



**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

**Understanding The Bear**

*A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of the 2014 Russian*

*Annexation of Crimea*

Master Thesis

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## **Abstract**

Neoclassical realism has the ability to advance our understanding of foreign policy responses through the recently designed neoclassical realist model. However as international relations have proven, a theory is not a concrete motionless design. Improvements can be made and the fluidity of theory allows social sciences to adapt and advance. This thesis introduces developments to neoclassical realism by stating that the individual factors and intervening variables hold varying degrees of importance that alter between each foreign policy decision. There is no overarching set of instructions for 'foreign policy', rather an adaptable model that takes into consideration the geopolitical arena, the state and the statesman. The case study chosen for this thesis is the Russian foreign policy response to annex Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. Analysis and comparisons of the variables resulted in three factors standing out as most significant. The most important influence within the *systemic stimuli* was the *nature of the strategic environment* and the window of opportunity that arose in Crimea due to Ukrainian political and military instability. The intervening variable *leader images* proved to be the decisive factor, as the consolidation of power by Vladimir Putin allowed the annexation to be completed successfully with little dispute within Russia. The intervening variable *strategic culture* also played a key role in the annexation as the strong sense of cohesion through nationalism took hold throughout Russian society. Russian foreign policy has been hijacked by the ruling elite, as was witnessed in Ukraine during 2014.

## **Keywords**

Neoclassical Realism, Russian Foreign Policy, Ukraine, Crimea, Geopolitics, Vladimir Putin, Conflict, Annexation.

## Abstrakt

Neoklasický realismus je nám schopen poskytnout posun v našem vnímání a zároveň pochopení různých zahraničních politik či pochodů skrze nedávno vytvořený „neoklasický realistický model“. Nicméně již několikrát bylo v historii mezinárodních styků prokázáno, že žádná z teorií nemůže být dokonale přesná a zcela detailně navržená, aby ji bylo možné aplikovat na vícero podobných případů. Nicméně zlepšení jsou patrná, jelikož proměnlivost a nestabilita teorie umožňuje společenským vědám se těmito výkyvy do značné míry přizpůsobovat a zároveň z ní vytěžit podstatné poznatky, na kterých je možné vystavět následující teorie. Tato práce se zabývá problematikou vývoje neoklasického realismu z pohledu rozhodnutí, jež vyvstávají v zahraničních politikách, pokud je na celou věc nahlíženo z úhlů individuálních faktorů a vstupujících proměnných závislé na stupni důležitosti. V současné době zde neexistuje žádný komplexní „manuál“ zahraniční politiky, který by se v reálném čase choval jako „přizpůsobivý model měnící se v čase podle dané situace“, jež by bral v potaz geopolitickou situaci, stát jako samostatnou entitu a představitele státu. Pro případovou situaci byla zvolena anexe Krymu v roce 2014, na které bude demonstrována ruská zahraniční politika spolu s ruským postojem. Analýza a porovnání proměnných vyústila ve tři stěžejní faktory. Nejdůležitějším vlivem uvnitř *systemic stimuli* bylo příhodné strategické prostředí a také příležitost, která vyvstala na Krymu díky ukrajinské politické a armádní nestabilitě. Intervenující proměnná v tomto případě byly vůdcovské předobrazy a priority, které můžeme považovat za rozhodující faktor, kolem kterých se konsoliduje moc a síla. V tomto případě se moc shromažďovala kolem ruského prezidenta Vladimira Putina, který celou anexi posvětil, aniž by to přineslo četné rozepře uvnitř Ruské federace. Svoji klíčovou roli v odtržení Krymu do značené míry sehrála i kultura, jelikož Rusové představují obrovskou sílu v otázce soudržnosti, bratrství a nacionalismu, který je v ruské společnosti silně zakořeněn. Ruská zahraniční politika je ztělesňována ruskou elitou, jak jsme již byli svědky v případě anexe Krymu v roce 2014.

## Klíčová slova

Neoklasický Realismus, Ruská Zahraniční Politika, Ukrajina, Krym, Geopolitika, Vladimira Putina, Konflikt, Anexe.

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## **Declaration of Authorship**

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague on \_\_\_\_\_

Zenko Synczyszyn \_\_\_\_\_

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# 1. Introduction

The relationship between Russia and the West is one of global importance. Academics dedicate their careers in an attempt to develop an understanding of the rivalry. Authors write historical collections that focus on a mere few years of relations between the two powers. Official political positions are created, think tanks are designed and media coverage regarding the relationship often takes priority over everything else. Despite the years of analysis, data collection and foreign policy evaluation, the rivalry remains unpredictable. Differing strategies, cultures, histories and economic systems may all play a significant role in relations between Russia and the West, which have deteriorated substantially within the past five years. The geopolitical position that Russia had inherited after the dissolution of the Soviet Union laid the foundations to the worsening relations. Strategic manoeuvres from both viewpoints are often focused on relative power, highlighted by the growth of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The definition of the term 'the West' has, and will change. Countries such as Ukraine and Georgia have become buffer states between the West and Russia, due to their current lack of affiliation with either power. Historical examples of proxy wars, civil wars and revolutions have underlined the severity of the situation that Ukraine and Georgia have found themselves in.

Russian foreign policy is a field of study that remains fundamental in predicting the future geopolitical arena. The severity of previous conflicts between Russia and the West can be historically observed during the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. In 2018 the United States owned 44% of total nuclear weapons while Russia owned 47%.<sup>1</sup> A large-scale conflict between Russia and the West could potentially turn into a nuclear war that would prove catastrophic for mankind. In a globalised world of international organisations and regional alliances, the rivalry for future members could well lead to international conflict. The case of

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<sup>1</sup> "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," Arms Control Association, June 2018, , accessed February 24, 2019, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>.

Ukraine is a prime example. The historic cultural divide between eastern and western Ukraine has laid the foundations to the conflict. The geographic strategic importance of Ukraine ensures that both Russia and the West pay close attention to growing alliances, membership attempts and economic partnerships. Until Ukraine pledges allegiance to the European Union and NATO or Russia, it will continue to fall victim to the natural conflict experienced within buffers states. In 2014, the time had come to pledge their allegiance. In a shock decision, former President Viktor Yanukovich rejected closer ties with the European Union and moved the country closer to Russia through a trade agreement. The reaction from many Ukrainians was one of uproar, as hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets in protest. The international community watched the fires burning in Kiev as snipers fired on protestors. Victory was in sight, as the president fled for Russia and was ousted by the Ukrainian government. Meanwhile, roughly 660km away, the Crimean Peninsula was swiftly and efficiently being annexed by Russia.

## **1.1 Research Aim**

The neoclassical realism model provides a general structure, useful in understanding the causation and process of a foreign policy decision. Nevertheless, the ambiguous significance of each factor concerning specific foreign policy decisions is a weakness within the theory. There is no quantitative measure or level of importance designated to each factor, and therefore the model alone can be deemed vague and merely the first step towards understanding the foreign policy decision. The research aim of this thesis is to examine which external and internal factors from the neoclassical realism model played the most significant roles in the Russian foreign policy decision to annex Crimea in 2014.

The importance of the research question must not be understated, as it will shine a light on the core of Russian foreign policy decision-making regarding the 'near abroad'. Analysis of each individual factor will enable us to intensely evaluate the isolated roles and their influences. At the time of writing, the Russian leadership

had remained the same as the leadership in power during the annexation in 2014. Therefore developing a greater understanding of the foreign policy decision-making process in 2014 may contribute towards predicting potential future foreign policy decisions, particularly aggressive manoeuvres within previous Soviet states. Factors of extreme importance can be highlighted and hopefully become topics of further study in the near future. From a strategic perspective, if a centre of gravity can be discovered, then this element can be targeted in order to prevent future territorial conflicts. By weakening the domestic structure of a state, the likelihood of the state acting aggressively within the international arena decreases, as cohesion, confidence and capability are affected.

## 1.2 The Theory

Since the so-called 'first debate' of international relations, the branch of realism has splintered into numerous factions. Neoclassical realism is perceived as an extension of structural realism. The weaknesses of structural realism have been identified and improvements have been introduced. Unlike structural realism, neoclassical realism focuses on foreign policy responses. The relationship between the international system and state foreign policy is strong, and the avoidance of foreign policy analysis from previous branches of realism had created a blank gap within the theory. Kenneth Waltz argues against this belief in his paper *International Politics is not Foreign Policy*.<sup>2</sup> However if structural realism were to attempt to explain the process towards a state foreign policy response, it would merely connect the details of the international system, or *systemic stimuli*, to the foreign policy response. Domestic and individual factors would play no role, therefore states with varying domestic characteristics, institutions and leaders would all be expected to make similar foreign policy decisions.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this is incorrect. Neoclassical realism, similar to structural realism, understands that the international system often provides threats and

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, "International Politics Is Not Foreign Policy," *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1996): , doi:10.1080/09636419608429298.

<sup>3</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

opportunities that should be acted upon. Nevertheless, there are individual and domestic factors that also play a key part in the creation of a foreign policy response. Neoclassical realism increases explanatory power through the use of four intervening variables that represent the first and second images of Waltz's *Man, the State and War*<sup>4</sup>, and attempts to bring the state and the statesman back in to realism.

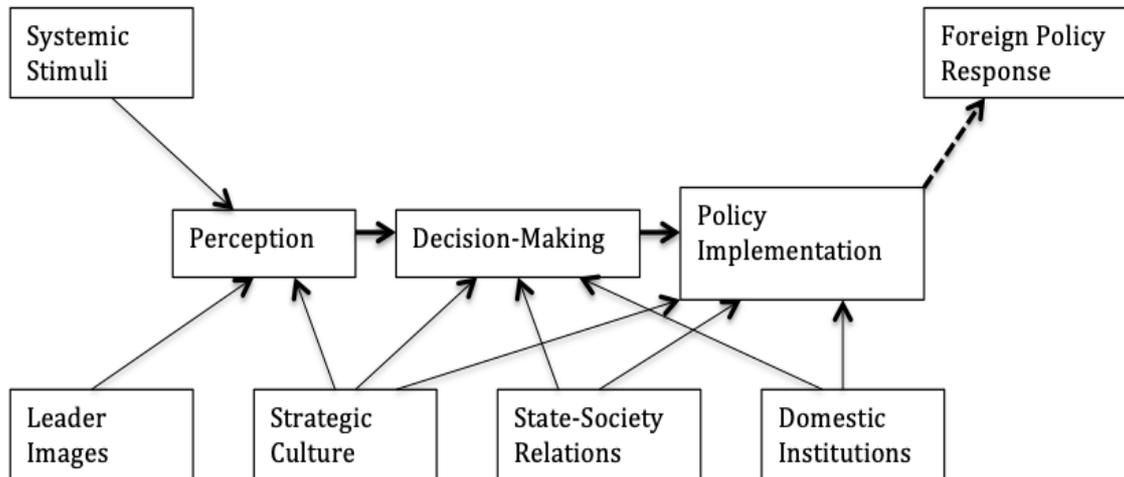
Neoclassical realism can be separated into Type I, Type II and Type III. Early opinions of neoclassical realism introduced in Type I and II underestimated the scope, timeframe and magnitude of the theory. Type III challenges this preconception and argues that foreign policy decisions made by great powers can have extreme and long-lasting effects, including reshaping the international arena itself. The book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*<sup>5</sup> by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell was the proponent of Type III neoclassical realism. Due to its recent development, extensive use of the theory and model does not yet exist, and relatively few reputable papers using the theory can be found. The few reports that do use Type III neoclassical realism fail to compare the importance of the sub-factors within the *systemic stimuli* or the varied significances between the four intervening variables.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the state, and war: a theoretical analysis*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959)

<sup>5</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Elias Götz, "Enemy at the Gates: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation of Russias Baltic Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 2 (2017): , doi:10.1093/fpa/orx011.



**Figure 1: Neoclassical Realism Model<sup>7</sup>**

The neoclassical realism model seen in *Figure 1* is clearly structured, and its ease of use can simplify the most complex foreign policy decisions. In agreement with neorealism, neoclassical realism understands that the external behaviour of each state is largely shaped by its power and global position within the international arena. The subcategories within the *systemic stimuli* include structural modifiers such as geography and military technology, distribution of power, polarity of the international system, clarity of the international system and the nature of state's strategic environment. As displayed in *Figure 1*, the *systemic stimuli* have a direct effect on the perception of the geopolitical environment. The intervening variables all play significant roles in the decision-making process, however this thesis will argue that the level of significance of each variable can vary greatly. The first intervening variable *leader images* focuses on the powerful individuals responsible for implementing foreign policies. The relatively small group, known as the *Foreign Policy Executive* or *Geopolitical Agent*, have access to domestic and international classified information, and therefore are often seen as the most suitable candidates for the foreign policy decision-making process. On the other hand, humans are susceptible to bias, irrationality and emotionally charged actions. The *leader images* is directly linked to the perception of the geopolitical environment. The intervening variable *strategic culture* can be interpreted as a

<sup>7</sup> Source: Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

comprehensive understanding of deep-rooted beliefs and expectations of society. Historical knowledge of the state is essential in understanding the *strategic culture*. The *strategic culture* impacts the perception, decision-making and policy implementation processes. The third intervening variable, *state-society relations*, takes into consideration the interaction between the state and the numerous economic and cultural groups that exist within the state. The influence of *state-society relations* can be great, as it can improve or disrupt the ability of the state to 'extract, mobilise and harness the nations power'.<sup>8</sup> The fourth intervening variable, *domestic institutions*, evaluates the ability for state institutions to contribute to policy development. Evidently, this can shape decision-making and policy implementation.

The weight of significance between the four intervening variables differs by case study. One could argue that foreign policy orchestrated by a totalitarian government would be primarily decided on by the *Foreign Policy Executive*, placing more of a role on the *leader images*. The centrality of a totalitarian government would diminish the influence of *state-society relations* and heavily monitor the power of *domestic institutions*. Contrastingly, a case study involving a democratic and liberal nation could see the power of the *Foreign Policy Executive* minimised by the public. The *strategic culture* can play a large role in the foreign policy decision of a state with high social cohesion, while a socially fragmented society can cripple the power of the *strategic culture*.

### 1.3 Hypotheses

1. The structural modifier *nature of the strategic environment* played a significant role in the Russian foreign policy response to annex Crimea
2. The intervening variable *leader images* was the strongest influence on the policy response
3. The *strategic culture* was the second most imperative intervening variable in the foreign policy decision

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<sup>8</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

## 1.4 Methodology

Conducting research in the field of social science is often a challenging feat. The methodological disagreements have led to multiple offshoot operational routes. The 'second debate' of international relations is an example of such a clash as behaviouralists and realists quarrelled over the correct methodological approach to research. Due to the often-unquantifiable information regarding culture, country relations, global perception, psychology and rationality, knowledge regarding foreign policy can be viewed as subjective and difficult to measure. Nevertheless, vital measurable and quantitative data concerning geopolitics certainly exists and must be incorporated into social science research. Neoclassical realism is unique in this instance, as both quantitative and qualitative data is necessary.

The research and methodological approach to this thesis will be focused on the neoclassical realism model introduced in the book *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*<sup>9</sup> by Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell. Therefore the methodology will include both quantitative and qualitative data. The necessary information gathered for this thesis will be from a combination of primary and secondary sources. Neoclassical realism involves analysing numerous variables regarding the internal and external environment. Therefore the methodological process will vary depending on the variable. Data collection for the *systemic stimuli* will largely consist of primary quantitative data collected from official government sources and reliable international sources. Qualitative data will be collected through credible international literature. Difficulties may arise concerning precise numbers of nuclear weapons, military technology and military strength due to classified information.

The first hypothesis will be tested through qualitative analysis of the numerous factors of the *systemic stimuli*. The approach towards the intervening variables

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<sup>9</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

will be heavily qualitative, as historical literature, Russian domestic policy evaluation, and biographies will play a key part. Information stemming from the operational code analysis of Vladimir Putin will contribute towards the intervening variable *leader images* and help to test the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis will also be tested through the qualitative comparisons between the intervening variables. It is important to reiterate that literature from both Russian authors and Western authors will be used.

## 1.5 Structure

This thesis will be structured into three chapters. The first chapter will review the literature surrounding Russian foreign policy, the decision-making process and the reasoning behind the Crimean annexation. Chapter one will also introduce the historical relations between Ukraine and Russia, including the build up to the Russian foreign policy response in 2014. An analysis on the importance of Crimea will be presented before assessing the annexation process that took place between February and March 2014. Chapter two will categorise the *systemic stimuli* into appropriate subdivisions and evaluate the role of each section. The third chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of each of the four intervening variables before completing a comparative review.

## Chapter One

### Literature Review

The momentous year of 1480 saw Russia break free from Mongol control and begin its development and expansion. Centuries of invasions and humiliation had created a country that would no longer allow itself to be victimised.<sup>10</sup> Scholars and foreign policy experts have often disputed the predictability and stability of Russian foreign policy. A popular claim is that Russian behaviour has been

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Schauss, "Understanding Putin Through the History of Russian Invasions". *History Unplugged*. Podcast audio, June 26, 2017. <https://www.historyonthenet.com/understanding-putin-through-the-history-of-russian-invasions-mark-schauss>

consistent throughout the centuries.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, some scholars have noted radical changes to Russian foreign policy and can distinguish certain phases of behaviour.<sup>12</sup> This can create an air of unpredictability that has led to Russian foreign policy being described as having 'borderline personality disorder'.<sup>13</sup> Unpredictability is often considered an advantageous trait in regards to war and power,<sup>14</sup> which supports the argument made by prominent Russian geopolitician Alexander Dugin, that Russian foreign policy follows a realist ideology.<sup>15</sup> In 1939, Winston Churchill famously described Russian behaviour as 'a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma'. Churchill would then claim that perhaps the key to understanding Russian behaviour lay simply in national interest.<sup>16</sup> Alexander Dugin clearly stressed this point by stating that only through military control over the neighbouring regions, can Russia guarantee territorial security.<sup>17</sup> As a consequence of near continuous Russian expansion, political realism is regularly associated with Russian foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> The prevalence of Mackinder's *Geographical Pivot of History* in the work of Dugin must also be highlighted, as a Russianised version was published in 2000, highlighting Russia's realist intentions.<sup>19</sup> Russia recognizes its position in the world island and also the significance of the countries that fall within the rimland.<sup>20</sup> Differing from Dugin's observation that connects expansion with security, Robert Kaplan describes the disadvantages of Russian geography and

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<sup>11</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016); Richard Pipes, "Flight from Freedom: What Russians Think and Want," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 3 (2004): , doi:10.2307/20033971.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Legvold, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Twenty-first Century and the Shadow of the Past* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Fredo Arias-King, Arlene King De Arias, and Fredo Arias De La Canal, "Russia's Borderline Personality," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 16, no. 2 (2008): , doi:10.3200/demo.16.2.117-130.

