and ending with goal attainment." Plans can be subdivided into "tactics," that is, "specific, palpable actions that are intended to facilitate implementation of an abstract plan to further progress toward a goal" and "forecasts," that is, what will happen if certain classes of tactics are executed in the course of plan implementation" (Beach 1993, 151–152). Naturally, "the decision maker's vision of the ideal future" (Beach's trajectory beliefs) and the "various *plans* that have been adopted for achieving the goals" (Beach's strategic beliefs) are linked, in no small measure, to what I refer here as causal beliefs. That is, to propose that plan p^* will bring about ideal state s^i is to propose a causal relationship leading from p^* to s^i .

Seventh, the normative/ethical component in the construction of images includes the "decision maker's values, morals, ethics, and personal crotchets, which, for convenience, are collectively called *principles*." These are the "bedrock beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad, proper and improper, appropriate and inappropriate" (Beach 1993, 148–149). They are the "guiding principles about the world and specific domains." Principles, then, are answers to questions of moral philosophy. Moreover, they "run the gamut from the general ('Honesty is the best policy') to the specific ('We always meet the payroll on time'), from the admonitory ('Try to treat the customer as you would want to be treated') to the imperative ('Never discuss internal financial affairs with outsiders!')" (Beach 1993, 149). Finally, principles "serve to internally generate *candidate* goals and plans for possible adoption, and they guide decisions about externally generated candidate goals and plans" (Beach 1993, 151).

Amitai Etzioni's discussion is instructive here. He posits that "the majority of choices people make...are completely or largely based on normative-affective considerations not merely with regard to selection of goals but also of means, and that the limited zones in which other, logical-empirical (L/E), considerations are paramount, are themselves defined by N/A factors that legitimate and otherwise motivate such decision-making" (Etzioni 1988, 126). N/A factors are important in two respects: first, N/A

factors “influence the selection of means by *excluding* the role of logical-empirical considerations in many areas.” This is to write that “choice is made exclusively on normative-affective grounds” (Etzioni 1988, 128–129). And second, N/A factors impact decision making “by *infusing* the deliberations in such a way that logical-empirical considerations play a relatively minor or secondary role to normative-affective factors; and in still others – define the areas in which choices may be made largely or wholly on logical-empirical grounds, areas referred to here as normative-affective *indifference zones*” (Etzioni 1988, 129; emphasis added).

It is important to recall that beliefs need not be true or justified to become a component in the construction of an image as a complex of theories. A similar caveat applies to principles. A principle need not be “admirable” (Beach 1993, 149) to become a component in the construction of an image. Whether or not a principle is admirable is of second-order importance to theorizing the construction of images. Of first-order importance is the fact that principles have structural characteristic; they delimit that which the PDM views as morally (in)appropriate and (un)desirable. Thus, what some may perceive as evil, immoral or normatively undesirable principles exert just as strong a structural pull as ostensibly admirable principles. Apposite for this chapter’s empirical discussion, therefore, is the idea that “foreign policies that involve the use of force (‘militant internationalism’) are *equally morally motivated*, but by values that emphasize the protection of the community” (Kertzer et al. 2014, 826; emphasis added). On this view, “hawks and hardliners have morals too, just a different set than those emphasized by liberal idealists; hard-headed considerations of the national interest therefore not only have cultural bases...but moral ones as well” (Kertzer et al. 2014, 826).

Finally *eighth*, I draw a distinction between foundational images and derivative (or subordinate) images. An image is foundational, it will be recalled, if (a) for its construction an image does not depend on another image and (b) it enters into the construction of other, derivative, images. Moreover, I have argued that images emerge as the result of ontological/metaphysical, normative/moral, and instrumental questions that sentient and active organism (a Kantian “judge”) ask about their milieu. Foundational images, therefore, depend on their emergence on foundational questions.

Hedley Bull’s discussion is instructive here. He posits that there are “three competing traditions of thought” in world politics: the Hobbesian/Machiavellian (henceforth, Hobbesian), Kantian, and Grotian traditions (Bull 1977, 23). Briefly examining the traditions will suffice to demonstrate the cogency of the theoretical move on which I insist herein – the proposition, that is, that Bull’s three traditions are the best candidates for foundational images in IR theory. We recall that the central ontological/metaphysical questions have to do with (i) “what there is, what exists, what the stuff [of] reality is made out of” (Hofweber 2017) and (ii) the most general feature of the way in which the entities, out of which the stuff of

reality is made, relate to one another. The foundational ontological/meta-physical questions in IR theory are (i) which entities are the central entities in world politics and (ii) what is the most general feature of the way in which these entities interact? In turn, the central ontological/metaphysical belief of *both* the Hobbesian *and* Grotian traditions is that states – *rather* than individual human beings – constitute *the* stuff that reality is made out of in world politics. In both traditions “the immediate members of international society are states rather than individual human beings.” Still, the two traditions diverge on the question of what is the most general feature of the way in which states relate to one another. According to the Hobbesian tradition, war constitutes the most general feature of the way in which states relate to one another. By contrast, in the Grotian tradition “economic and social intercourse” constitute the most general feature. The Kantian tradition departs from the other two traditions regarding the stuff of reality in world politics. In the Kantian tradition international politics is “only apparently the relationship among states.” The real stuff of world politics is a “community of mankind” (Bull 1977, ch. 2).

Aim additionally, more than the ontological centrality of states – and *irrespective* of whether war or “economic and social intercourse,” is the most general feature of the way in which states relate to one another – both the Hobbesian and Grotian traditions emphasize the centrality of power, the balance of power and the oversize role that great powers perform in world politics. Thus, the great powers, those states that are “in the front rank in terms of military strength” (Bull 1977, 195), are “guardians” or “custodians” (Bull 1977, 17) of the international system and society. Indeed, “great powers are powers recognized by others to have, and conceived by their own leaders and peoples to have, certain special rights and duties. Great powers, for example, assert the right, and are accorded the right, to play a part in determining issues that affect the peace and security of the international system as a whole. They accept the duty, and are thought by others to have the duty” (Bull 1977, 196). In the capacity as guardians/custodians, the principal function that great powers discharge is the “preservation of the general balance” (or systemic balance) of power (Bull 1977, 201). In so doing, the great powers obviate the emergence of a hegemon – or a state preponderant so as to be capable of “lay[ing] down the law to others” (Bull 1977, 97).

Second, the central principle (normative/moral argument) that enters the construction of the Hobbesian tradition is that “international life is beyond the bounds of any society.” States are “free to pursue [their] goals” completely free of “moral or legal restrictions of any kind.” By contrast, the Grotian tradition maintains that society obtains in the relations among states. States are not akin to gladiators, fighting to the death. Rather, they are “limited in their conflicts with one another by common rules and institutions.” Moreover, the Kantian tradition agrees with the Grotian tradition that morality obtains in international relations. However, in the Kantian tradition, “these [moral] imperatives enjoin not coexistence and

cooperation among states but rather the overthrow of the system of states and its replacement by a cosmopolitan society” (Bull 1977, ch. 2). *Third*, the central instrumental belief of the Hobbesian tradition, dovetailing on the central principle, is that the “rules of prudence or expedience” are the only rules that in some way limit state behavior.” That is, decision-makers are not encumbered by moral constraints. World politics is a catch-as-catch-can duel in which no holds are barred. By contrast, and as already indicated, the Grotian belief is that moral constraints limit the actions of states.

The three traditions of thought, therefore, *emerge* as the result of the asking of foundational questions; thus, the three traditions present as complexes of ontological/metaphysical and instrumental beliefs and principles. We recall, however, that this is necessary, but not by itself, sufficient for an image to be foundational. An image has to satisfy a second criterion in order to be counted as foundational; namely, the image has to enter into the construction of other, derivative, images. It is a fairly straightforward matter to show the way in which these two traditions enter into derivative images. Foreshadowing the arguments more fully developed below later, consider the way in which President Putin’s foundational image enters into the construction of his image of the Syrian Civil War. As I demonstrate in the subsequent section, President Putin’s foundational image coincides, to a significant degree, with the Grotian tradition/image. One component of this is his belief in the ontological centrality of states. Moreover, one principle informing the construction of his foundational image is that the ontological centrality of states is normatively desirable. President Putin, thus, consistently draws a sharp distinction between the normative desirability of strong, stable, and well-organized states and chaos. He laments, for instance, the fact that “the further escalation of ethnic, religious, and social conflicts” leads to the creation of “zones of anarchy, lawlessness, and chaos around them, places that are comfortable for terrorists and criminals, where piracy, human trafficking, and drug trafficking flourish” (Putin, October 24, 2014). It is not difficult, therefore, to see the way in which the foundational image thus defined informs the construction of President Putin’s image of the Syrian Civil War. Thus, President Putin’s core principle informing his *foundational image* is that strong, stable, and well-organized states are normatively desirable. This principle, therefore, informs his image of the Syrian Civil War. Consequently, efforts to destabilize Syria are viewed as normatively and morally undesirable. In President Putin’s own words, “some [until] recently stable and rather well-doing countries in the Middle East and North Africa – Iraq, Libya and Syria – have now plunged into chaos and anarchy that pose a threat to the whole world. We all know why that happened. We know who decided to oust the unwanted regimes and brutally impose their own rules. Where has this led them? They stirred up trouble, *destroyed the countries’ statehood, set people against each other, and then ‘washed their hands,’ as we say in Russia, thus opening the way to radical activists, extremists and terrorists*” (Putin, December 3, 2015; emphasis added).

Vladimir Putin: his foundational image and his image of the Syrian civil war

To illustrate the value-added of the theory outlined earlier, in this section, I propose to map the beliefs and principles that enter in the construction of the foundational image held by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, in his capacity as principal decision-maker. The central claim that I defend in this section is that the foundational image held by President Putin coincides, *to a remarkable degree*, with the Grotian image (or tradition of thought) as outlined by Hedley Bull (1977). I also examine the way in which President Putin's foundational image enters in the construction of his image of the Syrian civil war. But "[h]ow easy is it to infer policymakers' cognitive content or process?" In a "utopian world," it would be the easiest thing. We "would bring leaders into a controlled laboratory environment where we could have them answer a battery of tests and engage in a set of experiments designed to elicit exactly the information we are seeking." Needless to note, this is "highly infeasible" (Young and Schafer 1998, 67). Matters are not hopeless, however. Nicholas Onuf-style constructivists emphasize the notion that "saying is doing: talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world what it is" (quoted in Smith 2001, 52). Namely, "language is both representative and performative. People use words to represent deeds and they can use words, and words alone, to perform deeds" (Onuf 1989, 82 quoted in Zehfus 2015, 59). We can distinguish among three types of speech acts. Assertive speech acts are "speech acts stating a belief...with the intention that the hearer accepts this belief." Directive speech acts "contain an action the speaker wishes the hearer to perform (regulative intent)." Finally, commissive speech acts "consist of the declaration of the speaker's commitment to a stated course of action" (Onuf 1989, 87; quoted in Chebakova 2011, 18)

Moreover, with Michael D. Young and Mark Schafer, I will "assume that policymakers monitor the situations in which they find themselves and engage in decision making that is guided by their cognitions. In this process, they make public speeches to explain and justify their actions; they respond to questions from the press; they may write letters to prominent newspapers in their own countries or abroad." And crucially, "[e]ach of these activities can be captured in a written transcript which provides a record for analysis" (Young and Schafer 1998, 67). Thus, "[o]ne of the constancies in foreign policy decision-making is that proposed courses of action are always accompanied by justificatory arguments" (Anderson 1981, 744). Indeed, "[p]roposed courses of action which are inconsistent with desired precedents or which cannot be plausibly justified will be considered, *ceteris paribus*, unacceptable" (Anderson 1981, 740).

Finally,

the verbal and symbolic aspects of foreign policy behavior, including

precedents and justifications, play an important role in international politics: (1) Whether by design or default, governments use the behavior of other governments to develop expectations about the future. (2) Governments care about the expectations others develop about their behavior. (3) Sustaining expectations about future behavior requires pursuing courses of action consistent with those expectations. The force of the three premises is that the expectations others will develop constrain what counts as an acceptable alternative in foreign policy decision-making (Anderson 1981, 740–741).

I will, therefore, use the assertive and commissive speech acts of President Putin – speech acts designed as justificatory arguments – to map his foundational image.

President Putin’s first core belief: the ontological centrality of states

The *first* core belief that informs the construction of President Putin’s foundational image is the *ontological centrality* of states in international relations. Put otherwise, states are the central actors of world politics. Moreover, this ontological belief is accompanied by an equally-as-important principle. This is the principle pointing to the *normative desirability of the state as the locus for the organization of social and political life*. That is, not only are states the central actors of world politics but this is *normatively appropriate and desirable*. Connecting this argument with the theoretical argument presented above, here we have the case that in President Putin’s view Westphalian principles *ought* to remain the fundamental or constitutional normative principles of world politics today. Finally, President Putin’s approach, by his own admission, is conservative. He values the stability that well-ordered states provide. Thus, President Putin laments the “destruction of traditional values from above” as this destruction “leads to negative consequences for society” and is “also essentially anti-democratic” (Putin, December 12, 2013).

President Putin assails “unipolarity” (and here we see the combination of the ontological and moral beliefs) inasmuch as *unipolarity has frequently led to the destabilization of states*. In President Putin’s own words, the “*unilateral diktat* and imposing one’s own models produces the...result [where instead] of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, *instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos*, and instead of democracy there is support for a very dubious public ranging from open neofascists to Islamic radicals” (Putin, October 24, 2014; emphasis added). Indeed, he never misses an opportunity to impress upon his interlocutors the distinction between well-ordered states and chaos. He warns, for example, that “the further escalation of ethnic, religious, and social conflicts” leads to the creation of “zones of anarchy, lawlessness, and chaos around them, places that are comfortable for terrorists and criminals, where piracy,

human trafficking, and drug trafficking flourish” (Putin, October 24, 2014). In his 2015 address to the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly, President Putin warned that “[p]ower vacuum in some countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa obviously resulted in the emergence of areas of anarchy, which were quickly filled with extremists and terrorists.” Contrasting terrorists to states and state actors, President Putin added that “[w]e consider that any attempts to flirt with terrorists, let alone arm them, are short-sighted and extremely dangerous. This may make the global terrorist threat much worse, spreading it to new regions around the globe” (Putin, September 28, 2015).

Charlie Rose pressed President Putin on the point that “vacuum is an issue. It seems that you are a little irritated by one point: you are talking about a strong centralized government being Russia’s DNA and you have a huge fear that there is no strong government in Syria and in other countries, that there is some sort of anarchy.” Replying to this, President Putin stated that “I am not saying that there is no strong government there. I mean that if there was no government at all, there would be anarchy and a vacuum, and the vacuum and the anarchy would soon evolve into terrorism” (Putin, September 29, 2015). A few months later, during his 2015 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, the Russian leader posited that “[t]errorism is a growing threat today.” And, “some [until] recently stable and rather well-doing countries in the Middle East and North Africa – Iraq, Libya and Syria – have now plunged into chaos and anarchy that pose a threat to the whole world. We all know why that happened. We know who decided to oust the unwanted regimes and brutally impose their own rules. Where has this led them? They stirred up trouble, *destroyed the countries’ statehood, set people against each other, and then ‘washed their hands,’ as we say in Russia, thus opening the way to radical activists, extremists and terrorists*” (Putin, December 3, 2015; emphasis added). And, during his 2016 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin pressed home the same point: “*Can we develop successfully on the shaky foundation of a weak state and apathetic government controlled from abroad and [one] that no longer has the people’s trust?* The answer is clearly, “No.” In recent years, we have seen a number of countries where this kind of situation has opened the road to adventurists, coups, and ultimately, anarchy. *Everywhere, the result is the same: human tragedies and victims, degradation and ruin, and disappointment*” (Putin, December 1, 2016; emphases added). On yet another occasion, he noted that he “believe[s] [that] on a global scale, the creation of mono-ethnic states is not a panacea against possible conflicts, but just the opposite. Because after various partitions and sovereignties, the creation of mono-ethnic states might lead to clashes in the fight for the realization of the interests of the newly established mono-ethnic states.... This is why people who live in a unified state within common boundaries have a greater chance that their state will pursue a balanced policy” (Putin, October 19, 2017).

Finally, to illustrate President Putin's belief that the state³ is the proper locus for the organization of social and political life consider his statement bemoaning the "destruction of traditional values from above." This destruction "not only leads to negative consequences for society, but is also essentially anti-democratic, since it is carried out on the basis of abstract, speculative ideas, contrary to the will of the majority, which does not accept the changes occurring or the proposed revision of values....Of course, this is a conservative position," concedes President Putin. Thus, crucially for delimiting his foundational image *and* his image of the Syrian Civil War, President Putin noted that "speaking in the words of Nikolai Berdyaev, the point of conservatism is not that it prevents movement forward and upward, but that it prevents movement backward and downward, into chaotic darkness and a return to a primitive state. In recent years, we have seen how attempts to push supposedly more progressive development models onto other nations actually resulted in regression, barbarity and extensive bloodshed. This happened in many Middle Eastern and North African countries. This dramatic situation unfolded in Syria" (Putin, December 12, 2013).

President Putin's second core belief: preserving the dagger and not feeding the enemy's army

The belief that power "plays a significant role in international affairs" (Putin, April 17, 2014) is the *second* core ontological belief that informs the construction of President Putin's foundational image. The "power factor in international relations," he believes, "has always existed and will always exist" (Putin, April 17, 2014). Thus, "*we must be realistic: military power is, of course, and will remain for a long time still an instrument of international politics. Good or bad, this is a fact of life.*" The only question concerns whether power will "be used only when all other means have been exhausted" (Putin, October 22, 2015; emphasis added)?

Additional examples will attest to the fact that the centrality of military power in world politics is a core belief informing President Putin's foundational image. In his answer to a question posed to him by Alexander Batrakov, President Putin noted that "it makes sense to remember what the ancients taught us: If you want peace, prepare for war. There is another famous maxim: Those who do not want to feed their army will feed that of their enemy." President Putin added that "we should certainly pay attention to and take pride in [the fact] that despite the modest military spending we not only maintain military and nuclear parity, but we are also two to three steps ahead of our competitors, because no other country in the world has the cutting-edge weapons technology that we have, I mean our hypersonic missiles" (Putin, June 20, 2019).

Also revealing of President Putin's core belief regarding the centrality of military power is a "joke" (his own word) he told during his 2017 annual news conference:

A former military officer asks his son, “Son, I had a dagger here. Have you seen my dagger?” The boy replies, “Dad, don’t be mad. I swapped it for a watch with the kid next door.” The officer says, “Let me see the watch.” He looks at it and says, “A good watch, good for you. You know, gangsters and robbers will come to our house tomorrow. They will kill me and your mother and will rape your elder sister, but you will come out to them and say: ‘Good evening, Moscow time is 12.30.’” We do not want anything like that to happen, do we? So we will pay due attention to developing the army and the navy without getting involved in an arms race or ruining our budget (Putin, December 14, 2017).

President Putin again stressed the importance of military power in his 2020 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly. He noted that:

For the first time ever – I want to emphasize this – for the first time in the history of nuclear missile weapons, including the Soviet period and modern times, *we are not catching up with anyone, but, on the contrary, other leading states have yet to create the weapons that Russia already possesses. The country’s defense capability is ensured for decades to come, but we cannot rest on our laurels and do nothing. We must keep moving forward, carefully observing and analyzing the developments in this area across the world, and create next-generation combat systems and complexes.* This is what we are doing today. *Reliable security creates the basis for Russia’s progressive and peaceful development* and allows us to do much more to overcome the most pressing internal challenges, to focus on the economic and social growth of all our regions in the interest of the people, because Russia’s greatness is inseparable from dignified life of its every citizen. *I see this harmony of a strong power and well-being of the people as a foundation of our future* (Putin, January 15, 2020; emphases added).

President Putin believes that military power *is the ultima ratio* in world politics; therefore, preserving the dagger – and feeding one’s own army – is the most secure way to not feed another state’s army. Still, it is worth noting that President Putin’s belief regarding the centrality of power is nuanced. It is his belief that power encompasses more than just military capability. Thus, in an interview with *Le Figaro*, President Putin posited that a “professional army is not only about modern military hardware and weapons. It is about competent and well-educated commanders. It is about soldiers who see meaning in their service and who understand what the true dignity of a country consists in. And the dignity of a democratic state depends in many ways on its ability to maintain peace for its citizens and ensure their security” (Putin, October 26, 2000). Nearly two decades after that interview, President Putin noted that:

Previously, when assessing the role and influence of countries, we spoke about the importance of the geopolitical factor, the size of a country's territory, its military power and natural resources. Of course, *these factors still are of major importance today*. But now there is also another factor – the *scientific and technological factor, which, without a doubt, is of great importance as well, and its importance will only increase over time*. In fact, this factor has always been important, but now it will have game-changing potential, and very soon it will have a major impact in the areas of politics and security. Thus, the scientific and technological factor will become a factor of universal and political importance (Putin, October 19, 2017; emphasis added).

Finally, President Putin understands that *soft power* is not unimportant to the overall power of states. A few examples will suffice to illustrate this. In the already cited 2014 speech to the Valdai Club, President Putin noted that “There is no doubt that humanitarian factors such as education, science, healthcare and culture are playing a greater role in global competition. This also has a big impact on international relations, including because this ‘soft power’ resource will depend to a great extent on real achievements in developing human capital rather than on sophisticated propaganda tricks” (Putin, October 24, 2014). During a “meeting with VGIK film school professionals, young graduates, and students,” President Putin posited that “[o]ver these 100 years [of its existence], VGIK has certainly become a very important part of our cultural landscape. One would think that all the most iconic film directors, actors, scriptwriters, animators and camera operators, in general, all film specialists, studied at VGIK. Importantly, your specialists work both in our country and abroad. You are teaching foreign students and, given the quality of VGIK education, this represents Russia’s major, in today’s parlance, *soft power*” (Putin, October 17, 2019; emphasis added). And, in a “meeting of the Presidential Council on [the] Russian Language,” President Putin posited that “Mr. Tolstoy said that the Russian language is a powerful weapon and so on. Let us not use these words. I am serious. It makes sense to not use them. Why? Because if it is a weapon, it will be dealt with as a weapon. It is already being fought against, but for other reasons. Indeed, it is a power to a certain extent, *a soft power. I believe this is enough*” (Putin, November 5, 2019; emphasis added).⁴

President Putin’s third core belief: keeping Chekhov’s rifle from going off

The *third* core ontological belief that informs President Putin’s foundational image is that the systemic (or general) balance of power (or strategic stability) is indispensable to the maintenance of international order. An interview that President Putin granted to Andrei Vandenko is illustrative of this. In a particularly telling moment, Vandenko invoked what he referred to

as “Chekhov’s principle.” Namely, “if there is a hypersonic rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it will unquestionably go off,” argued Vandenko. President Putin demurred at this characterization of “political reality.” “That may be true for the theater,” argued the President. However, “[s]ecurity and political reality are governed by another rule. Do you know which one? *It [Chekhov’s rifle] will go off if it is hanging just on one stage. And if a similar rifle is hanging on a stage close by, it is unlikely that anyone near it would want to use it.* This is exactly the situation that is called *strategic stability and the balance of power*. Due to this strategic balance, the world has avoided major military conflicts after World War II. Precisely thanks to this strategic stability and strategic balance” (Putin, March 2, 2020; emphasis added). On this view, the central dichotomy is between unipolarity and the balance of power (or, multipolarity). Unipolarity – or, continuing with the Chekhovian analogy, the existence of only *one* rifle hanging on the wall of only *one* stage – is the situation “when...this one pole has the illusion that all issues can be settled through power.” By contrast, “only when there is a balance of power does the desire to negotiate appears” (Putin, April 17, 2014).

Mr. Putin had pointed remarks with regard to unipolarity. He warned that “[a]ttempts to promote a model of unilateral domination...have led to an imbalance in the system of international law and global regulation, which means there is a threat, and political, economic or military competition may get out of control” (Putin, October 22, 2015). During the Cold War, he noted, “there was a stand-off between two superpowers and two systems but nevertheless a big war did not take place? We are indebted to the balance of powers between these two superpowers. There was an equilibrium and a fear of mutual destruction. And in those days one party was afraid to make an extra step without consulting the other. And this was certainly a fragile peace and a frightening one. But as we see today, it was reliable enough. Today, it seems that the peace is not so reliable” (Putin, February 10, 2007).

Numerous other examples will attest to the fact that this ontological belief is a core component in the construction of President Putin’s foundational image. To select but a few, consider his speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference. “[W]hat is a unipolar world,” he asked rhetorically. “However one might embellish this term, at the end of the day it refers to one type of situation, namely *one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making*. It is world in which there is *one master, one sovereign*. And, at the end of the day, this is pernicious not only for all those within this system but also for the sovereign itself because it destroys itself from within” (Putin, February 10, 2007; emphases added). And, during a September 2013 meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club – President Putin’s favorite forum for the explication of his views – he argued that a “unipolar, standardized world *does not require sovereign states; it requires vassals*. In a historical sense this amounts to a rejection of one’s own identity, of the God-given diversity of the world.” President Putin further posited that, “*This is our conceptual*

outlook, and it follows from our own historical destiny and Russia's role in global politics. Our present position has deep historical roots. Russia itself has evolved on the basis of diversity, harmony and balance, and brings such a balance to the international stage" (Putin, September 19, 2013; emphasis added).

A year later, at the same forum, President Putin noted that the post-Cold War unipolarity led to "measures taken against those who refuse to submit." These measures include the "use of force, economic and propaganda pressure, meddling in domestic affairs, and appeals to a kind of supra-legal legitimacy when they need to justify illegal intervention in this or that conflict or toppling inconvenient regimes." Indeed, "*unilateral diktat* and imposing one's own models produces the...result [where instead] of settling conflicts it leads to their escalation, instead of sovereign and stable states we see the growing spread of chaos, and instead of democracy there is support for a very dubious public ranging from open neo-fascists to Islamic radicals." President Putin added that "this period of [U.S.] unipolar domination has convincingly demonstrated that having only one power center does not make global processes more manageable." Thus, continued President Putin, "the unipolar world is simply a means of justifying dictatorship over people and countries. The unipolar world turned out too uncomfortable, heavy and unmanageable a burden even for the self-proclaimed leader" (Putin, October 24, 2014).

The antithesis of unipolarity is, of course, multipolarity (or, at least, bipolarity). On this account, "peace, as a state of world politics, has never been stable and did not come of itself. Periods of peace in both European and world history were always been based on securing and maintaining the existing balance of forces." President Putin selects the Peace of Westphalia, the Congress of Vienna and the Yalta conference as instances where peace was established on the basis of maintaining the balance of power. Moreover, Mr. Putin adds that "[w]ith the appearance of nuclear weapons, it became clear that there could be no winner in a global conflict. There can be only one end – guaranteed mutual destruction. It so happened that in its attempt to create ever more destructive weapons humanity has made any big war pointless" (Putin, October 22, 2015). Or, as President Putin put on a different occasion, the systemic balance of power is important inasmuch as it provides the "conditions of relative, again relative, global peace." To be sure, "[r]egional wars continuously flare up here and there.... But there have been no global wars. Why? Because the leading military powers established strategic parity. And no matter how unpleasant this may sound, it is true: the fear of mutual destruction has always deterred international actors from sudden movements and made them respect each other" (Putin, June 7, 2018).

Indeed, multipolarity is an all-important theme for President Putin. "The world has become multipolar and, hence more complicated largely owing to the Asian countries" (Putin, October 3, 2019). On another occasion, he noted that the Russian leadership is "interested in strong, economically stable and politically independent, united Latin America that is becoming an

important part of the emerging polycentric world order.” He added that “there is a need to create a new and more equitable polycentric world order based on international law with the central and coordinating role of the UN” (Putin, July 11, 2014). And, addressing a 2016 “meeting of the International Forum Primakov Readings devoted to studying Yevgeny Primakov’s academic and political heritage,” President Putin noted that among Mr. Primakov’s numerous “merits is coming up with the multipolarity concept. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, a new unipolar world order began to emerge, but Mr. Primakov had truly strategic vision that enabled to look into the future and see how unviable and one-sided this unipolar model was. It was also his idea to develop close cooperation among the strategic triangle of Russia, China and India” (Putin, November 30, 2016).

Respecting the balance of power, President Putin takes note of the “mechanisms we [presently] have for ensuring the world order.” These, he adds, “were created quite a long time ago now, including and above all in the period immediately following World War II.” The President “stress[es] the solidity of the system created back [i.e., after World War II] then rested not only on the balance of power and the rights of the victor countries, but on the fact that this system’s ‘founding fathers’ had respect for each other, did not try to put the squeeze on others, but attempted to reach agreements.” He added that, however solid,

this system needs to develop, and despite its various shortcomings, needs to at least be capable of keeping the world’s current problems within certain limits and regulating the intensity of the natural competition between countries. It is my conviction that we could not take this mechanism of checks and balances that we built over the last decades, sometimes with such effort and difficulty, and simply tear it apart without building anything in its place. Otherwise we would be left with no instruments other than brute force. What we needed to do was to carry out a rational reconstruction and adapt it to the new realities in the system of international relations (Putin, October 24, 2014).

Still, President Putin believes that many complexities obtain in international relations – and note here the consonance of this with Grotian theorizing in International Relations Theory. He noted that the “modern world is indeed multipolar, complex, and dynamic – this is objective reality. Any attempts to create a model of international relations where all decisions are made within a single pole are ineffective, malfunction regularly, and are ultimately set to fail” (Putin, July 15, 2014). He also believes, however, that “multi-polarity as such is not a cure-all. Nor does it mean that urgent problems will disappear by themselves” (Putin, October 3, 2019). Indeed, “the formation of a so-called polycentric world...in and of itself does not improve stability; in fact, it is more likely to be the opposite. The goal of reaching global

equilibrium is turning into a fairly difficult puzzle[;] [it is] an equation with many unknowns” (Putin, October 24, 2014).

Finally, we recall that in a simple balance of power the only recourse available to the power that is lagging behind is to “augment its own intrinsic strength” (Bull, 1977: 98). In a complex balance of power, by contrast, the power that is lagging behind has two options. It can “augment its own intrinsic strength” *and* it can enter into a strategic alliance with other great powers (see Bull 1977, ch. 5). Thus, in concert with his belief in the importance of Russia augmenting its own intrinsic strength – the idea that “those who do not want to feed their army will feed that of their enemy” – President Putin also believes that alliances in general, and the Sino-Russian alliance in particular, are “an important stabilizing factor in international affairs” (Putin, April 25, 2019). Indeed, he stressed the idea that “[i]n order to improve the international situation and to form a more equitable and democratic global architecture, we will continue to closely coordinate Russia and China’s steps on important global and regional issues, and productively cooperate at leading multilateral venues” (Putin, April 25, 2019). And, during his 2019 annual news conference, President Putin again emphasized that

Russian-Chinese cooperation is undoubtedly a major factor of international stability, including the strengthening of international law and the creation of a multipolar world. As a matter of fact, it has already been created; a unipolar world no longer exists. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was an illusion that this system was possible and that it would last for a long time, but it was only an illusion. I always said so. The most recent events have indicated just that. When you say “some countries,” you, first of all, mean the United States. The world’s multipolarity is a derivative of economic relations.... [T]he world simply cannot have a unipolar structure, with a single center that governs the entire international community. The role of our interaction with China is very important here. We will continue to strengthen our multilateral strategic ties. I am sure that this will benefit the people of China and the Russian Federation alike (Putin, December 19, 2019).

President Putin’s fourth core belief: great powers’ as custodians of international society

The *fourth* core ontological belief is that the great powers’ management is *indispensable* for the maintenance of international order. On this account, and note, once more, the consonance of this belief with the core tenets of the Grotian foundational image (tradition of thought), the great powers are custodians/guardians of international society. To illustrate this contention, consider a 2003 interview with *The New York Times*. President Putin noted that he is

fully aware that...international stability is impossible without good interaction between the United States and Russia, and that the United States for us is an important element of international stability. In some regions and in some directions, the United States' significance for us is such that it cannot be replaced. I have already mentioned strategic stability. The United States and Russia remain the strongest nuclear powers. Our interests in the sphere of fighting radicalism and terrorism coincide, and we are very much concerned about the radicalization of certain countries and certain regions. Our common interest lies in counteracting one of the main threats of the 21st century – proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Putin, October 4, 2003; emphasis added).

And, in the 2013 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, he posited that “global development[s] [are] becoming increasingly contradictory and dynamic. Russia’s historical responsibility is growing in these conditions, not only because it is one of the *key guarantors of global and regional stability*, but also a nation that consistently asserts its value-based approaches, including in international relations” (Putin, December 12, 2013; emphasis added). Moreover, during the 2020 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, President Putin argued that he is “convinced that it is high time for a serious and direct discussion about the basic principles of a stable world order and the most acute problems that humanity is facing.” To that end, he again emphasized the outsized role performed by the great powers. He took note of the importance of “awareness of our shared responsibility and real actions.” President Putin further noted that the “*founding countries of the United Nations should set an example. It is the five nuclear powers that bear a special responsibility for the conservation and sustainable development of humankind*. These five nations should first of all start with measures to remove the prerequisites for global war and develop updated approaches to ensuring stability on the planet that would fully take into account the political, economic and military aspects of modern international relations” (Putin, January 15, 2020; emphasis added).

Of course, as President Putin noted during the 2017 meeting of the Valdai Club, “interests of states do not always coincide, far from it. This is normal and natural. It has always been the case. The leading powers have different geopolitical strategies and perceptions of the world. This is the immutable essence of international relations, which are built on the balance between cooperation and competition” (Putin, October 19, 2017). Still, the overriding point is that interests do, however infrequently and tentatively, coincide from time to time. Thus, in a September 2015 interview, President Putin expounded on his belief in the importance of great powers’ management. He began by noting, “we have no obsession that Russia must be a superpower in the international arena.” He, then, added that because “Russia and the United States are the biggest nuclear powers, *this leaves us with an extra special responsibility*.” Moreover, the “thing is, however

strange it may seem, that the interests of the United States and of the Russian Federation do coincide sometimes.” Thus, President Putin pointed to the fact that the Russian Federation and the United States “have a special responsibility for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction” and have “worked hard and consistently on resolving this problem” (Putin, September 29, 2015; emphasis added). And, Putin also noted that the Russian Federation is a great power that needs no prodding to perform its proper function as the custodian of international society: “We very often – and personally, I very often – hear appeals by our partners, including our European partners, to the effect that Russia should play an increasingly active role in world affairs.... It is hardly necessary to incite us to do so. Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a 1000 years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today” (Putin, February 10, 2007).

President Putin’s image of the Syrian civil war

How does Vladimir Putin’s foundational image enter into the construction of his image of the Syrian Civil War? To address this question, we must recall first that an image is to be characterized as foundational if (a) for its construction it does not depend on another image and (b) it enters into the construction of other, derivative, images. We, then, recall that President Putin’s foundational image is composed of the following: (i) the belief in the ontological centrality of states in world politics and the acceptance of Westphalian principles – that is, the normative desirability of the state as the locus for the organization of social and political life; (ii) “military power is, of course, and will remain for a long time still an instrument of international politics;” (iii) the systemic (or general) balance of power (or strategic stability) is indispensable to the maintenance of international order; and (iv) great powers’ management is *indispensable* for the maintenance of international order.

Consider, then, President Putin’s assertive and commissive speech acts regarding Syria *in light* of our discussion of the core beliefs and principles that inform the production of his foundational image. President Putin, we recall, emphasizes the normative desirability of the state as the locus for the organization of social and political life and draws a sharp distinction between stable, well-ordered states and chaos – recalling here the earlier contention that Mr. Putin’s view of the state is not unlike that of Samuel Huntington. Moreover, he emphasizes the importance of military power as the *ultima ratio* in international politics. President Putin, thus, bristled when asked by journalists about “supplying arms” to the Syrian government: “let’s not forget,” he argued forcefully, “that we are supplying them to the *legitimate government*, and this is not prohibited under any international rules” (Putin, April 8, 2013; emphasis added). A few months later, President

Putin pressed home this point. He noted that the “most important point here is that *not all arms supplies are the same. Russia supplies arms under legal contracts to a legally recognized government, the government of President Assad.* If we sign more such contracts we will deliver the supplies accordingly.... *We think that our position is beyond reproach whether from a legal or moral standpoint*” (Putin, June 18, 2013; emphasis added).

President Putin stipulated that “when someone supposes that Russia is on one side and the US is on the other, this is inaccurate; it is a simplistic view of complicated global processes.” Moreover, the President noted that “it is hard for [him] to imagine why anyone would supply arms to those armed opposition groups in Syria, whose composition is not fully clear to us. If the United States and the US Secretary of State recognize one of the key Syrian opposition organizations, Jabjat al-Nusra, as a terrorist group and officially recognize its connection to Al-Qaeda, how can they supply arms to that opposition? Where will these arms eventually end up? What will be their role?” Finally, President Putin again stressed that the Russian “position is justified and measured. We feel that only the Syrian people themselves can guarantee a long-term solution to all the problems that have accumulated there over many decades. And coming from the outside, we can only create the conditions for achieving these agreements” (Putin, June 21, 2013).

The President noted that “only the United Nations Security Council could sanction the use of force against a sovereign state. Any other pretext or method to justify the use of force against an independent sovereign state is inadmissible and can only be interpreted as an aggression.” Asked by John Daniszewski about the crimes committed by the Syrian government, President Putin pushed back: “We do not defend this government. We are defending absolutely different things. We are defending the norms and principles of international law. We are defending modern world order. We are defending the possibility, the discussion of a possibility to use force only within the existing international order, international rules and international law. That is what we are defending. That is what represents the absolute value. When issues related to the use of force are dealt with outside the framework of the UN and Security Council, then there’s risk that such unlawful decisions might be applied against anybody and on any pretext” (Putin, September 4, 2013).

During an interview he granted to Radio Europe 1 and TF1 TV Channel, a journalist asked President Putin the following question: “We don’t quite understand why you, Vladimir Putin, the man who wants to modernize Russia, support a person who is killing his own people, who is covered in their blood. How can this be?” President Putin’s answer is telling and forceful: “I’ll explain very simply and clearly....We very much fear that Syria will fall apart like Sudan. We very much fear that Syria will follow in the footsteps of Iraq or Afghanistan. This is why we would like the legal authority to remain in power in Syria, so that Russia can cooperate with Syria and with our partners in Europe and the United States to consider possible

methods to change Syrian society, to modernize the regime and make it more viable and humane” (Putin, June 4, 2014).

President Putin continued to draw for his interlocutors the distinction between stable, well-ordered states and chaos. He noted that

In Iraq, after Saddam Hussein was toppled, the state’s institutions, including the army, were left in ruins. We said back then, be very, very careful. You are driving people out into the street, and what will they do there? Don’t forget (rightfully or not) that they were in the leadership of a large regional power, and what are you now turning them into? What was the result? Tens of thousands of soldiers, officers and former Baath Party activists were turned out into the streets and today have joined the rebels’ ranks. Perhaps this is what explains why the Islamic State group has turned out so effective? In military terms, it is acting very effectively and has some very professional people. Russia warned repeatedly about the dangers of unilateral military actions, intervening in sovereign states’ affairs, and flirting with extremists and radicals. We insisted on having the groups fighting the central Syrian government, above all the Islamic State, included on the lists of terrorist organizations (Putin, October 24, 2014).

He insisted that “There is only one regular army there [i.e., Syria]. That is the army of Syrian President al-Assad. And he is confronted with what some of our international partners interpret as an opposition. In reality, al-Assad’s army is fighting against terrorist organizations.” What is more, “I strongly believe,” argued President Putin, “that by acting...to destroy the legitimate bodies of power we would create a situation that we are witnessing today in other countries of the region or in other regions of the world, for instance, in Libya, where all state institutions have completely disintegrated. Unfortunately, we are witnessing a similar situation in Iraq. There is no other way to settle the Syrian conflict other than by strengthening the existing legitimate government agencies, support them in their fight against terrorism and, of course, at the same time encourage them to start a positive dialogue with the ‘healthy’ part of the opposition and launch political transformations” (Putin, September 29, 2015).

Finally, and recalling, again, that great powers’ management is indispensable for the maintenance of international order, President Putin repeatedly calls for the United Nations Security Council – an international organ designed by the great powers *for* the great powers – to play an indispensable actor in the resolution of the Syrian civil war. “We need to use the UN Security Council and believe that preserving law and order in today’s complex and turbulent world is one of the few ways to keep international relations from sliding into chaos. The law is still the law, and we must follow it whether we like it or not. Under current international law, force is permitted only in self-defense or by the decision of the Security Council” (September 12,

2013). “We also do not exclude all possibility of using force [in Syria],” argued President Putin again, “but only upon a decision by the United Nations Security Council. Force can be used only with the Security Council’s approval, or in response to direct aggression against a country. These are the only two lawful ways of using force” (Putin, October 2, 2013). The President also took note of the fact that the intervention in the Libyan civil war was wrong inasmuch as the “Security Council took the decision at one point to declare a no-fly zone in Libya so that Gaddafi’s aircraft would not be able to bomb the rebels. I do not think this was the wisest decision, but be that as it may. But what happened in the end? The United States started carrying out air strikes, including against targets on the ground. This was a gross violation of the UN Security Council resolution and essentially an act of aggression with no resolution to support it” (Putin, October 24, 2014).⁵

Conclusion and the path forward

In the foregoing account, I have endeavored to retheorize the concept of “image” by delimiting the components that enter into its production. I then distinguished between foundational images and derivative images. And, I connected the work on images with broader theorizing in International Relations Theory. Namely, I proposed that Hedley Bull’s “three competing traditions of thought” (Bull 1977, 23) are the best candidates for foundational images in world politics. Still, the theory as presented in this chapter is but a faint outline of what will hopefully prove to be a far more fleshed-out theoretical approach. It will, moreover, prove incredibly profitable to engage the theory presented here in dialogue with five theoretical approaches that address themselves, to a greater or lesser degree, to decision making, in general, and foreign policy in particular: constructivism, English School theory, prospect theory, the theory on poliheuristic decision making and the theory on bureaucratic politics. I shall take up the tasks of fleshing out the theoretical approach outlined here and engaging in a dialogue with other theoretical approaches in subsequent work.

Notes

- 1 Note that ontological “kinds of [questions] quickly turn into metaphysics more generally, which is the philosophical discipline that encompasses ontology as one of its parts. The borders here are a little fuzzy” (Hofweber 2017). On “ontological” issues in foreign policymaking, see Chapters 1, 5 and 9 in this volume.
- 2 Epistemological questions are also important. I will, for the sake of parsimony, forgo discussion of epistemic beliefs and simply assume that answers to epistemological questions enter as background assumptions in the construction of images. One may ask questions regarding (i) individual and (ii) social epistemology. Individual epistemological beliefs amount to answers to questions regarding how “people should go about the business of trying to determine what is true, or what are the *facts* of the matter, on selected topics.” And, “*social* epistemology is, in the first instance, an enterprise concerned with how people can best

pursue the truth (whichever truth is in question) *with the help of, or in the face of, others*. It is also concerned with truth acquisition by groups, or collective agents” (Goldman and O’Connor 2019).

- 3 President Putin’s view of the state, I submit, is not unlike the one articulated by Samuel P. Huntington. In his classic *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Huntington famously wrote that the “most important political distinction among countries concerns not their form of government but their degree of government. The differences between democracy and dictatorship are less than the differences between those countries whose politics embodies consensus, community, legitimacy, organization, effectiveness, stability, and those countries whose politics is deficient in these qualities.” Thus, in Huntington’s view, in “effective rather than debile political systems...*the government governs*” (Huntington 1973, 1; emphasis added).
- 4 I am indebted to Dina Moulioukova for pressing me to clarify Putin’s beliefs regarding “soft power.”
- 5 Note, of course, that when the Security Council “took the decision...to declare a no-fly zone in Libya,” Vladimir Putin was the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation.

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4 **Atlanticism in an age of great power competition: is Russia achieving its goals?**

Suzanne Loftus

Introduction

The Transatlantic relationship and the Atlantic Community were founded after World War II. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created to ensure security in Europe – a pact among Europeans and North Americans to stay committed to the values of peace and democracy. These values came to be known as Atlantic values, which were the founding principles of the community. NATO’s primary threat at the time was that of Communism and the Soviet Union. NATO and the Warsaw pact existed as two opposing blocs containing one another throughout the Cold War. Once the Cold War ended, NATO evolved and became involved in more out of area operations and crisis management. It is still an active organization that represents shared values among the Atlantic community and shared commitments to security against potential aggressors.

As the Cold War ended, NATO’s relationship with Russia, as well as Western-Russian relations more broadly, did not unfold as desired. The end of the Cold War did not signify a peaceful integration of Russia into the West, as the two sides had a different view of what the new security architecture should look like (Sakwa 2017). Various events took place that made Russia feel that it was not respected as an equal partner in world affairs, and various actions taken by the Russians demonstrated a lack of willingness on their side to abide by the guiding principles of the new Western-led liberal world order. For Russia, restoring its “great power status” was always one of its foreign policy priorities. As a nation that has always been a great power, being treated as anything less was unacceptable to them (Stent 2014; Tsygankov 2014; Loftus 2018).

While the transatlantic alliance enjoyed supremacy and was able to exert its influence easily throughout the 1990s, today the world is witnessing an era of great power competition where transatlantic values are being challenged with the rise of authoritarian powers, as relative wealth has shifted to the east, namely toward China. A shift in relative wealth automatically translates into a shift of political and military influence, which makes it more challenging for the West to have the leverage it once had. In addition, the

United States and the EU are experiencing domestic issues that affect their ability to be as engaged internationally. Moreover, the health of their relationship as well as the health of the alliance system is on shaky grounds today due to various challenges. Diplomatic relations between the United States and the EU have worsened, especially during the Donald Trump Administration in the United States, which was accused of not abiding by Atlantic values or the rules-based international order.

This chapter argues that, although the transatlantic bond is what will keep the West strong and united faced with modern day threats, some of the challenges posed today seem to point toward a long-term trend of a readjustment in power dynamics. Domestic forces, structural forces, rising revisionist powers and challenges to the efficacy of the liberal international system have led to the destabilization of the world order that was founded on Atlantic principles after World War II. This, in turn, enables authoritarian actors such as Russia and China to gain more leeway in the international system – an objective of both nations in their foreign policy.

As already noted, the North Atlantic Alliance was founded after the World War II to secure peace in Europe, promote cooperation among members and protect their freedom. The main threat for the alliance at this time was the Soviet Union, since it not only posed a military threat but also a threat to the values enshrined in the Atlantic political community. The founding treaty of the alliance commits the allies to democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law and peaceful resolution of disputes (NATO 2020a). In addition, the allies agreed to a treaty of collective defense, where an attack against one is an attack against all. After the end of the Cold War, NATO's main threat had ceased to exist, as the Soviet Union collapsed. Usually alliance systems would disintegrate at this time – but NATO persisted, as it found new purposes to exist.

The “transatlantic values” that define the liberal democratic world order that the West formed after World War II are described in the Atlantic Charter signed in 1941, which advocates for self-determination, freer markets and collective security (Balzar 2019). The Atlantic Charter was the result of the summit between U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill at which they noted how they wanted the world to look. After the war, the economic order was agreed to at Bretton Woods in 1944, the United Nations Charter in 1945, the Marshall Plan in 1947 and the Atlantic Pact in 1949. These treaties symbolized the foundation for the Atlantic political community (Ikenberry 2008). This political community led and continues to lead, albeit with more challenges, the liberal world order through the international organizations and frameworks that organize international relations and economic cooperation.

Part of the logic of the alliance system is that democracies are more likely to be peaceful toward one another, so democracy as a prerequisite became a way to spread liberal democracy across the continent in order to export security. NATO's Partnership for Peace program was meant to engage

eastern nations into building trust with the alliance eventually to provide a path for membership, if they so desired (NATO 2020b). NATO enlargement to the east was part of a strategic long-term vision for peace. This, however, was not easy in practice. Integrating former Soviet-dependent states proved rather contentious for the Russia–NATO relationship. The NATO–Russia Founding Act of May 1997 was a commitment to building lasting and inclusive peace together in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security (NATO 1997). However, events that took place thereafter resulted in a rift between NATO and Russia, mostly based on a lack of shared perception on what constitutes a fair security architecture in Europe. The alliance’s relationship with Russia is fundamental for understanding the behavior of both the West and Russia. Within the West, the relationship has also affected questions on the unity of allies, shared perception among allies and a shared vision on how to approach Russia.

The NATO–Russia Founding Act led to the creation of the Permanent Joint Council, a platform that would allow the two to consult one another on different security-related issues. In 1997, then President of Russia Boris Yeltsin blessed the first round of NATO enlargement to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. However, tensions broke out very quickly, as NATO intervened in the former Yugoslavia without a UN mandate. Russia warned in the PJC meetings against the use of force in this region without authorization from the United Nations. These warnings were ignored and relations between Russia and NATO quickly deteriorated. Russia saw this act to be a disregard for Russia’s voice in important security-related decisions. Russia’s place in the European security architecture therefore remained unclear.

The main issue that Russia has with Western leadership is its perception that exporting liberal democracy is an ideological and hegemonic ambition with destabilizing consequences. The West’s use of “liberal interventionism,” on the premise of ensuring peace and security, is a violation of a nation’s sovereignty according to both Russia and China. This is demonstrated by their predictable vetoes on issues related to humanitarian intervention at the United Nations Security Council. Russia and China, in fact, claim to be less revisionist than Western powers because, by pushing for the sovereignty of states, they argue that they are defending the principles of the liberal international order agreed upon in 1945 (Harris 2015). Intervening by the West in societies on the premise of “regime change” or engaging with nations economically was an attempt to democratize the entire world in order to ensure peace and prosperity.

It was predicted at the end of the Cold War that all nations would democratize, and that peace would eventually be established all over the world. This was referred to as “The End of History” (Fukuyama 1990). The “Democratic Peace Theory” stated that democracies seldom fight other democracies, so, as the world democratized, nations would morph into a singular system of liberal democratic states and war would end (Doyle 1983a).

The West believed that, as nations adopted free-market capitalism and developed, the middle class would grow and demand more liberties – which would force the elite to concede. However, this was not the case, as we can see with examples such as China – a country that has experienced very rapid economic growth as a result of opening up its economy, but never democratized. And now, instead of having China integrated into the West, it has become a systemic rival. The way the United States should play its role as the leader of the international liberal order was not mutually agreed upon. Generally speaking, for Western powers, U.S. leadership is understood in terms of the provision of public goods such as international security, free trade, financial stability and freedom of navigation. However, this idea of the “provision of public goods” was questioned after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the financial crisis in 2008, which destabilized the world and raised doubts about the U.S.’s capacity to lead. Therefore, many argued that U.S. leadership may not be as “benign” as it has argued and may be influenced by its desire for global power (The German Marshall Fund of the United States 2017). The “America First” orientation of the Trump Administration contributed to the growing tensions in the alliance.

Nevertheless, when President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin came to power, he tried to rebuild relations with NATO out of pragmatism. When President George W. Bush and Putin met, they agreed to try to establish a collaborative relationship (Wyatt, BBC 2001). After the September 11 terrorist attacks Putin lent help to the United States and allowed them to use Russia’s air bases in Central Asia for access to Afghanistan. At this point, Putin was motivated to join the West, fight against the mutual threat of terrorism, and hopefully build a new security architecture where the West and Russia could be equal partners (Stent 2014). In 2001, then British Prime Minister Tony Blair proposed a new Russia–NATO relationship, where Russia would be treated as an equal in discussions on international security-related matters such as terrorism and nuclear proliferation (BBC 2001). But that proposal was rejected by the United States and some European allies, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, who argued that the PJC was sufficient and that giving Russia a decision-making role would be premature at this stage.

Then the United States pulled out of the Anti-Ballistic-Missile Treaty, a move which reduced the level of trust between Russia and the United States. In 2002, the NATO–Russia Council was established as an attempt to improve matters. This differed from the PJC by expanding the scope of issues that could be mutually dealt with between NATO and Russia. However, the spirit of collaboration did not last very long, as the Prague summit in 2002 made NATO’s intentions clear for another round of enlargement, which Russia opposed. NATO enlargement for Russia is viewed as a direct attempt to surround Russia with countries that are not only part of an exclusive security bloc, but also with democracies which may threaten the survival of the Russian regime. This is all in line with Russia’s perception of the spread

of liberal democracy as an ideology-based foreign policy for the insurance of U.S. supremacy and dominance in the world (Clunan 2009).

