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The Russian Federation in front of the 21st century security challenges: cooperation or confrontation

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Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Moscow on 4 January 2022

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Introduction

In May 1945 the Post-War Europe found itself in ruins and in the new lines of divisions, which after the Yalta's Conference became the new military-political-ideological lines of separation. As Winston Churchill (1946) prominently delivered his Fulton speech condemning the Soviet Union's policies in Europe and declaring: "From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent." This speech is considered one of the opening volleys announcing the beginning of the Cold War. The long and insecure time period registered during the geopolitical standoff between the collective West and the Soviet Union, where rivalry reached its apogee almost bringing the use of nuclear weapon into operation from 16 to 28 October 1962. The Soviet Union was under isolation and hostage of her own ineffective and as the history put it explicit the dead-end destiny. The arms race and hyperactive hybrid warfare together with futureless military adventure in Afghanistan broke the Soviet economy. Thus, when liberal Gorbachev started to alter the already rotten fundament of the Soviet Union, everything collapsed leaving ruins, deep economic crisis and still relevant unresolved ethno political conflicts. This is the point that Russia's President Vladimir Putin (2005) repeatedly made saying: "the breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century." The failure of the USSR to comprehend and understand the fact that the world-realities had been rapidly changing led to the ultimate collapse of that state. The Kremlin did not want or could not understand that time had been changing and a high amount of atom bombs or tanks were no longer the sign of the greatness. The West achieved the hi-tech and socio-economic progress which was unachievable for Russia.

The Russian Federation repeatedly declares her readiness for cooperation, although her aggressive course of actions shows the opposite. Similarly, Moscow is repeating some blunders of the Soviet Union. The key is initiating a confrontation with the West, most notably with the United States and her allies in NATO or the European Union. The initiation of confrontation is to be found in March 2014, amid the Russian illegal annexation of the Crimea and later occupation of two regions of Eastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia broke the International Law and committed the crime of aggression and war against a sovereign state, violating Ukraine's territorial integrity. Likewise in August 2008, Moscow did against her other neighbor, Georgia that had been seeking to join NATO. Russia has adopted a clear-cut goal: not to give in the post-Soviet region to NATO expansion. This aim has been indicated on Russia's national security strategies and military doctrines, in which Russia securitized NATO expansion as a military threat. The most recent Russian security demands of 17 December 2021 can be considered the most illustrative case to look at. Due to her aggressive foreign policy, the Russian Federation has been facing severe economic sanctions imposed by the West since the spring of 2014. The sanctions and further confrontation with the West is deteriorating socio-economic challenges inside of Russia, hence multiplying their number. In this context, Russia has to deal much more intensively with the present domestic problems such as poor living standards and declining demography. The both problems require a strong and effectively functioning state economy, which is not possible in the context of Western sanctions and confrontational Russian foreign policy.

The geopolitical balance of power and regime survival have become the fundamental aspects in Vladimir Putin's decision-making. The Russian foreign policy is primarily based on confrontation with the United States and NATO. Such political line resulted Russia being isolated from a variety of economic benefits in cooperation with the EU or United States. In fact, Putin's confrontational foreign policy led to closure of the western vector of the Russian foreign policy. To compensate the closed western vector, Russia is allying herself with People's Republic of China and attempting to near with India. Also, Russia has been attempting to appease Turkey, from Moscow's perspective, in order to weaken the southern flank of NATO. In this regards, China and Turkey are risky selections to rely on for Russian foreign policy. Beijing and Ankara have been dreaming of tearing off a larger portion of the Russian territory. China is seeking to silently expand its economic presence in Siberia, which could, in the longer run, transform into military one. As for Turkey, Ankara is waiting for the dissolution of the Russian Federation for the purpose of occupying the Muslim-populated North Caucasus. The 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh have revealed the abovementioned Ankara's geopolitical goals. Furthermore, the Nagorno-Karabakh War exposed Russia's political and military weaknesses in front of Turkey. In addition, Ankara has entered Azerbaijan, former Soviet republic, as a victor and a regional game-changer, unlike Russia. Moscow failed to support her military ally, the Republic of Armenia, thus letting Yerevan lose the war against the Azerbaijan-Turkey tandem.

Given the abovementioned, the Russian Federation is facing serious security dilemma which the Kremlin has created itself by securitization and neorealist approach to the West and NATO. The dilemma is either to cooperate for ending stalemate with the West and focus on the existential threats or continue confronting the West, economically and politically losing. Such a confrontation is eventually doomed to damage Russian economy, thus weakening socio-political stability inside the country. Moreover, the EU and USA would implement new severe sanctions, in case Russia invaded the Ukraine in January-February 2022. Russia's weakening economy and confrontational foreign policy could, to a greater degree, lead to the situation resembling the Soviet Union of 1990s. The adaptation to the new realities and cooperation with the West should be prioritized. The agenda of the unnecessary rivalry with the West and securitization of NATO must be reconsidered and left in the past.

Cold War 2.0

Although that intense superpower rivalry ended along with the Cold War in 1990, Russia and the United States did not work together to create the present order in Europe. For example, the United States rejected various Russian proposals to make the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe the central organizing pillar of European security, replacing the U.S.-led NATO (Mearsheimer, 2001, p. 27). Moreover, Russia was profoundly opposed to the expansion of NATO, which Moscow saw as a serious threat to Russia's security. Recognizing that Russia's weakness would exclude any retaliation, however, the United States ignored Russia's concerns and encouraged NATO to accept the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland as new members. Russia also opposed the United States' policy in the Balkans over the past decades, particularly the NATO war against Yugoslavia in 1999 (*ibid.*). On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that in 1991 there had been serious attempts to avoid a new line of confrontation and to establish peaceful security environment in Europe. Most notably, it is worth remembering that the United States was financially assisting Russia following the breakdown of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The U.S. financial aid to Russia in 1992 was as follows; \$3 billion for food and medicine, \$8 billion for balance of payments support and \$49 billion for exports and other credits (Brzezinski, 2007). In addition, in 1994 the United States and the Russian Federation reached a diplomatic breakthrough during the Budapest Conference where Washington and Moscow signed the Budapest Memorandum. This remarked the redeployment of the nuclear weapons from the newly declared republics of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan to Russia (Brzezinski, 2007). This indicates that level of trust allowed working productively. There were conducted thoughtful efforts to establish such a cooperative and secure environment in the Russia-U.S. relationship (Waltz, 2000). The United States tried to help Russia not fall apart further, which was the case in North Caucasus during the whole 1990s. Nonetheless, the events in Yugoslavia during the 1990s were the first sign of worsening the relations between Russia and the West. British General, commander of UNPROFOR, Rupert Smith (2007) pointed that during the Operation Deliberate Force, the NATO Air Campaign launched airstrikes against the local Serbian Units in Bosnia in August 1995. Smith (2007) acknowledges in his "Utility of Force" that this military action was unwelcomed by the Kremlin and enlarged tensions with Russia, which historically considered Serbia as her traditional and loyal ally in the Balkans. Consequently, Russia predictably took the pro-Serbian position. By 1995 Moscow

was declaring that NATO's action against the Bosnian Serbs exceeded the United Nations mandate (Bacon and Wyman, 2006, p. 159). Hence, it can be perceived that there were significant attempts for cooperation between Washington and Moscow. Nonetheless, NATO's airstrikes in Bosnia were strongly opposed by Russia, leading to deterioration of relations.

On 24 March 1999, Yevgenii Primakov¹ turned his plane across the Atlantic when he had been told about the NATO's air campaign against Yugoslavia. The NATO took these actions to prevent Slobodan Milosevic's atrocities and war crimes, which he had been taking for the last years around the former Yugoslavia. The Russian Federation was against of the military intervention and had suggested a political dialogue. However, the air campaign took place and without any consultations with Moscow. This is the moment when Russia actually felt inequality and mistreatment. De-facto, Russia's view had been ignored because of her pro-Serbian position. Primakov [1999] (2018) touched this issue and confirmed that the West did not consider the Russian suggestions and secretly took actions without consultations, which were a pre-agreed condition in the NATO-Russian Founding Act of 1997. The most notable is that after the bombings of Belgrade, the level of Anti-Americanism significantly rose in Russia. The mass media was presenting the situation as if NATO did it for dismemberment of Russia's historical ally Serbia. The reality was that Milosevic had his hands in blood. He broke out a war against Croatia, Bosnia, where he had committed the crime against Humanity. This time, Slobodan Milosevic began ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians. The Russian Federation preferred to stay silent either in Bosnia or in Kosovo. This silence was in favor of Milosevic's Serbia who was committing Genocides and other war crimes. The disinformation was strong and the majority of Russian populations favored the Serbians' in their "struggle". This is without even knowing and understanding the essence of these conflicts and ethnic compositions in these regions (V.Mlechn, 2018). The Kremlin Hawks did not want to understand the complexity of Yugoslavian events and NATO's actions. They only cared about the prestige and Russia's reputation in the world. For the hawkish majority², this was a slap on the Russian National Interests and thus, they wanted to move back to the confrontational times (V.Mlechn, 2018). Primakov's turning plane became a symbolic feature of Russia's turnaround in her foreign policy. This meant foremost that Yeltsin's policy of democratization began to shake. The nationalist

¹ Russian Prime Minister

² Military generality and the Federal Security Service leadership

parties and imperialist hawks have traditionally been the majority in Russian political affairs. Thus, it is difficult for Russia to cooperate with the West while ignoring viewpoint of her strongly represented nationalist wing.

Despite the above-mentioned disagreements, in May 1997 NATO and Russia were able to find a common ground and to sign the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security. This was an extensive road map for formation and settlement of the NATO-Russia cooperation (NATO, 1997). This demonstrates that the disagreements over the approaches towards the resolution of Bosnian crisis were a first successful test of the Russian-NATO relation. The next crisis of 1999 was more complex and harder to overcome. In the Yugoslavian war of 1998-1999, NATO and Russia found each other on the different sides of the armed conflict. Geopolitical perspective became more prevalent in the Russian political course. The Yugoslavian armed conflict significantly worsened the relationship between the West and Russia. First of all, this is because of the violation of the Founding Act, which had claimed to mark the beginning of a fundamentally new relationship between the Russian Federation and NATO based on common interests in stability, consultation, cooperation and most importantly joint decision-making (Bacon and Wyman, 2006, p. 162). Russian Prime Minister, Yevgeny Primakov³ was, however, not informed of the bombing of Belgrade while halfway across the Atlantic en route to a meeting with US Vice-President Albert Gore (Bacon and Wyman, 2006, p. 160). Hence, NATO neither consulted with Moscow nor tried to achieve a joint decision-making with the Russian counterparts, although this had been pointed in the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997. Russia perceived this as if NATO deliberately did not inform Moscow of the air strikes, which was to be considered as a serious violation of the 1997 Founding Act.

From the Russian perspective, the breach of verbal promises and security assurances by the West contributed to the resumption of the Cold War 2.0. Most notably, it is the first wave of the expansion of NATO, which began on 12 March 1999, with Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joining the alliance. This is perhaps the most important factor, especially in the context of promising not to expand eastwards, although the Kremlin did not oppose to that decision. In 2017 some of the U.S. national archives were declassified and by looking through these documents one can evidently and unambiguously notice the promises and agreements from the Western leaders. For instance, on February 9, 1990 U.S.

³ In office since 1998 to 1999

Secretary of State, James Baker assured to Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would make “not one inch eastward” (nsarchive.gwu.edu, 2017). IR theory Professor, Stephen Walt (2018) pointed that the Americans’ favorite “trust but verify” conveyed that Washington should be willing to reach agreements but only if Russia would follow to its commitments. The idea of this dictum is that “Americans are honest, plain-speaking truth-tellers who can be counted upon to keep their word and fulfill their promises” (Walt, 2018). In reality, the second wave of NATO expansion has continued in 2004 with the Baltic States joining the alliance. This action proved that the West and especially America absolutely ignore the Russian security concerns by stepping back from their promises not to expand. Some security analysts contend that these states joined NATO to increase their security, however, the very act of doing so created a security dilemma for Russia which undermined the security of all. It established the new dangerous reality; the high level of confrontation with Russia that simply can no longer trust the Americans, who already deployed NATO troops next to the Russian Northern Western borders. Mearsheimer’s offensive realism (2001) prioritizes necessity for security and state survival, making states maximize their power, thus creating fears and insecurity to the other states (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). According to John Mearsheimer (2001), states are not supposed to cooperate; nonetheless the states continually seek to diminish their competitors’ power and to enhance their own (Ibid.). In this regards, Russia found herself in a security dilemma position, forced to take counter steps to stop the further expansion of NATO. After the second wave of NATO expansion, the Russian political thinking has been motivated by neorealist fears of hypothetical encirclement by NATO.