<sup>14</sup> Sun-tzu and Samuel Griffith, *The Art of War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); Robert Greene, *The 48 Laws of Power* (New York: Viking Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Leipzig: Renovamen Verlag, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Winston Churchill. "The Russian Enigma." *BBC Broadcast*. October 1, 1939.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Leipzig: Renovamen Verlag, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Allen C. Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 1 (2001): , doi:10.1080/09668130124714.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Foundations of Geopolitics* (Moscow: Arktogeja, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Leipzig: Renovamen Verlag, 2016).

the desperate urge to control warm water ports, for economic security.<sup>21</sup> Ferry and Kanet argue that in certain regions of the world, Russian foreign policy can be explained through economic ambitions, for example Latin America and Africa. However they argue that foreign policy towards the 'near abroad' consists of a combination of cultural, historical and economic roots.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of Russian identity has often played a leading role in Russian foreign policy. Dugin argues that Russian political behaviour has little to do with ideological differences, such as socialism-capitalism or autocracy-democracy.<sup>23</sup> In a globalised world, Russia has adapted in an attempt to modernise its economy and survive within a capitalist system. While socialism or the spread of socialism no longer shapes Russian foreign policy, Rutland argues that many Russian nationalists view economic integration as an erosion of Russian identity.<sup>24</sup> Nationalism is frequently associated to Russia and Russian geopolitics, although the roots of nationalism are often found in the history of the country. Mark Schauss emphasises this argument by analysing the role that centuries of foreign invasions had on the Russian perception of the environment. Due to the fear of further hostility, the creation of buffer zones has become a priority.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Tuminez depicts the Russian identity as aggressive nationalism, yet points the blame towards a history of hostile rivals that have attempted to humiliate Russia.<sup>26</sup> Tsygankov describes the current Russian nationalism as a tool to minimise external influence and Western propaganda.<sup>27</sup> This *strategic culture* of Russia has been used as a justification of the use of force in order to achieve its objectives, according to Norbert Eitelhuber.<sup>28</sup> Nationalism has

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<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> William E. Ferry and Roger E. Kanet, "Towards the Future: Emerging Trends in Russian Foreign Policy," *The Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, 1997, , doi:10.1007/978-1-349-25440-8\_8.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Leipzig: Renovamen Verlag, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Rutland, "The Place of Economics in Russian National Identity Debates," *The New Russian Nationalism*, 2016, , doi:10.3366/edinburgh/9781474410427.003.0013.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Schauss, "Understanding Putin Through the History of Russian Invasions". *History Unplugged*. Podcast audio, June 26, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Astrid S. Tuminez, *Russian Nationalism since 1856: Ideology and the Making of Foreign Policy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Norbert Eitelhuber, "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What It Implies for the West," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 09, no. 1 (2009): , doi:10.11610/connections.09.1.01.

certainly increased under Vladimir Putin, who has attempted to strengthen cohesion throughout the country, by uniting all municipalities, ethnicities and minorities under the name of Russia.<sup>29</sup> The size and diversity of Russia decreases the likelihood of wide-scale nationalism. O'Loughlin has described Putin's ability to please the majority through clustering the population into six groups and focusing on each groups needs in order to win support. This has accurately been called the Masks of Proteus.<sup>30</sup>

The Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin has experienced increased stability, quality of life and geopolitical power. Western critics often describe his ruling as a kleptocracy, and focus on income inequality, corruption and human rights violations.<sup>31</sup> Others believe that due to the challenge of controlling such a vast territory with differing cultures, a strong leader and centralised state is necessary.<sup>32</sup> Since 2000, many changes to Russian policies have been seen as actions decided on specifically by the president and the *Foreign Policy Executive*, in order to consolidate power and gain personal wealth.<sup>33</sup> The aggressive operations selected by Vladimir Putin, such as Russian rearmament, remilitarisation and destabilisation strategies towards neighbours, have been strongly criticised by the international community.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, these actions have been described as reactions towards EU and NATO expansionism. The threat of encirclement is a key concern for Putin and many of the recent foreign policy decisions in the 'near abroad' have been apparent attempts in breaking out.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, "Russian Geopolitical Culture and Public Opinion: The Masks of Proteus Revisited," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 3 (2005): , doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2005.00174.x.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putins Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Mark Schauss, "Understanding Putin Through the History of Russian Invasions". *History Unplugged*. Podcast audio, June 26, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putins Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Stephen R. Covington, "Putin's Choice for Russia," *Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs*, August 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen R. Covington, "Putin's Choice for Russia," *Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs*, August 2015.; Alexey K. Pushkov, "Don't Isolate Us: A Russian View of NATO Expansion," *RUSSIA in The National Interest*, 2017, , doi:10.4324/9781315128870-9.

Ukraine has been caught in between two major geopolitical powers and is being pulled from both the east and the west. The Russian perspective of Ukraine has remained constant since its independence in 1991. Henry Kissinger stated accurately that 'The West must understand that, to Russia, Ukraine can never be just a foreign country'.<sup>36</sup> Vladimir Putin has specified on numerous occasions that Ukraine is not even a country.<sup>37</sup> Ukraine and Belarus are both seen as mere extensions of Russia.<sup>38</sup> The Russian culture is strong in the eastern half of Ukraine and is often used as a tool to culturally claim Ukraine as part of the Russian world. The new foreign policy programme presented in 2012 by Putin described the preservation of this Russian identity.<sup>39</sup>

The annexation of Crimea has been justified through numerous differing theories. The classical realist perspective introduced by Hans Morgenthau emphasises military strength as the most important material factor of state power.<sup>40</sup> The apparent risk towards the Black Sea Fleet and the Sevastopol Naval Base was justification for the annexation, as Russia felt Ukraine's shuffle towards the EU and NATO would threaten the navy and facilities.<sup>41</sup> The Sevastopol Naval Base and the Black Sea Fleet are symbols of Russian military strength and maintaining them holds geopolitical significance. The base provides an ice-free port that strengthens the Russian economy, while also opening up military options in the Middle East, the Balkans and the Mediterranean.<sup>42</sup> Historically, Russian determination for a warm water port had led them into numerous wars against the Ottoman Empire over access to the Black Sea. The current desire to control a warm water port is rejected by William Green, who

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<sup>36</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, "Henry Kissinger: To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End," *The Washington Post*, March 05, 2014, , accessed March 07, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end>.

<sup>37</sup> Anders Åslund, *Ukraine: What Went Wrong and How to Fix It* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2015).

<sup>38</sup> Janis Berzins, "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defence Policy," *National Defence Academy of Latvia* 2 (April 2014):.

<sup>39</sup> Roger E. Kanet, "Russian Strategic Culture, Domestic Politics and Cold War 2.0," *European Politics and Society* 20, no. 2 (November 15, 2018):, doi:10.1080/23745118.2018.1545184.

<sup>40</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations; the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948).

<sup>41</sup> Jolanta Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, A Case Study," *Centre for Eastern Studies* 42 (May 2014):.

<sup>42</sup> Panagiota Manoli, *Aftermath of the Ukrainian Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2017).

calls the concept a myth, and uses Russia's inward focus and reduction of overseas commitments to defend his view.<sup>43</sup> Despite the 25-year lease of the naval base, O'Hanlon and Petraeus claim that Ukraine could have terminated the agreement,<sup>44</sup> causing a geopolitical catastrophe for Russia. Relations between Ukraine and Russia had flared up in recent years due to the leasing of the base, though Seidler argues that the base was the cause of continuous strain on the relationship since Ukraine's independence.<sup>45</sup> Taras Kuzio, a specialist in Ukraine-Russia relations, predicted in 2010 that Crimea could become a potential flashpoint in the future.<sup>46</sup> The classical realist argument of military strength is supported by the Russian promise of 80 new warships for the Black Sea Fleet to repel NATO by 2020.<sup>47</sup>

A neorealist perspective of the annexation focuses on the necessity of a balance of power within the anarchic international system. The NATO expansion from 1990 onwards has been a clear increase in Western power. Russia has regarded the expansion as a threat to national security as the Russian perspective is often interpreted through relative power.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, the fear is of an imbalance of power. McFaul attacks this argument by reminding readers that there were five years between the last NATO expansion and the annexation of Crimea.<sup>49</sup> Eitelhuber counters this information by stating that the real threat to Russia is not the expansion of NATO, but the NATO missile defence system that threatens Russia's second-strike nuclear capabilities.<sup>50</sup> Mearsheimer notes that if Ukraine were to join NATO, then a NATO Naval Base could be built, immediately

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<sup>43</sup> William Green, "The Historic Russian Drive for a Warm Water Port: Anatomy of a Geopolitical Myth," *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 2 (1992):.

<sup>44</sup> Michael O'Hanlon and David Petraeus, "America's Awesome Military. And How to Make It Even Better," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Felix F. Seidler, *Maritime Herausforderungen Der NATO: Strategische Auswirkungen Und Die Effektivität Des Handelns* (Frankfurt Am Main: Lang, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Taras Kuzio, "The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?" *The Jamestown Foundation*..

<sup>47</sup> Panagiota Manoli, *Aftermath of the Ukrainian Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Maximilian Klotz, "Russia and the Ukrainian Crisis: A Multiperspective Analysis of Russian Behaviour, by Taking into Account NATO's and the EU's Enlargement," *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no. 80 (2017): , doi:10.1515/cirr-2017-0028.

<sup>49</sup> Michael McFaul, "Faulty Powers. Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?" *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (October 17, 2014):.

<sup>50</sup> Norbert Eitelhuber, "The Russian Bear: Russian Strategic Culture and What It Implies for the West," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 09, no. 1 (2009): , doi:10.11610/connections.09.1.01.

threatening the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>51</sup> However Ukraine's previous attempts to join NATO were rejected until 2008, when they were told they would become a member 'soon', although no timeframe was given. No urgent attempt was made to secure Ukraine's membership ambitions; therefore it can be argued that the threat of Ukraine joining NATO was not restrictive in time.<sup>52</sup> The subsequent war in eastern Ukraine sprouted from Crimea, as independence was seemingly desired and attained. The Russian backed separatists have made NATO membership extremely unlikely due to the ongoing war in the east of Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> The debate over the time frame of the annexation is particularly significant, as many attempt to understand if a Russian grand strategy exists. American international relations scholar John Mearsheimer argues that the annexation was a spontaneous move in response to the political instability in Kiev.<sup>54</sup> Daniel Treisman agrees with the spontaneity, pointing to the disorganised manner of the annexation.<sup>55</sup> Contrastingly, Hosle interprets the move as part of a long-term plan, highlighting domestic changes leading up to the annexation.<sup>56</sup> Studzinska has described the Russian actions as an attempt to regain an imperial role, and points towards the 2008 Georgian War as the first warning.<sup>57</sup>

The idea of Crimea returning to Russia was certainly not new, as Alexander Dugin, often described as 'Putin's brain' and 'Putin's favourite philosopher',<sup>58</sup> stated in 2008 that 'our troops will occupy the Georgian capital Tbilisi, the entire

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<sup>51</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault?" *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014):.

<sup>52</sup> Michael McFaul, "Faulty Powers. Who Started the Ukraine Crisis?" *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 6 (October 17, 2014):.

<sup>53</sup> Jerzy Mackow, *The Ukraine Crisis Is a Crisis of Europe* (Berlin: FotoTapeta).

<sup>54</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault?" *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014):.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea. The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (April 18, 2016):.

<sup>56</sup> Vittorio Hoesle, "Why Today's Russia Is More Dangerous than the Soviet Union," *Blätter Für Deutsche Und Internationale Politik* 6 (June 2015):.

<sup>57</sup> Zofia Studzińska, "How Russia, Step by Step, Wants to Regain an Imperial Role in the Global and European Security System," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 14, no. 4 (2015): , doi:10.11610/connections.14.4.03.

<sup>58</sup> Olivia Goldhill, "The Philosopher Known as 'Putin's Brain' Is a Big Fan of Trump," *Quartz*, December 24, 2016, , accessed March 08, 2019, <https://qz.com/871975/aleksandr-dugin-putins-favorite-philosopher-is-a-big-fan-of-donald-trump/>.

country, and perhaps even Ukraine and the Crimean Peninsula'.<sup>59</sup> It has also been argued that the expansion of the EU damaged the Russian economy and the fear of Ukraine becoming a member would add more fuel to the fire.<sup>60</sup> The cultural norms associated with the EU challenge many Russian norms and emphasise the Russian fear of a colour revolution within its territory. It is a Russian aim to ensure Ukraine remains within its ideological and political influence.<sup>61</sup> It was the Russian pressure on Ukraine and Yanukovich that caused the U-turn of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement. Similarly to the NATO membership theory, Ukraine was far from joining the EU in reality. The agreement would have taken the country one step closer, however Ukraine would have remained outside of the EU for many years. The annexation was seen as an attempt to break out of Western encirclement.<sup>62</sup> The colour revolutions have long been considered Western attempts to target the 'near abroad', and according to Russian geopolitician Igor Panarin, the move to annex Crimea was a defensive act.<sup>63</sup>

The annexation of Crimea has also been considered a popularity strategy, designed by Vladimir Putin to strengthen and successfully solidify his position as leader. The creation of an 'enemy' is a common tactic used by states to strengthen domestic cohesion and to place the blame of the country's problems on another state. Putin had specified that the West and particularly the United States was the antagonist in his speech during the 2007 Munich Security Conference.<sup>64</sup> The clarity of the West as the enemy has strengthened Russian

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<sup>59</sup> "Road to War in Georgia: The Chronicle of a Caucasian Tragedy - SPIEGEL ONLINE - International," SPIEGEL ONLINE, August 24, 2008, accessed March 08, 2019, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/road-to-war-in-georgia-the-chronicle-of-a-caucasian-tragedy-a-574812.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Maximilian Klotz, "Russia and the Ukrainian Crisis: A Multiperspective Analysis of Russian Behaviour, by Taking into Account NATO's and the EU's Enlargement," *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no. 80 (2017):, doi:10.1515/cirr-2017-0028.

<sup>61</sup> Jerzy Mackow, *The Ukraine Crisis Is a Crisis of Europe* (Berlin: FotoTapeta).

<sup>62</sup> Stephen R. Covington, "Putin's Choice for Russia," *Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs*, August 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Jolanta Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation, A Case Study," *Centre for Eastern Studies* 42 (May 2014):.

<sup>64</sup> Vladimir Putin "Speech at Munich Conference on Security Policy" (Munich, February 10, 2007), Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

unity.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, Zygar explains that Putin's relationship with the West began smoothly, until the NATO expansion of seven countries in 2004, which was viewed as a betrayal.<sup>66</sup> The *Maidan Revolution* was widely labelled a Western coup in Russia and the ousting of Yanukovich could have severely affected Russian domestic politics and Putin's popularity. Manoli claims that the annexation increased Putin's popularity as his strategy was widely supported by the Russian public.<sup>67</sup> Levada Centre Polling states Putin had a 62% approval rating in January 2013 compared to 89% in June 2015.<sup>68</sup> Putin's strategy to vilify the United States and unify the Russian people appeared to have worked, as Sputnik presents the large increase in Russians with a negative picture of the US, from 38% in 2013 to 71% in 2014.<sup>69</sup>

## Ukraine-Russia Relations

Contemporary relations between Ukraine and Russia cannot be fully understood without appreciating their deep intertwining historical and traditional roots. Much of their rich history originated from 'Kievan Rus', which included modern day Ukraine, Belarus, western Russia and part of Moldova.<sup>70</sup> The capital of Kievan Rus' was the current capital of Ukraine, Kiev. The united population of Kievan Rus' shared cultural aspects such as the Christian Orthodox religion, the 'Old Russian' language and a traditionally conservative mentality. Centuries of invasions from enemies in the north, south, east and west produced an intensified pride of Slavic traditions and a mental strength that remains prevalent to this day.

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<sup>65</sup> Fritz Ermarth, "Russian Strategic Culture: Past, Present, And... in Transition?" Defence Threat Reduction Agency, October 31, 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremains Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Panagiota Manoli, *Aftermath of the Ukrainian Crisis* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> "Indicators," LevadaCenter, February 2019, , accessed March 08, 2019, <http://www.levada.ru/en/ratings/>.

<sup>69</sup> "Umfrage in Russland: USA Und Ukraine Gelten Als Hauptfeinde," Sputnik Deutschland, October 05, 2015, , accessed March 09, 2019, <https://de.sputniknews.com/zeitungen/20140606268697056-Umfrage-in-Russland-USA-und-Ukraine-gelten-als-Hauptfeinde-/>.

<sup>70</sup> Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

After the ferocious Mongolian reign of Kievan Rus' that lasted over two hundred years, a split formed as the newly defined region known as Ukraine was seized and became a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1569. A Polish diaspora into western Ukraine resulted in the merging of cultures, as Catholicism increased in popularity. The remaining territory of Kievan Rus' became part of the Tsardom of Russia, which included areas of modern day eastern Ukraine, where the Orthodox tradition remained strong. A rebellious Ukrainian group known as the Zaporozhian Cossacks refused 'Polonisation' and successfully defended themselves against the western Polish forces. This would become known as *The Khmelnytsky Uprising* and lasted from 1648-1657. Nevertheless, the Cossacks needed strong allies to balance the power within the region. The Treaty of Pereyaslav united the Cossacks with the Tsardom of Russia in 1654, a year that would become a symbol of unity between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>71</sup>

The partnership was not long-lived, and the Russian protection over the Cossacks developed into a reign. Both Polish forces and subsequently Austrian forces would conquer the far west of Ukraine. The south of Ukraine, including Crimea would fall under the control of the Ottoman Empire. The perpetual threat towards Ukrainian culture, combined with other nationalistic European uprisings during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century strengthened nationalism within Ukraine, or Ukrainophilia.<sup>72</sup> This movement was identified as an immediate threat by Russia due to the possibility of revolution or separatism. Russian strategies such as Pan-Slavism and Russification were used in order to quash the Ukrainian nationalism. While some Ukrainians accepted Russian rule and embraced Russian culture, many fled to the west of Ukraine. The political and cultural divide between the east and the west of Ukraine grew.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution caused severe instability within Russia, and provided Ukraine with an opportunity to break away. The Ukrainian War of Independence lasted from 1917-1921, and was a chaotic period of anarchy, as control changed hands multiple times and regions became fragmented, despite

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<sup>71</sup> Serhy Yekelchuk, *Ukraine: Birth of a Modern Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

official independence in 1918. Ukrainian independence was a failure and short-lived, as the newly created Soviet Union occupied the majority of the country in 1922, creating the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>73</sup> Ten years into Soviet rule, the man-made famine of 1932-1933, also known as Holodomor or the Ukrainian Genocide, led to an estimated 7-10 million Ukrainian deaths.<sup>74</sup>

In 1941 the Ukrainian people were once again divided, as Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Some fought with the Soviet Army to prevent further invasion, while others saw the invading Germans as saviours to Soviet occupation. Nationalist partisan groups were also established in an attempt to fight both enemies from the east and the west. The Nazi German defeat in World War Two resulted in Ukraine remaining a part of the Soviet Union. In 1954 the Crimean Oblast was reassigned from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.<sup>75</sup>

Succeeding the dissolution of the Soviet Union, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1991, a referendum of Ukrainian independence was successful with results showing that over 90% voted for independence. All 27 regions of Ukraine saw a majority vote for independence.<sup>76</sup> Relations between Russia and Ukraine were relatively stable, however opinions largely differed from east to west. Corruption was widespread within Ukrainian politics and incidences such as the 'Cassette Scandal' highlighted the difference between the Ukrainian political environment and that of other European countries.<sup>77</sup>

The Ukrainian Presidential Election of 2004 would be a momentous period for the relations between Ukraine and Russia. The two main candidates were Viktor Yanukovich, supported and promoted by the previous President Leonid Kuchma and viewed positively by Russia, and Viktor Yushchenko, leader of *Our Ukraine*

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<sup>73</sup> Paul Kubicek, *The History of Ukraine* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008).

<sup>74</sup> Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Paul Kubicek, *The History of Ukraine* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver, *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> Igor Zhdanov, "Corruption in Ukraine: Essence, Scale, and Influence," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 01, no. 2 (2002): , doi:10.11610/connections.01.2.04.

and promoter of closer ties to Europe. One month before the election, Yushchenko was the target of assassination attempt through dioxin poisoning.<sup>78</sup> He survived the attempt although his face was heavily scarred and disfigured. The results of the first round of elections presented Yanukovich with 39.87% and Yushchenko with 39.32% of the overall vote. Due to neither candidate receiving over 50%, a run-off vote would decide the next president of Ukraine. Voting irregularities were reported during the first-round election, particularly favouring Yanukovich.<sup>79</sup>

Viktor Yanukovich won the second round election by 3%, yet his party was accused of widespread electoral fraud and many viewed the results as illegitimate.<sup>80</sup> Large-scale protests ensued in numerous major cities; most famously in the capital, where over 500,000 people took to Maidan Nezalezhnosti.<sup>81</sup> The protestors flaunted orange, the official colour of the *Our Ukraine* party, as the protests became known as the *Orange Revolution*. Opposing protests, loyal to Yanukovich, began to appear mainly in the eastern cities of Ukraine. A re-vote was finally decided on and the results announced Yushchenko as winner with 51.99% of the votes, compared to 44.20% of votes for Yanukovich. The victory was seen as a large step towards bringing Ukraine closer to Europe, and further away from Russia. Nevertheless, as seen in *Figure 2*, the east-west divide is clear. Crimea, Sevastopol, Luhansk and Donetsk voted heavily in favour for the pro-Russian candidate.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> "Doctors: Yushchenko Was Poisoned," CNN, December 11, 2004, , accessed March 02, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070218082557/http://www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/europe/12/11/yushchenko.austria/index.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post -soviet World* (S.I.: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Ukraines Orange Revolution: Rush to Judgement?" *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 23, no. 2 (2007): , doi:10.1080/13523270701317588.