The Russia–NATO relationship took a turn for the worse as Putin’s second term was met with rising oil prices, leading Russia to recover nicely from its economic turmoil since the fall of the U.S.S.R. With a strong economy, Putin gained confidence in standing up for Russian foreign policy priorities (Gaddy and Ickes 2016). Growing frustrations, such as the enlargement of NATO to the Baltic states and Western support for the Color Revolutions in Russia’s Near Abroad, led Putin to change paths and strategies toward the West officially. The Munich Security Conference in 2007 was a defining moment, when Putin presented a blistering critique of U.S. foreign policy, NATO, the OSCE and the unipolar moment. He announced that Russia would now have its own approach to democracy, international law and the use of force (Putin 2007). That same month, the United States began negotiations with Poland and the Czech Republic to build missile defense shields on their territory, which Russia saw as a clear threat and promised negative consequences should the countries agree to it.

The upcoming NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 was going to be a challenge, since Ukraine and Georgia were up for membership. Russia warned of the political and military consequences of such actions, but the alliance ignored these warnings. France and Germany later expressed doubt about providing a Membership Action Plan for these countries. Although the MAP was blocked in the end, the official communique stated that it was not a question of “whether,” but one of “when” these nations would become NATO members, which infuriated Russia (Reuters 2008).

Russia and Georgia later that year went to war over the separatist region of South Ossetia. NATO announced it would suspend meetings of the NRC unless Russia disengaged from the conflict in Georgia. At this moment, Russia suspended all its ties with NATO and the alliance’s core mission of collective defense came under scrutiny. Although Georgia was not a member of NATO and the implementation of article 5 was not required, many countries in Central and Eastern Europe stressed that the West’s response was tepid, leaving more than a few members anxious about the alliance’s true commitments to the region. Poland decided to abandon any objections to U.S. plans to install ballistic missiles on its territory and signed on to the missile shield agreement at this time.

Also, this conflict created heated debate about the future of NATO enlargement. Both sides that supported or did not support MAP thought their views were proven correct after this conflict. On the one hand, some argued that, if Ukraine and Georgia were to have been offered MAP, the war would not have happened. On the other, the opponents of MAP argued that, if these states had been offered MAP, the alliance would have been forced into a war with Russia or would have imploded in the face of a Russian aggressor (Smith 2008). Rising regional powers were, thus, starting to make their mark and to react to what they considered to be Western dominance of their near

abroad, posing challenges for the alliance. Western inaction in Georgia showed that its involvement in the post-Soviet space may not be worth a confrontation with Russia. This became all the more obvious in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine.

The question of Kosovo's independence was also an issue that same year. Russia warned that unilaterally declaring independence would be a "Pandora's Box" setting precedent for other breakaway regions in Europe, near or around Russia (Smith 2008). The events in Kosovo, for Russia, were just another example of Western dominance in the western Balkans region and their blatant disrespect of international law. As Russia grew in strength, it decided that it could also act as a great power does and could bend international law as it saw fit, as was the case in Ukraine.

The Ukraine crisis

The history of Russia's relationship with the EU is also one that can be looked at through a similar lens. After 2009, the EU launched its Eastern Partnership Program to cover the eastern dimension of the existing European Neighborhood Policy. Russia launched its own Eurasian Customs Union in 2011 along with Kazakhstan and Belarus, hoping that more post-Soviet states would join, specifically Ukraine. This was threatened by Ukraine's planning to sign an Association's Agreement with the EU during the Eastern Partnership summit in 2013. Moldova, Armenia and Georgia were supposed to follow suit. The Agreement is a framework for closer cooperation, namely through trade for nations to implement EU laws and trade regulations in return for access to the EU market. This agreement is also known as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. The EU presented this as an either/or agreement – either the countries sign the agreement with them, or they sign an agreement with Russia – but not both. Russia took this as direct competition – put pressure on these nations not to sign, threatened trade sanctions, the cutting off of energy supplies and the withdrawal of the Russian military presence from Armenia. In the end, Moldova and Georgia signed, but Armenia joined the Eurasian Custom's Union. Russia sees itself as a great power with an entitled sphere of influence in its near abroad, so any encroachment efforts by the EU or NATO is seen as a direct threat to its stance as an important international actor with legitimate interests.

In the important case of Ukraine, in March 2014 Russia offered then President Viktor Yanukovitch a 15 billion dollar credit, the elimination of trade sanctions and lower gas prices, in order for Ukraine to opt out of the deal offered by the EU Association's Agreement (Lehne 2014, 7–8). When Yanukovitch accepted the deal, the Euromaidan protests erupted in Kiev. The situation became critical, and Poland, Germany and France (acting on behalf of the EU) brokered a deal between President Yanukovitch and the opposition. The deal signed on February 21 restored Ukraine's constitution

of 2004 and scheduled elections for May 2014. Yanukovitch fled Kiev. The interim government then announced that it would reverse Yanukovitch's decision and sign the agreement with the EU, which led to the Russian invasion of Crimea in March 2014. The European Commission supported Ukraine with 15 billion dollars in loans and grants to keep the new government afloat in the face of bankruptcy. A referendum was held on the status of Crimea on March 16 and the result was in favor of joining the Russian Federation. It was then that Russia formalized the annexation of Crimea. Meanwhile the interim government in Kiev went forward with the political part of the agreement with the EU, but not yet with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) of the EU. This event was the greatest revision of Europe's geopolitical landscape since German reunification and shows to what length Russia is willing to go to defend its sphere of influence against the West. This can be described as classical geopolitics and has become an important threat to the United States and its allies today.

While the West recognized the independence of Kosovo in 2008 and Russia recognized that of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, these instances did not involve outright territorial expansion. Russia violated Ukraine's territorial integrity and, thus, broke the terms of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, which stated that in return for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal, it would be guaranteed national security assurances (Council on Foreign Relations 1994). Russia's controls over three post-Soviet republics that wanted to gain closer association with the EU or NATO – Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. These countries can no longer join these institutions unless they relinquish control over their separatist territories (Abkhazia/South Ossetia, Transnistria and Crimea), territories which Russia supports. Russia can exert pressure on these self-proclaimed countries and has leverage through threats to cut off gas supplies, trade embargoes or encouraging further separatism. Being on good terms with Russia implies visa-free regimes and easy access for immigrant workers to the Russian labor market, which is very attractive to them. Russia is also dominant in the realm of media and TV in these regions and can, therefore, influence public opinion among CIS countries where Russian remains a widely spoken language. Putin challenged the established Western commitment to expand the liberal security community as plus-sum thinking. He made it clear that expanding for the sake of positive-sum results can lead to a reaction by another great power with a different set of goals – which fits the realist paradigm in international relations of relative sum gains and losses, something that is being increasingly witnessed today between the great powers.

In responding to Russia's actions, Western actors disagree on the level of sanctions against Russia and what the goal of such sanctions should be – either a punitive measure or leverage to achieve a new East–West dialogue. They disagree on how to deal with Ukraine and how much to integrate

Ukraine into the West. They disagree on the nature and extent of military buildup in Eastern Europe or how much military support to provide to Ukraine (Larsen 2014). This shows the lack of unity on the side of the West of how to deal with issues so close to Russia. Now, it is questioned how much to intervene or how much to influence political and economic systems in countries near Russia's orbit, as opposed to acting without hesitation. This may be an indication that the West has accepted that these countries may not be worth the confrontation with Russia – thus showing that the liberal democratic world order has an enlargement limit.

It has proven to be strategically difficult tactics to respond to Russia's use of hybrid tactics to achieve its objectives by picking away at a society's cohesion and disrupting it from within. Russia uses a variety of tactics including the dissemination of propaganda, enforcing ties with populist leaders in Europe who express similar values, cultivating elite business ties, engaging in cyber campaigns that include hacking and cyber interference and uses private military companies to replace the national military in areas such as Ukraine, thereby making it easier to deny involvement. It is difficult to respond to these actions in a coordinated fashion, and the more Russia employs these tactics to divide and conquer Western societies, the less cohesive responses may be. These efforts have managed to effect political and strategic realities within the EU and NATO. There is concern that hybrid tactics have an effect on the credibility of deterrence. A swift takeover of a town in a NATO country by an unmarked group of men, such as the "little green men" Russia employed in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, could lead to a dilemma in how to respond. It could be a way to circumvent article 5 and to strike at political solidarity inside NATO and the EU. Russian media campaigns target large strata of society and Russia's use of "info-wars" could make it more difficult for large parts of domestic constituents within NATO to support common responses. The slightest hint of lack of solidarity within NATO or the EU is destabilizing (Popescu 2015).

The Ukraine crisis symbolizes the decline of U.S. hegemony. Russia was able to invade another country, annex territory and continue its involvement relatively unscathed there until the present day. Although the West implemented a sanctions regime, this has not done much to change Russia's behavior, as Russia was able to adopt import substitution and diversify its trading partners (Connolly 2018). Even the Minsk Peace Process to try to end the war favors Russia, as it grants the Donbas autonomy which ensures Russian political and economic influence in this region indefinitely. France and Germany are ready to implement the Minsk agreement, after which Europeans will be able to lift their sanctions regime on Russia. The political reluctance to continue to implement sanctions on Russia among the Europeans became apparent when there was talk of rolling them back should no decision be made.

Challenges within Atlanticism

Collective defense between both sides of the Atlantic involves reassurance and commitments. In the United States, the American public, as well as Congress, have become more budget-conscious and weary of overseas engagements. This domestic constraint along with current transatlantic tensions among allies has led the alliance to face challenges today. In addition, structural forces have shifted relative wealth to the east (Rachman 2016), and, therefore, a rising China is likely to take precedence in terms of U.S. national security priorities, as the 2018 National Defense and National Security Strategies have stated (National Defense Strategy 2017 and National Security Strategy 2017). American foreign policy may become less Eurocentric. If this is the case, Europe will have to bolster its defense capacities. However, the current Coronavirus pandemic and its resulting economic downturn have forced societies to make budget cuts, some of which will be seen in the defense sector. This is meant both in terms of European strategic autonomy defense spending as well as the ability to contribute the 2% for NATO. U.S. President Donald Trump repeatedly emphasized the importance of each ally's 2% of GDP contribution to the alliance and has threatened to withdraw U.S. support should the allies not comply with this requirement.

Debates within the alliance have also affected its stability by leading to disreements regarding policy and priorities. The allies' different stances on Russia and the type of threat posed by Russia have proven to be a challenge. A 2017 Pew Survey showed that only 40% of Germans would be in favor of defending an ally against Russia (Pew Research Center 2017). Germany has consistently refused to increase its defense spending and is adamant about going forward with the construction of the Nordstream 2 pipeline that will make Europe more dependent on Russian gas, despite criticisms from allies (The Guardian 2019). This has also gained harsh criticism from the United States, which threatened to impose sanctions on companies involved with this project. The pressure on Germany for the 2%, as well as the Nordstream 2 pipeline, does not sit well with the German leadership. A re-shaping of diplomatic tactics is needed.

Transatlantic friction has evolved throughout the years. In the 2000s, it stemmed from the U.S.'s tendency to act unilaterally. However, now that the United States is pursuing an "America First" policy, the fear is more of unilateral isolationism, where the U.S. retreats from global responsibilities. Efforts to integrate both sides of the Atlantic and provide relative gains against China's rising trade networks have been made including the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Those who pushed for the agreement argued that it would allow the West to stand united against China's plans to alter world trade to its own benefit. TTIP would also have been consequential for European security, since it would have increased the U.S.'s interest in it (Hamilton 2014). However, TTIP

talks were suspended, as Trump instead started a trade conflict with the EU. Though this was not in the spirit of cooperation, domestic concerns over free trade on both sides of the Atlantic have emerged in the last several years, with the result that such a trade agreement is unlikely to be reached in the future, no matter who holds the Presidency.

Domestic challenges hamper the transatlantic alliance from maintaining primacy in the world. The EU and the United States are both facing internal challenges. Nationalist Euroskeptic parties made significant inroads in the 2017 German and Austrian elections, as well as in the 2017 and 2018 Czech elections. The EU has also had to deal with the influx of refugees from 2015 crises, when 1.3 million asylum seekers sought support (EUROSTAT 2018). It is important to keep in mind that the majority of these refugees came from Syria and Afghanistan (BBC 2016), both nations where Western nations were involved in unsuccessful and expensive wars, thus further undermining political liberalism. In addition, Europe was consumed by a Greek debt crisis after the financial crisis in 2008 which threatened to break up the EU's single currency. When the UK voted to leave the EU in 2016, it posed an existential challenge to the bloc, since other countries may seek to follow suit or abandon the single currency. In the year 2000, the United States accounted for 50% of the military spending of the NATO alliance, but by the middle of the Obama years, this figure rose to 75%, as it became evident that Europe was increasingly unable to take on burdens beyond its borders (Rachman 2016).

In the United States, anti-establishment sentiment is also on the rise and has changed domestic politics. This is a direct response to the discontent felt with political liberalism and globalization. The outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to China has led to a decline in the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy and has hollowed out the middle class (Bartash 2018). Technological innovation, as well as automation, have aggravated that trend and have contributed to wage stagnation. The United States is highly unequal in terms of wealth distribution, since the wealthiest 1% of families hold about 40% of all wealth and the bottom 90% of families hold less than one-quarter (Leiserson et al. 2019). This has contributed to the rise in xenophobic attitudes and resentment of migrants, as migrant workers are seen as competing with the indigenous population for work. On both sides of the Atlantic, migrants and asylum seekers have become a representation of the political establishment's inability to look out for the interests of the native population. Labor and national identity have been threatened for a large portion of the U.S. and European population, thereby explaining the rise in popularity of anti-establishment political leaders. Faced with these internal challenges, ambiguity arises about what the EU and the U.S.' roles are in the context of multilateralism and global leadership. Internal divisions make it harder to speak with one voice.

The cohesion of the alliance is also threatened by the mixed threat perception among allies (Rand 2017). Many in the south of Europe are more

concerned about the threat of immigration from the Middle East and North Africa while allies in Central and Eastern Europe fear that Russia is capable of interfering in their societies. Western Europe also generally perceives Russia to be less of a problem than do the eastern states. The transatlantic relationship has experienced particular challenges since Donald Trump took office, which does not help the strength of the relationship or its future prospects for cooperation. It has been argued that the current U.S. administration has not upheld the rules-based international order as previous administrations have. The administration has been accused of rejecting values-based diplomacy and minimizing the importance of institutions and rules. This style has caused more friction between the transatlantic relationship. This friction became all the more visible during the current Coronavirus pandemic. The United States decided to ban European citizens from entering the the country and also called the virus “Chinese.” This led to political tensions that rendered it difficult to agree to a joint G7 Foreign Minister’s text on how to combat the virus together. The transatlantic relationship has also experienced disagreements about issues related to climate change, trade, defense, Iran and how to deal with China. Some European leaders had expressed concern over a second Trump administration, stating that they felt they could no longer rely on the United States and would have to begin working with other powers. The election of Democrat Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election means that the United States will cooperate more with the EU on climate change and multilateralism, but transatlantic tensions on defense, trade and China will likely remain, reflecting more structural and longer-term divergence of EU and U.S. interests. The Trump administration’s focus on isolationism, protectionism and burden sharing is a reflection of wider changes in Americans’ view about the United States’ role in world. This, coupled with U.S. domestic political polarization, will probably continue no matter who occupies the Oval Office. The transatlantic relationship has most likely taken a more permanent turn for the worse (Whineray 2020).

Trump’s diplomatic style led European leaders, such as Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, to state that Europe needs to look after its own security. French President Emmanuel Macron concurred that there is a need for strengthened European military capability (Sanders 2017). The term “strategic autonomy” is gaining tract in Europe – but its definition remains vague. The main idea, though, is that any powerful actor in international relations has the ability to uphold its territorial sovereignty – so, a security and defense structure independent from the United States is required for the EU (Fiott 2018). However, this does not mean that the EU no longer wants to collaborate with the United States on security – NATO would still exist. When one considers the nuclear umbrella that the United States provides for Europe, it is obvious that the EU needs the United States for security protection. The United States has expressed concerns about the EU’s plans for “strategic autonomy” which it views as a threat to its military arms sales

to Europe and that symbolizes a type of “de-coupling” of the alliance. But if navigated correctly, European Strategic Autonomy could prove to be quite helpful to the modern day needs and challenges facing the alliance system as a whole. Strengthening their own capacities would allow the Europeans to be more effective in continental Europe, where they could potentially take more responsibility for threats occurring in this region and let the United States focus on more pressing threats elsewhere. Unfortunately, the current Coronavirus pandemic will inevitably lead to budget cuts in this domain. Securing the 2% and increasing European defense capacities may have to wait until the economies of the world recover from the pandemic.

Atlanticism in an age of great power competition

The United States is said to have lived through its “unipolar moment.” According to structural theorists in International Relations, a unipolar system is the least durable of possible systems. This occurs because the dominant power eventually weakens itself by spreading itself too thin. It is also the result of the tendency of weaker states in the international system to balance the power of the hegemon by bandwagoning with other powers for a more equitable distribution of power (Waltz 2000). The unipole tries to prevent weaker powers from bandwagoning with other powers by encouraging them to bandwagon with the unipole instead. By engaging and exerting its influence in key regions militarily, politically and economically, the dominant state guarantees by a combination of soft and hard power that a network of weaker states will fall under its orbit. An example would be the U.S. military presence in Europe and Asia providing security guarantees to surrounding countries and containing China and Russia by doing so. NATO enlargement can also be considered an effort by the United States to keep smaller nations in its orbit as opposed to receiving security guarantees from another power such as Russia. However, the efforts of the unipole to remain sole hegemon will eventually exceed its economic, military, demographic and political resources (Waltz 2000).

The unsuccessful wars in the Middle East have stretched the American budget and have tarnished its reputation to lead, as did the 2008 financial crisis. This overextension of resources left a bitter taste in the mouths of Americans, who now seem to favor a more inward-focused approach to foreign policy. The domestic consequences of the 2008 crisis reinforced that sentiment. Thus, the Obama Administration concentrated its efforts on nation-building at home, partially drawing back from unsuccessful engagements in the Middle East (Dolan 2018). The inability of the United States to deal with Syria, coupled with the EU’s paralysis on the matter, encouraged the view of an ongoing Western decline. Donald Trump was elected to office for reasons such as the assurance of more protectionist trade policies and less international involvement as part of an “America First” strategy.

It is noteworthy to mention that the Trump Administration expressed reluctance to maintain and support a global political order, which will precipitate the decline of the hegemon. With the advent of COVID-19, the lack of a coordinated international response, hard economic downturns and rising nationalist policies are trends which point to a less cooperative international system. Trump demonstrated a preference for zero-sum thinking and transactional politics, abandoning the U.S. commitment to promoting a liberal international order (Cooley and Nexon 2020).

Important shifts have also taken place in the global distribution of wealth which has shifted to the east in the last 50, or so, years. Three of the four largest economies are now in Asia according to the IMF (those of China, India and Japan). When measured in purchasing power parity, China now has the largest economy. By 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will live in Asia, 5% in the United States and 7% in the EU (Rachman 2016, 8.) For growth projections, the Economic Intelligence Unit predicts that over the next 40 years the share of the world's real GDP at PPP accounted for by North America and Western Europe will fall from 40% in 2010 to 21% in 2050, whereas Asia's share will double to 48.1. The share of China alone will increase from 13.6% to 20% (China 1996). A shift in wealth to the east translates into a shift in political, military and soft power – thereby creating a challenge for the West to generate the military, political and ideological resources needed to impose order on the world. Under the Obama Administration, a “pivot to the east” was undertaken to maintain the U.S.'s world position. The increased diplomatic and military efforts with Asia at the time, when China pursued controversial territorial claims in the south China Sea and its ambitious global economic initiative known as the Belt and Road Initiative. The Trump Administration engaged in trade wars with China instead, as a means to contain it and negotiate what it termed fairer trade practices.

With the rise of great powers such as Russia and China, alternative projects with an autocratic and illiberal flavor rival development in the U.S.-led international system. Countries can now seek other options rather than have no alternative but to depend on Western support. Authoritarianism and nationalism are on the rise because of both the shift of wealth to nations with non-democratic governments, as well as the domestic issues facing countries around the world resulting from globalization. Nationalism and authoritarianism favor interests over universal values and present a threat to the weight and influence of Western normative soft power. Moscow annexed Crimea, Beijing ignored UN arbitration in the South China Sea, and the United States recognized the Golan Heights as Israeli territory. International law can also be described as currently being on shaky grounds (Belin and Reinert 2019).

The increasing multipolarity that started to form after the 2008 financial crisis and the relative shift in wealth to the east did not result in strengthened multilateralism. On the contrary, it proved to be increasingly disruptive for

international relations, as the world saw tensions break out in Ukraine and the South China Sea with the rising regional powers of Russia and China. Today these disputes have taken on the form of traditional great power politics (Mead 2016). The term “geopolitics” is now making a comeback. For a while, economic cooperation was central to international affairs and terrorism was the primary threat to U.S. national security. Today, Russia and China, among other smaller regional actors, are trying to establish dominance in their respective neighborhoods and are challenging the rules of the established international order led by the United States. Russia and China for these reasons have been labeled revisionist powers.

In addition, after the annexation of Crimea by Moscow and Western-imposed sanctions on Russia, Russia and China developed a closer relationship. They enjoy closer energy ties – Russia now represents 11% of Chinese energy imports and is moving toward becoming China’s largest supplier of oil (Sendagorta 2019). Their military relationship has also deepened, as they engage in military exercises together. Some European leaders, such as French President Emmanuel Macron, have recognized this and are trying to pull Russia closer to Europe rather than to the east. Russia supports China’s BRI, despite the involvement of states in Central Asia, which is considered part of the Kremlin’s self-proclaimed “sphere of influence.” Moscow’s rhetoric has shifted from talking about a Russian sphere of influence to a “greater Eurasia,” where Russia and China work together with investment and integration initiatives and shut out Western influence. China, for its part, abstained from condemning Russia’s annexation of Crimea, demonstrating its accommodation to Russian concerns despite its long-held view on territorial sovereignty. China and Russia have created new international institutions that exclude the West. BRICS is one example, which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and represents an alternative to Western-controlled institutions in the areas of internet governance, international payment systems and development assistance. The BRICS countries created the New Development Bank, which finances infrastructure projects in the developing world. The Shanghai Security Cooperation Organization promotes cooperation between security services and plans out military exercises. It was founded in 2001 by both Beijing and Moscow. India and Pakistan were added as members in 2017. The Chinese run the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank and the China Development Bank, which have financed projects across the developing world. The Russians have created the Eurasian Economic Union. These institutions provide a platform for a parallel system of global governance – but these structures are run by authoritarian states rather than liberal democratic ones.

China and Russia are also more engaged in regions that were traditionally influenced by the United States and its allies. China now convenes the 17 + 1 initiative with Central and Eastern Europe and is also involved with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states. It is important to point out that after the 2008 financial crisis, China became a lender for countries that were excluded by Western financial institutions. China lent 75 billion

dollars to Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan for energy deals. Total Chinese foreign aid assistance between 2000 and 2014 reached 354 billion dollars, nearing the U.S. total of 395 billion dollars (Cooley and Nexon 2020). China has since surpassed annual U.S. aid disbursements. Chinese aid automatically translates into Chinese influence, which often is antithetical to liberal norms. It has been suggested that Chinese development projects fuel corruption and regime patronage. Along with this development, the rise of populist nationalists in countries that were firmly under the U.S. economic and security order represent further challenges and a representation of the backsliding of western monopoly. The narrative that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, or Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte, or Turkish President Recep Erdogan has presented is that they represent the defenders of sovereignty against liberal subversions. They have also come closer economically and in their security relationships to Russia and China (Cooley and Nexon 2020).

Militarily, there is now what appears to be a “bipolar structure” on Europe’s eastern flank, as the alliance seeks to ensure proper deterrence against Russia. The allies implemented the 2016 Warsaw Summit decisions to establish NATO’s forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland and to develop a tailored forward presence in the Black Sea region. Russia, on its side, has enhanced its presence in the Black Sea through the seizure of Sebastopol and has also deployed Iskander-M short range ballistic missiles to Kaliningrad. Fired from this region, the missile can reach all of the Baltic republics and about two-thirds of Poland. It can carry a conventional or a nuclear warhead. Since it is able to reach 500 km, it brings this weapon into the scope of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces or (INF) treaty of 1987, an arms control agreement from the Cold War which bans the development and deployment of such weapons, but that treaty seems to be flailing today (BBC 2016). While it is important to have proper deterrence in the Baltics, Russia’s military ambitions are mostly in the Black Sea region. That is where they have already intervened militarily and attempted to fracture the NATO alliance and erode confidence in its commitments. It is a hub for Russia’s expansion into the eastern Mediterranean and supports its efforts in Syria. All of Russia’s military engagements in the last decade have occurred in this region – Georgia, Ukraine and Syria. Russia directly challenges the West in this region, as there are three littoral states that are NATO members. An increase in security relations between Russia and Turkey represents a challenge for the alliance. Turkey has the 11th most powerful military in the world, the second largest within NATO, the third largest air force and fourth largest navy. Turkey’s strategic position in the Black Sea anchors the alliance’s southeastern flank. This is a geostrategically important location because of energy security concerns, as well. The Turkish port of Ceyhan brings Azerbaijani oil to world markets – offering an alternative to dependence on Russian sources of energy (Defense One 2020).

Russia has increased its military spending by 29% since 2009. On the other hand, the United States has reduced its budgetary outlay for defense, with total spending contracting by 17% over the past decade (The Economic Times 2019). Still, it is important to remember the following statistics when assessing the real threat posed by each military in the world. In 2019, in dollars, Russia spent \$65.1 billion on its military, the United States spent \$732 billion, and China spent \$261 billion (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2020). China has dramatically increased its spending and has seen a seven-fold increase in the last 20 years from 39.6 billion dollars in 1999 to more than 260 billion dollars in 2019, second to the United States (SIPRI 2020). In 2017, the People's Liberation Army launched its first domestic-made aircraft carrier and a guided-missile destroyer. In July of that year, it opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti. China is now, also, the world's third largest weapons exporter after the United States and Russia (Lendon 2018).

In addition to upping its defense budget, China has made plans to become dominant in global high-tech manufacturing. "Made in China 2025" aims to use government subsidies, mobilize state-owned enterprises and pursue intellectual property acquisition to surpass Western technological prowess in advanced industries. This plan is aimed at new energy vehicles, IT and telecommunications, advanced robotics and artificial intelligence (McBride and Chatsky 2019). The United States and China are currently competing against each other in the development of 5G wireless networks. The Chinese telecommunications company Huawei is under scrutiny over concerns that it presents national security threats to the United States and Europe and was, therefore, banned by the Trump Administration. Huawei is now the world's biggest supplier of telecom gear (Ciluffo and Cardash 2018).

U.S. strategic thinkers during the Cold War understood that whoever controlled the Eurasian landmass basically controlled the world. Since land and sea power are linked, the thinking went that, if the U.S.S.R controlled the coastal regions of the Eurasian landmass such as Europe, it would control the world. Since then U.S. strategic thinking prioritized counterbalancing the Eurasian power (Rynning 2011). At that time, it was the Soviet Union, but now the threat of a rising China presents another power to contain. For this reason, U.S. security priorities will inevitably shift away from Europe. In a future global conflict, there might not be an American "Europe First" strategy, where it is taken for granted that Europe is the main theater of operations, as it was expected to be during the Cold War. If Sino-American tensions spill into an armed conflict, American forces would be tied down to the Asia-Pacific, leaving Europe vulnerable to possible Russian aggression – something European military capabilities do not have the capacity to face. Even if the Russian threat to Europe were as small as a limited incursion, it would still be able to affect the way NATO is perceived – perhaps as inadequate or dysfunctional.

It has been argued that Europe is a battle ground for great power competition (Simon 2019). The EU is experiencing pressure from the United

States to distance itself from China, Russia is engaged in competition with NATO, and China is creating more economic dependence in Europe. Russia and China are rather effective at identifying and exploiting European weaknesses. After the 2008 financial crisis, many EU member states sought Chinese investment and imports. But now, after realizing that China, is a systemic rival and an economic competitor, the EU is getting tougher on it (Ortega 2019).

Russian foreign policy and the transatlantic relationship

If U.S.–EU relations become more transactional in nature, it will lead to decreased predictability about how the West acts as a whole in the future. This would increase international uncertainty and cause Western weakness, while revisionist powers will seek to use that to their advantage. China might try to drive a wedge between the United States and Europe, and Russia might try to be more adventurous abroad and stir up conflict to which NATO will be unprepared to respond. The relationship depends on the willingness of the United States and the EU to turn common values into common interests. Their lack of shared threat perception makes it easier for revisionist powers to overturn the international rules-based order piece by piece and conflict by conflict (Rossbach 2019).

Putin seeks a more pluralistic international system (Sakwa 2017). His ideas resonate in both the developing and developed world. Populist parties throughout Europe and the West at large also advocate for similar messages as those of Putin. Putin has marketed himself as the “keeper of traditional values” (Loftus 2018). Russia manages to increase its relative power and influence in the world through asymmetric strategies. It seeks to divide domestic opinion in the West and uses bilateral negotiations as a tactic to achieve gains with individual nations. In its neighborhood, it seeks to maintain dominance through energy ties, business deals and security agreements and prevents its neighbors from joining Western institutions by supporting protracted conflicts. Internationally, Russia partners with nations across the globe advocating an anti-Western message, portraying itself as a moral alternative in an overly globalized world where national identities have been eroded. According to this portrayal, Russia does not seek global dominance, nor does it have the capacity to achieve it. Rather, Russia will use asymmetric capabilities and exploit ties with non-Western allies to promote its interests (Tsygankov 2019).

After its annexation of Crimea, Russia has been able to revive its presence in the Black Sea with its sea-going fleet in Sebastopol, which allows it more flexibility to reach the eastern Mediterranean and capture important energy markets. A tactic that Russia uses in this region has been described as “transactional neutrality,” namely with Turkey and Bulgaria (Gvosdev 2019). This entails bilateral agreements on energy deals, economic transactions and arms sales. One such example is Turkey’s procurement of the

S-400 Russian missile system. Another is the Turkstream pipeline project between the two which will increase Turkey's dependence on Russian national gas, while providing Turkey a major opportunity to become a key hub for Russian gas deliveries to Europe. Bulgaria may also benefit from this pipeline project, if it becomes a transit country. These tactics are particularly effective in an era of challenged multilateralism.

Bilateral deals eat away at institutional cohesion deal by deal by making progress on areas of pragmatic concern. Russia has used this approach to "broker" peace in Syria among all the key players in the conflict through the Astana Process.¹ In addition, Russia has increasingly been involved in Africa – where it highlights collaboration over aid, an approach based on equality rather than patronizing aid from the West. It has also sent weapons and instructors to the Central African Republic and is involved in the Libyan conflict. China has increased its influence on the continent even more. The involvement of both countries may affect the way African nations vote in the United Nations General Assembly.

Another powerful tool that Russia employs is its use of soft power. Russia's message is generally anti-Western and advocates more national and cultural sovereignty. Russia has invested heavily in its media platform, such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik. RT*, and attempts to broadcast concerning so-called Western hypocrisies by magnifying instances of racism or social inequality and underlining the failures of the EU to integrate migrants. It also gives a voice to Western dissidents who do not appear frequently on mainstream media. While Russia is not on par with the United States and China as a great power, it can still use asymmetric tactics in these regions and remain an important international player. By doing so, Russia is acting on its strategic priorities by "consolidating the Russian Federation's status as a leading world power, whose actions are aimed at maintaining strategic stability and mutually beneficial partnerships in a polycentric world" (Russian Federation 2015).

The Western alliance system is U.S.'s greatest strength and forms a much stronger counter to China and Russia than the United States alone. As populist pro-Russian parties gain a place in Europe, as China tries to entice European countries with economic incentives, and as the United States antagonizes Europe, Europe could drive farther east. Without European support, the United States will find it difficult to compete with China and Russia in other theaters (Polyakova and Haddad 2018). Although it may be true that the institutions that the West originally created no longer reflect "the world's true balance of political and economic power," if the West does not lead, the impact of its global values will be severely weakened (Bremmer 2012). Nevertheless, the West will have to get used to an increasingly contested and complex international order, as China and Russia offer rival conceptions of global order which has its appeal to many leaders of weaker states. The West no longer has a "monopoly of patronage" (Cooley and Nexon 2020), and rising powers such as China and Russia are using this to their advantage wherever possible. Russia in essence, is getting what it wants.

Conclusion

The United States and the European Union are facing their fair share of domestic and international challenges that have blurred and confused their role in pursuing multilateralism. Since multilateralism was the framework through which the West led the postwar order, this liberal democratic order is also being put into question. International challenges such as the relative shift of wealth to the east and an emboldened Russia and China have made it harder for the United States and the EU to impose their world view as well as they were able to in the 1990s. To make matters worse, the EU and the United States are experiencing diplomatic and political challenges between themselves which have led to a weakening of the transatlantic relationship. In order for the West to remain strong against rising actors with different global ambitions, the transatlantic relationship needs to remain solid. But it appears that there are challenges beyond repair that leave room for a more multipolar world order with different centers of gravity.

China is now a powerful actor, and unless a destructive systemic shock occurs, China is well on its way to catching up to the United States' nominal GDP, thereby strengthening Chinese-led projects and diplomatic relations in the world. This translates into good news for Russia since there will no longer be a Western monopoly on economic, social and political processes and authoritarianism has gained legitimacy. Russia will be freer to act as a sovereign democracy with an entitled sphere of influence and continue to defend its interests as an independent actor in international relations. The West can choose to remain solidary and therefore more united against rising parallel structures, or it can sink into pragmatic bilateralism, which will blend all structures and governance styles together into a muddled international arena.

Note

- 1 The Astana peace process, aimed at ending the Syrian conflict, was launched in January 2017 by Russia and Iran, allies of the Damascus regime and rebel-backer Turkey.

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5 The battle of ontological narratives: Russia and the annexation of Crimea¹

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Introduction

In 2014, the Crimean electoral commission announced that approximately 83% of registered Crimean voters had cast their ballots and, of those, 95% voted to separate from Ukraine and unite with Russia (*BBC News* 2014). The result might suggest a rigged election, and indeed, analysts in some ways saw it as such (Shooster 2014). The vote was cast during Russia's occupation of the peninsula and was largely boycotted by Crimea's ethnic minorities: Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians. More than half of Crimea's population are ethnic Russians who felt uneasy with the protests on Maidan. For those who participated in the referendum, this determination was more than a mere geographic choice, but rather a distinct vision of their present, future and the past.

Among other things, the analysis of Russia's annexation of Crimea represents a battle of diverse views about the relevant theoretical framework with which to examine Russian behavior, including ontological perspectives. It focuses on the examination of Russia's – and to a lesser extent on Ukraine's -- sense of ontological security,² which is carried out through selective activation and deactivation by both Russian and Ukrainian elites of their respective views on their countries' biographic narratives.³ These narratives either rupture or consolidate the sense of biographic continuity⁴ of these two states through the "politicization of history" (Judah 2015, 66). This conflict, therefore, is not about history *per se*, but, rather, its selective interpretations by political actors to advance their own agendas. The standoff in Ukraine goes beyond military and economic disputes. It is fought in the minds of people, where some beliefs are activated, used and deepened, while others are ignored as inconvenient. In other words, what one believes about today depends upon what one believes about the past. Hence, without the embedded and routinized beliefs held by both Russians and Ukrainians, this conflict could not be pursued.⁵

The history of conflict and annexation

Russia's relations with Ukraine have gone through periods of ups and downs (Tsygankov 2015). The Orange Revolution significantly cooled the relationship between Moscow and Kyiv, and the following gas wars and trade conflicts further strained relations. The countries entered into a honeymoon phase after the victory of Victor Yanukovych, known for his strong ties to the Kremlin. As a result, Russia's rights for military bases in Crimea were extended in exchange for gas discounts. However, after the Orange Revolution, relations between the two countries reached a boiling point yet again in 2013. This time it was because of Ukraine's intention to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. Although elected as a "pro-Russian," President Yanukovych was not averse to dealing with the West. During his presidency, Ukraine was involved in the "dual vector" balancing act of his predecessors. The Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine was initiated in 2012, and the majority of the Ukrainian parliament (*rada*), including Yanukovych's party, signaled its support (Association Agreement 2012). If signed, this binding contractual relationship would integrate Ukraine further into the European space, both normatively and economically. It would, as well, preclude Kyiv from joining the Russia-designed Eurasian Economic Community. The choice in favor of the European Union integration project would go beyond purely economic consequences. It would openly demonstrate Kyiv's choice in favor of a pro-Western biographic narrative over a Russian one.

The decision before the Ukrainian president was both ontological and pragmatic. What made Yanukovych change his mind was the pressure from Russia and the final figures of proffered Western aid. The International Monetary Fund offered the country \$4 billion, with European Union offering \$838 million in loans, contingent on Yanukovych raising domestic gas prices and making budget cuts. Russia, in contrast, proposed a more attractive opportunity with the promise of \$15 billion in loans plus \$3 billion in natural gas subsidies. As a result, Yanukovych and his cabinet suspended the deal with the European Union in November in favor of the offer provided by Russia (Pleshakov 2017, 52). However, in February 2014, they encountered significant domestic resistance. Indignant that such a decision was taken unilaterally, protesters in favor of association with the European Union assembled on Maidan square (Snyder 2014). They had two major demands: they insisted on choosing a Western narrative and saw their future in a rupture of Ukraine's biographic continuity of unity with Russia. It is not surprising that the majority of those who gathered on Maidan were from Western Ukraine. The western part of the country has historically been in favor of embracing Western ontological awareness⁶ instead of that of Russia. Those were powerful voices. The participation in these protests has been estimated at anywhere between 50,000 and 800,000 people. Protesters were quickly joined by ultra-right groups and pro-Putin provocateurs, and

as a result of civil unrest, the Ukrainian President was forced to flee to Russia in February 2014. This, together with ethnic strife in Ukraine, gave the Russian President a pretext to attack (Sengupta and Dearden 2014).

The Kremlin framed the events against Yanukovych as a coup d'état. Consequently, Moscow demanded his reinstatement and did not acknowledge the legitimacy of his short-term temporary successor, Oleksandr Turchynov.⁷ These declarations sparked pro-Russian protests in Sevastopol. On February 26, 2014, the Russian government deployed unmarked troops that occupied strategic posts and infrastructure in the peninsula in support of holding a secessionist referendum in Crimea (Biersack and O'Leary 2014). A session of the Crimean parliament dismissed the Ukrainian Crimean government and called for a referendum on the autonomy of the peninsula. The vote held on March 16, 2014 was overwhelmingly in support of annexation and Crimea's unity with Russia. The Crimean Parliament declared its independence and requested that the Russian president annex the peninsula. The deal was sealed two days later on March 18 (Vasovic and Croft 2014).

The ontological meaning of Crimea for Russia⁸

Some argue that the Russian president took the decision to annex Crimea long before the Euromaidan protests (Rosefield 2016, 45). Crimea has held an important geostrategic position, since it provides the Kremlin with control over the Sea of Azov and part of the Black Sea, along with control over the Sevastopol naval base. According to Mikhail Zygar (2016), Russian investigative journalist, the Kremlin's plan of action for Crimea dated to 2013. At that time, the head of the Supreme Council of Crimea and the leader of the local Party of Regions, Vladimir Konstantinov, visited the Russian capital and confirmed to the head of Russia's National Security Council Patrushev that in the case of an overthrow of Yanukovych, Crimea would be willing to "join Russia" (Zygar 2016, 275).

In addition to its geostrategic element, the decision to annex Crimea had strong ontological importance for Russia. Unlike the Euromaidan protesters, pro-Russian residents of Crimea voted in favor of continuing the peninsula's biographic unity with Moscow. These votes reflected not only Crimea's ontological self-awareness as a part of Russia, but also the rejection of the Western narrative adopted by protesters in Kyiv. The ontological impact of these votes spread outside the peninsula's geographic boundaries. In 2017, the Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster, revealed that many Russians consider the annexation of Crimea to be one of the greatest sources of national pride. "Returning Crimea to Russia" made it the second-most celebrated achievement of the country after the victory in the Great Patriotic War, followed by the country's leading role in the exploration of space (Levada-Tsentr 2017). Hence, the results of the Crimean referendum validated the ontologically embedded "Russia as a great power" project that was skillfully activated by the Kremlin. This project has proved to be

successful in consolidating the country's ontological awareness around its biographic signifiers, like the return of Crimea back to Russia. Still, what makes the annexation of Crimea so ontologically important for ordinary Russians?

The Crimean Peninsula became a part of the Russian empire as Taurida Oblast when Catherine the Great conquered the Crimean Khanate in the eighteenth century (Rosefield 2016, 46). At the time of the conquest in 1784, Crimean Tatars formed a clear majority of the Khanate population. Colonization by the Russian Empire was led by Prince Grigori Potemkin who generously gifted lands to Russian nobility. Serfs, mostly from Ukraine and fewer from Russia, were transferred to cultivate the land. Along with the Russian *dvoryanstvo* (nobility), Catherine the Great invited European settlers (German, Polish, Italian and Bulgarian) to the empire's newly conquered domain. With time, the ethnic composition of the peninsula started changing. In a 1897 census, Crimean Tatars continued to lead by 35%, closely followed by Russians (33%) and Ukrainians (11%), as well as Germans, Jews, Bulgarians and other ethnic minorities.

The ethnic cleansing of the twentieth century and the deportation of Crimean Tatars and other ethnic groups (Armenians, Bulgarians and Germans) to Central Asia and Siberia, further changed Crimea's cultural makeup. In 1944, as presumed, because of security threats during World War II, 200,000 Crimean Tatars were forcefully moved from Crimea. Between 25% (Soviet government estimate) and 46% (Crimean Tatar estimate) died in the first year of their exile (Kuzio 2009). Russian settlers took the place of these ethnic groups. As a result, Russians and Ukrainians soon made up almost the entire population of the peninsula. In 1967, the Soviet government dropped all charges of "Nazi collaboration" against Crimean Tatars. However, not until years later, in the late 1980s, did Tatars begin returning to their historic homeland (Kuzio 2009). Consequently, the Ukrainian census of 2001 reflected the effect of these policies on Crimea's ethnic composition, with the majority of the population identifying themselves as ethnic Russians (58.5%), Ukrainians (24.4%), Crimean Tatars (12.1%) and Armenians, Jews, Poles, etc. making up the remaining 5% (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001).

In 1917, after the Revolution, Crimea became a part of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic until 1954. In that year, Nikita Khrushchev, then Russian Premier, handed Crimea to Ukraine in a "goodwill gesture." This event was to mark the 300-year anniversary of what is embedded in Russia's ontological awareness as the reunification of the brotherly Ukrainian and Russian people. Khrushchev reportedly suggested to Stalin earlier to transfer Crimea to Ukraine, in order to appease Ukrainian elites and solidify joint ontological awareness in an effort to deepen unified biographic continuity between the two peoples (Kramer, n.d.).

Khrushchev's gesture did not sit well with Russian pan-nationalists who considered Crimea to be an integral part of Russia's ontological space. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the famous dissident, framed the transfer as the

“arbitrary capriciousness of a satrap” (Subtelny 2009). When the Soviet Union was dissolved in 1991, the Crimean Oblast became the Autonomous Republic of Crimea under the control of independent Ukraine. This decision was not coordinated with those who lived in the peninsula. Crimean Russophiles, a diverse group of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, had been thirsting for reunification with Russia instead (Pleshakov 2017, 113). Reflecting on this decision, Mikhail Gorbachev argued that Crimea should remain a part of Ukraine, but only with the assurance that NATO would not expand and that that Kyiv would not be invited to join the European Union, limitations on Western policy not likely to occur (Gardels 2014). Immediately after the dissolution of the USSR, both a national referendum and the Presidium of the Ukrainian parliament called for a referendum on independence. Both efforts were termed illegal by the Parliament in Kyiv.

In 1994, Yury Meshkov, the democratically elected president of Crimea, attempted an actual secession from Ukraine. In his move for independence, he reached out to the Kremlin for support. His move, however, was not reciprocated by Boris Yeltsin (Marples 2014). It is important to consider the context of Gorbachev’s decision to have Crimea remain a part of Ukraine and Yeltsin’s lack of interest in supporting Crimean independence. Under Gorbachev, with the occurrence of *perestroika* and new thinking, the Kremlin sought to mitigate the challenges to the country’s domestic and foreign policies. One of the priorities abroad was to open the Soviet Union to the possibility of partnership with the West. Moscow continued activating the Western narrative of partnership with the United States and the European Union under the presidency of Yeltsin. This could explain the positions of both leaders. In 1994, the Russian president did not want to jeopardize his good standing with Western states in the absence of resources and geopolitical willpower for the conflict over Crimea (Matlock 1995, 701–702).

Despite the Soviet/Russian leadership’s prioritizing the Western vector of the country’s foreign policy, the question of Crimea was a special one. Yeltsin’s position about Russia’s relationship to and policy concerning the peninsula was not shared by many. As a result, in May 1992, the Russian parliament ruled the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine invalid and “lacking legal force” (Goldberg 1992). Although Russian lawmakers stressed that they were not making any territorial claims, this decision provoked Ukraine and created tensions with Western partners that were so important for Russia and its economy.

What, then, makes the peninsula so important for Russia’s ontological awareness? In a speech on the annexation of Crimea, Vladimir Putin gave his explanations of the significance of Crimea for Russia. He underlined that the reasons behind the union of Russia and Crimea are ontological: “it is enough to know ... what Russia and Crimea meant for each other. Everything in Crimea speaks to our shared history and pride” (Putin 2014). He noted the complex role that Crimea plays for Russian ontological awareness, full of metaphysical and theological undertones, a role of

“fetish” (Pleshakov 2017). This fetish has different layers: spiritual, imperial, physical appreciation and magnetism of its physicality with the touch of *dolce vita* (Pleshakov 2017, 95). It is engrained in the country’s identity through the works of Russia’s creative writers and cultural narrators. In the Russian ontological awareness, Crimea plays the role of a wonderland – with mild climate, sunshine and with apricots and grapevines growing in the streets. This idyllic portrayal deepens in contrast with Russia’s ontological self-awareness as a land of harsh climate and scarce vegetation, as noted by Joseph Brodsky: “Assailed by winter, I withdrew to the South” (Brodskii and Komarov 1992).

Some spaces in Crimea are especially memorable for the construction of Russia’s biographic narrative. For Russian literati, Koktebel in its eastern part has been a mecca for artists like Maksimilian Voloshin (1877–1932). In Chekov’s time, Russians compared Koktebel to the Amalfi Coast in Italy and Alicante in Spain. By the 1960s, it was celebrated in poems of such prominent Russian authors as Marina Tsvetaeva and Joseph Brodsky (Tsvetaeva, n.d.; Armeyskov 2017). One of Russia’s most cherished poets of the Silver Age, Mikhail Lermontov, wrote extensively on Crimea. His story “Taman” is set on the shores of the Azov Sea and tells a romantic story about young “honest smugglers” and a local beauty who escaped to Turkey with a Crimean boatman (Lermontov 2013). These examples help demonstrate how Crimea and its spaces have been historically embedded and routinized in Russia’s ontological awareness. In his 2014 speech on the annexation of Crimea, the Russian president skillfully activated these embedded biographic narratives, stating that “everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history ... this is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized ... The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea ... There is also Sevastopol ... that serves as a birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts” (Putin 2014).

Crimea’s exoticism made it an ideal setting for an Oriental heaven, the reminder of Russia’s ontological complexity. Aleksandr Pushkin’s poem “The Fountain of Bakchisaray” tells a story of passion, vengeance and betrayal (Pushkin 1977). The poem’s exotic storyline has resonated so deeply with country’s creative elite that it inspired an opera and ballet. It was in “The Fountain of Bakchisaray” (The Fountain of Bakhchisarai 2018), in which two of Russia’s most cherished prima ballerinas, Maya Plesetskaya and Galina Ulanova, performed together, as they rarely did. Nabokov (cited in Boyd 1993) noted the complexity of Crimea’s meaning for Moscow as an extension of Russia’s imperial domain and a reflection of the cultural diversity of the country’s biographical narrative. He wrote that “the whole place seemed completely foreign; the smells were not Russia, the sounds were not Russian, the donkey braying every evening just as muezzin started to chant from the village minaret” Hence, Crimea has been ontologically

embedded as the romantic “exotic” side of the empire, an empire diverse by the very nature of its expansionist conquest. Aleksandr Grin (“Aleksandr Grin” 1979) disguised Crimea as a foreign country in his novel *Scarlet Sails*, developing an imaginary land around fairy tale cities of Zurbagan and Liss. The image of Crimea, therefore, has been continuously routinized and embedded in Russia’s biographic continuity and became an important part of Russia’s ethnically complex narrative. In his speech, the current Russian leader skillfully noted this special role that the region plays in the country’s ontological awareness. He paid tribute to Crimea’s diversity and complexity in the country’s biographic narrative, stating, “Crimea is a unique blend of different people’s cultures and traditions. This makes it similar to Russia as a whole ... ” (Putin 2014).⁹

As a result, the rupture of this narrative is framed as “arbitrary” and traumatic for Russia’s ontological awareness. In his speech, the Russian President puts an emphasis on the whimsical “nature” of Crimea’s “gifting” to Ukraine by Nikita Khrushchev, where people were “handed over like a sack of potatoes.” He stressed this transfer as a legally unjustifiable favor and “formality” that went against the embedded and routinized ontological unity of Crimea and Russia: “In people’s hearts and minds Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia. This firm conviction is based on truth and justice and was passed from generation to generation ... ” He frames the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine as an ontologically unjustifiable act, one that was illegal, “formal” and lacking in historic merit. This transfer, therefore, could not have ruptured the deeply embedded biographic narrative of unity between Russia and Crimea. The Russian president points out that “in 1954, a decision was made to transfer the Crimean Region to Ukraine, along with Sevastopol ... This was a personal initiative of the Communist Party head Nikita Khrushchev ... this decision was made in violation of the constitutional norms that were in place ... the decision was made behind the scenes ... in a totalitarian state ... What stood behind this decision of his ... is for historians to figure out” (Putin 2014).

The transfer of Crimea to Ukraine, therefore, is framed in the Kremlin’s official discourse as an illegal transfer, a reflection of a totalitarian state that did not take into consideration the shared biographic narrative of Crimea and Russia; “ ... in a totalitarian state nobody bothered to ask the citizens of Crimea and Sevastopol” (Putin 2014). But more importantly, it is framed as a “formality” that did not envision the rupture of biographic continuity, not only between Crimea and Russia, but as well between Russia and Ukraine “ ... we all know ... this decision was treated as a formality of sorts because the territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state. Back then, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia might split up and become two separate states” (Putin 2014). Thus, the Russian president’s comments reflected an embedded narrative.

The context of conflict and the ontological meaning of Ukraine for Russia

The annexation of Crimea has been activated in the Kremlin's official discourse within the context of Russia's ontological awareness of Ukraine. Russian elites share the sentiment that, as a nation, Ukraine lacks ontological coherence and a unifying biographic narrative shared by different segments of its population. The Kremlin argues that no other republic in the U.S.S.R. increased its territory as much as Ukraine. Before the "transfer of Crimea" by Khrushchev, Stalin as well assigned Galicia to the Ukrainian SSR after dividing Poland with Hitler. As a result, Ukraine obtained both Russian and Polish territories. This territorial diversity has been perceived as lacking embedded and routinized ontological coherence: Lviv has historically thought of itself as Europe and eastern Donbass and Crimea identified predominantly with Russia, leaving the rest of the country struggling to find an identity between these two extremes (Judah 2015).

While Ukraine has struggled to come up with a unifying identity since the dissolution of the U.S.S.R., Russia's ontological awareness of its neighbor has historically been quite consistent. The first state of eastern Slavs, remembered as Kyivan Rus', has been embedded and routinized in Russia's ontological awareness as the cradle of Slavic civilization and "Mother of all Russian Cities." The unifier of Russian lands, Ivan the Terrible, proclaimed himself to be a direct descendant of the Kyivan rulers (Suny 1998). Seeking unity, Kyivan princes brought together different Slavic tribes under the unifying religion and alphabet influence of the Byzantine Empire. In Russia's biographic narrative, Ukrainians and Russians share a "national creation myth" – with a common faith, language, alphabet and a pantheon of saints and heroes (Pleshakov 2017).

Ukraine's special status in Russia's ontological awareness was further embedded during imperial and Soviet times. Russia inherited the largest empire in the world. At the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the country was a "matryoshka doll of nested governance" (Toal 2017, 59), composed of 53 ethno-territorial units. At the top of the status pyramid were 15 Soviet Socialist Republics, followed by 20 Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics, eight autonomous oblasts and ten autonomous okrugs with the least status. In addition to difference in their status, these units were integrated into the empire in distinct ways. Some parts were incorporated, where the center subordinated particular geographic regions with the assistance of local elites who, while enriching themselves through the relationship, could never attain the same status as elites in the center. Kazakhstan could be presented as an example of such integration. The model for other areas was based on the fact that the region had a strong cultural identity and maintained a separate cultural and linguistic world, as Georgia in the Soviet context. In the third mode of incorporation, elites of an incorporated territory were able to join the ruling class of the imperial state. One of the most vivid examples of such integration in the Soviet

context was Ukraine. Ukrainians received more prominent positions in the Kremlin than any other non-Russian nationality. Together with Russians, Ukrainians made up the largest part of the Communist party, officer corps, police and KGB (Pleshakov 2017, 43).

