

A NEW COLD WAR? A RESURGENT RUSSIA AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY

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DEDICATION

To my father, Jerry Haile, who wanted to read this more than anyone.

ABSTRACT

Recent events in Eastern Europe and the Middle East have prompted world leaders to opine that the world is entering a new Cold War. These concerns are based on the recent invasions of Crimea and Ukraine, action in Syria, Russian rhetoric, and military posturing by both sides. Russian history, strategy, and strategic culture provide context for the current state of affairs. These do not, however, guarantee that the present implementation of strategy will mirror the past and that the goals are to return to a Soviet-style, Cold War-era, bipolar world order. The issue is more complex than our own cognitive biases have allowed us to comprehend. Russia is resurgent and does pose a threat to stability, but its goal is neither a Cold War nor a hot war. Rather, it seeks to be treated as an equal and to reassert a greater level of control and influence over its former lands.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	III
ABSTRACT	IV
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
A SHORT HISTORY OF RUSSIA	9
Pre-World War I	10
World War I Through World War II	12
The Cold War	15
History of Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea	16
Post-Cold War	17
The Leadership of Vladimir Putin	18
RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE & STRATEGY	22
Strategic Culture	23
Russian Military Strategy	25
Russian Information Warfare Strategy	28
Russian Economic Strategy	32
Russian Foreign Policy Strategy	32
POST-COLD WAR INTERVENTIONISM	35
The Post-Cold War European Landscape	35
Georgia as an Indicator	39
Initial Involvement in Ukraine (November 2013)	44
EUROPEAN INTERVENTIONISM ESCALATES	53
The Takeover of Crimea	53
Crisis in Donbas	58
The Downing of Malaysian Airlines (MH) Flight 17	67
Continued Escalation in Donbas	71
The Revival of Cold War Scare Tactics	75

A SHIFT TO SYRIA	80
Russian Regional Interests	80
Russian Involvement	84
IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY	93
Russian Military Expansion	94
Western Goals	98
Western Security	101
Russia’s Middle East Strategic & Security Goals	105
Global Goals & Security	106
CONCLUSION.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY	110
BIOGRAPHY	121

INTRODUCTION

Russia's recent aggression and resurgent military power have left world leaders reeling. Campaigns in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and Syria, along with significant rhetoric directed at former Soviet and Warsaw Pact allies have caused a great deal of concern. There is talk of a new Cold War and even rumblings of the potential for a hot war. But are these concerns valid, or is Russia just using strong rhetoric and the occasional show of force to try to get its way? Or is this simply how one should expect a resurgent Russia to act given Russian history and strategic culture? World leaders seem to be concerned that their fears of another standoff, particularly in Eastern Europe, are at least somewhat valid. Recent NATO exercises there have sought to show Russia a cohesive, capable alliance. Western states have also put in place substantial diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions.

World leaders' fears are not baseless. As Chapter One points out, Russia has a long and notable history of aggression toward its neighbors. Since the late 19th century Russian leaders have sought expanded influence and control over nations they consider either members of Russia or valuable to the larger Russian strategy of absolute control over Russia itself, dominance in near-abroad regions¹, and a high degree of influence in the far abroad.² Many, particularly in Eastern and Central Europe, remember Russia's decision to hold and, through surrogates, rule territory seized from the Germans in the waning days of World War II. These nations remember the end of the Cold War also, as citizens pushed back against their occupiers and gained their freedom. These nations are, rightfully, highly distrustful of Russia and its resurgence.

¹ A term developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union to describe former Soviet States.

² A term that refers to nations that were not former Soviet States. This can refer to former communist or Warsaw Pact nations, Western nations, and everyone else.

Also of concern is Russian strategic culture and its associated grand strategy, both of which are highlighted in Chapter Two. Russian strategic culture is expansionist and highly nationalistic. Russians believe that their country is exceptional, and that they have a right to rule or at least dominate neighboring territories. This worldview translates into a strategy that includes all the elements of national power: military, information warfare, economic measures, and diplomacy. Military posturing is the most notable to external parties, particularly as the invasions of Crimea and eastern Ukraine and military involvement in Syria have seized the attention of the West and countries in other regions. Russian information warfare has also been significant in recent years. In addition to information warfare in the conflicts, heavy propaganda has come from Russia's English language media outlets whose sole purpose is to spread Kremlin perspectives to the many people who may not realize RT, an English language outlet formerly named Russia Today but shortened to "RT" to remove the blatant reference to Russia, is a Russian outlet. Russia's economic strategy has been a significant component of an ongoing effort to bend former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations' wills to align with Russia's. Russian leaders have especially used the availability of natural gas and economic aid to exert their influence. Finally, Russia has developed its own multinational organizations to provide a counter to groups such as the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These groups allow them to expand foreign policy influence in a region inundated with Western foreign-policy efforts, although the strategy has not been very successful because Russia has been unable to add partners that do not rely solely on Russia.

Chapter Three examines the collapse of the once proud Soviet Union and the manner in which the landscape of Europe changed in subsequent years. Western organizations began

drawing in various former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations and promoting Western interests in these countries shortly after the collapse. Russia, still suffering from the economic fallout of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was largely opposed to the expansion but lacked the influence to stop it. As the country recovered, Russian leaders began trying to influence events in their near abroad. While many instances of political and economic subversion occurred early in the 21st century, the first blatant instance of this was the successful – in terms of reestablishing Russia as a power player – Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. Both during this conflict and in its aftermath Russia returned to its old and now widely accepted (though widely disliked) tactics. The status quo remained until fall 2013 when Russia enticed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich with a \$15 billion aid package to forego an association agreement with the EU in favor of Russian alliances. The subsequent protests threatened to throw Ukraine into a civil war, and by February 2014 Yanukovich had been removed from office and fled Kyiv. Russia characterized the removal as a coup and gave safe harbor to Yanukovich while Russian officials planned their next move.

Chapter Four outlines the fallout of Yanukovich's ouster. The rapid takeover of Crimea, regardless of initial denials, was clearly coordinated by Russian leadership. In less than a month Crimea was no longer part of Ukraine, and world leaders were left struggling to find more than a strongly worded response and economic sanctions in order to counter Putin's bold move. In early March the "uprising" moved to eastern Ukraine. Russia engaged in an active information warfare campaign that included small amounts of support, at least initially, to the small factions of separatists. Events in eastern Ukraine differed from those in Crimea. Instead of a mostly bloodless annexation, Russia provided training and equipment to separatists to ensure they remained in the fight. It would rapidly devolve into a bloody

civil war involving an early tragedy in the downing of a commercial airliner by a Russian surface to air missile. Western leaders stuck mostly to scolding Putin and initiating more economic sanctions. For his part Putin attempted to stir up tensions among ethnic Russians in the Baltics and ordered the Russian military to participate in aggressive military maneuvers reminiscent of Cold War days. But for all this posturing, Russia did not engage in escalatory actions in another country the way it had in eastern Ukraine. Instead, it established a new status quo, consolidating and building slowly and very carefully on its gains.

In fall 2015, Russia proved again that its military was surging regardless of sanctions. Chapter Five examines the value of Syria to Russian interests and the September 2015 commitment of forces there. Russian leaders saw an opportunity in Syria and seized it. They protected their strategic interests (access to the port of Tartus as well as several major airfields) and economic interests (a long-standing military-sales program) by ensuring Assad remained in power. They secured or regained access to facilities in the country that were strategically significant. They also launched a propaganda battle that framed them as targeting the much reviled Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) when in fact they were targeting anti-Assad forces. The involvement also allowed them the opportunity to showcase the flexibility of their military, which was operating on two fronts (even though they actively denied the first), and their new weapons upgrades. More importantly, it forced the West to engage them on the issue of Assad. While the move was not overly shocking, the decision by Putin to target rebels, including civilians, sparked international condemnation.

Chapter Six seeks to answer the question of Russian motivation. Why is Russia taking these actions? Are Russian leaders trying to launch another Cold War, or maybe even

a hot war? Do they truly plan on remedying the collapse of the Soviet Union? The answer is not black and white, and Russian actions, regardless of motivations, could cause the situation to escalate rapidly into a devastating event for all parties involved.

However, understanding what is happening today requires a knowledge of Russia's past. The claims to Ukraine and Crimea, both of which have varying levels of legitimacy, go back much further than the Soviet Union. Communist Russians' desires to establish the Soviet Union in the first place were not just prompted by a despotic group's search for empire. The issues at play have a deep and at times complex history, but they are vital to understanding what is happening today and how it may play out. And so this is where we must begin.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no shortage of available literature on Russia. Even the recent events in Crimea and Ukraine have been written about by multiple authors publishing through prestigious publishing houses, and there are undoubtedly works in progress on the recent events in Syria. The recency of some events, the evolution of media and government reportage, and the interaction between the two has provided a multitude of both primary and official documents from which to draw. Endless articles exist that were written by journalists on the ground and in some cases in the fray, or released by outlets that had journalists on the ground. Government investigations and public evidence are also widely available, largely due to the recognition of opposing governments that the Russian propaganda machine could only be countered with openness. The propagation of social media and smart phones also allowed a unique component in the form of first-hand footage provided by citizens in Ukraine's Euromaidan uprising and other major events.

In terms of primary sources I was limited only by language barriers. I used the automated translating tools from Google where possible, and also tried to track down translated official documents. Articles about events as they happened comprise a majority of my sources for the chapters dealing with Ukraine, Crimea, and Syria. Most outlets are reputable with global influence, but since part of this thesis focuses on Russian information warfare, articles with a decidedly Russian perspective (Russian media) have been used and appropriately identified as such. I accessed official press releases, interviews, investigations, and other resources when possible. The governments and organizations represented include (but were not limited to) the Netherlands, United States, NATO, EU, Ukraine, and Russia. I also used a documentary made using footage from protestors in the Euromaidan, allowing a

unique perspective on what was happening on the ground and in the months leading up to Yanukovich's ouster and how Ukraine so rapidly devolved into internal crisis, annexation of Crimea, and then a de facto insurgency in its eastern region supported directly by Russia.

Occasionally I did use books and journal articles to frame an issue, better understand components of Russian national power, or to help guide my primary source research. While this is not a complete listing of my multitude of sources, it is a highlight of the books that served to guide me the most. Orlando Figes' work, *Revolutionary Russia: 1891-1991*, allowed me to develop an understanding of Russian politics and internal events from pre-World War I to the collapse of the Soviet Union. While much of the book did not apply to my thesis beyond the history of Russia this served as the complete work that provided context, particularly for the pre-WWI periods of Russian history, and guided further research. Tony Judt's work titled *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* was my baseline for a knowledge of how the collapse of the Soviet Union came about. His explanation of the political and social issues of the late eighties and early nineties guided me into a tumultuous period in world history that set the stage for the present day. Andrew Wilson's book *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* and Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer's book *Conflict in Ukraine* served as my road maps from fall 2013 to early 2014 in Ukraine. The information provided allowed me more effectively to seek out primary sources, and gave me a better understanding of the tumultuous relations that brought about the crisis. All three authors also gave short insights into the larger implications for the West, although at the time of publication so much was still evolving on the ground that these perspectives were limited.

Three other books, *Imperial Gamble* by Marvin Kalb, *The New Cold War* by Edward Lucas, and *Russia and the New World Disorder* by Bobo Lo served as my primary readings

on the larger implications of the current Russian adventure for regional and global security. I chose to not read too heavily into these books, beyond their framing of the issue, until I neared the end of my paper and had already framed in my own mind the issues relating to Russia. My reasoning for this was that I wanted to develop an analytic opinion that was not formed on the basis of the ideas of others. As an analyst I recognize the importance of looking at an issue through as unbiased a view as possible, and I recognize that many Western experts have a very pessimistic perspective on Russia that is influenced not only by current events, but by their own experiences during the Cold War. My knowledge of Russia has been developed in a post-Cold War world that still focuses heavily on the Cold War period and what Russia was during that time. My studies have taught me that while history is important, we cannot be handicapped by it. Just because an issue evolved one way in the past does not mean it will evolve the same way today. This is not to say the same underlying issues do not exist and that some tactics will not carry over, but rather that the larger manifestations of Russian strategy, and the reactions to it among other countries, will play out differently this time.

A SHORT HISTORY OF RUSSIA

“History doesn’t teach any lessons, but greatly punishes one for not learning them.” Vasily Klyuchevsky (Russian Historian)

The issue of Russian expansionism and aggression directed at neighboring nations is not a 20th or 21st century phenomenon. In fact, scholars in Russia and the West recognize expansionism and the associated aggression as a central part of Russia’s history from the 16th century to the present day. Additionally, this aggression and expansionism was not an unprovoked event and can be traced back to the earliest periods of Russian history when the Slav predecessors to the modern Russian state were themselves subject to invasion.

Kievan Rus, Russia’s earliest form, suffered internal strife between the various members of the ruling family who sought to control the nation after the death of its leader. This internal conflict was accompanied by external invading forces of Kipchaks, Tartars, Swedes, and others that ended with the Mongol invasion that became the catalyst for collapse in the mid 13th century.³ The intermediate Russian predecessor, Muscovy, was established under Mongol rule and eventually was able to remove itself from the influence of the Mongol empire in the late 15th century. In the subsequent years Muscovy, which would eventually become the Russian empire, was invaded by outside forces including Poles and Lithuanians, and seized neighboring territory in its own invasions.

The colonialization of Russia by outside forces and of neighboring areas by Russian forces is enshrined, and even celebrated, in Russian history. Russian historian Vasily Klyuchevsky (1841-1911) wrote *The Course of Russian History* as a five-volume work that

³ Glenn E. Curtis, “Kievan Rus’ and Mongol Periods,” excerpted from *Russia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress, 1996), http://www.shsu.edu/his_ncp/Kievan.html.

identified colonization as the “greatest influence in Russian history.”⁴ In it he wrote, “the history of Russia is a history of a country that colonizes. The territory of colonization expanded along with its state borders. With rises and falls, this ancient motion continues all the way unto our days.”⁵ Michael Khodarkovsky, a Professor of History at Loyola who focuses on the Russian Empire, writes in his book *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* that Russia’s expansion was a “deliberate process with varying motives and policies... but consistent in its objectives of expansion and colonization of the new regions and peoples.”⁶ It is important to note that during this period multiple empires throughout the world sought control of increasingly large territories. But the important difference between those empires and the Russian Empire is the continuance of that policy into the 20th and 21st centuries.

Pre-World War I

In the 19th and early 20th century Russia sought to take territory from the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires via both subterfuge and direct military intervention. The expansion was based on multiple premises, including the protection of ethnic Slavs in the Ottoman Empire by taking control of those regions and acquiring Istanbul – formerly Constantinople – which had been the center of Eastern Orthodoxy and thus the most holy site

⁴ Olga Prodan, “Prominent Russians: Vasily Klyuchevsky,” *RT Russiapedia*, accessed January 12, 2016, <http://russiapedia.rt.com/prominent-russians/education/vasily-klyuchevsky/>. Excerpt of *The Course of Russian History* was accessed via this site because I was unable to find a translated version of the original text.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Michael Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier: The Making of a Colonial Empire, 1500-1800* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2.

of Russia's religious heritage.⁷ Additionally, gaining control of Constantinople and parts of the Ottoman Empire would ensure Russian control of the Turkish Straits, which includes the Bosphorus Straits, between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. The Black Sea holds one of only two warm water western Russian port on the Crimean Peninsula, leaving Russian naval vessels' ability to quickly access the Mediterranean and the Atlantic year round at the mercy of the Ottomans.

By the late 19th century German and Russian neutrality agreements had fallen apart. In the early 20th century, two conflicting alliances were formed featuring the Allies of Britain, France, and Russia on one side and the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy on the other. As Slav nationalist movements grew in the early 20th century the Central Powers became increasingly disgruntled with Russian intervention in the region. Russians, perceiving Austrians as aggressors and the Germans as their backers in the Balkans, began calling for a more aggressive policy to defend ethnic Slavs. By 1914 tensions began to bubble over as Russians in positions of power, including the Tsar, began to entertain the possibility of a war to defend the Slavs in the Balkans.⁸ Immediately following the Central Powers' declaration of war against Serbia on July 28, 1914 Russia began mobilizing its military based on a belief that a German declaration of war was imminent. On August 1, 1914 Germany declared war on Russia and by November 1914 the Central Powers were joined by Turkey (although Italy remained neutral and eventually joined the Allies) and the Allies, joined by Serbia and Japan, were involved in a war that continued through 1918 and created a very altered landscape in the region.

⁷ Orlando Figes, *Revolutionary Russia: 1891 – 1991* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014), 51

⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

World War I Through World War II

Russian involvement in the war created food shortages, and an already present dissatisfaction with the Tsar rapidly grew. The February Revolution in 1917 ultimately overthrew the Romanov dynasty and replaced the monarchy with a Provisional Government. The Provisional Government enacted reforms that Vladimir Lenin proclaimed made Russia the “the freest of all belligerent countries in the world,”⁹ including freedom of assembly, press, and speech, and removing legal restrictions on religion, race, and gender. The response from many of the non-Russian satellites that fell under the empire was one of celebration, with citizens believing they had now gained independence at the most and autonomy at the least, and raising national flags in place of symbols of the monarchy. The reality though was that Russia was unwilling to grant independence to most of the nationalists with the exception of Central-Powers-occupied Poland. In October 1917 a second revolution led by the Bolsheviks resulted in a coup d'état against the Provisional Government with Lenin becoming the leader of Russia. On March 3, 1918 the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed with Russia giving up most of its territories in Eastern Europe, including Poland, Finland, Estonia, and Lithuania, to Germany and Austria-Hungary, and withdrew troops from Ukraine. In 1918 a Civil War broke out between the anti-Bolshevik Whites and the Bolshevik Red Army that ultimately led to the defeat of the Whites and the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1922.

The USSR initially included Russia, Ukraine, Transcaucasia (South Caucasus nations of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), and Belarus; these would ultimately be the first of

⁹ Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution,” *Pravda* no. 26 (April 7, 1917), accessed via <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/apr/04.htm>.

many moves made by Russia to expand its empire back into Europe and retake Slavic nations Russia believed to be theirs. The expansion was enshrined in Soviet symbology put in place by the revolutionaries in 1918 and propagated through various policies. The red star, worn on the caps of soldiers, symbolized the fight for light and justice, the five points were said to represent the five continents that the Bolshevik's "revolutionary struggle would one day liberate from exploiters."¹⁰ Lenin realized the importance of conquering outside nations who had more resources available to the ultimate success of socialism. Russian leadership attempted to accomplish these goals through the previously mentioned subterfuge and meddling in the affairs of neighboring nations. While trade and increased diplomacy would be outwardly attempted, provocateurs would promote communist movements in the target countries. These deceptive policies would ultimately become some of the stalwarts of Soviet strategy.

In 1924 Joseph Stalin rose to power in the Soviet Union, ushering in a new era of relations between Russia and its Soviet member-states. By the early 1930s Stalin's Soviet Union was suffering a significant food shortage because of resistance by relatively affluent peasant farmers known as Kulaks who had been forced into collective farms in order to support Stalin's larger industrialization efforts. Stalin turned to Ukraine to solve the food shortage problem. The seizure of grain from Ukraine from 1932 to 1933 came to be known as *Holodomor*, which translates to "death by hunger." The issue was exacerbated by Stalin's decision to prevent citizens from leaving the area struck by famine and deporting and murdering many others. The number of Ukrainians murdered by Stalin and his policies has been placed in the range of five to seven million. Stalin also targeted Poles, Chechens,

¹⁰ Figes, *Revolutionary Russia: 1891 – 1991*, 204.

Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Romanians, Crimean Tartars and Greeks, Ingush, Koreans and many others for resettlement that often resulted in death. Even his own countrymen and party members were not spared because Stalin regarded them as a threat to his leadership and the direction of the nation. During The Great Terror Stalin not only imprisoned upwards of one million of his own countrymen, but conducted large-scale executions of perceived adversaries that current estimates place at a minimum of 30 million.