<sup>82</sup> "Ukraine. Presidential Election, 2004," *Electoral Geography*, , accessed March 02, 2019,

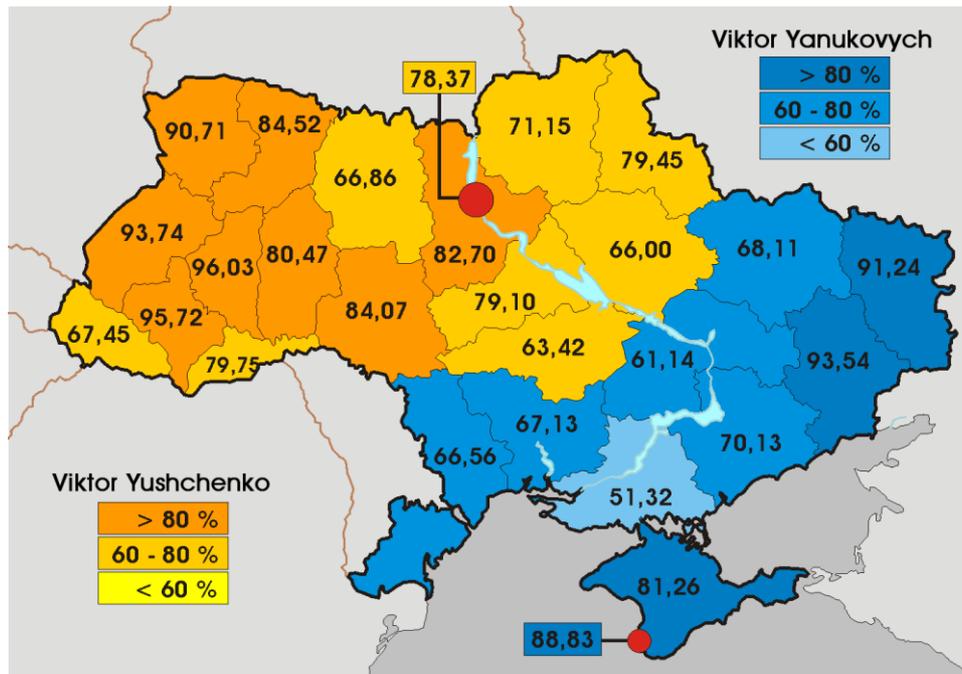


Figure 2: Ukraine 2004 Election Results, Percentage by region<sup>83</sup>

Relations between Ukraine and Russia soured in 2005 as disputes concerning the price of natural gas arose. In January 2006, Russia responded by turning off gas supplies for Ukraine. Three days later an agreement was reached. Gas-disputes resurfaced in 2007 over unpaid Ukrainian debt and would continue until the 2010 Gas Agreement. During the NATO Bucharest summit of 2008-2009, membership to NATO was not offered to Ukraine and Georgia, instead it was mentioned that both countries would eventually become members.<sup>84</sup> An Annual National Programme was created for Ukraine in order to assist and underline the necessary procedures on the path towards NATO membership. Russian accusations of Ukraine selling weapons to Georgia during the Russia-Georgia War further damaged their relations.<sup>85</sup>

Viktor Yanukovich ran for president in 2010 and won. Relations between Ukraine and Russia immediately improved due to the Russian leaning ideology of the new president. In less than three months of presidency, Yanukovich had

<sup>83</sup> Source: "Ukraine. Presidential Election, 2004," Electoral Geography, , accessed March 02, 2019, <http://www.electoralgeography.com/en/countries/u/ukraine/2004-president-elections-ukraine.html>.

<sup>84</sup> Paul Gallis, "The NATO Summit at Bucharest, 2008," CRS Report for Congress, 2008.

<sup>85</sup> "Ukrainian Army Supported Georgian Attack on South Ossetia," RT International, August 24, 2009, , accessed March 02, 2019, <https://www.rt.com/news/ukraine-army-south-ossetia/>.

signed an agreement with Russia to continue renting out the Sevastopol Naval Base to the Russian Black Sea Fleet, in exchange for a 30% reduction of the price of natural gas. This unpopular agreement led to violence within the Ukrainian parliament as punches and eggs were thrown. Despite the improvement in relations, the general consensus of Ukraine was a country slowly moving towards the European Union. Russia understood the situation, and in 2013, Russian customs regulations regarding Ukrainian imports changed in an attempt to put pressure on the Ukrainian decision to move closer towards the European Union and NATO. President Yanukovich decided not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, causing huge protests known as *Euromaidan*. During the protests, Yanukovich signed the Ukrainian-Russian action plan, which included a large loan and extremely low gas prices.<sup>86</sup> The *Euromaidan* protests grew in capacity and strength, as the people called for the resignation of the president. It is estimated that over 100 people were killed as the protestors and the police clashed.<sup>87</sup>

Yanukovich fled to Russia, and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2014, the Ukrainian Government voted to remove him from power. An interim president replaced Yanukovich and the Ukrainian protests had underlined their aspiration to become a member of the European Union. Nevertheless, the majority in the east of Ukraine saw this as a defeat, as did Russia.

## **The Crimean Peninsula**

The Crimean Peninsula is 27,000km<sup>2</sup>, roughly the same size as Albania, and is situated on the Black Sea. The region has historical importance, with a traditional and distinctive culture dating back centuries. Due to its strategic positioning on the Black Sea, numerous empires have gained control of the region, including the

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<sup>86</sup> Elizabeth Piper, "Special Report: Why Ukraine Spurned the EU and Embraced Russia," Reuters, December 19, 2013, , accessed March 02, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia-deal-special-report-idUSBRE9BI0DZ20131219>.

<sup>87</sup> "Amnesty International: Five Years After Euromaidan, Justice For The Victims 'Still Not Even In Sight'," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, February 20, 2019, , accessed March 02, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-maidan-justice-victims-amnesty-fifth-anniversary/29779358.html>.

Roman Empire, Greek Byzantine Empire, the Goths and the Huns.<sup>88</sup> The peninsula became part of Kievan Rus', however due to its territorial form and location, it remained a difficult region to protect. In 988 AD, Vladimir the Great, ruler of Kievan Rus' at the time, converted to Orthodox Christianity and began Christianising the population. It was in Chersonesus, a small town on the western coast of Crimea, where Vladimir the Great was baptised, and the Eastern Orthodox religion was founded.<sup>89</sup> The cultural and religious importance of the Crimean Peninsula has been emphasised by Vladimir Putin, who has compared it to Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup> The Golden Horde invasion and Mongolian rule resulted in the region becoming known as Crimean Khanate, which was a Turkic region largely controlled by the Ottoman Empire between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. During this period the majority of the population were Crimean Tatars, a Turkic ethnic group. The Russo-Turkish War of 1768-1774 concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca, which would change the regional geopolitical environment. Russia would return Wallachia and Moldavia to the Ottoman Empire, but would be allowed to intervene and protect Orthodox Christians if necessary. The Crimean Khanate became independent from the Ottoman Empire and numerous ports within the Peninsula were transferred to the Russian Empire, opening up the Black Sea to trade.<sup>91</sup> The Bosphorus strait flowing through Constantinople was opened to Russia ships, improving accessibility and travel time into the Mediterranean Sea. The treaty would also introduce political autonomy for the Crimean Tatars. Eventually in 1783 the Russian Empire, under Catherine the Great, defeated the Ottoman Empire and took complete control of the Crimean Peninsula. Continuous Russian expansion resulted in the Crimean War from 1853-1856, where Crimea became the principal battleground. It is estimated that there were over 530,000 Russian casualties.<sup>92</sup> The Russian blood

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<sup>88</sup> "Timeline of the History of Crimea," Crimea, , accessed March 03, 2019, <http://www.crimeahistory.org/timeline-of-the-history-of-crimea/>.

<sup>89</sup> Oleg Rapov, Russian Church in the IX- the first of the XII century. The adoption of Christianity (Moscow: Higher School, 1988)

<sup>90</sup> Rfe/rl, "Putin: Crimea Is Russia's Jerusalem," RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, December 04, 2014, , accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-putin-crimea-sanctions/26724940.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Peter Malcolm Holt, Ann Lambton, and Lewis Bernard, The Cambridge History of Islam I: The Central Islamic Lands (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Pr., 1970).

<sup>92</sup> Micheal Clodfelter, Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492-2015 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company,, Publishers, 2017).

spilt in Crimea during this period was not forgotten, adding an element of Russian pride and sacrifice to the land. European powers accurately recognised the Crimean ports as a Russian geopolitical advantage, and as part of the Treaty of Paris in 1856, Russia was forced to dismantle its naval base in Sevastopol and demilitarise the area. Nevertheless the naval base was rebuilt just 14 years later as European powers became preoccupied with the Franco-Prussian War.<sup>93</sup>

During the Russian Civil War, control over Crimea changed hands eight times within the four-year period.<sup>94</sup> Eventually in 1921, the Crimean Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was formed and would survive for 21 years, until the Nazi German invasion. During this period, Joseph Stalin's collectivisation project had a devastating impact on the Crimean population, with an estimated 100,000 perishing.<sup>95</sup> Crimean Tatars were targeted and deported to gulags or executed. The Greek population and culture was also attacked. The regional development policies of the Soviet Union orchestrated a large ethnic Russian migration into Crimea, restructuring the demographics.

During the Second World War, Crimea was once again the location of large-scale battles, as the invading Nazi German army targeted the peninsula for the fertile land and strategic location. Following a five-day battle, the German army eventually crossed the narrow choke point, known as the Isthmus of Perekop, and the majority of the peninsula fell into German hands. German and Soviet casualties during the invasion of Crimea were in the hundreds of thousands. The Soviet resistance in Crimea became legendary.<sup>96</sup> The city of Sevastopol would eventually be presented with the Soviet honorary award of Hero City, for its remarkable defensive display. Soviet partisans located in the Crimean mountainous region successfully engaged in guerrilla warfare against the enemy. Relations between the partisans and the Tatar population were negative and the

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<sup>93</sup> Norman Rich, *Why the Crimean War?: A Cautionary Tale* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991).

<sup>94</sup> Mikhail Khvostov and Andrei Karachtchouk, *The Russian Civil War* (London: Osprey Military, 1997).

<sup>95</sup> James Stuart. Olson, Lee Brigance. Pappas, and Nicholas Charles J. Pappas, *An Ethnohistorical Dictionary of the Russian and Soviet Empires* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>96</sup> John Erickson, *The Road to Stalingrad* (London: Weidenfeld, 1975).

Tatar communities were often accused of aiding German soldiers. In 1944, Joseph Stalin decided to punish the Tatar population by exiling them to Central Asia. The majority would return between 1987-1990.<sup>97</sup> Sevastopol, known as *The City of Russian Glory*, was completely destroyed by the end of the war. The iconic importance of the city was evident as Stalin prioritised its reconstruction.

In 1954 the leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, officially handed over the territory of Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic as an apparent gift, on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav, the agreement that created an alliance between Ukraine and Russia. However the reasoning behind the gift is currently still contested, and clarity on this matter may improve our understanding of the reasoning behind the 2014 annexation. The decision was briefly discussed and casually announced. There appears little connection between the Treaty of Pereyaslav and the Crimean Peninsula, causing many to search for more substantial motives. Some believe that the gift was a personal gesture from Khrushchev to Ukraine, as he had a deep-rooted love and respect for the country, after spending most of his life working in Ukraine and marrying a Ukrainian woman.<sup>98</sup> Others argue that the agricultural ties between Ukraine and Crimea were strong and therefore the transfer made economic sense.<sup>99</sup> The Crimean culture was heavily Russian at the time of the transfer. The population of Crimea was estimated to be 75% ethnic Russian and 25% Ukrainian, due to the organised Russian influx and the deportation of the Tatar, Greek, Bulgarian and Armenian minorities.<sup>100</sup> The demographically driven strategy to relocate ethnic Russians was also noted in the annexed Baltic states of Latvia and Estonia, as hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians were encouraged to relocate. As long as the ethnic Russians remained culturally and semantically Russian, soft

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<sup>97</sup> Greta Lynn. Uehling, *Beyond Memory: The Crimean Tatars Deportation and Return* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> Krishnadev Calamur, "Crimea: A Gift To Ukraine Becomes A Political Flash Point," NPR, February 27, 2014, , accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/02/27/283481587/crimea-a-gift-to-ukraine-becomes-a-political-flash-point>.

<sup>99</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremains Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>100</sup> Mark Kramer, "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?" Wilson Center, February 02, 2018, , accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>.

power would take its toll on the region.<sup>101</sup> The promise of militarily protecting ethnic Russians would also strengthen ties back to the homeland and announce that hard power was always an option, as witnessed in 2014. Many consider the transfer to be politically motivated as Khrushchev attempted to build support from Ukrainian elites in order to take over from Georgy Malenkov as absolute leader of the Soviet Union. It is reported that Khrushchev had discussed the transfer of Crimea with Stalin ten years previously as a way of gaining Ukrainian political support.<sup>102</sup>

The legitimacy of the transfer of Crimea has been questioned, most notably by the Russian Federation in recent years. Although there was no quorum on the Soviet Security Council, only 13 of the 27 members were present for the discussion and decision.<sup>103</sup> Article 18 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution states that consent from both parties is needed in the case of altering territory, of which both the Ukrainian SSR and the Russian SFSR had given their consent.<sup>104</sup> In 2015, the Prosecutor General's Office of Russia declared the transfer illegal, as apparently the Russian SFSR constitution did not permit changes in the legal status of autonomous soviet socialist republics.<sup>105</sup> The transfer was accepted in 1954 and again in 1991 when the Russian Federation acknowledged the borders of the newly independent Ukraine. The 1994 Budapest Memorandum of Security Assurances, signed by the Russian Federation, also ensured that the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus would be respected.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Mike Winnerstig, "Tools of Destabilisation. Russian Soft Power and Non-military Influence in the Baltic States." FOI Swedish Defence Research Agency, (2014): 2-149

<sup>102</sup> Mark Kramer, "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago?" Wilson Center, February 02, 2018, , accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>.

<sup>103</sup> Dmitry Sudakov, "USSR's Nikita Khrushchev Gave Russia's Crimea Away to Ukraine in Only 15 Minutes," PravdaReport, February 19, 2009, , accessed March 03, 2019, [http://www.pravdareport.com/history/107129-ussr\\_crimea\\_ukraine/](http://www.pravdareport.com/history/107129-ussr_crimea_ukraine/).

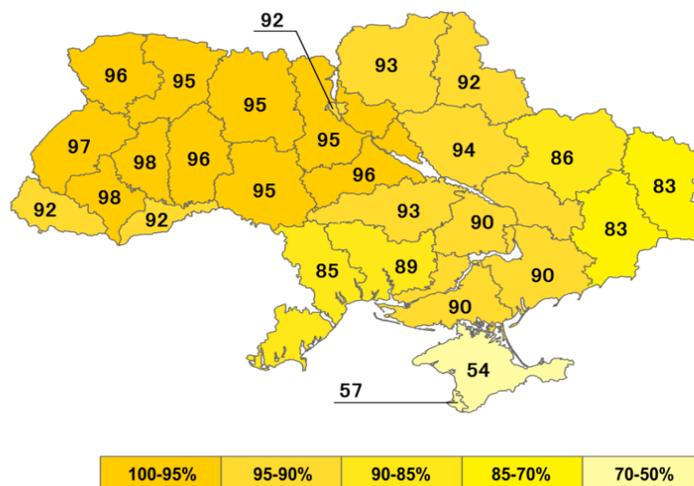
<sup>104</sup> Volodymyr G. Butkevych, "Who Has A Right To Crimea," Ukrainian History, 1997, , accessed March 03, 2019, <http://www.infoukes.com/history/crimea/page-12.html>.

<sup>105</sup> "New Russian Bill Condemns 1954 Transfer of Crimea to Ukraine as 'Illegal'," The Moscow Times, February 05, 2015, , accessed March 03, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/02/05/new-russian-bill-condemns-1954-transfer-of-crimea-to-ukraine-as-illegal-a43588>.

<sup>106</sup> Memorandum on Security Assurances in Connection with Ukraine's Accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Budapest, 19 December 1994, United Nations Security Council, available from <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org>

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, in 1991 a referendum regarding the independence of Ukraine was completed in all regions of the Ukrainian SSR. As displayed in *Figure 3*, the percentage of the population who were against Ukrainian independence was miniscule in all regions except the Crimean Peninsula. A mere 54% of votes within the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic favoured independence, while 57% of voters in Sevastopol voted for Ukrainian independence. It is important to note that the voter turnout from the Crimean Peninsula was estimated at 60% compared to the national average of 76%.<sup>107</sup>

**Figure 3: Vote by % for Ukrainian Independence in 1991<sup>108</sup>**



The independence of Ukraine caused problems concerning the Black Sea Fleet, which was stationed in Sevastopol. The Black Sea Fleet has been a symbol of Russian military strength since the victory over the Ottoman Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>109</sup> The issue was resolved in 1997 as three treaties were signed by both Ukraine and Russia. Armaments and bases would be divided between Ukraine and Russia, as each country would have their own independent national fleet. The treaties allowed Russia to keep up to 25,000 soldiers, 132 armoured vehicles, 24 artillery systems and 22 military aircrafts within the Crimean

<sup>107</sup> Paul Kolstoe and Andrei Edemski, *Russians in the Former Soviet Republics* (London: Hurst and Company, 1995).

<sup>108</sup> *Source:* Chrystyna Lapichak, "Independence," *The Ukrainian Weekly* (New Jersey), December 08, 1991, 49th ed.

<sup>109</sup> "234 Years of Naval Glory, and Counting: Russian Black Sea Fleet Marks Birthday," *Sputnik International*, May 14, 2017, accessed March 04, 2019, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/201705131053583690-russian-black-sea-fleet-history-of-heroism/>.

Peninsula. Military identification cards were to be presented by Russian troops when crossing the Ukraine-Russia border. Troops were only allowed to operate outside of their deployment areas with the agreement of respective Ukrainian agencies.<sup>110</sup> Russia paid a large compensation sum for the ability to lease the naval bases for a 20-year period from 1997-2017. The 2004 Presidential Elections, as seen previously in *Figure 2*, exposed the largely pro-Russian population in Crimea, as 81.26% of voters supported Viktor Yanukovych, while 88.83% of voters in Sevastopol voted for Yanukovych. The influx of Russians into Crimea had remained loyal to their homeland. In 2008, Russia was accused of handing out passports to ethnic Russians within Crimea. This tactic, known as 'Passportisation', occurred in the unrecognised breakaway states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria in order to strengthen the claim of military protection towards Russian citizens. Georgia was eventually invaded. Ex-presidential advisor, Sergey Karaganov, declared that the Russian's who found themselves living abroad after the dissolution of the USSR should remain abroad in order for Russia to maintain 'strings of influence' within these states.<sup>111</sup> In 2010, Ukrainian President Yanukovych and Russian President Medvedev signed an agreement, known as the Kharkiv Pact, to extend the Russian lease of naval bases in Crimea for a further 25 years.<sup>112</sup>

## **The Crimean Annexation**

The *Euromaidan* protests began in November 2013, after President Yanukovych decided not to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, instead moving the country closer to Russia with increased economic ties. On February 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014, Yanukovych was ousted from power and fled to Russia. However as the pro-Western population had regained control of the government and the presidency, the plan to return Crimea to Russia was already underway. On the

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<sup>110</sup> Spencer Kimball, "Bound by Treaty: Russia, Ukraine and Crimea," Deutsche Welle, March 11, 2014, , accessed March 04, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/bound-by-treaty-russia-ukraine-and-crimea/a-17487632>.