Another essential trigger is the U.S. withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which Russia had always regarded as a cornerstone of strategic stability (Trenin, 2018). On this issue, Professor Walt (2018) disputed that it was still a clear signal that the United States did not care about preserving good relations with Moscow and was not going to take Russian concerns into account. Consequently, it triggered Russia's dissatisfaction and feelings of being tricked by the United States and NATO. The breach of essential agreements have dangerously undermined the strategic security and moved the world to the Cold War 2.0. The ignorance of Russia and unilateralism by Washington made the Putin administration to respond harder. President Putin (1999) stated the following: "Russia was and will remain a great power. It is preconditioned by the inseparable characteristics of its geopolitical, economic and cultural existence..." According to Putin (1999), Russia is not going to give up her status of a Great Power. For supporting his thesis, Vladimir Putin is applying for Clausewitz's dictum of war being a continuation of politics by other means (Clausewitz, (1976) [1832]). The Russo-Georgian War of August 2008 and, the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 are worth looking cases, which show how Russia under Putin practically opposes to the NATO expansion along her borders. During his "Munich Speech", Putin (2007) manifested these concerns and warned the West about potential negative consequences of NATO expansion eastwards. As for Putin (2007), NATO is an obsolete legacy of the Cold War era and its expansion "...represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust". The Russian-Georgian War of 2008 and the annexation of the Crimea in 2014 are Russia's sharp reaction to NATO's hypothetical expansion towards these countries. In fact, it has hindered Georgia and the Ukraine to join NATO because these states have got issues with the territorial integrity. As the chapter 1, article 6 of "the Purposes and Principles of Enlargement" states: "States which have ethnic disputes or external territorial disputes... Resolution of such disputes would be a factor in determining whether to invite a state to join the Alliance" (NATO, 1995). By doing it, Russia violated the International Law, UN Charter and principles as well as the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. The Kremlin's aggressive steps disrupted the relatively peaceful security environment in Europe established since 1945. The annexation of Crimea has created a dangerous precedent and brought about confrontation, most notably the sanctions and countersanctions.

The unacceptability of NATO's further expansion eastwards has been reiterated in the documents "On the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation" since 10 January 2000 till the most recent update on 2 July 2021. The article 3 of the

concept states these threats as follows: “The use of military-political blocs and alliances above all NATO eastward expansion; the possibility of appearing in close proximity to Russian borders of foreign military bases and large military contingents” (National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000). That is to say the recent update of the National Security Strategy has not eased off the wording. The 2014 Military Doctrine, 2015 National Security Strategy and 2016 Foreign Policy Concept evidently identified the United States and NATO as a principal threat to Russia’s national security. The assessment is also reflected in the latest National Security Strategy issued in July 2021. The document portrays the confrontation with the West as protracted and increasingly dangerous with threats from NATO intensifying and the risk of the use of military force increasing. References to potential cooperation with the United States, Europe and NATO were replaced by an expression of lacking interest in dialogue and partnership in the foreseeable future (Buchanan, 2021). Instead, the USA and its allies in NATO are now officially recognized as unfriendly states. The relations with the West are no longer a priority and now referred to last in terms of proximity, after the former Soviet republics and to Russia’s strategic partners such as China and India (Trenin, 2021). Last official visit of Russian President Putin to India in December 2021 is a visible manifestation of the priority changes. Although it must be noted if for Russia, China has become a strategic partner, especially against the backdrop of Moscow’s isolation from the West, for India, China has become a primary threat (Rajagopalan, 2021). As the Indian Chief of Defense Staff, Bipin Rawat stated, based on the balance of threat theory, this has necessitated that India develop closer strategic partnerships with the U.S. and Australia and Japan, who have similar perceptions of the threat vis-à-vis China (ibid.). This has created issues in the India-Russia relationship, despite their close bilateral relations, as well as trilateral engagements such as the Russia-India-China (RIC) grouping and broader engagements such as through the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (ibid.). It remains unclear whether the current level of Russia-India engagements will be sufficient to improve cooperation; however, many can already note Russia’s priority shifting from the West towards South Asia region. Moscow is presently putting a deeper focus on non-Western organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS (Trenin, 2021.). Thus, the strategic documents of Russian Federation present enough sources for analyzing the present state of the Russia-West relationships. The Russian national security strategy of 2021 has undoubtedly a confrontational language with regards to the West and NATO. In other words, Russia chose confrontation in her strategic documents.

The continuous worsening of NATO-Russia relations negatively affects in the European Regional Security and cause instability. Although the OSCE diplomats claim that cooperation with Russia may help resolve the regional frozen conflicts, this does not reflect reality. For an illustration, although the OSCE Minsk Group had been supposed to prevent new war and find peaceful resolution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, a bloody armed conflict eventually occurred in autumn 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is worth noting that the OSCE Minsk Group is consisting of the United States, France and the Russian Federation. In the OSCE framework, the USA, France and Russia failed to collectively end the armed conflict that was lasting 44 days. Furthermore, Turkey, NATO member, did openly side Azerbaijan against de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, backed by Armenia. The Republic of Armenia is a military strategic ally of the Russian Federation and a member of CSTO, Moscow-led Collective Security Treaty Organization. Simultaneously, Armenia is a patron of de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. However in 2020 war, Russia intentionally did not support her military ally, Armenia and de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic against Turkey and Azerbaijan. In the context of a renewed Cold War, it is not incorrect to argue that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as well as other regional frozen conflicts cannot be resolved when there is Russia's interest to preserve them frozen. Being a chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group and military ally of Armenia, Russia did not want to use her influence over Azerbaijan and Turkey for ending the war in the first days. Instead, Moscow passively was waiting for the military defeat of her ally and did not allow France and the USA to intervene more actively for ending the war. The Kremlin did everything to manage the war in the way, so that no American or French peacekeepers would be deployed in Nagorno-Karabakh. Otherwise, this could have limited Moscow's space for preserving her leverage over Armenia and Azerbaijan. In fact, on 10 November 2020, Russia eventually reached her aim. Moscow finally deployed her peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, which means the Russian army's return to this essential region after 30 years. Russia's confrontation with the West does not allow any cooperation in solving the regional frozen conflicts. The present Russian revisionist foreign policy is not letting us assume the situation will improve in the near future. On the contrary, the Kremlin would sooner escalate those frozen regional conflicts on her periphery for advancing Russian political goals in the post-Soviet region.

This paradigm may suggest that the Cold War has never ended for the Russian military political leadership, but rather took a halt in the 1990s. It tends to worsen

when the Russian and American sides do not will to make concessions to reduce the level of tensions. The presence of tensions could be found in the last meeting on 16 June 2021 between of U.S President, Joe Biden and Russian President, Vladimir Putin in Genève. That is to say that the bilateral relations have reached its historic minimum. In the whole April of 2021, there extensively grew a danger of the direct armed conflict in the Ukraine with the Russian participation on the Moscow-backed separatist forces in East Ukraine. This is important to highlight the fact that it has been the biggest summit to be held in Geneva since the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting in 1985. Switzerland was once again playing its traditional of a neutral platform. The main themes were Ukraine, Belarus, Syria, Navalny, cyberattacks and interference in the US elections. For Russia, the main area of concerns was the problems with the West over Ukraine and the sanctions. If former US President Donald Trump was accused of being too close to Putin, Joe Biden's rhetoric has been much tougher. Biden (2021) has called Putin a "killer". This suggests a principally dissimilar approach towards the Russian affairs in the US Foreign Policy (Swissinfo.ch, 2021). It is, under Biden Presidency, no longer isolationist, but rather proactive. Biden's slogan "America is back" suggests that Russian revisionism would be strictly opposed by the USA and her Western allies in NATO and in the EU. The Geneva summit was aimed at de-escalation, first of all, in the Ukraine. Hence if the Russian leadership chooses confrontation in the Ukraine, Biden's offer for cooperation can be replaced by new severe sanctions. Also, western military involvement should not be excluded. There might be serious economic and military political challenges for Russia and it is hence in her interest not to go this way.

Nevertheless, at domestic level, the Kremlin considers it is unfair to give in the Ukraine to the Americans. The Russian top politicians believe that Soviet Union's military-political hegemony in Europe was replaced with the American dominance and military presence under the cover of NATO. Former U.S. National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) argued in his book "The Grand Chessboard" that with the start of the unipolar moment, after the collapse of the USSR, the USA has got an exceptional chance to dominate in the world affairs. Furthermore, Eurasia was perceived as the most significant geostrategic place; who controls Eurasia, controls the World (Brzezinski, 1997). From the Russian perspective, NATO's expansion deepens the crisis and may gradually turn this new Cold War into "Hot War". However, America cannot refuse her exceptional role and position to advance her global dominance. For doing so it is necessary to justify the very presence of NATO, in this regards Brzezinski (2007) points that the strength of a great power is

diminished if it ceases to serve an idea. The United States evidently defined its national idea of protecting the liberal-democratic order. NATO represents a forceful instrument in this respect and it is especially fair when U.S. President Joe Biden reassured the U.S. exceptional responsibility in safeguarding the world democracy and rule of law. The Russian leadership is trapped into her neo-imperialist ideas and barely seems to reconsider fallacy of the very idea that NATO and USA are adversaries to be confronted. In the context of current Russian political course, Ukraine is playing a pivotal role in preservation of the Russian supremacy in the Commonwealth of Independent Nations region. At domestic level, it is believed that Moscow was unfairly treated by the collective West led by Washington. In the Russian political establishment, America's safeguarding of democracy is a pretext for advancement its global hegemony. Hence, the Kremlin seeks to create as she had states the multipolar world where Russia has a key and fair role in global affairs management.

However, it is far less clear what national ideology Putin's Russia does have. Former security advisor, Vladislav Surkov (2019) tried to develop this point in his article in the following words: "Putin's big political machine is only gaining momentum and is setting up for a long, difficult and interesting job". Surkov (2019) suggests that Putin's big political machine is far from its full implementation and that it would require many years from now. According to Surkov (2019), Russia will still be Putin's state, just as modern France still calls itself the Fifth Republic of de Gaulle is still based on the ideology of "Six Arrows" Atatürk, and the United States still turn to images and values of semi legendary "founding fathers". The article necessitates awareness, understanding and description of Putin's system of power. Furthermore, it draws the whole set of ideas and dimensions of "Putinism" as the ideology of the future. Also, it highlights the ability to hear and understand the people, to see them through, to the depth and to act accordingly is the unique and central virtue of the Putin state. It is adequate for the people, along with them, and therefore not subject to the destructive overload of the opposing currents of history. It is therefore effective and durable (Surkov, 2019). Though it is clear that Surkov's wording tend to be more for propaganda purposes as the real situation in the ground significantly differs from what Russian former security advisor had written. Reality is that the Russian Federation presently lacks ideology that would unite more than a hundred of Russians with different ethnicities around the Russian military political as well as socio political course.

Presently, the Russian-Western standoff has a visible element of ideological confrontation. To be more precise it is the incompatibility of the Russian pursued “Eurasianism” with the Western led “Atlantism”. The Kremlin believes that the Western “Atlantism” is seeking to organize orange revolutions around the world against sovereign states and stable regimes such as in Iraq, Libya, Georgia , Ukraine and unsuccessfully in Syria. The problem is at the re-emerged post-imperial Russian revisionism that had been chosen since 2007 after Putin’s Munich Speech. On the other hand, many Russian politicians insist that it is not purely Russian fault, as the Munich Speech was only the statement of already appeared uncompromising reality. Others put blame on the West pointing at the American blunders that allegedly fostered the Russian revisionism. In the context of a renewed Cold War, the absence of compromise is a challenging negative factor when looking at the relations between the United States, NATO and Russian Federation. American political commentator, Tony Wood (2018) highlighted the questionable wisdom of admitting to NATO the string of countries along Russia’s western border. These new members have added significantly to NATO’s obligations for collective defense, under Article 5, and, according to him, it did not make Europe safer. As an illustration, Wood (2018) mentioned the Ukraine, where the USA and Russia are effectively engaged in a proxy war: “...the deadly confrontation there has its origins in a contest between Washington and Moscow for Ukraine’s allegiance, which in turn developed inexorably out of the decision to expand NATO in the 1990s”. Similarly, the Syrian Civil War can be viewed through the context of a renewed Cold War between Russia and West. The USA and Russia are supporting the opposite regimes and pursuing 180 degrees opposite aims. The active use of the proxy warfare and the “divided zones” either in the Ukraine or in Syria resemble the Cold War (Ibid.). That is one of the key cornerstones in the current confrontation and rivalry between the Russian Federation and the West. Russia is viewing the Western “Atlantism” as a threat to the Russian values and interest around the world. Therefore, it is more likely to extrapolate new escalations and proxy wars, especially in those conflicting regions where Russian and American interests clash.