The German invasion of the USSR in June 1941, despite its cataclysmic impact on Russia, ultimately turned the tide of the European Theater of World War II in the Grand Coalition's favor and actually gave the USSR an advantage in executing Stalin's policy. After defeating the Germans in conjunction with the Allies in May 1945, Stalin, realizing the opportunity the war gave him, turned his attention back to Eastern Europe. His plan was to exploit the damage done by the Nazis by "liberating" those nations and then installing Communist leadership. The success of the plan hinged on his ability to remain relevant to seeing through the Allied mission in Europe and the Pacific, and on keeping Allied nations in the dark about his goals while he "liberated" formerly Axis-controlled nations. He gave interviews denouncing any desire or intent to subvert other nations, he ordered foreign Communists to disguise their true intent by participating in anti-fascist and nationalist groups, and he prepared his Communist leaders who would take over the various targeted nations. While Stalin demanded control of some nations, he merely subverted or invaded the remainder, putting pro-Soviet leadership in power and imprisoning or executing anyone deemed a threat to his policy.

The Cold War

Stalin changed the global security landscape for decades in the aftermath of World War II, claiming nations from the Baltics down through Eastern and Central Europe, into the Balkans and over to the Caucasus and Central Asia, as new Soviet member states. A large part of this strategy was Stalinization and Russification. Stalinization involved the indoctrination of each Soviet satellite state into a political system based rigidly on the Soviet system established by Stalin and ruled by ‘Little Stalins’. Russification was the total indoctrination of every schoolchild into the Russian culture on the basis of the superiority of Russia over any other European culture. This included knowing the Russian language as a requirement for work and higher education; learning Russian history and literature; and immersion in Russian music, dance, food, and drink.

Expansion continued throughout the Cold War with varying degrees of success. Ultimately, the communist nations aligned to varying degrees with the USSR would include China, Vietnam, Cuba, Cambodia, Laos, and North Korea. Soviet leadership would also seek to establish an influence in various other nations, including Syria, through aid and military programs.

By the late 1970’s USSR member states and other nations in the Soviet sphere were experiencing a changing landscape.¹¹ In Soviet Central Asia the population in general had increased, including a 25% jump in the Muslim population; in Europe the minority nationals were also beginning to create problems for the Soviet machine. The ongoing arms race and the failure in Afghanistan further accelerated the move toward collapse. In the late 1980s the

¹¹ Tony Judt, *Post War: A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 593

first communist regimes began to collapse. The regimes in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania all had fallen by 1989, and others would begin to seek independence in the 1990s. In January 1991 Soviet troops attacked government, radio, and television offices in Lithuania and Latvia in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to stop the drive for independence that was being taken up by other Soviet states. On December 25, 1991 the Soviet flag was lowered and the Russian flag raised in its place. On December 31, 1991 the Soviet Union officially ended.

History of Russia, Ukraine, and Crimea

The area occupied by Ukraine came under the control of Kievan Rus, whose capital was the city of Kyiv. Following the collapse of Kievan Rus the western half of Ukraine was controlled by Lithuanians and then Poles while Cossacks controlled the eastern portion. It was during this time that the differing identities of Russians and Ukrainians that colors relations in the present day became strongly defined.¹² In the late 17th century Russia began the process of drawing eastern Ukraine back under their control (including the Crimean peninsula in the late 18th century) although they failed to absorb the entirety of Ukraine back into their realm of influence until after World War I. In this interim period of “Two Ukraines” western Ukraine began developing an ethnic identity. In 1917 Crimea became a sovereign state only to be retaken in 1921 by the USSR to become the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1919 the Bolsheviks, who had seized the entirety of Ukraine, created the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, and in 1922 the Ukrainian Soviet Republic became a member of the USSR. In 1954 Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev made the decision to

¹² Serhy Yekelchuk, “The Ukrainian Crisis: In Russia’s Long Shadow,” *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective* vol. 7, no. 9 (June 2014), <http://origins.osu.edu/article/ukrainian-crisis-russias-long-shadow>

transfer Crimea from a status as their own Soviet Socialist Republic to Ukraine. This was an economically sound decision because of strong economic links between Crimea and Ukraine based on the geography of the two nations. However, the two nations had never previously had any cultural or ethnic ties to one another: Ukrainians are considered ethnic Slavs and the Crimeans prior to their purge by Stalin in 1944 were ethnic Tartars. The decision to attach Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 remained after the fall of the USSR, creating a country for which no historic precedent existed.

Post-Cold War

December 1991 ushered in a new era on the European continent that many thought would include a shift to democracy for the Eastern Bloc and an improved security situation. Former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations would have representative governments, open markets, and open dialogue; concerns about an outbreak of war or the use of nuclear weapons would be put to rest. For some nations, these hopes became reality; seven former Warsaw Pact nations are now European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) member nations with an eighth, Albania, currently a NATO member and an EU candidate nation. In contrast, former Soviet states have experienced more challenges with their shift. Of the 15, only Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have integrated into the EU and NATO. Others have expressed interest in joining either organization, or both, but have ultimately moved away from those alliances for a variety of reasons. For some nations the issue has been that the governments are still largely autocratic and exercise significant control over the populace. For others who have sought increased democracy the issue has been a Russia that still actively meddles in the affairs of its former member states. Former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltic States, protected in part by NATO, have been interfered with primarily

through propaganda meant to appeal to the “plight” of ethnic Russians who are “subjugated” by the national governments. However, former Soviet nations have been subject to much more aggressive tactics by Russia.

In 2008 Russian forces invaded Georgia after a scuffle between South Ossetian separatists and Georgian Peacekeepers resulted in the commitment of Georgian forces. The Russian invasion force was reinforced by land, naval, and air elements and may have been spearheaded by a [alleged] Russian cyberattack.¹³ In the years that followed Russia became even more involved in the affairs of their former Soviet and Warsaw Pact neighbors, culminating in the recent takeover of Crimea and commitment of forces to the Donetks River Basin region of eastern Ukraine. At the helm of the Russian state in this increasingly aggressive period has been the former KGB agent-turn-president, Vladimir Putin.

The Leadership of Vladimir Putin

Vladimir Putin was born in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1952, and grew up in a working-class family. He graduated with a law degree from Leningrad State University in 1975 and immediately joined the KGB where he served at posts in the Soviet Union and East Germany. In the late 1980s Putin returned to his Alma Mater under the auspices of faculty, but actually as an in-house KGB officer responsible for recruiting and spying on students. Shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Putin quit the KGB at the rank of lieutenant colonel to work in the government of an old professor who would usher St. Petersburg into the post-Soviet era. In 1996 Putin moved to Moscow and joined the Kremlin staff, ultimately becoming the director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the KGB’s post-Soviet

¹³ David Hollis, “Cyberwar Case Study: Georgia 2008,” *Small Wars Journal*, published January 6, 2011, 2.

successor, and the head of the Kremlin Security Council in 1998. In August 1999 President Boris Yelstin tapped Putin for the position as prime minister; a move some believe had been promoted by Yelstin's inner circle and others who were attempting to secure a successor.¹⁴ Yelstin's abrupt resignation in December 1999 resulted in Putin's ascendance to the presidency; his election in March 2000 secured him a position of growing power in Russia to this day.

In March 2000 Putin became the president of Russia, receiving 74 percent of the vote in what observers considered a democratic election with 75 percent voter turnout.¹⁵ He was reelected in 2004, and succeeded by Dmitry Medvedev in 2008 following the end of Putin's second four year term - a constitutional limit placed on the office of the president in Russia. Immediately following his election, Medvedev appointed Putin to the role of Prime Minister.¹⁶ Although the people of Russia had chosen Medvedev as their president, Putin was still very much the power broker and viewed by many as being in charge. In late 2011 Medvedev announced he would not seek a second term and recommended Putin for the position of president – a position that had recently changed from four years to six years in duration under a constitutional amendment. Putin in turn said he would appoint Medvedev

¹⁴ David Hoffman, "Putin's Career Rooted in Russia's KGB," *The Washington Post*, published January 30, 2000, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/russiagov/putin.htm>. Historical data derived from this source.

¹⁵ Strobe Talbott, interview by PBS Frontline, *PBS Frontline*, May 2000, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/yeltsin/interviews/talbott.html>.

¹⁶ Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Press/Books/2012/mrputin/mrputin_chapter.pdf, 7.

as his prime minister. Putin won reelection in 2012 with 64.7 percent of the vote,¹⁷ though many viewed it as a fixed election whose result had been determined prior to Putin's candidacy announcement.¹⁸ Because of the new six-year presidential term, it would not be unreasonable to anticipate a Russia with Putin at the helm until 2024.

The history of Russia is significant to its culture, the world view of its citizens and leaders, and its larger strategy. The challenges faced by early Russians, including consistent exterior threats, shaped their early interactions and forced them to find ways to more effectively protect their borders. This desire mixed with a perspective of Russians as superior, coloring their interactions with neighbors and outside nations. This Russian preeminence carries across generations, from Lenin to Stalin to Putin, and many leaders in between, as Russia has sought to continually expand their empire and draw those around them into their sphere of influence. At times Russia has utilized military power to achieve this goal. However, they have also proven adept at wielding other elements of power to exert influence and achieve national aims. In times when the military was weak or would be ineffective against a foe, economic power has become the tool of choice. Additionally, Russia has placed propaganda and manipulation as a central strategy, using it to overtake adversaries or goad them into taking action to which a response would be justifiable and open a door to achieving their larger aims. Ultimately though, all of this goes back to a main theme, Russia's long history of desiring to be and working towards the aim of super power.

¹⁷ David M. Herszenhorn, "Putin Wins, but Opposition Keeps Pressing," *The New York Times*, published March 4, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/world/europe/russia-votes-in-presidential-election.html?_r=0.

¹⁸ Joshua Yaffa, "Reading Putin: The Mind and the State of Russia's President," *Foreign Affairs*, published July/August 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/137728/joshua-yaffa/reading-putin>.

Someone with whom the other major international players must contend, someone who must be at the table in resolving all major matters.

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC CULTURE & STRATEGY

“The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”
Vladimir Putin (Russian President)

Russian strategic culture and strategy are heavily informed by Russia’s history, geography, and geopolitical interests. It has been described as “one of the most martial and militarized cultures in history, rivaling, if not exceeding, those of Prussian Imperial and Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan in this respect.”¹⁹ The militarized nature of the strategic culture, notably the government institutions more than the general populace, is a result of the status of Russia as a conquered nation in the earliest periods of nationhood and the move to the role of conqueror for the remainder of their experience. Their rise to superpower status in the wake of World War II and their national and economic collapse at the end of 1991 hardened the resolve of the current leadership to strengthen Russia’s standing and return to their previous greatness.

These aspirations are best accomplished through a focused strategy featuring significant components easily categorized into the American concept of DIME – diplomatic, information, military, and economic – with a decidedly Russian twist. In the Russian model, military, information and diplomatic components of national power are intertwined to make one almost indistinguishable from another. Economic power is also used as a foreign policy tool to manipulate adversaries and accomplish goals. This strategic culture and the resultant strategy come together to inform their interaction with neighboring nations, resulting in a more aggressive stance than considered appropriate based on global norms and mores.

¹⁹ Fritz W. Ermarth, “Russia’s Strategic Culture: Past, Present, and... In Transition?” *Defense Threat Reduction Agency Advanced Systems and Concepts Office*, published October 31, 2006, <http://www.fas.org/irp/agency/dod/dtra/russia.pdf>, 3.

Strategic Culture

Russian strategic culture is informed by the early periods discussed in the previous chapter. Early on, their “physical and ethnographic geography” and a lack of “established and defensible borders” made them vulnerable to neighboring empires.²⁰ This consistent external threat from invading empires to the west, south, and east forced Russian leaders to develop a strong military capable of defending their interests. Additionally, an increasing desire to ascend to the ranks of the great European empires inspired Russian leaders to take on their own imperialistic strategy. The consistent exterior threats, an early move toward imperialism, and a large population capable of providing much-needed manpower to the defense establishment has ingrained national militarization into Russian strategic culture. This allowed for increasing expansionism that saw Russia draw in surrounding regions that gave Russia – a nation lacking natural barriers to invasion – a buffer against those seeking to conquer it. The expansion also provided Russia, a nation lacking a warm water port with ready access to the Mediterranean, access to the port of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea.

A Russian perception of ethnic and nationalist exceptionalism over neighboring ethnic and religious groups further encourages the expansion of Russian influence into these areas. The Russian institution views Russian and Slavic values and security as superior to the values and security of their neighbors and former Soviet member nations. This has been evidenced throughout history as Russia seized these nations and used their resources and manpower to prop up the Russian state through the present day as Russia seeks to continue to influence events in neighboring nations. In more recent cases, these countries and their

²⁰ Ibid, 4.

citizens have been subjected to Russian interference in national politics and economics. In the older cases, which were decidedly more extreme, entire crops were seized resulting in a deadly famine for whole ethnic groups (especially Ukrainians) while other minority groups were subjected to a calculated campaign of relocation and even in some cases extermination.

In the period prior to World War II (WWII) Russians faced a new threat that they perceived as being dangerous to their culture and well being along with their recently adopted Marxist-Leninist ideology. The new threat was capitalism and Western influence, which resulted in a newly developed component to Russian strategic culture. This aversion to Western influence has been a central Russian focus for the better part of the last century and has influenced various strategic steps and policies during WWII, the Cold War, and the present day. Russia perceives itself as an ethnically and nationally superior entity that should wield significant influence over regional and global interests. Russia also views sovereignty as a “fundamental organizing principle of the international system” and its leaders are “opposed to everything that can undermine the nation state.”²¹ This mindset has put them at odds with the influence wielded by the United States (US), European Union (EU), and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), causing both the Cold War and a recent uptick in tensions. As more former Soviet and Warsaw Pact member nations continue to move toward the West this aversion could become even more pronounced and further increase tensions with the West.

Russia views itself as deserving a place on the international stage, similar to the power they wielded towards the end of and after WWII. They believe their superpower

²¹ Lyudmila Igumnova, “Russia’s Strategic Culture Between American and European Worldviews,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 24 (2011), 256

status should be comparable to the influence held by Western nations, including the US. They view themselves as “indispensable in solving key contemporary security problems” and believe they should have a role in the “implementation of the international agenda, as well as in its development.”²² This belief has manifested itself in Russian action in Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine, where Russia made itself the central component for the “solution” of issues they had themselves created. In Syria they are ensuring they play a central role in any solution to the civil war and the issue of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Russian Military Strategy

Russian military strategy has always been used to cement Russian power in regions they wish to control or whose desires for independence need to be suppressed. Toward the end of WWII Russia used the collapse of Germany and military power to “free” many nations under Germany’s power and then impose Russian political will onto them, resulting in the establishment of many Soviet and Warsaw Pact member states. Some nations that had not been “freed” from German rule were simply invaded by Russian forces and forced into the Soviet sphere against their will. In the post-Cold War period Russia used military power against Chechnya, a Russian Republic, twice, in order to suppress a push for independence and in response to Chechen separatist attacks on Russian targets. It is in the Chechen example that Russia best shows their willingness to use their military power to indiscriminately target civilians. Representatives from Human Rights Watch have testified to the Russian campaign that included carpet bombing, artillery including surface to surface

²² Ibid, 257.

rockets, and the siege and destructions of many cities and towns causing widespread human atrocities for the civilians who were able to survive.²³

In recent years Russian military strategy has mostly, though not entirely, eased up on conventional tactics. Instead, they have focused on what many perceive as an attempt to counter Western influence and draw countries previously under Soviet influence back into the Russian sphere of influence. Some have even pointed out that the tactics are a return to Cold War methods.²⁴ Russia's assertion in its 2016 national security strategy that NATO expansion toward Russian borders poses a threat to Russian security seems to strengthen the idea that Russian leaders view Western action as a threat that must be countered.²⁵ These realities have resulted in a consistent uptick in Russian military spending, even when the economy is struggling.

According to the World Bank, Russian military expenditure as a percentage of its GDP reached 4.5 percent in 2014, the highest it has been since 1994 when the number was 4.9 percent.²⁶ The current estimates by journalists place the 2015 military expenditures

²³ Peter Bouckaert, "War Crimes in Chechnya and the Response of the West: Testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations," *Human Rights Watch*, published February 29, 2000, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2000/02/29/war-crimes-chechnya-and-response-west>.

²⁴ Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 246.

²⁵ "Russia's national security strategy for 2016 in 9 key points," *RT*, published December 31, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/327608-russia-national-security-strategy/>.

²⁶ Data exported from The World Bank World DataBank World Development Indicators using the variables of Russia, military expenditure (% of GDP), and time frame of 1992 to 2014, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>.

around 4.3 percent of GDP,²⁷ though the World Bank has yet to release the figures. When looking at dollar amounts, Russian military spending in 2014 reached \$3.25 trillion rubles (or almost \$42.2 billion USD based on current exchange rates)²⁸ and increased to \$54.1 billion USD in 2015.²⁹ This is a significant increase from the 1992 amounts of \$904 million rubles, or roughly \$12.58 million USD. The increased GDP has allowed Russia to rebuild their military and expand operations.

Under Putin, Russia has undertaken military operations in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine. Russia has also provided military aid in the form of manpower and artillery pieces and Russian indirect fire to separatist forces in Ukraine fighting the government in their civil war as well as material and physical support to Bashar al Assad in Syria based on the premise of targeting ISIS. Beginning in 2007, the military has returned to Cold War-style bomber runs along Western nations' borders and Putin proclaimed that they could afford round the clock operations by their nuclear bombers.³⁰ More recently they have participated in aggressive maneuvers targeting Western aircraft and have been accused of violating several nations' territorial waters utilizing submarines. As the Russian military expands its operations, it is not unreasonable to see an attempted expansion of access to foreign military facilities. The takeover of Crimea gave Russia ownership of Sevastopol, a naval base previously leased from Ukraine that is home to their Black Sea Fleet and is a valuable warm

²⁷ Anatoly Zhdanov, "Russia defense spending hits 10-year high," *CNBC*, published December 16, 2015, <http://www.cnbc.com/2015/12/16/russia-defense-spending-hits-10-year-high.html>.

²⁸ Data exported from The World Bank World DataBank World Development Indicators using the variables of Russia, military expenditure (current LCU), and time frame of 1992 to 2014, <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=world-development-indicators>.

²⁹ Zhdanov, "Russia defense spending hits 10-year high."

³⁰ Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, 246.

water port with access to the Mediterranean. Actions in Syria also ensure that Russia maintains access to its naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, which is small yet significant because it prevents Russian forces from being blockaded in the Bosphorus Strait by Turkey.

Russian Information Warfare Strategy

Information warfare has become central to Russian strategy with U.S. leaders accusing Russia of “waging ‘the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare’.”³¹ Russians themselves have also affirmed their stance on information warfare by identifying it as one of the key components of their 2016 national security strategy.³² While there are many components and manifestations of information warfare, the primary goal is simple: use propaganda, distortion, subversion, and every other information tactic, no matter how seemingly laughable, to turn Russian strategy into reality. Russia has used the expected tactics of state owned media, which will be referenced when relevant in this and other chapters to explain the Russian perspective, but has also taken advantage of social media to spread its message.

The concept of *maskirovka* is the primary component of Russian information warfare and is central to the Russian strategy and mindset. The term itself refers to “camouflage, concealment, deception, imitation, disinformation, secrecy, security, feints, diversions, and simulation” and has incredibly broad applications.³³ It is said to date back to the Battle of Kulikovo Field in 1320 when Dmitri Ivanovich divided his fighters into two groups, those

³¹ Peter Pomerantsev, “Russia and the Menace of Unreality,” *The Atlantic*, published September 9, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>.

³² “Russia’s national security strategy for 2016 in 9 key points.”