<sup>111</sup> Toru Nagashima, "Russia's Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics," Problems of Post-Communism, December 13, 2017, , doi:10.1080/10758216.2017.1388182.

<sup>112</sup> Luke Harding, "Ukraine Extends Lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet," The Guardian, April 21, 2010, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.

22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, Battalions of Russian Spetsnaz units and airborne forces left their bases within Crimea. More troops were transported directly to the Kerch Strait, separating Ukraine and Russia.<sup>113</sup> According to Vladimir Putin, an all-night meeting took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February discussing the Ukraine situation and briefly considering action in Crimea.<sup>114</sup> Groups known as the 'people's militia' began protesting in urban areas of Crimea, claiming that they were defending the region against extremism. Within a few days of Putin's meeting, the pro-Russian protestors grew in size and hostility as thousands clashed in the city of Simferopol. Self-defence groups of minorities were created as mosques, synagogues and cultural sites were protected. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the Sevastopol City Council installed a Russian citizen as mayor, while an armoured personnel carrier arrived in the city centre carrying members of the 810<sup>th</sup> Naval Infantry Brigade. This was a violation of the agreement regarding Russian military activity within Crimea. The following day, an estimated 200 special operations units arrived in Sevastopol on the *Nikolai Filchenkov*, a Black Sea Fleet landing-ship.<sup>115</sup> Unidentified soldiers took position around urban areas and seized control of the Crimean Parliament before raising the Russian flag. The soldiers set up blockades around important buildings, checkpoints on major roads and large security checkpoints on the Isthmus of Perekop and Chonhar Peninsula, isolating Crimea from mainland Ukraine. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, the Crimean Parliament building held an emergency session to vote for the termination of the current Crimean government and to vote in Sergey Aksyonov as Prime Minister. Communication within the building was cut off and no independent journalists were allowed inside. Mobile phones were confiscated on arrival by the unidentified security forces. The members of parliament were apparently threatened into voting, while others claimed they had been forced to vote at gunpoint. The members of parliament that were not present had their

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<sup>113</sup> Michael Koffman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," RAND, 2017.

<sup>114</sup> "Putin Reveals Secrets of Russia's Crimea Takeover Plot," BBC News, March 09, 2015, , accessed March 04, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31796226>.

<sup>115</sup> Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis, USA: East View Press., 2015).

votes cast for them.<sup>116</sup> The constitution of Ukraine declares that the President, who was still viewed as Yanukovich by Aksyonov and the militia, must verify the Prime Minister.<sup>117</sup> On February 28<sup>th</sup>, three Mi-8 helicopters and eight Mi-35M attack helicopters entered Ukrainian territory.<sup>118</sup> Also on this day, Simferopol Airport was captured, flights were cancelled and Russian Airborne troops arrived. On March 1<sup>st</sup>, the new illegally elected Prime Minister of Crimea contacted Vladimir Putin for assistance in creating peace within the Crimean Peninsula. The Federation Council of Russia agreed with the intervention and Putin swiftly began the complete annexation of Crimea with an increase in manpower and airpower. Meanwhile, a large build-up of Russian troops took position on the eastern Ukraine-Russian border. This act could be read as a distraction for the Ukrainian Military, or as preparation for a possible invasion of eastern Ukraine if given the order.<sup>119</sup> Ukraine had been separated from Crimea and had lost command of the peninsula. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Sevastopol City Council ordered a declaration of independence and request for a referendum to join Russia.<sup>120</sup> By the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, the referendum results had given the Republic of Crimea independence. Russian reports claim that over 95% of voters supported joining Russia.<sup>121</sup> Certain Ukrainian laws were abolished, private and state property was nationalised, the ruble was introduced as the joint main currency and the time zone was changed to Moscow Time (UTC+4).<sup>122</sup> The request to be accepted as federal subjects of Russia was accepted on March 21<sup>st</sup> by the Russian Federation Council, and Putin

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<sup>116</sup> Alissa De Carbonnel, "RPT-INSIGHT-How the Separatists Delivered Crimea to Moscow," Reuters, March 13, 2014, , accessed March 05, 2019, <https://in.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-aksyonov-idINL6N0M93AH20140313>.

<sup>117</sup> "Ukraine - Constitution & Politics." Foreign Law Guide. doi:10.1163/2213-2996\_flg\_com\_194034.

<sup>118</sup> Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis, USA: East View Press., 2015).

<sup>119</sup> Michael Koffman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," RAND, 2017.

<sup>120</sup> "Крым определился, каким способом войдет в Россию," ВЕДОМОСТИ, March 11, 2014, , accessed March 06, 2019, <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/articles/2014/03/11/verhovnyj-sovet-kryma-prinyal-deklaraciyu-nezavisimosti>.

<sup>121</sup> "Crimea Declares Independence, Seeks UN Recognition," RT International, March 17, 2014, , accessed March 06, 2019, <https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-referendum-results-official-250/>.

<sup>122</sup> "Названа дата перехода Крыма на московское время," Lenta.ru, March 17, 2014, , accessed March 06, 2019, <https://lenta.ru/news/2014/03/17/time/>.

confirmed the inclusion of the two areas into the Russian Federation.<sup>123</sup> Ukrainian warships, airbases and military bases were stormed and Ukrainian military personnel were evacuated. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of March, the Ukrainian government ordered a complete military evacuation of Ukrainian personnel within Crimea.<sup>124</sup> Russia had swiftly annexed 4.5% of Ukraine with no direct Russian casualties.<sup>125</sup> The classic Russian military operational features of shock, strike power and speed of action had proved extremely effective.

After two months of denying official involvement, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of April, Russia admitted that the soldiers involved in the annexation were in fact part of the Russian military. Official reasoning behind the deployment of armed forces was to defend the Crimean citizens and to protect Russian military infrastructure.<sup>126</sup> Although legal justification was used in an attempt to validate the annexation, it seems clear that Russia was willing to accept the response from the international community. Economic sanctions followed.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Systemic Stimuli**

#### **Structural Modifiers**

##### **Geography**

The Russian Federation is the world's largest country, covering an estimated 11% of all landmass. The territory stretches from Eastern Europe to Northern

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<sup>123</sup> Russian Government "On the signing of the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Crimea on the admission to the Russian Federation of the Republic of Crimea and the formation of new subjects within the Russian Federation" – 0001201403180001, Moscow

<sup>124</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "Ukrainian Forces Withdraw from Crimea," BBC News, March 24, 2014, , accessed March 06, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26713727>.

<sup>125</sup> Michael Koffman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," RAND, 2017.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid

Asia, and from deep within the Arctic Circle down to the Black Sea. Kaliningrad Oblast is the only Russian exclave. As a result of its size, Russia physically borders fourteen countries. Eight of the countries are within Europe, two of which border the exclave Kaliningrad Oblast. Three of the bordering countries are within Asia, while three others span both Europe and Asia. Russia also has two maritime borders in the Far East with the United States and Japan. The number of international borders causes security, economic and cultural concerns for Russia, as it would prove near impossible to create secure borders around the entire territory. Nine of the fourteen bordering countries were previously republics of the Soviet Union.<sup>127</sup>

### **International Military Bases**

Russia has numerous strategic international military bases. The majority of which are in former Soviet states, known as the 'near abroad'. **Armenia** is home to the Erebuni Military Airport, that is the location of the Russian 3624<sup>th</sup> Airbase. The Russian 102<sup>nd</sup> Military Base can also be found within the Armenian city of Gyumri. **Belarus** has two Russian military bases within its territory. The first is a radar system known as the Hansavichy Radar Station, and the second is a submarine transmitter station and home to the 43<sup>rd</sup> communications centre of the Russian Navy.<sup>128</sup> **Tajikistan** has extended the lease of a military base to Russia, known as the 201<sup>st</sup> Military Base, until 2042.<sup>129</sup> Russia has two other military bases in Tajikistan, while also sharing the Ayni Air Force Base.<sup>130</sup> **Kazakhstan** hosts Russian bases in three locations. The Balkhash Radar Station that acts as a warning system against missile attacks,<sup>131</sup> the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the world's largest space launch facility,<sup>132</sup> and the anti-ballistic

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<sup>127</sup> Yuri V. Medvedkov et al., "Russia," Encyclopædia Britannica, March 09, 2019, , accessed March 09, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>.

<sup>128</sup> Margerete Klein, "Russia's Military Capabilities. Great Power Ambitions and Reality," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, October 2009.

<sup>129</sup> "Russian Military Conduct Antiterrorist Drills in Tajikistan," TASS, February 29, 2016, , accessed March 09, 2019, [http://tass.com/defense/859627?\\_ga=1.75724885.1338776785.1474554077](http://tass.com/defense/859627?_ga=1.75724885.1338776785.1474554077).

<sup>130</sup> Margerete Klein, "Russia's Military Capabilities. Great Power Ambitions and Reality," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, October 2009.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> "Baikonur Cosmodrome Marks 50th Birthday," 24/7 Space News, June 02, 2005, , accessed March 09, 2019, [http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Baikonur\\_Cosmodrome\\_Marks\\_50th\\_Birthday.html](http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Baikonur_Cosmodrome_Marks_50th_Birthday.html).

missile testing site known as Sary Shagan.<sup>133</sup> **Kyrgyzstan** has leased Kant Air Base to Russia until 2032, while it is believed that the 338<sup>th</sup> Naval Communication centre is based on the outskirts of Chaldovar, on the Kyrgyzstan-Kazakhstan border. The Russian 954<sup>th</sup> torpedo-testing site is located on the Issyk Kul Lake, whereas the town of Mailuu-Suu is home to a Russian seismology station.<sup>134</sup> **Ukraine** had agreed to a 25-year lease extension of the Sevastopol Naval Base in 2010 through the Kharkiv Pact.<sup>135</sup> **Syria** has been the location of a Russian naval facility in Tartus since 1971.<sup>136</sup> The largest military airbase in Syria, the Tiyas Military Airbase, hosts Russian forces and aircrafts.<sup>137</sup> Centre S, before being captured by the Free Syrian Army in October 2014, was an undisclosed Russian-Syrian signals operational post, near to al-Harra.<sup>138</sup> **Vietnam** agreed to lease the Cam Ranh Naval Base back to Russia in 2014.<sup>139</sup>

Russia has also economically, politically and military aided the creation of so-called quasi-states, which are home to Russian military bases and military units. **Abkhazia**, an unrecognised state that broke away from Georgia in 2008, hosts the Russian 7<sup>th</sup> Military Base. **South Ossetia** also broke away from Georgia in

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<sup>133</sup> "Kazakhstan Ratifies Agreements With Russia On Test Sites," 24/7 Space News, June 22, 2007, , accessed March 09, 2019, [http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Kazakhstan\\_Ratifies\\_Agreements\\_With\\_Russia\\_On\\_Test\\_Sites\\_999.html](http://www.spacedaily.com/reports/Kazakhstan_Ratifies_Agreements_With_Russia_On_Test_Sites_999.html).

<sup>134</sup> "Russian Military Base Presence in Kyrgyzstan Extended till 2032 - Ferghana Information Agency, Moscow," Fergananeews, February 01, 2017, , accessed March 10, 2019, <http://enews.fergananeews.com/news.php?id=3244&mode=snews>.

<sup>135</sup> Luke Harding, "Ukraine Extends Lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet," The Guardian, April 21, 2010, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/21/ukraine-black-sea-fleet-russia>.

<sup>136</sup> "Russia Seeks Several Military Bases Abroad – Defense Minister," Sputnik International, February 26, 2014, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://sputniknews.com/military/20140226187917901-Russia-Seeks-Several-Military-Bases-Abroad--Defense-Minister/>.

<sup>137</sup> "Russia Builds Four New Air Bases in Syria, Deploys Another 6,000 Troops," DEBKAfile, February 1, 2018, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.debka.com/russia-builds-four-new-air-bases-syria-deploys-another-6000-troops/>.

<sup>138</sup> Inna Lazareva, "Russian Spy Base in Syria Used to Monitor Rebels and Israel Seized," The Telegraph, October 08, 2014, , accessed March 10, 2019, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11148857/Russian-spy-base-in-Syria-used-to-monitor-rebels-and-Israel-seized.html>.

<sup>139</sup> Phuong Nguyen, "What Should the United States Do about Cam Ranh Bay and Russia's Place in Vietnam?" Centre for Strategic and International Studies, March 16, 2015, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://www.cogitasia.com/what-should-the-united-states-do-about-cam-ranh-bay-and-russias-place-in-vietnam/>.

2008 and hosts the Russian 4<sup>th</sup> Military Base.<sup>140</sup> The break away state of **Transnistria**, formerly a part of Moldova, has one of Europe's largest stockpiles of weapons and ammunition that is guarded by an estimated 1,000 Russian troops.<sup>141</sup>

The majority of information provided on Russian international bases is public; nevertheless sites such as Centre S were not public knowledge until their discovery by enemy troops. Many more covert Russian military sites may exist. Classified information regarding Russian covert international military bases causes increased difficulty in fully understanding the strength of the Russian military in the international arena.

## **Military Technology**

### **Nuclear Strength**

The Cold War nuclear arms race between Russia and the United States has resulted in the two countries possessing the large majority of global nuclear weapons. In 2014, Russia officially claimed to have 1,400 nuclear warheads and 473 deployed strategic launchers,<sup>142</sup> although other estimates believe the figure to be between 1,500 and 1,700. It is also predicted that a further 700 strategic warheads were in storage, as well as 2,000 nonstrategic warheads. It is estimated that roughly 3,500 withdrawn, yet intact, warheads had not yet been dismantled. Russia had been modernising its nuclear capabilities by replacing the extensive out-dated Soviet stock with a smaller more efficient arsenal. In 2014, Russia had deployed an estimated 313 Inter Continental Ballistic Missiles, capable of carrying 976 warheads. The modernisation of the Russian nuclear submarine fleet had been slow, nonetheless submarine-launched ballistic

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<sup>140</sup> Ruslan Pukhov, *The Tanks of August* (Moscow, Russia: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010).

<sup>141</sup> Matthew Luxmoore, "Breakaway Transnistria Region Could Become next Flashpoint with Russia," *Al Jazeera America*, July 19, 2015, , accessed March 10, 2019, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/7/19/breakaway-transnistria-region-flashpoint-russia.html>.

<sup>142</sup> Tom Nichols, "Welcome to Russian Nuclear Weapons 101," *The National Interest*, May 08, 2014, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/welcome-russian-nuclear-weapons-101-10432>.

missiles were active. At the time, Russia had two types of strategic bombers capable of using nuclear weapons, the Tu-95MS Bear H and the Tu-160 Blackjack.<sup>143</sup> There is little information available regarding the total number of strategic bombers in 2014.

### **Anti-Access/Area Denial system**

The Russian anti-access/area denial system, more commonly known as A2AD system, is a highly effective air-defence system that contains levels of short, medium and long range defensive weaponry. It was created to defend against combat aircrafts, drones and cruise missiles of varying altitudes. In 2014, there was no air force that was capable of penetrating through the defensive bubble created by the Russian A2AD system. The S-300 and S-400 were the main Russian deployments of surface to air missile systems. Due to their manoeuvrability, exact locations can change within hours. In 2012, Russia deployed the S-400 system within Kaliningrad.<sup>144</sup> Other S-400 systems had been deployed in the Moscow Region and the Eastern Military District.<sup>145</sup>

### **Iskander Missile System**

The state of the art short-range ballistic missile system, known as the 9K720 Iskander, strengthens Russia's military capabilities. Numerous warheads are available, including earth-penetrating warheads for 'bunker busting', cluster attacks and fuel-air explosive blasts. Transient electromagnetic disturbance devices can also be used to overcome radar systems.<sup>146</sup> The superiority of the Iskander System is used against the perceived threat of NATO, and has been deployed along Russia's western border with numerous European countries. The Iskander system was deployed during the Georgian war in 2008 and in Armenia

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<sup>143</sup> Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Russian Nuclear Forces, 2014," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 70, no. 2 (2014): , doi:10.1177/0096340214523565.

<sup>144</sup> Nicholas Khoo and Reuben Steff, ""This Program Will Not Be a Threat to Them": Ballistic Missile Defense and US Relations with Russia and China," *Defense & Security Analysis* 30, no. 1 (December 20, 2013): , doi:10.1080/14751798.2013.864869.

<sup>145</sup> Nikoletta Zyga, "Russia's New Aerospace Defence Forces: Keeping up with the Neighbours," Directorate-General for External Policies. European Parliament, February 22, 2013.

<sup>146</sup> Dave Majumdar, "Why Russia's Iskander Missile Is a Killer," *The National Interest*, July 19, 2018, , accessed March 10, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/why-russias-iskander-missile-killer-26216>.

in 2013. In 2014, Russian officials denied rumours of Iskander systems within Kaliningrad.

### **Russian Air Force**

The Russian modernisation process of the Air Force has been relatively successful, with approximately 35% of all Russian aircrafts equipped with modern weaponry in 2014. The collection included the Su-30, Su-34 and Su-35 aircrafts.<sup>147</sup> In 2015, the number of Russian aircrafts was estimated at 3,547, second to only the United States.<sup>148</sup>

### **Russian Navy**

The Russian budget dedicated to national defence devoted a significant amount to modernising and developing the navy in the years leading up to 2014.<sup>149</sup> In 2014, the Russian Navy consisted of 79 large ships, one aircraft carrier, five cruisers, 13 destroyers and an estimated 52 submarines. These figures placed the Russian Navy as third strongest, after the United States and China. Despite that, the majority of the ships and submarines were inherited from the Soviet Union and were in need of modernisation. Delays and faults often hinder Russian shipbuilding and submarine building capabilities. Similarly to the Soviet Union, the Russian submarine arsenal is the spearhead of its navy. In 2014, Russia had 15 nuclear attack submarines, nine ballistic missile submarines, and six cruise missile submarines.<sup>150</sup> Exact details of submarine bases and technology are difficult to uncover or verify.

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<sup>147</sup> "Шойгу: оснащённость Российской армии современным оружием и техникой за год выросла на 7%," ТАСС, December 19, 2014, , accessed March 11, 2019, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/1660936>.

<sup>148</sup> Craig Hoyle, "Major Powers: Our Top 10 of Military Aviation Strength," Flight Global, December 04, 2015, , accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.flightglobal.com/news/articles/major-powers-our-top-10-of-military-aviation-streng-419734/>.

<sup>149</sup> Fedyszyn, Thomas. "The Russian Navy 'Rebalances' to the Mediterranean." US Naval Institute. December 01, 2013. Accessed March 11, 2019. <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2013/december/russian-navy-rebalances-mediterranean>.

<sup>150</sup> Kyle Mizokami, "The Five Most-Powerful Navies on the Planet," The National Interest, June 06, 2014, , accessed March 11, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-five-most-powerful-navies-the-planet-10610>.