Associate Professor of the Kazan Federal University, Farit Giniyatov (2012: 177) presented the Russian strategic vision on the issue, avoiding the open front with NATO, to slow down or completely block the expansion of the alliance, which contradicts the interests of the Russian Federation both geographically: the entry of Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan. In his article, Giniyatov (2012) pointed out the threats from expansion military infrastructure ending with the potential military actions in the post-Soviet region. Another Russian military analyst, Sergey Sokolov (2002: 63) claimed that expanding NATO's military infrastructure would increase approximately threefold the capabilities of tactical strike aircraft, including nuclear carrier weapons. The Russian military political establishment will never tolerate the membership of the Ukraine and Georgia in NATO. On the other hand, Russia has no say in NATO's affairs, as the alliance secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg (2021) recently put it. The present tensions between Russia and Ukraine may de-escalate, in case reasonable political concessions are found at negotiations in January 2022. In this regard, mutual cooperation must be waged in order to settle all the political issues between the United States, European Union, Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the other hand. It is not in Russia's interests to continue escalation, renewing the Cold War. Ultimately, Russia can find herself in a new attrition of resources and futureless arms race. The dissolution of the Soviet Union can give many valuable lessons for the Russian Federation. One of them is that the West possesses much more effective and capable economy, in case of a long term confrontation and arms race.

Russia-U.S. Nuclear Confrontation

A special focus should be put on the nuclear confrontation as it can pose a global challenge. Any confrontation between nuclear states could pose a global disaster and hence it requires a framework agreements as well as additional security mechanisms. The United States and the Russian Federation have the most extensive nuclear weapons at their disposal. The Russian military doctrine considers development and deployment of strategic missile defense systems that undermine global stability and disrupt the established balance of forces in the nuclear-missile sphere and the implementation of the global the intention to place weapons in space, as a threat to its national security. In the creation and deployment of NATO, and especially the United States, strategic missile defense systems that undermine the global stability and distorting the established balance of forces in the nuclear and missile fields, as well as in the deployment of strategic non-nuclear High-precision weapons systems. In particular, it relates to the American anti-missile complex stationed in Romania and in the Czech Republic. The Kremlin views this as an anti-Russian action. In this regard, it can be added the long-standing U.S. intention to place weapons in space, including nuclear weapons (Clark and et al. 2020). Moscow considers these missile deployments and build-up of nuclear weapons in the space as an unconditional military threat to the Russian Federation. There are about 14,935 nuclear weapons in the Russian Federation and the United States which accounts for 93% of the world number of nuclear weapons (Ryzhov and Kulakova, 2021). This fact cannot be neglected when considering confrontation/cooperation between Russia and the USA. Moscow frequently refers to the Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Intermediate-Range Missiles signed on 8 December 1987. It can be although claimed that this treaty reflected the aspiration of the Soviet Union and United States to limit missile capabilities for enhancement global peace and prevention an outbreak of war. Nevertheless, Moscow continuously insists that the problem has developed more severe because of relocation of the third position of the U.S. missile defense system in the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland. It is difficult to expect positive development as the Russian demands are not feasible, the Czech Republic, Romania and Poland are the members of NATO and have rights to expect additional security guarantees on their own territory. In addition, at the structural level, the world dramatically changed, marking the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the parties to the treaty and NATO's second wave of enlargement. Confrontational line is leading Russia to deadlock, which does not allow negotiating on a new treaty, reflecting the new world order realities.

The Russian Federation necessitates importance of searching for tools of protection, balancing mutual threat and especially for adequate retaliation. In the period of 2014–2020, the Russian Federation had a substantial conventional advance in the Russian nuclear strategy. In her strategic deterrence and conventional response strategy, Russia's conventional capabilities do not supplant nuclear capabilities or vice versa: rather one augments the utility of the other (Bruusgaard, 2020). The Russian deterrence concepts adjusted to capitalize on the military utility and deterrent effect of interchangeable conventional and nuclear options (Ibid.). Russian theorists discuss how conventional capabilities with nuclear potential can inflict enough damage on an adversary to a level it would deem unacceptable. Improved conventional capabilities provide Russia with more options before it would face whether to go nuclear: If nonnuclear means are unsuccessful in deterring him from initiating or continuing aggression, the transition to nuclear weapons use will be lawful and unavoidable (Ibid.). Russian strategic nuclear signaling has continued at high levels, conveying a sustained and improved secure second-strike capability. Russian nuclear submarine deterrent patrols have resumed by the middle of 2012 (Bruusgaard, 2020). Since 2014, Moscow has continued long-range bomber training with sorties flown over the Arctic, North Atlantic, and North Pacific, intercepted by NATO and Japanese fighter aircraft in “scenarios reminiscent of the Cold War” (Ibid.). An unprecedented 2019 naval exercise in the Norwegian Sea demonstrated Russia's ability to protect the Northern Strategic Bastion, however, the emphasis on non-strategic nuclear options has been influenced by the integration of conventional and nuclear assets, such as in the strategic nuclear exercise Grom-2019 (Ibid.). The strategic exercises Zapad-2017 had a reduced nuclear ‘tone’ compared to previous exercises, and resulted in no reports on simulated strikes against Western targets. After 2014, Russian nuclear signaling of strategic forces has remained at high levels, but Moscow's willingness for rapid and limited nuclear escalation in the face of non-existential conflict, as conveyed in 2000, has been supplanted by integrated conventional and nuclear response options (Bruusgaard, 2020). Thus, the high level of nuclear danger is present and the last Russian military drills could be a signal of nuclear response options.

International security scholar, Michal Smetana (2018: 146) points out some weaknesses of the Russian early warning systems, claiming there is no way for Moscow to determine whether the incoming SLBM would be a low-yield “tactical” variant or if it would represent a large-scale strategic attack. In the fog of war, this is potentially a major source of miscalculation that could lead to full nuclear retaliation to what was supposed to be a sub-strategic use of a nuclear weapon. The 2018 NPR offers a bleak picture. The document repeatedly highlights Russian noncompliance with the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and other agreements as the main obstacle to further progress, while bluntly asserting that “progress in arms control is not an end in and of itself” (Smetana, 2018, p. 146). In many aspects, the report seems to be less “hawkish” than expected; for example, earlier drafts reportedly included proposals for a new nuclear hyper-glide weapon and revoking the negative security assurance (NSA) (Ibid.). The problem of extended deterrence and assurance of U.S. allies is likewise essential in the NATO context, given the post-2014 developments in Ukraine and the baffling approach of the Trump administration toward the alliance and now the Biden administration (Ibid.). Hence it is essential to conclude additional framework agreements between Russian and the United States as well as supplementary security mechanisms for prevention a nuclear attack. The United States and the Russian Federation have the most extensive nuclear weapons at their disposal and therefore have to share a greater degree of responsibility, particularly it relates to the Russian Federation which has been leading an aggressive revisionist foreign policy. The risk of nuclear war is progressively growing in the lights of Russian military build-up at the Ukraine borders since April 2021 and potential invasion into the Ukraine in January-February of 2022.

On the other hand, the recent joint statement of the five nuclear weapon states' leaders may be viewed with optimism. Russia, China, France, the UK and the USA consider the avoidance of war between nuclear-weapon states and the reduction of strategic risks as the foremost responsibilities. It was affirmed that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought. A nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences. Therefore, it was underlined that the further spread of nuclear weapons must be prevented, by remaining committed to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) obligations. This is most notably including Article VI of the obligation "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control" (President of Russia, 2022). However, one of the key themes at negotiations in January 2022 will be the U.S. missile deployments in Eastern Europe. On 17 December 2021 Russia officially announced her security concerns, regarding the missiles deployment in Romania, Poland and the Czech Republic. Russia demanded a full withdrawal of the U.S. intermediate-range nuclear missiles as well as air defense systems from Eastern Europe. At the January negotiations, this topic may fuel military confrontation between Russia and the West, triggering Russian invasion into Ukraine.

Security analyst on Russian and European affairs, Andrew Bowen (2020) examined the Russian military and strategic documents, highlighting the Russian nuclear policy and typology of conflicts. For the Russian Federation, a military threat is "characterized by a real possibility of an outbreak of a military conflict." Once fighting breaks out, Russian military theory and doctrine identify a typology of conflicts relating to the extent and type of conflict: armed conflict, local war, regional war, large-scale war, and global nuclear war. These levels of conflict are important for understanding how the Russian military envisions the scale, nature, actors, and levels of escalation in war (Bowen, 2020). In June 2020, for the first time, the Russia Federation publicly revealed her official nuclear deterrence policy in the document "on the Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Nuclear Deterrence" (Ibid.). By this document, Russia made clear she would view the launch of any ballistic missile toward Russia as nuclear due to the impossibility of knowing whether the warhead was conventional or nuclear (Ibid.). Contrasting from the 1990s, since the 2000s, Russian military doctrine recognized the importance of

strategic conventional weapons as Moscow enhanced her conventional capabilities. At the present time, conventional weapons play a significant role in Russia's concept of deterrence, although the Russian military is viewing her deterrent capabilities as insufficient against NATO. Therefore, many security analysts are asserting that Russia maintains an "escalate to deescalate" strategy, where Russia might threaten the use of nuclear weapons early in a crisis if Moscow risked losing an armed conflict (Bowen, 2020). Other analysts, however, note that Russian military doctrine focuses on escalation management rather than thresholds for nuclear use and escalation control. Additionally, Russian doctrine gives policymakers flexibility in identifying the type and nature of its responses and does not exclude the possible use of non-strategic nuclear weapon. Nonetheless, Russia would be inflicting damage progressively and in doses to demonstrate the potential for further punishment and provide incentives for settlement (Ibid.). The Russian military doctrine of 2014 states the following: "The Russian Federation reserves the right to use nuclear weapons in response to the use against it and (or) its allies of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction, as well as in the case of aggression against the Russian Federation using conventional weapons, when the very existence of the State is threatened" (Doc.mil.ru, 2014). Consequently, the Russian military doctrine appears to utilize escalation management to control the growth of conflicts, deter outside actors, and support resolutions that are acceptable to Russia. Given the abovementioned, it may be explained Russia's readiness for military escalation of against Ukraine, without fearing Western military intervention. Russia might be relying on her "escalate to deescalate" or on "escalation management". In fact, the readiness to use non-strategic nuclear weapons mentioned in the Russian military doctrine of 2014 are lowering the threshold of a regional nuclear war.

Another expert on nuclear security, Amy Woolf (2021) analyzed Russia's nuclear forces capabilities, pointing at long-range, strategic systems, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers, and shorter- and medium-range delivery systems. According to Woolf (2021), Russia has been modernizing her nuclear forces since 2000s, replacing Soviet-era systems with new missiles, submarines and aircraft while developing new types of delivery systems. Russia retains thousands of warheads, with more than 1,500 warheads deployed on missiles and bombers capable of reaching U.S. territory (Ibid.). The latter argument can be partially explained by the Russian heavy militarization of the Arctic region since this is the shortest way to strike the U.S. territory from Russia, in case of a global nuclear war between Russia and NATO. This doctrine has led some U.S. analysts to conclude that Russia has adopted an "escalate to de-escalate" strategy, where it might threaten to use nuclear weapons if it were losing a conflict with a NATO member, in an effort to convince the United States and its NATO allies to withdraw from the conflict. Russian officials, along with some scholars and observers in the United States and Europe, dispute this interpretation. Though, alarms about this doctrine have informed recommendations for changes in the U.S. nuclear posture. In March 2018, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the Russian Federation was developing new types of nuclear systems. While some experts view these weapons as Russia's attempt to achieve a measure of superiority over the USA, other commentators note that they likely represent a Russian response to concerns about emerging U.S. missile defense capabilities (Woolf, 2021). These new Russian systems include, among others, a heavy ICBM with the ability to carry multiple warheads, a hypersonic glide vehicle, an autonomous underwater vehicle, and a nuclear-powered cruise missile. The hypersonic glide vehicle carried on an existing long-range ballistic missile, entered service in late 2019 (Ibid.). Moscow may actually raise her nuclear threshold as Russia reinforces her conventional forces. From cost and benefit analysis perspective it is however difficult to understand the Russian motives for pursuing military adventurism that would risk all-out confrontation with a technologically advanced and nuclear-armed adversary such as NATO. However, a number of experts notice and warn that Russia has integrated these "conventional precision weapons and nuclear weapons into a single strategic weapon set, lending credence to the view that Russia may be prepared to use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons during a regional conflict (Ibid.). Thus, it is highly essential to reaffirm the

non-use of nuclear weapons as well as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Russia-U.S. nuclear confrontation is a great threat of global scale, and must be excluded.