³³ Charles L. Smith, “Soviet Maskirovko,” *Airpower Journal* (Spring 1988), <http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj88/spr88/smith.html>.

mounted in an open field to draw the Mongols into attack and those hiding in the forest to ambush the Mongol forces attacking the soldiers in the field. The tactic has been used in nearly every Russian military advancement, including to conceal the development of weapons, and every application of Russian power and influence; maskirovka is ingrained in Russian operations and strategy.³⁴

The deception has been integrated into Soviet planning and operations on multiple occasions. It has also been integrated into military operations, diplomatic efforts, information operations, and economic strategy. Sometimes it has been a great undertaking, including the ongoing Russian denial of involvement in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight 17 over Ukraine.³⁵ Russian media, particularly the outlet formerly known as Russia Today but now simply known as RT,³⁶ have repeated Kremlin claims that neither Russia nor Ukrainian separatists are responsible for shooting down the plane. They claim Ukraine, not Russia, owns the weapons system in question, that they possess radar data placing culpability on a Ukrainian fighter, that it was actually an air to air missile instead of a Buk surface to air missile (SAM), and that a SAM could not have shot down the plane from separatist controlled Ukraine.³⁷ At other times, it has been a simpler process of sending Russian troops into Crimea without insignia on their uniforms and then vehemently denying that they are

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “MH17 downed in Ukraine: What has happened in 365 days since the crash,” *RT*, published July 17, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/310089-ukraine-mh17-crash-timeline/>.

³⁶ RT has no other published meaning. In fact, their “About Us” and “Contact Info” pages on their website provide minimal indications of any Russian links only stating at the end of the second paragraph that they “acquaint an international audience with the Russian viewpoint.” This should be read primarily as western, since their three broadcast languages are English, Spanish, and Arabic and they have listed both U.S. and London offices. While no offices are listed openly as being in Russia, their reception, producer, and press office phone numbers all feature Moscow area codes and a physical address is notably absent.

³⁷ “MH17 downed in Ukraine: What has happened in 365 days since the crash.”

Russian.³⁸ In the most simplistic of applications, maskirovka has involved the application of a mask covering the face of the Russian provocateur and the utter shock that anyone would question the wearer's identity and the purpose of their mask.³⁹

Early in the conflict in Ukraine Joergen Moeller, a Danish geopolitical scholar, accurately predicted the trajectory of Russian action aimed at Ukraine, specifically the implementation of maskirovka. He identified the utilization of a Russian propaganda campaign to justify the annexation of Crimea, and the likely use of manufactured unrest in eastern and southern Ukraine through the insertion of troops disguised as militia as grounds to declare Russia as the protector of minority Russians in Ukraine.⁴⁰ Russia also used the guise of non-Red Cross approved aid convoys and Ukrainian aggression toward minority Russians as justification for their involvement. These actions solidify their position as liberators amongst their allies, shine a negative light on the actions of their adversaries, and create a propaganda machine painting themselves as the "good guys."

Russian strategy has included significant amounts of measured subversion in former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations since the dissolution of the USSR. This dissatisfaction with their former allies is highlighted in the national security strategy for 2016, which specifically identifies "color revolutions" and the "radical social groups which use nationalist and religious extremist ideologies, foreign and international NGOs, and also private citizens' who

³⁸ Lucy Ash, "How Russia outfoxes its enemies," *BBC News*, published January 29, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283>.

³⁹ Mark Thompson, "The 600 Years of History Behind Those Ukrainian Masks," *Time*, published April 17, 2014, <http://time.com/67419/the-600-years-of-history-behind-those-ukrainian-masks/>.

⁴⁰ Joergen O. Moeller, "Maskirovka: Russia's Masterful Use of Deception in Ukraine," *Huffington Post*, published April 23, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joergen-oerstroem-moeller/maskirovka-russias-master_b_5199545.html.

work to undermine Russia's territorial integrity and destabilized political processes" as some of the key threats to national security.⁴¹ Russia has already enacted measures to address these security concerns, including propping up Russian backed regimes in former Soviet and Warsaw Pact countries and enacting legislation meant to punish those who choose to push back.

In nations aligned with EU and NATO where Russia must act more cautiously to avoid further confrontations, the preferred course of action seems to be subversion. Russian President Vladimir Putin has declared on numerous occasions that Russia reserves the right to defend the interests and rights of ethnic Russians abroad.⁴² This policy has served as the basis for intervention in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine when the Russians finally admitted to their involvement. These campaigns have been based heavily on the concept of maskirovka. Russia used a puppet president to move Ukraine away from the EU and NATO and toward the Russian orbit, causing protests. Then, they "sowed chaos" in Ukraine by inserting Russian forces dressed as separatists and provide military weapons to the actual separatists, held "elections" in Crimea, and toyed with the national economy.⁴³ World leaders have expressed concern over similarly styled campaigns of subversion occurring in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia,⁴⁴ as have Polish leaders.⁴⁵

⁴¹ "Russia's national security strategy for 2016 in 9 key points."

⁴² "Transcript: Putin says Russia will protect the rights of Russians abroad," *The Washington Post*, published March 18, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russia-will-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html.

⁴³ Carol J. Williams, "New Polish president demands better NATO protection from Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, published August 6, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-poland-president-nato-russia-20150806-story.html>.

⁴⁴ "Russia 'danger' to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia – Fallon," *BBC News*, published February 19, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31528981>.

Russian Economic Strategy

Russian strategy utilizes economic power in the form of their energy market to exert pressure on neighboring nations. Putin has declared that Russia's energy market will establish the nation as a "great energy power, even an energy superpower," and has clearly indicated through his actions that the nation will monopolize every aspect of the industry from extraction to distribution and marketing.⁴⁶ Russia has, on multiple occasions, utilized the availability of gas to the European continent to influence events in the region, usually as they relate to Ukrainian relations since the pipelines pass through Ukraine. The manipulation of available gas to the region has been ongoing since the 1990s and tends to occur in the winter. It is perceived as punishment for the West for drawing in former Russian allies, and Ukraine for seeking strengthened partnerships with Western nations and organizations. As tensions between Russia and Ukraine have increased so has the utilization of natural gas as a leverage for Russia against the West and Ukraine, and more recently to punish Ukrainians for removing Russian-backed president Viktor Yanukovich from power.⁴⁷

Russian Foreign Policy Strategy

In addition to military and economic pressure and the more subtle campaigns of subversion undertaken by the Russian state, Russian foreign policy has begun establishing more overt methods of influencing neighboring nations. The two most significant strategies have been the establishment of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization

⁴⁵ Williams, "New Polish president demands better NATO protection from Russia."

⁴⁶ Lucas, *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, 15

⁴⁷ Steven Erlanger, "Russia Ratchets Up Ukraine's Gas Bills in Shift to an Economic Battlefield," *New York Times*, published May 14, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/world/europe/russia-ratchets-up-ukraines-gas-bills-in-shift-to-an-economic-battlefield.html?_r=0.

(CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Both of these organizations are comprised of and have courted former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations and their allies, including Ukraine. In fact, Russian pressure on Ukraine to join the EEU was believed to be a contributor to the decision in 2013 to end the Ukrainian alignment with the EU. This led directly to the Orange Revolution, Ukraine's turn back toward Europe, and Russia's subsequent intervention in separatist provinces in the Donetks River Basin region of eastern Ukraine.

The CSTO was founded in 1992 and is meant to be the Russian response to NATO. It originally included Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. However, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan have all departed the organization. In reality, the organization is largely ineffective and primarily serves as a method for Russia to control former allies and maintain access to military bases in the region. The EEU treaty was signed in May 2014 and includes Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Similar to the CSTO, the EEU is Russia's response to the EU and is meant to strengthen the economic positions of the involved countries, particularly Russia. The EEU allows a more effective method for establishing trade relations with other nations, and would have benefitted greatly from diversification provided by the Ukrainian economy.

Russian strategy is built of many traditional components, diplomacy, military engagement, economic influence, and information management. Like many nations, they draw these elements together when implementing strategic goals. Unlike other nations that are mostly or fully developed, Russia takes an underhanded and highly aggressive approach to its strategy. The level of subversion that Russian leaders are willing to undertake to

achieve strategic goals is not considered acceptable by international standards, and the decision to invade Ukraine and annex Crimea runs totally contrary to the laws governing invasion of sovereign nations. Both Ukraine and Syria provide excellent examples of Russian strategy at work in two different yet similarly motivated scenarios.

POST-COLD WAR INTERVENTIONISM

“It is alarming that military intervention in internal conflicts in foreign countries has become commonplace for the United States.”
Vladimir Putin (Russian President)⁴⁸

Nowhere has Russian strategy been more clearly manifest over the 19th and 20th centuries than it has in Europe. Europe, particularly in the aftermath of World War II (WWII), opened the door for Russia to rise to its long-sought status of global superpower. The United States (US) and its European allies posed the single most significant threat to Russia’s power and influence during the Cold War. After a 45-year struggle, the US, supported by its European and other allies, brought about the collapse of Russia’s empire in 1991. The Europeans then encroached upon the fragments of that empire by expanding through the European Union (EU) and with the U.S. through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union were economically, militarily, and strategically devastating for Russian leaders; and the rapid altering of the European landscape in the post-Cold War period was a painful and constant reminder of that. Thus it makes sense that as Russia’s military strengthens and its economy surges in a way not seen in decades, Russia would seek to reassert itself in what it views as territory stolen from it by the West.

The Post-Cold War European Landscape

The end of the Cold War significantly altered the geography of Europe in both the short and long term. These alterations included the dissolution of four nations and the creation or independence of fourteen. The changes also opened doors to the inclusion of

⁴⁸ This statement was made in a New York Times op-ed in September 2013, shortly before intervention in Ukraine.

many former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations in both the EU and NATO. Some of these former Eastern Bloc states, particularly Warsaw Pact countries and the Baltic States were quick to alter the political landscapes of their countries to fit their own wants and needs, in most cases moving pointedly toward democracy. Citizens in other nations also sought, and at times protested for, these democratic shifts in the post-Cold War period. The success of the former Eastern Bloc nations has varied widely and resulted in tense stand-offs between citizens, elected officials, and Russian entities.

The end of the Cold War was caused by many factors; economic decline, last Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* (restructuring) and *glasnost* (openness), and discontent among citizens in member nations who began to push back against the Russian leadership. The initial changes included East Germany's collapse and immediate integration with West Germany on October 3, 1990. The reunification of Germany resulted in former East Germany's automatic acceptance into both the EU and NATO, the first of many former Eastern Bloc nations to join the ranks of these traditionally Western organizations. In 1991 the collapse of the Soviet Union destroyed that state and created fifteen new ones, including Russia. Of these, eight were in Eurasia and six – Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, and Ukraine – were in Europe. Finally, in 1993 Czechoslovakia divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Yugoslavia, a communist nation that chose to not align with either the Warsaw Pact or the West during the Cold War also began breaking apart in 1991 and ultimately comprised six states and the disputed territory of Kosovo in Serbia.

The inclusion of former Warsaw Pact nations – Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania –

into NATO and the EU began a decade prior to the inclusion of any former Soviet States. The first expansion occurred in 1999 with NATO accepting the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. In 2004 NATO and EU saw the largest combined expansion. NATO expanded to include the former Warsaw Pact nations of Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia. The EU also began accepting former Warsaw Pact nations in 2004, allowing entrance to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Additionally, 2004 saw the first, and so far only, former Soviet States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania join both NATO and the EU. In 2007 Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU, and in 2009 Albania became a NATO member nation. Currently the only former Eastern Bloc nation that is a candidate for membership to the EU is Albania. Moldova has also sought closer ties with the EU, signing an association agreement in June 2014.

In the past both Georgia and Ukraine have sought membership to either NATO or the EU. Georgia had become a Partnership for Peace member nation of NATO, but the issue of its geographic distance from Europe and conflict with Russia stopped its full membership in NATO. Ukraine has not yet sought membership in NATO, although recent polling indicates that 64% of Ukrainian respondents would support joining the alliance and political shifts in Ukraine indicate a desire to join NATO.⁴⁹ In 2013 Ukraine, under then President Viktor Yanukovich, seemed poised to sign an association agreement with the EU. In November of 2013 Yanukovich chose instead to move away from the EU and strengthen ties with Russia, sparking protests in the capital. He fled Ukraine for Russia in February 2014 as a result of the situation, and in June 2014 the agreement was signed between current President Petro

⁴⁹ Ievgen Vorobiov, "Surprise! Ukraine Loves NATO," *Foreign Policy*, published August 13, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/08/13/surprise-ukraine-loves-nato/>.

Poroshenko and the EU. This association agreement allows for the possibility of Ukraine becoming a candidate nation should they meet certain thresholds for candidacy, though it is not currently an EU candidate. Georgia is also not currently an EU candidate, though the EU does consider Georgia a European country, which could open the door to expansion.

A final component in the changing European landscape in the post-Cold War period has been the occurrence of Color Revolutions from 2003 to 2005 in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. These revolutions were considered electoral in that the protestors demanded that their leadership not steal elections, that they accept the candidates elected by the populace, and that they transfer power to the democratically elected candidates.⁵⁰ Ukraine and Georgia saw some short-term advantages of the revolutions, but true reform never fully took hold. In recent years both nations have tried to correct their political systems, but democratic institutions still struggle in those nations. Ultimately, the revolutions have had largely the opposite effect, with the leadership in many former Soviet states that never experienced their own Color Revolutions, including Russia, enacting laws meant to prevent future Color Revolutions. In fact, Putin has gone so far as to say that Moscow must prevent a Color Revolution in the country, stating: “in the modern world extremism is being used as a geopolitical instrument and for remaking spheres of influence. We see what tragic consequences the wave of so-called color revolutions led to... for us this is a lesson and a warning. We should do everything necessary so that nothing similar ever happens in

⁵⁰ Vitali Silitski, “A Year After the Color Revolutions: Preemptive Authoritarianism and Challenges for Democratization in the Former Soviet Union,” *PONARS Policy Memo No. 376 - Center for Strategic and International Studies*, published December 2005, http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/pm_0376.pdf, 57.

Russia.”⁵¹ This statement indicates the perspective of Russian leadership on the impact of Color Revolutions on their own sphere of influence, and provides an interesting lens through which to view events in Georgia in 2008, and more recent events in Eastern Europe in general, and within Ukraine and Crimea in particular.

Georgia as an Indicator

On the surface, the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia seems moderately justifiable. Georgia had denied independence to Abkhazia and South Ossetia, breakaway provinces supported by Russia and occupied by Russian peacekeepers since 1992. In 2008 Georgia fired the proverbial first shot when its military shelled the South Ossetian capital and sent troops into the province, reportedly killing South Ossetian citizens and Russian peacekeepers in the process. The Russian response was an invasion meant to protect South Ossetian interests against Georgian aggression. Most accounts of the invasion leave out many relevant facts and fail to account for the long and tense history between Georgia and Russia.

Georgia’s national identity can be traced back to the fourth and fifth centuries, but the country’s first significant historical interaction with Russia did not occur until a late 18th century treaty in which Russia guaranteed protection to Georgia against Persian invaders. This treaty allowed what has been described by the EU as “paving the way for further steps of Russian domination, both in terms of depth and space, finally leading to the complete integration of Georgia into the Russian Empire from 1881 until 1917.”⁵² Georgia became

⁵¹ Darya Korsunskaya, “Putin says Russia must prevent ‘color revolution’,” *Reuters*, published November 20, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-security-idUSKCN0J41J620141120>.

⁵² “Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,” *Council of the European Union*, published September 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/30_09_09_iiffmgc_report.pdf, 12.

independent once again from 1917-1921, when it was forced into the USSR, where it remained until declaring independence in April, 1991. Almost immediately thereafter, conflict erupted in Georgia over the status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both of which desired independence from Georgia and a close association with Russia. The Russians took on the role of peacekeepers in 1993 in the region, ensuring a cease fire was maintained and acting in accordance with the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMG). This, along with numerous incidents and “unfriendly” and even “bellicose rhetoric” resulted in “continued deterioration” in relations between the two countries.⁵³ One of the more significant issues was the decision by Russia in 2002 to undertake a “passportisation” [sic] policy. This included the “mass conferral of Russian citizenship and consequently passports” to citizens of South Ossetia and Abkhaz, but it lacked any legal basis outside of Russia and could be considered a violation of Georgian sovereignty.⁵⁴

In the months leading up to the 2008 invasion, tensions had been rapidly increasing. Georgian UAVs had been shot down by both Abkhaz and Russian forces. Beginning in April of that year Russian forces reinforced troops already in the region, and naval forces were positioned in the Black Sea while troops were massed along the border for exercises. In the summer there were bombings in Abkhazia, explosions in Georgia, subversive attacks between Georgia and South Ossetia, and the exchange of mortar and artillery fire between the two sides. In early August South Ossetia began evacuating civilians to the Russian side of the border, and then on the night of August 7-8 Georgia began a heavy artillery bombardment of South Ossetia. Georgia claims Russian forces were already in the country

⁵³ Ibid, 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 18.

when the operation began with a buildup having begun in July. The Russians claim they did not commit forces until immediately following a decision by Russian leadership to intervene. On 10 August Georgia declared a unilateral ceasefire and announced the intention to withdraw troops from South Ossetia, a process that was almost completed by 11 August. As Georgian forces retreated, Russian forces entered Georgian territory and occupied some towns. Simultaneously, Russian and Abkhaz forces entered Georgia from the west and seized undefended Georgian territory. The cease fire occurred on 12 August, but some Russian forces are reported to have remained in Georgia as late as October 2008.⁵⁵

The EU fact-finding mission determined that initial Georgian hostilities were not justifiable under international law because they were neither justified, necessary, or proportional, particularly the use of heavy artillery to bombard a village.⁵⁶ The EU also determined that elements of the South Ossetian, Russian, and Abkhaz response were not justifiable under international law, particularly the operations in Georgia, the involvement of naval forces, and any operations undertaken following the 12 August cease fire.⁵⁷

Russian subversion began in Georgia almost immediately following Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union, and experienced a notable increase in the 21st century as Georgia attempted to align itself more closely with the West. The EU fact-finding mission was never able to prove a movement of Russian forces in South Ossetia prior to the Georgian shelling on 7/8 August, although they did substantiate an abnormal, though not illegal, buildup of Russian military assets across the border. This buildup, along with the introduction of air and naval combatant capabilities to the theater, dramatically increased

⁵⁵ Ibid, 22.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 23-25.

already high Georgian concerns regarding Russian intervention. In addition to the build of Russian assets and equipment in the region, Russian authorities undertook multiple other measures that give the appearance of premeditation. The counter-invasion began shortly after the Georgian shelling of South Ossetia, causing some to characterize the attack as “carefully planned and competently executed” and indicating that the Russians were expecting the attack.⁵⁸ By 10 August Russian forces had launched an invasion from two points, bombed military airfields, disabled radars, and attacked numerous other targets, including civilian ones, in Georgia using both aircraft and naval bombardments.

More significant than the prepositioning of Russian forces was the “coordinated cyberspace domain attack” that began three weeks prior to the conventional war and was “synchronized with major combat actions” in three conventional domains.⁵⁹ It has been pointed out that the cyber offensive was coordinated in Russian web sites, chat rooms, and various other networks and that a test run was conducted in July.⁶⁰ When the ground attack was launched, Georgian websites used for communication, finance, and government were all taken offline by attacks, preventing citizens from accessing information and Georgian authorities from communicating effectively both inside and outside the country.⁶¹ The control of information in and exiting Georgia allowed Russian authorities to frame the issue in their own way, including the accusation that Georgia was conducting a genocide against the South Ossetians with 2,000 dead in the earliest periods of the conflict (the actual final

⁵⁸ George Friedman, “The Russ-Georgian War and the Balance of Power,” *STRATFOR*, published August 12, 2008, https://www.stratfor.com/weekly/russo_georgian_war_and_balance_power.

⁵⁹ David Hollis, “Cyberwar Case Study: Georgia 2008,” *Small Wars Journal*, published January 6, 2011, 2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 2.

casualty numbers indicated a total of 850 people between all sides, 162 of whom were South Ossetian civilians).⁶²

The components of the conflict between Russia and Georgia are both long and complicated, but they are incredibly telling of Russian strategy regarding protection of ethnic Russians and use of information warfare and maskirovka. Additionally, they serve as a clear precursor to Russian subversion and intervention in Crimea and Ukraine five years later, with Marvin Kalb writing “the curtain actually rose on Putin’s intervention in Ukraine in the summer of 2008.”⁶³ While the EU ruled that the Georgian justification for the initial attack was unfounded, the possibility that Russian leaders manipulated Georgian officials into attacking and giving Russia justification to launch a counter-invasion is not unreasonable. In fact, Russian actions indicate that forcing a Georgian action that would justify a counterattack may have been the plan all along. This probably served two purposes. First, it allowed Russia to reassert itself militarily and remind the international community that it still wields power in the near abroad.⁶⁴ Second, it allowed Russia to measure the willingness of the international community to respond to blatant disregard of international law and determine if NATO and the West would be willing to respond militarily, an action Putin properly assessed they would not take.⁶⁵ Ultimately, the Russian action in Georgia was, as Kalb describes it, a test run for future military action in the near abroad.