## Russian Distribution of Power

### Geography

The Russian Federation is the world's largest state with a total area of 17,098,242km<sup>2</sup>, 4.2% being water area. The majority of Russia is closer to the North Pole than the equator. Russia has a coastline of 37,653km and has access to three oceans, the Arctic, the Pacific and the Atlantic, through 13 seas.<sup>151</sup> The large majority of the northern coastline lands within the Arctic Circle and is blocked in by ice for the majority of the year, limiting the usage of the Barents Sea, White Sea, Kara Sea, Laptev Sea, East Siberian Sea and Chukchi Sea. Most Russian rivers flow north into the Arctic drainage basin, rendering them impractical for a large part of the year. The gradual rise of ocean temperatures is improving the situation, as icebreakers begin to open up sea channels. The poor accessibility of the seas on the northern coastline is also a result of the inhospitable climate and the difficulty of developing infrastructure within such a region. The Bering Sea and the Sea of Okhotsk are open seas flowing freely into the Pacific Ocean. The Sea of Japan is semi-enclosed and is shared with Japan, North Korea and South Korea. Russia has access to the enclosed Baltic Sea through St Petersburg and the exclave Kaliningrad. The enclosed Sea of Azov and Black Sea are also accessible by Russia but subsequent access into the Mediterranean Sea is only possible through the Turkish chokepoint, the Bosphorus Strait. Russia shares the enclosed Caspian Sea with Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The lack of available open seas has resulted in Russia developing as a telurocratic nation, while aspiring to control warm water ports.

Unlike major powers such as the United States and China, the Russian Federation is not completely protected by natural borders such as desert, jungle or mountain ranges.<sup>152</sup> Russia's western borders with Norway, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine fall within flat plains that are difficult to defend. The Carpathian Mountains found within Western Ukraine, Romania, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic would be the ideal natural border that would heavily

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<sup>151</sup> "Russia's Sea Resources," Seas and Oceans, , accessed March 11, 2019, [http://education.rec.org/ru/en/seas\\_and\\_oceans/in\\_russia/index.shtml](http://education.rec.org/ru/en/seas_and_oceans/in_russia/index.shtml).

<sup>152</sup> "Russia Geography," World Atlas, April 07, 2017, , accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/russia/rulandst.htm>.

improve Russia's geographical security concerns.<sup>153</sup> The western area of Russia consists of mainly temperate forest and is largely fertile. The Kaliningrad Oblast shares borders with Lithuania and Poland. The southern borders are more favourable as mountainous regions protect Russia from large-scale invasions and the threat of Islamic extremism. The Caucasus Mountain range can be found on the borders between Russia and neighbouring Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Ural Mountains act as a natural border between Europe and Asia. The Urals split Russia into two sections and are a burden to communication and transportation. In Central Asia and Northern Asia, Russia shares borders with Kazakhstan, Mongolia, China and North Korea.<sup>154</sup> There are nine mountain ranges within Russia, the majority of which are found in the east of the country, making invasions from the east more difficult. Due to its size, the physical geography varies greatly across the country. Russia possesses all of the vegetation zones except a tropical rainforest region. The northern coastline is hugged with Arctic tundra, while an estimated 60% of Russian territory consists of the forested region known as Taiga. The shape of the territory causes problems due to the extreme distances between the west and the east of the country. The geography of Russia has been described as a curse, as the open borders have historically made the country vulnerable to invasions.<sup>155</sup>

Russian political geography can be categorised through the 83 'Federal Subjects of Russia'. These included 46 Oblasts, 21 Republics, nine Krai, four Autonomous Okrugs, two Federal Cities and one Autonomous Oblast. The majority of the 83 federal subjects are located in the west of the country.<sup>156</sup> The far west of the country can be considered a strategic centre of gravity due to Moscow and St Petersburg being located in relatively close proximity.

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<sup>153</sup> Tim Marshall, "Russia and the Curse of Geography," *The Atlantic*, October 31, 2015, , accessed April 06, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>.

<sup>154</sup> Russia Geography," *World Atlas*, April 07, 2017, , accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/russia/rulandst.htm>.

<sup>155</sup> Tim Marshall, "Russia and the Curse of Geography," *The Atlantic*, October 31, 2015, , accessed April 06, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/10/russia-geography-ukraine-syria/413248/>.

<sup>156</sup> Russian Constitution, Article 65.

## Demographics

In 2014, the population of Russia was 143.8 million, making it the 9<sup>th</sup> most populous country. An estimated 73.95% of the population lived in urban areas.<sup>157</sup> The population density in 2010 was 8.4 people per square kilometre, compared to 35 in the United States and 146 in China, highlighting the vast empty space within Russia.<sup>158</sup> The majority of the Russian population resided within major cities in the far west of the country. According to the 2010 Russian Census, the capital city Moscow consisted of around 11.6 million whereas the population of St Petersburg was 4.9 million. No other Russian city had a population of over 1.5 million people.<sup>159</sup>

Historically the original Russian population were considered Slavic people who followed the Christian Orthodox religion. After centuries of expansion and foreign invasions, the demographics of Russia are more diverse, however in 2010 an estimated 78% of the population claimed to be ethnic Russian. The largest minority were the Turkic Tatars who made up 3.7% of the total population. A further 1.4% were Ukrainian. Other minorities included the Bashkir, Chuvash and Chechen people.<sup>160</sup> The Christian Orthodox religion was dominant in Russia and is considered a key part of Russian culture. The second most populous religion was Islam, consisting of an estimated 6.5% of the population, although this figure did not include Muslims in Chechnya and Ingushetia.<sup>161</sup> The majority of Muslim communities are found in the Caucasus region. The Russian language is the sole official language of the country, although there are 35 further languages that are considered official on a regional scale.

In 2014, life expectancy was 71 years. A large gap between males and females is noted, as the average life expectancy for females was 76.5 years compared to

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<sup>157</sup> "Russia Population," TheGlobalEconomy.com, 2017, , accessed March 12, 2019, [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Population\\_size/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Population_size/).

<sup>158</sup> "World Countries by Population Density," World Population Review, 2019, , accessed April 06, 2019, <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-by-density/>.

<sup>159</sup> "Russia Population Size - Data, Chart," The Global Economy, 2018, , accessed March 12, 2019, [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Population\\_size/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Russia/Population_size/).

<sup>160</sup> "The World Factbook: Russia," Central Intelligence Agency, February 01, 2018, , accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rs.html>.

<sup>161</sup> "Атлас религий и национальностей," Арена, 2012.

65.3 years for males. This has been associated with heavy alcohol consumption.<sup>162</sup> Smoking is also a major health concern in Russia as an estimated 39% of the population regularly smoke tobacco, the seventh highest percentage worldwide.<sup>163</sup> The median age in 2014 was 38 years while the fertility rate was 1.75, creating cause for concern due to an aging and shrinking population.<sup>164</sup>

## Resources

Russia is extremely rich in natural resources. Profit from these resources contributes heavily to the GDP. Russia has the largest reserves of natural gas worldwide and the second largest reserves of coal. Oil reserves within the country are the 8<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, although they are the largest exporter of oil worldwide. An abundance of metal ores such as iron, nickel, gold and silver can also be found within Russia. Due to its large reserves, Russia is often described as an 'energy superpower', giving it geopolitical leverage, particularly over European countries reliant on Russian energy, known as *pipeline diplomacy*.<sup>165</sup> In 2013, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia received 100% of their natural gas from Russia.<sup>166</sup> Energy security is a priority for Russia, however the Russian GDP is vulnerable as a consequence of the strong correlation between the Russian economy and global oil and gas prices. The overreliance of the energy sector often results in a weak foreign currency and a decline in manufactured goods exports, also known as the *Dutch Disease*.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Daria A. Khaltourina and Andrey V. Korotayev, "Potential for Alcohol Policy to Decrease the Mortality Crisis in Russia," *Evaluation & the Health Professions* 31, no. 3 (2008): , doi:10.1177/0163278708320160.

<sup>163</sup> "Tobacco Smoking," World Health Organization, 2016, , accessed April 06, 2019, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.sdg.3-a-viz?lang=en>.

<sup>164</sup> Joseph Chamie and Barry Mirkin, "Russian Demographics: The Perfect Storm," *Russian Demographics: The Perfect Storm*, December 11, 2014, , accessed March 12, 2019, <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/russian-demographics-perfect-storm>.

<sup>165</sup> Michael Bradshaw and Richard Connolly, "Russia's Natural Resources in the World Economy: History, Review and Reassessment," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 6 (2016): , doi:10.1080/15387216.2016.1254055.

<sup>166</sup> Dave Jones, Manon Dufour, and Jonathan Gaventa, "Europe's Declining Gas Demand. Trends and Facts on European Gas Consumption," E3G, June 2015.

<sup>167</sup> Kenneth Rapoza, "Despite Weathering Sanction Storm, Russia's 'Dutch Disease' Gets Worse," *Forbes*, February 28, 2016, , accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2016/02/28/despite-weathering-sanction-storm-russias-dutch-disease-still-quite-nasty/#2c684f69ceb0>.

## **Transport Circulation**

Russian federal highways are predominantly based in the populated western region, connecting major cities and towns. Highways exist along Russia's southern border, reaching as far as Vladivostok and Magadan. A large portion of Russia is disconnected by major road systems.<sup>168</sup> Railways lines follow a similar trend, as the west of Russia is well connected whereas only the Trans Siberian line and Baikal-Amur line connect the far east of the country. Rail reforms and modernisation of the railway systems are underway. In 2013, trains were used for 90% of all freight transportation.<sup>169</sup> Due to the inhospitable landscape of certain regions in the east of Russia, the transport circulation fails to connect the entire country, as many areas remain isolated.

## **Technology**

Numerous obstacles have stopped Russia from efficiently modernising its technology industry after the Cold War. A brain-drain during the 1990s limited Russian technological development due to the lack of funding towards science and technology.<sup>170</sup> The inheritance of vast amounts of out-dated Soviet equipment also slowed down development. However technology associated to military strength, nuclear force and online coercion have been prioritised and progress is impressive. Offensive technology has been prioritised. Some claim that Russian society is not designed for major technological modernisation due to the problematic legal environment and the monopolisation of the political power.<sup>171</sup>

## **Political System**

The Russian Federation is governed through a federal system that consisted of 83 federal subjects before the annexation of Crimea. It follows a semi-

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<sup>168</sup> "Russia Map - Road Map of Russia," Ezilon Maps, 2015, , accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.ezilon.com/maps/europe/russia-road-maps.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Chris Lo, "Russian Railways: Connecting a Growing Economy," *Railway Technology*, April 30, 2013, , accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.railway-technology.com/features/feature-russia-railways-connecting-growing-economy/>.

<sup>170</sup> Irina Ivakhnyuk, "Brain Drain from Russia: In Search for a Solution," *Center for International Relations*, 2006.

<sup>171</sup> Loren R. Graham and Irina Dezhina, *Science in the New Russia: Crisis, Aid, Reform* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008).

presidential system where both a president and prime minister exist. The president is popularly elected, whereas the prime minister is selected by the president with the consent of the parliament and cabinet. As of 2012, presidential elections are held every six years, an increase from the previous four-year term. The prime minister is responsible for legislature. The constitution states that Russia, a democratic state, is ruled by a multi-party system. A Constitutional Court of Russia is authorized to ensure constitutional supervision. The Federal Assembly consists of the upper house, known as the Federation Council, and the lower house, known as the State Duma.<sup>172</sup> In 2014, identical to 2019, the president of Russia was Vladimir Putin, the Prime Minister of Russia was Dmitry Medvedev and the Chairman of the Federation Council was Valentina Matviyenko.

The reality of the Russian political system differs largely from its constitutional description. Democratic norms are weak, as electoral freedom has been sacrificed for a strong central power, led by Vladimir Putin. Pledged loyalty towards the president is rewarded, while disloyalty will be met with severe punishments.<sup>173</sup> The parliament and the legal system have been absorbed by the presidential administration. The Russian political analyst Yevgeniy Gotmakher has described the situation as “Instead of the state as an institution implementing the course of a developing country, we have a huge and uncontrolled private structure which is successfully diverting profits for its own use”.<sup>174</sup> Russia has been described as a kleptocratic state run by the Vladimir Putin.<sup>175</sup> The power held in the hands of one individual can lead to instability if and when the reign of the individual ends. The leadership is heavily protected by the intelligence services, which has intertwined itself with the Kremlin. Whilst the dissolution of the USSR resulted in the dismantling of the region, the political

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<sup>172</sup> Russian Constitution.

<sup>173</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putins Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

<sup>174</sup> Yevgeny Gontmakher, "Российского государства не существует," *Московский комсомолец*, August 18, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.mk.ru/specprojects/free-theme/article/2013/08/18/901103-rossiyskogo-gosudarstva-ne-suschestvuet.html>.

<sup>175</sup> Karen Dawisha, *Putins Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

structure and the economy, it is important to note that the Russian secret services maintained its strength and remained intact.<sup>176</sup>

## **Economy**

In 2013, the GDP of Russia was \$2,297 billion, the 8<sup>th</sup> largest worldwide. According to the GDP per capita Russia ranked 51<sup>st</sup>.<sup>177</sup> The Russian GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest globally and the largest when compared to European countries.<sup>178</sup> The total debt owed in 2013 equalled 13.09% of the total GDP.<sup>179</sup> The Russian economy relies heavily on natural resources, in particular the extraction and refinement of hydrocarbons. The top four exports were oil, gas, coal and gold.<sup>180</sup> The Russian government has consolidated control of the energy sector, enabling its vast natural resources to be used as a geopolitical tool, and for the billions of dollars of profit to be used to reinforce political power within the country. The oil industry is monopolised by two major companies, Rosneft and LUKoil. The government owns 85% of the latter, giving it direct control, while Rosneft has been privatised but is indirectly supervised by the government.<sup>181</sup> A third company, Yukos, was once the largest oil company in Russia and owned by the richest man in the country, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, until it was forcibly dissolved by the state and Khodorkovsky was arrested. The official reasoning was due to tax evasion and fraud, however it is widely understood that the decision was politically driven and that Yukos had become too powerful for the Kremlin to allow.<sup>182</sup> State-owned company

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<sup>176</sup> Nuno Morgado, "Towards the New World Order? A Geopolitical Study of Neo- Eurasianism and Meridionalism," Ph.D. Thesis. Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, 2017.

<sup>177</sup> "Russia GDP - Gross Domestic Product 2013," Countryeconomy, 2014, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://countryeconomy.com/gdp/russia?year=2013>.

<sup>178</sup> Tatyana Lisina, "Russian Economy Becomes Biggest in Europe," Russia Beyond, July 17, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, [https://www.rbth.com/business/2013/07/17/russian\\_economy\\_becomes\\_biggest\\_in\\_europe\\_28149.html](https://www.rbth.com/business/2013/07/17/russian_economy_becomes_biggest_in_europe_28149.html).

<sup>179</sup> "Russia National Debt 2016," Countryeconomy, October 14, 2017, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://countryeconomy.com/national-debt/russia>.

<sup>180</sup> "Russian Federation Trade Summary," World Integrated Trade Solution, February 20, 2019, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/RUS/Year/2013/Summarytext>.

<sup>181</sup> Stylianos A. Sotiriou, Russian Energy Strategy in the European Union, the Former Soviet Union Region, and China, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>182</sup> Mikhail Zygar', All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

Transneft transports an estimated 90% of Russian oil. The gas industry is dominated by energy giant Gazprom, which is 51% owned by the government. Gazprom accounts for roughly 8% of the Russian GDP.<sup>183</sup>

Trade accounted for 46% of the Russian GDP in 2013. The Russian trade balance was 5.39% of its GDP.<sup>184</sup> The Economic Freedom Index scored Russia 51.1/100 in 2013, compared to 51.9 in China, 71.8 in Japan and 76 in the United States.<sup>185</sup> The Russian economy is strongly controlled by the state and the elite individuals that oversee, manage and reap the rewards. Russia ranked 127<sup>th</sup> out of 175 countries in the Transparency Corruption Index of 2013, whereas China ranked 80<sup>th</sup> and the United States ranked 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>186</sup> As a result of extreme corruption in Russia, the shadow economy remains one of the largest worldwide.<sup>187</sup>

## **Military**

The president of Russia is the Supreme Commander in Chief of the Military. According to the Global Firepower Index, in 2014 Russia had the second most powerful military, behind the United States.<sup>188</sup> Total active armed forces personnel were estimated at 1,260,000.<sup>189</sup> Military conscription is mandatory for men aged 18-27, although studying at university delays the conscription. Working in a state organisation for two years is an acceptable alternative. Many young men attempt to dodge the draft and risk fines and potential prison sentences.<sup>190</sup> The Soviet era weaponry has been a major concern for the Russian Military and modernisation of the Armed Forces has been a focus in recent years.

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<sup>183</sup> Stylianos A. Sotiriou, *Russian Energy Strategy in the European Union, the Former Soviet Union Region, and China*, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016).

<sup>184</sup> "Trade Balance as Percent of GDP," *TheGlobalEconomy*, 2019, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/compare-countries/>.

<sup>185</sup> "Economic Freedom Index," *TheGlobalEconomy*, 2019, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/compare-countries/>.

<sup>186</sup> "Corruption Perceptions Index 2013," *Transparency International*, 2013.

<sup>187</sup> "Russia's Shadow Economy," *Meduza*, June 30, 2017, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://meduza.io/en/news/2017/06/30/at-39-percent-of-gdp-russia-s-shadow-economy-is-the-fourth-largest-in-the-world-according-to-new-report>.

<sup>188</sup> "GFP 2013," *New Times*, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, <http://newtimes.az/en/multimedia/1815>.

<sup>189</sup> "Armed Forces Personnel, Total," *World Bank*, 2016, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1?locations=RU>.

<sup>190</sup> Demyan Plakhov, "Russia's Military Conscription Policies," *NAOC*, November 05, 2016, , accessed March 13, 2019, <http://natoassociation.ca/russias-military-conscription-policies/>.

In 2008, a large-scale reform project was launched with the intention of improving military capability, availability and readiness of the Russian Armed Forces. Since 2012, the military expenditure has been rising. The Russian Armed Forces are separated into the Ground Forces, the Navy and the Air Force. The Ground Forces are the largest branch and consist of eight subdivisions. The transportation of Russian troops depends heavily on the railways, which are state owned. In 2012, Russia was estimated to have 2,800 tanks, 18,260 infantry fighting vehicles and 5,436 artillery weapons, while many thousands more were in storage. Russian journalists debate these apparent overestimations. Much of the equipment was described as out-dated, yet functioning. The Air Force consisted of an estimated 150,000 personnel, 660 fighter aircrafts and 320 fighter ground attack aircrafts. The Navy consisted of 130,000 personnel and is separated into four fleets. The Baltic Fleet is based in Kaliningrad Oblast, the Northern Fleet located near Murmansk, the Black Sea Fleet is based in Sevastopol and the Pacific Fleet can be found in Vladivostok. There is also the Caspian Sea Flotilla that has its headquarters in Astrakhan.<sup>191</sup>

## **Polarity**

In 2013, the geopolitical arena was recognised as unipolar as the United States was widely accepted as the dominant superpower. The GDP of the United States was over double that of second place China. Military power was also superior to all other states, and its ability to project power through air, space and sea worldwide solidified its strength.<sup>192</sup> Some believed that US supremacy was overestimated as a result of their inability to stop the insurgency in Iraq or the development of North Korean nuclear capabilities.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, US dominance in multiple capacities such as economy, technology, military and innovation have strengthened its place as global hegemon and drastically

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<sup>191</sup> Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Pallin, "Russia Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective 2013," Swedish Defence Research Agency, December 2013.

<sup>192</sup> Jonathan Adelman, "Why The U.S. Remains The World's Unchallenged Superpower," *Forbes*, November 24, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/11/24/why-the-u-s-remains-the-worlds-unchallenged-superpower/#146f3ea95b6e>.