Hence, Ukraine enjoyed a special status in the country's imperial narrative and has been ontologically framed as an extension of the Russian state. Ukrainian statehood consequently has been largely debated by Russian elites in the country's biographic narrative. Some historians claim that the word "Ukrainian" started gradually replacing the name "Ruthene" only at the end of the nineteenth century. The word "Ruthene" comes from the same root as Rus or Russia, suggesting that an opportunity to form a Ukrainian state presented itself only after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires. As a result, in 1918, not one, but two distinct Ukrainian states were formed. West Ukrainians proclaimed an independent West Ukrainian People's Republic with the capital in Lviv. An independent state was declared in Kyiv, as well. These aspirations of statehood were short-lived, though, with most of West Ukraine becoming a part of interwar Poland. In 1939, the Soviet Army took Lviv and Western Ukraine, which had fallen victim to Polish imperialism, with Lviv cheering its liberators (Judah 2015).

Moscow has long questioned Ukraine's statehood, perceiving it as a land (*krai*) rather than an independent nation. In Russia's biographic narrative, no other place in its near abroad is more ontologically intertwined with Moscow than Ukraine. As noted by Russia's deputy foreign minister, Yury Mamedov, "anything between us and the Ukrainians is a family affair, and any disagreement we have is a family feud" (in Talbot 2002, 80). Henry Kissinger concurs and warns that "the West must understand that, to Russia, Ukraine can never be just a foreign country ... Even such famed dissidents as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Joseph Brodsky, insisted that Ukraine was an integral part of Russian history and, indeed, of Russia" (Kissinger 2014).

By denying Ukraine its own statehood, the Kremlin also denies Kyiv its own identity separate from that of Russia. For Moscow, Russia's biographic narrative is to be shared by Ukraine (Motyl 2014). In his 2014 speech, Putin skillfully activated the important role Ukraine plays in the country's biographic continuity. In his speech, he focused predominantly on the ontological unity between Kyiv and Moscow, where "fraternal Ukrainian people have always been and will remain of foremost importance," lamenting the rupture of shared biographic continuity where "it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two separate states." The Russian leader stressed the importance of the Kremlin of biographic continuity between Ukraine and Russia, where "good relations with Ukraine matter most" and shared his "hope for Ukraine to remain ... a good neighbor" (Putin 2014).

Ukraine's biographic narrative interpreted by Ukrainian nationalists

This biographic narrative differs drastically from the one by Ukrainian nationalists. They claim that, while Russia stems from Kievan Rus', in the sixteenth century, their historical paths started to diverge. Most of the territory of what is now Ukraine fell under Polish rule. This conquest has affected the ontological awareness of Ukraine as a nation. Polonization, or the adoption of Polish culture and language, had an especially strong influence on the country's elites and caused some alienation from the lower classes (Pleshakov 2017, 39). Russia, in turn, has been heavily influenced by its incorporation into the Mongol empire. While Mongols did not impose their religion and language on the conquered states and tribes, the conquest nevertheless had a profound effect on Russia's consolidation as a state, principles of governance and perception of the role of the leader.

The Ukrainian revolt against Polish rule is framed in terms of nationalist ontological awareness as a strategic choice by Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who opted in favor of Russia's imperial assistance to combat the Poles as the lesser of two evils. Hence, the Russification that followed is perceived as colonization. There is a clear gap, therefore, between perceptions of Russification in nationalist Ukrainian and Russian ontological narratives. While the Russian biographic narrative frames it as a liberation and as an organic process of re-unification of two brotherly people, Ukrainian nationalists ontologically perceive it as a conquest and imposition of Russian culture and language. For example, Nikolai Gogol, one of the greatest Ukrainian writers whose work in some instances illustrates the differences between Russian and Ukrainian characters, wrote predominantly in Russian (Bojanowska 2007).

The idea of shared imaging that unifies Ukraine has been introduced by the father of Ukrainian nationalism, Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866–1934). Hrushevsky dismissed the fragmentation of the nation that followed the breakup of the Kyivan state, and claimed that Ukraine has continued as a coherent, single ethos. To draw the distinction between Russian and Ukrainian biographic narratives, nationalists center on the Cossacks, members of cultural self-governing and semi-military communities with Bohdan Khmelnytsky as one of them. Ukrainian national poet Taras Shevchenko consolidated Ukrainian ontological self-awareness through the Cossacks' struggles against Ukraine's ontological "others": "Polaks" (lyahi), "Ivans" (moskaly), "kikes" (zhidy) and Tatar "infidels" (pohantsy) (Pleshakov 2017, 41).

The annexation of Crimea and Russia's actions in Ukraine have arguably further consolidated these nationalistic sentiments. It is important to note that external existential pressures can either rupture or consolidate a country's biographic continuity (Kinnvall). Russia's engagement in Ukraine further strengthened nationalistic "identity mutations." As a result, Ukrainians seemed to (re)discover their Ukrainianness, which was reflected

in the massive display of national symbols, such as national flags, changes in fashion preferences in favor of clothes with traditional national elements like Vyshivankas (Secieru 2014, 82). This consolidation of biographic narratives has even reached consumption preferences. According to some estimates, consumption of Russian goods had dropped somewhere between 25% and 40% by 2014. This trend made some retailers drop Russian products altogether (“Prodazhi rossiiskikh Tovarov” 2014).

In sum, both Ukrainians and Russians have divergent perceptions of each other’s biographic narratives and ontological awareness of the outside world. These divergences have been and continue to be skillfully embedded and activated by political entrepreneurs in Kyiv and Moscow for the advancement of their geopolitical goals.

Similar narratives: freedom and fascism

Despite these differences, both actors seem to converge on strategies to consolidate citizens behind their selectively constructed biographic narratives. As a result, both Russia and Ukraine (supported by the West) employ similar ontological tools in framing their positions. Both Kyiv and Moscow project themselves as defenders of freedoms and rights for self-determination. At the Munich Security Conference in 2018, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko noted that, after the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine has become “a key battlefield for the European order and security architecture ... a shield and a sword of Europe ... ” (Poroshenko 2014). The Russian president employed similar tools in framing the Kremlin’s stand as a defender of the public will stating that “Russia’s foreign policy position ... drew ... from the will of millions of our people” (Putin 2014).

Both Brussels and Washington contributed to the ontological battles between Moscow and Kyiv. In doing so, their leaders addressed their audiences relying on ontological awareness that they successfully routinized at home. For example, the United States framed its position on the annexation of Crimea in terms compatible with the embedded ontological narratives of the messianism introduced by Woodrow Wilson and continuously routinized in America’s ontological awareness. Washington presented its support for Ukraine as they fight against the “empire” in defense of vulnerable victims of the authoritarian Russian state, a fight for freedom and a free world. John McCain told the crowd on the Maidan, “This is your moment ... the free world is with you, America is with you, I am with you ... and the destiny you seek is in Europe” (McCain 2014). Poroshenko’s speech in the U.S. Congress in March 2015 mirrored McCain’s rhetoric and appealed to values embedded in the ontological awareness of American lawmakers. The Ukrainian leader stressed that the war in Ukraine was a war of freedom against colonialism, the West against its ontological other. He underlined that the conflict in Ukraine is “not only Ukraine’s war. It is Europe and America’s war, too. It is a war of the free world – and for a free world! ... aggression against Ukraine is a threat

to global security everywhere” (Poroshenko 2015). Another Ukrainian leader, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, appealed to the similar messianic narratives of the Western world when he spoke in 2015 at the American Jewish Council’s Global Forum: “This is a war between the past and the future, between the dark and light, between freedom and dictatorship” (Yatsenyuk 2015).

As both sides used similar ontological tools in supporting their respective positions, they also utilized very similar rhetoric in framing the actions of their opponents. In their analysis of the conflict in Crimea, both Moscow and Kyiv (along with Brussels and Washington) drew parallels with World War II, or the Great Patriotic War, as it is referred to in Russia. Protesters on both sides portrayed both Obama and Putin as Hitler, “Putler”¹⁰ became a popular term on Ukrainian social media, while Russian nationalists equated NATO with Nazism (McCoy 2014). The World War II references could be seen in discourses by Western leaders, as well. For example, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton described Putin’s policy on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea as reminiscent of actions by Hitler (Rucker 2014).

This selective interpretation of deeply embedded historic memories could be seen in the example of young Ukrainians who have selective filtering of a complex post-Soviet history. Which biographic narrative they choose to adopt and continue using in large part has depended on the debates in which they are engaged. Lviv historian Mihailo Romaniuk notes that in the Western part of Ukraine, there is a movement to study a variety of historical documents to create the country’s new biographic narrative, distinct from the one adopted during the Soviet times (Judah 2015, 61). A vivid example of that is one of the museums in Lviv. A visitor there will learn that the jail they are touring represents how three authoritarian regimes – Polish, Nazi and Soviet – imprisoned heroic Ukrainian nationalists, and that atrocities committed during these three periods took thousands of lives. Through this ontological framing of the Soviet past, Ukrainian nationalists selectively label the history of the Russian presence as a conquest, grouping it together with the Nazi invasion (Judah 2015, 63).

This glorification of Ukrainian nationalism was especially prominent during the presidency of Victor Yushenko. It was during his rule that both Stepan Bandera and Roman Shukhevych, two Ukrainian nationalists, were honored posthumously, prompting the later pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich to attempt a downgrade of this historical outlook. In the same manner as Yushenko, new Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has sought to deepen the rupture in the country’s biographic continuity by dishonoring the country’s ties to Russia. One of his first two decrees condemned and made it illegal to deny the criminal character of the Communist Party. The other criminalized the act of denying the legitimacy of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and other organizations’ struggle for Ukraine’s independence (Judah 2015, 66).

Russian rhetoric on Ukraine

As in the case of Ukraine and the West, Russian rhetoric centered on the fight between the past and the future, and metaphorically, the dark and the light. The story of Crimea emerged as a counter to the story of the Euromaidan and called for the protection of the compatriots from the genocidal fascist forces of Ukrainian nationalism. Russian propaganda used similar tactics by activating biographic narratives of Ukrainian pogroms and the torture of Jews after the Nazis seized large portions of Ukraine in 1941, when 4,000 were believed to have been killed by Ukrainian mobs and Germans. The red and black flag on Maidan square was framed by the Kremlin as a continuity of Nazi ties to Ukrainian nationalists.

Vladimir Putin, speaking at an EU–Russia summit, activated this narrative by suggesting that racist nationalism from Western Ukraine was influencing the crowds in Kyiv: “this is a radical nationalism of a kind that is totally unacceptable in the civilized world” (Putin 2014; “Russia-EU Summit” 2014). In the same manner as Hillary Clinton noted earlier, the Russian President considered extreme fascist nationalist sentiments to be behind the unrest in Ukraine. In Putin’s case, however, the fascists were the Ukrainian nationalists backed by the West. Historic memories of fascism are deeply embedded in the emotional part of Russians’ biographic narrative. The term serves as a designator of the enemies of the young Soviet state and international communist movement. During World War II (or the Great Patriotic War), “fascism” was a term applied to the Wehrmacht and its allies. During the Cold War, the term was applied to the enemies of the Soviet state – the U.S.A. and the states that supported it. Despite this historic embeddedness that associated the terms with external foes, it also contains another layer of ontological significance.

The terms “fascist” or “nazi” in Russia are reminiscent of the idea of being a traitor, a sellout, a proxy of the West without moral compass or sense of dignity. When Vladimir Putin spoke in March of 2014 to the Russian Parliament and other Russian leaders, he painted the events in Ukraine as a coup d’état against the lawfully elected leader by “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites.” The Russian leader outlined the embedded continuity of these beliefs that come from the “ideological heirs of Stephan Bandera” (Putin 2014). The reference to Stephan Bandera strongly resonated with older people both in Ukraine and Russia who share the embedded and routinized biographic narratives of Soviet times. It brought back historic memories of people’s fight against Nazi atrocities in World War II and Bandera’s alliance with one of the most brutal invasions in the history of the country, one that took millions of lives. This ontological activation hit a collective nerve and was widely embraced by the Kremlin’s audience. In his interviews of Crimean citizens following annexation, Tim Judah, an English reporter and political analyst for *The Economist*, noted that many referred to Maidan protesters as Nazis or Banderovtzi (Judah

2015, 115). Interpretations of Bandera's legacy became the ontological battlefield of competing biographic narratives in Ukraine. While the Russian leadership depicted Bandera as a traitor and Western proxy, current leaders in Kyiv, backed by the West, celebrated his attempts at establishing an independent Ukrainian state. In 2010, Bandera was awarded the posthumous title of "Hero of Ukraine" by outgoing Ukrainian President Viktor Yushenko. Hence, the treatment of nationalism became an ontological anchor that defined the ontological direction of Ukraine's future and the vision of its past.

Western narrative in the conflict

Both Ukraine and Russia activated ontological narratives in support of their position during the standoff between them. While a variety of narratives have been used, the role of the West has dominated the discourse during this conflict. Ukraine's identity entrepreneurs framed their vision of the West as a beacon of peace, stability and democracy. Petro Poroshenko in his speech at the Munich Conference did so by constructing an ontological unity between Ukraine and the European Union. The Ukrainian President called for the consolidation of Kyiv's biographic narrative with European values. He stressed that "it is in our joint interest to resist Russia's attempts to break our unity and ruin our democracies" (Poroshenko 2014). The Ukrainian leader underlined that this unity goes beyond purely geostrategic calculations. It is the shared values and perceptions, according to him, that bring his country into the union of the European nations. Hence, he skillfully presented this aspired unity of his country with European partners as based on common ontological awareness of shared values and a common biographic narrative. In his speech, the Ukrainian President noted that "universal values are to be respected by all. These values are our greatest asset against the Ukrainian threat" (Poroshenko 2014). The West, therefore, is framed by Ukraine's elites as an ontological anchor, the biographic narrative of which Kyiv is aspiring to be a part.

While seeking ontological unity with the West, Ukrainian elites are equally driven to rupture biographic ties to Russia. This rupture was a focal point of Poroshenko's speech at Munich. While the Ukrainian leader referred to Europe a little over a dozen times (13 times to be exact), it was Russia that dominated his discourse and was mentioned 42 times. Kyiv's denial of a shared biographic narrative with Moscow is reflected as well in the treatment of Moscow's ontological symbols. The Ukrainian leader's proposal not to welcome the Russian flag is a strong statement. The flag is one of the most widely used ontological symbols of any country, a tribute to historical experiences and pride, layered with meaning and messages (Beason 2015). To deny its legitimacy is to go against the very ontological core of Russia as a nation. In his speech, however, Poroshenko made Kyiv's distancing itself from Moscow contingent by saying, "Russia's flag shall not

be welcome anywhere while Russia keeps instigating the World Hybrid War” (Poroshenko 2014). This treatment of the symbol of Russian power is contrasted with Poroshenko’s narrative about the European flag and his country’s ontological perceptions of this European hallmark: “My soldiers put this flag of the European Union ... hope it will be there. This flag is about all those who withstand Russian aggression and believe in a United Europe – our family” (Poroshenko 2014). Hence, in his reference to Russia, the Ukrainian leader used strong vocabulary with marked negative connotations: “aggression,” “fight,” “restrictive measures,” “threat” and “deterrent.” In contrast, he used an ontologically different lexicon when referring to his Western neighbor. When mentioning the European Union and its member states, the Ukrainian president used such terms as “values,” “democracy,” “order” and “stability,” framing Ukraine as a “shield and sword of Europe” (“shield and sword” have historically been associated with noble symbols of common protection and defense).

The Kremlin’s discourse on the role of the West differs drastically from the narrative constructed by Kyiv. In Moscow’s ontological awareness, activated by its identity entrepreneurs, Russia and Ukraine are brotherly nations united by a shared and deeply embedded biographic narrative. In his speech on the annexation of Crimea, the Russian president, unlike his Ukrainian counterpart, referred to his neighbor with such words as “unity,” “hope,” “brotherly” and “friends” (Putin 2014). In the same manner as the Ukrainian leader, the Russian president emphasized shared ontological awareness based on common values. Unlike Kyiv, however, Moscow perceives its biographic narrative in unity with Ukraine, where it is “impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia may split up and become two.”

In contrast to Petro Poroshenko, Vladimir Putin does not refer to Ukraine as a unified state but rather divides it into two distinct parts. The first is “fraternal” Ukrainians, tethered to Russia by ontological links with a shared biographic narrative, people who “have always been and will remain of the foremost importance.” These fraternal feelings are what Vladimir Putin claims have historically been the basis for “accommodating” Kyiv, not only on the issue of Crimea, but also concerning “maritime boundaries.” The Russian leader claims that the centrality of continuity of the joint biographic narrative with Ukraine is one of the Kremlin’s priorities, for “good relations with Ukraine matter for us (Russia)” (Putin 2014).

Putin’s rhetoric differs strikingly when he refers to the other “side” of Ukraine, the side that seeks to rupture biographic continuity between two brotherly people. It was this ontological other that made attempts to “deprive Russians of their historic memory” (Putin 2014). He frames this ontological “other” as a corrupt self-serving force, “so-called authorities” that “milked the country, fought among themselves for power, assets and cash flow” (Putin 2014). This ontologically other part of Ukraine is referred to by Vladimir Putin as the actual source of troubles inside the country, as it “did not care much about ordinary people” who “saw no prospects at home and

went to work as day laborers,” both in Europe and Russia. The Russian leader then skillfully framed the protests in Ukraine as demonstrations against this “ontological other,” the corrupt and dysfunctional elites in Kyiv, united with “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites.” This ontological other seeks to rupture biographic and cultural continuity between Russia and Ukraine and stands behind current decisions in Kyiv; “there is not legitimate executive authority in Ukraine ... many government agencies have been taken over by imposters ... but they do not have control over the country and often are controlled by radicals” (Putin 2014). It is not surprising, therefore, that according to Moscow, one of the first acts in the effort to break the biographic continuity was the drafting of the law to revise a language policy and infringe on the rights of the Russian-speakers and other minorities. Despite the harsh words of the Russian leader to the current authorities in Ukraine, they are not his main target. According to Vladimir Putin, it is not the radicals themselves who call the shots. Instead, they are skillfully manipulated by their “foreign sponsors” (Putin 2014).

In his speech, the Russian president puts the blame for the conflict in Ukraine on the Western states – the United States in particular – and frames the West as Russia’s ontological other. He does not stop there, however, and attributes the challenges to the international system overall, including the situation in Ukraine to the West’s projection of its “exceptionalism” and “exclusivity,” an exceptionalism that strives to “decide the destinies of the world.” To support his argument, the Russian leader identifies the “color” revolutions as the West’s supported projects that “cynically” take advantage of people and their aspirations for the advancement of America’s geopolitical goals. As a result of the West’s orchestrated global shifts, “instead of democracy and freedom, there was chaos, outbreaks in violence and a series of upheavals.” The events in Ukraine for the Russian president are the continuation of this Western strategy. For Vladimir Putin, it is the West that is the mastermind behind Ukraine’s unrest. It is the West, led by the United States, that seeks to undermine Russia and its influence in its near abroad. It is the West that seeks to rupture the Kremlin’s biographic continuity with Kyiv. It is the West, and not Russia, that is Ukraine’s “true” ontological other. To support this narrative, the Russian leader stresses that “we (Russian people) understand what is happening; we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration” (Putin 2014). According to the Russian president, the West’s efforts to undermine relations with Ukraine are a part of a larger strategy that seeks to undermine Russia and its growing global influence that challenges Western domination; “they (the West) 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” (Putin 2014).

The story behind the annexation of Crimea by Russia, therefore, has been converted into the story of a battle for minds and hearts, the story of myths and clashes, but most importantly, the story of perceptions of who we think

we are and what we want to be. Hence, the annexation of Crimea represents the clash between different biographic narratives activated by Russian, Ukrainian and Western leaders to consolidate popular support behind their geopolitical objectives. Both sides in the conflict framed the annexation of Crimea as biographically contextual. The Kremlin centered its ontological framing on the flaws of the international system constructed by the West. To support this narrative, the Kremlin has been using the recent timeline of Russia's relations with the West. Relations between the two countries started deteriorating with the emergence of Putin as Russian president, but especially after President Obama's support for the overthrow of the long-standing leaders of Egypt and Libya. While the United States framed it as a quest for the promotion of democracy across the globe, the Russian leadership perceived the move as a continuation of the West's encroachment on the sovereign rights of states and the advancement of its geopolitical agenda and a "regime change" that ultimately suits the West's geopolitical objective.

The conflict in Ukraine extended beyond its geographic boundaries and became a manifestation of the battle between those who were for the West and those who were challenging its dominance. For some, this standoff became an opportunity to re-engage in their own embedded ontological battles, such as was the case with the Serbs and Croats. Serbs have been framing their position in support of rebels in Eastern Ukraine, and Croats were rooting for Western Ukrainians. The Serbs have deep feelings against the United States, the European Union and NATO, and considered the conflict in Ukraine as a part of a larger crusade. However, those who supported Putin's anti-Western rhetoric are not only from the Eastern part of Europe, but from the West as well. For example, the French Wikipedia page "Guerre du Donbass" (n.d.) ("Support for Donbass Rebellion") gained about 10,000 members and was tagged as an "anti-globalization movement." Hence, the conflict in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea united those who share Russia's ontological narrative of opposition to the West, skillfully activated by the Kremlin. It united not only those in the East, but as well those in the West who believe in the collapse of the liberal system dominated by the West. In their narrative, the old world order is collapsing and the oppressed are rising against an evil empire – that dominated by America. Many people saw it as a chance for their role in ushering in the age of revolution.

One of the most vivid ways that Crimea's annexation was framed in Russia's ontological awareness can be seen in the documentary drama *Crimea: The Way Home* (Kondrashev 2015) that was broadcast in Russia in celebration of the first year of the annexation. In the movie, the operation in Crimea is portrayed in largely ontological terms. The protests in Ukraine are presented as Western-backed attempts to rupture the country's biographic continuity of unity with Russia. The purpose of this rupture was to advance the West's geostrategic calculations and expand its sphere of influence in Russia's near abroad, while undermining the Kremlin's growing influence as

the West's ontological other. Russia is depicted as a country with ontological awareness divergent from that of the West in both moral and ideational aspects. Such divergence is perceived by the West as threatening to its global dominance. The role of the Kremlin in Crimea, therefore, is one of a savior who not only defends the legitimately elected Ukrainian president ousted from power by a mob of uncivilized West-backed Ukrainian nationalists, but also stands up to the West's encroachment in the region. The other important ontological narrative is the biographic continuity of Russia as a moral center that values traditions and is loyal to its compatriots. Hence, the Russian president decided to engage in the operation to save his people from Western-proxy fascists and Ukrainian nationalists. The biographic continuity of this narrative could be seen from the discourse on the country's sentiments from the Great Patriotic War to the annexation of Crimea. Putin later noted that "the situation in Ukraine has turned out in such a way that we are forced to begin work on returning Crimea to Russia. Because we cannot leave this territory and people there adrift, under the steamroller of nationalists" (Putin 2014). Vulnerable Crimea required rescue.

The return of vulnerable Crimea projected Russia's image as a strong state capable and willing to engage in risky foreign policy. Many saw the annexation as a continuation of the great power narrative of Soviet times. This Soviet context played an important ontological role in the conflict. For many in Crimea, annexation was reminiscent of a return to Soviet times remembered by many for financial stability and predictability. Some analysts argue that the Ukrainian state did not succeed in building a shared historical narrative broadly accepted by different segments of its population, especially ethnic Russians. Many, therefore, sided with Russia because of the perceived continuity of the Soviet times. Hence, their support for the annexation was not as much support for unity with the current Russian regime, but rather nostalgia for the long-gone union that had a far from perfect, but predictable, future. As Victoria, a resident of Sloviansk, said in an informal conversation with Judah, it did not really matter to her where she would live, either in Russia or in Ukraine. She lamented that the people in the region were fed up with everything and everyone. What mattered to them was financial stability and predictability. She did not feel like being "anxious about money anymore." Many people, therefore, were guided by embedded and routinized historical memories about "good times in the USSR when they had a stable salary, and could occasionally afford to go on vacation to the Caucasus" (Judah 2015). In Odessa, many of those who participated in anti-Ukrainian demonstrations were members of the middle class who were fatigued by the stagnant economic situation in Ukraine. They longed for the economic stability and predictability of Soviet times (Judah 2015, 222).

Along with a sense of stability associated with Soviet times, the annexation reactivated the use of other ontological images and narratives that reflect nostalgia for that era. This activation is reflective of the Kremlin's efforts to construct and embed a coherent dominant biographic narrative of

the country's modern history. According to some analysts, stories of the Great Patriotic War and the persona of Stalin are among the most activated ones (Kuzio 2009). Indeed, the use of Stalin's image was widely embraced by those who sympathized with Russia in the conflict with Ukraine. His persona became symbolic as a tribute to the continuity of Russia's embedded and routinized narratives of a strong state personified by a strong leader. The framing of Stalin by different sides of the conflict also demonstrated the selective framing of the biographic narrative by identifying entrepreneurs for the advancement of their political objectives. Ekaterina Mihaylova, who ran the press office of the proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, argued for the importance of Stalin for the country's history and decried the historically unjustifiable abuse of his image. She claimed that misinformation on Stalin was deliberately constructed in Canada by fascist Ukrainian exiles. They argued that *golodomor* "hunger extermination" was a fabrication to taint the name of the great leader who arguably used famine as a tool against Ukrainian peasantry (Judah 2015, 9). Mihaylova stressed that Stalin's role was quite opposite to the one described by Ukrainian propaganda. In fact, Stalin took a backward agrarian country and turned it into an industrialized state, a hegemon in the international system, proving that Stalin was good for the country, "good for us." His dictatorial traits are not denied, but rather celebrated as consistent with the country's biographic narrative of a strong leader called for at the time and a response to the ontological needs of greatness. As noted by Victor Priss (an IT specialist in his late 20s) Stalin was a dictator, but he was "a dictator by the will of the people" who made the world tremble. In other words, Stalin's persona fits ontologically embedded perceptions and supported the continuity of the biographic narrative of a strong leader. Priss considered Putin, much as Stalin, to be the type of leader capable of responding to the will of his people and getting the message across (Judah 2015).

This portrayal of Stalin is not unique to the former Soviet leader's sympathizers in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea. Rather, these sentiments are the consequences of the Kremlin's strategy to re-activate the positive image of Stalin in the process of so-called re-Stalinization (Kuzio 2009). Some argue that these sentiments in Eastern Ukraine are the outcome of aggressive nationalism among ethnic Russians, who comprised 60.4% of the population in Crimea, that was promoted by the Kremlin ("Demographics of Crimea" n.d.; Sherlock 2020). This aggressive version of Russian nationalism permeated different facets of society's lives. For example, history books until recently promoted by the Kremlin framed Stalin as a modernizer in the mold of Peter the Great. They offered a positive assessment of the Soviet leader who "found Russia working with a wooden plough and left her equipped with atomic piles" (Deutscher 1966). In their examinations of the Great Purges, the authors of these studies have found that mass repressions were justified for concrete historical context as "preventative" measures, a rational way to prepare for the War with Germany. They also argue that no

viable alternative to Stalin was possible, as Stalinism was a consequence of and response to external threats (Danilov et al., 2008, 39). In other words, it is the West that is ultimately responsible for the calamity of Stalinism (Sherlock 2020, 49). In the same fashion, the Russian population responded to Vladimir Putin as a tough leader protecting the country from Western plans to weaken Moscow and take advantage of Russia's natural resources. Although the annexation of Crimea was condemned by the United States and the countries of the European Union, the Russian president's popularity has increased as a result of that decision. After Russia absorbed Crimea, his approval ratings rose drastically and achieved record highs (Moscow Times 2015). Despite the collapsing ruble exchange rate, 85% of Russians polled said that they trust their leader. It seems that these sentiments were not affected by economic sanctions, a falling economy and drastic fall in energy prices. The number of people who wanted Putin to stay in power increased, compared to those who were ready to support their leader before the crisis.

Conclusion

Russia's annexation of Crimea has earned its rightful place in the study of ontological security for a number of reasons. First, it highlights the importance of selective activation and deactivation of biographic narratives by identity entrepreneurs. The same events were interpreted differently by the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. In their interpretations, both Moscow and Kyiv relied heavily on embedded and routinized biographic narratives that resonated with their audiences. It highlighted the "Westernness" of Ukraine for Mайдan supporters and the "fraternal nature" of two neighboring states for the Kremlin and those who supported its narrative. Secondly, this selective activation was contingent upon interpretation by identity entrepreneurs. This demonstrates the competing ontological narratives and the constantly changing nature of ontological awareness that is subject to constant interpretation and re-interpretations. Just a few decades ago, both the Russian and the Ukrainian people peacefully coexisted and voted for their future together in the referendum for the preservation of the Soviet Union. It was hard to imagine then that they would be at war with each other in the near future. This highlights the fluid nature of ontological awareness and the importance of understanding its shifts. Future research on the topic could shed some light on how these shifts overcome the embedded nature of previously routinized ontological beliefs. Moreover, as never before, the annexation of Crimea highlighted the importance of the West, not only for Russia's biographic narrative, but for its near abroad. Ironically, the current crisis is full of unintended ontological consequences. According to some analysts, Putin's annexation of Crimea has reduced the feelings of "fraternal brotherhood" and contributed "as much to Ukrainian nation building as two decades of independence" (Kuzio 2009). While seeking to build a *Russkii Mir*, the Kremlin fell victim to its own strategy and promoted the opposite – Ukraine's consolidation with Europe.

Notes

- 1 The authors have no conflict of interest in publishing this chapter. They have not received any financial support in researching or writing this chapter.
- 2 Giddens (1991) defines ontological security “as a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual.” On “ontological security,” see also, Steele (2008) and chapter 1.
- 3 The biographic narrative is what Giddens refers to as the “narrative of the self”: the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others (Giddens 1991, 243).
- 4 Biographic continuity is a consistency and resilience of an agent’s biographic narrative (narrative of self). This consistency of self-narrative establishes a protective cocoon that guards over the self and its dealings with everyday reality and allows individuals to preserve the “I” in shifting external contexts (Giddens 1991, 53). Biographic continuity, therefore, filters out many of the dangers, which, in principle, can threaten the integrity of the self.
- 5 Many analyses of Russian and Ukrainian policy emphasize geopolitical and neorealist theoretical perspectives on foreign policy, including that of Russia (Biersack and O’Lear 2014; Götz 2015, 2016a; Kuzio 2018; and Mearsheimer 2014). Others give much greater attention to ideology, psychological factors and issues of identity (Bukkvoll 2016; Hansen 2016; Teper 2016; Moulioukova 2017; Kuzio 2018). For an assessment of the three questions about the sources and purposes of Russian policy that differ significantly from these broad theoretical approaches, see Götz (2016b). Götz asks whether Russian policy is mainly revisionist (with identity concerns a central factor); or, rather, is it a result of Western incursion into Russian “space” and, thus, a response to Russia’s sense of victimhood; or, finally, is Russia making trouble abroad in order to facilitate support and control at home as the political system becomes more authoritarian. Perhaps the broadest and most comprehensive brief introduction to the myriad approaches to the analysis of Russian foreign policy can be found in Forsberg and Pursiainen (2017).
- 6 It is important to distinguish between *ontological awareness* and *awareness of self-identity*, even though the two are closely linked. Ontological awareness does not simply accept reality but instead creates ontological reference points. One such point is a tradition or habit that offers an organizing medium for social life. The other aspect is one’s relationship with others.
- 7 Turchynov was appointed as interim president by the Ukrainian parliament before Poroshenko’s election in June 2014.
- 8 For a perceptive discussion of the roots and development of an ontological approach to the analysis of foreign policy decision making and its application to Russian foreign policy, see Hansen (2016). See also Teper (2016), who concludes his discussion of psychological factors in decision making as follows: “Thus, the result of Russia’s rebirth was in large part depicted in geopolitical terms, but Russia’s original *raison d’être* in Crimea was portrayed as primarily a national one. Moreover, although Russia’s new stance on the international scene matched Putin’s traditional great-power statist vision, the national rebirth message that was conveyed stressed that the change primarily originated in the nation’s spiritual revitalization and increased self-awareness, not in the military, economic, or administrative build-up of the state. The neo-Slavophile and civilizationist rhetoric often employed to describe national rebirth could be explained by an effort to bridge over the growing gap between an increasingly ethnicizing Russian official national identity discourse and the need to accommodate domestic groups with pronounced ethnic and religious identities.”

- 9 In the later part of his speech, the Russian leader refers to the mistreatment of Crimean Tatars by Stalin.
- 10 The term was coined combining the name of the Russian president with that of Hitler.

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6 The role of energy in Russian foreign policy

Arsen Gasparyan

Vladimir Putin's arrival in the Kremlin in 2000 and the emergence of new governing elites in Moscow brought a focus on pragmatism and self-concentration in Russian foreign policy. Since 2000 Russia has had four consecutive foreign policy concepts adopted in 2000, 2008, 2013 and 2016 with adjustments because of the changes in the political situation in the world and justifying the implementation of its foreign policy dimensions. Nevertheless, the strategy adopted by the Putin administration to maximize the returns on political investments and converting oil and gas earnings into political dividends remained unchanged. Stefan Hedlund sees this as the essence of the country's new status as a great energy power; the challenge was to convince the Europeans and other partners that Moscow could be trusted as a reliable provider of energy (Hedlund 2014, 14).

Roger Kanet argues that in the early 2000s, as Moscow began to use the supply of gas and oil to neighboring states as an explicit foreign policy tool, Washington became concerned about Western energy dependence on Russia and renewed its role in encouraging the development of alternatives routes for the delivery of energy, especially natural gas, from the new fields in Central Asia to the West. The Russians, understandably, have viewed this U.S. initiative – especially in conjunction with the expansion of NATO eastwards – as a continuation of the policy of containment. However, Russia has positioned itself effectively to control the production and distribution of energy across almost the entirety of former Soviet space and, thus, to Europe as well, as part of President Putin's commitment to re-establish Russia as a major global actor (Kanet 2011, 217–218; see also, Moulioukova and Kanet 2017).

In this chapter, I argue that, if Russia views oil and gas as indispensable resources in international politics, then the integration of energy and foreign policy will be prioritized by the governing elites. Therefore, the coming to power of Vladimir Putin was the starting point of the integration of energy and foreign policy, and energy became a foreign policy tool wielded by the Russian state. President Putin reordered Russia's oil and gas assets to serve national interests and foreign policy.

Russia's energy agenda is driven by domestic and foreign policy motives. Although domestic motives are not a subject for this study, it is important to

acknowledge that Putin used the administrative resources of the state to consolidate power and the new political and economic elites became symbiotically connected in this system. Putin has fought and defeated all major oligarchs; in the meantime, others pulled back and accepted the new rules of the game, including major oil companies such as Lukoil, Surgutnefgas and Tatneft. According to Putin, his administration put an end to some manipulation schemes which allowed state property to be sold for free and led to the creation of oligarchs. These schemes also “led to the situation where the government either lost control of strategic industries or just led to the destruction of those industries. So, [the] goal was not to stop privatization, but to make it more systemic, more equitable” (ShowTime Documentary Films 2017, 19).

The Putin administration consolidated the oil and natural gas industries into the state-controlled giants Gazprom (natural gas, natural gas pipelines and oil), Rosneft (oil) and Transneft (oil pipelines). The leaders of these companies assisted President Putin to ensure Russia’s global importance as an energy provider. The oil and gas industry were viewed by the new governing elites not just a source of wealth, but as a resource for political power and state policy.

The following operational indicators also demonstrate how widely Russian national security and bilateral and multilateral diplomacy are affected by energy interests:

1. In 2000, the Russian Foreign Ministry’s State University of International Relations (MGIMO) established the International Energy Policy and Diplomacy Institute to conduct training and studies in the field of energy diplomacy, geopolitics and international energy cooperation with a Supervisory Board, chaired by the foreign to oversee the development of the Institute. The Board includes the heads of major Russian resource-producing jurisdictions and leading Russian energy companies. The Institute, in cooperation with West European universities and business schools, also established five institutes to study energy diplomacy, energy policy and cooperation (MGIMO University, n.d.).
2. An additional contribution to improve the effectiveness of the Foreign Ministry’s interaction with industries and its diplomatic support for Russian business is made by the Business Council of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, established in May 2006, to develop close relations with Russian business, including energy companies, in order to protect Russia’s political and economic interests abroad. The Ministry concluded cooperation agreements with the oil and gas producers, among others (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2017).
3. Since 2001 diplomats of territorial departments of the Foreign Ministry synchronize energy and foreign policy issues, if they are related to bilateral relations, and the Department of Economic Cooperation of the Ministry manages energy affairs when it comes to multilateral international relations.

An examination of the Russian foreign policy concepts adopted in the 21st century demonstrates that in the Concept of 2008, great importance was attached to maintaining Russia's reputation as a responsible partner in the world energy markets. In Concept-2013, this approach developed into the task of promoting modernization and diversification of the Russian economy, increasing the share of science and innovation in the overall economic structure by attracting advanced scientific knowledge and technologies, as well as foreign investments. Moreover, one of the major dimensions of the Foreign Ministry's activities became diplomatic support for and assistance to the interests of Russian businesses, including energy companies and their operations abroad.¹

The following sections of this research look at the ways in which Russia's governing elites prioritize the development of energy and foreign policy in different regions of the world, namely the former Soviet Union, the European Union, the Middle East and Asia respectively, with special emphasis on the Kremlin's foreign policy and the business of its agents. The Conclusion evaluates the main dimensions of Russian energy and foreign policy, and how Russia's governing elites blend commercial opportunities with important foreign policy objectives.

Russia in former soviet space: energy and foreign policy

Russian foreign policy is based on traditional notions of strength and power determining actions and motives in the international realm. The location of a region where a foreign policy challenge arises is also an important factor. One of the fundamental objectives of Russia's foreign policy is "to pursue neighborly relations with adjacent states, assist them in eliminating the existing and preventing the emergence of the new hotbeds of tension and conflicts on their territory" (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016). The formation of a good-neighborly belt along the perimeter of Russia's border is one of the traditional security goals advanced by former foreign minister Primakov. The reasoning for Russia's interests in its neighboring countries is explained as a way to preserve stability and the current *status quo*, to prevent further NATO infiltration, and to create favorable external conditions for the steady development of Russia. Much like the American Monroe Doctrine of regional control in the Western Hemisphere, Russia operates similarly in the so-called near abroad region (Skak 2011, 138–152).

Bertil Nygren argues that the European sub-complex consisting of the two Slavic states Ukraine and Belarus and the small non-Slavic Moldova has a special status among other sub-complexes of the larger Russia-led regional security complex. When the Baltic states became members of NATO and the EU, the next geographical "buffer" to Europe and NATO – i.e., Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova – became more important (Nygren 2008a, 47). These three republics depend completely on Russia for their natural gas needs, as

are many other former Soviet states. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova fall under the category of both importers and transit countries.

Ukraine has a powerful gas transportation system that not only brings a gas supply to domestic customers, but also permits the export of Russian gas to Central and Western Europe. The total capacity of Ukraine's gas transportation network amounts to 287.7 billion cubic meters per year, including 134.3 billion cubic meters per year to the European countries (Zhiznin 2007, 221). These great transit volumes make Ukraine the largest link in transiting Russian natural gas to Europe. However, the Ukrainian gas debt to Russia developed into a major conflict. The Russian position was straightforward: a higher price for the gas distributed and sold to Ukraine and, at the same time, a secure delivery of Russian gas through Ukraine to Europe. Given the growing debt of Ukraine, Gazprom several times reduced gas supplies by 25–35%.

On New Year's Day 2009 Gazprom cut off its gas supplies to Ukraine, and the impact on Europe was felt already in early January. Romania was the first to be hurt with a drop of some 30 to 40% in supplies. Hungary, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria also felt the cuts in deliveries. Gazprom promptly accused Ukraine of stealing gas in transit to Europe. The general argument was that Gazprom simply wanted to be paid for its gas deliveries to Ukraine and that Ukraine was to blame for the freeze that East Europeans were experiencing because of gas thefts. On January 19, 2009, then-prime ministers Putin and Tymoshenko signed a ten-year agreement, and the price was set at \$360 per thousand cubic meters.²

The Russian-Ukrainian relationship contained the most dangerous conflict in the post-Soviet area, when the major issues ranged from possible NATO and EU membership for Ukraine and Kiev's pro-Western path to the status of Crimea and the Russian Black Sea fleet based there. While some analysts and scholars believe that political undertones prevail over commercial argument of the Ukrainian debt for gas, it is clear that Ukraine, being much dependent upon import deliveries of gas from Russia, often failed to fulfill its financial obligations.

In November 2013, in an unexpected move, then-President Yanukovych rejected the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, and thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets in protest, seeing the move as a result of strong-arm tactics from Russia. The Russian response to the rejected EU deal was a bailout package and economic deal of its own. The deal was worth nearly \$20 billion and was to ensure that Ukraine remained in Moscow's political orbit for decades to come. It forgave the \$5 billion debt already owed by Ukraine to Russia and also included a steep decline in the price of natural gas for the country. The protests in Ukraine escalated and turned violent, which eventually led to the ouster of Yanukovych and his subsequent exile in February 2014 (Maness and Valeriano 2015, 121). Russia responded by taking Crimea, which is strategically important as a base for the Russian navy in the Black Sea. Moreover, in the Donbas region

of Ukraine, dominated by heavy industries, pro-Russian protests escalated into a civil war between self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk republics and the Ukrainian government. According to the prevailing wisdom, the Ukraine crisis can be blamed almost entirely on Russian aggression. However, John Mearsheimer argues that the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of trouble was NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West. At the same time, the EU expansion eastward and the West's backing of the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine – beginning with the Orange revolution in 2004 – were critical elements, too. For Putin, the illegal overthrow of Ukraine's elected and pro-Russian president – which is rightly labeled as a “coup” – was the final straw. According to Mearsheimer, great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory (Mearsheimer 2014, 77–89; Kanet 2018a).

The new Ukrainian leadership is not strong enough to withstand Russian economic and political interests. Since the break-up of the USSR, Ukraine has been economically dependent on Russia in more than one respect, perhaps best seen in the fields of energy and capital. Moreover, the ongoing civil war in the southeastern regions of Ukraine and the Russian takeover of Crimea complicated bilateral relations between the two countries. The crisis in Ukraine not only underscores the challenges of managing U.S. and European relations with Russia, it also points out the difficulty for European countries and Ukraine to break their dependence on a single energy supplier. On its side, Russia prioritizes the integration of energy and foreign policy and uses its energy arm, Gazprom, to advance its interests in the region.

Energy is one of the main engines of power for Russia in its near abroad. Besides pure economic revenues, factors such as close ties to the Russian government, relations with the West, whether or not the country is a transport pipeline territory for Russian energy exports, and the presence of ethnic Russians in former Soviet countries are all relevant to the examination of Russia's use of energy as a diplomatic weapon and source of power over those countries.

Belarus and Moldova have also been the occasional subjects of gas delivery problems. After his victory in the presidential elections in March 2000, Putin visited Minsk within a couple of weeks and firmly placed the economic aspects of the Russia-Belarus Union treaty signed by Yeltsin and Lukashenko at the center of bilateral relations rather than the political, security or defense aspects. It became evident that Putin and Lukashenko had very different perspectives on integration. According to Putin, economic ties should be the root of integration and “defense and political plans cannot be built on a shaky economic foundation” and the two countries should concentrate on a single tax policy, customs area, and joint tariff regulations (Nygren 2008a, 70–74).

A political and legal ground for energy cooperation between Russia and Belarus has been regulated by different interstate agreements, including the “Agreement on equal conditions in pricing.” Nevertheless, the pricing of gas deliveries to Belarus was directly linked to the issue of selling shares in the Belarusian gas transit and distribution company Beltransgaz. In 2006, Gazprom raised the issue of its participation in the privatization of the Belarus gas transportation system and started negotiations on market prices for gas deliveries to Belarus. The outcome of negotiations was the compromise price of \$100 per thousand cubic meters instead of \$130 proposed by Gazprom (Zhiznin 2007, 214–217). Between 2007 and 2010, Gazprom also acquired a 50% stake in Beltransgaz. On November 25, 2011, in furtherance of an intergovernmental agreement, Gazprom and the State Property Committee of Belarus entered into the purchase and sale contract for the remaining 50% stake of Beltransgaz. The company became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom and was renamed Gazprom Transgas Belarus (Gazprom Transgas Belarus 2020).

The Russia-Belarus energy dispute involved the issue of transit tariffs for Russian oil, as well. Russia also claimed that in 2007 Belarus began siphoning off large amounts of oil. The Russian pipeline company Transneft stopped pumping oil into the Druzhba pipeline and resumed oil exports through the pipeline only after Belarus ended the extremely high transit tariffs that sparked the shutdown. Bertil Nygren argues that Russia-Belarus relations saw a downward spin under Putin, and the grand design for political integration inherited from the Yeltsin era was effectively stopped by Putin’s “economization” of Russian foreign policy (Nygren 2008a, 80). The energy and pipeline sectors have been a prime object of Russian interest. At the same time, Russia and Belarus maintain the closest military ties that exist in post-Soviet space, and the importance of this fact should not be overlooked.

Moldova, another transit state and importer, does not possess any oil, gas, or coal reserves. In order to satisfy domestic demands, it must import from Russia and Ukraine, and Russian gas is Moldova’s major energy source. Today Moldova’s natural gas industry is mainly controlled by a joint Russian-Moldovan enterprise Moldovagaz, in which Gazprom has a 50% share (Moldovagaz 2020). Lukoil-Moldova, a subsidiary of Russian oil company Lukoil, is also one of the leaders in the hydrocarbon market of Moldova. Russian-Moldovan interstate energy cooperation is developing in accordance with the “Agreement on transit and supply of natural gas from the Russian Federation to the Republic of Moldova,” signed in November 200 (Zhiznin 2007, 218). The unsettled status of the Transnistria region, a landlocked self-proclaimed state between Ukraine and the river Dniester is the main controversy in relations between Russia and Moldova. Besides the Transnistrian problem, one of the most difficult issues between the two countries is Moldova’s debt on payments for gas. The price of gas supplied by Gazprom to Moldova was considerably lower than that for gas supplied

to neighboring Romania and Bulgaria. Nevertheless, Moldova insists on restructuring the accumulated debts with more than 80% going to Transnistria. Gazprom claims that the current agreement between Moldova and Gazprom does not separate the payment obligations between Moldova and Transnistria. For Moscow; a probable solution might be a transfer of some of the country's energy industry facilities to the ownership of the Russian companies. Moldova's inability to pay old and current energy debts has been used by Gazprom to acquire desirable Moldovan assets.

The cases of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova demonstrate how Russia prioritizes the integration of foreign and energy policy and uses energy as an efficient instrument in Russian foreign policy.

Other importers in post-Soviet space, besides these three countries, are Armenia and Georgia in the South Caucasus (see Arakelyan and Kanet 2012), and Tajikistan and Kirgizstan in Central Asia. Armenia has been Russia's main ally in the South Caucasus since the break-up of the Soviet Union. Gazprom Armenia, which manages the country's gas transportation system, is a subsidiary of Gazprom. It is also responsible for gas supplies in domestic markets, management of interstate transit of Russian gas, as well as for domestic and international sales of electric energy generated using Russian gas resources. This company was founded in 1997 as a joint Russian-Armenian project and Gazprom owned only 45% of stock. In 2014, Gazprom became the sole owner of the company (Gazprom Armenia 2020) and Russia is a main supplier of the refined products to Armenia as well (Rosneft-Armenia 2020).

Russia is also co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group, the only mediating body of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the most protracted one in the former Soviet Union. Moscow profits tremendously from weapons sales to the parties in the conflict and seeks a unilateral role in resolving it. Russia has a military alliance with Armenia and a fairly close relationship with Azerbaijan. The presence of a Russian military base in Armenia and Russian border guards along the Armenian-Turkish and Armenian-Iranian borders, Erebuni military airport deployed with advanced Russian fighter jets, significant debt of Armenia to Russia, and activities of Russian companies in the main industries of the Armenian economy, including in the field of nuclear energy, keep Armenia in the firm grip of Moscow.

Georgia's neighbor, Armenia, strives to increase its role as an important transit state. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline project provide significant economic benefits. Georgian international energy policy is determined by its desire to make possible transportation of Caspian hydrocarbons, thus bypassing Russia. In the meantime, most of domestically consumed gas was imported via the gas pipeline from Russia. The gas transit route to Armenia also crosses the territory of Georgia. This pipeline network has always been a kind of hot spot of political and economic importance. First of all, it is a generally negative background for political relations between Georgia and Russia.

The situation was aggravated after new forces headed by former President Saakashvili came to power in Georgia in 2004. In this period, the intention of Georgia to become a member of NATO led to the further deterioration of bilateral relations. In a brief war in 2008 Russian forces routed troops loyal to the Georgian authorities and secured the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as Russian protectorates. Dmitri Trenin argues that the five-day campaign was a clear success: Moscow prevented NATO from expanding into a former Soviet state that was flirting with membership, confirmed its strategic supremacy in its immediate southern neighborhood, and marked the limits of Western military involvement in the region (Trenin 2016, 24). Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, then proceeded to integrate them into the Russian military, economic and political space.

However, the new Georgian authorities have gradually normalized their relations with Russia despite the 2008 war. According to Nicu Popescu, Georgia's pro-Western consensus remains strong, but a striking 31% of Georgians are willing to join the Russia-led Eurasian Union, a number that would have been hard to imagine a decade ago (Popescu 2018). In 2019, Russia firmly held the position of Georgia's second foreign trade partner (after Turkey) with a total trade turnover of 1.33 billion USD. It is also in Russia that over the past years, Georgia has been successful in selling two-thirds of its wine (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia 2020). Rosneft acquired 49% of Petrocas Energy Group, a regional player in oil logistics. Petrocas also owns the oil product terminal in the port of Poti in Georgia and the gas station network Gulf, the largest in Georgia operating 140 gas stations across the country (Petrocas Energy Group 2014).

Two other importers, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan express strong interest in attracting Russian companies to take part in the reconstruction and development of their oil and gas industry infrastructure. In 2014 Kyrgyzstan, a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, and Gazprom signed in Bishkek a Sales and Purchase Agreement pursuant to which the company Gazprom Kyrgyzstan, later became a wholly-owned subsidiary of Gazprom and focused on natural gas supplies and marketing within the Kyrgyz Republic (Gazprom 2020). In 2003, Gazprom and the government of Tajikistan signed a 25-year cooperation treaty for the participation of Gazprom in the exploration, development, and exploitation of new deposits and reconstruction of pipelines. Some Russian oil companies, such as Rosneft and Sibneft strive for a right to take part in the development of oil deposits in Tajikistan (Zhiznin 2007, 212–214). Needless to say, the fact is important that Russia has military bases in both countries and both are heavily dependent on Russia.

The evolution of the Russian energy interests and foreign policy objectives in post-Soviet space should also be reviewed with the group of producers and exporters of energy resources – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the

Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines introduced significant changes to the South Caucasus and left Russia out of these projects. For a long period after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan was giving preference to the U.S. and the EU to attract foreign investments to develop oil and gas fields and ensure sustainability of the state's oil and gas infrastructure. However, Putin changed the direction of bilateral relations. The influx of Russian arms into Azerbaijan, regular trilateral summits of the presidents of Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan and, as a result, the construction of the Azerbaijani railroad segment of the International North-South transport corridor, and Russia's major role in restoring the ceasefire after four-days of war in Nagorno-Karabakh in April 2016 left President Aliyev with the impression that Russia alone calls the shots in the South Caucasus. Moreover, according to Alexey Pushkov, a member of the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament and Vladimir Solovyov, a Russian TV journalist, President Aliyev understands that the United States has the intention of changing the regime in Azerbaijan³ and if he does not maintain good relations with Russia, he might face the fate of Muammar Gaddafi, or in the best-case scenario, the destiny of ex-Georgian president Saakashvili (TV Channel Rossiya 1 2017).

Another issue between Russia and Azerbaijan is defining the legal status of the Caspian Sea, which also involves other coastal countries such as Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Finding a balance of interests among these five countries is required to develop the oil and gas resources of the Caspian, invest in the development of these deposits, and provide reliable transportation of the Caspian hydrocarbons to world markets. Oil and gas are not the only resources of the Caspian. It also concentrates about 90% of the world sturgeon fish reserves.