⁶² “Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia,” 5 & 21.

⁶³ Marvin Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2015), 229.

⁶⁴ The near abroad is a term developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union to describe former Soviet States.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Initial Involvement in Ukraine (November 2013)

As mentioned previously, Russian involvement in Ukraine goes back to the earliest period of Russian existence with the two nations' histories intersecting at various points and periods of time. Little Russia and Novorossiya (new Russia), as Ukraine has been called by Russian authorities, is considered by Kremlin leadership to be part of Russia.⁶⁶ However, many people within and beyond Ukraine hold a different perspective. They view Ukraine as having a distinct history, culture, and national identity. This is not to say that Russian and Ukrainian history have not intersected; in fact they have intersected to the point that feelings about relations between the two nations are split. In southern and eastern Ukrainian citizens identify more strongly with Russia, while in central and western Ukraine one finds nationalistic Ukrainians who prefer to align with the West. Notably, the 2001 census found that only Crimea was majority ethnic Russian, while eastern and southern Ukraine were 50 percent to 90 percent Ukrainian, and western and central Ukraine were comprised of 90 percent to 100 percent ethnic Ukrainians.⁶⁷ This makes it clear that, counter to Russian propaganda inextricably linking Ukraine to Russia, Ukraine is an independent nation with a history and culture that exists separate of Russia's.

The state of relations between Russia and Ukraine has varied greatly from the fall of the Soviet Union to the present day. Different elected officials have caused Ukraine to shift its focus from East to West, at times managing to balance the two sides. In the period immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk managed to build relations with both Russia and the West, including a Nuclear

⁶⁶ Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 23.

Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Budapest Memorandum guaranteeing Ukrainian sovereignty. He was not, however, able to strengthen the nation economically. Kravchuk's successor, President Leonid Kuchma, ran as sympathetic to eastern Ukrainian concerns and issues, but instead enacted a constitution that did not allow dual citizenship or identify Russian as a state language. Kuchma moved to end Crimean separatism and abolished the Crimean presidential office. He also awarded Russia a 20-year lease on the port of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula. Additionally, Kuchma initially shunned the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) in favor of closer ties with NATO and the EU, with the goal of joining both organizations. Corruption and election rigging became the downfall of Kuchma's alignment with the West. In 2002 he began negotiating membership with the EEC and in 2003 began affiliating himself with CIS. In 2004 following a meeting with Putin he shifted away from NATO and toward Russia. Much as it had with Kravchuk, Ukraine suffered economically under Kuchma.

In late 2004 presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko lost the presidential runoff in what was widely considered a rigged election. Yushchenko was an ethnic Ukrainian hailing from eastern Ukraine, and his run was so greatly opposed by the existing government in Ukraine that they targeted and even tried to poison him in an attempt to thwart his presidential bid. His opponent, Viktor Yanukovich, was initially declared as the victor in the election, the results of which were ultimately thrown out. The Orange Revolution served as the catalyst for this political shift with Ukrainians protesting in Kyiv's independence square (the "Maidan") for political change. The result of these protests was a new election in which

Yushchenko was elected, and a constitutional change was made to shift power from the President to Parliament.

In the intervening years Ukraine continued to experience difficulties. Infighting between Yushchenko and other government officials resulted in the position of Prime Minister changing hands two times in two years, continuous division, and rampant corruption. During this period Yushchenko also tried to achieve a more significant role on the global stage by expressing interest in both EU and NATO partnerships, and expressed a strong sense of Ukrainian nationalism in ways that undermined Russian influence. Yushchenko's anti-Russian sentiment and Ukraine's poor economic performance played a role in the economic and diplomatic sparring over natural gas with Russia that began in 2006. Since the Cold War Russia provided its gas to its friends and allies at a heavy discount. The continuance of the policy in the post-Cold War period allowed Russia a form of leverage to hold former allies close and encourage them to maintain the relationship. Yushchenko's decision to break with Russia resulted in a 2006 price hike that was quickly resolved with little issue and a three year deal. In 2009, on the heels of a failed new deal, Russia cut gas entirely to Europe via Ukraine in the midst of winter. The result ended up being a new ten year deal with terms that would continue to result in conflict during ensuing years. The lack of cooperation amongst the government, issues of corruption, and economic challenges resulted in Yushchenko losing reelection in 2010 to his old rival, Yanukovich.

Yanukovich took a predictably hard turn toward Russia, creating concern among nationalist Ukrainians. His signature on a 2012 law that allowed city and regional officials to make Russian their official language if at least ten percent of their citizens claimed to be native speakers further raised concerns. As corruption and economic difficulties continued,

Yanukovich began to entertain closer association with the EU that would strengthen their economic standing, although it went against the wishes of Russian leadership. In November 2013 Yanukovich abruptly ended the negotiations for an Association Agreement whose signature was imminent in favor of a turn toward Russia and a promised \$15 billion aid package. This decision became a Black Swan of sorts for Ukraine: an entirely unpredicted event that, while seemingly normal or minor, changes the course of geopolitics.⁶⁸ After decades of economic challenges and political corruption, all of which had been largely unaffected by previous protests and demands for reform, the country erupted into what would rapidly become a civil war over an event that was just a repeat of former policies.

On November 21 protestors occupied the Maidan in what quickly became termed the Euromaidan protests. These started small and peaceful, filled with citizens, particularly younger Ukrainians, who were there to oppose the turn from West to East. In the movie “Winter on Fire,” one young man interviewed in the Maidan says he came to protest because “our government crossed out the future of Ukraine, and the aspirations of Ukrainian youth. I came here to defend my future, the future of my children, compatriots and country.”⁶⁹ The mood was jovial, with video footage showing the Maidan full of people cheering and dancing. Ukrainian citizens waved the flags of Ukraine and the EU chanting “Ukraine is part of Europe” and “together till the end”; those present described the mood to be like a

⁶⁸ David Keyes, “The Middle East’s ‘Black Swan’,” *Reuters*, published January 29, 2011, <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2011/01/28/the-middle-east%E2%80%99s-black-swan/>.

⁶⁹ *Winter on Fire: Ukraine’s Fight for Freedom*, directed by Evgeny Afineevsky (2015; filmed in Kyiv Ukraine: Netflix), streaming video.

festival and not a protest.⁷⁰ The protestors were demanding that Yanukovich sign the association agreement and many felt as though they were duplicating the Orange Revolution.

On 29 November the protest took a sharp turn as police and the Berkut, a Ukrainian special police force with a history of violent crackdowns, began encircling the protestors. Video footage shows police in riot gear with shields and batons corralling chanting protestors. Officers can be seen using batons to beat protestors who were backing away or already on the ground, some of whom had head and face injuries. By 30 November the Maidan was largely empty, with remaining protestors having moved to St. Michaels Golden-Domed Monastery. The protestors filled the monastery to capacity, setting up food, medical, and legal aid stations. Shortly after they returned to the Maidan as an estimated 800,000 Ukrainians poured into Kyiv to protest the brutality.⁷¹ Polling and sentiments expressed to journalists showed they felt they were no longer protesting primarily for European integration but rather against the government repression of protestors.⁷² These protestors, many of who were unmasked and in plain clothes, marched on the Presidential Palace demanding change and peaceful revolution. Future President Petro Poroshenko stood on a bulldozer used to challenge the police line saying “if we want revolution we need to involve them, not hit them.”⁷³ Others, said by multiple sources to be provocateurs inserted by government forces to discredit the movement, were masked and instigated confrontations

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 79.

⁷² “Maidan-December and Maidan-February: what has changed?” *Democratic Initiative*, accessed March 5, 2016, <http://dif.org.ua/en/events/vid-ma-zminilosj.htm>.

⁷³ *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom*.

with police.⁷⁴ Allegations even exist that one of the men who framed himself as a “Ukrainian Nationalist Leader,” Dmytro Korchynsky, actually had close ties to the Kremlin and often spoke at pro-Putin summer camps in Russia.⁷⁵ The provocateurs used the tractor to push down the concrete barricades police were behind, and wielded rocks and chains. The provocation resulted in a significantly more brutal police response that began with stun grenades and tear gas. By nightfall police could be seen in footage using batons to brutally beat random Ukrainians who they came upon, some lying in the streets trying to cover their heads.

On 2 December the protesters decided to remain in the Maidan until their demands were heard. They were joined by military reservists and retirees and began building barricades and setting up aid stations providing food and warm clothes. On 10 December leaders from the EU and United States, including Secretary of State John Kerry, meet with Yanukovych to try to find a solution. During the meeting protestors were again surrounded by police and Berkut wearing body armor and helmets and carrying shields, to clear the Maidan. Clergy was present and protest leaders asked police to not intervene. As police began dismantling the barricades, female protesters were placed in the center of the crowd as men tried to create a human shield. Ukrainian police and Berkut began forcing their way among the protestors as the protestors responded with the Ukrainian national anthem. St. Michaels Monastery began ringing all its bells in solidarity with the Maidan, an act that had not been seen since 1240 when Mongol-Tartars invaded Kyiv.⁷⁶ The bells served as a call,

⁷⁴ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 69.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom.*

and citizens of Kyiv poured into the city center, forcing the police and Berkut to retreat without violence. Following the meeting and the ringing of the bells Kerry released a statement condemning the violence and pronouncing that the official response “is neither acceptable nor does it befit a democracy.”⁷⁷ He closed with the words, “As church bells ring tonight... the United States stands with the people of Ukraine.”⁷⁸

After that the Euromaidan organized, building barriers, training for defense, and demanding a change from the government. On 17 December Yanukovich and Putin signed the Ukrainian-Russian Action Plan that included the \$15 billion in aid in the form of bond purchases. Over the next month clashes between protestors and Berkut continued with human rights abuses occurring regularly. On 16 January 2014 anti-protest laws were passed by the Parliament in a show of hands vote. The laws would ban many elements of the protest to that point, including wearing masks and helmets, and result in jail time for those who disobeyed. As January wore on the violence escalated with police, Berkut, and by that point Internal Forces who served as a military force fulfilling emergency police duties participating in the protest response. Government forces raided and destroyed a Red Cross medical station, driving all the aid workers out. They also began changing out their rubber bullets for real bullets, and taping pieces of shrapnel (including nails and bolts) to stun grenades. The protestors for their part had increased the use of improvised weapons, including bricks and Molotov cocktails, in response to government forces. At the end of January much of Parliament stepped down and the anti-protest laws were rescinded.

⁷⁷ John Kerry, “Statement on Events in Ukraine,” *U.S. Department of State*, published December 10, 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/12/218585.htm>.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

As the Euromaidan entered February the revolution continued with a seemingly endless strength. Ukrainians of all ages banded together to demand change and the removal of Yanukovych. The week of 17 February was truly the beginning of the end for Yanukovych, although Ukrainian authorities had intended for it to be the beginning of the end of the Euromaidan. Ukrainian news outlets have alleged that Yanukovych deployed a sniper team led by an officer from the Interior Ministry and a member of Berkut.⁷⁹ Additionally, there was alleged involvement by Russia in the form of teams from the Russian Defence Ministry and the Federal Security Service (FSB) to conduct anti-terrorist operations and a crackdown on the Euromaidan between 18 and 20 February.⁸⁰ These teams also allegedly delivered grenades, explosives, and other equipment to Ukrainian authorities.⁸¹

On 18 February a march on Parliament saw a battle break out between police and protestors. Both sides were armed with guns and multiple people from both sides were killed. Yanukovych declared 20 February a day of mourning, but by 9 a.m. snipers were firing on protestors from government buildings. Some protestors with military experience had received weapons and equipment and were able to identify and retake some of the sniper positions, but mostly the protestors continued fighting with rudimentary weapons and using the power their numbers provided. That evening, Parliament motioned to end the crackdown on protestors as many government officials fled the city or even resigned their posts. So great was the rush to leave that only 238 out of the 450 members of Parliament (MPs) were present for the vote. In the evening hours of 21 February an agreement was reached that would rewrite the constitution by September and ensure a new election would take place in

⁷⁹ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, 89.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

December. Additionally, it demanded that all groups would end the violence and protestors would essentially stand down. On 22 February Yanukovich fled Kyiv and ended up in Sevastopol where he remained until he was evacuated to Russia a few days later. Parliament voted to remove him from office, scheduled a new election for 25 May, and named Oleksandr Turchynov as the interim President until the soon-to-be elected Petro Poroshenko was sworn in on 7 June to a five-year term. Russian President Vladimir Putin was quick to condemn the removal of Yanukovich from power, calling it a coup and assisting in his escape to Russia. Putin would admit a year later that on the night of 22-23 February, after planning the rescue of Yanukovich, he informed gathered officials that ““we are forced to begin the work to bring Crimea back into Russia’.”⁸²

⁸² “Putin reveals secrets of Russia’s Crimean takeover plot,” *BBC*, published March 9, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31796226>.

EUROPEAN INTERVENTIONISM ESCALATES

“You have to understand, George [W. Bush], that Ukraine is not even a country. Part of its territory is in Eastern Europe, and the greater part was given to them by us.”

Vladimir Putin (Russian President)

The Takeover of Crimea

On 22 February 2014 Ukraine officially turned away from Russia, dealing Russia a significant blow in a region where Kremlin leaders sought desperately to maintain influence. Historical tensions between Crimea and Ukraine provided an opportunity to regain some level of influence and damage Ukrainian territorial integrity and sovereignty by stoking local separatist sentiments already simmering below the surface.⁸³ The protests and unrest in Crimea began on 23 February. On 27 February militia and unidentified troops began taking over government facilities with support from the now disbanded Berkut. On 18 March Russia officially annexed Crimea. The rapid takeover gave the appearance of being coordinated ahead of time, catching much of the world off guard.

On 23 February protestors gathered in cities across Crimea including Sevastopol, the city where Russia’s Black Sea Fleet is headquartered, waving Russian flags and chanting “Russia!” Protestors in some cities elected new leaders who they felt were more prepared to stand up to the new Ukrainian authorities, and multiple cities established militias for self-defense. Protestors on that day who were interviewed by journalists from The Guardian expressed a desire to secede after the events in Kyiv, even booing a local official who had said that Crimea could not be allowed to secede.⁸⁴ Over the next few days many rallies took

⁸³ Menon and Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 83.

⁸⁴ Howard Amos, “Ukraine crisis fuels secession calls in pro-Russian south,” *The Guardian*, published February 23, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/23/ukraine-crisis-secession-russian-crimea>.

place expressing loyalty to various sides; even Crimean Tartars joined the demonstrations chanting “Glory to Ukraine” in Ukrainian.⁸⁵

On the morning of 27 February masked and uniformed men lacking any sort of national flag or other identifying insignia began seizing points of interest in Crimea. The “little green men,” as they came to be known, seized airports, military bases, roads leading onto the peninsula from Ukraine, and government facilities over which the Russian flag was raised. These little green men operated in units with matching uniforms and professional equipment including helmets and eyewear, much as a professional military would.

Photographs show these troops in front of military vehicles with Russian tags, carrying Russian made rifles with both hands on their weapons, allowing for their positive and rapid control. Reports indicated they operated with a level of professionalism not normally seen in militias, and spoke with Russian accents. The roughly 30,000 to 35,000 troops were said to hail from multiple units both inside and outside the region, and included elements from the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU).⁸⁶ However, Russian officials including Putin remained adamant that the men were not Russian forces but merely self-defense groups organized by locals with equipment and uniforms purchased at local stores.⁸⁷ Russian military forces began holding “unrelated” military drills meant to ensure they were prepared “for action in crisis situations that threaten the nation’s military security” along the border with Ukraine but not Crimea.⁸⁸ Spetsnaz, Russian Special Forces typically from the GRU, begin entering

⁸⁵ Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, 110.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 111.

⁸⁷ Vitaly Shevchenko, “‘Little green men’ or ‘Russian invaders’?,” *BBC*, published March 11, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26532154>.

⁸⁸ William Booth and Will Englund, “Gunmen’s seizure of parliament building stokes tensions in Ukraine’s Crimea,” *The Washington Post*, published February 27, 2014,

Crimea on 1 March. A Russian mechanized infantry brigade, a military unit comprised of infantry personnel who use armored personnel carriers that are either wheeled or tracked to improve mobility, was deployed on 12 March and joined on 14 and 15 March by artillery and surface-to-air missile elements.

Citizens in Crimea voted for the annexation of Crimea by Russia on 16 March. RT, Russia's English language media outlet started by State-owned RIA Novosti, reported on 17 March that overall voter turnout was 81.37 percent with 95.7 percent voting in favor of the referendum, 3.2 percent voting to stay with Ukraine but as an Autonomous Republic, and 1.1 percent of ballots classified as invalid.⁸⁹ Crimean Prime Minister Sergey Aksyonov stated that 40 percent of Crimean Tartars voted in the referendum, and a majority of them voted in favor.⁹⁰ RT also reported that the head of the election monitors' commission, Polish MP Mateusz Piskorski, classified the vote as adhering to "the most basic, most important international standards" and stating "it was very professional but very calm, with all guarantees of safety at polling stations but without too much exposure of police presence at the polling stations."⁹¹

Western nations and organizations viewed the referendum and the circumstances surrounding it in a different light. EU leaders released a statement calling it "illegal and

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/crimean-city-offers-refuge-to-police-who-battled-protesters-in-ukraine-capital/2014/02/26/ad105a78-9ec3-11e3-9ba6-800d1192d08b_story.html.

⁸⁹ "95.7% of Crimeans in referendum voted to join Russia – preliminary results," *RT*, updated March 17, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-vote-join-russia-210/>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ "Crime referendum professional, up to international standards – head of intl observers," *RT*, updated March 17, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/crimea-referendum-professional-observers-234/>.

illegitimate” and stating the “outcome will not be recognized [sic].”⁹² U.S. President Barack Obama called the referendum “a clear violation of Ukrainian constitutions and international law” and said “it will not be recognized by the international community.”⁹³ Western media reported that many Tartars they spoke with had boycotted the vote and were opposed to annexation, saying the vote occurred under the watchful eye of armed Russian troops.⁹⁴ Almost two months after the vote, an English-language report was released and quickly removed (although a Russian language version remained) by Russia’s official Presidential Council on Civil Society and Human Rights with the actual referendum numbers. The report, based on interviews with “numerous Crimean officials, experts, civil society leaders, and ordinary citizens,” states that voter turnout for the whole of Crimea ranged from 30-50 percent with only 50-60 percent of those voters in favor of reunification, or 15-30 percent of eligible voters.⁹⁵ The author points out issues discussed by other outlets, including the issue of “intimidation and violence by pro-Russia forces” and that while a “narrow majority” may have voted in favor, the issue was much more contentious than previously represented, and that significant repression of minorities and the press had already begun.⁹⁶

⁹² “Joint Statement on Crimea by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso,” *European Union*, published March 16, 2014,

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/141566.pdf.

⁹³ “Statement by the President on Ukraine,” *The White House*, published March 17, 2014, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/17/statement-president-ukraine>.

⁹⁴ “Crimea referendum: Voters ‘back Russia union’,” *BBC*, published March 16, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>.

⁹⁵ Ilya Somin, “Russian government agency reveals fraudulent nature of the Crimean referendum results,” *The Washington Post*, published May 6, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/05/06/russian-government-agency-reveals-fraudulent-nature-of-the-crimean-referendum-results/>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The involvement in Crimea of Russian forces, something that Putin admitted to an extent as early as 17 April in a televised interview with the nation when he said “Russian servicemen did back Crimean self-defence [sic] forces,”⁹⁷ was a significant violation of international law that seemed to catch Western leaders and international groups entirely unprepared. The level of planning to undertake such a significant campaign of subversion that resulted in the seizure and annexation of sovereign territory in only 22 days from the initial protests (18 days from the arrival of troops) is unprecedented in the post-Cold War world. The reality that this action was undertaken by Russia makes it even more ominous for Western leaders.