<sup>193</sup> Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States Unipolar Moment," *International Security* 31, no. 2 (2006): , doi:10.1162/isec.2006.31.2.7.

reduced the possibility of a balance of power.<sup>194</sup> The United States also dominated in terms of soft power. Silicon Valley was recognised as the global capital of the technology industry, whereas Wall Street remained the centre of finance and business. The US higher education system was superior with 17 of the world's top 20 universities. Hollywood dominated the film industry. More immigrants arrived to the United States than any other country.<sup>195</sup> Russian attitude towards the imbalance of power was made extremely clear during the Munich Security Conference in 2007 when Vladimir Putin called it 'unacceptable' and blamed the unipolar world for 'new human tragedies' and 'new centres of tension'.<sup>196</sup>

## **Clarity**

### **Threat**

The central threat felt by the Russian Federation was Western encirclement. The perceived encroachment of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has been at the forefront of Russian geopolitical concern since 1991.<sup>197</sup> Western expansion has been a worry since the dissolution of the USSR and the growing membership of the EU and NATO by former republics of the Soviet Union or previously Soviet controlled territory. Geopolitics within the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been strongly intertwined with intergovernmental institutions and regional alliances. The rivalry between Russia and the West follows a similar path, and due to the clarity of membership or non-membership, the threats and opportunities are presented clearly. The time horizon for the threat of Western encirclement is unclear. The threat consists of ongoing domestic political battles within numerous countries in Eastern Europe, Central Europe, the Balkans and

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<sup>194</sup> Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Assessing the Balance," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 24, no. 2 (2011): , doi:10.1080/09557571.2011.583008.

<sup>195</sup> Jonathan Adelman, "Why The U.S. Remains The World's Unchallenged Superpower," *Forbes*, November 24, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2013/11/24/why-the-u-s-remains-the-worlds-unchallenged-superpower/#146f3ea95b6e>.

<sup>196</sup> Vladimir Putin "Speech at Munich Conference on Security Policy" (Munich, February 10, 2007), Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

<sup>197</sup> Alexander Dugin, *Last War of the World-Island The Geopolitics of Contemporary Russia* (Leipzig: Renovamen Verlag, 2016).

the Caucasus. Russian policy options include coercion, persuasion and acculturation within these countries. This was evident within Georgia through the creation of Russian puppet states Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

### **Threat**

The threat of Ukraine joining the EU and NATO has been a Russian reality since the *Orange Revolution* in 2004. The east-west divide within Ukraine has further complicated this scenario. In 2013, the situation had turned into a zero-sum dilemma, as President Yanukovich had to decide on whether Ukraine would become a Russian ally or a Russian enemy. The ousting of the president, political turmoil and the new pro-Western government had confirmed the geopolitical threat. The Russian buffer zone would be lost if Ukraine were to join the EU and NATO. The Black Sea Fleet would also find itself based within the territory of a NATO member state. It would take Ukraine many years to become a member of NATO, as all five chapters of the action plan must be fulfilled beforehand. Nevertheless the process is unique for each country due to varying levels of strategic importance and geopolitical situations.<sup>198</sup> Similarly, the process of joining the EU often takes many years, but varies by country.<sup>199</sup> The social, judicial and economic hurdles that Ukraine faced in 2013 point towards a long and slow process towards potential membership of the EU and NATO. Russian acculturation within the east of Ukraine has been a long-term policy regarding the threat of Ukraine-EU membership. The likelihood of Ukraine being accepted into NATO while being involved in military conflict is slim. Therefore the clear policy for Russia would be to force the Ukrainian military into such a scenario.

### **Opportunity**

An opportunity for Russia comes in the form of European fragmentation, as a divided Europe would be a weaker and more vulnerable region. This has been a reaction to the territory lost as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The

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<sup>198</sup> Eugen Tomiuc, "NATO: What Does It Take To Join?" RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, April 09, 2008, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1099020.html>.

<sup>199</sup> "Steps towards Joining," European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations - European Commission, December 06, 2016, , accessed March 13, 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/steps-towards-joining\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/steps-towards-joining_en).

Russian return to superpower status will be possible through targeting the stability of Europe. Former Soviet states remain most vulnerable due to their receptiveness to Kremlin propaganda.<sup>200</sup> The time horizon is continuous, as elections for each member state of the EU are opportunities to change the status quo. There is no optimal policy in the attempt to divide Europe. Instead the economy, culture and politics are all simultaneously targeted through multiple routes. Direct and indirect funding, election meddling, political interference, cyber warfare and Internet trolling can weaken the unity of a country and allow anti-EU political parties to gain strength.

### **The Nature of State's Strategic Environment**

In 2013, the threat of Ukraine signing the European Union Association Agreement was extremely troubling for Russia. The agreement would have been a large step towards EU membership and eventual NATO membership, as it would commit Ukraine into economic and judicial reforms, guiding the country down the path towards acceptance. The situation had finally come to a conclusion, after six years of negotiations with Brussels and numerous meetings between the Ukrainian and Russian presidents. Ukraine was in a tug of war between Russia and the West. Russian persuasion proved effective as Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich abruptly suspended the signing of the EU agreement in November 2013. A large causation of the political U-turn was economic, as the following month Russia made a deal to reduce its gas prices to Ukraine by 30% and promised to invest \$15 billion in Ukrainian Eurobonds.<sup>201</sup> The political turmoil that erupted following the U-turn had left Russia with a serious problem, as Yanukovich was losing control of the country and the people. The threat was restrictive due to the imminence and the magnitude of the situation. Some have claimed that the plan to annex Crimea was in place many years before, as Putin stated in the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, that if

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<sup>200</sup> Putin's Asymmetric Assault on Democracy in Russia and Europe: Implications for U.S National Security, United States Senate, 115<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session.

<sup>201</sup> David Stern, "Russia Offers Ukraine Major Economic Assistance," BBC News, December 17, 2013, , accessed March 13, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25411118>.

Ukraine were to join NATO, it would risk losing Crimea and the east.<sup>202</sup> The Ukrainian authorities had also complained about Russian 'passportisation' in Crimea in 2008.<sup>203</sup> As a result of the escalating instability in Ukraine, time was of the essence. Before the 'official' referendum in Crimea, the Ukrainian authorities had requested Western assistance within the peninsula as signs of Russian interference were becoming clearer. Russia had a window of opportunity as Kiev was burning, the new government squabbling and a new general controlled the military. It was unclear how long the window of opportunity would remain open for Russia. The *Maidan Revolution* and the ousting of Yanukovich was a serious blow to Russian geopolitics, and foreign policy decisions were in place in order to minimise the loss if Ukraine were to join the EU in the future. The first step of Russian damage limitation was to annex the strategic Crimean Peninsula. The second step was to support, fund and organise an ongoing war in the east of Ukraine, which would drastically diminish its chances of joining NATO. If Ukraine were to join the EU and NATO then the Russian strategic naval base in Sevastopol could be lost or its significance diminished. The obsession with the control over warm water ports has historical roots and may prove to be extremely important in future large-scale wars. Other than the port of Tartus in Syria, Crimea is the only warm water port controlled by Russia. The people of Ukraine had spoken, and Russia appeared to have lost Ukraine to the West, however it would reclaim its most prized geopolitical possession.

## **The Significance of the Nature of the Strategic Environment**

The factors discussed within the *systemic stimuli* had all contributed to the Russian foreign policy decision to annex Crimea. Nevertheless the nature of the strategic environment played a critical role. The restrictive environment that had presented itself within Ukraine had gifted Russia with a momentary opportunity.

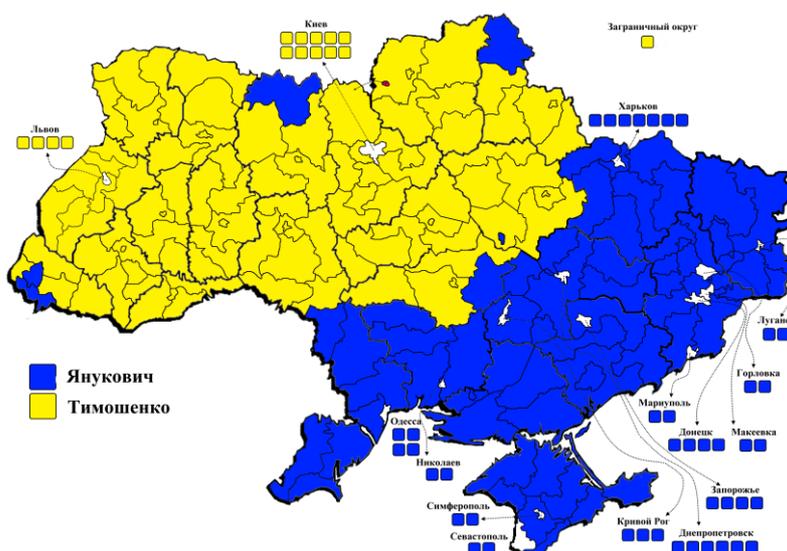
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<sup>202</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremains Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>203</sup> Toru Nagashima, "Russia's Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics," *Problems of Post-Communism*, December 13, 2017, , doi:10.1080/10758216.2017.1388182.

Although the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO or the EU within a year was unlikely, I argue that the political, military and societal instability at the time, created a window of opportunity for Russia, that may not have repeated itself again before eventual Ukrainian membership into the EU and NATO. The overall political environment within Ukraine was evident through analysis of the east-west divide. The division was clear for the international community to see through the regional voting patterns from the 1991 Ukrainian vote for Independence seen previously in *Figure 2*, the 2004 Presidential Elections presented previously in *Figure 3* and the 2010 Presidential Elections, seen in *Figure 4*.

**Figure 4: Ukraine 2010 Presidential Election Results<sup>204</sup>**



The *Maidan Revolution* had divided the people further, as the political differences had turned violent. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, Viktor Yanukovich began his escape to Russia, via Kharkiv and Crimea. The following day the Ukrainian Parliament voted to remove him as president, and scheduled the Presidential Election to replace him on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May. Russia had 93 days before the new president was chosen and a level of political stability restored. The signals from the revolution were clear. The next president would be a pro-European candidate.

<sup>204</sup> Source: Max Fisher, "Everything You Need to Know about the Ukraine Crisis," Vox, September 03, 2014, accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know>.

An interim president, Olexander Turchynov, was sworn in for the 93 days. The new government was an unorganised mixture of cabinet members from numerous political parties, including the far-right nationalist party, the left-leaning *Fatherland* party and several inexperienced activists who had gained recognition through the *Maidan Revolution*. The interim president was apparently unpopular among the protestors.<sup>205</sup> The disorder spread to the Ukrainian Military as political leadership and unity was weak, further demoralising the Armed Forces. Conscripted members of the Armed Forces from the south and east of Ukraine may have begun to question their allegiance. This could have particularly affected the high-ranking senior members who once fought for the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian Navy was a prime example.<sup>206</sup> In 2010, after Viktor Yanukovych was elected, the Ukrainian Navy and the Black Sea Fleet embarked on numerous joint exercises.<sup>207</sup> The former head of the Ukrainian Defence Ministry, Ihor Teniuk, testified in court that once elected, Yanukovych made major changes to the Ukrainian Navy. These included dismantling military drafting offices and recruiting only local Crimean citizens, who happened to be mainly ethnic Russians. Teniuk argues that the preparation for the annexation began in 2010.<sup>208</sup> Unlike in Russia, the Chief of the General Staff oversees the Military. Two days before Viktor Yanukovych fled to Russia in 2014, he fired the Chief of the General Staff, Volodymyr Zamana, and promoted Yuriy Ilyin. On the same day of his promotion, Ilyin cancelled the previous order from Zamana to bring the Ukrainian Armed Forces and Crimean Navy to full combat readiness, as a response to the growing threat in the peninsula.<sup>209</sup> Nine days later on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, the interim president dismissed Ilyin,

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<sup>205</sup> Harriet Salem, "Who Exactly Is Governing Ukraine?" *The Guardian*, March 04, 2014, , accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/04/who-governing-ukraine-olexander-turchynov>.

<sup>206</sup> Michael Koffman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," RAND, 2017.

<sup>207</sup> "Russia and Ukraine Resume Joint Naval Exercises," *Voice of Russia*, April 16, 2010, , <https://web.archive.org/web/20100419164120/http://english.ruvr.ru/2010/04/16/6503071.html>.

<sup>208</sup> Unian, "Witness in Yanukovych Case: Ex-chief of General Staff Ilyin in 2014 Compelled Troops to Defect," UNIAN, February 08, 2018, , accessed March 14, 2019, <https://www.unian.info/society/2388282-witness-in-yanukovych-case-ex-chief-of-general-staff-ilyin-in-2014-compelled-troops-to-defect.html>.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid*

however nine days was enough for Russia. Within this timeframe, unidentified Russian troops had taken position, blocked off the peninsula and received reinforcements. The new Prime Minister of Crimea was also 'elected' within the nine days. During this time, invitations were sent to high-ranking Ukrainian Navy officers to defect to Russia. The Russian tactic proved effective. Second in command of the Ukrainian Navy, Sergei Yeriseyev, deserted his post and accepted a new position as deputy chief of Russia's Baltic Fleet. Many others followed, and defected to Russia.<sup>210</sup> As a large-scale mutiny took place, the Armed Forces were still under the control of a pro-Russian general, and the Ukrainian government was in disarray. The window of opportunity for Russia was restrictive. The Ukrainian government was in transition and according to notes from government meetings, there was a high level of uncertainty regarding a plan of action, through fear of rapid military escalation, as seen previously in Georgia.<sup>211</sup> Ilyin would soon be replaced and the Ukrainian Armed Forces prepared. There was also the possibility of international peacekeeping forces and journalists entering the peninsula and jeopardising any future Russian coercion. The likelihood of the annexation being peaceful would have diminished if the Ukrainian Armed Forces were prepared and in position. The element of surprise combined with the political disorder highlighted the importance of timing.

It can be argued that other factors within the *systemic stimuli* played key roles. Russian dissatisfaction with the polarity of the international arena had certainly steered Russian foreign policy in general, and the annexation of Crimea has been viewed as an attempt to balance power in the region. The annexation has also been considered a move to enhance its presence within the Mediterranean Sea due to its lack of military capabilities within the region. The seizure of Ukrainian ships, weaponry and facilities strengthens this claim. The geography of Russia causes security concerns; therefore the annexation could be described as a

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<sup>210</sup> Pavel Polityuk and Anton Sverev, "Why Ukrainian Forces Gave up Crimea without a Fight - and NATO Is...," Reuters, July 24, 2017, accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-crimea-annexation-idUSKBN1A90G0>.

<sup>211</sup> Michael Koffman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," RAND, 2017.

means of improving the current borders. Although one could argue that the security issues regarding geography have worsened since the annexation as neighbouring countries reinforce their borders. I argue that within the *systemic stimuli*, the restrictive timeframe of the situation was the key factor behind the Russian annexation of Crimea.

## Chapter Three

### The Intervening Variables

#### Leader Images

Individuals can play a prominent role in foreign policy decisions. Members of the *Foreign Policy Executive* often have classified information regarding their country, other states and the geopolitical arena. They may also have domestic control and popularity, allowing them to act freely within international politics. Distinct psychological tendencies and characteristics can improve support and confidence towards individuals.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, the long-term attitude towards leaders and the traditional organisation of power within a country can turn autocracy into a cultural characteristic. The leader's perceptions of the *systemic stimuli* and their notion of what constitutes as the 'national interest' will spearhead their foreign policy decisions.

The history of Russian leadership had laid the foundations to the current ruling. Feudalism and serfdom ensured that the Tsarist autocracy remained in control until 1917, until it was replaced with Soviet totalitarianism. Under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin, Russia crumbled through instability, economic depression and violent political conflicts. The Russian transformation towards a capitalist system was a messy affair, as liberalisation, stabilisation and privatisation were attempted. The 1990s are known as the wild decade in Russia, as legal and illegal business overlapped, and organised crime became a key component of the

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<sup>212</sup> Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): , doi:10.1162/01622880151091916.

Russian economy. State assets were privatised and the new businesses became easy targets for extortion. Corruption was widespread as businessmen and gangsters became allies or enemies in an attempt to consolidate power and wealth. Yeltsin's inability to control the country created a power vacuum that was soon filled by seven men. The seven individuals, known as the seven bankers, unofficially controlled the politics and economy of Russia during the Yeltsin era. They successfully fixed the 1996 Presidential Election to ensure Yeltsin remained officially president, and that they remained in power.<sup>213</sup> It was during this period that the phrase 'oligarch' gained popularity. The unorganised gold rush ended in 2000, when Vladimir Putin came to power. If the oligarchs wished to continue profiting within Russia, they must pledge allegiance to the state, pay a fee for their privilege and avoid politics unless called upon. This strategy has enabled Putin to consolidate domestic power, as money buys control and influence, whilst the most powerful individuals remain loyal to the president. With very little domestic competition, Vladimir Putin can focus on Russia's international aspirations.

The members of the *Foreign Policy Executive* leading up to the annexation of Crimea included President Vladimir Putin, Igor Sechin, Vladislav Surkov, Sergey Shoygu, Nikolai Patrushev, Alexander Bortnikov, Sergey Ivanov, Dmitry Rogozin and Sergey Glasyev.

**Vladimir Putin** was born in 1952, in the Soviet city of Leningrad. He studied Law at university before beginning his career in the KGB. Putin rose to the rank of colonel within the KGB. In 1991, he entered into the world of politics and five years later moved to Moscow to work for Boris Yeltsin's administration. In 2000, Putin became president of Russia and has since remained in power. As a result of Russian constitutional law denying a third term to an acting president, Putin took the role of prime minister from 2008-2012, before returning as president.

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<sup>213</sup> David M. Kotz and Fred Weir, *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

**Igor Sechin** was born in 1960, in Leningrad, and worked for the KGB before working for the mayor's office, alongside Vladimir Putin. Sechin acted as deputy chief of Putin's administration for the first two terms and then deputy Prime Minister during Putin's term as Prime Minister. In 2012, Sechin became CEO of oil giant Rosneft. He has been described as the second most powerful man in Russia, and the leader of the *siloviki*, a term used for the numerous Kremlin officials that rose to power through the security or military services.<sup>214</sup> He is a key figure in Russian foreign policy, particularly regarding the energy industry. The United States sanctioned Sechin in March 2014, as a result of his role in Crimea.

**Vladislav Surkov** was born in 1964, in Chechnya, to an ethnic Russian mother and Chechen father. After a brief period in the Soviet Army, Surkov entered the business world, focusing on public relations. In 1999, Surkov moved into politics as the deputy chief of staff to the president. Since 2013, he has been an aide to President Putin, and personal advisor regarding Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ukraine. He has been described as the Kremlin's 'shadowy chief political strategist' and the Kremlin 'puppet master'.<sup>215</sup> The European Union sanctioned Surkov in March 2014.

**Sergey Shoygu** was born in 1955, in Tuva, to a Tuvan father and ethnic Russian mother. After graduating with a degree in engineering, Shoygu worked in construction until he gained the role of Minister of Civil Defence in 1994. He was appointed mayor of the Moscow region in 2012 and also Minister of Defence. In 2014 he was accused of forming illegal military groups in Ukraine. He is considered a close and trusted friend of Vladimir Putin.

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<sup>214</sup> Shaun Walker, "Ex-minister's Harsh Jail Sentence Sends Shockwaves through Russian Elite," The Guardian, December 15, 2017, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/15/russia-jails-former-economy-minister-alexey-ulyukayev-for-corruption>.

<sup>215</sup> Guy Faulconbridge, "Kremlin 'puppet Master' Faces Errant Oligarch," Reuters, September 16, 2011, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-prokhorov-surkov/kremlin-puppet-master-faces-errant-oligarch-idUSTRE78F2TB20110916>.

**Nikolai Patrushev** was born in 1951, in Leningrad. He rose through the ranks in the KGB and remained in the security services after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In 1999, Patrushev was promoted to the head of the FSB until 2008, when he became the Secretary of the Security Council of Russia. He is considered a key mastermind of Russian foreign policy.<sup>216</sup> He has been sanctioned by the European Union and the United States.

**Alexander Bortnikov** was born, in 1951, in Perm. Bortnikov has worked within the security services for the majority of his life and in 2008, he became the Director of the FSB. Bortnikov was sanctioned by the European Union in 2014.

**Sergey Ivanov** was born in 1953, in Leningrad. He worked in the KGB and specialised in external intelligence services and counterintelligence. In 1998, Vladimir Putin became the head of the FSB and promoted Ivanov to deputy head. He was later promoted to Defence Minister and eventually the Chief of Staff in 2011. He has been described as Putin's right-hand man.<sup>217</sup> Ivanov was sanctioned by the European Union in 2014.