Western sanctions on Russia

In response to Russia's aggression against the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukraine, the Western countries, most notably the EU's 28 member states and the US, Canada and Norway have imposed a series of economic sanctions against individuals and entities of the Russian Federation throughout the course of 2014. From an economic perspective, the most significant measures have been the so-called 'Stage 3' sanctions: hereafter 'economic sanctions' that were designed to inflict damage on strategic sectors of the Russian economy (Christie, 2016, p. 52). It should be noted that the political goal of the economic sanctions was never forcibly to impose a full reversal of Russia's hostile actions against Ukraine. Instead, both the EU and the US stressed that the conflict should be solved diplomatically, with economic sanctions serving as a tool to raise costs for Russia, with the aim of encouraging Russia to choose to de-escalate and desist from its illegal actions (Ibid.). According to official documents, the EU's economic sanctions were aimed at 'increasing the costs of Russia's actions to undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence' and 'promoting a peaceful settlement of the crisis' (Ibid.). The EU's economic sanctions first came into force on 1 August 2014 for an initial, limited duration of twelve months. In response to further Russian escalation in Eastern Ukraine, these sanctions were reinforced, starting from 12 September 2014, without modifying their expiry deadline. Importantly, the EU states decided, in March 2015, explicitly to link the lifting of the economic sanctions with the full implementation of the Minsk agreements by Russia (Ibid.). Hence, the EU is aiming at increasing the costs of Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence and is seeking to reach a peaceful settlement of the crisis. Cooperation and diplomatic breakthrough is the only way for the sanctions to be lifted. Russia's confrontational actions have received a strong collective response from the EU and the United States.

Political researcher, Edward Hunter Christie (2016) argues that these sanctions, in combination with credible threats of further sanctions, appear to have had an effect in limiting Russian aggression in the Ukraine. Although it can be argued that the situation on the ground has not changed. However, the sanctions ban on supplying goods and services for deep water, Arctic, or shale oil exploration and production in Russia. These are in fact one of the most critical technological fields which Russia needs cooperation with the West. The sanctions on military and dual use goods and technologies were not expected to have any substantial macroeconomic effect, given how narrow they were. The sanctions on advanced oil extraction equipment, as mentioned earlier, were expected to reduce Russia's mid-term oil production profile, therefore reducing export revenues and leading to lower economic growth (Christie, 2016). The financial sanctions were expected to have a number of short-run impacts. The transactions needed to compensate Western investors at maturity would indirectly put pressure on the ruble and the inability to borrow would immediately depress investment in the targeted sectors and because this includes the banking sector, private sector lending would be constrained (Ibid.). In addition, confidence among domestic Russian investors would also be negatively affected and capital flight would thus increase, which would also put pressure on the ruble. The Russian central bank would react to pressures on the currency and to capital flight, either by raising interest rates, by using up reserves to defend the value of the ruble, or by introducing capital controls (Ibid.). The longer term reduction in foreign investment flowing into Russia, notably into the country's banking sector, would bring about cumulative underinvestment across the Russian economy, and this longer term underinvestment would gradually decrease Russia's productivity and competitiveness, and thus its equilibrium GDP growth rate and its income levels (Christie, 2016, p.56-57). Therefore, it is visible how much damage and how targeted the sanctions are functioning. The productivity and competitiveness of Russian economy is decreasing annually as well as Russia is becoming much less attractive for foreign as well as domestic investments. At a retrospective glance, it is possible to argue that the Western sanctions have been effective and continue to devastate the Russian economy.

The Institute of International Finance (IIF) points to three possible channels of macroeconomic effects caused by sanctions, including the following:

1. the fiscal channel, forcing the government to raise taxes or cut spending;
2. the balance-of-payments channel, forcing Russia to cut back on imports or to increase its exports in the face of lower capital inflows;
3. the balance-sheet channel, forcing the government or state banks and state-owned enterprises to deleverage⁴.

While these effects reinforce macroeconomic stability, they all reduce economic growth. Partially as a result of sanctions, Russian GDP growth has remained underwhelming for many years. Visibly, it may look beneficial that a country reduces its foreign debt. However, it also means that a country abstains from financial resources that could help its economic development, and Russia's reduction of its foreign debt was not voluntary. The Western financial sanctions introduced in July 2014 forced Russians, both private and public debtors, to pay back their foreign credits and scared most potential creditors away. Russia's total foreign debt shrank from \$729 billion at the end of 2013 to \$470 billion at the end of 2020; that is a reduction of \$259 billion (Åslund and Snegovaya, 2021, p. 14). Other emerging economies, on the other hand, have attracted more foreign credits on average, 30.1% more between the end of 2013 and 2020 (Ibid.). If the Russian Federation had kept pace with the trend of the average emerging economy, it would have increased its foreign debt to \$949 billion (Ibid.). The Western sanctions forced the Russian Federation to sacrifice international credits of \$479 billion, which is one third of Russian current GDP. This could have gone toward investment and, thus, economic growth. Foreign investors outside the oil sector were not directly targeted by Western sanctions, but were naturally concerned to invest in Russia. They faced the risk that sanctions would be prolonged, which could occur at any time (Ibid.). Russian economic growth is, therefore, blocked by Western sanctions and the continuation of the confrontation would still exhaust the Russian economy.

⁴ Market Interventions: The Case of U.S. Sanctions on Russia," Institute of International Finance, March 2020, 5

When analyzing the impacts on the EU's GDP versus impacts on the Russian GDP one shall take in account specific losses on the both side. For the EU, this is directly related to the sanctions; foregone profits from financial transactions involving the sanctioned entities, and from the export of goods subject to the sanctions, namely oil extraction equipment, and military and dual-use goods (Åslund and Snegovaya, 2021). Few publicly available estimates seek to isolate the impact of the sanctions from the broader impact of the Russian recession. The European Commission's published estimate, for example, is of a 0.25 % decline in the European Union's GDP for 2015 (European Commission, 2015). As for the Russian economy, it is estimated to lose up to 1.5 % of real GDP; the EU likely lost only 0.25 %. In their analysis, Åslund and Snegovaya (2021) noted the sanctions imposed on Russia appear to have had an effect in limiting Russia's aggression in the Ukraine at a tactical level. At a strategic level, sanctions and threats of sanctions, however, did not bring about a reversal of facts on the ground, although Russia's self-imposed limits on its encroachment upon the Ukrainian territory should be seen as a partial success. Hence, these empirical data is although not complete, however, it visualizes the present trend of the EU-Russia sanctions and counter sanctions balance. The abovementioned sanctions would not necessarily change Russia's aggressive revisionist foreign policy in regards her neighbors, most notably the Ukraine. Nevertheless, the numbers explicitly show how Russia is economically losing in a longer run against the EU. The Russian Federation is staying far behind at technological development in comparison to the EU and USA. The numbers allow inferring that the Western sanctions effectively are leading to attrition of the Russian economy, which may become a triggering cause of social tensions inside of Russia. In addition to the social tension, the Kremlin's choice to confront the West by leading aggressive foreign policy will bring about further devastation of Russian economy.

Domestic challenges

At the domestic level, Russia's one of the main challenges is the irreplaceable autocratic leadership present since January 2000 till present times. The long rule of Vladimir Putin and his ministers represents a source of internal unhappiness that grows and reaches its dangerous point since January of 2021 and onwards. The problem is deep-rooted into the strong authoritarian leadership style, which blocks any independent manifestations and candidates. "Putinism" has become a threat to Russia since the Kremlin has mixed up her personal interests with Russia's national interests. Vladimir Putin has appointed his ministers by the factor of loyalty to his regime, not by their fruitful work. These ministers artificially put forward a narrative of irreplaceability of President Putin. Vychaslav Volodin's⁵ (2014) said: "There is Putin, there is Russia, there is no Putin, and there is no Russia". This quote can reveal about the current Russian political thinking or, more precisely, about the absence of independent political thinking. The majority of Russian political elites are strongly convinced that Russia can only survive with President Putin in charge. The Russian political establishment is a strong bureaucratic model orientated to, a greater extent, on the power-hold.

Putin's desire to hold on power is often done at expense of Russia's national interests. For instance, it is seen with empowering and appeasing Ramzan Kadyrov, head of the Chechen Republic. Being a part of the Russian Federation, Kadyrov's Chechnya has its own well-equipped army and Special Forces; Chechnya receives billions of the rubbles of subsidization annually. President Putin (2017) confirmed this fact at his interview to Oliver Stone, saying that Moscow subsidies almost 87% to Chechnya's budget. Furthermore, Moscow repaid Chechnya's regional debt for the use of gas, which had been roughly 9 billion of ruble (Gazeta.ru, 2019). At the same time, there are a plenty of the Russian regions, which have problem with gasification. In comparison, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District received 7.6 million rubles. This is despite the fact that Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District is almost 100 times larger territory than Chechnya and is in terrible social condition. The Chechen Republic received the subsidy of 27 billion rubles, even Russian-annexed Crimea was allocated lesser 17.7 billion rubles, neighboring Ingushetia got 9.2 billion rubles

⁵ former Secretary-General of the "United Russia" party and the current Chairman of the Russian State Duma

and another North Caucasian region, Karachay-Cherkessia with 9.1 billion rubles (RBK, 2017). These numbers express how unequal and selective the budget allocation works in the Russian regions. This data cannot be explained rationally, unless one comprehends the Putin-Kadyrov personal relationship. Appeasement of Kadyrov in Chechnya creates a situation when a new Russian leader after Putin would have to keep this high level of subsidization, if not to increase it at Kadyrov's request.

The regime survival became one of the priorities, although it would be unfair to call it the top priority. In other words, Russian confrontation with the West is not exclusively rooted into Putin's regime survival. There are other domestic factors such as the unity and integrity of the Russian Federation. The most sensitive and latent spot for Russian integrity remains the Muslim-populated North Caucasus. It should be reminded that the majority of Western states were in favor of the Chechen struggle for independence and even provided financial support for promoting democracy in Chechnya. This was negatively viewed in Russia as the Kremlin perceived this action as a hostile and intervention into Russian domestic affairs. In 1994-1996 and 1999-2000, the Russian Federation had to fight the Chechen separatists and a variety of terrorists from the Middle Eastern states, for instance from Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Russia intentionally put the emphasis on the terrorist actions and criminal infiltrations in the separatist movement, attempting to undermine the credibility gained by the Chechen forces in their fight for independence. The Kremlin was able to present the formula "terrorism equals separatism" which also meant to respond to criticism from inside and outside the country. The intention was to hide the ruthless way in which the Russian military operations had been conducted and the consequent widespread violations of human rights in Chechnya. Coincidentally, the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 allowed the Russian Federation to present herself as a great power engaged alongside the West in the fight against the common enemy, international terrorism (Calzini, 2005). In return, Russia could claim an important international role and gain a greater tolerance among the Western states in her struggle in Chechnya, especially from the United States. Another essential aspect that added to the complexity of the Chechen Wars is the link between Islamic fundamentalism and the radical component of the Chechen rebel movement more inclined towards terrorism which was fighting to create a unified Islamic state in the Caucasus (Brownfeld, 2003). At the domestic level, the Russian Federation had to deal with the Chechen separatism in a long-lasting bloody war in North Caucasus. Although, the active

combats ended with Russia regaining full control over Chechnya, the insurgency movements are still present in North Caucasus. Preservation of Russia's territorial integrity is a fundamental domestic level challenge. The most sensitive and latent spot remains the Muslim-populated North Caucasus and hence more attention must be paid for this strategically essential region.