The Russian involvement in Crimea provides clear examples of maskirovka, from the presence of the little green men, to the constant vehement denials by Russian leaders and press of involvement, and in the manipulation of the actual voting process and subsequent voter turnout numbers. In fact, Putin denied involvement to Russian media in April 2014 stating multiple times that he “never intended to annex any territories, or planned any military operations there, never.”⁹⁸ This statement was walked back in a rather matter-of-fact manner in March 2015 by Putin himself.⁹⁹ Putin went so far as to admit personal involvement with the introduction of Russian forces while leaders of Russian state media simultaneously denied the reports to Western outlets when questioned, stating instead that the troops involved in the siege were “local self-defense forces, but not Russian troops.”¹⁰⁰ This

⁹⁷ “Direct Line with Vladimir Putin,” *Kremlin*, published April 17, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ “Putin reveals secrets of Russia’s Crimean takeover plot.”

¹⁰⁰ Simon Shuster, “Putin’s Confessions on Crimea Expose Kremlin Media,” *Time*, published March 20, 2015, <http://time.com/3752827/putin-media-kremlin-crimea-ukraine/>.

deception would continue as Russia's campaign to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and regain control of the country saw them entering combat operations in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region, initially covertly (in Russia's mind) and then overtly.

Crisis in Donbas

The Donbas region, named for the Donets River Basin, comprises the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, the easternmost provinces of Ukraine along the Russian border. Donbas is a largely industrial and mining region where 44 percent of citizens are ethnic Russians and 68 percent to 74 percent speak Russian as their primary language, according to the 1989 and 2001 census (the most recently available).¹⁰¹ Opinion polls in these regions conducted in April 2014 by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology allow a look at the sentiments of southeastern Ukrainian citizens regarding the upheaval in general, but the Donbas in particular:

- 27.6-32.4% considered Yanukovich the legitimate President (the region as a whole was 19.6%);
- 25-30% believed that the region should secede and join Russia (the next highest oblast was 16.1% and the region as a whole was 15.4%);
- 44.2-47% agreed Russia rightly protects the interests of Russian-speaking citizens (the next highest oblast was 36.6% and the region as a whole was 32.6%);
- 43.4-48.3% believed Russian troops may invade and 19.3% would support the invasion although 43.2-55.4% would stay at home (the region as a whole was 46.3%, 11.7%, and 46.9%, respectively);
- 51.9-55.9% believed civil war was possible (the region as a whole was 46%).¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Data exported from the All Ukrainian Population Census Databank using National composition of the population, language attributes, and citizenship section with subsections for Distribution of the population by nationality and native language, http://database.ukrcensus.gov.ua/MULT/Database/Census/databasetree_en.asp.

¹⁰² "Views and Opinions of South-Eastern Regions of Residents of Ukraine: April 2014," *Kiev International Institute of Sociology*, published April 20, 2014, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=news&id=258>. Percentages provided are for Donbas unless otherwise noted.

These numbers tell a different story than the one that began at the time of the polling when pro-Russian separatists seized parts of Donbas. These numbers indicate that a majority did not consider Yanukovich the legitimate president, and that a significant majority in the region did not support secession to Russia. Even in Donbas, where conflict rages to this day, 70 percent of polled citizens did not support secession even though over half believed that there would be a civil war and almost half believed Russian troops would become involved. In fact, it indicates that the level of support provided by the citizens of the region at the outbreak of hostilities was not enough to sustain the conflict to this point. Russian involvement was vital to the continued destabilization of the region.

The conflict in eastern Ukraine started at the beginning of March when ethnic Russians began protesting and stormed some government facilities. Some of the protestors were Ukrainian citizens who felt disenfranchised by the events in Kyiv, but others were Russian nationals bussed in as “protest tourists,” giving the appearance that a coordinated campaign of subversion stoking feelings of dissatisfaction with western Ukraine existed from the beginning.¹⁰³ Soon thereafter, separatists and militias began to attempt to raise Russian flags, take over government facilities, and organize referendums similar to Crimea. Counter-protests were also held by those opposing Russian involvement and desiring to remain a part of Ukraine. While the unrest was undoubtedly encouraged by Russian officials, initially there was no apparent involvement by Russian military forces. The separatists were largely unprofessional forces, wearing a variety of clothing and lacking any military style gear or a distinct military decorum, a departure from what was seen in Crimea. These protests served

¹⁰³ Andrew Roth, “From Russia, ‘Tourists’ Stir the Protests,” *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/04/world/europe/russias-hand-can-be-seen-in-the-protests.html>.

to validate a narrative developed by Russia that Kyiv did not have the interests of ethnic Russians in mind and that those individuals preferred association with Russia. In an effort to strengthen this sentiment Russia called the new Ukrainian leaders fascist and chastised Kyiv for allowing “armed bandits” to terrorize the region.¹⁰⁴ A hashtag also began, much in the spirit of the #Euromaidan and other protests that have been organized or supported through social media, which translated roughly to “Russia does not leave its own behind.”¹⁰⁵ This hashtag was used over 85,000 times and tweeted repeatedly by newly created twitter accounts in an effort to make it trend.¹⁰⁶

Russian troops began gathering for “drills” along the border of Ukraine on 13 March, just days before the Crimea referendum vote. The buildup was condemned by multiple world leaders, with some expressing concern that the Ukrainian crisis could develop into a confrontation between the East and West, reminiscent of Cold War era concerns. The buildup reached 30,000 troops, and Russia began sending Special Forces and military equipment into eastern Ukraine to strengthen the rebellion. In an attempt to allay the concerns of the citizens of eastern and southeastern Ukraine and stave off Russian intervention, Ukraine’s Prime Minister announced measures to decentralize the nation on the same day that Russia absorbed Crimea. In announcing the measure the Prime Minister appealed for involvement in moving the country forward, attempting to ensure representation of all groups and to address the concerns of southeastern Ukraine. Despite these efforts, violence and protests increased; on 6 April in a seemingly coordinated operation protestors

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ “#BBC Trending: Russian site recruits ‘volunteers’ for Ukraine,” *BBC Trending*, published March 5, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-26435333>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

stormed and seized city halls in Donetsk, Kharkov, and Luhansk. Protestors demanded an 11 May referendum for autonomy and an 18 May referendum similar to that of Crimea's for independence or seceding to Russia. There would be no middle ground. Ukrainian forces regained control of the City Halls the next day, but protests and attempted seizures continued as it became apparent that the separatists were now receiving assistance from Russian "advisers." Additionally, world leaders and NATO again warned Russia to back away from the conflict and enacted more sanctions, but Russia's mind was already made up. The waters had been tested in Georgia and Crimea, and the Kremlin recognized that the rebukes by world leaders would not develop beyond that. Putin now had an opportunity to reestablish his "Novorossiya" or New Russia, a region he claims belongs historically to Russia, including the very regions in which he was supporting separatist movements. Putin again was using a questionable recounting of history to justify Russian actions. This same concept would be raised over and over throughout the impending conflict, with the definition ultimately expanding to include the entirety of Ukraine. It was on these many premises that Russia introduced forces and equipment to eastern Ukraine, changing the nature of the conflict and bolstering a separatist movement that lacked popular support, the necessary structure, or the capabilities to fight back against the Ukrainian government.

On 15 April, Ukrainian President Turchynov announced an "anti-terrorist operation" in the east by the army. The operation came only a day after the Ukrainian government presented evidence to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that

Russian forces were operating in eastern Ukraine.¹⁰⁷ The evidence included photographs of separatists in both Crimea and eastern Ukraine with similar and at times identical uniforms, gear, and weapons. The photographs indicate an increasing level of organization among separatists that is uncommon for non-military trained groups. Additionally, there are a few men who appear in photographs from multiple cities, indicating that at least some advisors with a more professional military appearance were involved across the region. World leaders also accused Russian forces of instigating the tensions in Ukraine, with General Philip Breedlove, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, providing key observations in a Business Insider article that indicated the introduction of Russian forces to the conflict.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, the operation only increased tensions in the region as world leaders continued to call for de-escalation. Ukraine was placed on “full combat alert” and reinstated conscription on 1 May, and the very next day fighting erupted in Odessa on the Black Sea, leaving 42 dead. On 7 May Putin’s rhetoric took a sharp, brief, and bizarre turn toward Western goals. He denounced the pending referendums for independence in eastern Ukraine, called for a cease fire, and requested dialogue between the opposing forces. He also announced a withdrawal of Russian forces from the border, although NATO officials indicated that the troops remained in place. In addition to the outright denial of involvement, Putin’s easily disproven claims regarding the status of Russian forces continue to the present day.

¹⁰⁷ “Ukrainian Evidence of Russian Involvement in East,” *NBC News*, published April 21, 2014, <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/ukraine-crisis/ukrainian-evidence-russian-involvement-east-n86076>.

¹⁰⁸ Philip Breedlove, “NATO Commander: Ukraine ‘Activists’ Are Clearly A Professional Military Force Under Russian Control,” *Business Insider*, published April 17, 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/philip-breedlove-activists-professional-military-force-2014-4?utm_content=buffer28993&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

On 11 May citizens of Donetsk and Luhansk voted for increased independence in a referendum condemned by the international community over concerns that the illegal vote would not be free and fair. The verbiage on the ballot was overly vague, asking only if voters “support the act of self-rule.” This created confusion among voters who were uncertain if it would increase autonomy, grant independence, or result in annexation by Russia.¹⁰⁹ A Pew poll conducted before the vote indicated even greater uncertainty among eastern Ukrainians, even Russian speaking ones, showing that only 18 percent of eastern Ukrainians (including Russian speakers) and 27 percent of Russian speakers wanted to secede.¹¹⁰

Officials publically announced there would be no minimum turn out and established polling locations across the region, including in schools and hospitals. Voting was also held at a polling station in Moscow for anyone with a Ukrainian passport. As polls opened police and other armed men guarded polling locations, and sporadic conflict broke out between Ukrainian and pro-Russian forces. A 2012 voters list was present at polling stations but multiple journalists reported that anyone with a passport was allowed to vote, even if their name was not on the list. Some journalists observed people bringing multiple passports in order to fill out multiple ballots, and accusations were made that some polling locations did not even check passports, allowing Russians to vote. Additionally, the lack of any international monitors and the reality that many of the staff at polling locations supported the

¹⁰⁹ Andrew E. Kramer, “Amid Much Uncertainty, Separatists Prepare for Voting in Eastern Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, published May 10, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/world/europe/managing-every-detail-separatists-prepare-for-voting-in-eastern-ukraine.html?login=email&_r=0.

¹¹⁰ “Despite Concerns about Governance, Ukrainians want to Remain One Country,” *Pew Research Center*, published May 8, 2014, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/05/08/despite-concerns-about-governance-ukrainians-want-to-remain-one-country/>.

referendum created concern. After polling ended the head of the Central Election Commission of the “Donetsk People’s Republic” told Russian media outlet RT that 74.87 percent of eligible voters participated and that “the number of people who said no [to independence] was relatively small... 89.07 percent voted for, 10.19 percent voted against, and .74 percent of ballots were ineligible.”¹¹¹ In Luhansk the Central Election Commission reported a 75 percent voter turnout with 96.2 percent supporting independence.¹¹² Ukraine’s Interior Minister reported significantly different voter turnout numbers, with only 24 percent of eligible voters participating in Luhansk and 32 percent of eligible voters participating in Donetsk.¹¹³

The distortion of voter turnout and referendum results was similar to Crimea’s experience only two months earlier, giving the impression that the status of eastern Ukraine had already been decided prior to the referendum. In fact, a leaked phone call between the founder of a Russian ultra-nationalist paramilitary group named Alexander Barkashov and an eastern Ukraine rebel leader indicates that the percentage of voters who said yes to an independent Donetsk was planned. In the audio, Barkashov can be heard telling the rebel leader to “write something like 99% down... well, not 99%... Let’s say 89% voted for the Donetsk Republic.”¹¹⁴ The rigged referendum, down to 89 percent voting yes in Donetsk,

¹¹¹ “Referendum results in Donetsk and Lugansk Regions show landslide support for self-rule,” *RT*, updated May 12, 2014, <https://www.rt.com/news/158276-referendum-results-east-ukraine/>.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ “East Ukraine separatists seek union with Russia,” *BBC*, published May 12, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27369980>.

¹¹⁴ Adam Taylor and Ishaan Tharoor, “The crisis in Ukraine, as told by leaked phone calls,” *The Washington Post*, published September 3, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/03/the-crisis-in-ukraine-as-told-by-leaked-phone-calls/>.

was meant to legitimize the plans Russia had already laid out, but had tried to deny days earlier, for the region. On 12 May the regions formally asked to join Russia, although Russian leaders demurred instead calling again for dialogue.

The Russian handling of eastern Ukraine to a casual observer may have seemed to show a level of rationale regarding the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. In reality, the gestures and statements of dialogue were used to hide the larger strategy of irreparably damaging Ukraine's sovereignty and forcing it back into the Russian sphere. Eastern Ukraine had to be handled differently because the Russians lacked the widespread support there that they had seen in Crimea. Additionally, European leaders and other former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations would be even more strongly opposed to a full military invasion of eastern Ukraine than they were to Crimea, for which sanctions were already being handed down. As the days and weeks passed Russia continued to participate in actions that were directly contradictory to their public statements, in some cases going to great lengths to deny the obvious.

Petro Poroshenko was elected 25 May, largely without the participation of eastern Ukraine due to violence, voter suppression, and even the kidnapping of election officials. Immediately following his election Poroshenko said he intended to visit Donbas in an effort to bring peace to the region, and Putin stated he would cooperate with the new authorities although he considered Yanukovich the legitimate president. The two leaders met on 6 June at the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings and agreed that the hostilities needed to end, but instead the fighting intensified. A week later on 14 June NATO released images suggesting Russia had supplied T-64 Main Battle Tanks to separatists. The images, taken from a video posted on 11 June, showed T-64s without distinguishing markings (a tactic used

by Russian forces in Crimea) and featuring a different paint scheme than Ukrainian variants operating in two separate cities in eastern Ukraine.¹¹⁵ The T-64s joined an already growing list of Russian military equipment that had been given to separatists. This included anti-aircraft systems, one of which is a man-portable air defense system (MANPAD) with infrared homing designated by NATO as an SA-18 “Grouse”, which had been used multiple times since 29 May to shoot down Ukrainian military aircraft such as helicopters, an AN-30 surveillance aircraft, and an IL-76 transport aircraft. On 20 June a week-long cease-fire began that was extended on 27 June while Poroshenko signed an EU association agreement.

Three days later the Ukrainian military launched an offensive meant to destroy the insurgency. Ukrainian forces pushed into rebel held territory, retaking control of cities and towns while advancing on Donetsk and Luhansk. The separatists were retreating, destroying bridges and fortifying rear positions. On 11 July a Ukrainian military transport aircraft was shot down from an altitude of 6,500 meters (21,000 feet), almost double the altitude of the SA-18 used against Ukrainian aircraft the month prior. Separatist forces had gained access to more advanced surface to air missiles (SAMs) and were actively using them against Ukrainian forces. The Russian commitment of equipment to the fight increased rapidly and dramatically. On 14 July, the U.S. Department of State reported the following changes to the battlespace in eastern Ukraine:

- Russian forces deployed additional tanks, armored vehicles, multiple rocket launchers (MRLs), artillery (ARTY), and advanced air defense systems at site in southwest Russia, probably for delivery to separatists;¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ “NATO Releases Imagery: Raises Questions on Russia’s Role in Providing Tanks to Ukraine,” *NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe*, published June 14, 2014, <http://shape.nato.int/statement-on-russian-main-battle-tanks>.

¹¹⁶ MRLs and ARTY, either towed or self-propelled typically on a tracked body, are indirect fire (IDF) weapons that allow the user to engage and destroy targets that they do not have

- T-64¹¹⁷, BM-21s¹¹⁸, BMP-2s¹¹⁹, unspecified towed antitank guns, ZU-23-2 anti-aircraft guns¹²⁰, 2B16 mortars¹²¹, a 2S9¹²², and multiple other infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) and armored personnel carriers (APCs) were delivered to separatists;
- Ukrainian forces discovered caches of MANPADs, mines, grenades, meals ready to eat (MREs), vehicles, and even a pontoon bridge;
- Unspecified Russian equipment with documentation providing proof of Russian origin was found in recaptured areas;
- Recruiting efforts in Russia for volunteers capable of operating heavy weapons, including tanks and air defense systems.¹²³

The Downing of Malaysian Airlines (MH) Flight 17

On 17 July citizens around the world who had largely been ignoring the conflict were shocked when separatists shot down MH17, a commercial airliner cruising at 33,000 feet with 298 civilian passengers onboard. MH17 had been on a transcontinental flight from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur and was over eastern Ukraine when hit by what is now known to be a SAM designated by NATO as an SA-11 “Gadfly.”¹²⁴ World leaders immediately called for accountability and the UN held an emergency session. The primary question initially was who did it. Western leaders believed it was either the separatists using Russian

direct line of sight on. These weapons can be, and eventually were, used by Russian forces to engage targets inside Ukraine from their own territory.

¹¹⁷ T-64s are no longer used by Russia but had not yet been destroyed; they feature a 125mm main gun, and an antitank guided weapon (ATGW).

¹¹⁸ BM-21s are a 40 tube MRL system that fires 121mm rockets.

¹¹⁹ BMP-2s are infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs) with a 30mm cannon, and an ATGW.

¹²⁰ ZU-23-2s are towed anti-aircraft guns featuring a twin 23mm cannon that can fire a maximum 800-1000 rounds per minute at an altitude up to 2,500 meters (8,202 feet).

¹²¹ 2B16s are towed 120mm gun/mortar systems capable of both direct fire and IDF.

¹²² 2S9s are 120mm self-propelled direct fire anti-tank weapons systems.

¹²³ “Russia’s Continuing Support for Armed Separatists in Ukraine and Ukraine’s Efforts Toward Peace, Unity, and Stability,” *U.S. Department of State*, published July 14, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2014/07/229270.htm>.

¹²⁴ The SA-11 (called a Buk-M1 by Russia) is capable of engaging and destroying a variety of aircraft and missile systems at a max altitude of at least 14,000 meters (46,000 feet). It is mounted on a tracked body and is equipped with radars used to acquire targets and guide the missile to the targets, it also has an identify friend or foe (IFF) system that allows the user to determine if the aircraft is civilian or military (friendly or adversary) based on transponder codes.

equipment, although they claimed to lack the capabilities to shoot down an airliner, or Russian forces operating in Ukraine. The latter was assessed to be a possibility because of the advanced nature of the weapons system necessary to engage and destroy an aircraft at that altitude. It is not a simple point-and-shoot process like that used with a MANPAD but actually requires missile guidance systems and radar. Russia immediately blamed Ukraine, touting theories that it was a Ukrainian fighter aircraft or Ukrainian ground forces. Russia also claimed Ukraine was at fault because their campaign, which began earlier that month, had dramatically escalated the ground war in the region.