**Dmitry Rogozin** was born in 1963, in Moscow. He entered into politics in 1993 and became joint leader of the nationalist *Rodina* Party in 2002. In 2008, Rogozin became the ambassador to NATO. His negative views towards Ukraine and Georgia were publicly clear. He was added to the list of individuals sanctioned in 2014.

**Sergey Glasyev** was born in 1961, in Zaporozhye, Ukraine. He received a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and Doctor of Philosophy in economics. He has spent the majority of his career working within politics. In 2012, he was appointed as presidential aide to Vladimir Putin. Glasyev was one of the first

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<sup>216</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremains Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>217</sup> "Vladimir Putin's Powerful Right-hand Man Steps down," *The Economist*, August 12, 2016, , accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/08/12/vladimir-putins-powerful-right-hand-man-steps-down>.

seven individuals to be sanctioned by the United States after the annexation of Crimea.

Patrushev, Ivanov and Bortnikov attended the all-night meeting on the 22nd of February 2014, regarding the Ukraine crisis and Crimea. This group have been labelled the 'war council'.<sup>218</sup> Vladimir Putin rose to power through the security services within Leningrad/St Petersburg. His inner circle reflects his experiences, as the majority of the individuals considered part of the *Foreign Policy Executive* are of a similar age and have spent time in the security services. Therefore it is naïve to assume that an official title reflects the amount of power held by an individual. A clear example of this was the role of Prime Minister, held by Dmitry Medvedev, who lacked real authority. Due to the Russian political smokescreen, identifying the individuals within the *Foreign Policy Executive* is a challenging feat.

The authority held by the *Foreign Policy Executive* during the period leading up to the annexation of Crimea was immense. It was a result of years of consolidating domestic power, beginning in Putin's first term as president. He had inherited a country that perceived power as money, which was controlled by oligarchs. In 2001, Putin invited a dozen of Russia's most powerful businessmen to his summer residence, to specify the rules of the new Russia. The main commandment during the 'barbecue meeting' was simple, do not interfere with politics. If the oligarchs complied, then they would have no trouble from law enforcement agencies. The example made of Mikhail khodorovsky acted as a clear warning to the Russian oligarchs.<sup>219</sup> Putin had ensured that the media tycoons painted the state in a positive light. The energy industry was the key to Russian economic growth and geopolitical leverage, thus the energy giants could have played a fundamental role in world geopolitics. The risk for Vladimir Putin and for Russia was immeasurable, leading to the energy companies being

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<sup>218</sup> Harriet Alexander, "Vladimir Putin Held Secret Meeting to Agree Crimea Annexation Weeks before Referendum," *The Telegraph*, March 20, 2014, , accessed March 21, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/10712866/Vladimir-Putin-held-secret-meeting-to-agree-Crimea-annexation-weeks-before-referendum.html>.

<sup>219</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

directly or indirectly taken over. The kleptocratic state has resulted in extreme personal wealth acquired through crony state capitalism and corruption. The wealth has been resourcefully distributed throughout the elites within the military and intelligence services, guaranteeing protection and loyalty. If loyalty cannot be bought, then someone more trustworthy will fill the position. The consequence of this power structure is the efficient ability to manage the necessary resources and turn Russian potential into Russian power.<sup>220</sup>

A generic *Foreign Policy Executive* will possess private information on foreign countries. Due to their experience in the KGB and FSB, the Russian *Foreign Policy Executive* excels within this field. As mentioned previously, the intelligence services remained intact throughout the Soviet-Russian transition, and therefore familiar faces have remained within the shadows. Vladimir Putin has secured control over the political system, the economic system and the military/intelligence services. A career in the intelligence services is likely to shape individuals values, beliefs and images. Suspicion and secrecy are two key characteristics of such a mind-set, known as *chekist*. This has resulted in Putin being described as 'the man without a face',<sup>221</sup> an advantage within domestic and international politics as unpredictability can confuse opponents. The suspicion held by Putin developed into a complete lack of trust towards the West after the NATO expansion. Putin's view of the Russian *Raumsinn* was made clear during his 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference. Geopolitical naivety and inexperience can result in a 'geomisguided' *Foreign Policy Executive*.<sup>222</sup> However as a result of decades of Soviet practice, the current Russian *Foreign Policy Executive* is well versed. Putin has accurately described the global *Raumsinn* as a unipolar system, and does not hide Russia's national interest in shifting the

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<sup>220</sup> Nuno Morgado, "The Role Of Elites In Geopolitical Studies," 5th SGEM International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on SOCIAL SCIENCES and ARTS SGEM2018, Modern Science, 2018, , doi:10.5593/sgemsocial2018h/11/s12.097.

<sup>221</sup> Masha Gessen, *The Man without a Face: The Unlikely Rise of Vladimir Putin* (NY, NY, USA: Riverhead Books, 2014).

<sup>222</sup> Nuno Morgado, "The Role Of Elites In Geopolitical Studies," 5th SGEM International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on SOCIAL SCIENCES and ARTS SGEM2018, Modern Science, 2018, , doi:10.5593/sgemsocial2018h/11/s12.097.

environmental towards a multipolar system.<sup>223</sup> An operational code analysis of over 1 million words spoken by Vladimir Putin concluded that he is hyper-aggressive towards terrorism, verified through US cooperation regarding Afghanistan, Islamic extremism in Chechnya, Dagestan and more recently Syria. The study also described him as an opportunist rather than a strategist,<sup>224</sup> which was evident with the restrictive timeframe within Ukraine in 2014.

The foreign policy decision to annex Crimea was a momentous act that took efficient planning and funding. The role played by the *Foreign Policy Executive* in the decision to annex Crimea was evidently large, as their monopolisation of power within Russia had developed into foreign policy takeover.

## Strategic Culture

The *strategic culture* of a state has a strong influence on the foreign policy decisions. It can impact how the *systemic stimuli* are perceived while also directly effecting decision-making and policy implementation. Whilst the definition of *strategic culture* is contested over, the focus is on the respected norms and deeply embedded notions of a society.<sup>225</sup> The *strategic culture* is not fixed, and can change naturally or be altered over time.

Russian *strategic culture* is unique. The history of Kievan Rus' and the Mongol reign has particularly shaped the modern Russian culture. The Slavic people became victims to foreign invasions from all sides. Mongol control over Kievan Rus' led to the enslavement of an estimated three million Slavs.<sup>226</sup> The brutality of the Mongols forced many Slavic communities to migrate westward, towards the Balkans and Poland. The Christian Orthodox religion was also targeted by the

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<sup>223</sup> Laurynas Jonavicius et al., "Russian Interests, Strategies, and Instruments in the Common Neighbourhood," The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries – An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment, March 2019.

<sup>224</sup> Stephen Benedict Dyson and Matthew J. Parent, "The Operational Code Approach to Profiling Political Leaders: Understanding Vladimir Putin," *Intelligence and National Security* 33, no. 1 (2017): , doi:10.1080/02684527.2017.1313523.

<sup>225</sup> Charles Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>226</sup> Mark Schauss, "Understanding Putin Through the History of Russian Invasions". *History Unplugged*. Podcast audio, June 26, 2017.

invaders, forcing the religion into secrecy, as churches were built within the forests where monasticism could thrive in safety. Religion was seen as a source of hope during the dark period, and led to its growth and importance within Slavic communities. Catholicism has been historically viewed as a challenging ideology towards Orthodoxy, and a Western soft power tactic used to fragment Slavic and Russian communities.

The consequences of centuries of invasions from all directions have shaped the contemporary Russian *strategic culture*. The consistent lack of trust towards outsiders can be expected, as a result of centuries of oppression. The traditional customs and values that were at risk during this period have been celebrated and emphasised in modern day Russia. The mental strength and perseverance has become a key component to the psyche of the Russian individual, and considered an outcome of many generations of hardship. The Napoleonic invasion of Russia in 1812 underlines the attributes of strength and sacrifice within the Russia persona, as a scorched earth tactic was used, over 400,000 Russians were killed and Moscow was burnt to the ground, yet victory was achieved.<sup>227</sup> The Nazi invasion in 1941 also resulted in the scorched earth tactic and hundreds of thousands of soviet prisoners. By the end of the Second World War, tens of millions of Russians had been killed, yet once again victory was achieved. The popularity of Joseph Stalin remains high in Russian society as a result of his victory over the Western invaders, a characteristic of Russian *strategic culture* that differs greatly in Ukraine, and acts as a crack between the individual strategic cultures.<sup>228</sup> The lack of trust towards outsiders had evolved into distrust towards Western powers, after Napoleon and Hitler had targeted Russia. The latest Western invasion is perceived to be by NATO.

A consequence of the fear of further invasions is a militaristic *strategic culture*. The majority of the current Russian population experienced the Cold War, while others were directly involved in conflicts in Angola, Afghanistan, Georgia,

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<sup>227</sup> Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Encyclopedia of Casualty and Other Figures, 1492-2015* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company,, Publishers, 2017).

<sup>228</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Stalinism and Russian and Ukrainian National Identities," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 4 (2017): , doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2017.10.001.

Chechnya and Dagestan. Older generations within Russia are particularly militaristic due to these conflicts. Compulsory military conscript has sustained the militaristic culture within younger generations. Notwithstanding the military tradition, Vladimir Putin has strengthened this philosophy through rearming Russia and increasing the military expenditure.<sup>229</sup>

Russian nationalism and importance of traditional values have become the glue holding the vast country together, as Western ideologies are seen as dissimilar and are vilified. Putin specified this during a conversation with US Vice President Joe Biden, stating 'we are not like you. We only look alike. But we are very different. Russians and Americans resemble each other only physically. But inside we have very different values'.<sup>230</sup>

The *strategic culture* of Putin's Russia has its roots in the works of Ivan Ilyin, a Russian philosopher born in 1883. His ideology has been described as Christian fascism.<sup>231</sup> Putin has used the geopolitical views of Ilyin, who introduced the notion of 'spiritual threats', and questioned the rule of law by stating that the enemies of fascists must be sacrificed. The world was corrupt and needed saving by a strong state, Russia. This theory was used to defend Russian expansionism. Russia was described as an immortal living creature and organism that included Ukraine. Democracy was seen as a cause of individuality and described as evil. The attempt to strengthen nationalism through the words of Ivan Ilyin began from 2005 when Putin and Surkov started quoting his work. Soon after, Dmitry Medvedev recommended Ilyin's books to Russia's youth, whilst various Russian political parties also began quoting him. In 2014, Russian soldiers received their orders regarding the Crimean invasion, meanwhile the book titled 'our task' by Ilyin, which argues for Russian civilisation over the rule of law, was sent to high ranking Russian officials and regional governors. Vladimir Putin also directly

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<sup>229</sup> Stephen R. Covington, "Putin's Choice for Russia," Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, August 2015.

<sup>230</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>231</sup> Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, March 16, 2018, , accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/>.

quoted Ilyin as justification of the annexation.<sup>232</sup> The revival of the works of Ivan Ilyin appears to be an attempt to strengthen the nationalistic *strategic culture* of Russian citizens, in an era when the modernised West may seem attractive to many Russians.

The annexation of Crimea has been justified through the words of Ivan Ilyin. The 'defensive' move to protect ethnic Russians within Crimea reflects the victimisation that Russia has experienced in history. The offensive actions of NATO and the EU towards Ukrainian membership has also been considered an attack on Russian culture and traditions, as the majority of the East of Ukraine speak Russian and consider themselves Orthodox Christians. The views of Romanian born author, Jean Parvulesco, have also become prominent within Russian *strategic culture*. His 'prophecy' describes the geopolitical arena at a crossroad, as the current period of Western democracy is nearing its end and a new era will soon begin. According to Parvulesco, a Eurasian force that prioritises religion, steered by Vladimir Putin, will lead the new era.<sup>233</sup>

## **State-Society Relations**

Relations between the state and various societal and civic groups are a fundamental part of domestic politics. The power held by the citizens of a country can strengthen democracy or contrastingly limit personal freedom. If the relations are positive, the leaders can extract, mobilise and harness the power of the state more efficiently. Conversely, difficult *state-society relations* can be a great burden on the leaders as fragmentation and internal conflict can destabilise the leadership.

The Russian *state-society relations* under Vladimir Putin have been heavily criticised by the West. The state has become increasingly centralised, as the

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<sup>232</sup> Timothy Snyder, "Ivan Ilyin, Putin's Philosopher of Russian Fascism," *The New York Review of Books*, March 16, 2018, accessed March 24, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/03/16/ivan-ilyin-putins-philosopher-of-russian-fascism/>.

<sup>233</sup> Jean Parvulesco, *Vladimir Poutine Et LEurasie* (Saint-Etienne: Amis De La Culture Européenne, 2005).

power of the country is held in the hands of a few individuals. It is important to note that the majority of Western literature regarding Russian *state-society relations* focus on protests, corruption and human rights abuses, however this alone does not clarify the reality of the situation.<sup>234</sup> The power vertical within Russia was initiated during Putin's first term and remains to this day. Oligarchs, gangsters, journalists, academics and regular citizens must stay in line or risk persecution. The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States resulted in a global shift towards national security as civil rights were suppressed in many countries, including Russia. The difference between the democratically formulated Russian constitution and the undemocratic reality within Russian society is great.<sup>235</sup> Policy changes have eroded the liberty within the civic sector, as the government effectively reshapes the organised structures through regulations. The policy changes regarding Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are a prime example. Under Yeltsin, Russia was labelled a 'negligent state' as few policy initiatives were encouraged and foreign investors stepped in. Contrarily under Putin, Russia has been labelled a 'vigilante state',<sup>236</sup> as foreign investment towards NGOs was all but prohibited in 2012 by the 'foreign agents' act, through fear of further colour revolutions. Putin offered NGOs two options, either avoid politics or refuse foreign funding.<sup>237</sup> An estimated eight out of every ten NGO applications are refused and those that are accepted are forced to open accounts with state banks, ensuring that their funds are carefully inspected.<sup>238</sup> The Russian decision to block the pro-democracy 'Open Foundation Institute', founded by George Soros, clarified Russia's position on foreign investment, stating that it posed a threat to state security.

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<sup>234</sup> Alfred B. Evans, "Protests and Civil Society in Russia: The Struggle for the Khimki Forest," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45, no. 3-4 (2012): , doi:10.1016/j.postcomstud.2012.06.002.

<sup>235</sup> Sarah L. Henderson, "Civil Society in Russia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 58, no. 3 (2011): , doi:10.2753/ppc1075-8216580302.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Zoya Svetova, "NGOs in Russia: Do They Still Stand a Chance? (Op-ed)," *The Moscow Times*, February 12, 2018, , accessed March 27, 2019, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/02/12/ngos-do-they-still-stand-a-chance-russia-svetova-a60471>.

<sup>238</sup> Vladislava Vojtíšková et al., "The Bear in Sheeps Clothing: Russias Government-funded Organisations in the Eu," *European View* 15, no. 2 (2016): , doi:10.1007/s12290-016-0414-6.

The societal environment described has resulted in the deterioration of rights towards threatened communities and groups that challenge Russian traditions and the political status quo. LGBTQ and feminist communities are often persecuted by the state, while racism and xenophobia are widespread. The targeting of political activists and the use of force and detainment during peaceful protests highlights the tactics used to resolve disputes regarding *state-society relations*. In 2012, the Russian Parliament voted to increase the penalty fines for unsanctioned demonstrations from 5,000 Rubles to 300,000 Rubles.<sup>239</sup> Individuals involved in demonstrations were forbidden from wearing masks, making them identifiable for future ramifications. In 2014, a new law was introduced, enabling the detainment of peaceful protestors for up to 15 days or five years after the third strike.<sup>240</sup> The continuous persecution of political activist Alexei Navalny demonstrates the oppressive control over Russian society. The assassination of Boris Nemstov, a Putin critic who reported details of Kremlin corruption, was a clear warning to others. At the time of his death, Nemstov was investigating the use of undercover Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine, while also focusing on state-organised persecution and assassinations of journalists within Russia.

While NGOs have been repressed, Government Organised Non Governmental Organisations (GONGOs) have filled the void and represent the illusion of freedom within Russian society. The GONGO youth movement known as *Nashi* is an anti-fascist, anti-liberal and pro-nationalist movement that has been described to resemble the Soviet youth organisation known as *Komsomol*. The organisation is seen as an attempt to prevent colour revolutions.<sup>241</sup> Due to the entwinement of Kremlin officials, oligarchs and security personnel, GONGOs represent the unofficial branches of the Kremlin.

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<sup>239</sup> "Russian Parliament Approves Massive Increase in Protest Fines," Sputnik International, June 05, 2012, , accessed March 30, 2019, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20120605173855383/>.

<sup>240</sup> "Russia: Peaceful Activist Sentenced under Repressive New Law Must Be Released," Amnesty International, December 7, 2015, , accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/12/Russia-Peaceful-activist-sentenced-under-repressive-new-law-must-be-released/>.

<sup>241</sup> Peter Osborne and James Jones, "Unreported World: Vlad's Army - Putin's Brave New World," The Telegraph, October 29, 2011, , accessed March 29, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8852735/Unreported-World-Vlads-Army-Putins-brave-new-world.html>.

Russian foreign policy decisions remain firmly in the hands of the elite, as Russian citizens and independent organisations that interfere are denied funding, isolated and targeted. The nationalistic *strategic culture* and state domination of the media industry has created a high level of cohesion within society, where official foreign policy decisions are typically supported. The importance of the state is superior to individualism, perceived as a Western ideology. Nevertheless the differentiation between state and society in Russia is blurred. Members of the Russian elite include oligarchs, who have influence on foreign policy, particularly pipeline diplomacy. In return, they can assist the leader in extracting, mobilising and harnessing state power. Corruption is the link between state-high society relations, and is often used to manage politics. The Russian leadership would crumble without 'grand corruption' and for this reason is in no rush to target it.

The decision to annex Crimea was not influenced heavily by *state-society relations* due to the high level of cohesion throughout the public regarding Russia, Putin and Ukraine. Those individuals and organisations who publicly criticise Putin's international manoeuvres pose little threat to the leadership due to the monopolisation of the security services and the flexible rule of law in regards to Putin critics. The high society is at the disposal of Putin and despite their wealth, they are in no position to attempt to influence or alter Russian foreign policy regarding Ukraine. The leadership maintains a firm grip on power throughout all aspects of Russian society, reducing societal influence on Russian foreign policy and improving the availability of state power.

### **Domestic Institutions**

The structure of the state system and the formal *domestic institutions* can impact the decision-making and policy implementation of foreign policy. The constitution, bureaucracy and legal processes can largely contribute towards state policy. Unofficial factors do exist and can hold significant weight within less democratic nations.

The Russian domestic environment under Putin is far from transparent. The 'virtual' environment consists of the generic speeches, interviews and doctrines that paint the appearance of democratic conventional decision-making processes. Nevertheless the real policy environment is hidden behind a smokescreen, where the majority of the political class and the public are rarely involved or aware.<sup>242</sup> The real decision-makers are never publicised, as even members of the Kremlin are kept in the dark until the order arrives. The curtailment of state institutions has led to a centralised state controlled by a handful of individuals. The policies have been described to benefit the policy makers and not the national interest. The current environment is centred on individuals and not institutions. The politics of Russia has become synonymous with Vladimir Putin, and the 'Putinisation' of Russian foreign policy has become evident. It must be stated that there are areas of foreign policy where Putin is not the key decision-maker, for example Igor Sechin manages energy geopolitics.<sup>243</sup> Sechin's influence does not derive from his position as chairman of Rosneft, rather his longstanding comradeship with Putin. Individuals have become the institutions. Whilst the Russian political landscape is far from democratic, it can be argued to be efficient in achieving its goals and maintaining stability. The institutional constraints often found with democracies can obstruct military action. The slow process can result in lost opportunities, particularly if the timeframe is restrictive.<sup>244</sup> Russia does not have this problem, as foreign policy decisions regarding conflict have been separated from *domestic institutions* and are made covertly by the *Foreign Policy Executive*.