The Russian government has announced the construction of a highly sophisticated naval facility for its Caspian flotilla by 2020. The new base will be one of Russia's most technically advanced naval facilities and will entrench Moscow's military hegemony over the Caspian region for years to come (Ramani 2017). During August 2013 Putin's visit to Baku, Russian warships arrived in the port of Baku to demonstrate the naval power of the Russian Caspian flotilla.

Gazprom and SOCAR (State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic) reached an agreement to resume natural gas supplies to Azerbaijan, which began on November 22, 2017. It is planned to deliver a total of 1.6 billion cubic meters of Russian gas to Azerbaijan under this contract (Gazprom 2017). According to Nygren, under Putin, Azerbaijan has been a cooperative partner with respect to the Caspian Sea and its resources, and bilaterally electricity grids, as well as the export of Azeri oil and gas to and via Russia have constituted important integrative measures (Nygren 2012, 232).

Russian policy in the Caspian and Central Asian regions and its relations with oil and gas producers of this region (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan) are significantly influenced by energy. Gas is much more a problem than oil for Caspian producers, since their landlocked

position means that they cannot develop liquified natural gas (LNG) for shipping as a way of overcoming their dependency on pipelines. As a result of its preeminent position as ‘gatekeeper’ to export markets, Russia controls around 80% of Turkmenistan’s gas exports and a similar proportion of Kazakhstan’s oil exports. Russia has exploited the situation with gas over much of the past 20 years by using Central Asian gas as backfill for its domestic needs. It has bought this gas at a very substantial discount, which it could then sell abroad for a significant profit. Finally, as claimed by John Lough, Russia extends its influence further through its ability to compete with proposed new pipeline systems from the Caspian region in its attempt to prevent Caspian producers from exporting independently of Russia. The case of South Stream also known as Turk Stream⁴ versus Nabucco⁵ provides a clear example (Lough 2011).

The proved reserves of oil in Turkmenistan are estimated at 200–300 million tons. Turkmenistan’s maximum gas reserves are estimated at more than seven trillion cubic meters, which ranks the country sixth in the world. Turkmenistan is largely dependent on gas export income; the gas industry provides around 50% of the GDP value (U.S. EIA, n.d.). Turkmenistan stayed out of deep engagements with Russia in the security and defense sphere. It has been the most ‘neutral’ of all new-post Soviet states – Turkmenistan is neither a CIS member nor one of the Eurasian Economic Union. Putin’s first foreign visits as a head of state were to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. After these visits, the energy policy of Russia in Central Asia and, in particular, Gazprom’s strategy radically changed and Central Asia became a region to be taken under control (Panyushkin and Zygar 2008).

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan has constantly raised the question of cooperation in oil and gas, transport and refining industries. Under Putin, the leaders of Turkmenistan realized that it would be impossible develop without strong liaisons with Russia. In the beginning of the 21st century, the “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan” was signed by President Putin and former president-for-life Niyazov. Another important agreement is the “Gas Industry Cooperation Act between Russia and Turkmenistan until 2028” signed in 2003. Gazprom signed an agreement with Turkmenneftgaz to increase the amount of imported gas from 5 billion cubic meters in 2004 to 70–80 billion cubic meters in 2028 (Zhiznin 2007, 207). The Central Asia – Center gas pipeline system, which runs from Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to Russia, is already controlled by Gazprom.

Kazakhstan, a member of the Eurasian Economic Union, with the output of about 1.4 million barrels per day is the largest oil producer in the Caspian region. Russia and Kazakhstan have strong ties at the levels of the CIS, CSTO, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. A legal framework of Kazakh-Russian cooperation, including the energy sector, is set out in more than 260 bilateral agreements. The state-owned KazMunaiGas and Timur Kulibaev,⁶ son-in-law of the former

President Nazarbayev, have full control of the country's oil and gas industry. KazMunayGaz and Gazprom established the company KazRosGas with a 50/50 stake in 2002 to consolidate efforts across a number of new projects in Kazakhstan (KazRosGas, n.d.).

Driving Russian policy in Kazakhstan are the activities of four major Russian energy companies: Gazprom, Lukoil, Transneft and Rosneft. These companies allow Moscow to keep Kazakhstan within the sphere of Russian interests and help prevent China from dominating Kazakhstan's economy. Their participation in local energy projects gives Russia access to oil and gas reserves, while binding the two countries in the energy, including nuclear industry, transport, space and agriculture sectors.

The basis of the partnership rests on agreements covering petroleum contracts and energy supplies transiting through Kazakhstani and Russian territory to European or Chinese markets. Currently, the leading Russian investor in Kazakhstan is Lukoil, which operates seven projects and has a stake in the cross-country pipeline Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC). In 2013, 32.7 million tons of oil was pumped through the pipeline, 28 million tons of it exported from Kazakhstan (Gushchin 2015).

Since January 1, 2014, Rosneft has been able to transport 7 million tons of oil each year via the Priirtyshsk-Atasu-Alashankou route under an inter-governmental agreement on sending Russian oil to China via Kazakhstan. Russian authorities have stated that the transported amount can be increased to 10 million tons. This will allow Moscow to expand long-term economic cooperation with Astana and guarantee the latter additional budget revenues of 54.6 million dollars as a transit charge. Moreover, the agreement extended the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline capacity from 12 to 20 million tons of oil per year (Kandiyoti 2012, 185–190; Zhiznin 2007, 199–203).

The third important Russian – Kazakhstan pipeline is the Atyrau-Samara route, which transfers Kazakh oil to Russia and then on to Europe. In 2013, 15.4 million tons of oil was transported via this route. Finally, both countries use a maritime route in the Caspian Sea to deliver 2.7 million tons of oil. This stable energy partnership is also evident in the gas sector. Two gas pipelines – Central Asia – Center and Bukhara – Ural – that run through Kazakhstan territory let Gazprom expand its resource portfolio and guarantee an uninterrupted gas supply abroad (Gushchin 2015). Russian foreign policy and the Eurasian Economic Union seek to enhance the strong ties between the two countries and the shared heritage of the former Soviet Union. Astana's position also makes clear that Russia will remain a primary partner of Kazakhstan.

While Russia maintains an entrenched energy trade partnership with Kazakhstan, it has looked to supplement its ties with Astana with deeper relations with Uzbekistan, another energy-rich Central Asian partner. The oil and gas industries are the largest in this country. Uzbekistan possesses large proved reserves of gas, which in 2005 were estimated at 1.9 trillion cubic meters and about 4–5 trillion cubic meters of undiscovered gas

reserves. The country's gas extraction capacity in 2005 exceeded 53 billion cubic meters, which ranks Uzbekistan the third among the CIS states, after Russia and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan's proved oil reserves amount to 100–200 million tons and exports gas to Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and small amounts of oil and refined products to neighboring countries (U.S. EIA 2004; BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2005).

Since 2003–2004 Uzbekistan leaders have begun to promote strategic and economic cooperation with Russia, including energy cooperation. It correlates with the fact that Uzbekistan did not receive desirable Western investments in proposed energy projects. Therefore, Uzbekistan started to pay greater attention to energy cooperation with Russia, especially in the gas industry. Uzbekistan's gas transport network is also connected with the CIS integrated system of gas pipelines. Besides the strategic partnership treaty signed by Putin and former president Karimov in 2004, which gave a new boost to the development of interstate political and economic cooperation, another agreement was signed between Lukoil and UzbekNefteGaz National Holding Corporation on the development of the Kandym-Khauzak-Shady deposit situated in the southern Uzbekistan. In the consortium, Lukoil has 90% and UzbekNefteGaz 10% of shares.

Uzbekistan's weakening economic position and rising inflation have provided Russia with an opportunity to consolidate a durable trade partnership with Tashkent. By settling a debt dispute that dated back to the early 1990s, Putin has taken his first step toward capitalizing on Uzbekistan's growing vulnerability. In synchrony with its debt forgiveness pledge, Gazprom took an advantage with the UzbekNefteGaz to purchase 5 billion cubic meters of Uzbek natural gas annually.⁷ In the landmark "Agreement on strategic cooperation in the gas industry" of December 17, 2002, Gazprom and UzbekNefteGaz National Holding Corporation agreed on long-term supplies of Uzbekistan's natural gas for 2004–2012, as well as on cooperation in geologic exploration based on a production sharing agreement. Moreover, Russia has considerable leverage over the Uzbek economy. Three million Uzbek migrant workers live in Russia, and their productivity is responsible for 25% of Uzbekistan's GDP (Zhiznin 2007, 208–211).

In addition to improved counter-terrorism cooperation agreed between Putin and the new president Mirziyoyev, Uzbekistan has a vested interest in cooperating with Russia to ensure that its borders with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan remain secure. Russia's foreign policy and energy relations with Tashkent are producing the required results in achieving economic and political influence in Uzbekistan.

Since the beginning of his presidency, Putin sought to rebuild Russia's lost status as a "great power," first and foremost by controlling energy resources, to be followed by economic dominance and integration of former Soviet space, and in the longer term, also by much closer political integration. Putin's Kremlin team has been extremely skillful at nationalizing energy resources and advancing the business of the state-owned energy in the post-

Soviet area. These companies and private energy companies such as Lukoil, Surgutneftegas are highly integrated with the federal state elite. These hand-picked governing elites prioritize the integration of the energy and foreign policy of Russia in the former Soviet region.

Maness and Valeriano (2015, 113) claim that countries of the former Soviet Union, whose governments have closer diplomatic ties to Russia than to the West, will have lower natural gas prices relative to those post-Soviet countries that do not have close ties to Russia. Countries on friendly terms with Russia (Armenia and Belarus) have managed to postpone price increases, but in the end have not been able to withstand Russian demands for higher prices. Countries too poor to pay higher prices (or their accumulated energy debts – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) have been forced to sell what little energy independence they had by paying with domestic energy infrastructures, production and transportation. Countries on not-so-friendly terms with Russia (Georgia and Ukraine) have not been able to postpone price rises, and in addition have seen separatist parts of their territories (Abkhazia, and South Ossetia) being offered lower Russian gas prices (Nygren 2008a, 13–14). Central Asian gas exporters, largely because of their geographic isolation, do not have many alternative routes and infrastructure for their gas exports. In the end, they must face geographical reality and accept long-term solutions beneficial to Russia, which is, in effect, a monopsony buyer.

Russia's vast energy resources are a mainstay of its foreign policy and an essential source of its current political projection in its near abroad. These resources act as a source of economic attraction for Russia's neighbors, and are significant factor in bilateral relations with these countries. They can be traded by the Kremlin for both economic and political benefits. Hard power, the kind Moscow deployed against Georgia in August 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014, only reinforces Russian dominance in the energy sphere, raising the stakes for countries in the region that would seek to escape its grip.

EU–Russia energy relationship

Russia's reputation in Europe as a reliable energy supplier had been built over decades of cooperation with the USSR and pre-Putin Russia. In the broader picture of, first, the Western European and, later, the European Union natural gas suppliers, there have been three large exporters: Russia, Norway and Algeria. Russia has been the main supplier, filling the needs across the EU in the northern, central and southern gas markets.

For Russia, the EU has been its primary export market, and energy trade with the EU is crucial to the Russian economy. The EU, on the other hand, has no bigger natural gas supplier in its import portfolio, a fact that adds to the latter's special weight in the bilateral relationship. Moreover, market prices for natural gas are much higher in Europe than in other markets. Boussena and Locatelli (2013, 180–189) argue that this is caused partly by

the growing demand for energy that must be covered by external suppliers – and here Russia is by far the most important.

The EU–Russia Energy Dialogue was launched in Paris at the EU–Russia Summit on October 30, 2000. The parties had agreed to initiate a dialogue that would “enable progress to be made in the definition of an EU–Russia energy partnership and arrangements for it” (EU – Russia Energy Dialogue 2011, 6). World energy prices were on the rise, and the EU needed to secure a steady inflow from its main supplier, which was pleased to oblige its biggest export market. The legal basis for EU–Russia energy relations was considered the EU–Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which came into force on December 1, 1997 for an initial duration of ten years.

However, the reputation in the EU of Russia as a reliable supplier turned out to be questionable in the aftermath of the “energy wars” between Russia and several former Soviet republics, especially Ukraine. These conflicts led many European policy makers to view Russia as a potential threat to European energy security. Busygina and Mikhail (2013, 91) note that Russia, on the other hand, saw EU decisions and policies as a direct challenge to its dominant position in the European energy market and as an attempt to undermine its strategic energy and geopolitical interests.

In developing the argument on the integration of energy and foreign policy in Europe by the Russian governing elites, I pursue a two-level analysis: the supranational Russia–EU level and the national Russia–EU member-state level, where the latter interact with the Russian government and energy companies. In recent years the integration processes in the EU significantly stimulated efforts to develop and implement a common energy policy, both inside the EU and towards third countries and international organizations. The original European initiative was a deep engagement with Russia, in order to minimize the potential political chaos and economic disarray emerging from the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. The Caspian and Central Asian regions were also central to any discussion of diversifying Europe’s energy supplies and minimizing its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons.

The geopolitics of energy were an important element in relations between the West and Russia during the 1990s. The oil and gas relationship became truly central during Vladimir Putin’s first presidency (2000–2008). As a result, European energy security became intimately linked with both Russian foreign policy objectives and the interests of a small number of state-owned corporations such as Gazprom, Rosneft and Transneft. As already noted, the Russian understanding of the overlap between its energy and foreign policies was reflected in the 2003 Energy Strategy, which noted that Russia’s significant energy resources and powerful fuel-energy complex was “an instrument for conducting domestic and foreign policy” and that the role of the country on global energy markets to a great degree determines its geopolitical influence (Energy Strategy of Russia till 2020, 2002). After 2004 Russia benefited from a steady increase in the global oil price that transformed its

international position and fueled a level of economic growth that was unimaginable in the late 1990s. Russia's energy tool could conceivably become more powerful with the completion of Gazprom's new offshore bypass pipeline, Nord Stream 2 (under the Baltic Sea directly to Germany with a capability of transporting enough gas to supply to 26 million households) (Nord Stream 2, 2020). Another pipeline, Turk Stream, the first of two parallel pipelines running through the Black Sea with a 31.5 billion cubic meters total supply capacity per year, is intended for Turkish consumers, while the second one is to deliver gas to southern and southeastern Europe (Gazprom TurkStream 2020).

By bypassing current transit countries Ukraine, Belarus and Poland these pipelines will allow Gazprom to cut supplies to those countries entirely without repeating the experience of the crises already discussed above. The natural gas cutoffs of supplies for Europe that resulted from a dispute over gas prices between Russia and Ukraine raised great concerns in the EU about energy security and demonstrated Europe's vulnerability.

However, while energy is a key aspect of the foreign policy of Russia, especially in its relations with the EU, it is not yet a predominant feature. According to Amelia Hadfield, many imbalances between major powers will continue without energy being factored in (Hadfield 2008, 336; also, Kanet 2018b). Dmitri Trenin claims that, after the end of the Cold War, the Euro-Atlantic countries failed to create a regional security system that would include Russia. This failure lies at the heart of Europe's current security problem, in which Russia is challenging the world order that emerged at the end of the Cold War under American leadership. Trenin also maintains that Russia strove to become part of a Greater Europe, while the EU was willing to share everything with Russia except its institutions. Now this foundation has been totally dismantled (Trenin 2018). The U.S. diplomat and architect of America's successful containment of the Soviet Union, George Kennan, articulated this perspective in a 1998 interview, shortly after the U.S. Senate approved the first round of NATO expansion. "I think it is the beginning of a new cold war," Kennan said "I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else" (Friedman 1998). Most realists in the United States also opposed the expansion. They feared that enlargement would only give Moscow an incentive to cause trouble in eastern Europe (Mearsheimer 2014, 77–89; Cohen 2019, 122–125; Kanet 2019).

The EU is still Russia's principal trading partner, but political relations have deteriorated. The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) and the Energy Charter Protocol on Energy Efficiency and Related Environmental Aspects were never ratified by Russia. Russia used the possibility of the ECT provisional application and repeatedly returned to consideration of this issue at the level of the State Duma (in 1997, 2001 and 2006), accompanied by broader discussions in academia and business, but with no results. The

analysis of previous studies and documents on Russia's participation in the ECT suggests that the following main arguments, among others, prevail for the non-ratification of the Treaty: (1) the ECT requires third-party access to the Gazprom pipelines for cheap gas from Central Asia; (2) the ECT seeks to disrupt the system of long-term contracts for the supply of Russian gas to the European countries; and (3) the ECT opens up a long-term and free access to Russian natural resources; (Pominova 2014; International Energy Charter 2014).

The June 2008 EU–Russia Summit saw the launch of negotiations for a new EU–Russia Agreement to replace the PCA, which was renewed annually since 2007 and remains the legal basis for EU–Russia relations (EU – Russia Energy Dialogue 2011; Delegation of the EU to Russia 2016). Not unexpectedly, several times Poland blocked the beginning of negotiations between Brussels and Moscow on the development of a new basic partnership agreement. Among the preconditions put forward by the Poles was the ratification of the ECT by Russia.

This statement culminated on March 23, 2009, when the Russian delegation, led by former Minister of Energy Sergei Shmatko, walked out of Brussels negotiations on the future of the Ukrainian pipeline system, and Vladimir Putin threatened the EU with a revision of overall EU – Russia relations (Busygina and Fillopov 2013, 91–92).

Despite the annual EU – Russia summits, the EU – Russia Energy Dialogue also has not solved the outstanding energy security issues. As a result, the Dialogue has effectively promoted only dialogue, rather than viable progress on energy security. During the same period, Europe's dependence upon imported Russian gas has only increased. The year 2014 marked the end of the post-Cold War order in Europe. The immediate cause was the Ukraine crisis. In response to this crisis, the United States and the EU have imposed restrictive measures against Russia. However, Europe's grand strategy to become less import dependent on Russian gas and oil, which has been discussed since the 1990s, looks more and more like a failure.

Gazprom and Rosneft are generally assumed in Europe to be highly influential agents of the Kremlin's energy policy. In particular, these companies, collaborating with most of the main EU energy companies, not only cemented their presence at the national level, but also built such a complex and inextricable web that would “short-circuit” every EU collective effort to stand against Russian interests. This business is supported by bilateral Russian diplomacy on the governmental level.

Russia developed distinctive bilateral energy dialogues and relations of its own with most countries of Western and Central Europe, especially with Germany, Italy and France. It is highlighted in the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia that mutually beneficial bilateral ties with Germany, France, Italy, Spain and other European countries “have substantial potential in terms of promoting Russia's national interests in European and world affairs” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016).

Energy represents a major factor in the German-Russian relationship. Russia and Germany enjoy deep interaction and cooperation with each other in this area – the Russian Federation remains Germany's leading energy supplier, while Germany is one of the main export markets, trading partners and investors for Russia. Energy cooperation between Russia and Germany covers a broad spectrum of technical and scientific areas, aiming at becoming something much more substantial and stable than just a supplier-consumer relationship.

Former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (1998–2005) cultivated close ties with President Putin⁸ in an attempt to strengthen the partnership between Berlin and Moscow. As Chancellor, Schröder was a strong advocate of the Nord Stream pipeline project, which aimed to supply Russian gas directly to Germany, thereby bypassing transit countries. The agreement to build the pipeline was signed two weeks before the German parliamentary elections in 2005. Soon after stepping down as chancellor, Schröder accepted Gazprom's nomination for the post of the head of the shareholders' committee of Nord Stream AG (51% owned by Gazprom) (Nord Stream, n.d.).

Since Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia's energy diplomacy also developed a strong influence in France and Italy. The French company Total is the largest purchaser of Russian oil and oil products, more than 20% of the total export from Russia. Total is also involved in the development of oil and gas deposits in Russia with Gazprom. Gas de France and Engie are in a long-term strategic partnership with Gazprom. In 2016, Gazprom exported to France 11.5 billion cubic meters of gas which was 18.2% higher than in 2015 (Zhiznin 2007, 310).

President Putin developed quite a good personal relationship with almost all prime ministers of Italy since 2000. Russia is one of the main oil and gas suppliers of Italy, and issues of energy cooperation are constantly included on the agenda of negotiations between Russian and Italian authorities at all levels. Italian Eni and Gazprom have an agreement that envisages long-term cooperation in E&P, transportation of oil, gas and gas condensate. Agip, the subsidiary of Eni is the strategic partner of Lukoil in some projects, and Lukoil holds the strongest positions in the Italian oil market. Italy annually receives 20–25 million tons of Russian oil, which is transported mainly by tankers (Lukoil, n.d.).

In 2012 Rosneft and Eni signed a Strategic Cooperation Agreement which provides for joint development of areas in the Black and Barents Seas in Russia, and for Rosneft to participate in Eni's international projects, including Egypt's largest hydrocarbon field with Eni and BP. In May 2017, Rosneft and Eni reinforced this document and entered into a Cooperation extension agreement in the areas of refining, marketing and trading during the visit of an Italian delegation to Russia. The Agreement provides for cooperation between Rosneft and Eni in Russia and abroad across virtually all areas of development and production. In addition, the parties will consider expanding their international cooperation further, including the Zohr

project offshore of Egypt, as well as the potential for joint supplies of refined products to the country. Rosneft and Eni agreed to assess the potential for cooperation in refining at German refineries where both companies are shareholders, including the optimization of feedstock supplies. The parties also intend to consider using Eni technologies to refine heavy oil residues at Rosneft refineries (Rosneft 2017).

Russia's governing elites integrate their energy and foreign policy in a number of other European countries, including Greece, Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Serbia and others to achieve economic and political influence and advance their energy and foreign policy interests. Many European parties of both right and left admire President Putin and lean toward Russia. Far-right groups are seduced by the idea of Moscow as a counterweight to the EU and U.S. hegemony, and by its law-and-order policies. Moscow's stance on the promotion of traditional moral values appeal to religious conservatives. Russia's most surprising allies, however, are probably Europe's Greens. They are opposed to shale-gas fracking and nuclear power – as is Moscow, because according to some European energy experts, both promise to lessen Europe's dependence on Russian fossil fuels. Former NATO Secretary General Rasmussen has accused Russia of “sophisticated” manipulation of information to hobble fracking in Europe, though without producing concrete evidence (The Economist 2015, 19–22).

Energy and energy security emerged as top priorities in EU-Russia relations after gas disputes between Russia and Ukraine during 2005–2006 and 2008–2009. Russia's foreign energy policy in the European Union is influenced by the factors of global politics, economy, the dynamics of the energy market, as well as by the developments at regional and bilateral levels. Fyodor Lukyanov argues that, by taking action in Ukraine and Syria, Russia has made clear its intention to restore its status as a major international player (Lukyanov 2016). The Kremlin's intention is also to harmonize the integration processes within the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union which according to President Putin is highly promising (The Washington Post 2015). Russia's reemergence with growing interests in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, is causing shivers in Brussels and parts of Europe. So, even though Europe is diversifying its energy sources and the European Commission is insisting that Gazprom play by the EU's competition rules, sanctions or not, Europe is too lucrative for Russia to ignore. And sanctions or not, Russia's underdeveloped gas fields are also too lucrative for Europe's energy companies to ignore, and recent years have seen Russia's gas and oil supply strategy boosted in Europe.

OPEC, oil prices, and Russia's power play in the middle east

In the first half of the 1990s, Russia turned to the West and OPEC was somewhat “forgotten.” Then in the period of 1997–1998, the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Energy, a number of other ministries, and the heads of

the largest oil companies studied and analyzed an issue of potential dialogue with OPEC. The decision was made to participate in the Ministerial OPEC Conferences as an observer. In 1998–2000, many influential representatives of the political and business elites in Russia and also of OPEC member states raised the question on the full-scale entry of Russia in OPEC. However, in 2004, in one of his interviews, President Putin stated that “Russia will further implement the same balanced policy and cooperate with the OPEC. But we are not a member of this organization, and I think we will not become one: we consider that Russia should be independent in formation of its own energy policy” (Zhiznin 2007, 169–171).

The oil supply surge led by the U.S., especially by the end of 2014, slow growth of the world economy following the financial crisis of 2008–2009, and the supply-demand factors which finally caught up with the oil market in June 2014, finally made the market roll over. In September 2014 the Third High-Level meeting of the OPEC-Russia Energy Dialogue took place in Vienna, two months before the 166th OPEC meeting in November 2014, when the price of a barrel of WTI had fallen from \$108 per barrel to \$74 per barrel, a 31.5% plunge. The members of OPEC stated that they would allow market forces to determine oil prices, and the decision of this meeting became known as a “battle for market share.” Accordingly, in the interest of restoring market equilibrium, the Conference decided to maintain the production level of 30.0 million barrels per day, as had been agreed in December 2011 (OPEC 2014). On that announcement, oil prices shed another 8% in one day (Hanke 2016). While Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates had each stashed away hundreds of billions of dollars in savings to buffer the effects of lower prices, Iran, Algeria and Venezuela, for example, were struggling to finance their government budgets at the collapsed price levels. During the week of OPEC’s meeting, the CEO of Rosneft met with the former Saudi oil minister to discuss cutting production, but no agreement was reached (Rosneft 2014). Nevertheless, Russia and OPEC continued consultations and annual High-Level meetings of the OPEC-Russia Energy Dialogue led by the Russian energy minister and OPEC’s Secretary General in order to build a consensus on a cut in oil production. Besides the efforts of Russia’s ministries of Energy and Foreign Affairs, President Putin played a key role in reaching an agreement with the OPEC countries to reduce oil production, achieving a settlement of the differences between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

On December 1, 2016, during the first OPEC and non-OPEC Ministerial meeting at OPEC headquarters in Vienna, 13 OPEC Member Countries and 11 non-OPEC countries, including Russia, committed to a sizable adjustment in crude oil production, known as the “Declaration of Cooperation,” to help correct a powerful market imbalance which had started in the summer of 2014 and had come to represent the longest down cycle in the industry’s history. These ongoing and interrelated efforts led to a decision that 11 non-OPEC producers agreed with OPEC Member Countries to a

combined output reduction of around 600,000 barrels per day. This amount, added to the 1.2 million barrels per day output reduction already decided upon earlier by OPEC, meant that, from the beginning of 2017, 24 of the world's oil producers would implement joint reductions totaling nearly 1.8 million barrels per day, which would ease oversupply in the market (OPEC Bulletin 2017, 6–9).

As for Iran, the agreement allows it, not to cut, but on the contrary to increase oil production by 90,000 barrels per day. Meanwhile, Iran's official representatives never made any public statements that the results of the OPEC summit are a victory for Tehran, since they were agreed to among President Putin, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman and Iran's President Hassan Rouhani.

As a result, in November 2017 the price of Brent (sweet light crude oil) at the ICE Exchange in London was \$59.03 (S&P Global Platts 2016). The successful reconciliation of the positions of Riyadh and Tehran demonstrates the growth of Russia's influence in the Middle East after the beginning of the Russian military operation in Syria. The Russian Minister of Energy has already announced that Russia is ready to discuss the extension of agreements with OPEC after 2017. This agreement with OPEC is another model of how Russian governing elites, including President Putin, members of his cabinet, and heads of Russian energy companies view oil as an indispensable resource in international politics and prioritize the integration of energy and foreign policy to increase state revenues.

The new phase in the bilateral relations of the Kremlin with Saudi Arabia began with the visit of Saudi Arabia's King Salman and his huge delegation to Moscow on October 5, 2017. King Salman's visit was met with great enthusiasm, as his arrival marked the first official visit of any Saudi monarch to Moscow. The deals agreed to between Moscow and Riyadh during King Salman's trip encompassed a wide range of economic sectors. Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to sell Moscow's prized S-400 air-defense system⁹ to Saudi Arabia was heralded as a new dawn in a bilateral relationship that has been severely strained ever since Moscow decided to intervene militarily on behalf of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in September 2015. During King Salman's visit Rosneft, Lukoil and Tatneft expressed their readiness to work with Saudi Arabia's national oil company Aramco. Rosneft and Aramco will look into joint investment assets in Saudi Arabia. The two countries are discussing unprecedented investments in each other's oil industries. A Russian sovereign wealth fund is considering buying shares in the Aramco listing, Aramco is mulling a stake in a vast LNG project in the Russian Arctic (The Economist 2018, 59).

Samuel Ramani argues that as many Western geopolitical analysts who covered King Salman's Russia trip focused principally on the transactional dimensions of the Moscow-Riyadh partnership, such as arms sales and cooperation on oil prices. The implications of improved relations for Moscow's broader Middle East strategy were alarmingly overlooked. This

neglect is short-sighted, as Moscow's burgeoning partnership with Saudi Arabia symbolizes a sweeping transformation of Russia's diplomatic conduct and strategic objectives in a critically important region of the world (Ramani 2017).

Putin's policies and Russian influence in oil and gas in the Middle East and North Africa has grown exponentially. Gazprom, Rosneft, Lukoil and Novatek are actively involved with their businesses in these regions. The setup of a permanent naval base in Syria and the military capacity to support its allies, including Syrian President Assad, military training exercises in Egypt, and growing military technology cooperation with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and others have already made Russia the new power player in the region. Cyril Widdershoven argues that in the bigger picture, the growing naval presence of Russia in the eastern Mediterranean is and will be a direct threat to offshore oil and gas operations in the region. With a naval base in Syria and full-scale battle groups in the eastern Mediterranean, Moscow will be able to influence or even stifle the incipient energy cooperation between littoral states such as Egypt, Cyprus, Israel and possibly Turkey (Widdershoven 2016).

Full diplomatic, economic and military cooperation between Russia and Turkey is again on the table. Welcoming Turkey with open arms, Putin is trying to bring the country into Russia's camp. The sale of the S-400 to U.S. allies – Turkey and Saudi Arabia – was criticized in Washington but did not affect the outcome of the deals. Russia's State Atomic Energy Corporation (Rosatom) is set to build a \$20 billion nuclear power plant in southern Turkey, which some estimate to become operational by 2023.

Iran, another regional player, traditionally has special relations with Russia. The significant interest demonstrated by Iran in energy cooperation with Russia is explained not only by economic, but also political reasons. Russia is considered in Tehran to be a power capable of counterbalancing the United States and breaking the foreign policy and economic isolation of Iran. Great importance is given to electric power development, nuclear power plant construction, cooperation is the settlement of Caspian problems, and the attraction of Russian companies to participate in the development of oil-and-gas deposits of the country, including in the Iranian sector of the Persian Gulf.

Russia and Iran have long worked on oil-for-goods deals worth up to \$20bn, since cash-strapped Iran has been under Western sanctions over its nuclear program. Under these agreements, Moscow has bought Iranian oil in exchange for Russian equipment and technology.

Recently both countries have signed agreements to collaborate on "strategic" energy deals worth up to \$30bn that will involve energy groups such as Rosneft and Gazprom. Six provisional deals were signed with Russian oil companies as part of a visit by President Putin to Tehran in November 2017. According to Rosneft's CEO Igor Sechin, whose international ventures often dovetail with Kremlin foreign policy, cooperation with Iran included

“carrying out swap operations, supplying oil and oil products, training staff and modernizing oil refining” (Financial Times 2017).

While the energy cooperation with other Persian Gulf states is limited and practical business in Iraq is impossible before the situation there becomes peaceful and stable, Russian energy companies are actively involved in North Africa, namely in Algeria, Egypt and Libya. Italy has already signaled that it wants Russia’s help to stabilize Libya and bring an end to the migrant crisis. Libya represents an interesting opportunity for Russia’s foreign policy and geopolitical ambitions. The Kremlin, which is also eager to recover lost oil and infrastructure investments in this country, is taking advantage of the political void left by the U.S. administration and is stretching its arms in the Mediterranean.

As foreign minister and later prime-minister, Yevgeny Primakov laid the intellectual and political foundations for Vladimir Putin’s current policies in the Middle East. Putin has adroitly refined and modified that framework where and when necessary, e.g., to confront the threat of terrorism in Syria and develop Russia’s capabilities all over the region. The Kremlin and its energy agents promote their ability to interact with many state and non-state actors in the Middle East. Russia’s multifaceted diplomatic relations and recent interventionist trend are superseded by longer-term economic, energy and arms deals in the region.

Russia in Asia: energy politics

Russia’s special interest in the development of energy cooperation with countries of Asia and Asia-Pacific region (APR) is based on the following factors. First, the region shows stable growth of demand for energy resources, a rapid development of markets with great potential opportunities for the supply of Russian gas, oil and oil products. Second, the region is one of the largest capital markets, whose capabilities can be used to develop the resource and raw materials potential of East Siberia and the Russian Far East by implementing large international projects. Third, given the current confrontation between Russia and the U.S./NATO and the alienation between Russia and Europe, the Asian dimension has become a priority for Russian foreign policy. However, in 2006, long before the crisis in the relationship with the West, Putin made a commitment to increase energy exports to Asia in 15 years from three to 30%. This means Russia would sell to Asia at least 60 million tons of oil and 65 billion cubic meters of gas per year (The Kremlin 2006). Russia also promotes economic cooperation with Asian countries within international initiatives such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. Issues of energy efficiency, energy security, and investment in the field of renewable energy have been always on the agenda of the BRICS group of countries.

Evaluating Russian interests in Asia, it is reasonable to outline the coincidence of Russian and Chinese points of view for forming a strong energy

base for bilateral strategic, political and economic cooperation. In addition, the rapidly developing energy market of China is of great interest for Russian energy companies, not only in supplying energy resources, but also equipment, technologies and services. Both countries also share a border running around 4,300 kilometers, which is one of the world's longest international border. The legal basis of energy cooperation between the two states has been solid since the 1990s. In July 2000, Russia and China signed another inter-governmental Agreement on cooperation in the field of energy. Perspectives for cooperation in the energy sector are always on the agenda of top-level negotiations between Russia and China.

Partnership between Russia and China in the sphere of natural gas stepped up to a completely new level when, in 2013 after more than a decade of talks, Russia agreed to supply China with natural gas in a deal that could see China surpass Germany as the largest importer of Russian gas. The main partner of Gazprom on the Chinese market is China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), the largest state-owned oil and gas company in China and one of the leading integrated oil and gas production companies in the world. The agreement was reached in Moscow during Chinese President Xi Jinping's first foreign trip as president. Then, at the time of Putin's visit to Shanghai, on May 21, 2014, Gazprom and CNPC signed the Purchase and Sale Agreement to supply Russian gas via the eastern route. The deal is worth about \$400 billion over 30 years and it is the biggest purchase and sale contract in the history of the global gas industry (The Economist 2014, 39). The 30-year agreement implies delivering 38 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually to China from Yakutia and Irkutsk gas production centers via the gas pipeline named "Power of Siberia." Gas supplies to China via "Power of Siberia" commenced in December 2019 (Gazprom 2019).

During the same visit of Xi Jinping, officials signed a raft of other energy deals, including a \$270 billion agreement, one of the biggest in the history of global oil industry, to double Russian oil supplies to China and hand CNPC, a stake in Russian oil fields. The oil deal also included some \$60–70 billion in prepayment from Beijing and a \$2 billion loan for Rosneft from China's state development bank under the new 25-year deal (The Wall Street Journal 2013; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2013). Rosneft's agreement to a partnership with CNPC to develop oil fields onshore and on Russia's Arctic shelf was the first time Moscow has agreed to a substantial stake for China in its strategic oil sector. Rosneft and Gazprom's abovementioned deals with the CNPC is evidence of a growing "energy alliance" between Russia and China.

The greatest point of divergence in the Sino-Russian relationship is on Central Asia. After China poured massive amounts of money into its Silk Road Economic Belt infrastructure project and developed an oil pipeline with Kazakhstan and a gas pipeline with Turkmenistan, which have broken the monopoly of Russian ownership of Central Asian pipelines, some scholars such as Stephen Blank and Stefan Hedlund claimed that the role of

designated winner of the great game over energy resources in Central Asia clearly appears to be moving in the direction of Beijing rather than Moscow (Blank 2010, 25–35; Hedlund 2014, 136–138). However, the recent Chinese compliance with Russian interests, as discussed previously in this chapter, has led to a huge increase in revenue for these poor states of Central Asia, and the continued sale of gas to Gazprom is now in these states' best interest. Ryan Mannes and Brandon Valeriano argue that states in post-Soviet space that allow American energy investment as its primary external funding source will have a higher likelihood of Russian energy coercion than those states that allow Chinese energy investment (Mannes and Valeriano 2015, 141). Moreover, Russian efforts to establish the Eurasian Economic Union have already limited Chinese economic domination of the region.

The Foreign Policy Concept of Russia highlights that Russia will continue developing comprehensive, equal, and trust-based partnership and strategic cooperation with the People's Republic of China, and proactively step up cooperation in all areas. Russia views common principled approaches adopted by the two countries to addressing the key issues on the global agenda as one of the core elements of regional and global stability. Building on this foundation, Russia intends to promote foreign policy cooperation with China in various areas, including countering new challenges and threats, resolving urgent regional and global problems, cooperation in international organizations and multilateral associations (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016).

The development of Sino-Russian bilateral relations might also present an opportunity for Moscow to find its place in what the Kremlin refers as “wider Eurasia” in its foreign policy. The Kremlin plays a vital role in maintaining the Russia-China-India trilateral format during which the nations reconcile on the basis of a mutually-shared vision and responsibility for the future of the Eurasian continent. Russia perceives such meetings as vital steps for pushing forward its agenda of a multipolar world and challenging Western dominance. The Kremlin also facilitated New Delhi's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Moscow pushed forward India's membership, in order to dilute China's potential dominance in the organization.

The year 2017 saw a breakthrough in bilateral relations for Moscow and New Delhi. Both nations experienced impressive 22% growth in trade and boosted cooperation in a number of spheres ranging from agriculture to energy. Earlier, Rosneft closed the purchase of India's second largest private oil refinery, Essar Oil and its subsidiaries, which marked one of the biggest foreign investments in India (Rosneft 2017). New Delhi likewise was the major guest country of the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in 2017, Russia's top national event for international cooperation, and

hosted the pavilion titled “Make in India” along with Indian Prime-Minister Narendra Modi’s participation in a plenary session next to Putin (Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum 2017). The Modi government also did well in welcoming Rosneft’s entry into its energy market. Rosneft’s plans convey a big political message by the Kremlin.

Ties of Russia with Japan have been complicated by a long-lasting territorial dispute over the four Kuril Islands, as well as by Japan’s joining the West in imposing sanctions, even if in the form of milder restrictions that do not prevent its companies from taking an active role in oil exploration and production in Russia. In December 2016, 23 energy-related documents were signed in the presence of President Vladimir Putin and Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe during the first visit to Japan in 11 years by a Russian president.

Rosneft signed agreements with three Japanese companies on hydrocarbon exploration, development and production at a license block offshore Russia’s Far Eastern Sakhalin Island. The parties agreed to work in Sakhalin’s southwestern offshore area between the island, just north of Japan, and mainland Russia. These documents also include Gazprom Neft’s agreement with Yokogawa Electric, expanding LNG partnership of Japanese companies with Gazprom and Novatek, opening a credit line for Yamal LNG plant and setting up a mutual fund, among other agreements. Japan is also one of the top buyers of Russia’s ESPO and Sokol crude (S&P Global Platts 2016).

The growing interest of Japan and other Asian countries, including South Korea, to develop “energy relations” with Russia is connected with the policy of reducing dependency on the countries of the Persian Gulf. The importance of energy export diversification towards Asia is being emphasized by Russia, as well. According to President Putin, “Russia’s reorientation toward the Pacific Ocean and the dynamic development in all our eastern territories will not only open up new economic opportunities and new horizons, but also provide additional instruments for an active foreign policy” (The Kremlin 2013).

This development occurred in the context of sundry factors (such as progress in the EU energy markets regulatory reforms that were imposed against Russian sectoral sanctions targeting vital forms of cooperation with the Western partners and the dramatic fall in the global oil prices) revealing their negative impact on Russia’s energy sector and economy at large. To speed up the realization of international projects in Northeastern Asia and to contribute to the development of the Russian Far East, during the past several years the Russian government has made large-scale financial investments in the extraction of natural resources and transportation in the Russian Far East and has announced immediate plans to construct several new oil and gas-processing plants in the Far Eastern part of the country. While certain results in geographical reorientation of Russian energy flows can already be observed, Russia’s prospects for authentic diversification depend on its ability to perform in increasingly competitive and permanently evolving energy markets.

Conclusion

Russia's view of the modern world, as well as its goals and objectives, are reflected in the Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2016. It evaluates the global situation and analyzes the processes in the world and different regions vital for the Russian national interests. On the basis of this concept, the foreign strategy of the country gives full recognition to the fundamentally new geopolitical situation in the world.

Henry Kissinger has argued that throughout history Russia has been a special case and none of the traditional principles of European diplomacy seemed to apply to it. Bordering on three different cultural spheres – Europe, Asia and the Muslim world – Russia contained populations of each and, hence, was never a national state in the European sense. Constantly changing shape, as its rulers annexed contiguous territories, Russia was an empire out of scale in comparison with any of the European countries. Moreover, with every new conquest, the character of the state changed as it incorporated another new, restive, non-Russian ethnic group. According to Kissinger, this was one of the reasons Russia felt obliged to maintain huge armies, whose size was unrelated to any plausible threat to its external security (Kissinger 1994, 24).

Post-communist Russia found itself within borders that reflect no historical precedent. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union threw Russia into a decade of political and economic turmoil. The point of departure of this chapter is that, as Russia emerged from the “time of troubles,” Russian elites were permeated by an increasingly powerful drive to restore lost greatness. Pavel Baev claims that these elites are possessed by an idea of the indispensable great power of Russia that is “objectively destined to come out as an independent player, a separate center of force not to be dissolved in any international amalgamations” (Baev 2008, 119).

President Putin's promise to restore the country's dignity was well received by the general population of Russia. Putin's political and economic reforms stabilized the Russian economy and Russian GDP growth outpaced that of many of the economic powers of the West until the collapse of the global economy in 2008. Stefan Hedlund argues that the spike in the price of oil that marked Putin's first term in office and the bonanza of hydrocarbon revenue added a new dimension to the ongoing games for power and profit (Hedlund 2014, 7). All of these events led to more confidence in the Russian foreign policy regime and one of its new contexts was found in Russia's energy. Russian elites view oil and natural gas as indispensable resources in international politics, and as observed in this research, these governing elites prioritize the integration of energy and foreign policy.

The aspects of power inherent in Russian energy are threefold. First, the vast majority of Russian gas and oil activity is conducted by the state-owned Gazprom and Rosneft. Second, the world's largest gas transportation system belongs to Gazprom and oil pipelines within Russia are owned

outright by another Russian state-owned company, Transneft. Ownership of the other dozen or so pipelines connecting Russia to the Caspian, the Baltic region, and Europe itself are divided amongst the states (or state enterprises) across which the pipelines run. Third, long-term contracts lock in Russian exports to a guaranteed set of foreign importers. With all three components in place, the economic side of Russian energy presents serious monopolistic challenges from the Western perspective. State companies are generally assumed to be highly influential agents of the Kremlin's energy and foreign policy. For Russia, these companies' value extends beyond economic performance and serves the state's foreign policy and political goals.

In its multi-vectoral foreign policy, where Russia seeks to affirm its interests in a wider area, primacy is given to the post-Soviet space. Russia's foreign policy in the CIS and the Eurasian Economic Union regions is without any exception significantly influenced by energy.

Gazprom is trying to gain control over the gas transportation infrastructure that used to be part of the Soviet gas supply system. Simultaneously, it is making gas consumers in the former Soviet Republics pay European, rather than subsidized gas prices, while retaining discounts for loyal countries. The strategy of Russian energy companies is to control where possible the energy infrastructure in the post-Soviet space regardless whether these countries are importers, producers and exporters of energy resources, or transit countries. Energy power gives Russia the leverage to dominate the region when its rivals challenge Russian political and economic goals. Some scholars argue that Russia uses coercive diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy goals in this region (Maness and Valeriano 2015; Hadfield 2008). Currently, Russia controls the production and distribution of energy across almost the entirety of former Soviet space, and many regional countries comply with Russia's energy and foreign policy interests. Russia also uses the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty, the Eurasian Economic Union and other regional organizations to further its interests and foreign policy goals in the post-Soviet space.

The "gas wars" and further crises in Ukraine brought Russian power politics back into the forefront of debate among policymakers and scholars. Eastern Ukraine remains the most dangerous conflict zone in Europe that affects European security. The principal sources of this trouble have been the resumption of great power rivalry around the world, with Russia challenging the U.S.-built and led post-Cold War order and NATO expansion. In 2007, long before the crisis in Ukraine, President Putin, in his well-known speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, stated that NATO expansion does not have any relationship to the modernization of the Alliance itself or to ensuring security in Europe. "On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust. And we have the right to ask: against whom this expansion is intended?" Putin also made clear that the unipolar world that has been proposed after the Cold War is not only acceptable for Russia but also impossible in today's world (The Kremlin, 2007).

The U.S. sanctions, including those in the energy sector and against Russian energy companies imposed because of the crisis in Ukraine and alleged meddling in the 2016 elections, have contributed to the deterioration in the bilateral ties between Moscow and Washington. The U.S. sanctions also limit the type of business energy companies can do with Russia. Many European leaders and top executives of energy companies worry that the U.S. sanctions could impact the oil and gas firms and pipeline projects of the continent. Nevertheless, the EU still remains a major oil and gas trading partner of Russia.

The EU is interested in a reliable supply of gas and oil with advantageous prices and settled transit regimes. Russia's interest in the EU is to remain the major player in the important European gas and oil market. Susanne Nies claims that Russia uses the EU energy dependency as a tool for power politics, where it pursues specific energy and political interests. The use of dependency is selective and has never concerned the EU as a whole (Nies 2011, 282). Russian interest is also to have reliable transit routes or direct infrastructure (ideally controlled by Russian energy companies) and remain the only export route to Europe for other exporters, including Central Asian republics.

The institutional aspect of the EU-Russia energy relationship includes three main elements. First, the EU-Russia PCA of 1994 with its energy dimension still to be replaced by a new document. Second, the ECT, never ratified by Russia and even proposed by Moscow to be replaced. Third, the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue, which has remained only a dialogue without resolving any energy security issues expected by the EU. This picture illustrates a high degree of distrust and deterioration of political relations between Brussels and Moscow. Nevertheless, Russia and big European countries, including Germany, France and Italy organize their energy relations bilaterally. The small EU members rely more on the Union's institutions. The EU's difficulty in finding a "single voice" to deal with Russia on energy issues is testimony to Moscow's diplomatic achievement.

Russian governing elites have shown considerable skill at integrating foreign policy and energy policy to leverage Russia's advantage both as a holder of hydrocarbon resources and as a very important and capable producer. John Lough argues that President Putin's understanding of both areas of policy and their overlap has made him a difficult negotiating partner for European leaders. No Western leader has a level of knowledge of the international energy business comparable to Putin's, based on his strong interest in Gazprom and Rosneft (Lough 2011; Romanova and Pavlova 2012, 240).

Russia's re-emergence as a major international player by taking military action in Syria expanded Russia's regional influence in the Middle East and North Africa. Russia has relationships with many countries in the Middle East and apparently is the only state that can deal with everyone, including Israel, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. The agreement between Saudi Arabia and Russia to cut back on oil production has boosted oil prices and is now the foundation for a broader relationship. The dialogue and partnership with OPEC also strengthened Russia's position in the Middle East.

The world oil and gas sector suffered a tumultuous start in 2020 in the wake of the Covid-19 virus. OPEC agreed to the biggest ever oil output cuts with the backing of Russia, the U.S. and the wider G20 group of nations in an effort to bolster crude prices that the coronavirus outbreak helped push to 18-year lows. However, Russia's biggest oil companies are well-positioned to withstand low prices for the next couple of years, given certain advantages they have over global rivals, and may still be able to turn a profit, even if prices fall to \$15 a barrel (Financial Times 2020).

Energy is also a central component of Russia's foreign policy in Asia. Gazprom and Rosneft achieved a breakthrough with China and concluded the biggest agreements with CNPC in the history of the global gas and oil industry – a 30-year natural gas sales and purchase deal worth of \$400 billion and \$270 billion deal to double oil supplies to China. Russia needs eastern outlets for its energy amid its geopolitical rivalry with the West, while China seeks natural gas supplies over land that limits Western influence over imported LNG. Timothy Lehmann argues that Sino-Russian energy deals serve many geopolitical objectives and illustrate the limits of the oil majors and their home governments with respect to the great powers still unbowed before the United States. Russia's ability to use its "blue gold" to cement the Sino-Russian partnership exemplifies the truism in Russia's 2003 Energy Strategy. It stated: "the role of the country in the global energy markets largely determines its geopolitical influence"¹⁰ (Lehmann 2017, 13).

Russia is expanding energy cooperation with India, Japan, South Korea and with other Asian consumers directly, as well as via Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Russia-ASEAN summits. Asia is also one of the largest capital markets and the financial capabilities of the regional countries can be used for developing the resources of East Siberia and the Far East of Russia in implementing large international energy projects.

Russian energy companies have been pushing deeply into politically sensitive countries like Cuba, Egypt and Vietnam, as well as tumultuous places where American interests are at stake. Russia's activities in Venezuela are just one example of how Moscow is leveraging its economic power to expand its influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Western sanctions imposed after the crisis in Ukraine have isolated Russia from global markets to some extent, including the restrictions to borrow from Western banks that led to the depreciation of the ruble and the fall in real incomes and wages. Along with hazards, this crisis also presents certain opportunities for Russian political leaders to demonstrate their ability to diversify the country's economy. Derek Beach argues that sanctions can be also counterproductive. While they might be intended to weaken support for a regime, they often result in gaining popularity for the leader in the eyes of the people, as he stands up against foreign pressure (Beach 2012, 195–196). Western sanctions consolidated Russian society and did not derail Russia from its chosen foreign policy path.

Implementing structural reforms, building modern political and economic institutions, and fighting corruption is another set of crucial actions that should be able to assist Russia to catch up to wealthier countries. The weak ruble and low commodity prices are good incentives to diversify as well. The weak currency helps exports overall, especially those that use local labor and materials. But these are just positive external factors. For diversification to work, the Russian government would need to direct investments towards export-oriented companies and industries since already adopted import-substitution policy can be effective in the short term.

Among other factors the spectacular growth of state income generated by oil has helped Putin to keep a high level of popularity, enabling him and governing elites to secure the support of key interest groups and the majority of population. According to Thane Gustafson, “the government taxes the lion’s share of the profits of producers and transfers them to the rest of the economy through state-mandated investment programs and state-funded welfare, pensions, and subsidies” (Gustafson 2012, 84). However, the big question is how fast the country’s leadership would be able to diversify the economy through structural reforms, upgrade its political and economic institutions, and modernize its energy sector via innovations and technology.

Since Vladimir Putin returned to the presidency in 2012, Moscow has engaged in a broad campaign to expand its international reach. Russia’s presence is increasingly visible throughout the Europe, Middle East, Asia and in even in some parts of Latin America and Africa. Russia’s energy diplomacy is frequently effective because of its persistence and the fact that governing elites, including the president, the prime-minister, the foreign and energy ministers, and heads of energy companies are personally involved. The investment of time and effort at the highest level is rarely replicated by other foreign leaders. Russia did not return to an expensive foreign policy as during the Soviet years. On the contrary, Moscow has relied on relatively inexpensive diplomatic, energy and financial tools to wield influence, and its foreign policy is guided by the objective to maximize its economic growth.

Edward Morse and Amy Myers Jaffe argue that, unlike the members of OPEC, Russia is not primarily an oil-resource-dependent country. It is a former and potential future superpower, with a nuclear arsenal and an ability to project force internationally in a way second only to the United States. With its growing industrial and agricultural base, it will also seek to balance its oil and natural gas objectives against those of other sectors of the economy – sectors that happen to benefit when oil prices are lower (Morse and Jaffe 2005, 82). Russia’s energy policy is part of a larger calculus that involves other dimensions of Russian foreign policy and national interests. Moscow has already opened up new exports routes beyond former Soviet space and Europe and integrated its oil and gas export and energy infrastructure ownership components into a consistent framework of its foreign policy. Consequently, Russia defines its international interests in its own ways.