Within two days the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine had released a statement assessing that MH17 was brought down by an SA-11 fired from separatist controlled territory. The embassy states that this was likely Russian equipment fired by separatists, pointing out that Ukraine does own SA-11s but none was within range of the incident and Ukrainian forces had not fired a single SAM during the hostilities despite repeated violations of Ukrainian airspace by Russian aircraft. The embassy pointed to the Russian weapons and equipment that had been pouring into Ukraine in previous days and evidence of Russia providing training on SAM systems to separatists. They also explained that on the day of the tragedy sensors detected a SAM launch, believed to be an SA-11, from separatist controlled territory. Even more incriminating was the release of intercepted separatist communications from a few days prior to the incident discussing the repositioning of an SA-11 system, and the release of intercepted communications from immediately after where separatists report shooting down an aircraft. Immediately following the crash multiple separatists, including the “Defense Minister” of Donetsk People’s Republic, bragged about shooting down a military transport aircraft on social media; the posts were quickly deleted when it came out

that the aircraft was actually a civilian airliner. Finally, video posted to social media showed an SA-11 on a transport vehicle traveling toward Russia and missing at least one missile, indicating it had been recently fired.¹²⁵

For their part, the Russians repeatedly and strongly denied any connection to the downing of MH17. Four days after MH17 was shot down representatives from the Ministry of Defense gave a briefing to the media meant to absolve Russia of any guilt. The Russian report agrees that SA-11s were deployed to the region and provides imagery as proof, although they claim that these were Ukrainian systems. The report also claims that an SU-25 was within the range of MH17 to effectively engage and destroy the aircraft with its onboard air-to-air missile system. Although the Russian authorities do not specifically blame Ukraine in this document for shooting down MH17, they seem to imply guilt while also attempting to discredit the international accusations that a Russian SA-11 in separatist control was the guilty system. Russian authorities even go so far as to deny that Russia delivered any SA-11s “and other equipment” to the separatists. In the course of the statements Russia also indicates that U.S. intelligence had the necessary collection sensors in the region to prove who and what shot down the system, indicating that the US should release that intelligence as proof.¹²⁶ Essentially, Russian statements by the Ministry of Defense representatives were meant to deny involvement while not providing any tangible evidence of a lack of

¹²⁵ “United States Assessment of the Downing of Flight MH17 and its Aftermath,” *Embassy of the United State: Kyiv, Ukraine*, published July 19, 2014, <http://ukraine.usembassy.gov/statements/asmt-07192014.html>. All data in this paragraph derived from this source.

¹²⁶ “Special Briefing by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation on the crash of the Malaysian Boeing 777 in the Ukrainian air space,” *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, published July 21, 2014, http://archive.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/ECD62987D4816CA344257D1D00251C76.

involvement, place blame on Ukraine using specious evidence, and demand that the US release more tangible (and classified) evidence of Russian guilt.

These tactics and denials continued into October 2015 when the Dutch report on MH17 crash findings was released. The report did identify the missile as an SA-11, although it did not place blame for who launched the missile. In response, RT published an interview with the lead Russian investigator from the Federal Air Transport Agency (Rosaviatsia), Oleg Storchevoy, attacking the position of the Dutch investigation, and accusing them of disregarding Russian comments, and “slanting the documents towards their version of events beforehand.”¹²⁷ Russian authorities, via the article, denied almost every relevant finding including the type of missile launched, the location and trajectory of the launch, and the chemical composition and shape of the missile fragments. Russian authorities also accused Dutch investigators of disregarding Russian air traffic control radar, claiming that this was the only data because there was no Ukrainian air traffic control data, and accusing the investigators of shutting Russia out of the investigation.¹²⁸ In reality, the report on the investigation identifies Russia as a participant in the investigation and explains what material Russia provided.¹²⁹ Additionally, Appendix I of the report features images of the Ukrainian and Russian air traffic control radar and commentary on the images.¹³⁰ And while the report

¹²⁷ “Russia rejects Dutch report on MH17, but agrees Ukraine should have closed airspace – regulator,” *RT*, updated October 15, 2015, <https://www.rt.com/news/318628-russia-regulator-dutch-report/>.

¹²⁸ “Official letter on MH17 investigation by top Russian aviation official Oleg Storchevoy,” *RT*, updated February 10, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/politics/official-word/331834-mh17-russia-storchevoy-letter/>.

¹²⁹ “Appendices: MH17 Crash,” *The Hague*, published October 2015, <http://www.onderzoeksraad.nl/uploads/phase-docs/1006/77c9b856be08report-mh17-crash-appendices.pdf>, 11.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 56-59.

does not specifically blame Russia it is damning regarding Russian involvement in Ukraine, a fact that Russia adamantly denied until December 2015 despite obvious evidence to the contrary.

Continued Escalation in Donbas

MH17 escalated the conflict in eastern Ukraine significantly, with August experiencing some of the bloodiest fighting in all of 2014.¹³¹ Ukraine was gaining territory and rocketing rebel held areas; they had the momentum and were poised to crush the separatists who only held a pocket of territory in Donetsk oblast around the city of Donetsk and toward the border of Luhansk oblast, and the southern portion of Luhansk oblast. Putin was in a position where his options were to send the Russian Army across the border and essentially take control of Ukraine, or continue on the current path but with Russian commanders leading the rebels.¹³² Allowing the rebels to lose was not an option for Putin, nor was he prepared to blatantly invade Ukraine, leaving a “subtle” (in Russia’s eyes) continued introduction of Russian military forces and commanders as the only viable option. On 22 August Russia sent an unmarked “aid convoy” to eastern Ukraine under escort of pro-Russian gunmen. Russian authorities claimed the convoy had been “prepared in an atmosphere of full transparency with Ukraine and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)” although both Ukraine and the ICRC deny any involvement.¹³³ Russian

¹³¹ Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 174.

¹³² *Ibid*, 175.

¹³³ “Ukraine Crisis: Russia aid convoy ‘invades Ukraine’,” *BBC*, published August 22, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28892525>.

authorities cautioned that any delays of the convoy were “unacceptable” and that any attempt to stop them would result in unspecified action.¹³⁴

On 27 August rebels backed by Russian equipment gained control of the region surrounding town of Novoazovsk on the Sea of Azov,¹³⁵ directly across the border from Russia. On 28 August NATO released a report stating that satellite imagery showed Russian self-propelled artillery units and combat troops operating inside Ukraine. NATO officials characterized it as a “significant escalation” and a “blatant attempt to change the momentum of the fighting.”¹³⁶ Ukrainian forces also began capturing Russian forces in late August, while separatists reported Russians fighting alongside separatist forces, although they characterized these Russians as civilians or service members taking leave to volunteer. A ceasefire was signed on 5 September, although it was used primarily to rebuild forces in preparation for fighting that would erupt four days later at the Donetsk airport. By mid-September separatist forces were in control of almost double the territory prior to the ceasefire, now holding the border region from the Sea of Azov part way between Mariupol and Novoazovsk, as far west as the city of Donetsk in some areas and as far north as the city of Luhansk.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ The Sea of Azov is north east of the Black Sea and is bordered by Ukraine on the north, Crimea to the west and south, and Russia to the east and south. Russia is currently in the process of building a bridge across the strait that separates Crimea and Russia on the southern portion of the sea.

¹³⁶ “New Satellite Imagery Exposes Russian Combat Troops Inside Ukraine,” *NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe*, published August 28, 2014, <http://shape.nato.int/new-satellite-imagery-exposes-russian-combat-troops-inside-ukraine>.



Figure 1: Map of eastern Ukraine for reference¹³⁷

In late September NATO began reporting Russian withdrawals from east Ukraine, and while fighting did ease up, it did not stop between separatists and Ukrainian forces. On 2 November the separatists held elections with the support of Russia. These were denounced by the West, and within a matter of days Russian troops were again entering eastern Ukraine as fighting increased. As the months wore on this pattern would be repeated. On 12 February 2015 a new ceasefire was signed, and within days fighting restarted as separatist forces gained more territory. In March the U.S. promised nonlethal military aid to Kyiv, while reaffirming that no military action would be taken. In May Russia moved to classify the deaths of soldiers in Ukraine as having occurred during peacetime operations, probably in response to increasing reports of Russian troops imprisoned and killed in combat operations

¹³⁷ "Ukraine crisis in maps," *BBC*, published February 18, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27308526>.

in Ukraine, and possibly in preparation for another operational push.¹³⁸ In late June footage taken by a drone in May and June was released showing evidence of a Russian military training facility in eastern Ukraine.¹³⁹ Throughout the remainder of 2015 fighting continued, halted only occasionally by unsuccessful cease fires. Russia continued to provide heavy weapons to separatists while denying any involvement in the region. The West continued enacting sanctions while Russia established sanctions of its own. On 17 December Putin finally admitted the presence of Russians in Ukraine when he responded to a reporter's question about Russian military intelligence officers captured by Kyiv. He stated: "we never said there were not people there who carried out certain tasks, including in the military sphere'," although he also said that this was different than regular Russian troops, who he still insisted were not there.¹⁴⁰

As 2016 began the fighting in eastern Ukraine had become status quo. Russia showed no signs of easing up its pressure on Ukraine, although it continues to deny involvement. Ukraine, in the midst of a political and economic crisis, still seeks to stabilize the nation and receive economic assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), although the country is worn down from two years of constant crisis. Sanctions remain in

¹³⁸ Karoud Demirjian, "Putin denies Russian troops are in Ukraine, decrees certain deaths secret," *The Washington Post*, published May 28, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-denies-russian-troops-are-in-ukraine-decrees-certain-deaths-secret/2015/05/28/9bb15092-0543-11e5-93f4-f24d4af7f97d_story.html.

¹³⁹ Dan Lamothe, "Gotcha? Russian military base reportedly found in Ukraine, detailed in drone video," *The Washington Post*, published June 30, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2015/06/30/russian-military-base-reportedly-found-in-ukraine-detailed-in-this-drone-video/>.

¹⁴⁰ Shaun Walker, "Putin admits Russian military presence in Ukraine for first time," *The Guardian*, published December 17, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/17/vladimir-putin-admits-russian-military-presence-ukraine>.

place against Russia, and while they have certainly impacted the nation economically they show no signs of inspiring the Kremlin to give up its campaign against Ukraine. Putin does not yet show signs of wavering; instead he just seems to be expanding his scope.

The Revival of Cold War Scare Tactics

Russia's recent aggression has been directed most obviously at Ukraine, although it is not the Kremlin's only target. Russia has increased subversion campaigns against multiple former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations who are refusing to play by Russia's rules and removing themselves from the Russian sphere of influence. Nations who have remained aligned with Russia are largely untouched by this new campaign. But nations who have turned to the West, particularly Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, have been in Russian cross hairs. Additionally, Russia has undertaken various campaigns meant to showcase Russian military capabilities to Western nations, with some tactics having a scope and complexity not seen since the Cold War.

The Russian excuse for involvement in Ukraine, protecting the right of ethnic Russians, is part of a larger propaganda campaign that has caused concern in former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations. The sudden dissolution of the USSR, and the policies of Russification under the Soviet regime, ensured that Russian interests and influences became an inseparable part of many nations. Ethnic Russians do still comprise portions of the populations in many former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations, and many of them have links to Russia from the Soviet era that include family and military service. Additionally, Russian is still spoken to some extent in many of these countries, even though it may not be an official language. Russia has used this reality, and Russian-language TV and radio broadcasts to former Soviet and Warsaw Pact nations, to sow seeds of unrest and discontent among these

populations. This has been particularly disconcerting for the Baltic nations who were invaded and annexed by the USSR during World War II (WWII) as part of their expansion campaign and are the only former Soviet states that have joined Western organizations such as NATO and the EU.

In Latvia, where one third of the population is ethnic Russians, the statement by a Russian diplomat that alleged discrimination against ethnic Russians would cause “unfortunate consequences” raised serious concerns that echo in Lithuania and Estonia.¹⁴¹ In Estonia the government set up a Russian-language TV channel meant to “empower the local identity” and counter Russian propaganda that included accusations of Estonia’s support of Nazism.¹⁴² Lithuania’s president has also spoken bluntly about the increasing threats from Russia, stating that propaganda and disinformation campaigns have already placed the country under attack.¹⁴³ Even British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon warned that NATO must be ready to “repel Russian Aggression” as the Russian government attempts to destabilize the region.¹⁴⁴ In Poland, Russian propaganda accused the government of training Ukrainians protesting in the Euromaidan and has waged what Polish leaders characterized as

¹⁴¹ Michael Birnbaum, “In Latvia, fresh fears of aggression as Kremlin warns about Russian minorities,” *The Washington Post*, published September 27, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-latvia-fresh-fears-of-aggression-as-kremlin-warns-about-russian-minorities/2014/09/26/b723b1af-2aed-44d1-a791-38cebbbadbd0_story.html.

¹⁴² Ott Ummelas, “Estonia Must Counter ‘Hostile’ Russian Propaganda, Adviser Says,” *Bloomberg*, published March 25, 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-03-25/estonia-must-counter-hostile-russian-propaganda-adviser-says>.

¹⁴³ “Lithuania ‘already under attack’ – President Grybauskaitė,” *BBC*, updated March 6, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31773941>.

¹⁴⁴ “Michael Fallon warns of Russian threat to Baltic states,” *BBC*, updated February 19, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-31530392>.

the beginning of a “hybrid war.”¹⁴⁵ Russian propaganda in the region reached such a fever pitch as to cause western leaders to characterize it as potentially being more dangerous than conventional forces because of its impact on regional security.¹⁴⁶ RT, a key component of Russian information warfare aimed at the West, has been central to the subversion campaigns. Its English language articles often make outrageous and unbelievable claims that have minimal basis in reality. Some have argued that they are not meant to be believable, but rather meant to slowly tear down the reader’s mental defenses.¹⁴⁷ These focused propaganda efforts (soft power) are then complimented by military show of force type exercises (hard power), meant to further engrain the idea of a strong and aggressive Russia that poses a significant threat to western interests.

Over the last two years headlines regularly pop up that raise alarms regarding Russian military actions. The most common articles are about Russian air activity, which experienced a significant spike in aggressive air patrols in late 2014 that included dangerous maneuvers.¹⁴⁸ Russian air patrols were a normal military occurrence during the Cold War, dropping off after the fall of the Soviet Union due to budget cuts, and making a comeback in

¹⁴⁵ Damien Sharkov, “Poland prepares for ‘hybrid war’ amidst Russian threat,” *Newsweek*, published March 24, 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/poland-prepares-hybrid-war-amidst-russian-threat-316469>.

¹⁴⁶ Chris McGreal, “Vladimir Putin’s ‘misinformation’ offensive prompts US to deploy its cold war propaganda tools,” *The Guardian*, published April 25, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/25/us-set-to-revive-propaganda-war-as-putin-pr-machine-undermines-baltic-states>.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Brian Everstine, “EUCOM sees drop in Russian air patrols, increase in ‘professionalism’,” *Air Force Times*, published May 3, 2015, <http://www.airforcetimes.com/story/military/pentagon/2015/05/03/eucom-russian-air-patrols/26651179/>.

recent years.¹⁴⁹ Longer-range patrols, common during the Cold War, are becoming more commonplace along the U.S. and Canadian borders and are typically conducted by Russian bombers capable of carrying cruise missiles. In the European theater Russian fighters, bombers, and other aircraft have been used to regularly conducting overflights of Western military forces, including U.S. ships, and to violate the national airspace of various nations. While the overflights are largely harmless, other than the unsafe maneuvers that have been undertaken at times, they send a message of an increasingly strong Russian military that can reach out and touch super powers and other states that have exerted control over them since the Soviet collapse. Additionally, Russian military drills along the borders of Western nations have allowed Russia to ensure that their military capability on the ground is front and center.

Russia blames the current security situation in Europe on the West for expanding NATO and the EU to Russia's borders, an aggression in Russia's eyes that must be countered. This is not entirely inaccurate; the West did expand toward Russia's borders, undoubtedly leaving Russian leaders feeling encroached upon. But that is not to say the expansion of NATO and the EU was wrong, rather that it may not have been handled properly, leaving Russians feeling as though they had been backed into a corner.¹⁵⁰ If history has shown anything, it is that Russian leaders do not appreciate feeling cornered or surrounded. This statement especially rings true for Putin, a leader who views himself as capable of returning Russia to its former glory and seemingly longs for the days of the Soviet

¹⁴⁹ Sam LaGrone, "West: NORAD Head Says Russia Increasing Arctic Long Range Air Patrols," *USNI News*, published February 10, 2015, <http://news.usni.org/2015/02/10/west-norad-head-says-russia-increasing-arctic-long-range-air-patrols>.

¹⁵⁰ Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 5.

Union. This feeling of being treated as inferior and being removed from significant global events caused Russia to lash out in Eastern Europe. The ongoing conflict in Syria, a nation ruled by Russian ally Bashar al-Assad and in which Russia has significant military interests, has provided another frontier on which to assert themselves as a power player. The ongoing conflict in that country is the current focus of global superpowers, and Russian involvement on the side of al-Assad ensures that any solution in Syria goes through Russia.

A SHIFT TO SYRIA

“We think it is an enormous mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian government and its armed forces who are valiantly fighting terrorism face to face. We should finally acknowledge that no one but President Assad's armed forces and (Kurdish) militia are truly fighting the Islamic State and other terrorist organizations in Syria”

Vladimir Putin (Russian President)

Russian intervention in the Syrian Civil War is, on its face, another opportunity for Russian President Vladimir Putin to be contrarian to Western goals and interests while flexing his military capability and intertwining Russia with any regional resolution of the conflict. This is not a new development, though. Russian interest in Syria predates Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Putin, and it runs deeper than countering Western influence. Economically, strategically, and geographically, Syria matters to Russia. Because of this, it is extraordinarily important in Russia's eyes to maintain a pro-Russian regime in the country, and Assad is currently that regime.

Russian Regional Interests

Historically, Russia has maintained ties with multiple nations in the region. These ties have ebbed and flowed based on regional and global events. Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union some nations in the Middle East and North Africa were significant recipients of Soviet arms exports. From the mid-1950s to 1960 Egypt and Indonesia received 50 percent of Soviet arms sales and Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria accounted for another one third.¹⁵¹ In the 1970s the Arab Middle East comprised at least 70 percent of all Soviet arms sales to non-communist developing countries including tanks, helicopters, fighters, and other advanced

¹⁵¹ Robbin F. Laird, “Soviet Arms Trade with the Noncommunist World,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (1984), 202.

weapons systems.¹⁵² In the 1980s the Soviet Union was the primary arms supplier for five of the seven major importers, including Iraq, Libya, and Syria.¹⁵³ And while Soviet action in Afghanistan caused them to fall out of favor with many in the region, Syria has been the constant.

Syria first began purchasing weapons from the Soviet Union in 1950 and has sourced the vast majority of its military arsenal from the USSR and then Russia.¹⁵⁴ The exact numbers, at least in the present day, are difficult to find because Russia does not publish arms-export data. However, in 2012 Amnesty International published an estimate that 10 percent of all Russian arms exports are to Syria.¹⁵⁵ These are said to include equipment such as fighters, helicopters, other aircraft, tanks, various missile and rocket systems, and small arms. Even as civil war raged in Syria arms exports did not cease. In February 2012 Vyacheslav N. Davidenko, the chief spokesman for Russian state-owned weapons trading company Rosoboronexport, called the Syrian crisis “aggravated” but said in the absence of international decisions, sanctions, and a directive from the Kremlin they would not halt sales.¹⁵⁶ Satellite imagery dated 15 September 2015 showed newly emplaced artillery pieces, indicating weapons were still being provided to Syria. A Syrian military source confirmed

¹⁵² Ibid, 196.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Data exported from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s Arms Trade Database using the variables of Import to Syria, time frame of 1950 to 2015 (all available), summarized by recipient/supplier and outputted on screen, http://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/html/export_values.php.

¹⁵⁵ “The ‘Big Six’ arms exporters,” *Amnesty International*, published June 11, 2012, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2012/06/big-six-arms-exporters/>.

¹⁵⁶ David M. Herszenhorn, “For Syria, Reliant on Russia for Weapons and Food, Old Bonds Run Deep,” *The New York Times*, published February 18, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/19/world/middleeast/for-russia-and-syria-bonds-are-old-and-deep.html?_r=0.

this to Reuters, stating that Syrian troops received and were trained on new systems that allowed engagement with air and ground targets.¹⁵⁷

Strategically, Syria hosts Russian forces at a deep water naval base in the port of Tartus that they have used since 1971. Historically, the port has been used to deliver weapons to Syria as part of the larger arms trade, although it also hosted naval logistics services for Soviet and Russian ships. It is also one of the few warm-water ports in the region that Russia has access to in the winter.¹⁵⁸ The other two, Murmansk and Sevastopol, are better-equipped naval facilities but both have shortcomings. Murmansk, located off the Barents Sea in the far north of Russia, does not freeze because of the North Atlantic Current. However, in order for naval vessels from the port to gain access to the north Atlantic they must pass through the Barents and Norwegian Seas, a fairly long distance. Sevastopol is more conveniently located in the Black Sea and is under full control of Russian forces since the annexation of Crimea. The issue with Sevastopol is that any ships departing the Black Sea must pass through the Bosphorus Straits, which are under the control of Turkey, a NATO member nation, simplifying the process of a naval blockade in the event of conflict.