The Kremlin's solution to Chechen insurgency was the "Chechenization" of the counter-insurgency operations. For doing so, Russian President, Vladimir Putin formed a special relationship with head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov. This could guarantee some stability in North Caucasus as Kadyrov had been effective in counter insurgency operations and also is a loyal figure to Moscow. In his interview, Putin (2016) reminded to a journalist about Kadyrov's past, where Ramzan and his father were fighting against the Russian army "in the forests, with weapons". Chechnya is a region of crucial significance for Russia, as Vladimir Putin (2000) pointed it; Chechnya is "where the future of Russia is being decided". Kadyrov is not only the loyal minister, but also he is de-facto the President of the Chechen Republic where counter-insurgency is still in power, the counter-terrorist operations continue. Kadyrov's presence is thus crucial for Vladimir Putin as the counter-terrorism is being successfully undergone under his ministry time. The appeasement of Chechnya will continue because of the sensitivity of this region. Peace in Chechnya has a high political importance for Vladimir Putin, who can prolong his leadership based on this achievement. However, such relations cannot continue for long as the very danger is that Kadyrov and Putin are in good relations. Nonetheless, Chechnya and the North Caucasus remain the Kremlin's most immediate domestic security concern. Chechenization or Kadyrovization can only be a temporary solution. Even though Moscow has learned that only Muslims can control Muslims, it is still far from restoring stability to its vulnerable southern flank (Trenin, 2007, p. 46). Therefore, it is risky for Russia to rely exclusively on the special relationship between Putin and Kadyrov. The power transit may take place in the Kremlin in near future. However, there is little confidence that Chechen leader, Kadyrov would keep loyalty to Russia's future leader. Hence the domestic challenge in Chechnya might appear again after Putin, which can escalate situation in Russia's North Caucasus.

Another domestic level factor is the Russian mass media that plays a very significant role in contemporary Russia. Taken into account the fact that the majority of mass media belongs to the Kremlin, it becomes a serious strategic instrument. The mass

media is the best way to influence on masses, mess their mind, create such a picture of Russia, which Vladimir Putin would wish to have. The media as a governmental propaganda tool certainly holds for authoritarian states that seek to manage the flow of information to their citizens in the interests of regime security (Alden and Aran, 2012, p. 57). It should be said that President Putin has taken the most active steps to control key media outlets and limit the opportunities available to the political opposition (Bacon and Wyman, 2007, p. 69). The situation has not improved, though Vladimir Putin (2008: 42) had touched on this topic, claiming that without really free mass media, the Russian democracy is not alive, and a civil society cannot emerge. Phillip Casula (2012: 168) developed this point in his book, arguing that “it follows immediately the suggestion that the lack of freedom of the mass media is not just a result of State censorship, but may also be conditioned by commercial and political interests - a clear indication of control, the oligarchs over important radio stations and newspapers and had an apologetic against state intervention and censorship”. This is why it is unsurprising that none of the state media channels has invited Alexei Navalny, the most active and strong Russian oppositional politician and the head of Anti-Corruption Foundation since 2011. Navalny (2017) filmed an investigation on Dmitri Medvedev’s⁶ luxurious lifestyle and his properties abroad; yachts, cottages and vineyards. This film was enough to trigger the Russian society’s anger by presenting luxurious life of President’s friends and close circle, while officially around 20 million citizens are living in poverty. Also, Navalny (2017) filmed about Putin’s Secret Villa near Vyborg, which occupies territory of a whole island. However, the state channels are silent about the luxury life of the Russian leadership. There is no mention about the \$120 billion capital outflow that only in 2014 left Russia (Bolshakov, 2017, p. 99). Thus, we can see how the Russian mass media creates a positive image of Russia and stays silent on all of the corruption by Putin and his friends. The state media does not show Russia’s internal problems such as a huge level of corruption. Instead, the pro-Kremlin mass media deliberately attacks the neighboring states: the Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and other post-Soviet republics which are looking at the West. Russian propaganda is regularly demonizing the Ukraine and is spreading a huge number of misinformation to confuse the Western powers as well as the domestic public. Additionally, it is a very useful instrument for Vladimir Putin to hold on to power. Propaganda allows justifying the necessity of a strong leadership of President Putin in the lights of the alleged United States and NATO’s neo-imperialist policy against Russia.

⁶ Russian Prime Minister, former President 2008-2012

Putin's contribution can be seen in improvement of Russia's economic situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Russian economy had been negatively impacted by the financial crisis of 1998: the GDP was -5.3% and the inflation grew up to 84%. Once Vladimir Putin had come to the office, the Russia economy registered a very impressive growth in the period of 1999-2005, as an illustration in 2000, the first year of Putin's Presidency, the GDP% was hugely improved to the positive number (10.0 %) and the inflation % was reduced to 20 % (Bacon and Wyman, 2007, p. 90-100). On May 2004, President Putin addressed to the Russian Deputies to the Federal Assembly, declaring: "For the first time in a long time, Russia has become a politically and economically stable country...Our goals are absolutely clear. They include strengthening of Russia's position in the world" (Donaldson, Noguee and Nadkarni, 2014, p. 384). *Stabilnost'*⁷ is a key argument for Putin's supporters; they argue in favor of Putin due to this belief in stably developing Russia under Putin. Nonetheless, the mass media and pro-Kremlin experts are using this argument frequently. It should be pointed out that *Stabilnost'* was fairly justified during Putin's first two terms 2000-2008. Nevertheless, the period of 2014-2021 could not be considered as a stable development time for Russian economy. This is the direct consequence of Western sanctions following Putin's military adventurism in the Ukraine in March 2014. Economist, Anders Aslund (2021) calculated that Russia annually loses from - 2.5 to - 3% of GDP. The main losses are not only caused by the sanctions, but also because Russia needs to be very careful about her currency and government spending. Russia's economy could have grown by 2.5-3% more every year, if there had been no sanctions. Most importantly, Russia could have borrowed more money. Other developing countries borrowed 30% more than Russia did. These are resources that Russia has lost. Aslund (2021) elaborated in his analysis that also foreign investment has virtually stopped. The total amount that Russia has already lost in the period of 2014-2021, according to Aslund's calculations, is \$950 billion. With respect to real incomes in Russia, they have fallen by 11% in the period of 2014-2021 (Ibid.). Hence Putin's relatively successful presidential terms in 2000-2008 are completely overshadowed by his latest terms in the office. The foremost cause is particularly Putin's military adventurism in the Ukraine, making Russia look an aggressive rogue state.

⁷ Stability

In the past, the picture of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union was that under Yeltsin democracy grew, the economy floundered and the people were miserable, whereas under Putin democracy has declined, but economy has grown (Bacon and Wyman, 2007, p. 173). However, the situation changed following the Western sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation in 2014 because of the annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Eastern Ukraine. Russia is suffering economic hardships and it nullifies all of Putin's achievement in domestic policy. Furthermore, Russia is no longer enjoying "Stabilnost" as the economy is in decline since 2014 till the present days. A brief review of some of the main economic indicators can help see how Russian economy began to lose after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Researcher at Eurasian Research and Analysis Institute, Alexander Osadta (2016) presented some figures indicating the decline of Russian economy in the period between 2014 and 2016. The indicators are presented below:

1. Currency: Russian ruble is the most affected by the sanctions and oil prices. Its effects were felt hardest in the pockets of ordinary citizens. The price of most imported products has also significantly increased. Also people who have taken foreign currency loans and had to pay it back in rubles felt the dramatic effects due to ruble's devaluation. If the dollar in February 2014 amounted to 35.22 rubles then in the Feb. 2016 ruble has lost its value and reached 80 rubles per 1 dollar in 2016. The GDP growth, which remained stable in the period of 2010-2014, began to suffer from the second half of 2014. The GDP growth began to be negative from -0.6% in 2014 to -1.4 \$ 2015⁸.
2. In regards of inflation rate, Russia has had three major crises inflation rate in its modern history after 1991. The most serious reached 2,300% at the end of 1992. Second reaching 130% in 1999, and the third reached 15% in 2008. During the 2012-2013 period the inflation rate was kept stable at acceptable limits of 4-6%. In 2015 inflation reached 17%, which is worse than it was in 2008 inflation crisis when it reached 15%⁹.
3. With the respect of exports of goods, Russia's exports began to grow especially after 2003 when the economy starts to recover. Russia is exporting

⁸ www.tradingeconomics.com

⁹ Ibid.

petroleum products (crude petroleum, refined petroleum, petroleum Gas) together accumulating 66% of the total export of Russia in 2013. The first crisis which occurred in 2008 decreased from 45B in Jan 2008 to 20B in Jan 2009. From 2010 till December 2013 export has managed to not only stabilize but also to reach a maximum of almost 50B in December 2011 and December 2013. From June 2014 once sanctions start to be available Russia's exports declined dramatically to about \$25B in July 2015, nearly equaling the export level of 2008 (Osadta, 2016).

In his data collection, Osadta (2016) infers that the period immediate following 2010 was a period in which the main aspects of the Russian economy such as GDP and exports began to gain profit. In 2014, with the sanctions imposed by the EU and US as well as the fall oil prices, the Russian Federation has entered into another economic crisis that increasingly resembles that of 2008.

Although this data is examined for the period between 2014 and 2016 and does not explain how it could change Russia's foreign policy behavior, it is still relevant. In addition, the situation has not improved for the Russian economy as to the December 2021. Hence, "Putinism" can no longer be justified. Given the above-mentioned corruption, domestic challenges are likely to grow. In the second quarter of 2021, nearly 18 million people in Russia lived under the poverty line, marking a significant decrease compared to the previous three months (Statista, 2021). The total population in Russia was estimated at 146.2 million people in 2020, according to the latest census figures and projections, according to Trading Economics (2020). According to world population review data (2021), the rate of change of the Russian population is very close to 0% at present and the population isn't expected to change much by 2020. Further in the future, it is expected that the population will continue to decline slowly, getting down to 140 million by 2030, and 136 million by 2040. Between 1993 and 2008, Russia's population saw a considerable decline in its population from 148.37 million to 143.25¹⁰. During this time, Russia experienced low birth rates and abnormally high death rates. Since then, the population has increased again to 145.93 million; however, the population is expected to reach its peak at the end of 2020 and is projected to start declining again. Russia has one of the lowest fertility rates in the world of 1.58 births per woman, which is also below the replacement rate of 2.1 births per woman. Russia also has one of the oldest

¹⁰ <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/russia-population>

populations in the world with an average age of 40.3 years. Further contributing to Russia's population decline is a low level of immigration. While projections into the future of Russia are very difficult, it's estimated that Russia will fall from the 9th most populous country to 17th by 2050. Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his plans to boost Russia's dwindling population by encouraging immigration and higher birth rates, nevertheless estimates indicate that Russia's population will decrease from 2014's 142 million to only 128 million by 2050¹¹. Hence it can be noted that domestic challenges such as corruption, high poverty rate and declining demographic situation represent a great challenge to the Russian Federation in the longer run. In the context of Russia's confrontation with the West, the Russian leadership is likely to near the domestic collapse. "Putinism" may be seen as the main source of the Russians' worsening living standards. All of these challenges can generate social explosion in the form of protests or violent revolution attempts.

¹¹ Ibid.

Pan-Turkism around Nagorno-Karabakh and Russian interest

The breakup of the Soviet Union significantly altered the balance of powers in the Transcaucasia region, allowing Turkey partially fill in the security vacuum. Furthermore, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan sets a clear political objective of revision of the Lausanne Treaty and seems to advance the Turkic Union concept of “Great Turan”, the aim of which to unite all Turkic nations around Turkey. At the same time, the Russian Federation has been pursuing her regionalist concept called “Eurasianism” with the objective of re-integration of the post-Soviet region (Morozova, 2009). Nonetheless, the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh transformed the balance of powers, challenging the Russian “Eurasianism”. According to Davutoglu (2001), because of its central position Turkey bears a heavy burden of responsibility in security of neighboring regions that could be achieved exclusively through an active policy in the Turkish near abroad. Davutoglu (2001) notes Turkey is no longer a country that can be dictated the rules of the game, but rather now Ankara’s policy will be intended at becoming a regional power. For example, the Western Balkans demonstrates Turkey’s growing influence via religious, economic and military assistance (Xhaferrim, 2017). It can be claimed where Turkey can enter by the name of Islam consolidation and religious-historical aspects as in Bosnia and Albania she does so, including business investments (Ibid, 2017). In other cases, where “soft power” meets obstacles, Ankara’s modus operandi is a forceful revisionism. The tools go beyond the interstate conflicts, actively utilizing the violent non-state actors for proxy warfare. During WW1 the Russian Empire was challenged by “Pan-Turkism”, trying to alienate the Caucasus and Central Asia from Russia. It is thus essential to unfold the nature and means of “Neo-Ottomanism” or “Pan-Turkism”.