Notes

- 1 See more on the Russian foreign policy concepts in Official Internet Resources of the President of Russia (2008); The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2013).
- 2 Previously, in 2006, Gazprom suggested a price of \$180 per thousand cubic meters instead of planned \$160. See more on so-called “gas wars” between Russia and Ukraine in Nygren (2012, 224–226; Nygren (2008a, 59–62).
- 3 One of the best descriptions of the activities of the Aliyev dynasty and accumulated wealth, property and business interests around the world is featured at the CNBC film *Filthy Rich: The Aliyev Family of Azerbaijan*.
- 4 TurkStream is a current international project of a gas pipeline from the Krasnodar region of Russia along the bottom of the Black Sea to the western part of Turkey. Gazprom also intends to transport fuel via this pipeline to the countries of south-eastern Europe.
- 5 Nabucco was a proposed natural gas pipeline from the Turkish-Bulgarian border to Austria. The potential suppliers of the Nabucco project were considered to be Iraq, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Egypt. The aim of the Nabucco pipeline was to diversify the natural gas suppliers and delivery routes for Europe, thus reducing European dependence on Russian energy. The project was backed by several European Union members and the U.S. however, it has effectively been canceled.
- 6 Timur Kulibaev is Chairman of the Kazakhstan Association of Oil and Gas Sector Organizations (KazEnergy) and member of the Board of Directors of Gazprom (Gazprom, n.d.).
- 7 Uzbek gas sold to Russia went from \$44 to \$60 per thousand cubic meters and was resold by Russia upwards from \$120 per thousand cubic meters. See more in Nygren (2008a).
- 8 See more on the friendship of Putin and Schröder in Rossiya 1 TV Channel. Documentary *Putin* by Andrei Kondrashov [In Russian.], released March 21, 2018. Schröder is closely connected both with the political elites of Europe and with the major Western oil and gas companies and is capable to mediate between Moscow and European countries if necessary.
- 9 The S-400 is Russia’s most advanced long-range mobile air defense missile system. It can carry three types of warheads designed to destroy targets including aircraft, as well as ballistic and cruise missiles. The system is able to track and engage up to 300 targets to an altitude of 27 kilometers at the same time (Army Technology).
- 10 The Russian Government later tried to moderate this statement and insisted on purely commercial motives for global expansion. The new “Energy Strategy of Russia up to 2030,” adopted in 2009, diplomatically says, “The goal of Russian energy policy is to ensure ... strengthening of its global economic positions” (IAE 2017).

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Part II

**The Russian response to
U.S. policies**



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7 NATO, U.S. grand strategy and the Russian response¹

Rajan Menon and William Ruger

NATO's purpose, from its founding under the 1949 Washington Treaty until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, can be summarized by recalling the quip, widely attributed to its first Secretary General, Lord Lionel Hastings Ismay, that NATO's purpose was to "keep the Americans in, the Russians out, and the Germans down." By that standard, NATO has proved to be among the most successful alliances in history. It harnessed American power and kept it militarily engaged on the continent in order to defend western Europe for over four decades. In the post-Cold War era, the alliance has enlarged dramatically and brought former members of the Warsaw Pact. Yet, with the implosion of the Soviet Union it has faced an identity crisis and questions have been raised about its continued relevance.

This chapter assesses NATO's enlargement and its consequences for U.S. post-Cold War grand strategy. It unfolds in eight segments. First, as a prelude to a discussion of enlargement, we consider the basic case for NATO's continuing relevance given the end of the Cold War. Second, we turn to NATO's post-Cold War expansion and the debate surrounding it. Third, we consider the consequences of the alliance's incorporation of states on Russia's border. Fourth, we consider Russia reactions to NATO enlargement and its effects on US-Russian relations. The fifth segment considers a counterfactual: could post-Soviet Europe's stability have been ensured without NATO expansion and, if so, how? Sixth, we discuss the hazard of continued NATO enlargement, especially in regard to Ukraine and Georgia. Seventh, we explain why a more sober assessment of the threat posed by Russia helps put into context the of past and present enlargement. We conclude with a discussion of the future of NATO and Europe. future.

The case for a post-cold war NATO

The continuation of the Atlantic alliance has been central to the U.S.'s post-Cold War grand strategy of maintaining global primacy for several reasons. NATO ensures that Europe's resources – geographic, demographic, economic and military – do not supplement the power of an adversary, present or prospective. As long as Europe remains militarily intertwined with the

United States and dependent on the US for its very security, Washington will have great influence in and on Europe. Europe's dependence on the US for so essential a need will prevent it from becoming a rival center of power, either collectively or because one state achieves dominance on the continent (Art 1996). NATO's continued existence ensures that Europe remains a strategic adjutant subordinate to and defended by the U.S., which explains why the United States, while it has complained about inequitable burden sharing, has never demanded a dramatic increase in European military power.² Reliable access to NATO countries' ports, airfields and intelligence enables the United States to project its military power worldwide, even for missions unrelated to Europe's defense. NATO provides the veneer, and sometimes the substance, of multilateralism, which makes American military interventions and "stability operations" more palatable to other countries. By contributing to a stable, prosperous Europe, NATO also sustains a favorable environment for American trade and investments in a lucrative global market.

The United States' decision to pursue global primacy rather than alternative grand strategies helps account for why NATO endured after the Cold War. Given the depth of support for NATO among powerful American constituencies and Europe's reliance on it for security, the success of those who pushed for the alliance's enlargement should not be surprising. Nor should the failure of those who opposed it.

NATO expands, facing few obstacles

The proponents of NATO expansion had a significant advantage at the outset, and for at least three reasons. First, the alliance as a military and institutional enterprise already existed; it did not need to be created *de nouveau*. In planning for their security states, like individuals, prefer to build on the familiar rather than venturing into the unknown by building alternatives from scratch. Second, NATO had been demonstrably successful in protecting and ensuring the stability of its member states – and for almost half a century. It was not merely familiar, it had worked. Hence the proposition that NATO could do for its new members – from East-Central Europe, the Baltics and the Balkans – what it had done for western Europe seemed plausible. Countries that sought membership in post-Cold War NATO believed that joining the alliance was crucial to realizing their goals of integrating with the West and protecting themselves from a resurgent Russia, with which many of them had had a troubled history. But Moscow saw NATO's eastward march as a threat – and well before Vladimir Putin took the reins – no matter American assurances that it had nothing to fear. Third, the balance of power after the Cold War overwhelmingly favored the United States. Russia's economy and military were in shambles in the 1990s and it lacked the wherewithal to prevent enlargement or threaten enough trouble to deter NATO from trying.

Those who believed that NATO must not merely be preserved, but expanded in membership and mission, believed that that could only happen with vigorous American leadership, given that the United States has far more resources to mobilize and deploy for defending Europe than do its allies, collectively, let alone individually. NATO has always been, and remains, a unipolar pact and, absent that, NATO could not have incorporated states in East-Central Europe, the Baltics countries, and parts of the Balkans without a increases in the defense spending on a scale that the alliances European members were not willing to undertake. In particular, defending the Baltic states – small and weak countries that adjoin Russian territory – would not have been possible absent American military might. Though the American military presence in Europe has declined from a Cold War highpoint of 4000,000 to just under 79,011 in 2019, it remains essential unless a robust common European defense system emerges.

Those who championed NATO expansion also believed that it was essential to the promotion and consolidation of democracy in post-Cold War Europe. Among American leaders, in the executive and the legislature, and within the foreign policy community (i.e., specialists in universities, the media and think tanks) there was general agreement that a NATO with strong American leadership is essential for democracy's success in the alliance's newest states and that emergence of authoritarian regimes in the states east of NCANEATO's old perimeter would lead to turmoil, even war, there, a denouement that would ill-serve US interests. The proponents of NATO enlargement also considered it as essential for promoting democracy, economic reform, militaries subject to civilian control in countries that had been part of the "Soviet bloc" for decades (Clinton 1996; Holbrooke 1995; Talbott 1997; Albright 1997). They disagreed with critics who warned that NATO's eastward expansion would eventually provoke resistance from a resurgent Russia and force the United States to bear the burden involved in protecting several militarily weak states near or adjacent to the Russian border. Beyond that, advocates of reconfiguring NATO after 1991 insisted that it should move "out of area," and help control conflict and consolidate stability and advance human rights in countries outside Europe. Included in this new agenda were humanitarian intervention (to stop mass atrocities) and "stability operations" in countries emerging from civil war.

Despite the strong support for NATO in the United States, once the Cold War was history, American officials and members of the foreign policy community were divided on the wisdom of expanding the alliance eastward. The proponents of expansion mobilized by forming organizations such as the US Committee to Expand NATO.³ They tapped foreign policy luminaries who wielded considerable influence by virtue of their academic expertise, experience in government, and access to the mass media. A prominent example was Zbigniew Brzezinski. A noted authority on the Soviet Union and Russia who served as President Carter's National Security Adviser, Brzezinski (1994) insisted that expansion was an urgent necessity and had to proceed

“with Russian cooperation or without it.” He warned that the Clinton’s administration’s failure to act decisively on expansion “could compound the danger that the alliance may disintegrate.” Brzezinski was not alone in offering such dire predictions. Writing in 1994 about East-Central Europe’s desire to join, NATO, Henry Kissinger, Secretary of State under presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, warned in an opinion piece that “if this request is rejected, and the states bordering Germany are refused protection, Germany will sooner or later seek to achieve its security by national efforts, encountering on the way a Russia pursuing the same policy from its own side. A vacuum between Germany and Russia threatens not only NATO cohesion but the very existence of NATO as a meaningful institution (Kissinger 1994).” And he reiterated this claim while testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Kissinger 1994; *The Debate on NATO Enlargement* 1997), a forum at which Brzezinski also spoke.⁴

Other prominent experts fervently opposed expansion; but they did not fall into predictable political camps. Consider those who helped to forge a collection of organizations, encompassing the political left and right, into the Coalition Against NATO Expansion (CANE) (“Founding Declaration,” 1998). CANE’s founding members were Richard Pipes (a preeminent historian of Russia, a conservative, and proponent of a hardline toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War who served as Director for East European and Soviet Affairs in the National Security Council under President Ronald Reagan), Jack Matlock (American ambassador to the Soviet Union from April 1987 to August 1991), and Fred Iklé (Under Secretary of Defense during the Reagan administration). Another opponent of expansion was George F. Kennan, the “father of containment,” who predicted that pushing ahead with expansion “would inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western, and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion,” “have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy,” and “restore the atmosphere of the Cold War to East-West relations.” It would, he declared, prove to be “the most fateful error of American foreign policy in the entire post-cold war era” (Kennan 1997). Professor Michael Mandelbaum (1995, 1996, 1997), another prominent participant in the debate on NATO expansion, agreed with Kennan’s critique and made his case in articles, books and media appearances.

There were voices of caution within the government, as well. While senior military officers obviously did not express their concerns publicly, some feared that the United States would be committing itself to the defense of additional countries, but without added resources, and at a time when the American military presence in Europe would likely be pared down. William Perry, Defense Secretary under President Clinton from February 1994 to January 1997, had a different concern. He did not oppose expansion in principle but believed that it should be delayed and pursued slowly thereafter. Perry worried that rapid expansion would damage the American relationship with Russia and make it harder to gain its cooperation for further

arms control agreements, which he considered essential. Perry's view was that Russia did not object to the participation of East-Central Europe and the former Soviet republics in the Partnership for Peace (PfP), which was designed to foster's military cooperation between NATO and individual countries that were not part of the alliance, and that Moscow was itself eager to join that program. But he was convinced that Russia retained "its traditional opposition to Eastern European countries, especially those on its periphery, joining NATO," which is still considered "a potential threat." In his view, "we needed to keep moving forward with Russia...and...that NATO enlargement at this time would shove us into reverse." His plea for a delay and slow pace was based on the assessment "that we needed more time to bring Russia, the other major nuclear power, into the Western security circle," to him "an over-riding priority" (Perry 2015).

Despite these critics and voices of caution, there was nothing that could accurately be characterized as a debate within the American government on NATO expansion. Eric Edelman, Strobe Talbott's executive assistant from 1996 to 1998, confirmed this later, noting that "there wasn't really that much opposition inside the [administration]...It was mostly outside" (Adelman 2017). This should not be surprising. The opponents of expansion never acquired the influence required to prevent its launch during the Clinton administration, let alone to derail it once it gained momentum. The proponents of expansion within the government consistently held a stronger hand, not least because President Clinton strongly favored the policy and believed that Russian concerns could be assuaged. Vice President Gore's views aligned with the president's, and he made them known vigorously. Strobe Talbott, a prominent, a well-regarded expert on Russia and Clinton's confidant and Oxford classmate, who served as Deputy Secretary of State between 1994 and 2001, also pushed hard for the policy, and his views carried weight for reasons professional (his knowledge of Russia) and personal (his closeness to Clinton) (Talbott 1995; Fitchett 1997; Talbott 1997).

Talbott was joined by other senior officials. Madeleine Albright, Clinton's ambassador to the UN (January 1993–1997) and later Secretary of State (January 1997–January 2001), was an impassioned proponent of expansion. Likewise, Tony Lake, Clinton's National Security Adviser, was "an early exponent of expansion." Lake argued that it represented "a rare historical opportunity to anchor former Communist countries like Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in a successful and democratic and market economic transition" and to assuage their fears of a "revanchist Russia." This view prevailed not only because other influential officials shared it but more so because "it struck a chord with [President] Clinton," the man who mattered the most (Burns 2019). As Lake later recalled, NATO enlargement was among the issues President Clinton "cared about," "which is why I was able to keep pushing the way I did within the bureaucracy and with my colleagues" (Lake 2002). Likewise, Lake's successor, Samuel (Sandy) Berger, who in any event deemed NATO expansion as "extraordinarily important,"

knew exactly where Clinton stood, and that increased the weight of his opinions (Berger 2005).

Another advocate of expansion within the administration, Richard Holbrooke, was, in sharp contrast to Perry and Lake, famous – some would say notorious – for pressing aggressively and relentlessly for policies he held dear. Holbrooke, who served in top posts within the Clinton administration, including ambassador to Germany (1993–1994), Assistant Secretary of State for Europe (1994–1996) and ambassador to the UN (1999–2001), spoke often and with authority. While Perry and the Department of Defense may have fretted about the pace and implications of NATO expansion, Holbrooke brimmed with confidence. In September 1994, soon after having been appointed Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, he “told a stunned group from the Pentagon the president had stated his support for enlargement and that it was up to them [sic] to act on it.” “Over the next three months, as skeptics inside the administration realized that the president, vice president, national security advisor, and secretary of state all supported NATO expansion, the bureaucracy fell into line...” (Goldgeier 1999, 20). In his memoirs, Perry notes that “Holbrooke...proposed in 1996 to bring into NATO at once a number of the PfP members, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states.” In opposing Perry’s counsel for delay Holbrooke “was irrepressible and his proposal moved forward,” especially because “neither Secretary of State Warren Christopher nor National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, spoke out.” On top of that, Perry recalls, “Vice President Gore...made a forceful argument in favor of immediate membership, an argument more persuasive to the president than mine” (Perry 2015, 128). Perry observes that “the rupture with Russia may have occurred any way [i.e., even if he had won the day]. But I am not willing to concede that.”

The bottom line: while there was skepticism and apprehension about NATO expansion within the administration and among some senior military officers, at no point was the policy ever in peril. President Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and the administration’s top foreign policy officials backed it strongly. The groundwork for expansion was laid in the early 1990s. The opposition was never strong enough to stop its forward momentum. By the time the first stage of expansion occurred in 1999, Russian objections were well known within the administration. They just did not count enough to make a difference, especially given the existing imbalance of power between the two states. Despite Lake’s talk of “pushing” NATO expansion, it is not evident that much exertion was required. When it came to NATO expansion, it was, to borrow from the title of a book on the subject, it was “not whether but when” (Goldgeier 1999).

NATO on Russia’s border

At its January 1994 Washington Summit, NATO agreed, on the basis of Article X of the 1949 Washington Treaty that created it, to admit more

members into its fold. At its July 1997 Madrid conclave, the alliance acted, formally inviting the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to initiate talks on accession. They gained membership in March 1999 (NATO, n.d.; von Moltke 1997). At the Madrid meeting, NATO also reaffirmed that its door remained open to other aspirants, subject to their fulfilling membership criteria. The alliance did not tarry: in 2002 it gave seven more states – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, – the green light to start accession negotiations. They entered the alliance in 2004, during George W. Bush’s administration. Following accession talks, which commenced in 2008, Albania and Croatia joined in 2009, during Barrack Obama’s presidency. Montenegro was admitted in 2017, soon after President Donald Trump’s inauguration, and North Macedonia joined in 2020, increasing NATO’s membership from a Cold War highpoint of 16 to 30 – in the space of two decades. Georgia and Ukraine are also eager to join. Though the alliance did not offer either country a Membership Action Plan (MAP) during its 2008 Bucharest summit, the post-conference declaration stated that “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed that these countries will become members of NATO” (NATO 2008).

If Georgia and Ukraine do join, not only will NATO’s membership have doubled from the Cold War peak, it will have four member countries that share borders with Russia (not including the Kaliningrad enclave) and are small and weak to boot. Even if Ukraine and Georgia fail to gain entry, NATO’s Baltic members will be nearly impossible to defend and thus the alliance will have to rely on an extended deterrent with dubious credibility.⁵ James Coyle of the Atlantic Council sums up the problem starkly. “There is no strategic depth, and the [Baltic] states are only connected to Europe by the 65-kilometer-wide Suwalki Gap. The entire area is covered by Russian Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities. It would be suicide to try to fight a war with the Kremlin on this territory” (Coyle 2018). Three of the bordering states – Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine – have sizeable ethnic Russian minorities. Two, Georgia and Ukraine, are embroiled in border disputes with Russia, are battling separatist statelets sustained by Russian material support, and have fought the Russian army. Given the extent of NATO’s military dependence on the United States, Washington will have committed itself to playing the main military role in protecting a collection of states that have scant military resources and locations that give the Russian army a clear advantage, whether for launching, reinforcing and resupplying military operations directed at them or for missions aimed at destabilizing them without resorting to war. Moreover, the United States cannot realistically hope that its European partners will boost their defense budgets and the quantity and quality of their armaments substantially, even though some under pressure from President Trump, Yet excluding the United States, in 2019 only four NATO countries surpassed the two-percent-of-GDP guideline defense spending and two were barely above the

line while two others were right on the line. Only two had exceeded that proportion as well as the second part of the guideline, which called for allocating 20% of the military budget to weaponry. Ten had met neither benchmark. The median for defense spending as a share of GDP – including the US, which devoted 3.5% – was 1.63% (NATO 2019a). One might argue that defense spending should not be accorded totemic status and that increased expenditures by small countries counts for little. But how countries' defense expenditures and the capabilities and readiness of their forces do reflect their priorities and the degree of their commitment to the goal of collective security.

Quite apart from lacking the means to defend weak, vulnerable states adjacent to Russia, NATO also faces the problem of an asymmetry when it comes to the stakes. The Baltic states, Georgia, and Ukraine are simply more consequential to Russia's security than they are to the security of the United States. Moscow, therefore, has greater motivation to take steps against both countries that the United States will be hard-pressed to counter without taking risks that could not reasonably qualify as prudent. This is the lesson offered by the 2008 Russia-Georgia war and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and its support for insurgents in parts of Ukraine's Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. Neither Georgia nor Ukraine was part of NATO at the time of these conflicts, so we cannot know whether their inclusion in the alliance would have deterred Russia or whether, given the combination of asymmetric capabilities and asymmetric stakes, NATO would have been unable to deter Russia or defend Georgia and Ukraine.

As regards US grand strategy, the question raised by the prospective membership in NATO of Georgia and Ukraine, and the admission of the Baltic states, is whether the alliance's policy of apparently open-ended post-Cold War expansion has already produced an overextension, the burdens and potential hazards of which will fall principally on the United States.

The Russian reaction

Once the discussions over NATO expansion began in earnest, Russia registered its objections – early, frequently, and fulsomely. But considering that the alliance's membership will have increased from 16 in 1991 to 30 with the formal admission in 2020 of North Macedonia, Moscow's objections clearly have made little difference to those driving the policy. Richard Holbrooke, writes his biographer George Packer, “brushed off” arguments that expanding NATO would provoke Russia and dismissed the idea that Russia had reason to feel threatened by the West. But, as Packer observed, Holbrooke's inability to imagine how other countries might view one's action given their past experiences – in Russia's case repeated invasions across its western frontier – and current apprehensions meant that “his doctrine risked becoming a kind of liberal imperialism” (Packer 2019, 399).

Holbrooke's attitude is instructive because it marked the thinking of other advocates of NATO expansion (and still does). They believed that Russians, especially the democrats among them, could not truly believe that an enlarged NATO posed a threat to their country. Stated differently, American officials committed to expanding the alliance seemed to believe that the only reasonable way Russia could view their policy was the way they themselves viewed it. In consequence, they regarded Russian objections as, in the main, rhetoric designed for domestic consumption, the result of misunderstanding about what American intentions truly were, or simple paranoia. They also believed that Russia's leaders could be won over by a variety of means, whether economic aid and inclusion in PfP or inclusion in security forums such as the Russia-NATO Consultative Council, and that personal chemistry between Russian and American presidents, notably Boris-Bill bonhomie, would calm Moscow's anxiety.

This view discounted, if not dismissed, the possibility that Russian leaders would regard the alliance's movement eastward toward their country's borders as provocative – and disingenuous given the American assurances that the Cold War was over and that Russia was a partner. In an October 1993 cable that was subsequently declassified, Yeltsin complained to Clinton that “the spirit of the treaty of the final settlement with respect to Germany [i.e., the deal under which a unified Germany became part of NATO], signed in September 1990, especially its provisions that prohibit the deployment of foreign troops in the eastern lands of the Federal Republic of Germany, precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the east” (Yeltsin 1993a). The question of whether the United States pledged not to expand NATO remains disputed. Jack Matlock, the United States' last ambassador to the Soviet Union, insists that “we gave categorical assurances to Gorbachev back when the Soviet Union existed that if a united German were able to stay in NATO, NATO would not be moved eastward” Philip Zelikow (1995), who served on the National Security Council from 1989 to 1991, disagrees, contending that the assurance provided was that the alliance's military forces and equipment would not be moved into the territory of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany). Academics remain divided on the matter.⁶

In the end, however, it does matter whether Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev ever received from the George H. W. Bush administration a binding, let alone written, commitment not to enlarge NATO in exchange for Moscow's cooperation on German unification. The Russians believed they had been given an assurance and that the United States later reneged – and at a time when Russia was beset by weakness, unable to push back, and did not pose any military threat to Europe. Opponents of NATO expansion had warned that Russia's leaders would interpret expansion precisely that way and would be unmoved by the argument that it was needed to provide security to and foster democracy in the lands to NATO's east (Mandelbaum 1999, 1996; Dean 1997). Russia was scarcely in a position to attack its

Western neighbors. During the 1990s its economy contracted by one-third and, in the words of a leading expert on the Russian military, the country “was left with a shambles of an army and a totally confused military doctrine.”⁷ As for promoting democracy, it would surely have made sense to apply the underlying logic – namely that military alliances advance democracy and that the latter fosters peace – to Russia, by far the most consequential of the ex-communist countries in Europe. And, as Clinton and his foreign policy team understood, during the Yeltsin years Russia’s democratic experiment was under siege from both the communists (led by Gennady Zyuganov) and the nationalists (such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy), both unrelenting critics of NATO expansion.⁸ There was, to be sure, the prospect of a resurgent Russia, but including it in NATO would have been one way to prevent that outcome from threatening Eastern Europe. That, after all, was the reasoning behind bringing West Germany in NATO following World War II and a unified Germany into NATO following the Cold War.

Declassified US documents demonstrate that Russian leaders did desire a post-Cold War European order that would include them, and not as a mere adornment. This vision underlay Mikhail Gorbachev’s (1989) proposal to the Council of Europe for restructuring Europe to create “a common home.” And following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders continued to regard NATO expansion and Russia’s integration into a pan-European security order as incompatible. Although Yeltsin could be emotional and erratic, among other things, his assessment proved prescient. By the end of his October 1993 cable to Clinton explained that, even reform-minded politicians in Russia would regard NATO expansion “as a sort of neo-isolation of our country in diametric opposition to its natural admission into the Euro-Atlantic space.” “We have a different approach,” he added, “one that leads to a pan-European security system, an approach predicated in collective (but not on the basis of bloc membership) actions....Security must be indivisible and based on pan-European security structures” (Yeltsin 1993a).

Not surprisingly, Russian leaders regarded NATO enlargement not as a step toward inclusiveness, but rather as a repudiation of it. James Collins, *chargé d'affaires* at the American embassy in Moscow and later ambassador to Russia, wrote in a cable to Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1993 – prior to the latter’s visit to Moscow – that the Russians had made clear their fear that NATO expansion would exclude them and therefore strategically bifurcate Europe in a new manner. “No matter how nuanced,” Collins noted, “if NATO adopts a policy which envisions expansion into Central and Eastern Europe without holding the door open to Russia, it would be universally interpreted in Moscow as directed against Russia and Russia alone – or ‘Neo-Containment’ as Foreign Minister Kozyrev recently suggested” (Collins 1993).

Russia’s leaders made their opposition to NATO enlargement unambiguous well before Vladimir Putin was elected President in 2000 – in short, from the

beginning. In July 1991, as the Soviet Union was unraveling, a senior delegation from the Russian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic – which, once the Soviet state dissolved, became the independent Russian Federation – wrote in a memorandum to its president, Boris Yeltsin, that it had stressed to senior NATO officials that “expanding NATO would be seen negatively in the USSR and the RSFSR” and that the alliance’s Secretary General, Manfred Woerner had assured the Russian leader that he and the NATO Council were opposed to expansion (Yeltsin 1991a). But as discussions about expansion nevertheless proceeded within the alliance, Yeltsin made his objections clear during a December 1993 meeting with Woerner (Yeltsin 1993b). And in March 1995, Kozyrev, Yeltsin’s foreign minister and a liberal reformer whom Europe and the United States considered a staunch advocate of partnership with the West, remarked that “whatever one may think of NATO, it’s still a military alliance that was created when Europe was divided.” “It should,” Kozyrev added, “be replaced by a new model based on comprehensive security.” Kozyrev, echoing Gorbachev, added archly that “the gap between NATO’s very active moves to studying potential enlargement and its passive attitude in developing this new model of comprehensive security is a very wide one, and it could be dangerous” (Kozyrev 1995).

Later that year Russian President Boris Yeltsin, true to form, used blunter phraseology. In criticizing NATO’s first major out-of-area endeavor, “Operation Deliberate Force,” which launched airstrikes against Bosnian Serb redoubts as part of the effort to end Bosnia’s civil war, he called for a European (including Russia) solution to the conflict and wondered why Europeans allowed themselves “to be dictated from beyond the ocean,” an obvious reference to the United States. Turning to the broader NATO enlargement issue, he noted that “when NATO approaches the borders of the Russian Federation, you can say there will be two military blocs, and this will be a restoration of what we already had” (Andrei 1995). Yeltsin could be emotional and erratic, among other things, but his assessment proved prescient. By the end of Barack Obama’s presidency, talk of a “new Cold War” between Russia and the West had become commonplace. Hopes for partnership had all but evaporated (Legvold 2016; 2014).

True, when Kozyrev and Yeltsin made their remarks, Russia was part of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, established in 1991, its 1997 successor, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and the PfP, formed in 1994. Yet to Russian leaders these forums were scant recompense for NATO’s advance toward its borders, which from the outset, they deemed a threat to their country’s security. A 1993 report by Evgenii Primakov, the head of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service, who would succeed Kozyrev as Foreign Minister three years later, warned that “a stereotypical bloc mentality” persisted in the West, which still regarded Russia as a threat. He noted that while NATO’s leaders may not intend to exclude and isolate Russia, the country should nevertheless anticipate a future in which the alliance’s “zone of responsibility...reaches the borders of the Russian

Federation.” Primakov opined that although that outcome would not result in creation of “a bridgehead to strike Russia or its allies...this is not the same as saying that NATO’s eastward expansion does not affect Russia’s military security interests.” NATO was the world’s “biggest military grouping,” and its movement toward Russia’s borders would, in his assessment, necessitate “a fundamental reappraisal” of Russia’s defense doctrine and posture” (Primakov 1992).

Though Russia did not beef up the military units deployed on its western flank, that does not establish that its leaders did not see NATO expansion as a threat. For one thing, they made abundantly clear that they did so, and one would have to dismiss all of their protestations as propaganda in order to conclude that they were merely engaged in theatrics. In addition, Russia’s economic free fall in the 1990s, coupled with the continuing necessity to deploy forces along a vast frontier, one that abutted 16 countries, rendered a countervailing military response infeasible. Russia’s leaders held a weak hand, but that only served to increase their resentment over what they regarded as the West’s disregard for their legitimate security interests. Their bitterness was not contrived. Consider Sandy Berger’s characterization of President Clinton’s response to Yeltsin objections at the 1996 Helsinki summit: “Give it up on NATO enlargement....We’re going ahead; stop rocking it. All you’re doing Boris is creating a defeat for yourself.” When Yeltsin sought to salvage something by asking that the Baltic states not be inducted into NATO, Clinton’s answer, as characterized by Berger was, “No, I will not make that commitment....All you are doing is moving the line of the divide between East and West....farther to the east” (Miller 2005).

But by 2002 it was clear that the Baltic countries would, in fact, join NATO. Vladimir Putin, Yeltsin’s successor, also acquiesced in the face of this reality, and for two reasons. Russia had still not recovered from the collapse of the 1990s and Putin understood that he was confronting a *fait accompli*. In addition, though Putin’s image in the West would change markedly as the new decade advanced (he would come to personify the anti-Western autocrat), in his early years as president he was hopeful about a substantive partnership with NATO, and indeed even membership. As the conservative British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* reported in 2002, “Mr. Putin’s acquiescence to NATO expanding its borders to within 100 miles of his home city, St. Petersburg, was the latest sign of his strategic shift toward the West” (Putin 2002). Similarly, Charles Krauthammer, the *Washington Post*’s famed columnist, also a conservative, noted that same year, in an op-ed deriding those who warned that NATO expansion would produce Russian backlash, “In fact the level of US-Russian cooperation is the highest today since 1945. Putin is not just collaborating in the war on terror, not just allowing a US presence in the former Soviet Central Asian states, not just acquiescing to NATO expansion right up to Russia’s border and into Soviet space; he is knocking on NATO’s door, trying to get in” (Krauthammer 2002).

The strategic benefits gained by the policy of enlarging NATO must, therefore, be weighed against the negative consequences, one of which is the part it played in Russia's eventual transformation from a putative partner of the West into an adversary. To be sure that metamorphosis cannot be attributed entirely to NATO enlargement without falling victim to the single factor fallacy – pinning the entire blame for the deterioration of NATO-Russia relations on the West in general, the United States in particular. What became known as the “new Cold War” owed its emergence to a concatenation of developments (Kanet 2019). They include complex political and cultural trends within Russia's polity and society that proved hospitable to the rise of authoritarianism and nationalism; the 2002 US decision to jettison the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM); the effect on Moscow's strategic thinking of NATO's 1999 intervention in Kosovo, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and NATO's war in Libya (2011); Russia's 2008 military clash with Georgia, and its 2014 annexation of Crimea and arming of separatists in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region.

Still, no serious account of the mutation of what had been a budding cooperative relationship into a near breach can avoid reckoning with NATO enlargement's role in altering Russia perceptions of the West. The effect on Russian strategic calculations was especially evident once the alliance moved from admitting former members of the Warsaw Pact located in East-Central Europe to admitting the Baltic states, which border Russia to contemplating the admission of Georgia and Ukraine. It seems inconceivable that the American attitude – or that of any historical power – would have been one of equanimity had an alliance that was once its principal foe started to move toward its borders at a time when it was crippled by weakness. Moreover, a revived US would surely have pushed back in order preserve its historic sphere of influence. President Vladimir Putin's strident speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, delivered as senior American officials sat in the front rows, symbolized Russia's resurgence, its determination to resist the loss of what it regarded as its sphere of influence, and its new strategic outlook (Putin 2007). The change cannot be attributed solely to Putin's personality. Russia's 2008 war with Georgia, we should recall, occurred during the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. And it was Medvedev who described the former Soviet republic as part of Russia's zone of “privileged interests,” railed against the American-dominated unipolar world, and asserted that Russia's sphere of influence was not limited to states immediately on its border (Kramer 2008). What the Russia-Georgia war – sparked by Georgian leader Mikheil Saakashvili's shelling of the capital of the Russian-backed breakaway enclave of North Ossetia – and Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014 demonstrated was that Russia had acquired the will and wherewithal to resist and had carried out a strategic reassessment that bore little, if any, resemblance to that of Yeltsin and the early Putin.

The argument that the West precipitated the 2014 Ukraine crisis has been widely rejected as either an exaggeration or as baseless (Mearsheimer 2014, 1–2; Chengyi 2017, 267; Sakwa 2017, 267–268).⁹ The gist of that thesis is that the West bears the blame because it serially provoked Russia following the end of the Cold War by expanding NATO without regard to Russian security interests. The West, and the United States in particular, did so, the reasoning goes, in several ways. They assured Ukraine that it would join NATO one day. The EU launched its Eastern Partnership, the plan designed to draw post-Soviet states toward it, notwithstanding that in Russia’s eyes there is a huge overlap in membership rosters of the EU and NATO. The US vocally supported the 2014 Maidan Revolution that ousted Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, and as it unfolded a senior US foreign policy official visiting Kyiv even discussed with the American ambassador to Ukraine the composition of the future Ukrainian cabinet (Nuland-Pyatt 2014). The West also failed to consider how repeated invasions across Russia’s western frontier had made its leaders acutely sensitive to the strategic trajectory of states on its western flank. One can disagree in whole or part with the “the West is to blame” argument and still conclude that the shadow of NATO expansion loomed over the 2014 Ukraine crisis and shaped its course and outcome.

There is no doubt that Russian leaders were deeply perturbed about the consequences of Ukraine – which in their eyes is, culturally, demographically, economically and geo-strategically, the most consequential of the post-Soviet states – joining NATO. Moreover, NATO gave them a good reason to believe that Ukraine could well be admitted. By the time Putin arrived at NATO’s 2008 Bucharest Summit, the alliance had already decided not to provide Ukraine (and Georgia) a MAP. Even so, against the background of NATO expansion during Yeltsin’s presidency as well as his own, Putin clearly did not discount the possibility that Ukraine would be part of NATO one day, not least because the summit’s declaration stated explicitly that it would. According to the insider account of Mikhail Zygar, a respected Russian journalist and former editor of Russia’s sole independent television network, “he [Putin] was furious that NATO was still keeping Ukraine and Georgia hanging on by approving the prospect of future membership.” Zygar writes that Putin “flew into a rage” and warned that “if Ukraine joins NATO it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. It will simply fall apart” (Zygar 2016, 153–154).

As the protests against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich gained strength in 2014, it was not unreasonable for Russia’s leaders to fear that his ouster and the advent of a pro-Western leader would have substantially increased the odds of Ukraine’s eventually entering NATO. In the eyes of Russian leaders the Ukrainian opposition’s rejection of the EU-brokered deal, which involved major concessions by Yanukovich, including early elections, was proof that the Maidan movement, with Washington’s fulsome support, was determined to topple him so as to align Ukraine with the West

(Menon and Rumer 2015: Intro, chs. 2, 4). Russia's annexation of Crimea, Ukraine's sole Russian-majority province, was doubtless unlawful, but Russia had never attempted to seize Crimea before, even when a Ukrainian government hostile to it took power following the 2004 Orange Revolution.

The challenge for American grand strategy is that Russia remains fervently opposed to the induction of Georgia and Ukraine into NATO. Addressing a group of Russian ambassadors in July 2018, Vladimir Putin, referring to the West, warned that "our colleagues, who are...seeking to include, among others, Georgia and Ukraine in the orbit of the alliance, should think about the possible consequences of such an irresponsible policy." "We will, he added pointedly, "respond appropriately to such steps, which pose a direct threat to Russia" (Osborn 2018). Putin may be bluffing in an attempt to block the two countries' entry into the alliance by trying to unnerve the alliance or create dissension its ranks. He may be playing to the domestic galleries to burnish his nationalist credentials and strongman image. Perhaps Russia would have been deterred from doing what it did in 2008 and 2014 had Georgia and Ukraine been inside NATO and the lesson is that admitting them will not prove dangerous.

These are reasonable suppositions. But sound strategy requires thinking hard about what might happen if things unfold in unexpected ways, what responses are feasible if that happens, and at the risks associated with them implementing them. Now that NATO expansion has become integral to American grand strategy, the task is to figure out what, if any, limits should apply and how the costs associated with NATO's assuming added obligations serve US interests.

Was an alternative path possible?

The end of the Cold War presented an opportunity for a fresh start with Russia. One way forward might have been the creation of a new pan-European security architecture that included Russia and perhaps even used NATO as a foundation to start with. But a project of that scope never became a serious proposition in the West, let alone an element in American grand strategy (Hill 2018).¹⁰ For one thing, because the East-Central European and Baltic countries that joined NATO regarded it as a means to protect themselves against Russia, not as a forum for partnership with Moscow, they would almost certainly have blocked Russian membership, helped by the requirement for consensus on admitting new members. Perhaps the attempt to create a new European order that included Russia would have failed. Perhaps Russia would have subverted it from within. There is no way to tell because, in sharp contrast to what happened following World War II, Western leaders did not try to conceptualize, let alone create, a new European security order, nor did the United States provide the leadership that would have been required to make that possible.

The problem, however, was that Russian leaders, regardless of their political orientation and despite NATO's commitment to an open door, did not see the alliance's expansion policy as a project that would eventually include Russia; and those may have harbored such hopes soon abandoned them given the actual direction of events. As expansion proceeded apace Russians viewed it as a move that, whatever the underlying intent of the United States and its allies, would exclude it, drawing a new East-West strategic demarcation line in Europe.

What might an alternative security order have looked like, and would it have proved feasible? The enlargement of the European Union could have served as the means to foster democracy and economic reform in East-Central Europe and the post-Soviet states, with benchmarks in both categories serving as the criteria for membership. The EU's indigenous capacity for providing security on the continent could have been strengthened by building on its Common Security and Defense Policy and providing it greater institutional heft through EU states' commitments to boost their defense spending as well as military capabilities, including by increasing the inter-operability of weapons; reducing the duplication armament production; and regularizing joint training, military exercises and training. (New EU members would pledge to participate as the price for benefitting from a collaborative European system). NATO could have been kept in place as a hedge, but not expanded. Talks between the EU and Russia might have held to promote and deepen security cooperation that included reductions and pullbacks of Russian forces facing Europe and confidence-building measures (CSBMs) designed to prevent the outbreak of war and facilitate the management of crises. Sufficient progress on that front could have laid the groundwork for a pan-European security order that included Russia. The creation of a wider European security system would not have prevented the United States from helping to further political, economic and military reforms in states that lay beyond unified Germany, NATO's 1991 eastern boundary.

To be sure, a new pan-European security order would have been accompanied by uncertainties and risks. Yet that was also true when NATO, the Marshall Plan and the EU were first imagined as means to create a cooperative, secure Western Europe after World War II. Indeed, uncertainty is always present, particularly in international relations, when bold, new ventures are formulated and their implementation attempted. But this much is certain: nothing of comparable boldness was ever attempted. Instead, NATO expansion became, for reasons we have explained, the main event; and as some of the prominent advocates of that policy noted, it all but precluded the integration of Russia into "a new, all-European security framework" (Asmus, Kugler, and Larrabee 1995, 7).¹¹

NATO expansion's advocates and latter-day defenders have hailed it as a resounding success.¹² In their minds it has ensured the continued engagement of the United States in Europe's security, ensured East-Central Europe's security, disproved those who predicted turmoil and even

nuclear proliferation in that region, and checked a resurgent, nationalistic Russia. But the relevant question is not whether these outcomes were desirable, but whether there were no other ways to achieve them except through NATO expansion. There were alternatives and Western Europe, which was not prostrate as it was after the ravages of World War II, had the wherewithal to help achieve them. The argument that the US would have abandoned Europe had NATO not expanded is open to challenge. The United States could have remained involved in Europe in a variety of ways. NATO expansion's proponents posited a false choice between their policy and a wholesale US departure from the continent.

The proponents of expansion aver that it has been vindicated by the rise of authoritarianism in Russia and Russia's war with Georgia and the 2014 Russia-Ukraine conflict. Under Putin, Russia has indeed revived in important respects, but any meaningful index of power – GDP and military spending included – shows that its power is dwarfed by that of Europe. The problem in the 1990s was not that the United States' European allies lacked the economic and technological resources to mount an effective collective defense but that they were politically unwilling to do so, in part because they had all but subcontracted their security to the United States.¹³ Yet it is also true that Washington, while it complains about insufficient European military effort, regards a strategically autonomous Europe as incompatible with American global primacy.

As for Russia's political evolution, many complicated factors account for it. But NATO's expansion despite Moscow's fervent objections certainly did not provide an external environment conducive to the success of democracy in Russia. NATO expansion cannot, by any means, explain all that has happened in Russia's politics and foreign policy; but it cannot also be excluded from a comprehensive explanation of that country's political evolution. That, in turn, raises the question of whether and to what extent, an alternative approach involving the forging of a new European security order that was less threatening or that incorporated Russia would have provided a more propitious setting for success of Russian democracy.

As for the claim that NATO expansion was essential to ensure that democracy would take root and survive in East-Central Europe and the post-Soviet states, it assumes the truth of a proposition that scholars disagree on, namely that NATO can promote democracy, or save it when it encounters trouble (Reiter 2001, 41–67).¹⁴ The history of Greece and Turkey does not support the contention that it can. Both countries joined NATO in 1952 yet succumbed to military rule (Greece from 1967 to 1974) or military rule plus the military's intervention in politics (Turkey in 1960–1965, 1971 and 1980–1983) Nor has NATO membership prevented the erosion of democracy in Poland and Hungary or forestalled the rise of illiberal anti-democratic movements and parties across Europe. Besides, the United States could have pursued democracy promotion in Europe in many ways short of expanding NATO.

The hazards of continued NATO enlargement

NATO enlargement created a new dividing line in post-Cold War Europe, one with Russia and the West on different sides, and it helped increase the security dilemma between both countries while contributing to the emergence of what many commentators refer to as a second Cold War. This occurred when both would have benefitted from cooperating to solve global challenges and could also have worked together to balance a rising China, with which Russia has aligned as its relationship with the US has deteriorated. And this occurred at the time when NATO opened its doors to several states that are hard to defend and the United States has assumed still more obligations even as new challenges arise. That, in turn, has revealed or exacerbated some of the problems built into its primacist grand strategy. NATO enlargement has, in short, been an unforced error. What can be done to mitigate the consequences of this error? What can the U.S. do in this region to satisfy better its vital national interests? Should NATO continue to enlarge the alliance? Or should it close the door to aspiring entrants? Our answer is that the U.S. and NATO can safely and beneficially shut the alliance open door, especially given that Russia's status as a great power competitor has been overblown (Menon 2020, 7–9).

Yet, NATO has repeatedly proclaimed that its door remains open, including to two of the most controversial would-be members, Georgia and Ukraine. At Bucharest in 2008, NATO noted in its Summit Declaration that “We agreed today that these countries [Georgia and Ukraine] will become members of NATO” (Bucharest Summit Declaration 2008).

Vice-President Mike Pence reaffirmed that pledge to Georgia in late 2017 exclaiming during a visit there that “President Trump and the United States stand firmly behind the 2008 NATO Bucharest statement which made it clear that Georgia will, someday, become a member” (Pence and Kvrakashvili 2017). As one of us noted at the time, “Indeed, Pence practically suggested Georgia is already an ally with security guarantees, pointing out that “The joint military operations that are taking place today we hope are a visible sign of our commitment to Georgia’s sovereignty and to her internationally recognized borders (Ruger 2017)” Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterated Pence’s promise in June 2019, remarking that “Georgia’s efforts give me great confidence to speak for President Trump, and all of the United States Government, when I say that you will continue to have the support of the United States as you seek to become a NATO member” (Pence and Kvrakashvili 2017)” And despite saying “Do you think Americans care about Ukraine?” just before a January 2020 trip to that country, once in Kyiv Pompeo stated that “We have maintained support for Ukraine’s efforts to join NATO and move closer to the European Union” (Secretary Michael R. Pompeo 2020).

One of the primary reasons that the United States should avoid further NATO enlargement is that neither the U.S. nor its allies need the states that

most desire to join the alliance. Consider Georgia.¹⁵ It is a weak country located in a relative strategic backwater, enjoying little military power. It also has a small economy and is an insignificant trading partner for the U.S. Instead, Georgia is a security liability, despite its contributions and brave sacrifices in missions like Afghanistan. Georgia has approximately 35,000 active duty soldiers and in 2018 spent a mere \$312 million on defense (SIPRI 2019b). The United States in comparison has spent considerably more annually on its military bands and their 6,500 musicians (Philipps 2016). Georgia's military is also significantly smaller than that of its neighbors, including Azerbaijan's and Russia's friend Armenia. Nor did Georgian troops acquit themselves well during the five-day war with Russia in 2008 (CNN 2020). As Michael Cecire concluded, "one item that seems to be almost universally agreed upon by all parties is that the Georgian military performed poorly." It did so, he argues, because of the Georgian military's relatively small size, its flawed doctrine and training, the fact that its best troops were in Iraq, its lack of force multipliers, and its deficient command and control network (Cecire 2011).

A small country – its land area is only slightly larger than that of West Virginia, its population less than 4 million (CIA n.d.b). Georgia's economy ranks 118th in the world in terms of GDP and is half the size of the smallest state economy in the U.S., Vermont (Gross Domestic Product 2020; Vermont 2019). Georgia's economic future is mixed. While it fares well on the *Economic Freedom of the World* rankings at 12th – an indicator that correlates with positive economic outcomes – a recent report by the Carnegie Endowment paints the other side of the coin, including slow growth, stagnating living standards, a high poverty rate, and lack of diversity in its economy (Gwartney, et al. 2020; Stronski and Vreeman 2017). The lack of economic opportunity in Georgia has led to high rates of emigration and on top of that the birth rate is insufficient to maintain the current population size (The World Bank 2019c) In sum, Georgia has some ability to contribute to NATO, but hardly enough to matter for an alliance of wealthy and populous countries that spends a trillion dollars on its military forces – and certainly not enough to justify the resources needed to defend it, let alone to take on the significant risks involved.

Ukraine is likewise a problematic partner, even if it has more economic and military resources than Georgia. Nearly the size of Texas, Ukraine contains 44 million people (CIA, n.d.). Its GDP, \$131 billion, ranks 58th, but in per capita terms only just over \$3,000. Its economic weight is comparable to Nebraska's (Gross National Product 2020; The World Bank 2020b; U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis 2019). Corruption stunts Ukraine's economic development. World Bank data show that (in constant 2010 dollars) Ukraine's GDP contracted from roughly \$200 billion at the end of the Cold War to \$131 billion in 2018 (The World Bank 2020b). As the *Washington Post* notes, "The combination of corruption, economic mismanagement, the ongoing civil war against Russian-supported rebels, and did we mention the

corruption, have all left Ukraine's economy in worse shape today than it was when the USSR still existed. It seems almost impossible to believe, but Ukraine's GDP is actually 24% smaller now than it was in 1993 – the first year we have reliable figures for it – and average incomes are 17% lower" (O'Brien 2019).

Militarily, Ukraine has shown resolve in countering Russian intervention in the Donbas. However, according to Denys Kiryukhin, "its military potential remains vastly inferior to that of its primary adversary: Russia" (Kiryukhin 2018). This is not surprising. Ukraine spent only \$4.4 billion on defense in 2018 (in constant 2017 dollars) and fielded 204,000 troops (SIPRI 2019a; IISS 2016–2017). True, recent reforms have paid some dividends. Valeriy Akimenko observes that "the country's armed forces are larger and better equipped than ever before, numbering 200,000 active-service military personnel. The military budget is set to rise by more than one-quarter in 2018. And, just as importantly, morale has improved." Yet he adds that "major problems remain, all of which stem from Ukraine's internal political struggles and the continuing weakness of state structures. They include the lack of civilian and parliamentary oversight of the armed forces; incomplete integration of volunteers into the regular army; impunity and abusive behavior in the conflict zone; and systemic corruption and opaque budgets, especially in Ukroboronprom, the state-owned defense-industry monopoly" (Akimenko 2018). The upshot: Ukraine, while more capable than Georgia, will add to NATO's militarily capabilities only at the margins. But that benefit will be far outweighed by the risks that the alliance will assume to defend it.

NATO's would-be members also are difficult to defend, sitting on Russia's doorstep in a place where almost everything favors the adversary. Georgia, for example, is far away and separated geographically from the strongest NATO members.¹⁶ Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, lies 1,600 miles from Berlin and 6,000 miles from Washington. By contrast, it is less than 125 miles from the Russian city of Vladikavkaz. These geographic realities create enormous headaches for NATO when it comes to logistics and power projection. NATO – meaning, effectively the United States – would need to station some troops and materiel in Georgia to provide a credible tripwire and muster a lot more power to even delay a Russian advance. Then there is the problem of moral hazard. NATO's Article V guarantee could encourage Georgia to engage in what Barry Posen (2015, 33–35) calls "reckless driving." Other scholars have argued that the mere possibility of membership and warm relations with the West may have emboldened Georgia to drive recklessly in the run-up to the 2008 war (Posen 2015; Savage 2020, 75).

This scenario is not far-fetched. In 2008, when Georgian membership in NATO was being discussed in Bucharest, Russia warned: "We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders...as a direct threat to the security of our country" (Putin 2008). It issued a similar warning in 2017: "Moscow has historically treated the process of NATO's enlargement

toward our borders with mistrust and concern; we believe this threatens our security and the balance of forces in the Eurasian region. It goes without saying that Russia is taking all necessary measures to rebalance the situation and protect its own interests and its own security” (Peskov 2017). This reaction should not occasion surprise. Surely the United States would not look on with equanimity were an alliance or major power to deploy its armed forces on its border. Reassuring words that no harm is intended and that US has nothing to fear would be dismissed out of hand.

Ukraine also would be very difficult for NATO to defend. It has really long and porous land borders with Russia, and its eastern provinces are quite far from other NATO allies but adjoin Russia. It is over 1,200 km from the Polish border to places like Donetsk in Ukraine’s east. Russian forces could enter Ukraine from many points with much shorter lines of logistics and communication compared to NATO. Furthermore, Russian-annexed Crimea now forms Ukraine’s underbelly, which adds to the advantage Russian sea power has over NATO navies in the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait. Thus, adding Ukraine to NATO, let alone actually defending it (as opposed to merely creating a tripwire), would require significant investments and troop deployments.

Of course, Ukraine’s current war in eastern Ukraine with Russian-backed separatists will keep it out of the alliance for now (Ruger 2019; NATO 1995).¹⁷ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a former NATO secretary-general, highlighted this fact recently, noting that “the criteria for eligibility makes it virtually impossible for any country with a territorial dispute to become a NATO member” (Rasmussen 2019). But the U.S. should worry that even if Ukraine, the eastern separatists, and Russia reach a peace agreement, Kyiv might try to relitigate its dispute with Russia once it enters NATO.

Naturally, all political decisions come with trade-offs. There are costs to shutting the door to new entrants. In these cases, the majority of the costs are most likely to be borne by Ukraine and Georgia. While that is unfortunate, U.S. foreign policy should serve American interests rather than those of other countries. One might also argue that denying Georgia and Ukraine membership forecloses the possibility of moving the dividing line further east and could allow Russia to add these countries to its side in any future clash with NATO. But the prospective gains of admitting these two are outweighed by the accompanying risks.

Avoiding threat inflation regarding Russia

Thinking through the enlargement issue requires putting the Russia problem in perspective, which supports not only a less aggressive approach, but also less need for new allies. Russia – NATO’s only real military adversary – is a pale imitation of the former Soviet Union (and thus the biggest danger may be from threat inflation). Russia today is not even close to having the relative strength of the Soviet Union in the global balance of power. On the

economic side, it is basically a geographically large and relatively populous version of a middling European state – but with less current upside, absent major changes to global natural resource markets or significant domestic reform. Even uber-hawk Senator Lindsey Graham acknowledged that Russia’s economy was dwarfed by the West’s economic power, noting in 2014 that it only “has an economy the size of Italy” – a second-tier European country with serious economic problems (Carroll 2014).

Things have not changed in Russia’s favor since then. When Graham spoke, Russia’s nominal GDP was \$2.06 trillion compared to Italy’s \$2.15 trillion. In 2017, the most recent date of World Bank data, Russia’s nominal GDP was only \$1.58 trillion compared to Italy’s \$1.94 trillion (The World Bank 2020a). Using 2017 PPP, Russia fares better than Italy, at \$3.78 trillion compared to Italy’s \$2.48 trillion (The World Bank 2018). But GDP per capita was only \$10,749 per capita in Russia compared to \$32,110 in Italy (The World Bank 2018). Table 7.1 shows the economic weakness of Russia when compared to the three largest economies of Europe, separate and combined, and compared to the United States, separately and combined with these three countries. And this tally does not even consider the combined economic wealth of all 29 NATO countries.

The combined GDP of European NATO countries, calculated in 2010 prices, was \$18.8 trillion, and if one considers NATO as a whole, the figure jumps to \$38.1 trillion (NATO 2019b). Russia’s, by contrast, totals \$1.6 trillion.