Tartus' location on the Mediterranean ensures that if Russia has ships operating in the Mediterranean and Middle East that they will always have a logistics point available to them.

¹⁵⁷ Tom Perry, "Exclusive: Syrian army starts using new weapons from Russia – military source," *Reuters*, published September 18, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-exclusive-idUSKCN0RH15S20150918>.

¹⁵⁸ A warm water port is a port that does not ice over in the winter, requiring ice breakers to clear the path for ships. St. Petersburg, located near Finland off the Baltic Sea, normally freezes in the winter months and can only access the Atlantic through the Baltic and North Seas, this is further complicated if a widespread freeze creates ice in most of the Baltic Sea. Arkhangelsk, located in the White Sea off the Barents Sea, also freezes in winter months and requires the escort of ice breakers in order for naval vessels to depart. Both ports also lack direct access to the Atlantic Ocean.

It could also someday provide a base from which to operate permanently stationed Russian vessels that would have ready access to the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Arabian Sea. Because Tartus could not be blockaded as easily as Sevastopol it is important to maintain the facility and this access. It also allows a naval presence in countries and regions that have been important to Russia's policies and strategy in the far abroad, allowing influence to extend beyond the immediate Russian borders. Unfettered naval access to the Arabian Sea in particular is important because of the significant regional interests in the Middle East, India, and Africa, and the reality that naval forces at the other major warm-water naval bases that are not easily blockaded, such as Murmansk and Vladivostok, would require several weeks underway to reach the region. Additionally, maintaining Tartus allows Russia to further develop a logistics point that is vital to the operations of a blue-water Navy.¹⁵⁹

Tartus is not a Russian-owned facility, nor does it have warships permanently stationed there. Its classification as a deep-water facility means it can host a variety of vessels with deeper drafts, including nuclear submarines. Recent reporting by Russian outlet *The Moscow Times* indicates work is being done on the facility to make it a "full scale naval base" that would provide improved logistical support to Russian vessels in the region and possibly host even larger ships.¹⁶⁰ In addition to being used as a weapons delivery facility

¹⁵⁹ A blue-water Navy is capable of operating across wider expanses of deep ocean. The challenges of maintaining ships capable of being significantly geographically distant from port for extended periods mean that only a few countries possess deep-water navies. Additionally, a blue-water navy requires logistics support to be available at further flung foreign ports. The benefits and costs are both very high.

¹⁶⁰ Matthew Bodner, "Why Russia Is Expanding Its Naval Base in Syria," *The Moscow Times*, published September 21, 2015,

and a logistics point for ships in the Mediterranean, it has also been used as a point of entry for covert Soviet and Russian forces operating in the country. In 1983 a Soviet anti-aircraft unit was delivered to the port on board a cruise ship in an effort to hide its affiliation with the Red Army. The unit was responsible for setting up surface to air missile (SAM) batteries meant to deter Israeli aircraft that may fly into Syria, and to shoot them down if necessary. Syria also hosted Soviet and then Russian forces in the early 1990s; these forces trained a Syrian missile defense unit on Soviet missile systems and reported that Syrian citizens viewed them as “protectors.”¹⁶¹ Over the course of Russian involvement in Syria the port of Tartus has hosted various warships, including amphibious landing ships. Additionally, Russian forces have delivered weapons systems, “military specialists” to train Syrian forces on the equipment, and other unidentified cargo.¹⁶²

Russian Involvement

In early September 2015 Russian forces began the process of setting up facilities, including modular buildings and an air traffic control system, at an air base in Latakia, a Syrian port city 50 miles north of Tartus. The construction at the air base, which appeared to be able to hold 1,000 troops and had cargo and passenger aircraft coming and going, raised concerns for world leaders that Russia was going to prop up a regime that many had

<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/why-russia-is-expanding-its-syrian-naval-base/531986.html>.

¹⁶¹ Maria Tsvetkova, Christian Lowe, and Olga Dzyubenko, “Russian military mission in Syria brings history full circle,” *Reuters*, published October 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-idUSKCN0SH1P820151023>.

¹⁶² Luis Martinez, “Russian Build-Up Continues at Base in Syria, Causing Concern Among US Officials,” *ABC News*, published September 9, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/russian-build-continues-base-syria-causing-concern-us/story?id=33637451>.

proclaimed should step down.¹⁶³ On 30 September Russian aircraft, launched out of Latakia, began striking targets in Syria. The air strikes were described by Major General Igor Konashenkov, a spokesman for Russia's Defense Ministry, as precision strikes aimed at "military equipment, communications centers, transport vehicles, arms depots, ammunition and fuels and lubricant materials belonging to ISIS terrorists."¹⁶⁴ United States Secretary of Defense Ash Carter countered Russian statements regarding the airstrikes, informing reporters that the airstrikes were actually targeting US backed moderate rebel groups opposed to Assad's rule and were conducted in areas not held by ISIS.¹⁶⁵ Russian airstrikes continued throughout the month of October with non-ISIS groups opposed to Assad's rule as their primary targets. Additionally, Russia began launching cruise missiles from multiple surface ships operating in the Caspian Sea in October. The cruise missiles were coordinated with the ongoing air strikes and provided support to pro-Assad ground forces that were launching an offensive at the time. Russia claimed that the strikes were aimed at ISIS, though reporting indicates that they were still targeted at anti-Assad forces. On 31 October a Russian airliner flying at 31,000 feet over Egypt's Sinai Peninsula crashed into the desert, an act Russia alleges was the result of an ISIS planted bomb, causing Russia to turn their focus, at least temporarily, to ISIS forces in Syria.¹⁶⁶ By mid-November Russia had begun using tactical

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Michael R. Gordon and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Moves in Syria Pose Concerns for U.S.," *The New York Times*, published September 4, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/05/world/middleeast/russian-moves-in-syria-pose-concerns-for-us.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ No official statement has been released regarding the cause of the crash. ISIS has taken responsibility for the crash and some world leaders believe ISIS was involved (including Russia, who launched retaliatory strikes in Syria). Egypt has denied any links to terrorism. A Reuters article published in January 2016 purports that anonymous sources stated ISIS was

aircraft and long range bombers outfitted with an air-launched cruise missile to conduct air strikes on ISIS targets in eastern Syria, notifying US forces prior to the first strikes in an attempt to avoid an incident. Additionally, media reports indicate that Russia continued cruise missile strikes from Caspian Sea-based surface vessels, which primarily were aimed at ISIS targets but may have also destroyed rebel targets. In all, over 100 cruise missiles were launched in a four-day period in mid-November.¹⁶⁷ Russia's grand finale of sorts with their cruise missile launches came on 8 December when a Russian diesel-electric powered submarine that had recently completed sea trials launched multiple cruise missiles at ISIS targets in Syria.

The launch of cruise missiles from long-range bombers, surface ships, and submarines is not unheard of in times of conflict; the US has used them in multiple recent conflicts, including Syria. The unique aspect of Russia's cruise missile launches in Syria in November and December of 2015 is that they were all weapons systems that had not seen combat before. This is a stark difference from the US Tomahawk cruise missile that was first deployed in 1984 and has been fired over 2,000 times in combat missions. The Kh-101¹⁶⁸ was launched from long-range bombers at ISIS targets, with some calling it an odd pick because it severely outmatched the ISIS targets it was up against, leaving some to opine that

involved. "Exclusive: EgyptAir mechanic suspected in Russian plane crash," *Reuters*, published January 29, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-crash-suspects-idUSKCN0V712V?utm_source=twitter.

¹⁶⁷ "Syria crisis: Massive Russian air strikes on 'IS Targets'," *BBC News*, published November 20, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34882503>.

¹⁶⁸ Kh-101 is an intercontinental ballistic missile with a reported range of 6000 miles (it could hit almost anywhere in the U.S. from Moscow). It is equipped with an 880 pound warhead and is capable of flying below many air defense radars, making it an ideal weapons system for a surprise attack.

it was used to show off Russian capabilities.¹⁶⁹ The 3M14T¹⁷⁰ was launched from surface ships and a newly fielded submarine having just completed trials in October; the Russian Defense Ministry reported that the launches occurred while the submarine was submerged but video indicates the vessel was operating on the surface.¹⁷¹ Once again, the launches demonstrated a significant advance in Russian technology that shows they have “closed the gap between the U.S. in conventional defense technology.”¹⁷²

In mid-February it was estimated that 4,000 to 5,000 Russian personnel and 70 aircraft were in Syria, with bombers also launching from Russia to support air strikes.¹⁷³ Additionally, Russian Spetsnaz (Special Forces) were deployed to Syria prior to the official intervention and remained following the drawdown. Their primary functions were to conduct reconnaissance and provide special security for Russian facilities and assets; they were not however believed to be involved in direct combat operations (a direct departure

¹⁶⁹ Kyle Mizokami, “Russia’s Newest Cruise Missiles Make Combat Debut in Syria,” *Popular Mechanics*, published November 20, 2015, <http://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/news/a18262/russia-new-cruise-missiles-make-combat-debut-in-syria/>.

¹⁷⁰ The 3M14T is a ship/submarine launched land attack cruise missile capable of traveling over 1000 miles. It is equipped with an 882 pound warhead and is designed to fly low to the ground/ocean to avoid detection and engagement by air defense systems. It is also designed to fly around known air defenses, radar, and obstacles and its path can be updated midflight using satellite communications.

¹⁷¹ Christopher P. Cavalas, “Russian Submarine Hits Targets in Syria,” *Defense News*, published December 9, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/breaking-news/2015/12/08/submarine-russia-kalibr-caliber-cruise-missile-syria-kilo/76995346/>.

¹⁷² Brendan McGarry, “Strike Highlights Russia’s Advances in Cruise Missile Technology,” *Defense Tech*, published October 8, 2015, <http://www.defensetech.org/2015/10/08/strike-highlights-russias-advances-in-cruise-missile-technology/>.

¹⁷³ Michael Kofman, “The Russian Quagmire in Syria and Other Washington Fairy Tales,” *War on the Rocks*, published February 16, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/02/the-russian-quagmire-in-syria-and-other-washington-fairy-tales/>.

from other recent Spetsnaz activities in Crimea and Ukraine).¹⁷⁴ Even though Russia has avoided a commitment of ground forces, their support of Assad through air strikes and artillery has assisted the regime in gaining territory from rebel groups as well as ISIS. On 11 February a multinational meeting in Munich called for a reduction in hostilities against all targets except al Nusra and ISIS within a week. Only days later civilian areas with two schools and five medical centers (including a Doctors Without Borders hospital) in rebel held towns were targeted by either Russian or Syrian missiles.¹⁷⁵ These attacks, unfortunately causing only a continuance of civilian loss of life in the conflict, drew significant international condemnation with United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon calling them a “blatant violation of international law.”¹⁷⁶

A ceasefire went into effect in Syria on 27 February with a goal of increasing humanitarian aid and moving Syria toward a political transition that could bring an end to hostilities. Russia announced a withdrawal of forces from Syria on 14 March due to Russian success in achieving objectives in the nation and the ongoing peace talks. The decision caught many off guard, although some were quick to point out that it was a withdrawal in name only. Russia sent some troops home but ensured some stayed behind to provide logistical support to assets still in country. Additionally, some Russian aircraft returned home only to be replaced by new tactical aircraft (although possibly at lower levels than

¹⁷⁴ Mark Galeotti, “The Three Faces of Russian Spetsnaz in Syria,” *War on the Rocks*, published March 21, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/the-three-faces-of-russian-spetsnaz-in-syria/>.

¹⁷⁵ Suleiman al-Khalidi and Lisa Barrington. “Around 50 dead as missiles hit medical centers and schools in Syrian towns,” *Reuters*, published February 15, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-missiles-idUSKCN0VO12Y>.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

before).¹⁷⁷ Russia also maintained anti-access area denial weaponry that could establish a no-fly zone and prevent the establishment of a humanitarian corridor for safe delivery of aid.¹⁷⁸ The remaining forces allow Russia to continue airstrikes in support of Assad and more significantly act as a deterrent against Western action against Assad. In fact, Putin has openly threatened that they could reconstitute forces in a matter of hours and that they would shoot down “any target” that violated Syrian air space.¹⁷⁹

On 24 March, almost a month after the cease fire began, US Secretary of State John Kerry characterized the situation as including “improvements on the ground” that were “welcome but not sufficient, nor permanent’.”¹⁸⁰ This characterization came after a four-hour-long meeting with Putin in which they continued to discuss the way forward, including a possible political transition, and even touched on issues in Ukraine. Additionally, peace talks have been ongoing in Geneva in an attempt to resolve the situation on the ground. The reality, though, is that Russian forces remain a central part of Assad’s operations in Syria. The announcement of a drawdown was merely for show. Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov told Russian media on 28 March that the battle for Palmyra in Syria was fought by Assad’s forces with the support of Russian aircraft, Special Forces, and military

¹⁷⁷ Garrett I. Campbell, “The ulterior motive behind Russia’s partial Syria withdrawal,” *Brookings Institution*, published March 18, 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/03/18-russian-withdrawal-from-syria-campbell>.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Andrew Osborn and Denis Dyomkin, “Russia can make powerful Syria military comeback in hours: Putin,” *Reuters*, published March 17, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-putin-idUSKCN0WJ1D4>.

¹⁸⁰ Neil MacFarquhar, “Russia and the U.S. Agree to Try to Bolster Cease-Fire in Syria,” *The New York Times*, published March 24, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/25/world/europe/kerry-russia-talks.html>.

advisers.¹⁸¹ The inclusion of Special Forces as separate from advisors in this statement implies that the Special Forces did not act in the capacity of advisors but rather combatants, a point some journalists have begun to raise.¹⁸² Reuters reporting from 30 March also discusses continued Russian involvement in Syria and highlights Russian attempts to conceal their involvement. Reuters reporting indicates that in the weeks following the drawdown Russian ships have delivered more military equipment and supplies to Syria than they have removed.¹⁸³ In fact, the deliveries (at this point it is unclear what the cargo specifically is) are so heavy that civilian photographs of the ships transiting between the port of Novorossiysk¹⁸⁴ in the Black Sea and Tartus indicate ships inbound for Tartus sit significantly lower in the water than those outbound from Tartus.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, Reuters reports that it appears the presence of warships in the Mediterranean has increased since the “withdrawal” to nearly one dozen, probably to protect the cargo ships but also to provide naval fire support.¹⁸⁶ In addition to the military ships, civilian cargo ships have made trips to Syria with military equipment onboard. Interestingly, Reuters reports that some vessels with

¹⁸¹ “Russian tactical air group subject to withdrawal from Syria back in Russia – General Staff,” *TASS Russian News Agency*, published March 28, 2016, <http://tass.ru/en/world/865520>.

¹⁸² Thomas Gibbons-Neff, “How Russian special forces are shaping the fight in Syria,” *The Washington Post*, published March 29, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2016/03/29/how-russian-special-forces-are-shaping-the-fight-in-syria/>.

¹⁸³ Maria Tsvetkova, “Exclusive: Russia, despite draw down, shipping more to Syria than removing,” *Reuters*, published March 30, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-supplies-idUSKCN0WW0DJ>.

¹⁸⁴ This is a commercial port although Russia has been attempting to build a Naval base here to house multiple submarines. There is no recent or reliable reporting on the status of construction (a 2014 article states it will be ready by 2016) but it would face the same constraints of Sevastopol in regards to potential blockades in the Bosphorus Straits.

¹⁸⁵ Tsvetkova, “Exclusive: Russia, despite draw down, shipping more to Syria than removing.”

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

onboard transponders meant to broadcast their locations to fellow vessels were switched off prior to reaching Syria, and did not come back online until they were en route back to Russia.¹⁸⁷

The path forward in Syria is far from clear at this point. The nation, long an ally, provides Russia a unique opportunity to exert a significant amount of influence in a far abroad¹⁸⁸ region that also has strategic implications for Western countries. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East, the US's ongoing involvement in the region, and Russia's history with and interests in Syria provide an opportunity for Russian leadership to counter the U.S. on "neutral" (not quite NATO, save for Turkey, and not Eastern Europe) territory. It also allows Russia to directly challenge an ongoing U.S. strategic interest where American and Western forces have been unable to reach a resolution. If Russia can "defeat" ISIS and make a deal with Assad they force the West to acknowledge their importance.

Additionally, the ongoing operations in the Middle East serve a larger purpose to undermine the effectiveness of American leaders or simply to highlight their ineffectiveness to American citizens. This second part is important, and it is a central component of the ongoing propaganda blitz by Russia. Social media postings began circulating following the Russian entrance into Syria that have "demonstrated" the Russian "prowess" at dealing with ISIS where the US has "failed." It has appealed to a group of Americans who are largely dissatisfied with current US policy in the region, which they perceive as weak. Russia's attempts to paint itself as decisive and successful against ISIS underscores the Russian narrative that US leaders are the problem and Russian leaders offer the solution. If Russia

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ The far abroad is a term that refers to nations that were not former Soviet States. It includes communist or Warsaw Pact nations, Western nations, and everyone else.

can win the propaganda war in the Middle East against the US then it can more successfully launch a propaganda campaign regarding its near abroad¹⁸⁹ that could potentially undermine US support for countries seeking to break from the Russian sphere. The reality that it is also an election year for the US undoubtedly plays a role, and it is in Russia's interests to see a nationalist president elected who finds NATO and the EU a waste of American time and money. If Russian leaders can play to already existing tensions in the American political sphere, specifically isolationism and distance from significant Western institutions, they further cement their ability to exert influence in both the near and far abroad without American meddling for at least four years.

Ultimately, Russian involvement in Syria has much more to do with economy and geography. It addresses a Russian strategy that extends far beyond destroying "terrorists" and propping up an ally. Direct involvement in Syria is the most effective way Russia can counter Western policies. It is a means by which Russia can address issues in the near abroad by forcing engagement in the far abroad, and it ensures that all paths of resolution (at least in Syria, for now) go through Russia.

¹⁸⁹ The near abroad is a term developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union to describe former Soviet States.

IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY

“If this [stationing more NATO troops in Eastern Europe] isn’t preparing for another Cold War, what is it for then? For a hot war? Such is the reality.”

Dmitry Medvedev (Russian Prime Minister)

The rumblings of a new Cold War have been increasing in strength and coming from politicians and scholars on both sides of the issue. Western leaders view Russia as pushing the world toward a new standoff, and Russia views the west as making provocative moves. As western organizations, particularly North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), have expanded to Russia’s borders, so has Russia sought to push back and expand its own organizations and interests. A strengthening Russian economy in recent years has resulted in significant military expansions and advanced weapons programs. This has allowed Russians to return to what they view as their rightful place as a super-power. However, there is one major issue: The West refuses to accept that Russia is a global power player and still treats it as the loser in the larger geopolitical realm.¹⁹⁰ That is not to say that Russia did not experience a significant degradation after the Cold War, rather that economically and militarily it is no longer the Russia of 1991. The Russians view themselves as important and deserving, and they feel belittled and written off by the West. Their goals in the grander scheme of global politics and influence are not as aggressive as they appear at face value, but their implementation is contrary to the Western understanding of political and diplomatic posturing. That has resulted in a significant misunderstanding of Russian objectives and potential actions. This has translated into policy actions that, at least in some theaters, pose serious potential consequences for security and stability.

¹⁹⁰ Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 5 & 6.