For Russia, Turkey is strategically important country as Ankara controls the key approaches from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean through the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelle (Hill, 2010). On the other hand, Russia and Turkey found themselves in opposed camps in the 1990s on a number of international crises such as the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. The most sensitive dispute, however, was spotted in Chechnya during 1994 and 1996 as Turkey was supplying the Chechens with weapons and transferring far-right Turkish fighters among the “Grey Wolves” to fight on the Chechen side. Turkey intended to deepen the dissolution of the Russian Federation with the target to fill in the new power vacuum. This partially worked with regards to Georgia and Azerbaijan which fell under the Turkish zone of influence. In this context, Turkish scholar, Bayram Balci (2019: 4) contends that “exporting the

Turkish model could facilitate the diffusion of Western values throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus and help these young states to defend their sovereignty against possible Russian resurgence in the region". Therefore, the Kremlin should not suffer from illusions with regard to cooperation with Turkey. Russian President Vladimir Putin although has been attempting to purchase Turkey's and Azerbaijan's loyalty by economic projects such nuclear plant station, gas pipelines and sacrificing Moscow's military political ally, Armenia. The present development seems that Alexander Dugin's "Eurasianism" failing since Azerbaijan is nearing towards Turkey and Baku will hardly join the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and CSTO.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has been attempting to involve Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan into anti-Western coalition. However, the reverse development occurs; Turkey's revisionism alters the balance of powers in the Caucasus. Ankara cooperates with Georgia and Azerbaijan in the regional projects such as the pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and railway Baku-Tbilisi-Kars. Moreover, Turkey was able to change the regional status quo by militarily backing Azerbaijan during the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. As Putin's former policy advisor, Andrey Illarionov (2021) puts it: "...although this might be a victory for the Kremlin as it punished Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan for his democratization policy, Russia ultimately lost in this war, leaving her only military-strategic ally in the South Caucasus, Armenia against the Turkish coalition". Consequently, Turkey achieved her aims of revising the status quo in the Caucasus and growing her presence in Azerbaijan. It is argued that President Aliyev was forced to act under pressure of his Turkish counterpart Tayyip Erdogan. Clearly, Baku was not ready to go to war alone as few months ago Azerbaijan had lost to Armenia in the border skirmishes, despite the presence of drones. Turkey's pressure and assurance of full military support played the key role in unleashing the war. Some experts see that the price for Turkey's assistance was sovereignty of Azerbaijan itself. The incorporation of Azerbaijan has been long time a priority for "Pan-Turkism" since this would provide Turkey with a springboard through the Caspian Sea to the rest of brotherly Turkic lands in Central Asia. Thus, it can be inferred that the defeat of Armenia means the defeat of Russia in the South Caucasus. Turkey has announced her readiness place three military bases in Azerbaijan that would endanger the regional hegemony of Russia. By its intentional neutrality, the Kremlin discredited the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) during the autumn war in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Turkish F-16s and Azeri artillery had several times targeted CSTO member, Armenia's territory. After the war, Turkey increased its prestige and proved to be an effective game changer in the

region and what is more important, to be a reliable military ally, unlike Putin's Russia. The Turkish military industry is benefiting since CSTO member, Kazakhstan signed a contract on Turkish weapon supply, most notably unmanned aerial vehicles "Bayraktar TB-2" that was able to overcome the Russian made air defense systems at Nagorno-Karabakh Defense Army's disposal. Therefore, it is possible to assert that Turkish revisionism gradually materializes and drives Russia out from her claimed exclusive influence zone.

Assertive Turkish revisionist policy is visible around and along the whole perimeter of her borders, where Ankara undermines her neighbor's territorial integrity and the sovereignty of these states as in case of Iraq, Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. The special role is put on the violent non-state actors in Ankara's proxy warfare. One small illustration would be the following: Turkey sent 1,750 people to Libya; another 1,500 of fighters are being trained in the Turkish camps. Mercenaries were recruited in Afrin and other settlements occupied by the Turkish army during the Operation "Shield of Euphrates. There is one more a place where militants can be useful is Turkish Kurdistan. By moving them there, Ankara can de-populate the local disloyal to Ankara Kurdish population (Bagdasarov, 2016 p. 257). The same tactics does Turkey in the post-war occupied areas of de facto Nagorno-Karabakh where Ankara aim to populate the de-Armenized areas of Nagorno-Karabakh with the radical Islamist fighters. These jihadist fighters had been fighting for Turkish interests and sponsorship on the Azerbaijani side in the 2020 war against de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. Syrian President Assad (2020) confirmed that Turkey was transferring the jihadist fighters from the occupied areas of the Syrian Arab Republic to Azerbaijan. France, USA and Russia's political leadership as well as their intelligence service chiefs also confirmed the role of Turkey in the transfer of jihadist fighters from Syria and Libya to Azerbaijan for fighting war against de facto Nagorno-Karabakh backed by Armenia. Most notably, French President Emmanuel Macron was the first leader to confirm Turkey's involvement in transferring thousands of Syrian jihadists to Azerbaijan. The use of Syrian or Libyan jihadists is not a new tactic for Ankara, the opposite, Turkish Intelligence and army have used different radical groups, forming them into battalions, trained, equipped and exploited against the Kurds (Bagdasarov, 2016). In January 2018, this tactic was applied by Turkey during its "Olive Branch" operation against the Kurdish forces in Afrin, in which Ankara additionally used the air-strikes to guarantee their military success. If Syria is far from the Russian borders, Nagorno-Karabakh is located in less than 200 km from

Russia's Dagestan. The presence of jihadist fighters in the occupied part of Nagorno-Karabakh might become a challenge for stability in Russia's North Caucasus where the radical Islamist fighters would try to penetrate.

Officially, Turkey is already voicing more assertively about the Russian annexation of Crimea and about Turkey's readiness to support Ukraine militarily for de-occupation. Turkey has already begun to supply Ukraine with Turkish made drones and other equipment. During March-April of 2021 there had been a high level of tensions along the line of contact in Donbass region. Turkey officially announced its full support to Ukraine's territorial integrity. Coincidentally, Stratfor published a chapter with a map called "Turkey's sphere of influence in 2050." According to the map, Ankara's sphere of influence by 2050 will contain Libya, Egypt, Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Crimea, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia's North Caucasus. For Russia, Armenia is the only military foothold in the South Caucasus that has been betrayed by the Kremlin's short-sighted policy. These blunders by the Kremlin are already giving its negative outcomes and potentially could lead to final defeat of Putin's politics in the Caucasus. In contrast, Erdogan's Turkey has significantly increased its regional influence and prestige.

Russia-China strategic partnership

The Russian Federation and Peoples' Republic of China were both reluctant to enter the new era they find themselves in. At the close of the Cold War, Russia had hoped for a new, cooperative post-Cold War world. It could be argued that, at the close of the Cold War, Russia wanted to transcend the blocs and divisions, but America insisted on preserving them. Russia wanted to join a transformed international community freed of blocs and made up of equal partners who cooperated with each other; America offered Russia only an invitation to join an enlarged American-led community as a defeated and subordinate member. It took Putin about 14 years to give up the transformational vision and accept the reality of the second cold war. By 2012, Russia had realized that the only option America offered was losing the Cold War, not ending it. By 2014, Russia had abandoned what "its last cold peace inhibitions." (Snyder, 2021). As for China, it took even longer to accept the reality of the second cold war. Since 2016 the United States declared an all-out trade war on China that China joined Russia in the reluctant realization that "the international system dominated by the United States and its Western allies would never admit them as equals." The vision of cooperation was replaced by an acceptance of a new cold war.

Russia and China have both accepted the Cold War 2.0 in which Moscow and Beijing are both challenged by the Western sanctions and confrontation from a U.S.-led block. Based on balance of threat theory, the Russian Federation and People's Republic of China turned to each other to balance the U.S.-led unipolar world by creating new international organizations. To give an example, Russia and China initially turned to each other with the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and friendly cooperation agreement, in which the two nations commit not to enter into "any alliance or be party to any bloc . . . which compromises the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other. . . ." (Snyder, 2021). Political analyst, Dmitri Trenin (2021) clarifies the relationship as one in which, though Russia and China "do not have to follow each other," they "will never go against each other." On June 5, 2019, the Russian Federation and Peoples' Republic of China signed a joint statement announcing a "comprehensive and strategic interaction" in which Russia is officially developing a strategic partnership with Beijing, making China not only a friend, but practically an ally (Snyder, 2021). In addition, Russia and China began the formation of new international organizations. The most important among them were the BRICS nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In this first stage of

response to America's insistence on the Cold War 2.0, the new organizations were not intended as new cold war blocks. It can be argued that these organizations were intended as economic and foreign policy counterweights to balance the United States and to foster a multipolar world, the key foreign policy driver for Moscow and Beijing. The BRICS, an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, represents 44% of the world's population and 25% of the world economy. The most significant new body might be the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) where Russia and China are joined by India, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Iran. The SCO embodies 43% of the world population, one quarter of the world economy, almost one quarter of the planet's territory and four of its nuclear powers (Ibid.). Therefore, Russia-China strategic partnership can be explained by the sense of geopolitical desires to reconfigure the present U.S. led world order. Moscow and Beijing find it, at this stage, mutually beneficial to cooperate in order to withstand confrontation with the collective West.

Vladimir Putin has described the closeness of the China-Russia relationship as "a relationship that probably cannot be compared with anything in the world." Chinese President Xi Jinping has called the relationship a "strategic partnership." But the recent joint naval patrol is the latest in a series of cooperative activities that may be bringing the strategic partnership into what China calls a "new era." In this new era, the strategic partnership may be expanding to include a military partnership. Senior fellow at the Institute of Far Eastern Studies, Vassily Kashin (2019), pointed that since 2018, military cooperation between Russia and China reached a new level of a tacit alliance. Russia sold China its latest-generation weapons such as 24 Su-35 fighter jets and its S-400 air defense system. By 2019, Russia had helped China build and install a missile attack warning system. In 2017, Russian and Chinese navy ships carried out joint exercises in the Baltic; in 2019, Russian and Chinese long-range bombers flew a joint patrol over the Pacific. In 2018, Russia significantly reshaped their regular military drill for defending against China. The Russian drill along the shared border was a joint exercise with China. China contributed 2,300 troops, 900 pieces of equipment and 30 aircraft (Kashin, 2019). China was participating in these military drills in order to further Russian-Chinese relations and strengthen the strategic partnership between the two states (Ibid.). In August, 2021, Russia and China carried out exercises that, for the first time, employed a joint command and control system. The Russian troops were fully integrated into larger Chinese formations and used Chinese armoured assault vehicles, infantry fighting vehicles and other battle equipment. Russia and China gave each other levels of

access that are unprecedented for either country (Ibid.). Therefore, it is possible to track the positive and rapid trend in the Russia-China strategic partnership. Evolution of this strategic partnership is fast and can be explained in the context of Moscow's and Beijing's confrontation with the West.