Nor is Russia a true military competitor of the United States and its NATO allies. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS 2016–2017), Russia’s defense spending in 2017 was \$45.6 billion, 3.1% of its GDP. This amounts to less than 10% of US defense spending, which IISS estimates totaled over \$600 billion in 2017, 3.1% of GDP (IISS 2016–2017). The Stockholm Institute for Peace Research (SIPRI) calculates that Russia’s 2018 military spending amounted to \$64 billion (in 2017 prices and exchange rates) (4.2% of GDP) compared to the United States’ \$634 billion (in 2017 prices and exchange rates), 3.1% of US GDP (SIPRI 2019a;

Table 7.1

<i>Country</i>	<i>Nominal GDP US\$ (millions) (2017)¹⁸</i>	<i>GDP PPP US\$ (millions) (2017)¹⁹</i>	<i>GDP per capita US\$ (2017)²⁰</i>
Russia	1,578,417	3,783,139	10,749
Germany	3,693,204	4,345,631	44,666
United Kingdom	2,637,866	2,965,796	39,954
France	2,582,501	2,954,850	38,484
Big 3 Europe	8,913,571	10,266,277	
United States	19,485,394	19,485,394	59,928
Big 3 Europe + USA	28,398,965	29,751,671	

SIPRI 2020). These numbers are just blunt comparisons based on spending alone. The differences become starker and favor the United States even more when we include its technological edge and its effectiveness at utilizing the “modern system” of force employment on the types of battlefields that the U.S. would face if confronted directly by Russia and that resemble the Gulf War rather than the insurgencies the US has been mired in since then (Biddle 2004).

While the NATO alliance creates numerous challenges for the United States, not least the difficulty of credibly deterring and defending many small or weak countries that are security dependents, it is nonetheless true that the combined military strength of NATO relative to Russia is massive. Military expenditures for all NATO countries as a whole in 2018 (in constant 2017 US\$ in millions) were \$933 billion compared to Russia’s \$64 billion (SIPRI 2019a). And this is for just one year, following years and years of similar disparities that add to the overall military advantage for the United States and NATO. The gap is substantial even if one allows for the fact that personnel costs – pay and benefits – are far greater in NATO countries than in Russia. The one-year disparity holds up even if one excludes US and Canadian spending: NATO’s European members spend \$278 billion on defense compared to \$64 billion for Russia. Indeed, France, the United Kingdom and Germany are all individually in the neighborhood of Russian spending, with France closest at nearly \$60 billion alone. Moreover, as Michael Kofman argues, “The Russian armed forces are actually small relative to the size of the country they have to defend, perhaps exceeding no more than 900,000 in total size with a ground force doubtfully greater than ~300,000. That may not seem small, but Russia is one eighth the earth’s land mass” (Kofman 2017).

Furthermore, the wealthiest, most populous states of Europe are spending relatively low levels as a percentage of GDP and could fairly easily (in terms of economic capacity, as opposed to political will) increase their expenditures, widening the resource gap that Russia faces. The balance of power – using military expenditures as a not unreasonable proxy for military capabilities – clearly favors the US, NATO and Europe.

Russia’s difficulties in Georgia in 2008 (which to be sure have been somewhat remedied based on learning from that conflict) and in Ukraine and Syria offer recent examples of the challenges the Russian military would face against NATO in Europe. In assessing the Russia-Georgia war, Michael Kofman concludes that “Russia won, but the Russian military simply was not set up to fight a modern war, even against a smaller neighbor, much less a peer competitor.” He adds that, “the war revealed profound deficiencies in the Russian armed forces. Moscow was surprised by the poor performance of its air power, and more importantly the inability of different services to work together. It truly was the last war of a legacy force, inherited from the Soviet Union. The conflict uncovered glaring gaps in capability, problems with command and control, and poor intelligence”

(Kofman 2018). Russia has fought differently in both Ukraine and Syria. “Moscow,” Kofman continues, “has applied force sparingly, leveraging the local population, its own volunteers, and the militias of allies” in order to meet its goals (Kofman 2017). But this is a far cry from the type of conflict that it would be forced to fight to challenge NATO existentially in any of its major member states whose defeat would represent a serious threat to the United States’ stated interests in Europe (e.g., Germany, France, or even Poland). Kofman would seemingly agree, noting in reference to Ukraine that “Russia lacked the force, the money, and the military experience to attempt any large-scale operation” (Kofman 2017).

Russia also faces considerable social problems that contribute to its weakness. A European Parliamentary Research Service study summed it up well:

Economic recovery [in Russia] has been anemic, with growth likely to remain below 2% for the next few years. Forecasts suggest that Russia’s share of the global economy will continue to shrink, and that it will lag ever further behind the world’s more advanced economies. External factors such as sanctions certainly weigh on Russia’s economy, but the main barriers to growth come from inside the country and are the result of long-standing problems, many originating in the Soviet period or even further back. Despite market-economy reforms in the early 1990s, Russia remains dominated by large and inefficient state-controlled enterprises. Reforms have improved the regulatory environment and cut red tape, but these gains have not been matched by progress in tackling corruption, which remains a major scourge for business. In terms of human capital, a catastrophic shrinkage in the size of the workforce caused by low birthrates is expected to hold back economic growth. Inequality remains high, and economic recovery has not yet benefited the nearly 20 million Russians living in poverty. A low level of competitiveness correlates with a general lack of innovation, low levels of investment and reliance on natural-resource exports (Russell 2018).

Nothing in our analysis suggests that the United States should not take Russia seriously. It is a force to be reckoned with, particularly in adjoining regions (like the Baltic states) and in Syria. Russia can still create trouble for its neighbors and further abroad, including attempting to create problems through small investments that cause internal challenges in the West (such as election meddling using misinformation). However, none of this warrants the type of threat inflation that presents Russia as a huge problem for the United States or its primary European allies. It can safely and confidently deter Russia, given its relative strength. This assessment does not contradict our conclusion that NATO should not overextend itself by assuming responsibility for defending weak states on the Russian border.

Conclusion: looking ahead

As long as NATO continues to exist, greater burden sharing and burden shifting will be necessary to calm rising American concerns about “cheap-riding” Europeans (Posen 2015). But this problem will be difficult to resolve, and those who would like to see NATO continue as a keystone in the arch of the “liberal international order” should be worried. It is not just a matter of boosting European NATO’s defense spending. NATO’s European members should be pressured to devote more of its spending to military procurement changes and to do away with the pervasive duplication in armament production. Only then can they reduce their dependency on American power – so vividly illustrated by the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Balkans and Libya – and increase their capacity to take on alliance missions, especially if the US were to be tied down elsewhere. Temporary combinations of European states should be able to cooperate together for missions like Libya (not that a repeat of this is to be recommended given the disastrous results) or Kosovo. And given that they have more to fear from the Russian military than does the United States and they also have great economic capacity, European countries should do more on behalf of their own defense.

Some aver that alliance relations will revert to normal since President Trump has departed the White House in 2021. But they forget that American concerns about the relative contribution of the Europeans are long-standing – and indeed harken back to the 1960s. Moreover, these concerns are likely to get more severe, as the US faces economic constraints (the colossal national debt and soaring budget deficits) and long-neglected domestic problems create even more disaffection among Americans. Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, European countries have become economic competitors and neo-mercantilists and populists in the U.S. are more vocal – in Democratic, as well as Republican ranks. American leaders will ratchet up pressure on NATO allies to assume more of the burden of collective defense – and NATO may not survive if Europe does nothing more than tinker in response. Moreover, the rise of China will inevitably divert more American military resources to Europe. In short, Trump’s departure won’t restore the status quo ante for NATO, at least for long.

Recent friction in the alliance owing, among other things, to different outlooks on the world and the nature of threats, as well as disputes over burden-sharing raise the question of whether it would be good for the United States (and Europe itself) for Europe to develop a strong common foreign and defense policy, or even to evolve into a “super-state.”²¹ Scholars such as Glyn Morgan have for some time made the case that something like self-sufficiency in defense would be good for Europe (Morgan 2005). President Macron (2020) of France argued at the 2020 Munich Security Conference that “We need some freedom of action in Europe. We need to develop our own strategy. We don’t have the same geographic conditions (as the US), not the same ideas about social equilibrium, about social welfare.

There are ideals we have to defend. Mediterranean policy: that is a European thing, not a trans-Atlantic thing, and the same goes for Russia – we need a European policy, not just a trans-Atlantic policy” (Macron 2020).

But would such changes be desirable? Some American realists might worry that ending our primacy in Europe and allowing the development of a European superstate could give rise to the type of Eurasian hegemon that Americans have traditionally fought to prevent (Spykman 1942). They would prefer that Europe remain largely relatively weak, divided and dependent on the United States while the US would maintain its hegemonic position on the continent. But, other realists would see advantages for the United States. These include a reduced responsibility for ensuring stability and security in Europe and focusing more thoroughly on East Asia, as China continues its rise. The latter type of realist would rest assured that Eurasia’s main centers of power – Europe, Russia and East Asia – will remain divided and preoccupied with one another and therefore unable to challenge the United States. This should certainly be the case between Russia and China, unlikely allies absent a perceived threat from the United States that pushes them closer. As for non-realists, they would be less concerned about a more vigorous Europe, even a European superstate, given their assumption that shared democratic values and norms and economic interdependence will create a peaceful Western community. In that case, a European superstate would be a partner, not the foe about which traditional balance of power theorists might worry.

If a European common security and defense policy – as part of a superstate or not – would not be palatable to countries in Europe, there are other alternatives. NATO could be preserved, given the difficulties and hazards of jettisoning its current commitments. But further enlargement could be taken off the table. This could be paired (or not) with something resembling the new security architecture for eastern Europe proposed by Michael O’Hanlon (2017). Another option would be a Europe in which major powers like Germany and France work together to counter threats from the east or south. This would not necessitate a unified European military force and security competition and the danger of war would be diminished by the fact that France, the United Kingdom and Russia have nuclear weapons. Their conventional and nuclear force would also serve as a hedge were Germany to once again pose a threat to Europe’s equilibrium. Some realists might not even be worried about a Germany that joining the nuclear club to bolster its security.

NATO enlargement has not been a plus for the United States. It foreclosed, without much thought, other options for future European security arrangements that might have prevented a new dividing line on the continent and a hostile relationship between the United States and Russia. And while Russia’s wars in Georgia and Ukraine cannot be singularly chalked up to NATO expansion, Russia did fear that these two bordering states might eventually join NATO. In short, post-Cold War American presidents would

have been wiser listening to the pro-NATO, yet anti-enlargement figures who understood at each turn that it could lead to numerous unintended consequences, additional defense obligations, negligible benefits and an increased risk of crises and even war.

Notes

- 1 Neither author has a conflict of interest in writing this chapter, though one of us has previously served in a NATO mission. The chapter is reprinted with the permission of the publisher Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature. It appeared originally under the authors' names with the title "NATO Enlargement and US Grand Strategy: A Net Assessment." *International Politics*, vol. 57, pp. 371–400 (2020).
- 2 A recent example was Defense Secretary Robert Gates's warning, in his 2011 farewell address, that NATO risked "turning into a two-tiered alliance" in which a small minority provided the muscle for joint defense and the rest enjoyed the resulting security while shirking the burdens (Becker 2017). For the text of his speech, see Gates (2011).
- 3 See (Goldgeier 1999), who notes that the Committee "left no stone unturned in its efforts to build a winning coalition."
- 4 Brzezinski appeared before the Committee on October 9; Kissinger on October 30.
- 5 While defensive capabilities there have been increased since this study, our assessment tracks with the conclusion of a key Rand study of the problem of defense (Shlapak and Johnson 2016).
- 6 On the scholarly debate on this issue, compare, for example, MccGwire (1998, 23–42) and Shiffrin and Itzkowitz (2016, 7–44) with Kramer (2009, 39–61) and Sarotte (2014, 90–97).
- 7 On Russia's economic and political upheaval, see Reddaway and Glinski (2001); Rutland (1997, 30–39). The quotations related to the Russian military's parlous plight are from Felgenhauer (1997).
- 8 Sandy Berger noted this explicitly in his oral history interview with the Miller Center (2005).
- 9 For a variation on the same theme, see Sakwa (2016). For a spirited rejection of this thesis, see the joint comments of McFaul et al. (2014), (former US ambassador to Russia), and Chrystia Freeland (member of the Canadian parliament and later foreign minister in a 2014 debate on the Ukraine crisis).
- 10 Note that, when Gorbachev floated the idea, that "You say that NATO is not directed against us, that it is simply as security structure adapting to new realities. Therefore we propose to join NATO," it went nowhere. President George H.W. Bush's Secretary of State, James Baker, reportedly dismissed it as "a dream." Russian membership in NATO was broached again by President Boris Yeltsin in a December 1991 letter to President George H.W. Bush in 1993. Vladimir Putin also raised the issue with President Clinton during the latter's visit to Moscow in 2000 (Gorbachev 1989; Yeltsin 1991b; Putin 2017; Putin 2000; Roache 2019).
- 11 In fairness to the three authors, they noted that mishandling NATO expansion could lead to "the unraveling of the Alliance" but also to "a new Cold War with Russia."
- 12 For a recent example, see Brands (2019); for a response, see Larison (2019).
- 13 For an early critical assessment of NATO's post-Cold War essentiality and the argument that its European members do not lack the means to defend themselves, see Menon (2007, ch. 3).

- 14 For a critical response, see Waterman, et al. (2001/02, 221–235).
- 15 This section on Georgia draws on work that first appeared in Ruger (2017).
- 16 This section on Georgia draws on work that first appeared in Ruger (2017).
- 17 This paragraph on Ukraine draws on work that was written contemporaneously with this paper but first appeared in Ruger (2019).
- 21 This section draws on work that was written contemporaneously with this paper but first appeared in Ruger (2019).
- 18 The World Bank (2019b) *GDP (current US\$), 1960–2019*.
- 19 The World Bank (2019a). *GDP, PPP (current international \$) – Russian Federation, Germany, France, United Kingdom, United States*.
- 20 The World Bank (2019a). *GDP, PPP (current international \$) – Russian Federation, Germany, France, United Kingdom, United States*.

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8 The politics of sanctions in U.S.-Russia relations¹

Charles E. Ziegler

Economic coercion has become the tool of choice in America's relations with Russia. Over the past decade, the United States has utilized a broad range of targeted economic sanctions against Russia, starting with the Magnitsky Act of 2012. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Russian covert support for separatists in eastern Ukraine, the U.S. and European Union significantly expanded sanctions against Russian individuals and companies. These measures have impacted the Russian economy and contributed to a significant deterioration in what was already a troubled relationship, yet there is a general consensus that sanctions have had little, if any, impact in reversing Russia's actions in Ukraine and Syria, stemming human rights abuses, or curtailing Russian interference in U.S. elections.

This chapter assesses the politics of sanctions in U.S.-Russia relations, starting with a theoretical discussion of the role of sanctions in foreign policy. The major sanctions regimes imposed by the United States on Russia over the past decade are outlined, followed by a discussion of U.S. coordination with allies on sanctions against Russia. Subsequent sections consider Russia's domestic policy responses to sanctions and Kremlin strategies to undermine coordinated action between the U.S. and its European allies; this involves orienting trade and investment eastward, in the form of Russia's pivot toward the Pacific. The conclusion evaluates the long-term implications of resistance to sanctions regimes for U.S.-Russia relations and U.S. global economic hegemony.

Sanctions as a foreign policy tool

Economic statecraft has long been an instrument of foreign policy among the major powers and consists of both incentives and penalties. Economic coercion can take various forms – blockades, protectionism, boycotts, tariffs, broad-based sanctions and targeted or “smart” sanctions. In this chapter, I focus on economic sanctions, defined as “a partial or complete disruption of existing economic arrangements in the trade, financial and monetary arenas by a state (or group of states) in order to force a target state to change its political behavior” (Blanchard and Ripsman 2013,

Introduction). As we shall see, U.S. and allied economic measures against Russia are relatively recent and have been limited to “smart” sanctions, as defined below.

There is a huge literature on economic statecraft, much of it debating whether or not sanctions are effective, and what it means to be “effective” (see Baldwin 1985; Pape 1997; Hufbauer et al. 2007; Drezner 1999; Baldwin 1999/2000). As a tool of foreign policy, sanctions occupy the middle range between the “hard” option of military force and the softer approach of diplomacy, though sanctions are often applied in tandem with diplomatic negotiations and implied military coercion. Analysts agree that states with the most powerful economies are more likely to resort to economic coercion to realize foreign policy goals.

The literature also tends to argue that authoritarian systems are more resistant to sanctions, or at least face different domestic constraints, than democracies. Authoritarian regimes are not directly accountable to voters, but autocratic leaders may need to keep various elite factions loyal in order to maintain their positions. The type of authoritarian regime also matters – personalist dictatorships tend to be more vulnerable to sanctions than are single-party systems or military dictatorships. Sanctions reduce patronage rents derived from external sources, and personalist dictators often are heavily reliant on patronage to stay in power. Single-party regimes and military dictatorships also are reliant on patronage but are better able to find alternative revenues. Sanctioning single-party regimes that are also petrostates, like Russia, may prove ineffective or even counterproductive (Escribà-Folch and Wright 2010). Hydrocarbon revenues invariably provide regimes with the greatest potential for capturing rents needed to reward loyal supporters.

In the post-Cold War era the United States, by far the world’s largest economic power, has resorted to economic sanctions more frequently than any other state, though the European Union has also imposed sanctions, often in collaboration with the U.S. The most extensive sanctions regime imposed after the Cold War was that on Iraq levied by the United Nations Security Council and the United States in the 1990s. But these broad-based sanctions failed to restrain Saddam Hussein; the costs were borne disproportionately by the Iraqi population – particularly children – while Hussein and the country’s political elites were relatively unaffected. This humanitarian disaster led to a shift by both the United States and the UN toward “smart sanctions” that specifically target key constituents (political and economic elites, specific firms) and seek to avoid punishing the general population (Drezner 2011). The tools utilized tend to be financial measures, technology transfer restrictions, arms embargoes, and travel bans on elites, all of which have been employed by the United States against Russia.²

Sanctions, as David Baldwin reminds us, are just one of a number of policy choices that decision makers can select to achieve their foreign policy goals – others include military force, diplomacy and propaganda. Each of

the various alternatives has costs and benefits, and while sanctions may not always prove effective at achieving the sender state's main goals, they are usually far less costly than military action (Baldwin 1999/2000). Russia's military power is equal to that of the United States in nuclear weapons, and while its conventional forces cannot match U.S. capabilities, they are more than sufficient to deter American officials from utilizing force to effect a withdrawal from Crimea or to punish Moscow for interfering in U.S. elections. Many analysts would agree that American diplomacy and propaganda are inferior to Russia's; the State Department was starved of resources and morale tanked during the Trump administration, while the U.S. has struggled to compete with Moscow's disinformation campaign.³ Only in the realm of economic coercion does the United States have the upper hand.

States (senders) may impose economic sanctions on other states (receivers) to effect a change in behavior, as punishment, or to satisfy demands from domestic constituencies. Sanctioning states generally explain their goals in terms of changing state behavior, though symbolic or political reasons may be equally important. The sanctions campaign against South Africa in the 1980s, for example, was directed toward effecting change in the apartheid regime, but it also was a reaction to group pressures in Western democracies and embodied a strong normative component (Klotz 1995).

Targeted sanctions are designed to impact certain powerful interest groups within the target state (business owners or the military, for example), which then are expected to mobilize pressure against the regime. Many of the sanctions the U.S. has imposed on Russia are aimed at key supporters of President Putin, Russia's major financial institutions, weapons exporting firms and energy companies, and the bureaucracies supporting these businesses. Sanctions create winners and losers inside the sender country, just as they do in the target country: "a decision to sanction cannot but reflect the domestic alignment of interests and power in the sender country" (Chan and Drury 2000, 6).

The assumption is that a state, behaving rationally, will assess the costs of continuing the sanctioned behavior against the potential benefits of compliance. This approach, however, slights the role that pride or honor play in resisting sanctions, particularly among great powers like Russia (Tsygankov 2012). Costs to the regime may be purely economic (lost sources of foreign investment, denial of critical technologies, financial restrictions), or more political (loss of support from key domestic interest groups, or the humiliation of being excluded from major international forums like the G-7). The vulnerability of a state to sanctions depends on several factors: the comprehensiveness of the sanctions regime (whether sanctions are limited and specific, or comprehensive and far-reaching); the extent to which the target state is integrated into the global economy and dependent on foreign trade and investment; the willingness of the target's main trading partners to cooperate with or defect from the lead sanctioning state; and the economic health of the target state.

Daniel Drezner argues persuasively that senders tend to be more eager to coerce adversaries than allies. Adversaries that have long-run expectations of future conflicts with the sender are more likely to resist making concessions that might weaken their reputation or bargaining position in the future. Allies, by contrast, have lower expectations of future conflict with senders and so are more willing to grant concessions to sanctioning states. Reputation is important for both senders and target states – targets will worry about the long-run implications of giving in to sender demands, because concessions in the present may undermine a target state’s bargaining leverage in the future, and bolster a sender’s credibility as a tough negotiator (Drezner 1999, 4–5). Over the past decade the United States, expecting future conflicts with Russia, has frequently resorted to sanctions against a country that has become one of its chief adversaries. Russia, hostile toward the United States and preoccupied with its reputation as a great power, resolutely resists making any significant concessions and the result is a deadlock.

Sanctions in U.S. Russia policy

Economic sanctions have become Washington’s foreign policy instrument of choice in dealing with Russia, but the pattern for sanctions against Russia derives from measures imposed in the 1990s and 2000s, in particular those against Iran. Iran has been treated as a rogue actor since the 1979–1980 hostage crisis; major sanctions were imposed in 1996 with the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act to deter Teheran from developing nuclear weapons and punishing it for supporting terrorism. Targeted measures against Iran established a pattern of long-term sanctions on financial, transportation and insurance sectors, individuals linked to the regime’s nuclear and missile programs, and oil and gas firms, together with the use of secondary sanctions to punish firms that would do business with specified Iranian entities (see Esfandiari and Fitzpatrick 2011; Lohmann 2016).

In dealing with Russia recent U.S. administrations have combined the deterrent effect of military modernization and force deployments with the use of economic sanctions to punish Moscow for a range of aggressive actions – the invasion of Ukraine, cyberattacks, interference in the 2016 elections, human rights abuses, use of chemical agents to conduct assassinations, and support for Syria (U.S. Sanctions on Russia 2019). Diplomatic initiatives to address the Ukraine crisis, whether bilaterally through the Volker-Surkov negotiations or multilaterally through the Minsk Process, have proved ineffective. The European Deterrence Initiative, NATO’s military response to the Ukraine crisis, may have deterred further territorial advances by Russia but has not resulted in Russia’s withdrawal from Crimea or the Donbas. Sanctions are the middle ground of American policy – generating more pain than diplomatic negotiations, yet less risk than military action.

Since the first Gulf War in 1991, the United States has avoided broad embargoes in favor of “smart” or targeted sanctions that supposedly avoid harming the general population. The United Nations had imposed comprehensive sanctions against Iraq to restrain Saddam Hussein’s WMD programs, but the regime’s lack of compliance, widespread malnutrition and the spread of disease among the Iraqi people, and a growing body of literature critical of sanctions’ effectiveness led to changes in the tactics of economic coercion. By the late 1990s the UN and the U.S. had abandoned comprehensive sanctions in favor of targeted measures – arms embargoes, asset freezes, travel bans – designed to be more effective and more humanitarian, impacting the leadership or key elites rather than a vulnerable public (Gordon 2011; Drezner 1999). Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States government employed smart sanctions to target terrorist networks and state sponsors of terror – primarily Iran and North Korea – to isolate rogue actors from the U.S.-dominated financial system (Zarate 2009). Targeted financial weapons developed after 9/11 would later be used against Russia.

During the Cold War, the United States had imposed sanctions on the Soviet Union and its East European allies as early as 1948. The most prominent economic instruments used against the USSR were Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (Cocom) restrictions on the export of dual-use technologies to the Soviet Union, the Jackson-Vanik amendment to the 1974 Trade Act conditioning most-favored nation status on freer Jewish emigration, Reagan administration sanctions over the Siberian natural gas pipeline, and Jimmy Carter’s grain embargo following the invasion of Afghanistan (see Hunter 1991; Jentleson 1986). However, the bulk of economic sanctions imposed by the United States during the Cold War were not directed toward the Soviet Union. The U.S. routinely sanctioned hostile states, including the People’s Republic of China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Cuba, but also imposed penalties on a wide range of friendly states.⁴

Following the Cold War, the Clinton administration emphasized the benefits of globalization; while the United States remained the lead sender country, unilateral sanctioning declined dramatically as Washington pursued multilateral sanctions (Hufbauer et al. 2007, 125). This approach to economic statecraft was subsumed under a foreign policy of enlargement – that is, increasing the community of market-oriented democracies. During this period the United States supported post-communist Russia’s integration into the global economic community; sanctions were reserved for states seeking weapons of mass destruction and egregious human rights abusers – Myanmar, Sudan, Iran, Libya, Cuba and Iraq. The George W. Bush administration initially preferred unilateral sanctions to counter-terrorism and the possibility of terrorist and rogue states acquiring nuclear capabilities and was less interested in multilateral approaches that involved the United Nations. The neoconservatives in his administration were also more inclined

to use military force than either diplomacy or economic sanctions in foreign policy (see Peleg 2018). Toward the end of Bush's second term, as conflicts dragged on in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States adopted a more cooperative stance in working with Russia and the Europeans to put pressure on rogue states North Korea and Iran (Gottemoeller 2007).

The final sanction imposed on the USSR had occurred in 1991, when President George H.W. Bush suspended economic aid following the announcement of the August coup against Mikhail Gorbachev (Rosenthal 1991). For the remainder of the decade the U.S. and a newly independent Russia worked together on economic issues. The absence of sanctions against the Russian Federation in the first two decades reinforces Daniel Drezner's argument that expectations of future conflict are a key factor in leading policy makers to adopt or maintain sanctions (Drezner 1999). Through the 1990s President Bill Clinton had good personal relations with Boris Yeltsin, at least until the bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, and the administration's Russia policy was predicated on integrating Russia into the expanding community of democratic market systems. No one in the U.S. government anticipated a return to hostile relations with Russia – economic incentives were employed in relations with Moscow rather than economic penalties.⁵

The first sanctions against Russia in the post-Cold War period were the result of the Sergei Magnitsky Act of 2012, imposed by Congress on an Obama administration reluctant to jeopardize the reset policy. Bill Browder, founder and CEO of Hermitage Capital Management, undertook a one-man lobbying campaign seeking justice for his Russian lawyer, Sergei Magnitsky, who had died from torture in prison after exposing Russian state corruption (Browder 2015). The Obama administration at that time was working to secure Russia's entry to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and Congress made revocation of the Jackson-Vanik amendment – a relic of the Cold War that impeded Russian WTO membership – contingent on adoption of the Magnitsky Act sanctions. The Kremlin and the Duma responded by enacting the Dima Yakovlev Law banning child adoptions by U.S. citizens (Gilligan 2016).

The next round of sanctions was imposed following Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea; these measures targeted individuals, mostly high-level officials; additional sanctions were imposed on Russian companies after the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 in July 2014. The Obama administration was careful to impose limited sanctions gradually and, in an effort to reassure European allies, declined to interfere with Russian energy exports to Europe (Lew and Nephew 2018, 143–144). The Russian government responded in August-September 2014 with a food embargo against the United States and European Union. As the EU and U.S. renewed and extended sanctions against Russia through 2020, Russia reciprocated by extending the food embargo through the same period, justifying it as a national security measure (USDA 2019).

From 2012 to 2020 the United States government imposed some 70 sets of sanctions on Russian financial, defense, energy and government sectors, either by legislation or, more commonly, by executive order.⁶ President Trump personally was reluctant to criticize Russia or President Putin, but his administration imposed a large number of executive orders related to Russia's violations of North Korean sanctions, annexation of Crimea, support for the Assad regime in Syria, cyber intrusions, and interference in U.S. election (CSIS Russia Sanctions Tracker 2018). However, Trump was reluctant to endorse the 2017 Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), enacted by Congress as punishment for interfering in the 2016 elections, claiming it encroached on executive branch authority to conduct negotiations ("Statement" 2017).

To summarize, U.S. sanctions against Russia have the following goals: punishing Russia for human rights violations, incentivizing Russia to withdraw from Crimea and end its support for separatists in the Donbas, deterring Russia from further aggression against Ukraine and the Baltic states, punishing Russia for interfering in the 2016 elections and convincing Moscow to end its meddling in domestic U.S. politics. While some sanctions have been imposed by executive order, members of Congress critical of Russia often pressure the administration to adopt sanctions. For sanctions to be effective, however, Washington needs to coordinate with its allies.

Sanctions and America's allies

Sanctions are most effective when the sender can convince other states not to defect and violate the sanctions regime against the target. Since the European Union is Russia's largest trading partner, and Russia has important trade relationships with Japan and South Korea, close coordination between Washington and its allies is necessary if sanctions are to have maximum impact.

The European Union and the United States have coordinated sanctions against Russia since 2014, with the EU imposing restrictions on arms sales, dual-use technology, certain financial transactions, and services related to oil exploration (Tolksdorf 2017). However, dependence on Russian oil and natural gas constrains the EU's willingness to apply extensive sanctions; according to the European Commission, in 2018 fully 30% of EU oil imports and 40% of its natural gas imports came from Russia (EU energy statistics, n.d.). The EU contemplated sanctions on Russia following the August 2008 war with Georgia, but the U.S. was not willing to enact sanctions at that time and key members of the EU, particularly France and Germany, were opposed (Shagina 2017, 5). The European Union is committed to multi-lateral diplomacy and is frequently reluctant to take action outside the auspices of the UN Security Council, while the United States tends to act unilaterally, as it did under the George W. Bush and Donald Trump administrations. The EU is willing to use secondary sanctions, but only within

its territorial jurisdiction, while the U.S. is increasingly willing to penalize foreign firms and put them on its sanctions list (Timofeev 2019).

Secondary sanctions have been a source of tension between the U.S. and Europe, as with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA – the Iran nuclear agreement) and the Nord Stream II pipeline, providing Moscow with opportunities to drive a wedge between the two. While the U.S. and EU cooperated on sanctions against Russia and Iran during the Obama administration, the Trump administration's more confrontational approach toward Europe, and its unilateralism, generated resentment over secondary sanctions provisions among Europeans who are dependent on Russian energy and eager to resume business with energy-rich Iran (Early and Preble 2017).

Russia's wedge strategy is evident in the politics of the Nord Stream II pipeline. Secondary sanctions on European companies supplying pipeline equipment for Nord Stream II (and TurkStream) were included in the National Defense Authorization Act signed by Trump in December 2019. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov condemned the sanctions; Chancellor Angela Merkel's office likewise criticized the sanctions as interference in Germany's internal affairs. The EU also issued a statement critical of U.S. sanctions, though some EU members – most notably Poland and Lithuania – are suspicious that Nord Stream II could pose a threat to Europe's energy security (RFE/RL 2019).

Following the poisoning of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny with Novichok – a Soviet-era nerve agent – in August 2020, some EU leaders contemplated new sanctions, including suspending completion of the pipeline. Members of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee pressed the administration to investigate Navalny's poisoning and proposed additional sanctions; Trump, however, dismissed evidence of Navalny's poisoning provided by German scientists and refused to condemn the Russian government or Putin for the attack (Reuters 2020).

The European Union has also been slow to pass Magnitsky-style legislation adopting sanctions for human rights violations. In his efforts to secure justice for Sergey Magnitsky, Bill Browder campaigned in Europe for adoption of legislation similar to America's Magnitsky Act; in response, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Canada eventually passed Magnitsky laws. By late 2019 the European Union was under pressure from the Netherlands to adopt a sanctions regime comparable to the U.S. Global Magnitsky act that would target individuals responsible for gross violations of human rights. However, unlike the United States European Union officials were reluctant to single out Russia for sanctioning (Barigazzi 2019).

Britain contemplated Magnitsky legislation for several years, but postponed action until Brexit was completed. Following Britain's exit from the EU in January 2020, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab announced plans to introduce sanctions legislation to punish egregious violations of human rights worldwide. Raab promised that his country would coordinate closely

with the U.S., EU and Canada in imposing targeted sanctions on Russia, Saudi Arabia, Myanmar and North Korea (Ottaway 2020).

Canada had imposed sanctions on Russia shortly after the Crimean annexation, and Ottawa updated the sanctions periodically. By early 2019 Canada had imposed 435 sanctions on Russian entities and individuals, in the form of asset freezes and prohibitions on dealing with Russian companies; many of these measures were taken in coordination with the United States and other allies. That same year Canada, the EU and the United States acting together imposed new sanctions on Russia over its attack on three Ukrainian ships in the Kerch Strait (Government of Canada 2019).

Japan reluctantly went along with the G7 in imposing sanctions on Russia after the Crimean annexation, although Tokyo's sanctions have been the weakest among that group. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has too much invested in his policy of rapprochement with Russia to follow Washington's lead unreservedly. Abe launched an eight-point economic cooperation plan in 2016 with the goal of leveraging Japanese investments to secure a deal on the Kuril islands. Better Russian-Japanese relations could help address the problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, and Japan has a keen interest in expanding energy cooperation with Russia. Japan also needs Russia to balance a rising China; Russia's pivot eastward following the Ukraine crisis threatened to undercut Japan's strategic utility as a counterweight to Beijing.

Japanese companies, however, have been reluctant to risk fines and lose business in the United States by violating sanctions against Russia. The U.S. market is critical to Japanese business, and Washington's use of extra-territorial, or secondary sanctions, forces firms to choose between alienating Russia, with a much smaller economy, or losing critical American markets. The sanctions Tokyo eventually imposed on Russia were largely symbolic, and in turn Moscow did not apply the agricultural ban to Japan (Shagina 2018). Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, however, criticized Japan for not showing more independence from the United States (Fackler 2014).

In 2014, the United States sent a senior State Department official on a tour of Asia to rally support for sanctions against Russia after the downing of the Malaysian MH17 airliner, but the only two countries that agreed to U.S. proposals were Japan and Australia, and both did so reluctantly. For most of Asia sanctions against Russia were simply not in their national interest. China has vocally and categorically rejected Western sanctions against its strategic partner, though the importance of European and American markets has made Chinese businesses reluctant to challenge the sanctions regime (Gabuev 2016). Singapore generally supports sanctions only if approved by the UN Security Council, and its banks would likely benefit from Western restrictions on London's financial sector. As Russia's largest arms purchaser, India had announced back in March 2014 that it would not sanction Russia over Crimea's annexation. South Korea prioritizes trade, investment, and energy deals and values Moscow's assistance in

dealing with North Korea. Japan and Australia, each pursuing their own engagement policies with Russia, were careful not to jeopardize their developing relationships (Keck 2014; Wong and Taylor 2014).

To summarize, Europe – particularly Eastern Europeans suspicious of Moscow – and Canada have been most supportive of U.S. efforts to sanction Russia. Western Europeans and European business interests, by contrast, tend to resist Washington's frequent application of secondary sanctions. Egregious actions, such as Alexei Navalny's poisoning, can generate demands for increased sanctions from some European officials, but relations generally return to business as usual. America's Asian-Pacific partners have been even more reluctant to cooperate than Europeans, and China, itself under trade pressure from Washington, openly rejects efforts to use economic coercion against Russia.

Russia's response to U.S. sanctions

Russian leaders condemn sanctions as unwarranted interference in Russia's internal affairs and an attempt to restrain Russia's great power ambitions. Putin referenced the large number of sanctions imposed under the Trump administration as evidence that relations were steadily deteriorating (Vladimir Putin's Interview 2019). The Kremlin is strongly opposed to sanctions because the Russian economy and centralized governing structures make countering sanctions difficult. Russia is far more integrated into the global economy than was the USSR, and so is more vulnerable. But Russia has alternatives to Western finance and hydrocarbon markets. Russian leaders regard sanctions outside the UN Security Council as contrary to international law and reject the linkage between Russian behavior and sanctions. Some Russian analysts regard U.S. sanctions as a weapon targeted at accelerating the country's political decline or effecting regime change (Khudoley 2019, 100–101).

Sanctions have imposed significant costs on the Russian economy. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russian arms exports declined by 17% in 2014–2018 over the previous five-year period (Wezeman et al. 2019). Sanctions contributed to devaluation of the ruble, inflation, capital outflow and tighter credit deriving from restrictions on foreign lending. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has calculated that from 2014 to 2018 sanctions slowed economic growth by 0.2 percentage points annually; the decline in oil prices, by comparison, reduced economic growth by an estimated 0.6% (IMF 2019, 5). Russia's response to Western sanctions has included imposing the food embargo and adopting import substitution policies, placing travel bans on certain Western officials, and more broadly accelerating the pivot toward Asia.⁷ In September 2014 the Duma passed (by a vote of 233–202) a bill compensating Russians who had property abroad confiscated by foreign governments, benefiting among others Putin's close friend Arkady Rotenberg, who had a

\$40 million estate seized by Italian authorities. The same law also permits judges to confiscate property of foreign states (RFE/RL 2014).

Russia's diplomatic philosophy emphasizes reciprocity in international relations, so the Kremlin routinely responds to U.S. sanctions with comparable measures (Ziegler 2018a). One day after the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) released a list of Russian officials and oligarchs prohibited from entering the United States under the Magnitsky Act, Russia countered with a similar list of American citizens banned from entering Russia ("U.S. Sanctions on Russia" 2019, 32–33). Russia's embargo on most food and agricultural products imported from countries implementing sanctions, including the U.S., EU, Canada, Australia and Norway, was justified as an economic measure to guarantee the security of the Russian Federation and, like Dima's law, reflected the practice of reciprocity in Russian foreign policy. Russia's response indicates these targeted sanctions, which coincided with a decline in oil prices, had a significant impact on Russia's economy, and on its political and business elites.

The 2017 CAATSA forced President Trump to accept broad-ranging secondary sanctions on Russian business partners in third states that conducted "significant transactions" with Russian defense and energy sectors. CAATSA, designed to punish Moscow for its cyberattacks against the United States, passed both houses of Congress with overwhelming majorities. Rather than vetoing the measure, Trump signed the bill but issued two separate signing statements expressing his conviction that the legislation was seriously flawed and would likely drive Russia, China and North Korea closer together ("Statement" 2017).

The day after Congress passed CAATSA Russia ordered the U.S. embassy to reduce its diplomatic staff in Russia by 755 staff members (MacFarquhar 2017). In an interview with Rossiya 1 television Putin condemned the sanctions as an "unprovoked step" against Russia and noted American attempts to influence other countries (through secondary sanctions) that were otherwise interested in preserving good relations with Russia (VestiRu 2017). Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev condemned the legislation as a victory for the American establishment over Trump, charging that Congress had forced the President to surrender executive authority (Eckel 2017). Less than a year into the new administration, Moscow was apparently seeking to deflect blame from President Trump, who was perceived as friendly toward Russia, and foster divisions between the president and a more antagonistic Congress.

During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump had questioned Obama administration policies supporting Ukraine and suggested that sanctions imposed on Russia after 2014 might be lifted. Moreover, Trump explicitly rejected the "dangerous idea that we could make Western democracies out of countries that had no experience or interests in becoming a western democracy" (Trump 2016). Trump said virtually nothing negative or threatening about President Putin or Russia; indeed, he frequently praised the Russian

president, denied Russian interference in the elections, and repeatedly expressed his wish that the two nations could be friends (Sanger 2018). In contrast, during the 2016 campaign Democrats sought to link Trump with Putin, to the point that Russian analysts came to see the Democratic party as anti-Russian (Bezrukov and Sushentsov 2018, 118–119).

Targeted sanctions are designed to impact Russian business and political leaders and certain Russian firms, without unduly impact the general population. However, the government has attempted to shift blame for Russia's poor economic performance onto U.S. and EU-imposed sanctions. The Kremlin has also appealed to Russian nationalism and patriotism, using television and major periodicals which articulate the official position. Anastasia Kazun finds support for the “rally round the flag” phenomenon in her analysis of the Russian media. Television other state-controlled outlets have framed the issue of Western sanctions as having only a minor impact on the economy. Putin is portrayed as a strong leader who can stand up to the West, while the annexation of Crimea and the food embargo are depicted in the Russian media as necessary measures to counter Western aggression (Kazun 2016).

Studies by Timothy Frye, Mikhail Alexeev and Henry Hale challenge Kazun's findings. Drawing on two sets of opinion surveys conducted by the Levada Center, Frye found that Western sanctions have not created a “rally round the flag” effect; that is, increased support for an embattled Russian government. Frye also found only mixed support for the theory that economic pressure would lead the public to withdraw support from the target regime – Putin's supporters were more likely to blame the United States and EU for their country's economic problems, while Putin critics were only marginally more likely to blame the Russian government. In general, respondents who were not primed (by being reminded of sanctions) blamed the Russian government for poor economic performance, although Crimea's annexation generated widespread support for the regime (Frye 2019).

Using pooled survey data, Mikhail Alexseev and Henry Hale (2020) come to the same conclusion as Frye, that there is no evidence for the “sanctions backfire” argument that sanctions increase support among the general population for the target regime. They did find support for a narrower version of the theory – that smart sanctions do not cause dissension among elite segments of society but instead encourage them to rally around the regime. They also found that sanctions-triggering events – in this case, Russia's Crimean annexation – can strengthen support for the regime sufficient to overcome the generally negative effects of worsening economic situation. Their research calls into question the effectiveness of sanctions eroding support for a popular leader among elite factions.

Theoretically, targeted sanctions are intended to inflict costs on key elites and businesses within Russia, which in turn are expected to pressure Putin to make concessions. Entities sanctioned after the Crimean annexation include Gazprom, Rosoboronekспорт, Lukoil, Bank Rossiya and other oil and gas

firms; individuals targeted include Putin supporters Valentina Matviyenko, Arkady Rotenberg, Leonid Slutsky, Igor Sechin, Vladislav Surkov, Vladimir Yakunin and Dmitri Rogozin, among others. U.S. sanctions related to the 2016 election interference – AATSA and executive orders – singled out Russia’s Federal Security Service, the Main Intelligence Directorate, the Internet Research Agency, and companies investing in the Crimean peninsula for sanctioning (CSIS Russian Sanctions Tracker 2018).

One key resource that the regime has utilized to minimize the impact of economic sanctions on the Russian elite is patronage. In late 2018, for example, the Russian government announced plans for a massive infrastructure project in the Arctic. Private investment is expected to contribute over half of the needed funds (about \$150 billion), with companies receiving substantial tax benefits for participating (Staalsen 2019). In addition to private funds, the government plans to invest \$100 billion in the project to reward loyal oligarchs and compensate them for losses stemming from Western sanctions. One likely beneficiary is Gennady Timchenko, who is on the U.S. sanctions list and whose Novatek gas company will utilize the Northern Latitude Way, a rail line in the Yamal region that revives a defunct Stalin-era project. Putin has made Arctic development a central goal of his third term as president, and the railway is critical in developing the region’s natural gas resources. Supporting the Kremlin line is good business practice for Russia’s oligarchs. As one industry analyst observed, most of the country’s executives prefer the risk of Western sanctions to that of being driven into bankruptcy by the Russian government (Kurmanaev 2018).

Russia’s options in the global economy

With an economy heavily dependent on commodity and arms exports, Russia is in a vulnerable global economic position that encourages the United States to utilize sanctions as a major policy tool. As a raw materials exporter, Russia can find markets for its products outside Europe and the United States, but the advanced technologies needed for deep water and Arctic oil and gas exploration are concentrated in a just a few Western companies. China can provide much-needed financing and investment, although China’s economic ties with Russia are driven more by profits than politics (Ziegler 2018b).

According to Russian economist Anastasia Likhacheva, the regime’s strategy for coping with sanctions consisted first of enacting import substitution policies (during 2014–2015), followed by localization; that is, “attracting foreign technologies and industrial solutions for the production of goods in Russia” supported and financed by the federal budget (Likhacheva 2019, 122). Large and well-connected firms in the military-industrial sector received the bulk of state assistance; small and medium enterprises benefited the least.

Diversifying foreign economic relations was another Kremlin strategy to counter sanctions, although this process had started prior to the Ukraine

crisis with the pivot to Asia. Trade reorientation, however, accelerated after 2014: the share of Russian trade with the EU decline from 53.2% in 2013 to 46.4% in 2018, while the share accounted for by Asia-14 countries rose from 23.7 to 30.8% over the same period (Likhacheva 2019, 123). Investments from the U.S. and EU also declined as a result of sanctions and, while the Kremlin can secure investment funds from China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS New Development Bank, few projects have been funded by either institution to date. Compounding the problem, Russian businesses have not proved to be very flexible in adapting to the sanctions challenge (Likhacheva 2019).

One sector that benefited from Russia's import substitution program is agriculture. The food embargo adopted in 2014 targeted a wide variety of European and American products – pork, poultry, fish, fruits and vegetables, cheese – and provided a welcome boost to the underperforming Russian agricultural sector. The share of imports in food products declined dramatically, and self-sufficiency in agriculture became a point of pride for Russian nationalism. In 2018–2020, the government allocated approximately \$4 billion for agricultural support, including loans, block grants to regions, support for capital investments, and transportation subsidies. Agricultural products became the second largest export commodity after hydrocarbons, surpassing international arms sales; leading export markets for food included China, Turkey and Egypt (Twigg 2019).

Sanctions imposed after 2014 included restrictions on access to the U.S. financial system, and Washington contemplated cutting Russia off from the SWIFT bank card payment system.⁸ The U.S. had used this option against Iran to great effect. Banning Russia from the SWIFT system would have a negative impact on trade, investment and millions of routine financial transactions. Although this option was subsequently abandoned, Russia reacted proactively by establishing its own network, the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS), in late 2017, and held talks with China, India, Iran and Turkey about the possibility of joining with Russia's financial messaging network (Reuters 2019). Russia's payments system, however, is likely to be limited to domestic transactions and a few bilateral transactions with close partners – Eurasian Economic Union members, for example. Building on the Russian initiative, the BRICS countries announced plans in 2019 to create a BRICS Pay cloud platform that would use national currencies and avoid dependence on SWIFT (Ostroukh 2019).

Another Russian response to sanctions has been to solicit support in the non-Western world, including China, other members of the BRICS, and ASEAN. This approach reflects Kremlin assertions that the Western-dominated global order is in decline and will eventually be supplanted by non-Western powers (Petrovsky 2014). U.S. sanctions on countries other than Russia (Iran, North Korea, China) give Moscow leverage by aligning with these nations against the United States. For example, at a November 2018 meeting between Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev and Chinese

Premier Li Keqiang, the two leaders agreed that American sanctions against Russia, and protectionist measures against China, were driving the two countries closer together (“Russia, China Lash Out 2018”). Unlike the United States and the EU, Moscow and Beijing consider the United Nations the only legitimate institution for imposing sanctions and reject unilateral U.S. measures. Economic sanctions, then, heighten distrust and suspicion between the U.S. and Russia, and the U.S. and China, and contribute to a strengthened Sino-Russian partnership.

Acting from the principle that only sanctions approved by the UN Security Council are legitimate, Russia has positioned itself as a defender of states that are “unjustly” sanctioned by the U.S. and its allies. Russia has called for easing sanctions on Syria, Iran, North Korea and Venezuela in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic. In February 2020, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Venezuela to demonstrate support for President Nicholas Maduro, and denounced U.S. sanctions as illegal and damaging. As part of its campaign against Maduro’s government the U.S. had imposed sanctions on Rosneft Trading for its role in exporting Venezuelan oil (Jakes 2020).

Lavrov also visited India in January 2020 to discuss defense and energy cooperation and to work out an agreement protecting investments against U.S. sanctions. India has a long history of defense acquisitions from the Soviet Union and Russia, and the country is currently Russia’s largest arms customer. CAATSA had imposed sanctions on Rosoboroneksport and threatened to punish any country having “significant transactions” (over \$15 million) with the Russian defense industry. India had signed a \$5 billion agreement with Russia in 2018 to purchase S-400 air defense systems, with an additional \$5 billion in purchases of helicopters, warships and other weapons. In response, India and Russia arranged to use national currencies rather than dollars in the exchange, a strategy that fits with Russia’s policy of gradual de-dollarization of the global economy (Gady 2019; Bipindra and Pismennaya 2019).⁹

Russia faces a range of economic problems, from external factors such as the global economic recession, declining or stagnant oil prices, low levels of foreign investment, and international tensions. Internal factors impacting growth include demographic problems, low levels of diversification, currency fluctuations and government policies. These problems are both economic and political, and sanctions, while painful, are less important than deeper structural issues. The crisis in Russia’s growth model was apparent by 2008; sanctions make this crisis more acute, but are of secondary importance compared to global factors (Mau 2016, 356–357).

Still, Moscow is quick to blame U.S. economic coercion as baseless, aimed more at containing Russia’s aspirations to great power status than as a response to Russia’s bad behavior. Ivan Timofeev, Director of the Russian International Affairs Council, claims that the United States and Russia have very different approaches to sanctions. The American approach is long-term and strategic; once sanctions are in place they are very slow to change (as

with the Jackson-Vanik amendment). In his view Washington's position is motivated by Russophobia and ideology, a crusading spirit determined to transform other countries' domestic political structures. Russia's approach, by contrast, has been improvisational and pragmatic: "Moscow emphasizes that its sanctions are only aimed at compelling the United States to adjust its foreign rather than domestic policy." He concludes that to counteract American sanctions, Russia must continue diversifying its international contacts while maintaining ties with the United States (Timofeev 2017).

Russia's experience demonstrates that the effectiveness of sanctions is limited when target states are large and powerful, or when members of multilateral sanctions regimes have incentives to defect. Domestically, sanctions on Russia led to a securitization of Russian foreign economic relations and import substitution measures to insulate the economy and protect the country's sovereignty and independence. Internationally, Russia accelerated its pivot eastward, seeking out sources of trade and investment in a politically friendly region.

Conclusion

The United States has imposed a wide range of targeted sanctions against Russia since 2012. Russia's arms and energy export markets are vulnerable to sanctions, and financial restrictions make doing business more costly for Russian firms. Yet Russia is unlikely to withdraw from Crimea any time in the near future, and its proxies are still active in southeast Ukraine. Nor has Moscow curtailed assistance to the Assad regime in Syria, ceased cyber-attacks and electoral interference, or addressed human rights violations. Sanctions did impact the Russian economy, particularly during the economic downturn in 2014–2015, but by 2017 Russian energy, finance and defense sectors recovered as the country utilized domestic resources and cultivated new foreign partners (Connolly 2018).

The Kremlin apparently does not see a connection between its international and domestic behavior and Western sanctions. From the Russian perspective, U.S. sanctions have become more unpredictable, increasingly long-term and focused on achieving political objectives, including weakening the Russian state and preserving American global hegemony. In the Trump administration, sanctions coincided with broader protectionist goals of U.S. foreign policy, a development that makes finding common ground more difficult (Likhacheva 2019).

In both the Obama and Trump administrations Congress has been more aggressive than the executive in imposing sanctions on Russia. Under Obama, the executive branch prioritized the U.S.-Russia reset and resisted using coercive tactics to punish Russia for Magnitsky's death. Trump's fixation on trade imbalances as the leading threat to American primacy makes Russia, with its anemic economy and small trade presence, far less of an economic challenge than China, Japan or the European Union. Trump

consistently maintained a positive attitude toward Putin and downplayed Russian electoral interference; it was Congress that forced the administration to adopt additional sanctions by passing CAATSA with overwhelming majorities.

A more financially diversified, multipolar world makes it harder for the U.S. to impose effective sanctions, since there is greater likelihood of defection by allies and partner states. By weaponizing the U.S. dollar, the Trump administration encouraged Russia, together with China, Iran and India, to explore the possibility of more non-dollar denominated arrangements such as barter or using national currencies in trade deals. Although the dollar remains the world's reserve currency, if this trend continues America's global economic leadership will erode (Lew and Nephew 2018). But in the near future options for evading U.S. economic dominance are limited. According to the IMF, the dollar and the euro together account for about 80% of the world's foreign exchange reserves, and the yen and pound combined account for another 10%. As long as the U.S. and its allies are united in agreeing on sanctions, Russia has few options.

That, however, is becoming more difficult, as the United States under President Trump squandered much of its soft power through a confrontational, zero-sum posture on international economics and security. The U.S. antagonized many of its European allies by withdrawing from the JCPOA and then imposing a new round of sanctions on Iran, while pressuring the Europeans to do likewise. The Europeans also resent secondary sanctions imposed on companies involved in the Nord Stream II pipeline project, which in any case is virtually completed. In short, America's sanctions policy has been largely ineffective in changing Russian behavior, though it has generated tensions among Washington's long-standing allies.