Putin and his inner circle have heavily controlled Russian foreign policy concerning Ukraine. Putin has publicly expressed his opinion on Ukraine and its cultural connection with Russia. Former Kremlin officials have described his fear

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<sup>242</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Order* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of losing Ukraine as an obsession.<sup>245</sup> It can be argued that Putin did not need official authorisation from parliament to use further military force, as the Kharkiv Pact allowed up to 25,000 Russian troops to be located in Russian bases within Crimea. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, Putin officially asked parliament for permission to use force in Crimea, although this was merely to adhere to the constitution. He received full support. Any Russian official who publicly opposed the use of force in Crimea would be risking their career. The unofficial decision-making process regarding the annexation was kept extremely top-secret, in order to guarantee the element of surprise. This reflects the *Chekist* mind-set of the *Foreign Policy Executive*.

## **The Importance of the Leader Images**

The individuals that represent the *Foreign Policy Executive*, particularly President Vladimir Putin, played the most essential role in the decision to annex Crimea from Ukraine. As discussed previously, all four of the intervening variables played a part in the foreign policy decision, but the variable *leader images* took control of the decision-making process, and undermined the *state-society relations* and *domestic institutions*.

The monopolisation of Russian foreign policy by the president had its roots in the failures of the previous president, Boris Yeltsin, and the crumbling fragmented state that attempted the transition towards a democratic free market economy. It became evident that individuals were finding opportunities within the chaos and that profits were not returning and strengthening the state. Vladimir Putin arose to the challenge of confronting the oligarchs, and of restructuring the crippled system. The task of blackmailing and threatening Russia's most powerful men into order was the moment of truth for Putin, and consequently Russia. Putin had turned an internally weak Russia into a predatory state, through the monopolisation of the energy industry and big

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<sup>245</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

business, while targeting those who were considered a threat. The barbeque agreement would turn Vladimir Putin into one of the most powerful individuals on earth. Putin's achievement was not possible without the experience gained from the intelligence services and the network of colleagues that have remained loyal. If tested, the new president had the experience and power to devastate an opponent. A snowball effect of power has cemented Putin's control over the country and foreign policy, accurately turning his name into a synonym of Russian politics. Former aid to the president, Vyacheslav Volodin, stated that 'Russia is Putin. Russia exists only if there is Putin. There is no Russia without Putin'.<sup>246</sup> The accuracy of this opinion can be contested, however it is clear the *Foreign Policy Executive* has heavily insulated Russian foreign policy.

When the control of a state lies in the hands of a few humans, the experiences, personalities, bias and prejudices play a large role in their actions. The *chekist* mentality that is prevalent among ex-KGB and FSB personnel, including Putin, was a great advantage within the Kremlin and has safeguarded the positions held by the *siloviki*. The general distrust felt by the *siloviki* has resulted in the extremely tight inner circle around Putin. The near complete bypass of institutional and societal opinion and contribution in regards to foreign policy has been continuous throughout Putin's reign. When the foreign policy decision was particularly aggressive, Putin's control of Russian media could be used to sway the public into supporting the decision made by the *Foreign Policy Executive*. This was seen clearly during the Russia-Georgia War, as *Russia Today* justified the Russian aggression by accusing Georgia of genocide. The use of covert operations also helped to keep the public and institutions in the dark. Putin's negative relationship with ex-Georgian President Saakashvili was evident and has been regarded as a contributing factor to Russian aggression.<sup>247</sup> Putin's personal opinion regarding Ukraine has been evident since his first term. His involvement in the 2004 *Orange Revolution* included regular meetings with Yanukovich, political funding and the creation of the 'Russian Club', a permanent

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<sup>246</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

<sup>247</sup> Mikhail Zygar', *All the Kremllins Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2017).

group of Russian analysts and consultants based in Kiev. He has also been accused of being behind the poisoning of Yushchenko.<sup>248</sup> Putin and Sechin would later manage the multiple gas disputes between Ukraine and Russia, further verifying the power of the *Foreign Policy Executive* in Russia and also the aggressive nature of Russian foreign policy towards a pro-West Ukraine. Putin's obsession with Ukraine has been evident, and has been a thorn in his side since 2004.

The combination of Putin's consolidation of foreign policy power, domestic power and the personal objective to bring Ukraine back under the influence of Russia has resulted in a personal war between Putin and Ukraine. The Russian embarrassment during the *Orange Revolution* and the *Maidan Revolution* had stained Putin's reputation and record. The response to annex Crimea was geopolitically driven, yet Putin understood that his position as leader could have been at risk if action was not taken.

## **The Power of the Strategic Culture**

The Russian *strategic culture* has been fairly consistent throughout the past century and has in turn shaped the personalities of the various *Foreign Policy Executive* members during the Soviet era and ultimately contemporary Russia. The relationship between the *strategic culture* and *leader images* is interwoven. The *strategic culture* is evident within society and therefore a leader must respect and adapt to the shared ideologies to gain support. Organisational psychology clarifies that the strongest organisations are those where the leaders are aware of the existing culture and develop it.<sup>249</sup> Vladimir Putin's views on nationalism, Russian tradition, Orthodox Christianity and strength are a reflection of the *strategic culture* within the Soviet Union. His effort to reintroduce these values was an attempt to return Russia to the glory days of the Soviet Union, and was a popular tactic following the disastrous 1990s. The nine

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1985).

years between the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the election of Putin was an outlier period for *strategic culture*. Putin has previously described the collapse of the Soviet Union as a 'major geopolitical disaster', and has attempted to re-establish the superpower status. The fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the independence of Ukraine had created a political border between Russia and Ukraine, however for many Russians, this border was imaginary. Ukrainians and Russians had shared a long history and numerous cultural connections, and this could not be erased overnight. This was reflected in Russian *strategic culture*, particularly for the older generations that lived through the transition from the Soviet Union to the Russian Federation.

Putin has effectively introduced the notion of Russian victimisation and vilification of the West to the contemporary *strategic culture*. A modernised Russia combined with state controlled media outlets has resulted in a *strategic culture* that can be gradually altered by the *Foreign Policy Executive*. Russia's arduous history is heavily focused on within schools, universities, television, statues, national holidays and military parades. This has strengthened Russian pride and helps to create public uproar towards 'Western encroachment'. The legal rhetoric regarding the protection of ethnic Russians is considered a legitimate threat by many Russians. The Russian information war played a key role, as the *Maidan Revolution* was described as a fascist uprising, a neo-Nazi movement, anti-Semitic and supported by the West.<sup>250</sup> These keywords were consciously chosen to compare the pro-Western Ukrainians and their Western supporters to the same enemies that were responsible for the deaths of millions of ethnic Russians. The nationalist *strategic culture* had been revived and according to Russian media outlets, foreign enemies were once again targeting ethnic Russians.

A combination of the traditional Russian *strategic culture* and the manipulated Putinised *strategic culture* has played a large role in the foreign policy decision to annex Crimea. The Russian public opinion of Ukraine had forced Putin to

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<sup>250</sup> Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzov, "Winning the Information War Techniques and Counter-strategies to Russian Propaganda in Central and Eastern Europe," Centre for European Policy Analysis:.

retaliate to Ukraine's step towards the EU. If there was no reaction from Putin, his strength as leader would have been called into question. The Russian publicity regarding the *Orange Revolution*, the Georgian War, NATO expansion, Western encirclement and the *Maidan Revolution* had set the scene. The next logical step, when considering Russian *strategic culture*, was military action.

## Conclusion

On a macro scale, this thesis has attempted to enrich the neoclassical realist approach by highlighting a limitation of the model, and attesting that the components that make up the *systemic stimuli*, and the four intervening variables are far from equal. By focusing on the case study of the Crimean annexation, I have argued that in this instance, one characteristic within the *systemic stimuli* played the largest role in the foreign policy response. I have also claimed that two intervening variables hold significant weight within Russian foreign policy. The consequence of their dominance has a zero-sum affect, witnessed through the weakness of the other two intervening variables. The case study chosen can be considered an extreme example due to the unique political environment in Russia. Nevertheless, the validity of the argument opens up a new stream of research within neoclassical realism, as each foreign policy response can be analysed through the significance of the individual factors and intervening variables.

On a micro scale, this thesis has focused on three hypotheses that attempt to shine a light on 21<sup>st</sup> century Russian foreign policy responses, particularly concerning the 'near abroad'. The numerous factors within the *systemic stimuli* all play a role in constructing the state's place, significance and power within the international system at any given time, and therefore influence state actions. The nature of Russia's strategic environment during the period of instability within Ukraine was a momentous pull factor. It must be noted that other factors such as Russian geographic vulnerability and dissatisfaction with the unipolar world also heavily contributed, however the brief window of opportunity that arose had

handed Russia the ideal circumstances for the annexation. Russian aggression during a neighbour's moment of weakness has taught the international community of Russia's military preparedness within the 'near abroad'.

I have declared that the most significant intervening variable regarding the Crimean annexation was the *leader images*, more specifically the monopolisation of power by Vladimir Putin. Few contest that the *Foreign Policy Executive* has commandeered Russian foreign policy and that *state-society relations* within Russia are extremely unequal. A consequence of the Putinisation of Russian foreign policy is the overreliance of one individual. Vladimir Putin can be considered Russia's strategic centre of gravity. This thesis has also emphasised the weight of the Russian *strategic culture* in the foreign policy response. The *strategic culture* focused on traditional Russian values and ideologies that had survived since the empire of Kievan Rus'. Nonetheless, the *strategic culture* was altered and reinforced by the *Foreign Policy Executive*, who appropriately understood the role of *strategic culture* in foreign policy and domestic politics. The survival and security of Russian tradition remains a key priority, and confirms to the international community that the Russian state is willing to take military action to protect Russian culture abroad. On the other hand the modification of Russian *strategic culture* since 2000 confirms its fluidity and ability to adapt. In turn, this places more power in the hands of the *Foreign Policy Executive*, who have the ability to alter the expectations of an entire society. This thesis has aimed to highlight the power held by the Russian leader through his ability to shape Russian foreign policy and Russian society.

The importance of the research undertaken must not be understated. On a theoretical level, neoclassical realism is relatively new and in need of attention. The use, evaluation and development of the theory will enhance its stature within the field of realism and general international relations. The necessity to bring the state and the statesman back into realism is of paramount importance, as we must acknowledge that domestic politics and the power of an individual can change the geopolitical arena. The importance of the chosen case study is clear, as the annexation outraged the international community and resulted in

immediate defensive responses from other European countries. The foreign policy response from Russia took many by surprise and by analysing the factors involved in the decision making process, the international community can gain a stronger understanding of the Russian Federation and its ambitions.

This thesis has opened a door to further research within neoclassical realism, as I have demonstrated that the weight of each factor varies by case study and state. Further research could evaluate multiple case studies in an attempt to look for relationships between a specific intervening variable and perhaps a country, region, continent, religion, or era. The driving forces of foreign policy responses do vary through time, space and topic, however there has not been sufficient research regarding this issue through a neoclassical realist lens. Whilst this thesis has concentrated its findings through qualitative comparisons, future research may benefit from attempting a quantitative assessment by using a point system to clarify the significance of each variable out of 10.

Further questions have sprouted out from this thesis concerning Russian foreign policy, which will hopefully be focused on by other researchers. One important topic for further research is the strategy of Russian 'passportisation', as the rapid increase in passport distribution could uncover future Russian annexation attempts. Research into large-scale Russian migration and sizeable ethnic Russian communities in the 'near abroad' can also shine a light on future hotspots. The ethnic Russians that worked within the Ukrainian military and eventually defected should also act as a warning to countries within the 'near abroad' to pay close attention to the high-ranking positions. Another area of interest is concerning the ever-changing demographics of Russia and the effect on the *strategic culture*. As the Soviet generation diminish over time, there will most likely be a shift in social norms and culture. If the leadership does not succeed in adapting to the change, then Russian foreign policy could also be affected.

Relations between the West and Russia were heavily damaged in 2014, and accusations of US election meddling, large-scale cyber attacks and assassination

attempts on British soil have set the geopolitical scene. Some are describing the situation as Cold War 2.0; with others claiming that the likelihood of nuclear war is in fact higher than in the Cold War. Developing a greater understanding of the variables that shape Russian foreign policy will inevitably improve attempts to predict, deter and defend against Russian aggression.

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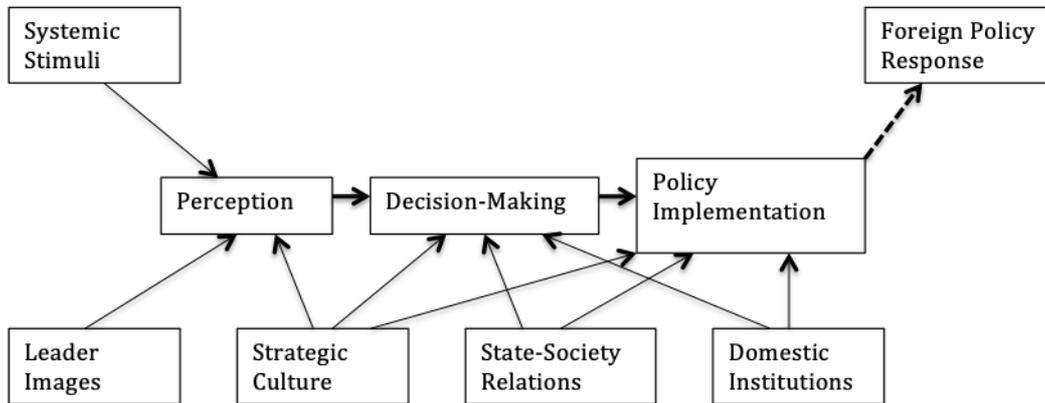
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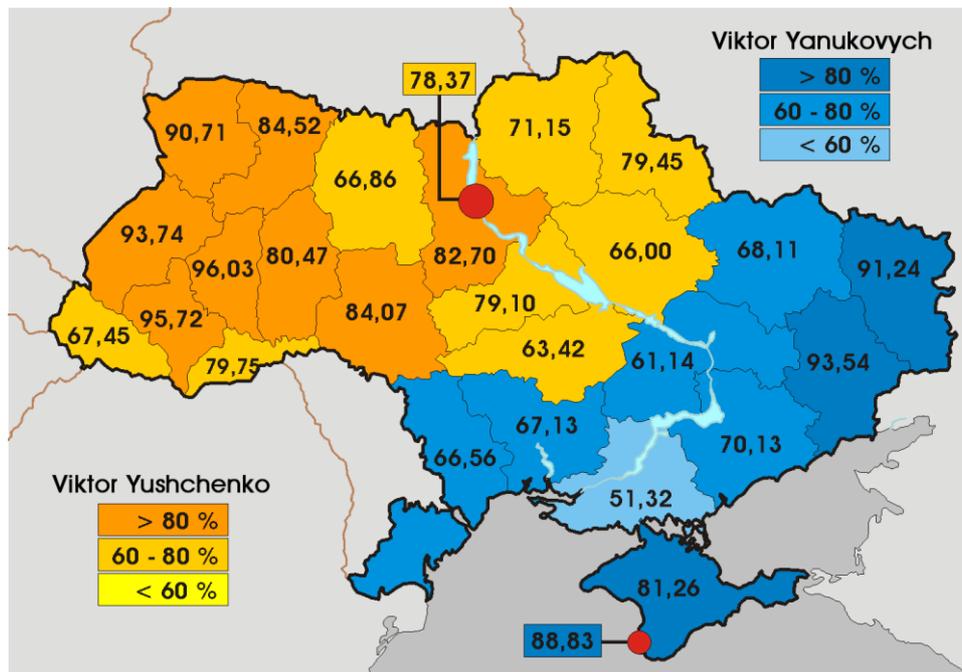
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## Appendix



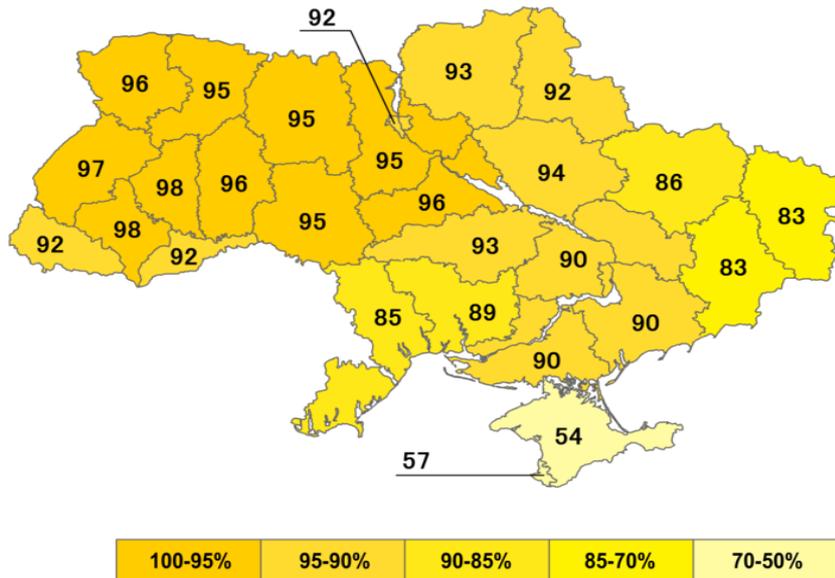
**Figure 1: Neoclassical Realism Model**

Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

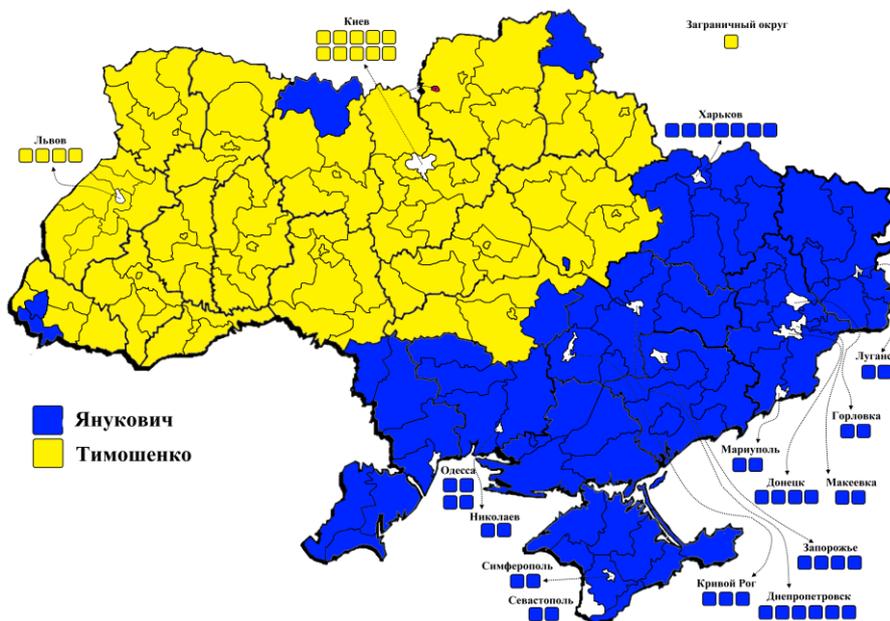


**Figure 2: Ukraine 2004 Election Results, Percentage by region**

"Ukraine. Presidential Election, 2004," *Electoral Geography*, accessed March 02, 2019, <http://www.electoralgeography.com/en/countries/u/ukraine/2004-president-elections-ukraine.html>.



**Figure 3: Vote by % for Ukrainian Independence in 1991**  
 Chrystyna Lapichak, "Independence," The Ukrainian Weekly (New Jersey),  
 December 08, 1991, 49th ed.



**Figure 4: Ukraine 2010 Presidential Election Results**  
 Max Fisher, "Everything You Need to Know about the Ukraine Crisis," Vox,  
 September 03, 2014, , accessed March 14, 2019,  
<https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know>