The recent developments in Moscow-Beijing cooperation can suggest the possibility that under the pressure of the USA and its allies in NATO, the China-Russia strategic relationship is expanding to include an essential military relationship. Namely, after the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian Federation found herself under severe economic and political pressure from the USA and the EU. This pressure has intensified strategic partnership with the People's Republic of China. A crucial component of Moscow's relationship with Beijing, giving the partnership a new quality, has been the strengthening of military and technical cooperation. Russia and China will further develop the military and technical cooperation, which benefits both countries at the moment (Kashin and Gabuev, 2017). Nevertheless, there are nuances to be considered for the Russian Federation in order to avoid the Chinese trap in future. In the 1990s, Chinese orders ensured the survival of the Russian the defense industry, which suffered from the collapse of the USSR, and maintaining its global competitiveness. In return, after the Western sanctions were imposed on China in 1989, Russia became the main source of advanced weapons to China. The Russian-Chinese military-technical cooperation in 1990s was an essential opportunity; the People's Republic of China has been able to radically transform their armed forces into modern war machine. Heads of the Russian Military-Industrial Complex (MIC) knew that the weapons sold to China would eventually be copied. However, Moscow exported the arms to China, seeking to preserve the defence industry and earn money to build a new generation of weapons systems. She supplies the most sensitive systems capable of providing a rapid jump in the Chinese MIC and undermining the competitiveness of Russian military industrial complex. In general, this approach has proved to be justified. In the mid-2000s, arms deliveries from Russia to the People's Republic of China decreased markedly. The reason was saturation of the Chinese market, progress MIC in the People's Republic of China itself, as well as the increased fear of the Russian leadership on Chinese copying and potential competition in third-country markets. Many Russian experts and politicians have constantly expressed their concerns since Moscow's Armed Friendship with Beijing cannot be put into the overall logic of the Chinese Army's growing potential near the Siberian and Far Eastern borders of the Russian Federation (Ibid.). Although the Russia-China military partnership is empowering, it

cannot be defined as a military alliance in the sense that NATO is. Both China and Russia remain opposed to a world of blocks in international affairs as they have been since the close of the Cold War. That is to say the Russian-Chinese relations are very close with a high level of strategic and military coordination; however, there are no mutual defence obligations (Snyder, 2021). In addition, Moscow and Beijing are though not willing to enter into a formal military alliance, nonetheless under pressure from NATO, Russia and China entered into what can be called a quasi-alliance relationship. The idea of such a quasi-alliance is that Russia and China cover the back of each other; and do nothing that would fundamentally challenge the interests of the other.

After deterioration of relations with the West in 2014, the Russian leadership conducted a systematic risk assessment analysis of the partnership with China. From the Kremlin's viewpoint, the risks of cooperation with China are much less than with the West. The Russian policy makers believe that fears about the "domination of Chinese to the east of the Urals" have also proved to be exaggerated. In these circumstances, Moscow decided to sell such Modern systems such as C-400 air defense systems and Su-35 fighter aircraft (Kashin and Gabuev, 2017). In a number of branches of military production, Russia still maintains strong advantages over China. Most notably, it is the development of air defence equipment, some types of radar equipment; aviation engine building and submarine ship building. On other aspects, however, China is ahead of Russia, especially when it comes to manufacture of unmanned aerial vehicles, medium transport aircrafts and artificial intelligence. The purchase of arms in Russia serves the Chinese armed forces a reliable way to rapidly increase its military strength. Particularly, this is important in view of the potential escalation of conflicts in South China and the East China Seas, as well as in Taiwan (Ibid.). However, unlike Russia, which has little choice but to use hard power to make herself relevant globally, China's spectacular achievements in the last decade have given it scope for real soft power. Under Xi presidency, China is home to the world class companies such as Alibaba and Tencent and is a leader in cutting edge technologies such as artificial intelligence. Beijing presently has tremendous scope to generate international admiration without resorting to hard power. However, the party-centric nationalism directs the Xi Administration to project soft power through Confucius Institutes and the One Belt as well as the Silk Road Initiative, in so doing, confuses hard power with soft power (Tsang, 2019). Mutual dependency may create a mutually beneficial atmosphere for conduction of a more accurate policy in which Beijing would not oppose Moscow. However, this formula

can work unless the power balance changes asymmetrically in favor of China. The present trend explicitly illustrates that China is already ahead of Russia economically and technologically. The development of Chinese military industry complex is a question of time, although China already produces hi-tech weapons and is planning to become the world super power in artificial intelligence by 2030. Bearing these nuances in mind, Russia-China strategic partnership can turn into a strategic challenge for the Russian Federation in the longer run.

Chinese President, Xi Jinping (2018) spoke on the Sino-Russian relations, stating that they are “at their best time in history”. This statement was followed by Xi Jinping’s announcement of a US\$10 billion fund for cross-border infrastructure projects along the borders between the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation. Nevertheless, the Chinese investment in the region is helping to fuel tension, raising fears of China’s growing presence in the Russian Far East (the RFE). A side effect of Beijing’s investment is an influx of Chinese migrants, which is often perceived by locals as an expression of China’s de facto territorial expansion. Some Russian political groups and media outlets have tapped into this anxiety and deliberately sensationalised it. The fear-mongering notwithstanding, the scale of migration is actually not that large. According to Russia’s census of 2010, the number of Chinese residing in the country was just 29,000, down from 35,000 in 2002 – no more than 0.5 % of the total population of the RFE. Other estimates, however, put the number of Chinese in Russia at 300,000 to 500,000 (*Kashin, 2019*). According to Russian statistics, the number of Chinese entering the country is growing, but so too is the number leaving. In 2015, for example, 9,083 Chinese passport holders came in, while 9,821 left. In short, even though illegal Chinese immigration does happen, there is no evidence of a quiet Chinese annexation of the RFE. But the issue of Chinese presence in the RFE touches a raw nerve in Russia, largely for two reasons. First, Russians view it in the context of the enormous and growing economic and population incongruence with China and second, the three-decades-long Sino-Soviet confrontation, including border clashes in the late 1960s. China’s population is about 10 times that of Russia. The population of the RFE, comprising seven provinces, is only a little more than 6 million – an average density of less than one person per square kilometre. Furthermore, the population in this region is in decline due to low birth rates and migration to other regions of Russia where living and working conditions are better. It should be pointed that since 1991, the RFE has lost about a quarter of its population. This should become a security concern, considering the fact that China’s gross domestic product is almost 10 times

that of Russia's and the gap is increasing. The Chinese economy also grows almost 7% a year, while Russia has just gotten over a recession and is unlikely to grow more than 1.5% to 2 % in the coming years. Irrespective of its rich natural resources, the RFE remains one of the most problematic Russian regions in terms of infrastructure, industrial development and living conditions (*Kashin, 2019*). The outdated infrastructure of most towns and villages, especially those in the border area, is in stark contrast to the state-of-the-art facilities built in Chinese border cities like Suifenhe or Heihe. Thus, some degree of securitization should be considered in a step by step manner. From the Kremlin perspective, the cooperation with Beijing is beneficial for Russia in the context of the geopolitical confrontation with the West for establishing a multipolar world and restoring control over the post-Soviet region. On the contrary, the abovementioned analysis indicates a number of jeopardizing trends for Russia's security in the long-term. The confrontation with the West is fundamental argument for China to cooperate with the Russian Federation; however this *modus operandi*¹² cannot last permanently. Beijing may one day find a common ground with the Western powers on its peaceful rise, taken into account Washington's regional and global concerns. In such case, the Russian policy-makers make a blunder when excessively relying on the strategic partnership with China. In the context of Russia-West confrontation, this course of action is merely a temporary solution, although risky for Russia's own security.

Last but not least, imperative issue is the Chinese state propaganda which indirectly indicates and shapes the potential Chinese territorial claims to the Russian Federation. These concerns intensify, when the Chinese people strongly believe that a larger part of Siberia and Russia's Far East are the historic Chinese lands. This belief is cultivated at the state level and it is a part of the state education. The 1858 Aigun Treaty between the Russian Empire and the Qing Dynasty established the Sino-Russian border along the Amur River, reversing the previous Nerchinsk Treaty of 1689. According to Chinese perspective, Russia got over 600,000 sq. km on the left bank of the Amur, which had been previously held by China. With the signing of the Convention of Beijing two years later, Russia also acquired the vast area on the right bank of Amur, thus gaining complete control over the Primorye region down to the city of Vladivostok. In China, both treaties are viewed as unequal, drawn up in a time of China's weakness. In 1969, when confrontation between Beijing and Moscow peaked, military clashes broke out on the border, raising fears of an all-out war. As a

¹² Course of action

result, China militarily took over around 720 sq. km: the Island of Zhenbao. The issue of the territorial status of the two small islands near Khabarovsk along the junction of Amur and Ussuri rivers was left to be settled later. According to the agreement in 2004, the former and about half of the latter were transferred to the People's Republic of China. With the signing of the additional border agreement in 2008, officially all the territorial issues were settled. Nonetheless, many Chinese feel that the Aigun Treaty and the Convention of Beijing were unfair, meaning that China should, at some point, get back territories it had ceded to Russia. In the long-term, these claims may grow into a Chinese military encountering or if the Russian government steps back again by selling the lands to Beijing, it may end up with a peaceful takeover of the significant parts of the RFE and Siberia.

Russia's strategic deadlock in Ukraine

Since March 2014, the Russian Federation has been involved in an International conflict with Ukraine by illegally annexing the Crimean peninsula. Moscow rapidly took advantage out of the created domestic political chaos in Kiev. The Russians used the “Spetsnaz” forces without Insignia and plausible deniability via their mass media and top diplomats to cover up the military operation. In addition, Russia provoked a bloody war in Eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk region. The uneasy relations date back to 1991 when the “Belovezha Accords” were signed, meaning dissolution of the Soviet Union and Russia’s last hope for the “Slavic Union”. President Kravchuk was committed to Ukraine’s Independency. Ukraine has traditionally been in a strong opposition to Russia’s Imperial aspirations and as Brzezinski (1997) pointed out: without Ukraine, Russia is no longer a European superpower but rather an Asian empire. Bearing in mind the strategic importance of Ukraine, the Kremlin put a strategic goal to retain its supremacy and re-constitute its exclusive interest in the CIS region, especially since Putin’s second presidential term. In other words, it was merely a matter of time when Moscow would apply for “hard power” in relation to Ukraine. Some claim that since summer 2008 Russian general staff already had the military plan for Ukraine and 2009 Alexander Dugin predicted for Ukraine tensions and consequently the loss of its territory in near future. Therefore the annexation of Crimea and attempts to further dismember Ukraine pose a set of challenges for Russian neighbors and in long-term perspective for the wider European security system (Alison, 2014).

Given all the controversy over Kosovo and other conflicts, Russia is trying to justify its course of action as a rescue of the Russian compatriots in the Crimea, saving them “from the fascist military junta in Kiev”. Moscow claimed that the government in Kiev which assumed authority when President Yanukovich fled the country had no legitimacy as it violently usurped power in a coup d’état - consistent theme of Russian discourse. The role of rhetoric is especially important as Russia label any attempt by former Soviet republics to integration into NATO and/or EU as the “Orange Revolution” organized by George Soros and “bloody Hilary” who seek to repeat the Drang nach Osten. The Cliché for Propaganda have been vital for Russian Hybrid Warfare strategy of 3Cs: confrontation, confusion and cooperation.

The soft power is often combined by hard power, so Moscow creates a deniability of the territory for the West: this is the strategy in regards of Ukraine. Roy Alison (2014) outlines that the claim of Russian-speakers, ethnic Russians and Russian 'compatriots' were being threatened and repressed in south-east and Eastern Ukraine, and that Russia had responsibilities to protect them and ensure their legitimate rights and interests, became a core feature of Russian discourse in spring 2004. Putin (2014) explicitly evoked the 'lost' territories of 'Novorossiya', which were given to the Ukrainian SSR by the Soviet government in the 1920s. In this context he accused external forces of involvement in an attempt 'to divide us into parts', as was done with Yugoslavia. To some extent this argument may be justified in relation of the first Chechen War, where the West was openly supporting the Chechens via different channels (Alison, 2014).