Notes

- 1 Parts of this chapter are drawn from Ziegler (2020).
- 2 Drezner (2011) concludes that smart sanctions are more humane and "can be imposed indefinitely with minimal cost," but they appear to be no more effective at extracting concessions from the target state than are broad-based sanctions.
- 3 Insider perspectives on the neglect of American diplomacy and Washington's poor performance in the information wars can be found in Burns (2019) and Stengel (2019), respectively.
- 4 These included Chile (to reduce copper prices), Turkey (over Cyprus), South Korea (over nuclear proliferation), and Israel (during the Suez crisis) (Peterson Institute for International Economics 2008).
- 5 The total amount of aid provided by the United States to Russia through the Freedom Support Act in the 1990s was \$2.26 billion (*Foreign Assistance* 2000, 165).
- 6 For a list of all sanctions see the CSIS Russian Sanctions Tracker (2018), at <https://russiasanctionstracker.csis.org/>
- 7 In August 2018 Rossel'khoznadzor, the agricultural monitoring agency, announced that over 27,000 tons of food products prohibited by Putin's 2014 decree had been destroyed (Rossel'khoznadzor 2018).

- 8 SWIFT is the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, a cooperative of some 11,000 financial institutions used to transfer money electronically. Website: <https://www.swift.com/>
- 9 In his discussions with India Lavrov charged the United States with abusing the dollar's status as the world's reserve currency (Chaudhury 2020).

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Part III

Russian policy in the developing world



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9 **A comparison of Soviet and Russian foreign policy: ontological security and policy toward Africa**

Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova

At the height of the Cold War in the mid-1950s, the Soviet Union began to challenge the West in the “Global South” (then usually referred to as the “Third World” or the “developing countries”), with an initial focus on Africa, where the European colonial system was in the early process of disintegration. For nearly a half-century, until its final implosion at the end of 1991, the Soviet Union was one of two global superpowers, along with the United States, whose competition for power and influence led to its engagement around the world with nearly all other states. Initially, the Soviet Union and the United States faced one another across what Winston Churchill called the Iron Curtain in Central Europe. Soon, however, the emergence of a host of states from the decolonization of West European empires in Africa and Asia created new platforms for competition between the superpowers (Namikas 2016). The USSR and the United States virtually inevitably expanded their competition to the Third World, where each viewed it and their competition for influence in zero-sum terms.

For the Soviets involvement in the Third World was driven by three major factors: ideological issues directly related to the Soviet ontological narrative which underlay a sense of identity and self-image as the leader of an international communist movement, by the increasingly global geopolitical competition with the United States which was also strongly influenced by the sense of identity as a revolutionary power committed to changing the international economic and political systems, and by the long-term economic interests that could be gained through international involvement, which at that time were the weakest of the three goals, but did serve as a means for Soviet influence. Economic, military and geopolitical assistance were the tools with which the USSR attempted to reach their objective.

As a state that had emerged from revolution and a commitment to ideologically-based change – not only in Russia itself, but globally – the USSR’s identity and self-image (its ontological security and competition with the capitalist West) were a central factor in its supporting what it viewed as ideologically based change for all economic-political systems away from existing capitalist systems to ones based on Marxist-Leninist socialist principles (Papp 1985). We argue that the Cold War could be framed as the

ontological continuity of Russia's opposition to the West's narrative of Russia as backward and underdeveloped, which was historically embedded in the Russian identity discourse. As the European colonial system collapsed, some of the new states – such as Ghana, Guinea and Mali – began to establish leftist regimes that needed economic and military assistance and were open to Soviet involvement (Kanet 1969). Ideologically this alliance was based on the convergence of anti-Western narratives of post-colonial Africa and the Soviet Union that historically had conflicted relations with the West. A few years later, at the beginning of the 1960s, the Soviets were seriously involved in the struggle for power in the Congo (today's Zaire) (Namikas 2016).

The role of ontological security in the engagement of the USSR and Russia in Africa

In the following pages, as we examine the policies of the USSR and its Russian successor state in their relations with Africa, we will structure the analysis within the theoretical framework of “ontological security,” an approach that focuses on “self-identity” and “self-image” as central issues in influencing foreign policy making.¹

The concept of ontological security was introduced first in the field of psychology in the study of individual behavior. It centers on security of self and identity. Introduced by Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing who viewed individuals as ontologically secure when they have a stable sense of identity that allows them to socialize and integrate into the world holistically (Kinnvall 2007; Browning and Joenniemi 2016). This sense of stability is difficult to sustain in a life filled with uncertainties, fragility of human existence and anxiety of the unknown (Mitzen and Larson 2017). Because of life's uncertainties ontological security gives humans the experience of ourselves as whole and continuous, with the sense of “being” rather than constantly “becoming” (Mitzen and Larson 2017). In a sense this confidence in the continuity of self-identity supports us in the “everyday courage to be” (Tillich 1952) Because of this stable sense of self, when ontologically secure individuals encounter others, they do so without the loss of their own identities. Those who are ontologically insecure, on the other hand, lack a strong degree of confidence in their autonomous existence and, therefore, constantly question their identity and autonomy. As a result, ontologically insecure actors interpret everyday occurrences through a different symbolic hierarchy (Laing 1969).

Ontological security allows one to avoid existential anxiety or dread of the unknown by establishing and sustaining routines and self-narratives through which we construct our sense of self. Routines provide us with the sense of certainty and predictability and create habits that operate subconsciously (Graybiel 2008). Physiological features of brain-routinized habits tend to evoke self-fulfilling and validating behaviors from actors. Habits are located

in the “automatic system” of the brain and are effortless and automatic. Routinized habits link identity to ontological security. Habits reiterate identity and assist agents in having a predictable sense of self and other. Embedded routines eliminate uncertainty between subjects as they presuppose certainty about themselves and others. The discipline of routines, therefore, helps to constitute a “formed framework” for existence by cultivating a sense of “being.” Moreover, the *maintenance of habits and routines is a crucial bulwark against threatening anxieties*. Routines create cognitive and behavioral *certainty and predictability*.

Cognitive neuroscientists tend to agree on the importance of habitual perception during rational cognitive deliberation, since any reflective thoughts and actions happen *within the context of habitual perception and attitudes* that have made these reflections possible in the first place (Graybiel 2008). This occurs even at a time when an agent is reflecting upon what action will yield the most benefit, or will correspond to the agent’s normative commitments. What he or she does occurs against a background of embedded habitual perceptions formed by routine that is taken for granted. This structure of routinized habit constrains the actor’s imaginable outcomes, even while leaving room for reflection. The question of conscious awareness on which ontological security operates is perhaps one of the central debates about ontological security (Mitzen and Larson 2017, 16). The existing literature has different takes on the role of consciousness in decision making process ranging from intentional and deliberate to habitual and completely unconscious.

Just as individuals, states constantly reproduce their identity. This reproduction is subjective and relational. As with individuals, self-identity is not something that is presumed or given, but something that has to be continuously constructed and sustained. Different scholars in ontological security diverge in their understanding of what constitutes the sense of self. While Mitzen and Roe both emphasize the relational aspect of identities, others, like Innes and Steele, consider the basis of identity to be mostly endogenous (Mitzen 2006a; Roe 2008; Innes and Steele 2013; Steele 2008; Rumelili 2015, 56). In response to this divergence, Prozorov underlines the importance of the dual nature of ontological security. He notes that both external (relations to the Other) and internal aspects of the self (through domestically constructed biographic narratives) cannot be disassociated from one another (Prozorov 2011). Hence, the ontological security of a state combines both exogenous and endogenous aspects and can be perceived as explanatory for both structures and the properties of units (Krolkowski 2008; Rumelili 2015).

As in the case with individuals, trust and routine are two important aspects of a state’s ontological security. According to Krolkowski (2008), endogenously basic trust differentiates ontologically secure states from insecure ones. Exogenously, the concept of trust as well defines the relationship with the Other. Mitzen (2006a, 2006b) argues that all states satisfy their

ontological needs through routinization of their social interactions. States differ in their attachment to routines. Some states “participate more reflexively,” while others rigidly repeat established routines (Mitzen 2006a, 342). The degree of “routinization” depends on an agent’s level of basic trust in itself and others. A healthy level of trust allows a state to adapt its behavior to new information. This ability allows states to modify their conduct based on changed information, rather than retreating into habituated behaviors (Mitzen 2006a, 350).

As a result of a healthy attachment style, ontologically secure states have a sense of biographic continuity. Continuity of identity allows a state to respond reflexively and to encounter the hazards of life “from a centrally firm sense of his own” that has a sense of basic unity (Laing 1969, 39). Unlike ontologically secure states, ontologically insecure states exhibit a “blind commitment to established routines” (Giddens 1991, 40). This rigid commitment to routines stems from “unmastered anxiety” when breaking out of embedded routines, even the ones that are physically harmful, cause agents the loss of self and paralyzing anxiety. Such a state of anxiety can be replaced by blindly following the routines as patterns of behavior that “swallow up” the underlying anxiety (Giddens 1991, 43). As a result, a state with unhealthy attachment styles would blindly follow established routines even if they were detrimental to its physical survival.

This goes against realist assumptions that states want to escape the security dilemma, but uncertainty prevents them from doing so. Ontological security sheds light on how established routines may drive states to engage repeatedly in conflicts both domestically and internationally. Even routines that are dangerous for survival could become routinized and embedded as a part of state’s ontological security. This attachment to routines could drive states, as rational security seekers, to become attached to a conflict. Ontological security, therefore, could shed light on a state’s investment in a seemingly irrational hostility (Mitzen 2006b).

To sum up, ontological security plays an important role in a state’s foreign policy formation. Ontologically secure actors have a coherent sense of identity and basic trust. They exhibit the ability to learn and adapt to changing environments. As a result, ontologically secure states reflexively engage in interactions with other agents in the international system. Unlike ontologically secure states, the biographic continuity of ontologically insecure states could be easily disrupted, and thus, these states lose their ability to answer questions about doing, acting and being. To combat existential anxiety these countries rigidly repeat embedded routines with others. At times, these attachments to ontological routines may diverge from a state’s interests of physical survival. In the next section, we will explore important ontological narratives that influence Russia’s foreign policy.

In this chapter, we argue that both views of consciousness are applicable to our analysis of Russia’s engagement in Africa. As has been noted in the literature, Russia’s self-perception as a great power has historically dominated its

discourse (Adomeit 1995; Hopf 2002; Mankoff 2009; Neumann 2008). This self-perception as a great power – an important status position for the country – is one of the fundamental aspects of Russia’s identity and its sense of ontological security and included within this is a sense of virtual permanent hostility to the West. Hopf (2002) notes that the continuity of the great power narrative survived not only the historical evolution of the country, but also its ideological shift from the USSR to Russia. While the former Soviet Union considered itself to be a great power during the Cold War, it seemed to feel the need to reassure other states that, despite being a great power, it was not a traditional one ideologically.

In the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this differentiation from other great powers was not at the top of the country’s agenda. The great power discourse continued, however, maintaining its dominant position despite the country’s ideological shift (Hopf 2002, 157). Russia continued its great power discourse despite economic and political challenges after the end of the Cold War and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1996, when the government’s approval ratings were in single digits, Evgeny Primakov, as Russia’s new Minister of Foreign Affairs, saw his primary role as strengthening the effort “to protect Russia’s national interest” as a great power and having a policy that reflected this status (Primakov 1996). Primakov’s vision of opposing U.S. hegemony was a drastic change from that of his predecessor, Andrey Kozyrev. Despite their vocal disagreements on what it meant for Russia to be great, they concurred that it was “doomed to be a great power” by virtue of being Russia (Kozyrev 1994, 62).

There are a couple of important issues that contributed to the unconscious embeddedness of the great power theme in Russia’s ontological security. One of them is the degree of routinization of these experiences. With time this ontological awareness became further embedded through routine and practice to create predictability and to allow agents to avoid anxiety about the unknown. The more routinized these experiences, the more embedded they become in the agent’s ontological security, and thus, agents apply them less consciously when making decisions. In the case of Russia, this has meant centuries of an expansionist foreign policy.

As with the larger Russian population over the centuries, Russian elites have skillfully manipulated this narrative for their own political ends. This manipulation is illustrated by the behavior of four of the most noted of Russia’s past leaders who carried out a continued expansionist response to relations with the outside world, although they did not use current President Putin’s (2007) call for reestablishing Russia as a “Great Power.” For example, summarizing his interpretation of the impact of the 16th century ruler Ivan the Terrible, Nikolay Andreyev of the University of Cambridge, notes the regular expansion of the Russian state under Ivan and also of his successor Peter the Great more than a century later: “Ivan’s achievements were many. In foreign policy, all his actions were directed toward forcing Russia into Europe – a line that Peter I the Great was to continue. Internally, Ivan’s

reign of terror eventually resulted in the weakening of all levels of the aristocracy, including the service gentry he had sponsored.... Nevertheless, he left his realm far more centralized both administratively and culturally than it had been previously” (Andreyev n.d.).² Another assessment of the role of Peter the Great notes that “Under Peter’s rule, Russia became a great European nation. In 1721 he proclaimed Russia an empire and was accorded the title of Emperor of All Russia, Great Father of the Fatherland and ‘the Great’” (“Peter the Great”2020). Moreover, in the words of Zoé Oldenbourg-Idalie (2017), at the end of the 18th century the next major Russian ruler, Catherine the Great, “Frustrated in her attempts at reform, Catherine seized the pretext of war with Turkey in 1768 to change her policy; henceforth, emphasis would be placed above all on national grandeur. Since the reign of Peter the Great, the Ottoman Empire had been the traditional enemy of Russia; inevitably, the war fired the patriotism and zeal of Catherine’s subjects.”

Despite the dramatic change of governance following the Communist Revolution in 1918, the orientation of Moscow’s self-perceptions and its relations with the rest of the world remained much the same, if not more assertive, especially after World War II. In the immediate aftermath of the war Soviet leader Joseph Stalin expanded westward and incorporated the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into an emerging empire and, until his death in 1953, pursued the USSR’s challenge to the other great power, the United States (Tucker 1997). After World War II Stalin saw the world as divided into two camps: imperialist and capitalist regimes on the one hand, and the Communist and progressive world on the other – with the latter ultimately emerging as dominant globally. As we will argue in some detail later in this article, a decade and a half after the collapse of the Soviet Union Vladimir Putin, the fourth of these expansionist leaders, began to assert the argument that Russia remains a Great Power.

The convergence of ontological narratives

We turn now to the relevance of the concept of “ontological security” as a theoretical approach to the analysis of foreign policy and, particularly, to the policy of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation with the countries of Africa. Ontological security maintains that our ability to make choices and take action depends critically on our sense of self. In other words, who we are determines what we do (Mitzen and Larson 2017). This focus on the security of self distinguishes ontological security from traditional understanding of the term security. In traditional security studies survival and integrity of the political unit are primal; Stephen Walt (1985), for example, argues that only when actors ensure their physical survival can they pursue other goals. Ontological security offers a distinct approach to the study of state behavior. In her article on the security dilemma, Jennifer Mitzen maintains that conflict could become so essential for a state’s

identity that it could rigidly engage in it, despite the lack of material benefits. While the concept of ontological security could be effective in explaining the state of conflict and animosity it could as well be beneficial in explaining alliance formation and their resistance to change. Convergence of ontological narratives as the basis for alliance formation: anti-Western narratives, plus the manipulation by the elites for their own political ends (Wendt 1994).

Both Moscow and Beijing share complex relationships with the West as the basis of their ontological creeds.² China and Russia initially sought acceptance into the Western world throughout various periods of their history, but were denied full integration on equal terms into Western organizations. Both countries initially sought to establish great power status through contributing to global governance, while maintaining their identities that are distinct from the West and without subscribing to proclaimed Western liberal democratic norms. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which the United States framed as a victory in geopolitical competition with the emphasis on the “end of history” and the triumph of Western ideals, the “losing” camp was then invited to join the Western club on Western terms and was expected to emulate its values.

The newly emerging great powers instead sought prestige in the distinctiveness of their identity narratives. For China, it is the interpretation of Confucianism as a part of Beijing’s soft power (Lahtinen 2015). For Russia, it is the interpretation of its identity and the importance of its Eastern heritage that celebrates the country’s traditionalism and collectivism framed as the Eurasian dimension of the country’s self-perception. Eurasianism puts an emphasis on spiritualism and a communal nature of society in contrast to the West’s “impoverished” focus on materialism and individualism (Mankoff 2009). Beijing, on the other hand, has been raising its profile around the world with a variety of multilateral initiatives such as the One Belt One Road that seeks to emulate the Silk Road and connect China to Europe via the web of transformational infrastructure. Beijing has also initiated multilateral institutions such as the Asian Investment Bank of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that could indicate its willingness to take more of a leadership role in international diplomacy.

The emergence of Soviet policy in the developing world

Prior to Stalin’s death in 1953 the USSR had virtually no direct relations with the developing world, which was largely dominated by European colonialism. From the mid-1950s through the early 1980s, however, the Soviet Union and Soviet bloc more broadly, established significant political, economic and military relations with the new states that emerged from this colonial system. This new direction of Soviet foreign policy in the Third World represented perhaps the most significant global expansion of U.S.–Soviet competition. It was based on an innovation in theory termed “national democracy,” in which the central idea was that leftist

non-communist parties – such as those in Guinea, Mali, Ghana, the UAR and Algeria – were the first stage of the transition to Marxist-Leninist political and economic systems (Ulianovskii 1966).

By the mid-1960s, most Western colonial empires had collapsed and many anti-Western, or “progressive,” single party regimes had taken root throughout Asia and Africa – in addition to Cuba in the Americas. Yet, the USSR’s new friends and allies in the Third World were generally among the weakest and most institutionally challenged states in the world. Initially, the Soviets focused on Africa. By then no developing country, with the sole exception of Cuba, had transitioned to communism. By the end of the 1960s, Moscow had extended this interest to the Middle East, especially including the Israeli–Arab conflict (Kanet, with Venkatesan 1980). Military and political support was a central and growing element of Soviet policy in this region (Cutler et al. 1987). By the beginning of the 1970s, the Soviets were extensively involved throughout the entire Third World. Moreover, they had developed an entire theoretical apparatus, based on categories of “creative Marxism-Leninism,” for analyzing developments there. This apparatus was wedded to an evolving ideology about the major role that they played in the assumed eventual success of communism on the international level (Kanet 1969).

Indeed, by the early 1970s, the mainstream Soviet view (Inozemtsev 1972) was that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (“Helsinki Conference,” 1972–1975) would confirm the shift of the European politico-economic balance toward the Soviets. What they called the “changing international correlation of forces” would lead to a transition: the “socialist world-system” would predominate over the “capitalist world-system” on the global level, eventually overcoming and replacing it. In other words, the Soviets developed a view of themselves as the central actor in an imminent shift in the entire international system (for details, see Avakov and Mirskii 1962; Kanet 2006). Throughout the 1970s the USSR and the Soviet bloc (including Cuba) provided substantial support to selected Third World governments and political movements as part of this expected shift.

During that decade the Soviets were extremely optimistic about the prospects for increasing their influence in the international system. They were committed to pushing their Third World allies toward their own self-image of progressive Marxism-Leninism and their key policy instruments were economic and military support for the ruling regimes in the South, especially in those that they viewed as “progressive” (Kanet 1986). The U.S.–Soviet détente of the early and mid-1970s gave the Soviets the opportunity to take advantage of Third World conflicts. In Angola, Ethiopia and Southeast Asia, for example, they helped favorable regimes consolidate power (Kanet and Ganguly 1986, 20). Soviet preoccupations with NATO and with China, nevertheless, resulted in ranking Europe and Asia higher in absolute importance for Soviet security.

By the 1980s, growing internal Soviet weaknesses vitiated the Soviet leadership’s confidence, leading them even to question the USSR’s superpower

status. The over-commitment of Soviet resources in order to support allies and clients across the entire globe was coming quite visible. Despite their optimism and the reasons for it, the Soviets found themselves increasingly on the defensive internationally. Détente with the United States had collapsed under the weight of the West's response to Soviet political adventurism in Africa and military intervention in Afghanistan. The USSR confronted new embargoes, higher American and Japanese military spending, and NATO's decision to deploy intermediate range nuclear weapons in Europe. Moreover, the Soviets discovered that the political appeal of their socio-economic policies had weakened significantly: they were now losing what they called the "ideological struggle."

As already pointed out, involvement and success in the developing world, beginning initially in West Africa, became a central element of the USSR's own self-image and sense of identity, as the transition of the Third World to communism, facilitated by the Soviets, became closely associated with the identity of the Soviet Union itself. Moreover, that involvement became much more important for the growing global geopolitical competition with the United States. The Third World or Global South, however, did not yet emerge as significant because of its own economic interests and development.

From retrenchment to the collapse of the Soviet state

The final years of the Soviet system witnessed attempts by the leadership to reform the very structures of the Soviet state. These began with internal economic reform, but soon expanded to encompass change in the entire political system. The state's foreign and security policy framework was inevitably implicated in this attempted transformation. The Soviet leadership initiated fundamental changes in foreign policy, including dramatically scaling back the global confrontation with the United States and reducing Soviet military and political involvement in regional conflicts around the world. Not only did Soviet efforts at domestic reform fail; their unintended consequence was, moreover, to bring down the entire economic and political structure undergirding the extended Soviet-bloc system from Central Europe to the Chinese border.³

After assuming political leadership in Moscow in spring 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev (1987b) publicly described the problems facing the Soviet Union and called for a reorientation of domestic and foreign policy. His main argument had three points. First, the Soviet economic problems, including their growing technology gap with the West, augured poorly for the future. Second, economic reform (*perestroika*, meaning "restructuring") within the state-socialist framework was essential to overcome these problems and to provide a foundation for future economic growth. Third, a more open political system, based on *glasnost'* (openness/transparency) and *demokrati-zatsiia* (democratization), was necessary to overcome entrenched political interests and carry through the required reforms.

The rate of Soviet economic growth was declining. In Gorbachev's (1987a) words, economic growth had "fallen to a level close to economic stagnation." Overall, Brezhnev's successors confronted a situation filled with contradictions and challenges. The USSR remained a global superpower, but could use its military capabilities for political gains only with difficulty. Gorbachev's proposals were, therefore, in part, based also on his concern about the future position and role of the USSR in the international system – their continued status as a "great power." He called for "new political thinking" to reform Soviet foreign policy (Hudson 1968).

That initiative complemented the increasing Soviet pessimism about developments in the Global South. It soon led to important changes in actual policy and to a remarkable improvement in relations with the U.S. and the West in general, with Japan and China, and with the less radical developing countries. Gorbachev recognized that the Soviets, by the middle of the 1980s, had effectively been frozen out of influence in many key situations of global significance. His new policy in Europe, Asia, and the rest of Third World was based on recognizing that the expansion of Soviet military power had not brought comparable political gains. This retrenchment of Soviet foreign policy did not signify, however, the abandonment of gains already made or the renunciation of the goal of expanding Soviet influence as a "great power" in the future.

Challenges to Soviet hegemony had even emerged in Eastern Europe by the beginning of the 1980s. Most important was the challenge to the orthodox communist regime in Poland (Kanet 1984), a country in the very heart of the Soviet empire. Moreover, many Third World governments with which the Soviets had close ties faced serious challenges and required continued Soviet support. This applied decidedly to Afghanistan. The Soviet Union had been instrumental in the 1979 coup in Afghanistan, but they were soon involved in supporting the new government against internal military challengers (Vogel 1980). The costs of Soviet commitments to Third World clients were beginning to drain the Soviet economy itself. Soviet international-affairs experts in Moscow understood that the USSR's early successes in the Third World states did not create stable political and economic systems in those countries.

At the very same time, in the early 1980s, relations with the United States were continuing to deteriorate. The Reagan Administration, which came to power in January 1981, viewed Soviet behavior as an aggressive challenge to U.S. interests in the developing world and undertook a more assertive policy than its predecessor. By the time Brezhnev died in November 1982, the Soviet role in the developing world had greatly expanded in comparison with three decades earlier; yet its power and influence remained limited. The immediate post-Brezhnev leadership, first with Yuri Andropov (November 1982–February 1984) and then Konstantin Chernenko (February 1984–March 1985) at the head, still did not make any major shifts in that policy; if anything, it even increased the USSR's involvement in the Third

World. It was only with the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev after Chernenko's death that the policy changes noted earlier were introduced,

Early in the Gorbachev era "new political thinking" comprised three main policy elements. First was a rejection of the rigidity and aggressiveness of the Brezhnev years, complemented with an effort at revitalization by reducing the role of ideology in foreign policy making (Kanet, with Katner 1992, 127; Bialer 1988). Second was the addition of "global problems" to the Soviet foreign policy agenda, signifying that capitalists were no longer to be blamed for every injustice and that communists could cooperate with them to ameliorate the human condition. Third was the recognition that the existence of nuclear weapons made international security mutual in nature.

By 1986 Moscow's decision to reduce commitments to Third World states was evident. Besides reacting to the growing cost of supporting allies, Gorbachev (1987a, 173–174) himself argued "that regional conflicts in Asia, Africa and Latin America are spawned by the colonial past, new social processes, or reoccurrences of predating policy, or by all three." The goal was to find political solutions to the problems. Moreover, every country had the right to its own solutions and neither superpower should intervene in these conflicts (Gorbachev 1987a, 117, 187). Soviet views were changing. Prominent Soviet analysts (for example, Bovin 1984) had begun openly to question the optimism of the 1970s concerning likely developments in the Third World (Hough 1986; Papp 1985.)

Thus, by the end of the 1980s and shortly before the demise of the USSR itself, "new thinking," as it applied to policy toward the developing world, implied the demilitarization of regional conflicts and the search for political solutions to them;⁴ the removal of ideology from interstate relations; and restraint from interference in the domestic politics of other states (Kanet, with Katner 1992, 129). The impact of this "new thinking" on Soviet policy in the Third World became evident when the Soviets began to withdraw their military forces from Afghanistan in 1989, reduced the number of their troops in Angola and pushed for a ceasefire there, and announced in 1991 their intention to limit their role in the civil war in Ethiopia. In other words, in the years and months leading up to the implosion of the Soviet Union in the fall of 1991, the government in Moscow was disengaging from many of its policies in the Third World, and elsewhere, that it had pursued for more than three decades. Yet, consensus on foreign policy broke down, as many in the party and state apparatus opposed the changes in both domestic and foreign policy being implemented by Gorbachev and his supporters (Kanet, with Katner 1992).

The Russian federation and Africa

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War brought to a close the ideology-driven policy that had characterized Soviet relations with the world and had been such an important part of Soviet identity and

self-image. Throughout the 1990s, as the new Russian Federation attempted to stabilize itself and to find its place in the international system, relations with the Global South, including Africa, were largely put on hold. With the emergence of Vladimir Putin a decade later, however, Russia almost immediately began to reassert its role as a major world power, including re-establishing its relations with the Global South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (Olivier and Suchkov 2019). The focus, however, changed significantly from that of the Soviet period, when the central concern was ideological affinity and a transition toward communist political systems, along with geopolitical competition with the United States. The dominant ontological narrative of the current period is overwhelmingly the enrichment of elites in a network state, with the great power narrative, domestic consolidation, and related issues serving as means to accomplish that goal. Now, even though geopolitical competition remains an important element of Russian policy (Adibe 2019), the primary interest of the Russian Federation under President Putin has become economic – markets for Russian exports and access to energy resources and minerals, all as part of a commitment to re-establishing Russia once again as an important actor and creating the ability of elites to enrich themselves. This set of policy goals applies to Russian behavior across the Global South, including in Africa, as Russia has returned as a major global participant with renewed self-confidence (Lo 2003; Neethling 2019), even though Russian economic involvement today, almost two decades later, is much smaller than that of China, Western Europe, or the United States (Geröcs 2019).

During the Cold War, as we have already noted, military involvement was a very important instrument of Soviet policy – for example, in Angola and Ethiopia – as was economic aid, including the education of African students in the USSR (Besenyő 2019, 134). By the 1980s, because of growing economic hardship, the Soviet leaders became concerned about overreaching their economic influence in the global South. For example, they refused Mozambique's attempt to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in July 1981. Yet, as Tamás Geröcs (2019) points out, the "Soviet legacy is still Russia's most important present-day link to many African countries, insofar as the economic and political leaders of these countries have connections to the Soviet Union's institutional past" (Pham 2010). But, the current relationship emphasizes almost completely economic relations, including military exports, that are expected to benefit Russia, much as other states in the North had already benefitted before Russia (Olivier and Suchkov 2019, 148). This was made most clear in President Putin's and President Medvedev's visits to Africa in 2006 and 2009, at the time when Russia was renewing its relationships with the countries of the continent. President Dmitry Medvedev referred to what he termed "Russia-Africa traditional friendly relations," foreseeing a "new dynamism in Russia-Africa traditional friendly relations," but also adding that "Russia was almost too late in engaging Africa" (Makarychev and Samao 2014).

Africa's importance to Russia, as to other countries of the North, derives from Africa as a market with growing demand and significant improvements in its infrastructure, as well as an important source of natural resources.⁵ The McKinsey Global Institute has concluded that:

The lure of a “new dawn” in various African countries...set loose what was being called, a new “scramble for Africa.” The attraction radiated by the economic performance of a number of modernising and peaceful African states, and the availability of abundant resources, became well-nigh irresistible to industrialised nations in the Global North. On the policy level, a surge was created in various African states by government action “to end armed conflicts, improve macroeconomic conditions, and undertake microeconomic reforms to create reforms to create a better business climate” (Roxburgh 2010).

In 1980, just 28% of Africans lived in cities; today the number is 40% of more than one billion people live in cities (Dobbs 2011). In another decade, that share is projected to rise to 50%, “and Africa's top 18 cities will have a combined spending power of \$1.3 trillion. Africa is a market with growing demand and significant improvements in its structure” (Leke et al. 2010).

An indication of the growing interest of Russia in Africa was the first Russia – Africa summit held for two days in 2019 at which more than 170 Russian companies and organizations participated, and Russia and African countries signed more than 50 agreements worth above \$12 billion. President Putin, who attended the summit, concluded:

The first Russia-Africa summit ended; summing up the results of two days of its work, we can say that this event really opened a new page in relations between Russia and the states of the African continent... The meeting was business, but at the same time friendly, if not emotional, (and) that created a special atmosphere for our discussion” (“Russia Returns” 2019).

It is not only the availability and export of natural resources that account for Africa's success. Because of economic reforms, democratic transformations and strict financial discipline, various countries have managed to improve their image significantly with investors. For example, a dozen and a half countries are expected to come close to the growth rates of the Asian tigers (McKinsey 2010).

Russia is well-positioned to extend its role in Africa. Besides a positive image in Africa that builds on earlier Soviet involvement, and a track record of generally successful large projects, Russian business uses local African labor, it respects local rules and traditions, allowing African countries to determine their own policies in respect of implementation of economic projects. As noted by Olivier and Suchkov (2019):

Overall, this approach has contributed to a positive image of Russia in Africa. At the same time, African leaders also look at Russia as a partner or link toward building relations with emerging economies and new and existing multilateral organisations, particularly the UN and its Specialised Agencies, BRICS and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (see also, Arkhangelskaya 2013, 153–170).

Added to the economic attraction in the relationships, as Kimberley Marten (2019b) clearly demonstrates, Russia has become a very important supplier of military support, including weaponry, throughout much of Africa.⁶ Russia has become the largest supplier of arms to Africa, accounting for 35% of arms exports to the region, followed by China (17%), and the United States (9.6%). Between 2015 and 2019 Russia signed over 20 bilateral military cooperation agreements with African states (Adibe 2019).

Besides the economic and military export factors that attract Russia to Africa, there is also once again the geopolitical competition with the United States and the West, more broadly. For example, Russia has also been willing to support African regimes that are in conflict with Western countries, and to get involved in internal political disputes in several African states, but now more as a tool of policy rather than a primary ontological objective.⁷ This policy approach marks a stark transformation for Russia's position in the region and around the globe since the early 2000s as part of a concerted effort by the Kremlin to boost its standing as a “great power”:

Following Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine, Moscow was hit by sanctions as Western governments tried to isolate and pressure the Kremlin into changing its behavior. But Russia's push for global influence and stature has only accelerated as part of a foreign-policy pivot to find new opportunities around the world amid its deepening standoff with the West (Standish 2019).

Also relevant to the rise of Russian influence, even before the catastrophe of the Covid-19 pandemic, has been the relative withdrawal of the United States from an active and positive role in world affairs, especially in the Global South. This is perhaps best exemplified under the administration of Donald Trump by his reported openly racist description of some African countries, Haiti and El Salvador as “shithole countries” and his questioning of why so many of their citizens had ever been permitted to enter the United States (Wintour, Burke, and Livsey 2018). Added to this was Trump's failure to fill ambassadorial posts in Africa and elsewhere. In concluding their discussion of Russia's current position in Africa and its relationship to U.S inaction, Wintour et al. (2018) state:

Against this backdrop, Russia has deployed a loose strategy of self-enrichment boosting military ties, deepening trade links, and selling its

influence as a path for autocrats to stay in power and defy Western pressure. Russia is already the largest arms exporter to Africa and has signed military cooperation agreements with at least 28 African governments (Bugavoya and Regio 2019). Russian state-owned companies, which have largely been cut out of Western markets, are also investing in oil, gas, and nuclear energy, and Moscow increased its trade volume with Africa to \$20 billion in 2018. But Russia still lacks the financial means to match other external players, such as the European Union, the United States, and China, which pledged more than \$60 billion in investment to Africa last year and is the continent's leading economic force.⁸

While China has emphasized Sub-Saharan Africa in its trade expansion, Russia has concentrated more on North Africa and has a jointly invested in a Free Trade Zone for Russian manufacturers in Port Said in Egypt. Russian bilateral trade with Egypt has subsequently boomed, and rose 37% in 2018. Russia also has a logistics base in Eritrea, giving it access to the Red Sea. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has also recently visited Angola, Namibia, Mozambique, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, signing a raft of agreements for economic zones, mineral exploration and for other co-operations including military supplies and training ("Russian Trade" 2019).

This renewed active approach to Africa emerges out of Russia's revived self-image as a unique civilization that differs from and, in many ways, is superior to others (Kazharski 2019). However, despite the expanded Russian involvement in Africa and elsewhere – especially the Middle East – that involvement is much less significant than was that of the Soviet Union,⁹ but does build upon past Soviet activities and in the words of Reid Standish, "Against this backdrop, Russia has deployed a loose strategy of self-enrichment, boosting military ties, deepening trade links, and selling its influence as a means for autocrats to stay in power and defy Western pressure" (Standish 2019).

Conclusion

It is clear from this brief review of Soviet and Russian policy in Africa over the past 60+ years that that policy has been motivated by much more than traditional security concerns defined in terms of the survival and integrity of the political unit that is acting – in this case, the USSR and Russia. In the case of the former, as we have seen, the effort to encourage and speed up a global Marxist-Leninist communist revolution, along with geopolitical competition with the United States and the West, more generally, were central to Soviet policy. They came to be an essential element of the USSR's sense of identity – as a great power and the leader of a global transition that would replace the existing exploitative economic and political system with what they viewed as an equitable system based on joint ownership and

control over the economy. As noted, geopolitical competition with the West was an essential element of Soviet policy, but as part of the effort to build a global system and to establish the *bona fides* of the Soviet Union as a great power with a self-image as a progressive state helping to bring the world to a future more positive than what has existed throughout history.

Economic gain for the USSR was not an important factor; rather economic assistance from Moscow was an important tool in the effort to attract other states into the emerging progressive global alliance of which the Soviet were the leaders. So, the survival of the USSR was not at the center of Soviet policy in Africa, even though the global competition with the United States was an important determining factor in policy during much of the postwar period.

When we examine the return of Moscow to involvement in Africa in the 2000s, now under the guise of the Russian Federation, we find a quite different set of factors motivating policy. For more than a decade after the demise of the USSR in 1991, as the new Russia sought to determine its very nature and where it fits in the international system now completely dominated by the West, it appeared likely that it would eventually integrate into that system. As we have seen, however, both internal factors related to the re-emergence of authoritarian rule as well as Western policy initiatives viewed in Moscow as threatening to the interests, even the very identity, of Russia as a great power – such as the dramatic expansion of NATO and the European Union up to the very borders of the new Russian Federation – resulted in a major re-assessment of Russian identity and policy in the 2000s, after the coming to power of Vladimir Putin.

After referring to the collapse of the USSR as the greatest catastrophe of the twentieth century, current President Putin's (2007) called for re-establishing Russia as a "Great Power." However, the main thrust of Russian policy has changed dramatically from that of the Soviet period, when the central concern was ideological affinity and the transition toward communist political systems and eventually a global communist system, along with geopolitical competition with the United States. To a substantial degree, this meant that the identity and self-image of the USSR as a great power and the dominant actor in a global political transformation prevailed as a means for elites to enrich themselves.

Now, even though geopolitical competition remains an important element of Russian policy (Adibe 2019), the major Russian interest has been economic – markets for Russian exports and access to energy resources and minerals as part of the commitment to re-establishing Russia once again as an important actor in Africa as an integral part of Russia's return as a major global participant and its renewed self-confidence (Lo 2003; Neethling 2019). Confrontation with the West has reemerged, although ideology no longer provides the foundation for that confrontation. Despite the expanded Russian involvement in Africa and elsewhere – especially the Middle East – that involvement is much less significant than was that of the Soviet Union.

This renewed active approach to Africa emerges out of Russia's revived self-image as a unique civilization that differs from and, in many ways, is superior to others.

Notes

- 1 For a clear outline of the relevance of “ontological security” for the analysis of Russian foreign policy see Akchurina and Della Sala (2018); see also, Kazharski (2019) See also, Steele (2008).
- 2 For discussions of the importance of ontological security and identity see Innes and Steele (2013) and Krolkowski (2008).
- 3 For a clear and forceful analysis of the decline and collapse of the USSR see King (2020).
- 4 For a general discussion of Soviet military assistance policy over the course of the Cold War see Kanet (2006).
- 5 On the other hand, Africa, unlike any other region of the world, appears to be urbanizing without at the same time industrializing on a substantial scale, thus opening itself in the future to continuing and significant dependence on the Global North (see Gollin, Jedwab, and Vollrath 2016; Copley 2017).
- 6 See, also, Bugavoya and Regio (2019, 6).
- 7 For a discussion of Russian involvement in internal conflicts see Marten (2019a), as well as documents concerning these activities in Dettmer (2019).
- 8 See also, Tsygankov(2020)
- 9 Russian trade with Africa is still concentrated in only a handful of countries, that is, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and South Africa, which account for 80% of Africa's exports to Russia (Olivier and Suchkov 2019).

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10 **Russia's expanding role in the eastern Mediterranean: opportunities and challenges**

Nuray V. Ibryamova

The past decade has seen the rise of Russia as a key regional power in the tumultuous Eastern Mediterranean region. Although it had close relations or alliances with various countries during the Cold War – including Egypt, Libya and Syria – the power of the USSR declined with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its present role as an important regional player was achieved primarily through increased military presence and energy politics; Russia is also very active diplomatically, working both with state and non-state actors. The absence of coherent EU or US policies or discontent with existing ones has also facilitated Russia's ability to attract new partners, allowing it to fill the void. Russia's newfound role in the region has also helped its overall objective of eroding US power globally.

This chapter focuses on Russia's growing military presence and the parallel expansion of Russian participation in the energy markets of the Eastern Mediterranean. It also briefly discusses its relations with key states from the area: Syria and Turkey. It aims to show that Russia's approach to the Eastern Mediterranean is part of its quest to expand its power, while simultaneously to undermine US influence.

Russia's objectives in the eastern Mediterranean

Russia historically has had a significant influence in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which encompasses Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt and Libya. It has a shared cultural heritage rooted in Orthodox Christianity with Greece and Cyprus, which appeals to the public at large and casts Russia as a trusted ally. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union had close links with Libya, Egypt and Syria, some of which were lost during subsequent years for various reasons: Russia's weakness in the 1990s, Qaddafi's ouster in 2011, and the impact of the Arab Spring in Egypt. Meanwhile, beginning with the Obama Administration, the United States withdrew as a security guarantor in the Middle East; the Trump Administration continued this trend by withdrawing troops from Syria and Iraq, and even abandoned erstwhile allies. At the same time, the European Union has been unable to formulate a common policy on Syria or Libya. Dissatisfaction with the austerity

measures imposed by the Union in the wake of the Greek financial crisis, which also affected Cyprus, pushed these countries to pursue closer relations with Russia. Egypt had been a US ally since the Camp David Accords of 1979 and a recipient of substantial US military aid, but relations worsened after the Arab Spring and, especially, after the 2013 coup led by Gen. Abdel Fattah al Sisi that overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi. Turkey, an important NATO ally, parallel with the rise of Islamist and authoritarian politics domestically, has seen its relations with European powers and the US become so troubled that its place in the alliance has been questioned. It is against this background of dissatisfaction with EU or US policies or the absence thereof, that Russia has been able to reclaim its Cold War clout in the region. These countries, in turn, sought to use their enhanced cooperation with Russia as leverage in negotiations with the West.

While no longer a superpower, thanks to its military capabilities Russia enjoys the status of a great power. During Putin's first presidency it sought to reestablish its influence over the post-Soviet space and extend it over its historical allies in the Balkans and East Central Europe. The 2015 military intervention in Syria was the first of its kind that impacted on post-Soviet Russia outside the territories of the former USSR. As a result of the swift annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia was facing sanctions imposed by the US and the EU, which were beginning to have a negative impact on its economy. It was only logical that Russia would look for new partners and foil any diplomatic isolation intended by the West; its enhanced profile and power in regions neighboring the EU could also help as leverage against the Union. Russia's current policies in the Eastern Mediterranean can be seen as part of a pattern aimed at enhancing its power globally: after all, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russia Federation clearly states that one of the objectives of its foreign policy is "to consolidate the Russian Federation's position as a center of influence in today's world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016).

The next section of this chapter looks at the main thrusts of Russia's energy politics in the Eastern Mediterranean and its role in bolstering its standing in the region as well as in the European Union.

Russia's energy policy in the eastern Mediterranean

Energy resources have long been part of Moscow's domestic and foreign policy. The emphasis on energy is important for a number of reasons. Russia itself has an abundance of fossil fuels, which in 2017 accounted for 63% of the total Russian exports and 36% of the country's federal budget in 2016 (OECD 2020). As such, the production and export of these resources can help increase state budget revenues and have a positive impact on the economy. But having control over key resources, such as fossil fuels, can augment state power and be used as leverage over other actors, as Russia did

in 2006 when it attempted to force Ukraine to give in in its price dispute with Russia by cutting off the supply of natural gas transiting the country on the way to the EU. This move prompted the European Union to seek both to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels and to diversify the import sources of gas and oil. Russia, on the other hand, aims to thwart the latter as it would have negative economic and strategic implications.

For Russia energy politics are part of foreign policy.¹ The 2016 Foreign Policy concept stated that Russia “enhances cooperation with the leading energy producers, promotes equal dialogue with consumer and transit countries assuming that stable demand and reliable transit are needed to guarantee energy supplies” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation 2016). As evidenced by how Gasprom has used pricing as a way to punish or entice Ukraine in the mid-2000s and 2010s, it is clear that Russia uses energy to achieve its goals in a very *realpolitik* manner. In the Eastern Mediterranean, Russia has focused on the exploration and production of both oil and natural gas, building pipelines and nuclear power plants; it has an active presence in the energy markets of almost all countries in the region. It has achieved this by working with both regional governments and multinational corporations.

The known energy reserves in countries around the Eastern Mediterranean have been augmented since 2009 with the discovery of vast fields of natural gas off the shores of Israel, Cyprus and Egypt. It was hoped that, once countries met their domestic needs, they would be able to export, especially to southern European countries such as Italy. This led to disputed claims and questions over export and transportation strategies and costs, further exacerbating already existing conflicts in the region. For instance, Turkey has claimed a maritime boundary that is supported by the UN-backed government in Libya, but disputed by other countries, including Greece and Cyprus, and leading to the imposition of sanctions by the EU. The European Union is implicated not only because some of its member states are involved in the exploration of these reserves, but also because this natural gas could eventually be used to ease Europe’s demand.

In 2018, Russia supplied nearly 40% of the EU’s natural gas, approximately 30% of its crude oil and 42% of solid fuels, mostly coal; while the dependency ratio varies among member states, Cyprus and Malta are among the most dependent ones, meeting 90% of their energy needs from imports, with other Mediterranean countries such as Greece and Italy close behind (Eurostat 2020a). In 2019, nearly 45% of EU’s imports of natural gas and 28% of oil came from Russia; during the first semester of 2020, these numbers were 39.3% and 26.4% respectively (Eurostat 2020b), further emphasizing the EU’s dependence on Russian supplies, making it vulnerable to Russian demands. A study commissioned by the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Relations states, “But, more than others, Russia uses its energy wealth as well to protect and promote its interests in its ‘near abroad’ and to make its geopolitical influence felt further afield, including in

Europe. It uses gas supplies to punish and reward, affecting both transit states and end-consumers” (Korteweg 2018). It is not surprising, then, that the European Union has made diversification of its energy imports a priority.

In 2019, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Italy, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority established the EastMed Gas Forum (EMGF), which in 2020 was elevated to the status of an international organization, based in Cairo. It is a prime example of regional multilateralism, with the purpose of promoting natural gas exports from the Eastern Mediterranean. If the efforts were to succeed, EU’s energy security would receive a boost (Reuters 2020a). It is noteworthy that Turkey was not part of the forum, indicating the troubled relationship it has with some members over its role in the gas exploration. For its part, in December 2019, the US Congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act, which allowed the US to provide military assistance to Greece and Cyprus, lifted the US arms embargo on Cyprus, and authorized the establishment of a Energy Center to facilitate energy cooperation between the US, Greece, Cyprus and Israel. It can be argued that this legislative act served as a catalyst for the Greek-Cypriot-Israeli energy alliance (Prince 2019). It is expected that US involvement in the region will increase during the upcoming Biden Administration. In January 2020, the governments of Greece, Cyprus and Israel signed an agreement on the EastMed pipeline project, a 1900 km undersea pipeline intended to carry natural gas from Israel to Europe by 2025. While the profitability of the pipeline remains questionable, its potential to help the European Union reduce its dependence on Russia for energy supplies makes it valuable (RFE/RL 2020a).

Russia, on the other hand, has no intention of giving up its share of the European market, and has signed a number of agreements focused on the production of natural gas. A case in point is Zohr, the largest natural gas field discovered by the Italian company ENI in 2015. Rosneft, a company controlled by the Kremlin, purchased a 30% stake in the project in 2017 (Reuters 2019). Another Russian state-owned company, Zarubezhneft, announced that it would join in the exploratory drilling in two other blocks off the coast of Egypt (Egypt Oil&Gas 2019). Rosatom is in the process of building Egypt’s first nuclear power plant, El Dabaa. In Libya, in the summer of 2020, Russian military contractors from the Wagner Group seized control of Libya’s largest oil field, Sharara, and its most important oil-exporting port, Es Sider (Faucon and Malsin 2020). In February of 2018, Russian company Novatek obtained permission from the Lebanese government to develop natural gas fields in the territorial waters disputed by Lebanon and Israel (Melamedov 2020). In Algeria, Lukoil and Zarubezhneft have signed Memoranda of Understanding with Algeria’s state-owned oil company Sonatrach for exploration and development (RFE/RL 2020b). Russia is already heavily involved in Turkey’s energy sector, and is also building its first nuclear power plant. In Syria, Russia is working on renovating approximately 40 energy facilities, including off-shore oil fields (Reuters 2020b). In other words, Russian companies

participate, invest or exercise control over energy resources in almost every country in the Eastern Mediterranean. Although this is not the subject of this chapter, it should be noted that Russia is emerging as a key energy partner in a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including designing and construction of nuclear power plants and research projects. This suggests that Russia is expanding its energy links well beyond Europe and China; this makes it less dependent on the European market should the EU reduce its dependence on Russian gas. At the same time, energy investments in other countries are also likely to bring about geopolitical gains, especially in strategically valuable countries.

Given the importance of fossil fuels for Russia's domestic and foreign policies, it is not surprising that Moscow would focus on pursuing access to and control over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Energy is not only an exceptionally valuable commodity, but it can also be used as a coercive tool in the pursuit of strategic advantage.

In addition to seeking aggressively to participate in various exploration projects, Russia has also increased its profile in the Eastern Mediterranean region through military and diplomatic means. Two countries in which Russia has military presence are Syria and Libya, which are discussed in the next section.

Russia's military presence in the eastern Mediterranean: Syria

Without a doubt, Russia's participation in Syria's civil has been its most extensive military intervention in the Eastern Mediterranean; its increasing military buildup in Libya is also drawing international attention. However, Moscow has been able to raise its profile militarily in the region through other means as well, including arms deals, joint exercises and increasing *operational capabilities*.

Russia's intervention in the war marked the first time after the collapse of the Soviet Union that it intervened militarily in a conflict outside of the post-Soviet space. It came at a time when Russia had lost a valuable ally in Col. Muammar Qaddafi after the Western-led bombing of Libya, and was on strained terms with the West after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The reasons for the intervention have been widely discussed: long-standing alliance with Syria dating back to the Cold War, distaste for US-sponsored regime change, expanding its influence while seeking to limit that of the US. Moscow's official position has been that it is helping fight terrorism, even though its primary target has been Assad's opposition rather than ISIL or other Islamist groups. Bashir al-Assad's regime was self-described as a secular one in a region that had been contending with growing Islamist influence; it is not too far-fetched to expect that, had Islamist won the war, the region would become even more unstable and liable to export Islamist fundamentalist terrorism – something with which Russia has had to contend. Hence, while Assad could accurately be described as a dictator, for

Moscow he was far preferable to an Islamist alternative. In fact, Moscow has consistently supported leaders who are not Islamist, including al Sisi in Egypt and Haftar in Libya.

Syria had been a long-time ally and an important military and economic partner, as well as the home of the only Russian military base outside of post-Soviet space, Tartus. Russia's support for the Assad regime was evident early on as Moscow continuously shielded it from UN Security Council resolutions, instead calling for external powers' cooperation in the conflict. During the summer and fall of 2013, Russia started to intervene diplomatically on behalf of the Assad regime (Wintour 2013). Moscow's role as a mediator between the regime and the West after government forces used chemical weapons against the civilian population, crossing a so-called "red line" announced by President Barack Obama, precluded any Western military operation against the regime. It also reaffirmed Russia's role as a key player in the conflict.

Russia's military intervention in the Syrian civil war officially began on September 30, 2015. While it relied primarily on air operations, the number of Russian troops who participated in combat between 2015 and 2018 reached 63,000 (BBC 2018). It continued to supply the government forces with arms throughout the war. Russia also converted Bassel Al-Assad International airport in Latakia into Hmeimim air base, and expanded the facilities at Tartus naval base, allowing it to host Russian aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines (DW 2017). The base was further expanded in 2020 by adding more land and coastal waters, leased for free for 49 years and now is part of Russia's permanent military contingent in Syria (Defense World 2020).

By supporting Bashir al-Assad's regime Russia ensured the continuation of these links: access to the naval base in Tartus was secured and the base itself significantly enhanced, the Hmeimim air base has been acquired, and Syria's government forces have remained an important client for the Russian defense industry. Furthermore, by supporting the regime's forces, it prevented what it perceived as a potential regime change driven by the West, and established itself as a reliable partner. Russia had long opposed regime change policies espoused by the US; it was even suspicious of anti-regime protests in countries around the world – as well as is Russia itself – and perceived them as instigated or supported by the West as well. Further US troop withdrawals during the Trump administration solidified Moscow as the essential security actor in Syria.

While the intervention has paid off handsomely for Russia, there are still issues that remain to be settled in Syria. For instance, Russia still has to contend with Iranian influence over the regime and in the country itself; US military presence, while minimal, along with Turkish forces in the north of the country suggests that these two countries will also want to have a say in the future of Syria. The rebuilding of the country will require financial assistance and investments from Europe and elsewhere, which is unlikely to be forthcoming unless there are major concessions from Bashir al-Assad.

Finally, while some Russian businesses, such as the Wagner Group, have made investments in Syria, they remain few; the sanctions imposed on Syria by Western countries as well the situation in the country make it unattractive place for business for Russian companies (Petkova 2020).

Russia's relations with Libya, Egypt and Cyprus

Moscow's growing involvement in Libya has led to comparisons with Syria. Russia has quietly backed the forces of General Haftar with military aid and mercenaries from the Wagner group,² described by the US defense department as "surrogate for the Russian ministry of defense" (MacKinnon and Detsch 2020) and led by businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, a close confidant of Vladimir Putin. Although the influx of Turkish military aid and fighters prevented Haftar's forces from capturing Tripoli, he still controls a large portion of Eastern and Central Libya, allowing the Wagner Group mercenaries access to bases and an airport, allowing it to reach across the border into the Sahel. It should be noted that Moscow has also reached out to the UN-backed GNA President al Sarraj as well, making it ideally suited as a possible future power broker in the conflict.

The reason for Russia's intervention in the Libyan civil war can be seen as an attempt to regain the influence and contracts lost after the fall of Col. Muammar Qaddafi, access to Libya's considerable energy reserves, and last but not least, strengthening its negotiating position *vis-a-vis* Europe. Civil wars and instability can cause ordinary people to flee from the violence, potentially creating a new wave of refugees – one that Europe is not equipped to handle, and hence, leverage against it.

The Egyptian government, led by President al Sisi, shares Russia's support of General Haftar in Libya and Assad's regime in Syria as the least bad option; both Moscow and Cairo share preferences for political actors without an Islamist agenda. Furthermore, economic and military ties between the two countries have grown considerably since the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, which saw al Sisi come to power. While the West has been critical of the el Sisi regime for its violations of human rights, Moscow has embraced it. In addition to the energy cooperation sketched in the previous sections, Cairo has allowed a Russia Industrial Zone to operate in the Suez Canal Economic zone and the establishment of a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union zone (Mohamed 2019). In October 2016 Egypt voted against a proposed UN Security Council Resolution seeking to end airstrikes in Syria.

In October 2018 Russia signed a strategic partnership agreement with Egypt, which has led to the expansion of economic, diplomatic and security ties between the two countries. Bilateral trade increased by 37% between 2017 and 2018, leading to more investments. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of the renewed Russia-Egypt relationship has been in military cooperation. Russia and Egypt are also cooperating in Libya, where they both

support General Haftar and the LNA. In addition to purchasing a significant number of advanced fighter jets from Russia, conducting joint air force and naval exercises, there is also the possibility of a Russian naval base in Egypt. To a degree unmatched in the Arab world, Russia is seeking to enhance its military interoperability with Egypt (Ramani 2019).

Russia is by far the largest arms supplier in Africa, accounting for 49% of the total, compared to 14% share of the market for the United States, and 13% for China. The top two recipients of Russian arms on the African continent are Algeria and Egypt. Between 2015 and 2019, Russia's exports to Egypt increased by 191% compared to 2010–2014, accounting for 34% of Egypt's total arms imports. Algeria, the world's sixth-largest arms importer between 2015–2019, acquired 67% of its purchases from Russia, accounting for 14% of total Russian arms exports. It is interesting to note that despite Russia's military involvement in the Syrian conflict, arms exports to Syria between 2015–2019 actually declined by 87% compared to the 2010–2014 period, accounting for only 0.7% of total Russian arms deliveries worldwide (Wezeman et al. 2019; Rakesh 2020).

One of the most controversial Russian arms transfers has been Turkey's purchase and installation of S-400 air defense systems. The US was adamantly against this purchase, as it would threaten NATO air defenses and F-35 fighter jets (Markus 2019) and retaliated by expelling Turkey from the multinational F-35 program. There was pressure from Congress for the new Biden Administration to impose sanctions on Turkey, which were required by law, but never implemented by the Trump Administration. Either way, the sale of S-400s has a disruptive impact on NATO that will likely be felt for some time in the future.

As Russia's influence in the Mediterranean expands, Cyprus becomes more important strategically. The relationship between the Republic of Cyprus and Russia is primarily an economic and political one, but it does have a military dimension. In addition to the already existing positive views that the Cypriot public has of Russia as a partner, Cyprus has become a hub for Russian investments and an attractive destination for Russian expats, lured by its low-tax rate regime in the EU and relatively easy adaptation facilitated by widespread use of the Russian language, similarities in culture and religion. In 2012, Moody's estimated Russian banks and corporations had \$31bn on deposit in Cyprus – more than its annual gross domestic product (Peel 2020). Although the numbers have dropped significantly since then, Russian money and tourism remain very important for the Cypriot economy. When Cyprus was hit in the financial crisis, in exchange for favorable loans from Moscow, the Cypriot government was willing to consider Russian participation in the exploration of natural gas in the Cyprus Exclusive Economic Zone. While the latter did not materialize, there were media reports that Russia obtained permission to use the Andreas Papandreou airbase and the Evangelos Florakis naval base near Limassol (TASS 2014). In 2015, Russia and Cyprus signed an agreement allowing the Russian navy to use Cypriot ports, and also

allowing for the possibility of Russian warplanes and military ships to use airports and seaports for humanitarian purposes (Reuters 2015). This includes the refueling of Russian jets carrying out strikes in Syria (Hurriyet Daily News 2015). Cyprus has vetoed proposed EU sanctions more than once: in 2020 it blocked sanctions intended to blacklist Russian officials from Crimea and sanctions against Belorussian officials, including Aleksandr Lukashenko (DW 2020; Baczynska 2020).

Russia as a mediator

Russia has not only expanded its military presence in the region, but also its diplomatic activities. Moscow is in contact with governments, as well as various other political forces across the region; thanks to its extensive diplomatic contacts, Russia offers to mediate in border delineation conflicts, ceasefire negotiation, or even over energy exploration. Examples include Russia's offers to mediate between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, ceasefires in the Syrian war, Israel-Lebanon and Syria-Lebanon border disputes, even talks between Turkey and Cyprus over energy exploration and on solving the decades-old Cyprus problem. In Syria, Moscow has worked together with Turkey and Iran as part of the Astana process to find a solution to the crisis and resolve humanitarian issues (Al Jazeera 2017). However, it hasn't always been successful in bringing opposing parties together: in Libya, despite contacts with both General Haftar of the LNA and Prime Minister al-Sarajj, it was not able to bring them together to negotiate a ceasefire following the offensive of Haftar's forces. It took US intervention to bring both parties to the table. This shows that, despite its considerable influence, Russia still lacks the resources to be able to persuade conflicting parties.

A quick look at Russia's mediating efforts elsewhere – in Nagorno-Karabakh or Transnistria – suggests that none of these conflicts has reached a resolution; instead, they have become “frozen conflicts.” The *status quo* benefits the participants more than it does Russia itself. Russia's approach to conflict resolution has been characterized as “coercive mediation,” where negotiations and coercive military action are interlinked (Lewis 2020).

Russia also has a history of using its veto power in the UN Security Council to shield its allies and punish adversaries; in this, it is no different from any other normal power. It has repeatedly vetoed proposed resolutions on Syria, ranging from ceasefire calls for investigating use of chemical weapons, and the supply of humanitarian goods. Similarly, Russia is using its veto on proposed resolutions regarding Libya, shielding LNAs commander Haftar and his allies.

Russia's relations with Turkey

Russia has undoubtedly enhanced its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean. Another regional actor that has become more assertive in the region is

Turkey. Ankara and Moscow are frequently at odds, but also act as partners at issues of mutual interest, often against EU or US interests. Relations between Russia and Turkey have been on the upswing since the early 2000s, but the level of cooperation has increased significantly during the past decade. Much has been written about the growing economic, institutional and geopolitical ties between the two countries as well as the low point their relations reached after the downing of the SU-24 by Turkey in 2015. Although Moscow and Ankara do not share a geographical border, they nonetheless have interests in the neighboring regions, including Syria and, most recently, Nagorno-Karabakh. Both countries have been active participants in other conflict-laden areas including Libya, Cyprus and the hydrocarbon diplomacy in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. In fact, it can be argued that Russia and Turkey have both tried to assert their influence in the region, with various degrees of success. By engaging with Turkey, Russia also weakens Western, and specifically, US influence in the Mediterranean.

At a first glance, the cooperation between Russia and Turkey appears to be continuously strengthening and expanding, leading many observers to argue that an alliance between two countries is emerging. Cooperation is particularly strong in the areas of trade, tourism, energy and humanitarian ties, and seen as “positive interdependence” by Russia (Teslova 2020). Russia is a very important trading partner for Turkey, with energy imports accounting for a large portion of the trade. Currently, there are several significant projects underway, including the building of the Akkuyu nuclear power plant – the first of its kind in Turkey and built by a Russian company and TurkStream. The latter is a 910km long natural gas pipeline that runs under the Black Sea, connecting Russia and Turkey, and supplying gas to Europe thereafter (Martin 2018). It should be noted, however, that the pipeline is not as profitable as expected because Turkey has drastically reduced its Russian gas deliveries in favor of Azerbaijani gas (Assenova 2020). Despite that, it is a pipeline that bypasses Ukraine, which means that Bulgaria would have to receive its gas from Turkey, which would then continue to Serbia and Hungary. The project helps Ankara achieve its goal of becoming a regional energy hub, but leaves Bulgaria vulnerable.

Upon closer examination, it is clear that the objectives Moscow and Ankara pursue are very often contradictory. For instance, in Syria, Turkey’s initial objective was regime change; facing Western hesitation and Russian support for Assad, both diplomatically and militarily, it has had to settle for working to prevent a potential Kurdish state in northeastern Syria. Further, while Turkey has been primarily concerned with the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) and its links to the PKK, the Russians have targeted the Syrian opposition as well as Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham (HTS) and other groups that are widely considered to be linked to Turkey. In February 2020, 36 Turkish soldiers were killed in Idlib province, purportedly by Syrian government forces. So far, Turkey and Russia have managed to reach agreements on disputed issues – such as the status of Idlib, and

continue to coordinate military deployments. Yet, not being willing or prepared for a military confrontation with Russian forces in Syria, Turkey has had to compromise more than expected.

Libya is another case where Turkish and Russian interests diverge. Turkey openly supports the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, who has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, and has sent military advisors, Syrian militants, and (in contradiction to the UN arms embargo on Libya) drones and air defense. The main opponent of the GNA is the Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, whose main supporters are Egypt, UAE and Russia. In another significant development, in November 2019, Turkey signed an agreement with the GNA demarcating the maritime boundaries of each in a way that supports Turkey's claim for drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean (Sahinkaya 2020). Libya is where the relations between Turkey and Egypt are at their most intractable, even though the two also have opposing positions on natural gas exploration and Syria. Turkey's relations with Egypt have been in crisis since the 2013 coup that saw the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi, a friend and ally of President Erdogan, and full-fledged diplomatic relations are yet to be restored.

Differences between Ankara and Moscow exist in another area of the Eastern Mediterranean, Cyprus. While Turkey is the only country to recognize the self-proclaimed Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Russia is seen as an ally of the Republic of Cyprus as well as Greece. Cyprus not only remains the last divided country in Europe, but the discovery of massive quantities of natural gas off its shores has brought about disputing claims and further acrimony during recent years. In the summer of 2020, it was reported that the Cypriot government sought President Putin's help in diffusing the tensions with Turkey over natural gas exploration (Kambas 2020).

Given the continuing existence of an array of conflicting interests between Ankara and Moscow, it can be argued that the relations between the two focus on areas of mutual interest, such as trade, and accommodation when the need arises. There does not seem to be an overall strategy, rather a case-by-case compromise and settlement of different objectives. As the weaker power, Turkey tends to be the one to adjust its objectives and accept compromise. Putin is said to have a good working relationship with Turkey's President Erdogan, complimenting his independent foreign policy (TASS 2020). Facing the prospect of more EU sanctions over gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean and a deepening economic crisis at home, President Erdogan, although frequently spurning European leaders, has stated that "Turkey's future is together with Europe" (Al Jazeera 2020a, 2020b). Russia, as a medium size economy, cannot provide the investment and support that a country such as Turkey needs. It can be expected that the Russo-Turkish cooperation will continue on a transactional basis, without Turkey completely turning its back on its Western allies. From the Russian perspective, cooperation with Turkey helps to bring about discord among

NATO allies, thereby further weakening the alliance. This is in line with Russia's goal of weakening US power and influence globally.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked the growing involvement of Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean, which has resulted in the substantially more important role compared to a decade ago. Russia has achieved this regional power status through active diplomacy, military presence and activism on energy markets and explorations. The Eastern Mediterranean, encompassing geopolitically important states from the Middle East and North Africa, is a natural stepping stone for Russia's increasing involvement in both regions.

While Europe and the post-Soviet space remain Russia's primary strategic concern, it is only natural to seek new partners at a time when the US has been reluctant to take a leadership role, especially in areas where anti-Western sentiments prevail. Russia's rising influence helps erode US power globally, which is in line with Russia's objective of a multipolar world, in which it can participate as an equal partner. Moscow has achieved its enhanced power position by simultaneously increasing its military presence and energy politics in the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. Currently, Russia's energy exports are primarily to Europe and Asia, but with the EU's stated goal of diversification and reducing the consumption of fossil fuels by 2050, it is only natural that Russia should look for new markets, and Africa, with its growing population, is an attractive market for investors. While Russian arms exports are falling globally, they are on the rise in its most important markets of India, China and Algeria. Many Western countries are wary of nuclear power plants, but many African states see them as a way to meet their growing energy needs and benefit from Russian support. Hence, at a time when the world seems to be outgrowing US global leadership and interventionism, Russia has the ambition to fill the void. Its power play in the Eastern Mediterranean can help it regain the influence and capability to do so.

Notes

- 1 See Chapter 6 in this volume.
- 2 On the role of the Wagner Group in supporting Russian foreign policy. see Marten (2019).

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11 The new great game: ontological factors in western and rising powers' competition in Venezuela

Dina Moulioukova and Karina Brennan

On 23 January 2019 Juan Guaidó, President of the National Assembly of Venezuela, declared himself President of Venezuela, setting off further political turmoil in a country already in crisis (Krygier et al. 2019). In response, on the very same day of Guaidó's declaration, the Trump administration quickly expressed its support for his interim presidency as the National Assembly was described by President Trump as "the only legitimate branch of government duly elected by the Venezuelan people." (Trump 2019) European leaders followed suit a few days later – on 4 February 2019 – and while the Western world ultimately stood in agreement with one another, the time lapse between these two critical announcements is perhaps a sign of yet another misstep among the traditionally close allies (Jones and Wintour 2019). Russia and China, the major emerging powers, in contrast, have remained firmly behind Nicolas Maduro, helping to empower an embattled leader who has managed to maintain power despite contestation over a period of several years. Moreover, on a recent trip to the region, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo called out both Russian and Chinese support for the Maduro regime, as he "accused China of aiding Venezuela's economic collapse by bankrolling President Nicolas Maduro's government," and condemned the presence of Russian troops in Venezuela as an "obvious provocation" (Pompeo 2019).

This exchange not only signals escalating tensions between Western powers and rising powers in general, but it is also a signal that Western hegemony in the region is now in question. How has this hegemony come into question? We argue that dissonance among the strategies and alliances of Western powers, namely the US and EU, is contributing to the uncertainty of what mitigating steps these states might take toward regime change in Venezuela. As a result, rising powers, namely Russia and China, have seized this opportunity to continue expansion of their influence in Latin America. What has emerged then is a divided world along relatively similar lines to those of the Cold War.¹

Western perspective: growing dissonance and transatlantic divide

Historical context

US strategy toward Venezuela has largely centered on security, economic and ideological interests. Historically the US is the largest trading partner of Venezuela, which relies on oil for about one-third of its gross domestic production (Corrales and Romero 2013). Since President Hugo Chavez came to power in 1999, the dynamics of relations between the US and Venezuela dramatically shifted – once more friendly and both democratic regimes, the US and Venezuela enjoyed relatively stable relations. After the end of the Cold War, Latin American countries, in general, underwent “peaceful processes of democratic consolidation,” and the policies of the Washington Consensus fused the economic ties between Latin America and the US. With these shifts in regime and growing economic interdependence, Crandall, Corrales and Romero argue that “security concerns became less important as democracy and globalization made governments more accountable and less radical” (Corrales and Romero 21).

However, by 1999 the election of Chavez in Venezuela would shift the trajectory of US-Venezuelan relations, as the process of unraveling democratic institutions in Venezuela raised concern in the US once again. According to experts, Chavez ushered in an era where US officials had to “worry anew about the risks of civil unrest (either internally in Venezuela or deliberately fomented by Venezuela in neighboring states) and the potential for financial calamity (if, for instance, Venezuela decided to place an oil embargo on the United States)” (Corrales and Romero, 21). Moreover, Chavez’s heightened anti-US sentiments and turned his regime toward Russia and China, creating ever-more pressing security and economic threats for the US in the region. And, while there was palpable and tangible antagonism between the US and Venezuela during the Chavez era, an oil embargo toward US never came to fruition and Venezuela would challenge the US, but without crossing a “dangerous” threshold; in turn, Washington DC vocalized its discontent with the Chavez regime, but never engaged in a policy of regime change nor levied extremely damaging sanctions” (Corrales and Romero 2013).

However, since that time, toward the end of the Chavez era and now into the Maduro regime, the circumstances have changed dramatically. The trend toward authoritarianism, the violation of human rights, and the deterioration of democratic institutions have been widely documented and acknowledged by the international community. A 2019 Human Rights Watch report (Human Rights Watch 2018) summarized the conditions in the current crisis in Venezuela:

No independent government institutions remain today in Venezuela to act as a check on executive power. A series of measures by the Maduro

and Chávez governments stacked the courts with judges who make no pretense of independence. The government has been repressing dissent through often-violent crackdowns on street protests, jailing opponents, and prosecuting civilians in military courts. It has also stripped power from the opposition-led legislature ... Severe shortages of medicines, medical supplies, and food leave many Venezuelans unable to feed their families adequately or access essential healthcare. The massive exodus of Venezuelans fleeing repression and shortages represents the largest migration crisis of its kind in recent Latin American history (Human Rights Watch 2018).

Thus, the fears of US officials of civil unrest, economic risk and growing external influences are at a point where US interests in Venezuela are more at risk now than ever before. According to a January 2019 Congressional Research Report, “The United States historically had close relations with Venezuela, a major U.S. oil supplier, but relations have deteriorated under the Chávez and Maduro governments. U.S. policymakers have expressed concerns about the deterioration of human rights and democracy in Venezuela and the country’s lack of cooperation on counternarcotic and counterterrorism efforts” (Congressional Research Service 2020). Such perspectives within the US government resulted in the US beginning its pivot toward advocating for regime change in January 2019.

Recognizing the National Assembly as the only democratic institution in Venezuela, the US, the EU and other Group of Seven (G7) countries have rejected the reelection of Nicolas Maduro, citing that the elections were illegitimate and, as the president of the only democratic institution, Juan Guaidó received their full support in the aftermath of his declaration (Brice 2019).

Security interests

The shift in US and EU policy toward Venezuela has presented a number of key security threats to the latter, derived mainly from the instability and chaos of the current crisis, spurred by deteriorating political and economic conditions. Some of the key security risks, including declining oil production and exports and terrorism, are discussed below.

Energy sector risks are central to US interests in Venezuela, as it is home to more than 300 billion barrels, the largest oil reserves in the world, yet for the past four years has continued to experience declining export volume (BP 2018). According to OPEC reports, oil production in Venezuela was 2.3 million barrels per day in 2015/2016 on average, by 2018, that figure had dropped to about 1 million barrels per day (OPEC 2016).

While sanctions on Venezuela are certainly a contributing factor to this decline, there are other regime-specific interests that cause this particular insecurity. Production has suffered for several reasons. First, the Maduro

regime has imprisoned executives of PDVSA, and has appointed Venezuelan military leaders to those open posts (Ulmer and Buitrago 2017). A former National Guard general who had no oil experience became the head of PDVSA and was suddenly responsible for leading the state-run oil company. Only one year after the first imprisonment, analysts reported that oil output had gone “AWOL” in Venezuela. Further complicating matters is the new “parallel board of directors” established by the Venezuelan Congress to negotiate foreign debt ahead of upcoming payment deadlines (Cohen and Guanipa 2019). According to reports, this new board will make the determination as to whether or not it should make a “\$71 million interest payment due on April 27 on PDVSA’s 2020 bond, which is backed by a 49% stake in Citgo” (Cohen and Guanipa 2019). In addition to political factors that contribute to the decline in Venezuela’s oil production, there are also practical matters affected by the domestic conditions. Recent prolonged power outages, for example, hinder production since blending and exporting crude are affected (Guanipa and Buitrago 2019).²

Another critical security risk cited by many experts is the issue of Venezuela’s counterterrorism policy and efforts, particularly because the presence of Hezbollah, a terrorist group known as an Iranian proxy, in Venezuela. According to experts, Venezuela has had a substantial history of relations with Iran, as both regimes partnered to establish financial and business ties used to “launder Iranian money, procure technology, and bribe senior Venezuelan officials” (Ottolenghi and Hannah 2017). Iran and Venezuela have also shared similar anti-Western narratives that cemented relations between them, and an ideological exchange has been promoted through the establishment of institutions like the Centro de Intercambio Cultural Iran LatinoAmerica (Ottolenghi and Hannah 2017).

This relationship has extended even further, as Hezbollah has expanded its presence and operations in Latin America, primarily through Venezuela. As described by Colin Clarke, “Hezbollah is well-entrenched in Venezuela, where the Shiite terrorist group has long worked to establish a vast infrastructure for its criminal activities, including drug trafficking, money laundering, and illicit smuggling” (Clarke 2019). Moreover, under Chavez, harboring Hezbollah was more actively supported than in previous regimes because of the relations between Chavez and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, and many agree that this policy has continued under the Maduro regime. However, as recently as February 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo commented on Hezbollah in Venezuela, saying, “The Iranians are impacting the people of Venezuela and throughout South America. We have an obligation to take down that risk for America” (Sharman 2019). While not explicitly stated, Pompeo’s comment implies that perhaps a different regime, like one headed by Guaidó, may result in different policy outcomes when it comes to counterterrorism operations. Some experts doubt that a change in regime would actually result in different policies because, even though a Venezuela under Guaidó may attempt to

counter Iranian and Hezbollah influence in the region (even if just to appeal to US interests). Given Venezuela's weakened state, its actual capacity and priorities may be focused elsewhere (Clarke 2019). Moreover, while this is an important question, US perception of a new regime and its effects on counterterrorism matter just as much.

Economic interests

In terms of economic interests, the case of US-Venezuelan relations is intriguing. With an estimated GDP of \$210 billion, Venezuela is the 33rd largest trading partner of the US, with trade valued at an estimated \$16.5 billion in total two-way goods trade in 2017, according to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.). Because of this relationship, US trade with Venezuela supports approximately 82,000 jobs in the US (2015), highlighting that deteriorating economic conditions would have a serious, though perhaps not critical, impact on the US economy (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.).

The US also has something to gain with the imposition of oil sanctions in particular. Oil sanctions, which have traditionally been, a "last tool in economic and diplomatic arsenal," are also a source of emptied (forced out) space in the competitive oil industry. Sanctions on both Iran and Venezuela have created somewhat of a void in crude exports so that the US has now been able to increase its output and economic gain. By "scaring buyers across the world," US exports of crude oil are reaching new heights. According to a recent report by Reuters, "shipments of U.S. crude into Europe have just hit a new record. January 2019 imports were 630,000 barrels per day, still – behind Russia and Iraq, but above other OPEC producers including Nigeria and Libya" (Yagova and Kumar 2019; Wightman 2019). Oil trading experts affirmed that this trend is only likely to increase, as the Joint Comprehensive 2019 Plan of Action is further challenged and as the Maduro regime attempts to tighten its grip" (Yagova and Kumar 2019). However, as described above, the US is also experiencing challenges because of the reduction of Venezuelan oil production, demonstrating the fine line between economic self-interest and broader geopolitical security interests.

In terms of its economic interests, the EU is Venezuela's third-largest trading partner, and exports to Venezuela grew rapidly in the early 2010s, but have more recently declined due to deteriorating economic conditions. Foreign direct investment had also grown rapidly, increasing from 5.5 billion euros in 2004 to over 24 billion euros by 2012. Thus, the economic relations between the EU and Venezuela have been strengthening and may have continued on trend if not for the deterioration of Venezuela's economy under Chavez and then Maduro. Overall, in understanding the key security and economic interests of Venezuela, it becomes clear how and why the US

chose to support Juan Guaidó as the interim president. With the hopes that a Guaidó regime would mean a return to normal economic conditions, oil production and a tougher stance on terrorist organizations within the region, the US has a clear interest to see the end of the Maduro regime and usher in a regime more aligned with its own interests. In essence, a return to the pre-Chavez era relations between the US and Venezuela.

Normative and ontological interests

Based on their own embodied democratic principles values and language, the European Union and its member-states have become a chorus calling for the end of Nicolas Maduro's illegitimate rule after the 2018 elections were highly contested and raised suspicion of rigging around the world. However, while Venezuela embodies key economic and security interests for the US, Venezuela embodies very different interests for the EU, namely normative (democratic) values and colonial "special relationships."³

As outlined in *Europe and America: the End of the Transatlantic Relationship?* by Federiga Bindi (2019), Spain and Portugal played particularly important roles in shaping the foreign policy of their own states and the EU toward Latin America. For example, in 1982 Spain "created generous development aid programs for Latin America," and EU policies toward the region were greatly influenced by Spanish commissioners which focused policy on "promoting peace, democracy, and regional economic and political integration" (Bindi 2019, 285). This approach is rooted in the traditionally liberal approach to foreign policy utilized by the West, and is of particular importance for the case of the EU and Venezuela, because of their shared history and policy objectives.

Transatlantic divisions

The official narratives from both the US and the EU have centered on democratic values and have voiced support for a "democratic outcome," which would mean a policy of regime change from Maduro to Guaidó. The US and EU also both happen to have material and ideational interests in Venezuela via oil, economic relations, historical and colonial ties, security and are in opposition to the ideas of Chavismo. Yet, each had a different, unaligned approach to Guaidó's declaration, though ultimately they were aligned in reality.

In his statement, first expressing support for Guaidó, President Trump (2019) stated, "I will continue to use the full weight of United States economic and diplomatic power to press for the restoration of Venezuelan democracy. We encourage other Western Hemisphere governments to recognize National Assembly President Guaidó as the Interim President of Venezuela, and we will work constructively with them in support of his efforts to restore constitutional legitimacy." And, while Europe responded, it did so with an ultimatum.

Rather than coming out on January 23, 2019 in full support for Guaidó along with the US, European leaders instead took a different approach. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, voiced concern and urged for the restoration of democratic principles, but fell short of recognizing Guaidó as the leader of Venezuela:

The EU strongly calls for the start of an immediate political process leading to free and credible elections, in conformity with the Constitutional order. The EU fully supports the national assembly as the democratically elected institution whose powers need to be restored and respected. The civil rights, freedom and safety of all members of the National Assembly, including its President, Juan Guaidó, need to be observed and fully respected. Violence and the excessive use of force by security forces are completely unacceptable, and will for sure not resolve the crisis. The Venezuelan people have the right to peacefully demonstrate, to freely choose its leaders and decide its future. The European Union and its member states remain ready to support the restoration of democracy and rule of law in Venezuela through a credible peaceful political process in line with the Venezuelan constitution” (Council of the EU 2019).

The same day France, Germany and Spain issued an ultimatum to Maduro – calling for a new presidential election or they (and the broader EU) would recognize Juan Guaidó as the interim president (France 24 2019; BBC 2019). In the days between the US declaration and the end of the ultimatum, the EU remained vague on whom they recognized as the legitimate leader of Venezuela, falling out of full agreement with long-time ally, the US. Their ultimatum was ignored and, thus, the EU extended its support and recognition to Guaidó. Therefore, while ultimately the US and the EU were united in their support for a democratic regime, there was a clear distance between the two partners in their respective recognitions of Guaidó.

In another key independent move, the European Union established an “International Contact Group,” whose objective is “contributing to create conditions for a political and peaceful process to emerge, enabling Venezuelans to determine their own future” with the support of free and fair electoral processes (France 24 2019). Reports indicate that this contact group was established due to urging by Spain in an effort to not “deepen divisions and even risk a civil war in Venezuela,” and as push back to the rapid move by the US to support Guaidó, in which many European leaders felt “caught off-guard” (Von Der Burchard and Hanke 2019). This group remains independent of the US, and is comprised by the EU, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Britain, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay.

The case of Venezuela is now another example in the growing Transatlantic Divide, but while “there has been a gradual erosion in the significance of the relationship,” between the US and the EU, the strain of the relationship is in

full view today (Bindi 2019). Central to this tension are US complaints of Europe's shortcomings in contributions to security, and Europe's counter criticism of having to abide by US interests and whims rather than their own (Bindi 2019). Several policies of the Trump administration have caused or exacerbated tensions with traditional key allies throughout the world; by the US withdrawal of the Paris Agreement and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the US has demonstrated recently that it will move unilaterally (and quickly), causing rifts in decades-old partnerships. Thus, as many experts have warned, the growing gap between Europe and the US does and will continue to have consequences. One of those consequences is the case of Venezuela, characterized by some as a "seemingly feeble country with fewer than 30 million inhabitants," that is now center stage to a new set of great game politics between western and rising powers.

Rising powers: converging and conflicting interests

The Russian and Chinese positions in support of Maduro's regime stand in striking contrast to the Western narrative, which itself is shaped by diverging responses to the crisis in Venezuela. We turn now to the question of the role that energy has played as the basis for this alliance between Russia and China in Venezuela, the possible divergences of interests between the two, and the competition in the energy sector between Beijing and Moscow.

Historical context

The history of relations in the energy sector between the emerging powers and Venezuela has varied over the past several decades. They have depended not only on ideological differences between rising powers and the US, but also on Venezuela's ideological self-perception. Despite similarities of approaches between the PRC and the Soviet Union, there was a marked difference between Beijing's and Moscow's strategies in the region: the USSR favored building relations with countries that shared its ideological views. The Soviet period, therefore, was marked by the deepening of the relationship between the USSR and leftist governments in Argentina, Uruguay and Mexico and, after 1959, with Cuba. The Cold War between the United States and the USSR was an important obstacle in the way of economic and political rapprochement between countries of the socialist camp and Caracas, but Soviet ideology was nonetheless at the center of Soviet foreign policy (Sitenko 2016).

Beginning in the 1970s, unlike the Soviet Union, Beijing took a different approach to foreign policy: at that time Deng Xiaoping deemphasized the importance of communist ideology and instead centered Chinese foreign relations on a more pragmatic approach. Thus, Beijing's policy of choice centered on a pragmatic understanding that suggested a willingness to transcend the differences of social systems in order to facilitate the country's

economic development. As a result, China's economic development became its top priority in the 1980s (Xu 2016; US Department of Defense 2018).

The climate of the relations with Caracas changed drastically in early 2000s for both Moscow and Beijing. Under the Presidency of Hugo Chavez, Venezuela had risen to become one of the most important partners of the rising powers in Latin America, and both Russia and China have become two of the most consistent supporters of the Venezuelan regime. Hugo Chavez summed up this shift in his iconic phrase “*del subsuelo a la estratosfera*,” or *from underground to the stratosphere*. China and Russia are now Caracas' main bilateral creditors, accounting jointly for one of quarter of the nation's foreign debt. This did not go unnoticed by Washington. In 2018, U.S. National Defense Strategy cited long-term strategic competition between rising powers and the United States as the threat that could “undermine the international order” (US Department of Defense 2018). The question arises to what extent are these countries able to undermine the US efforts to “uphold national sovereignty, independence and stability,” and calling for the parties “to remain rational and keep calm” (Shi 2019). Unlike China, the Russian leadership was more assertive in its rhetoric that fell along Cold War lines (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). The Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, warned the United States against meddling in Caracas, asserting that the US position was nothing short of “the cynical, overt interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state...It must stop” (Granma 2019). What role does energy play in the Kremlin's and Beijing's responses to crisis in Venezuela? Can energy security interests of China and Russia explain the difference in tone of their responses?

Economic interests

Russia and China have both political and economic interests in Venezuela. Despite the small size of its economy, among all Latin American countries, Venezuela has perhaps the strongest economic ties to China. From 1999 to 2015, Chinese lending to Caracas has grown from \$120 million in 1999 to \$11.38 billion in 2015. In fact, Venezuela has received the largest foreign direct investment in Latin America of all countries from Beijing. To date, Caracas was granted eighteen loans in the amount of \$67.2 billion, the overwhelming majority of which are in the energy sector. At its peak, Venezuela accounted for 64% of China's approved credit lines for Latin America (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). This is more than twice as much as its second investment recipient, Brazil, with \$28.9 billion. China, therefore, has been Venezuela's largest bilateral lender and, under Chavez's and Maduro's leadership, became an indispensable partner. Venezuela depends heavily on its energy exports to China and Beijing's investments that support the liquidity of Maduro's regime.

Beijing's economic interests in Caracas are predominantly in the oil sector. In addition to that sector, China has been participating in other

projects in the construction of Venezuelan infrastructure, such as railway and telecommunication systems, along with social housing and hydropower. There has been a steady growth in trade, with 15% of Venezuelan exports going to the Chinese market (97% of which were crude oil and petroleum) and 17% of all Venezuelan imports coming from Beijing.

Energy indisputably plays an important role. In 2003, for the first time in its history, China became the second-largest world oil consumer and in 2009, the second-largest importer after the United States (Alves 2011). As a result, China's economic objectives have included the pursuit of *natural resources*, in particular in commodity-producing countries, and its energy diplomacy entails an emphasis on building relations with energy rich countries. In pursuit of this strategy, Beijing has become an important investor in Venezuela's oil sector. In 2007 China and Venezuela established a development fund with 60% contribution from China Development Bank (CDB) and 40% by Venezuela's National Development Bank (BANDES). These funds have established financing mechanisms that in different tracks have invested billions of dollars in the Venezuelan economy. These loans were commodity-backed, with Venezuela's payment of 330,000 barrels of oil per day. In addition, Venezuela has awarded to PRC various commitments to develop in Janin-4 at the Orinoco river basin with the world's largest oil deposits. As a result, Venezuela became the third-largest supplier of refined oil to Beijing (Casanova et al. 2015). The CDB's key expert on Venezuela, Li Kegou, summed up the logic of the relationship between these two countries: "We (China) have lots of capital and lack resources, they have resources and lack capital, so it's complimentary" (Cited in Ferchen 2013).

China's debt diplomacy involves agreements in which Chinese banks lend funds to governments in Latin America. Thus, Chinese banks have secured their lending with loan-for-oil-deals based on the logic that Caracas' oil production capacity was a sufficient guarantee for future debt repayment. Beijing was also hopeful of gaining an advantage in the Venezuelan energy sector through a combination of cheap loans and financing for development. Daily oil proceeds from Petroleum of Venezuela (PdVSA) were used to repay the loans until they reach maturity. In other words, oil revenues were used as collateral (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). Therefore, the success of repayment of the debt has been contingent on PdVSA's ability to sustain its oil production. Such sustainability of production depends on a number of factors, such as security of demand, price on the international markets, investment in company's operations and company's internal operations.

In Venezuela, the importance of the oil sector in domestic policy reaches far beyond purely economic objectives. In 2007, Chavez nationalized the oil operations of US-owned ExxonMobil and ConocoPhillips after they refused to give the majority of control of PdVSA to the state (Blomquist et al. 2017). PdVSA was established in order to consolidate the control of the state over its resources and serves as a value pump to the Venezuelan government. It also provides funding for the state's social programs of development and

redistribution that are the cornerstone of popular support of the country's current regime. Because revenue is used mostly for social programs, Venezuela fails to invest in its oil infrastructure. As a result, plans to boost production have never been achieved and the company has been struggling to fund its operations, which has led to dwindling production and the inability to repay the loans. This, in addition to the fracking revolution that flooded the market and suppressed global prices of oil and has created a challenging situation for PdVSA – and the Chinese banks that have lent with that oil revenue as collateral.

The biggest challenge, however, is as Kaplan and Penfold framed it, “a moral hazard problem” (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). Moral hazard occurs when an institution trapped into a self-defeating cycle, fails to bear the consequences and adjust its behavior. From the beginning of Maduro's leadership, China has already invested over \$40 billion in Venezuela and over \$30 billion of this amount is still outstanding. Since 2013 Beijing has grown increasingly concerned about irresponsible spending of the Venezuelan government. Maduro has continued to borrow, using future oil sales as a collateral, but failed to reform the country economically. His strategy has been to increase public spending by leveraging the county's most valued asset. In other words, Maduro was killing the golden goose that has long been laying the country's golden eggs (Kaplan and Penfold 2019). Given the uncertainty about the economic management credentials of Venezuela's leadership, Chinese investment has dwindled over the past few years and the funds that did make it to Caracas had some new strings attached, including Chinese approval of domestic spending (Monaldi 2019). In 2016 China's lending to Caracas entered a new stage, as it extended debt relief with some investments to boost oil production in an attempt to recover outstanding oil collateral. Beijing, therefore, fell victim to the design of its debt diplomacy that, unlike Western loans, lacks conditionality and proclaims non-intervention in sovereign affairs of its partner states (per the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs). China was instead ensnared by a creditor trap and was ready to make risky loans with international players that seemed to lack clear strategy and credibility.

It seems that China's primary strategy in Venezuela is economic, rather than geopolitical. It follows the narrative coined under Hu Jintao's presidency that prioritized China's global commerce above geopolitics. To recover its vast investments, Beijing signaled its willingness to deal with governments from across the political spectrum (Domínguez 2006). In recent years, China has been holding talks with the political opposition in Venezuela to safeguard its investments in the troubled state. In February 2019, Beijing held debt negotiations with representatives of Juan Guaidó, the leader of US-backed opposition (Vyas 2019), as it is going through a learning curve as a lender. After miscalculating its risks in Venezuela, it appears to be placing more emphasis on assessments of debtor's macro-economics situation.

In a similar manner, the foreign policy doctrine of the Kremlin has described relations with Caracas and its neighbors in Latin America as being of “strategic importance” and has been offering urgently needed cash for the government in Caracas in this crisis. As its Asian counterpart, the story of Russia’s relations with Venezuela seem to be characterized by “risky investments” and “risky business opportunities” (Rouvinski 2019). Despite joining Beijing in support of Maduro’s regime, it seems that Russia goals differ from China’s objectives. It is political, rather than business, priorities that are guiding the Kremlin’s engagement in the Venezuelan economy. While there are growing uncertainties about Caracas’ future, the Kremlin believes that it has made too many “tangible and intangible” investments in the country that would make it painful for Moscow to lose”(Rouvinski 2019).

One of the fundamental differences between the Kremlin and Beijing’s engagement in Venezuela’s economy is in the two players’ economic capabilities. In its dealing in Latin America, Russia has faced overwhelming competition from China, which started working with Latin America shortly after Russia did. Russian companies quickly proved that they could not compete with their Chinese counterparts as they lacked the financial capacity and were prone to mismanagement and poor strategies (Rouvinski 2019). Russian strategy, therefore, shifted in sacrificing commercial interests for political benefits that came in the form of arms sales, limited investments and short-term credits.

In the 2000, the Kremlin’s engagement in Venezuela included both state and privately-owned companies from its energy sector, such as Lukoil, Gazprom and Rosneft, followed by a contract with Russian automakers for the assembly lines and sales of Kamaz trucks and Lada cars. Venezuela also became one of the largest markets for the sale of Russian arms, after purchasing military helicopters and Kalashnikov machine guns, among other armaments at a total cost of \$4 billion (Ellis 2015). However, as a result of rampant corruption and mismanagement, many Russian companies lost their investments and interests and left the country. The level of corruption and lack of transparency in dealing with Venezuela is known in Moscow to be high – even by Russian standards. There were reports of missing funds destined for the construction of affordable housing in Latin American countries, and one of the members of Russian parliament received a prison sentence for stealing millions of dollars allocated for the construction of the Kolashnikov plant in the Venezuela (Rouvinski 2019). In his interview with *Russia Today* news agency, the Russian Ambassador in Caracas complained that there has been no real commitment on the part of the Russian businessmen to the market in Venezuela. The only company that has remained in the country throughout all challenges has been Russian state-controlled energy giant, Rosneft.

Rosneft is considered as one of Russia’s most strategic companies and has historically been a tool in Russian foreign policy, providing aid and concessions to regimes aligning geopolitically with Kremlin’s objectives.

However, this description is incomplete without taking into consideration the network nature of the Russian state. The head of this energy giant, Igor Sechin, is one of Putin's closest confidants and does not shy away from exhibiting his advantage in climbing the Russian political hierarchy. The CEO of Rosneft is considered the second most influential political figure in Russia who skillfully uses the country's economic power to advance its geopolitical interests.

Since 2005 Moscow's investment in Venezuela totals around \$17 billion and was primarily made by Rosneft in the oil sector. The company holds minority stakes in five oil ventures with PdVSA and has a sizeable stake in the company's oil refinery and gasoline stations, Citgo. Initially, another Russian energy giant, Gazprom, made waves with investment in the country, spending about \$300 million in drilling one well at Urumaco field, only to find no oil. Growing political turmoil and instability in Caracas, along with the lack of economic incentives, caused Gazprom to look for ways to leave the country. Because of Venezuela's growing geopolitical importance for Moscow, the Kremlin managed to convince Gazprom and other energy companies to stay and form the National Petroleum Consortium. With the passage of time many consortium partners saw little economic benefit and were relieved to leave the project by selling their shares to Rosneft (Rouvinski 2019). In 2014, Rosneft lent PdVSA more than \$6 billion dollars as a prepayment for 4 million barrels of oil per month (133,000 barrels per day), which it failed to deliver. In mid-2018, Venezuela still owed Rosneft approximately half of the contracted total (Sigalos 2019).

Unlike China's position, the challenges with loan repayment did not seem to be an issue to Rosneft. China, a major Venezuela creditor, has shown little interest in accumulating Venezuelans assets and strengthening ties with the failing regime, but has instead concentrated on trying to get their loans repaid. In contrast, Russia has refinanced or taken in-kind payments from Caracas. Since 2016 Rosneft lent another \$6 billion to the already discredited PdVSA as prepayment for oil deliveries. According to Rosneft's financial statements, Venezuela's current debt to the company at the end of 2018 amounted to \$2.6 billion dollars. Why would Russia continue to engage in these risky loans? One explanation could be the fact that, in exchange for modest loans, Russia now owns significant parts of five oil fields along with 49.9% of Citgo, Caracas' wholly owned company in the United States (Sigalos 2019); another justification could be that the country's economic downfall gives the Kremlin additional leverage over Venezuela. For example, in late 2018 the Russian government sent a team of experts from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Russian Central Bank and other ministries to assist in economic reform. At approximately the same time as the Kremlin's experts arrived in the Venezuelan capital, different reports surfaced indicating that the purpose of the visit was for Russian Evrofinance Mosnarbank to help Venezuela work around the US sanctions. In 2018, it was the first international financial

institution to back the Venezuelan cryptocurrency, the petro (Rouvinski 2019; Krygier 2018).

In summary, both Russia and China have substantial economic interests in Venezuela. However, their alliance is fragile and is based on converging interests. While Beijing's strategy centers predominantly around economic gains and repayment of loans, Moscow sees its economic investments in Caracas as a way to increase its geopolitical leverage. The next section will briefly discuss the differences and similarities in geopolitical narratives of rising powers.

Geopolitical and ontological approaches

There are two divergent points of view on China's strategy in its foreign policy in general and in Latin American in particular. The first is clearly optimistic and supported by the government's rhetoric. It applauds the country's win-win objectives for both sides and portrays Beijing's experience as a successful model for developing countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a number of occasions proclaimed its commitment "to pursuing a win-win strategy" and pushing forward global development through its own development (Chen 2017). Beijing also stresses the embeddedness and continuity of China's strategy in its foreign policy dating back to 1950 and its "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence."

The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence have been the cornerstone of China's foreign policy strategy for six decades. They include, among other things, mutual respect for sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs, and mutual benefit. These principles are presented as Beijing's tools that assist in the advancement of win-win direction of its foreign policy that seeks to push global development through China's own development. This strategy is meant to accommodate the legitimate concerns of others, especially those of developing countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China n.d.). China's official strategy is presented as "peaceful in nature," that it is not meant to harm or threaten other players in the international system. Its win-win approach should not be confused with the neoliberal agenda of the West that some argue masks itself as a global collective good, but serves the advancement of the West's interests. China's official discourse outlines clearly that Beijing is committed to "peaceful development" and is neither seeking "to advance its interests at the expense of others" nor asserting its hegemony "now or in the future." It concludes in the Confucian tradition that, "when others respect us, we respect them even more." One may argue that China's strategy in Venezuela and its lack of loan conditionality is a vivid example of the "Five Principles" in action. It seems, however, that along with the benefits of Beijing's assistance, there are downsides of its "win-win" strategy.

Some skepticism has been voiced about whether China's investment is in fact promoting Venezuela's development or instead fueling China's economic growth at the expense of Venezuela's economy. More skeptical

studies frame China as a rising power with imperial ambitions to support its economic growth that will inevitably lead to geopolitical leverage, as it solidifies its influence over natural resources, especially in the energy sector, which are abundant in the developing world. Its strategy in Latin America, therefore, is nothing short of an imperialist conquest. China, as a result, represents a competitive threat to the continent and impedes its development. In 2013, when Xi Jinping came to leadership there, there was both clear continuity, as well as notable changes from earlier eras. While Hu Jintao put forward the concept “harmonious world,” Xi no longer mentioned it in official discourse. Instead, it was replaced by the concept of “China dream” as a reflection of China’s aspiration to rise again after century of foreign humiliation. For Xi economic cooperation is a key element in this strategy. The official discourse further framed focus on economic concerns over geopolitical aspirations. As a result, China’s foreign policy became largely impacted by “ontological security” factors.⁴ China and Russia initially sought acceptance into the Western world throughout various periods of their history but were denied full integration on equal terms into Western organizations. Both countries initially sought to establish great power status through contributing to global governance, while maintaining their identities that are distinct from the West, without subscribing to proclaimed Western liberal democratic norms. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which the United States framed as a victory in geopolitical competition with the emphasis on the “end of history” and the triumph of Western ideals. The “losing” camp was then invited to join the Western club on Western terms and required to emulate its values.

The newly emerging great powers instead sought prestige in the distinctiveness of their identity narratives. For China, it is the interpretation of Confucianism as a part of Beijing’s soft power (Lahtinen 2015). For Russia, it is the interpretation of its identity and the importance of its Eastern heritage that celebrates the country’s traditionalism and collectivism framed as the Eurasian dimension of the country’s self-perception. Eurasianism puts an emphasis on spiritualism and a communal nature in contrast to the West’s “impoverished” focus on materialism and individualism (Mankoff 2009). Beijing, on the other hand, has been raising its profile around the world with a variety of multilateral initiatives such as the One Belt One Road that seeks to emulate the Silk Road and connect China to Europe via the web of transformational infrastructure. Beijing has also initiated multilateral institutions such as the Asian Investment Bank of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that could indicate its willingness to take more of a leadership role in international diplomacy.

Ontological convergence between Venezuela and both Russia and China have become an important factor in framing ideological basis for alliance. When President Chavez visited Russia in 2004, he underlined the resemblance between the Bolivarian Revolution and the anti-Western roots of the regimes in both China and Russia. The Bolivarian Republic brought along

dramatic changes in country's foreign policy, particularly bringing to the forefront the importance of sovereignty and unity in the face of anti-hegemonic (anti-US) sentiments. As a result, Venezuela initiated anti-Western regional alliances such as La Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra America (ALBA) along with Union de Naciones Suramericanas (UNASUR) and CELAC forum, all of which have become an important space for the dialogue with Beijing. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), which, unlike the Organization of American States (OAS), excludes the US. Beijing hosted the first China-CELAS forum in January 2015 at which Xi pledged further financial support to the region with \$500 billion in trade and \$250 billion in investment over the next ten years. This signals Beijing's desire to deal with the region as a whole.

Until lately China has openly demonstrated its support of Venezuela, but fell short of openly confronting the US. However, Chavez' Bolivarian project that seeks to undermine US influence in the region has been beneficial to Beijing strategically. Through its challenge to Washington's dominance in the region, the PRC could open some space for its economic and business activity and its fostering of the relationships. For example, nationalization and the restructuring of the legal framework in Caracas created important opportunities for Chinese companies in sectors previously dominated by Western multinationals

Global shifts

While the crisis in Venezuela continues to unfold, the emerging new great game is closing in on Caracas: the divide between the EU and the USA has created a power vacuum in this particular situation, and the rising powers (China and Russia) have not hesitated to fill this vacuum. As a growing dissonance emerges in the West, Russia and China are asserting their influence globally and in the backyard of the United States. Russia and China have asserted this influence through their support of Maduro's regime that has manifested itself particularly through investments in Venezuela's energy sector, affirming the critical role of energy in the Venezuelan crisis. Despite seeming similarity of interests, however, Beijing and Moscow are competitors in the region and have different geopolitical goals in Caracas. While China's objective in Venezuela's energy sector is predominantly motivated by its economic interests, the Kremlin's support of PdVSA is based predominantly on geopolitical aspirations. The actions of these powers converge, however, in their search for a multipolar world and "civilizational" opposition to the West – and have seized the opportunity

Notes

- 1 See infographic included in "Maduro vs. Guaidó: a global scorecard: support is waning for the Venezuelan president, but he still has Russia and China on his

- side,” by Amy MacKinnon <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/06/maduro-vs-guaido-a-global-scorecard-map-infographic/>
- 2 For more on Venezuela’s oil production, “Battered business” in Reuters Graphics: <https://graphics.reuters.com/VENEZUELA-PDVSA-MILITARY/010081QE33J/index.html>
 - 3 EU exports to Venezuela have grown from \$4.3 billion Euros in 2008 to 6.5 billion euros in 2012, and have more recently declined due to the economic conditions in Venezuela. See Bindi (2019, 285–286).
 - 4 For discussions of the importance of ontological security and identity see Alexandria Innes and Brent Steele “Memory, trauma and ontological security” in Budryte and Resende (2013) and Krolkowski (2008). See Chapter 1 in this volume.

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Conclusion

Roger E. Kanet and Dina Moulioukova

The primary argument of this volume is that, after a brief period during which Moscow pursued a foreign policy that placed cooperation with Western states at the center of its relations, Russia under President Putin shifted to the objective of re-establishing the great power status of the country. This shift, however, began already earlier when Foreign Minister Evgeny Primakov began to assert Russia's great power status and interests. This shift occurred, in part at least, because the United States and the West more broadly responded to the collapse of the USSR by moving in directions contrary to Russian interests. Both NATO and the EU admitted former members of the Soviet bloc, and of the Soviet Union itself. Russia itself received little financial support despite its dire needs.

The authors of the chapters that comprise this book treat many, but by no means all, aspects of Russian policy – the nature of Russian policy, including the effort to reestablish Russia's status as a great power; instruments employed by the Russians to achieve policy objectives; and relations with various regions and countries, especially the United States. They point to the strengths, but also to the weaknesses, of Russia, as it operates in its regional and also the global environment. They note that, although Russia has re-joined the great powers, it increasingly ranks – and will continue to rank – third behind the United States and China. Some of the authors argue that a sense of national image (ontological security) underlies much of Russian policy, while others take a more realist approach.

They also point out that the United States, especially in the age of President Donald Trump, has increasingly withdrawn into a semi-isolationist approach to the outside world – much to the advantage of Russia, as well as of China. The Russia that they examine is no longer the dominant global power that the USSR was, but it still is a major nuclear power and can exert significant regional political and economic influence. Because of its extensive energy exports, Russia can influence the policies of numerous other countries that depend on imports of that energy, and its command of cyber technology enables it to intervene in the domestic affairs of numerous other states in a forceful manner.

Three decades after the collapse of the USSR, the nature of many of the successor states and regions is still in flux. With the exception of the three

small Baltic states which left the USSR before its dissolution and eventually joined Western political, economic and security organizations as countries committed to democratic political institutions and full-fledged market economies, most of the other successor states, including Russia itself, are still seeking their future. However, Russia and for most of the Central Asian states the outlines of that future seem increasingly set – as authoritarian states of one form or another with semi-market or state-capitalist economies in which the state takes a direct role, including widespread ownership, especially of the ‘heights’ of the economy.

For Russia, one of its major foreign policy goals, related to the objective of re-establishing its place as a great power, is insuring its dominant position in post-Soviet space. Important, as well, is the rebuilding of ties with states in the developing world with which the USSR had a special relationship. The lack of democratic experience and tradition, the weakness of organized and active civil societies, and the dearth of political forces capable of institutionalizing democratic change in former communist countries have greatly facilitated the pursuit by Russia of goals in areas where political and economic chaos exist in many states in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

As the contributors to this volume have shown, the European Union and the U.S. have actively attempted to influence political and economic developments in Eastern Europe and Central Asia as part of a broad policy that underlies relations with other regions and states. This has mainly been pursued through the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, and NATO as the privileged instruments for promoting cooperation with the post-Soviet states.

The Russian Federation has seen these policies as a challenge to Russia’s interests in re-establishing its dominant position within former Soviet space. The signing of trade agreements, the definition of energy projects, the development of cooperation regarding institutional and judicial reforms are examples of how the West’s increased presence in the area, through different means, results in a different approach to relations with the common neighborhood from that pursued by the Russian Federation. The result has been, in effect, a growing confrontation between Russia and the West over the future of Eurasia, in particular, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, but a confrontation that now extends to much of the rest of the world.

The chapters in this volume have tracked various aspects of Western and Russian relations, in particular as they relate to and affect other countries. Rather than cooperating to facilitate the future development of these countries and regions, Russia and the West seem to be destined to continue to compete with one another in their commitment to conflicting and incompatible goals and, therefore, to employ competing military, political, economic and cyber/informational instruments to achieve their objectives.

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