However, there are three main explanations considered in regards of Russian intervention in Ukraine. The first focuses on geopolitics and Russian strategic goal, asserting primacy in the CIS region. This relates to the claims of neo-realism and security dilemma that a hegemon is trying to solve (Mearsheimer, 2001). In regards with Ukraine, the Kremlin is applying an offensive realism. Russia is putting efforts to deny the territory of Ukraine to NATO and the EU; Russian regional ambitions towards western-leaning CIS states; and the value of Crimea as a strategic asset. The second focuses on Russian identity as an influence on policy, which could draw on the insights of social constructivism. The third is focusing on domestic politics and regime consolidation as a determinant of policy; the line of thought could be developed further through the various paradigms of foreign policy analysis (Alison, 2014). Also it is essential to comprehend the Moscow's readiness to use force to pursue its interests, especially to Russia's neighbor states outside the CSTO and/or Eurasian Economic Union. The Moscow's coercive means are either classical use of force or a threat of using force as it was in Crimea in 2014, when apart "Spetsnaz", there were the Russian warships in the Azov and Black Seas and the air fighters ready to get involved, if Ukraine have showed any resistance. But, there is another coercive method for asserting Russian foreign policy. Under Putin, Moscow has shown itself ready to view citizenship not just as a mark of identity but as a coercive resource. Tension had arisen between Moscow and Kiev earlier in autumn 2008 when the Russian consulate in Simferopol increased the distribution of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens in Crimea. So Russia was able to break out the Armed Conflict in Donetsk region of Ukraine, by supporting the Russian-backed separatists in the self-proclaimed "Donetsk Peoples' Republic" and "Luhansk

Peoples' Republic" in summer of 2014. However, according to Hague International Court, Russia later in the autumn 2014 and winter 2015 got directly militarily involved in the abovementioned regions. The involvement includes different paramilitary contract groups such as "Chwka Wagener" and mercenaries from Chechnya, the "Kadyrovtsy". So the conflict remains in long perspective unstable and Moscow can manipulate by heating and freezing the level of escalation in Donetsk, if she needs to pressure Kiev and the West. From, strategic point of view, this continuous deadlock is undoubtedly much more favorable to Moscow and in her interest as this solves the main goal, denying the Ukraine to NATO and to the EU. Nonetheless, the most important aspect is also that Russia seeks to deflect attention from Moscow's use of force and seizure of the sovereign territory of its neighbor, with which she had signed the "Budapest Memorandum" in 1994. Otherwise Russia may face legal/normative consequences at the Hague Military Tribunal for Crimes against humanity and Crime of War. The Russian course of action in the Ukrainian crisis helps us judge the emphasis on de/escalation of the conflict in to further dangerous crises ahead. The current military escalation in Ukraine and the crisis in the West-Russia relationship have been initiated by the Russian aggressive revisionism. The risk of war is gradually increasing in the lights of Russian military build-up at the Ukraine borders which might end up with Russian military invasion into the Ukraine in January-February of 2022. Russia is continuing her military build-ups and drills at the Ukraine borders, deploying additional irregular troops.

Furthermore, it is critical to discuss Russia-Belarus integration that was finalized on 5 November of 2021, approving 28 integration programs. This event is especially noteworthy since over the last 20 years, the Union State of Russia and Belarus had stagnated in its development because of Lukashenka's reluctant position. Belarus President Alexander Lukashenka had strict red lines beyond which he was not ready to go, especially when it came to political integration (Kommersant.ru, 2021). While the main programs merely include a common approach to taxes, credit, and the creation of integrated markets for oil, gas and transportation services; however, many see it as Belarus's incorporation into the Russian Federation. Some political commentators argue that such a quick finalization of Russia-Belarus integration is linked to the Belarus political turmoil in summer 2020: giving up Belarus's sovereignty is the price Lukashenka paid for his regime survival. However, the importance of this event grows in the context of Russian threat of military escalation in Ukraine. Belarus may become an additional theater of military activities by which Russia would extend for Ukraine the front with approximately additional 1000 km,

making it difficult for Kiev to stop massive invasion. Additionally, Moscow might destabilize the Belarus-Ukraine border with the use of migrants and refugees which have already become a threat to the European Union. The Lukashenka regime has initiated the migrant crisis in the autumn 2021 in an attempt to destabilize the EU bloc. Nevertheless, some note that by initiation of migrant crisis, Minsk is, in cooperation with Russia, diverting the European Union's attention from Russia-Ukraine border escalation. In this context, Russian minister of defense, Sergei Shoygu (2021) pointed out that it is the military threat from Western states that forced Russia and Belarus to take retaliatory measures, one of which was the new Military Doctrine of the Union State. Additionally, Shoygu (2021) believes that Russia and Belarus continue to face political and economic pressures from the collective West. At the new military doctrine, Russia and Belarus are to coordinate the two-State response to military threats as well as political and economic pressure from the collective West (iz.ru, 2021). On 10-16 September 2021, Russia and Belarus conducted unprecedented military drills. The Zapad-2021 is an illustrative case as the maneuvers included 200.000 military personnel and several hundred of military of vehicles, artillery, fleet as well as air forces. The intensity and frequency of Russia-Belarus joint military exercises in 2021 allow supposing that Belarus might turn into a springboard for a rapid Russian invasion into Ukraine.

The current Ukrainian crisis resembles the Caribbean missile crisis of 1960s when the world was at the brink of nuclear war. The Russian leadership is gradually increasing level of escalation. On 3 December 2021, the U.S. intelligence was the first to reveal its findings, published later in the Washington Post (2021), indicating Russia's plans for a multi-front offensive against Ukraine, involving up to 175,000 troops as soon as in early 2022. Using geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT), the U.S. intelligence provided satellite images from 16 June to 16 November 2021, indicating massive Russian military build-up with more than 50 tactical battalions. The U.S. intelligence document also suggested that "Russian forces may be leaving equipment behind at training facilities to allow an attack on Ukraine to commence quickly" (The Washington Post, 2021). At the annual press conference on 23 December 2021, Russian President, Vladimir Putin (2021) warned the West as follows: "...We remember, as I have mentioned many times before and as you know very well, how you promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly: there have been five waves of NATO expansion, and now the weapons systems I mentioned have been deployed in Romania and deployment has recently begun in Poland..." (President of Russia,

2021). Putin (2021) also blamed the USA and NATO for the current escalation at the borders of Ukraine: "...It is you who have come to our border, and now you say that Ukraine will become a member of NATO as well. Or, even if it does not join NATO, that military bases and strike systems will be placed on its territory under bilateral agreements... It is you who must give us guarantees, and you must do it immediately, right now, instead of talking about it for decades and doing what you want, while talking quietly about the need for security guarantees to everyone" (President of Russia, 2021). Russian foreign minister, Segei Lavrov has recently repeated Putin's warning about the U.S. military equipment and activity encroaching on Russia's borders, saying: "The nightmare scenario of military confrontation is returning" (The Washington Post, 2021). Given all the bellicose rhetoric of Russian President Vladimir Putin, it can be inferred that the Kremlin is resolute to military escalation and further invasion of Ukraine, if Russia does not receive the security guarantees from the West in early 2022. The Ukrainian crisis is thus representing no less threat than the Caribbean missile crisis of 1960s did. The Russian leadership is gradually increasing level of escalation, making it impossible to avoid indirect military confrontation between Russia and the West over Ukraine.

Conclusion

The deteriorated relations between the West and the Russian Federation are the most essential factor to consider when trying understanding the European and Asian regional security. Some other aspects are political distrust and absence of coordination between the Russian Federation and the USA as well as the EU. Likewise it can be pointed that confrontational relations led to the direct military clash in the other regions. It is undeniable that the positive NATO-Russia relations are crucial for stability and the regional security in the European region. Alternatively the situation could considerably improve in case there would be established the West-Russia interdependency modus operandi. The Russian Federation, European Union, United States and military bloc NATO could be playing crucial role in this interdependent modus operandi, with fairly delegated authority and responsibility. The European security is, to a significant extent, determined by absence of confrontation and stability in the Eastern borders of the EU and NATO. From Moscow's perspective, it is essential to avoid confrontation as in long term Russian economy will be predictably exhausted of the sanctions and arms race. Russian neorealism towards the West and NATO is not fully justified. Furthermore, it can be claimed that such an unnecessary securitization draws Russia into an attrition of resources and into new arms race. Likewise the Soviet Union was involved in the past century; the Kremlin chose similar political line. Consequently, it is limiting space for any positive trend in Russian economic and technological development. Neither the West nor NATO is to be considered Russia's natural adversaries; they are hence not a military challenge. NATO is not planning to invade Russia and violate her territorial integrity. In contrast, Ankara's increased regional role in Caucasus amid Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 is more likely challenge Russian interest in the region. With respect to China, it can be inferred that asymmetric economic development of China, in comparison to Russia's economic stagnation pose threats to Russia's security in Siberia and Far East Region, where a more powerful and rising China will expand in future.

However, the Biden administration suggests that Russian revisionism would be strictly opposed by the USA and her Western allies in NATO and in the EU. The Genève summit was aimed at de-escalation, first of all, in the Ukraine. However, in case the Russian Federation decides to militarily intervene into the Ukraine, Biden's offer for cooperation will be replaced by new severe sanctions. Also, western military

involvement should not be excluded. There might be serious economic and military political challenges for Russia and it is hence in her interest not to go this way. Taken into account all the factors, the Russian Federation faces serious security dilemma that may challenge her stability, federal unity and integrity in long term perspective. The dilemma is either to change the dead-end and futureless confrontation with the West and focus on the real looming existential threats such a day by day empowering Pan-Turkism and Chinese expansionism or continue to oppose the West: demonizing the EU, USA and NATO. Russia's weakening economy and confrontational policy is to a greater degree repeating the Soviet Union's fatal mistakes. Following the annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Eastern Ukraine, Russian economy has to suffer under the Western sanctions.

At a retrospective glance, it is possible to contend that the Western sanctions have been effective and continue to devastate the Russian economy. In case the Kremlin does not reconsider her aggressive foreign policy and revisionist intentions, the Russian Federation could ultimately face a catastrophe alike the breakdown of the USSR. The adaptation to the new realities and cooperation with the West should be prioritized by Russia. The Kremlin's fake agenda of the rivalry with the West must be left in the past. Hence it is indispensable to work on additional framework agreements between the United States, European Union and Russian Federation for prevention any confrontational scenarios in the post-Soviet region, which Russia views a sensitive spot. Supplementary security mechanisms could be also negotiated in order to avoid escalation in the Ukraine. However, the choice for cooperation is up to Moscow. The current military escalation in the Ukraine and the crisis in the West-Russia relationship have been initiated by the Russian aggressive revisionist foreign policy. The risk of war is progressively growing in the lights of Russian military build-ups and drills at the Ukraine borders, which may potential end up with invasion into the Ukraine in January-February of 2022. The choice of cooperation or confrontation with the West is on the Russian side. The Kremlin's decision will predetermine Russia's political and economic future for the next decade.

Summary

This work has attempted to analyze the Russian foreign policy since 2007. It explained how the Russian aggressive revisionist foreign policy has led to confrontation with the West, which culminated in March 2014 following Russian annexation of Crimea. The work discussed a number of aspects the Russia-West confrontation such as economic sanctions, which were imposed in order to deter Russia's aggressive actions in the Ukraine. The Russian economy has lost nearly \$950 billion in the period of 2014-2021 because of the Western sanctions. It is because of the Kremlin's initiated confrontation, Russia is facing serious economic challenges that are worsening already existed domestic problems such as declining demography, poverty and corruption. The work presented a few extrapolations on possible negative developments inside of Russia due to failing economy. In addition, the thesis indicated unnecessary securitization of the Russia-West and Russia-NATO relationships. Simultaneously the thesis attempted to display a number of the structural level threats that can be considered more reasonable and adequate to Russian security such as growing Pan-Turkism and risks of strategic partnership with China. The work reflected on the 44 days war in Nagorno-Karabakh, demonstrating Russia's strategic blunder in not assisting her military ally, Armenia in the war. The thesis touched upon potential developments of this Russian blunder or weakness in front of Turkey, pointing out Ankara's increased regional role. It can later materialize in other Russian exclusive influence zones like Central Asia. Also, Turkey could destabilize North Caucasus, where Russia has been long time pacifying Chechnya's insurgency. With respect to China, the thesis inferred that asymmetric economic development of China, in comparison to Russia's economic stagnation, will only continue and create threats to Russia's own security in Siberia and Far East Region, where a more powerful China will expand in future. At the end, the work covered the rapidly developing escalation between Russia and Ukraine. In the lights of Russian military build-ups and drills at the Ukraine borders, the risk of war is growing and, taken into account the Russian security demands of 17 December 2021, war is inevitable. Last but not least, the thesis work tried to demonstrate how the Kremlin's confrontational revisionist policy exacerbated Russia's development and put the country in isolation. The confrontation with the West is weakening the Russian Federation economically and politically, making Moscow technologically backward and weak in front of rising China. Ultimately, Russia's weakening economy and

confrontational foreign policy could lead to the situation resembling the Soviet Union of 1990s, in case the Kremlin continues the present political course.

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