Russian Military Expansion

An interactive New York Times article from 2015 provides the most comprehensive look at Russian military expansion in recent years. A steadily increasing military budget from roughly \$10 billion (USD) in 2005 to just over \$50 billion (USD) in 2015, and a single year budget increase of \$11 billion (USD) from 2014 to 2015 have played a significant role in Russia's expanded military aggression.¹⁹¹ The increased funds have been used, in part, to build and/or update 18 military bases in the Arctic region, ensuring Russia maintains a level of influence as ice caps in the region recede.¹⁹² The role of the Arctic was in heavy play among the US, Canada, and the USSR during the Cold War and it still provides important strategic advantages to this day because it is the shortest distance between the superpowers. In fact, some long-range patrols are flown over the Arctic and along Canadian and US air defense zones, and there are regular naval exercises by all three countries in the region. Russia has also used the funding increases to expand and construct Russian bases in neighboring countries. An interactive map compiled by Al Jazeera showing Russian bases abroad, along with their purpose and the year established, shows that as of 2015 Russia had 18 bases outside Russia, all of which are in their near abroad.¹⁹³ Of these bases seven have been established since 2008, two are air bases in Belarus and five are military bases dispersed between Belarus (one) and Georgia (two each in the areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

¹⁹¹ Catrin Einhorn, Hannah Fairfield, and Tim Wallace, "Russia Rearms for a New Era," *The New York Times*, published December 24, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/12/24/world/asia/russia-arming.html?_r=0.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ The near abroad is a term developed after the collapse of the Soviet Union to describe former Soviet States. It is distinct from the far abroad, which is a term that refers to nations that were not former Soviet States including former communist or Warsaw Pact nations, Western nations, and everyone else.

that were recognized by Russia as independent following the 2008 war).¹⁹⁴ In 2014 Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu implied to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti¹⁹⁵ that Russia was also planning on expanding to places such as, Cuba, Nicaragua, Singapore, the Seychelles, Vietnam, Venezuela, and other countries.¹⁹⁶ Some facilities would be military bases, although the Russian government plans on establishing logistics points for ports of call while naval vessels are underway and refueling points for long range strategic bombers while on patrol.¹⁹⁷ This expansion would not only given Russia an increased global presence in the form of a blue-water navy¹⁹⁸ that could project Russian military power, but it would open the door for increased expansion in both countries were partnerships were established, or in other nations in the region. It would also provide a strategic jump off point for any other operations that Russian forces may, in the future, consider launching.

Russia's increased military expenditures have allowed them to make significant upgrades to equipment and weapons systems that had fallen into significant disrepair in the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR. New air, naval, ground, and weapons systems give them capabilities more on par with the more advanced Western military powers, including

¹⁹⁴ Tamila Vashalomidze and Mohsin Ali, "Interactive: Russia's foreign military bases," *Al Jazeera*, published February 19, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2014/05/interactive-russia-foreign-military-bases-201459104513678477.html>.

¹⁹⁵ Short for Russian Information Agency Novosti, RIA Novosti is a state owned media outlet that publishes english language articles via Sputnik News that is meant, like RT, to put a Russian spin on world events and counter negative narratives regarding Russia.

¹⁹⁶ "Russia Seeks Several Military Bases Abroad – Defense Minister," *Sputnik News*, published February 26, 2014, <http://sputniknews.com/military/20140226/187917901/Russia-Seeks-Several-Military-Bases-Abroad--Defense-Minister.html>.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ A blue-water Navy is capable of operating for extended periods of time across the ocean and far removed from their own territory. It requires both afloat and inport logistics services around the world (or at least in the area distant operations occur) and is costly in terms of logistics and maintenance.

the United States. In fact, Russia plans to modernize 70 percent of its military by 2020 with a special focus on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), fixed and rotary wing aircraft, tanks, ships and submarines, and a variety of artillery systems that include air defense, multiple rocket launchers, and surface to surface missiles.¹⁹⁹ Some of these will be upgraded systems, prolonging their combat life and improving their performance. Others will be brand new equipment meant to compete with the equipment fielded by Western counterparts. Some of the new and upgraded systems have already made their combat debut, with Russian leaders ensuring that Western powers had a front row seat. Russia released video footage, widely circulated by media outlets, on their Defense Ministry YouTube channel showing new cruise missiles being launched by a long-range bomber,²⁰⁰ and upgraded but not-yet combat-tested cruise missiles being launched from ships in the Caspian sea (with a flight map),²⁰¹ and a newly fielded submarine.²⁰² Even though sanctions have caused recent economic hardships that could slow the progress of modernization initiatives, many upgrades and new systems are already completed or near enough to completion that Russia will ensure at least some percentage of the systems reach operational status.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ “Application of the latest high-precision strike cruise missile on board the Tu-160,” *Russian Defense Ministry*, published November 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d48LHI6u3bY>. (Website translated to English by Google Chrome).

²⁰¹ “The massive strike with precision weapons on targets in Syria LIH of the Caspian Sea,” *Russian Defense Ministry*, published October 7, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMasnaAf_H4. (Website translated to English by Google Chrome).

²⁰² “Group launched cruise missiles “Caliber” submarine “Rosto-on-Don” for terrorist targets in Syria,” *Russian Defense Ministry*, published December 8, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwja7sogNs4>. (Website translated to English by Google Chrome).

However, these same sanctions will limit strategic objectives in other areas, including the establishment of overseas bases, logistics points, and logistic/supply vessels. The maintenance cycles for ships capable of operating across large expanses of oceans far away from home ports are financially taxing, and ensuring deliveries of food and fuel to these vessels is even more complicated. Failing to maintain these vessels significantly decreases readiness and operating range, if it was easy there would be significantly more countries with blue-water navies. At this point in time Russian naval forces are capable of conducting blue-water-type operations for short periods of time but they are unable to support prolonged operations far away from friendly territory and ports. Until further financial stability can occur Russia will be unable to develop and sustain a full blown blue-water navy capable of approaching U.S. capabilities.

Additionally, many of the modernization initiatives have focused on the professionalization and readiness of Russian forces themselves, creating a more agile fighting force capable of deploying rapidly to multiple operating areas and shifting mission objectives as needed.²⁰³ The professionalization, readiness, and increased flexibility of forces have been especially apparent in recent Russian operations. Russian forces rapidly deployed to Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria, bringing equipment with them and quickly meeting objectives. Russian forces have also, in this period, conducted scheduled and unannounced exercises that have seen them efficiently move up to 100,000 or even more troops and their equipment throughout Russia.²⁰⁴ Finally, Russian forces have participated in ongoing show of force

²⁰³ Gustav Gressel, "Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, and What it Means for Europe," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, published October 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Russias_Quiet_Military_Revolution.pdf, 2.

²⁰⁴ Einhorn, Fairfield, and Wallace, "Russia Rearms for a New Era."

exercises, in the form of various operations, but particularly air patrols. These are being conducted at levels and in locations not seen since the Cold War. They have, at times, been overtly aggressive and dangerous, while at other times they merely seem to serve as a reminder that Russian forces are there and capable of acting if need be.

Western Goals

Russia's treatment as the loser that must accept the desires of Western nations in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, particularly in the European theater, has resulted in increasingly aggressive and destabilizing actions by Russia.²⁰⁵ Putin's perception of a total disregard of Russian interests in the period since 1991 created a system in which he, an ultra-nationalist leader, could rise up and inspire nationalism in Russian citizens and speakers both at home and even (to a limited extent) in the near abroad. This overcorrection is now manifesting itself in Eastern Europe where Russia is desperately trying to maintain its deteriorating influence.

Russian rhetoric regarding the European theater has been strong. Inflammatory statements about the tragedy that was the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rightful place of Ukraine and Crimea within Russia as "Novorossiya," and even the U.S. desiring a hot war have fed into a mindset that Russia's goals are to return to those days when Russia ruled over its near abroad as one big nation along with its allies and satellite states. In reality, though, it is highly unlikely that Russia truly wants to seize control in its former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact satellite states and recreate the putative glory days of the Soviet Union. Instead, Russian goals are probably to increase influence in the region and guarantee themselves a prominent seat at the global power players' table. The keyword is prominent.

²⁰⁵ Kalb, *Imperial Gamble*, 5.

Their goal is to be treated as a global equal and not be left out of the proverbial winner's circle that is being created by EU and NATO expansion.

Russian rhetoric and the associated initiatives are not, in Russian minds, unprovoked. In fact, Russia views these reactions as defensive in nature, meant to counter encroachment by the US and NATO. Russia has made numerous statements regarding this very topic, statements that NATO has taken the time to counter in a fact sheet on their website. Russia believes:

- NATO is worsening divisions in Europe;
- NATO has a Cold War mindset and is trying to encircle Russia;
- The larger goal of NATO is to contain, weaken, isolate, and marginalize Russia;
- NATO is destabilizing the region and plans to build bases and station equipment in non-NATO countries;
- NATO poses a direct threat to Russia through its worldwide bases, actions, ascension to greater economic and political influence, and military exercises.²⁰⁶

These issues run contrary to Western sentiments, so much so that NATO took the time to counter every accusation. Their responses, based on their perspectives and world view, are rational and logical. For Russia they are simply excuses meant to conceal the truth, which is of course all the accusations Russia's leadership has made based on its own perspectives and worldview. And who should understand this better than Russia, a nation more than willing to spout shockingly blatant falsehoods and pretend that they are absolutely truthful. From the Russians' perspective, NATO is just as guilty as they are. But NATO will not admit it, so Russia raises a second category of issues with NATO—issues that do not directly impact Russia but are meant to undermine the legitimacy and capabilities of NATO, especially in the eyes of those outside of its direct sphere of influence.

²⁰⁶ "NATO-Russia relations: the facts," *NATO*, updated December 17, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl409.

Russia's second category of accusations against NATO falls squarely into the argument of NATO failing at its missions and lacking legitimacy. The accusations include:

- NATO violated the Non-Proliferation Treaty through multiple exercises and arrangements;
- NATO violated its own policies in responding to Russian actions in Ukraine;
- NATO reneged on its own guarantees to not expand east after the Cold War;
- NATO should have been disbanded after the Cold War;
- NATO expansion is following the same process as the expansion of the USSR and Warsaw Pact before their collapse in 1989-1991;
- NATO took illegitimate action in Kosovo and Libya;
- NATO was hypocritical regarding Crimea, which was identical to Kosovo and justified based on the opinion of the International Court of Justice's decision on the independence of Kosovo;
- NATO failed in Afghanistan both militarily and with stopping the drug trade;
- NATO attempted to force Ukraine into the alliance, provoked the Euromaidan, and backed illegitimate Ukrainian leaders.²⁰⁷

These accusations are not meant to do internal damage to NATO, though that would undoubtedly be a positive outcome for Russia. Instead, the accusations would ideally cause foreign countries contemplating NATO membership or closer partnerships with NATO to reconsider. If a country felt that the NATO alliance would undermine its national sovereignty or would disregard some international norms and standards, it may turn away from the alliance and possibly toward Russia. This argument would ideally ensure more countries do not join NATO, while also hopefully moving some toward the idea of joining Russia's own Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). These of course lead into Russia's third set of statements regarding NATO.

The third type of statement Russia has made regarding NATO is based heavily on the foundation laid by the previous two of NATO posing a threat to Russia and lacking legitimacy. This third statement of principles has to do with Russia's own rights, which its

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

leaders believe are infringed on by NATO and are similar to the rules NATO has written for itself. Russians believe:

- They have a right to oppose NATO-supported infrastructure in Central and Eastern European member states;
- They have the right to a “100% guarantee” that Ukraine (or probably any other former Soviet and Warsaw Pact non-member state) will not join NATO.²⁰⁸

These demands show Russia’s true goals, which were mentioned earlier: that Russia be treated as a central and equal player on the European stage, that it deserves to be at the main table as opposed to the outer circle. Russia does not want membership in NATO, at least not Russia under Putin. Instead, Russia just wants to hold an equal amount of power and influence. Russians have been forced to the outside since the start of the Cold War, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union they were left out as their former allies were drawn into the Western embrace. Russia was shunned, and its leaders want to change that and be shown the respect they believe Russia deserves.

Western Security

Their method of achieving this goal is, in classic Russian fashion, bearish and off-putting. Instead of cementing their influence, they are alienating the very people with whom they wish to become equals and potentially pushing the region closer to crisis. Russia does not want to be part of NATO. Russia does not want to fight a hot war with NATO. Russia probably does not even want to be involved in another Cold War with NATO. Russia just wants to be a central power. However, Western leaders seem unable to come up with a way to draw Russia in to their “winner’s circle.” So Russia has become more aggressive and is trying to force its way in. This is in turn further alienating Russia from Western states and

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

other organizations which, instead of engaging Russia, continue to belittle Russian actions and thus widen the rift. There is probably no going back in regards to Ukraine unless the West comes to the table with Russia and brokers a peace deal that gives eastern Ukraine a significant level of autonomy, if not independence. However, any negotiations with eastern Ukraine must involve Russia, or risk further aggravating the situation. Additionally, Russia may need to be drawn closer to NATO and the EU to ease concerns regarding the organization. This could be effectively accomplished through joint exercises meant to address the issue of terrorism in Europe, a security concern for all sides that truly needs a coherent response.

The more likely scenario is that Russia will not be effectively engaged by Western leaders. This is because there is concern that by engaging Russia, the West will validate its leaders' actions and simply prompt them to begin pushing for more and taking their aggressive actions further and further. Western hesitation is understandable in this regard. If eastern Ukraine were granted independence Russia may attempt similar actions in Poland or the Baltics. They also may push back harder on the issues of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and Transnistria in Moldova. This would violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and Moldova even more so than has already occurred, and give other countries the perspective that Western groups are unwilling to act in their interests.

Without engagement, Russia will continue to take subversive action meant to undermine the countries in its crosshairs. The Russians may provide increasingly lethal weapons to eastern Ukrainian rebels or pro-Assad forces, resulting in a significant accident or attack. They may overcommit forces to eastern Ukraine, resulting in a dedication of Western forces to the fight and bringing on a hot war. They may even get overly confident and take

action in a NATO member nation that would then undoubtedly invoke Article 5. Whether the collective defense concept would include commitment of forces or just diplomatic measures remains to be seen even though Article 5 says explicitly that all countries will come to the defense of any member state that is attacked. A Cold War standoff, pitting East against West, may even occur. But there is one scenario that seems most plausible. This involves prolonged subversion and interference in former Soviet states in particular but also possibly former Warsaw Pact nations that create economic and political instability that never turns hot, but also avoids cold war. These campaigns of “controlled instability,” as the Russians now call them, are a gray area of sorts—diplomatic stand offs with both sides cautiously avoiding any real clear or definitive lines of action. There would be no threat of mutually assured destruction, just sanctions and strong rhetoric. Russia would undermine the political integrity of nations that do not align with it and create unrest in these nations. Weapons shipments, though not on the scale of eastern Ukraine, would go to separatist groups who would wage an insurgency of sorts. Countries would suffer politically and economically, unable to regain control unless a pro-Russian government comes to power. Russia would vehemently deny any involvement, regardless of the occasionally blatant evidence, and operate on the adage of “admit nothing, deny everything, make counteraccusations” until Western nations decide to give up that portion of the fight. This has the potential to undermine not only the stability of the nation Russia is targeting but could also undermine the larger economic and political stability of neighboring nations and the EU.

Much has been made of the devastating blow Russia could deal to the Baltics, and NATO, if it invaded with mechanized units. Rand Corporation surmised after tabletop

games and scenarios that “across multiple games using a wide range of expert participants in and out of uniform playing both sides, the longest it has taken Russian forces to reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals of Tallinn and Riga, respectively, is 60 hours. Such a rapid defeat would leave NATO with a limited number of options, all bad.”²⁰⁹ While it is undoubtedly true that NATO forces in the region are not enough to stop a full Russian assault, this does not mean that a full Russian assault is the most feasible scenario. It gives the appearance of having been “red teamed,” a method in which analysts will act as devil’s advocates or given alternate scenarios that are recognized as highly unlikely but still something leaders should recognize as a possibility. However, the authors stray away from red teaming when they surmise that while not likely, “Moscow’s recent behavior suggests that NATO should take the prospect sufficiently seriously to at least evaluate the requirements for deterring and, if necessary, defeating Russian adventurism.”²¹⁰ And they are not inaccurate: It is possible. However, there are endless, more plausible scenarios that have already been mentioned. Ultimately, a hot war does not benefit Russia in any way. The Russians would most likely lose significantly more in terms of economic and political influence than they could possibly gain, even if the conflict ended in a draw. In a war between Russia and the West no one would walk away a winner. Russia would undoubtedly face insurgencies on the ground in countries they invaded, while also engaging in conventional fighting with Western forces. Time has proven that conventional forces struggle to effectively fight insurgencies, particularly over the long term. Add the

²⁰⁹ David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, “Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO’s Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics,” *Rand Corporation*, published 2016, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1200/RR1253/RAND_RR1253.pdf, 1.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 16.

complexities of an insurgency to a constant conventional engagement and the war becomes almost entirely not worth the effort. Losses on both sides would be significant and, if any nuclear or other kinds of WMD were to be deployed, have the potential to outstrip even the devastation that World War II caused in Europe. That is why the new conflict would be neither cold, nor hot; instead, it would be a psychological, geopolitical proxy war that occasionally gets warm but never reaches the boiling point.

Russia's Middle East Strategic & Security Goals

The Middle East is merely an extension of Russian policy in Europe and the Caucasus region. The region provides another avenue by which Russians can insert themselves into global events and make themselves central to the solutions. The long-running relationship Russia has with Syria, and the manner in which it has linked itself to Assad, ensures that Russia is central to any resolution in the region and thus has influence over international security agreements.²¹¹ Russia's role in removing chemical weapons from Syria, while met with hesitation by many in the West, was another way of asserting its role in the larger issue. In fact, Russia has used Syria to reestablish relations with the West, which it had largely ended over the Ukraine problem, a tactic that some have pointed out seems to be working.²¹² This is not to say Russia does not have its own set of interests in Syria. Russian leaders most certainly have geographic and economic interests that hinge on the outcome of the Civil War. But those interests are only a piece of a much larger issue of global influence.

While Russian support for Assad has resulted in multiple issues with the West, particularly because of the targeting of Western backed rebels, it is probably not destabilizing

²¹¹ Bobo Lo, *Russia and the New World Disorder* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 221.

²¹² MacFarquhar, "Russia and the U.S. Agree to Try to Bolster Cease-Fire in Syria."

for the region at large. In fact, if Russia could only turn its fire power to focus primarily on ISIS, as well as using its influence with Assad to broker a transition of power, it could improve some things in the region. The reality, particularly where the Middle East is concerned, must be that the solution is comprehensive between all parties, and Russia is the country with the most influence over Assad. Russia could easily be allowed to maintain relations with Syria in terms of weapons transfers and the port of Tartus, and they could help usher in a less despotic form of leadership by pressuring Assad to work more effectively to address the issues in the country, including his tyrannical treatment of toward Sunnis and other outside groups.

With regards to Russian goals in the Middle East, the West has much to gain if it can broker some sort of arrangement. Allowing Russia to exert its influence could make it feel valuable and valued as a world player, and it could open the door to resolving issues in Europe, a goal Russia seems to have. Granted, resolution of the crisis in Syria may not look the same to both sides, but there is a middle ground that everyone would greatly benefit from meeting, and Russia holds a very important key to that middle ground.

Global Goals & Security

The bulk of Russia's focus is on their near abroad, but that is not to say they do not have global interests and goals. As was mentioned regarding both Europe and the Middle East, Russia wants to be a power player with a central role in resolving issues. Indications by the Russian defense minister that they are seeking bases and partnerships with nations in the Americas and the Pacific hint to global aspirations for influence. This has two ways it can play out, and the result depends heavily on how Western leaders and diplomats handle the process. They can either seek to further alienate Russia, probably driving Russia to a

more extreme position in places like Cuba and Vietnam, or they can initiate meaningful engagement with Russia on issues in those areas. Russia is probably better positioned to assist in dealing with nations like North Korea, China, and Cuba than is any Western nation. The authoritarian similarities between the regimes make leaders in these countries more likely to listen to and engage with their Russian counterparts. If the West can become inclusive toward Russia it could at least thaw some of the pervasive issues in these regions.

Ultimately, any sort of hostile relationship between Russia and the West does more harm than good. It allows historic divides to fester like a wound that cannot heal, developing infection that spreads and does significant damage. Instead of continuing to treat Russia within an “us versus them” scenario that harkens back to the Cold War, Western leaders should seek to engage Russia in a meaningful way. If they fail to do this, Russia will only push itself further away, inflaming tensions and creating a deteriorating security situation. It is a scenario in which Russia has proven time and again that it is willing to engage, though it does not seem to be the priority right now. Russian leaders, for all their bravado, recognize that the Soviet Union cannot dominate the world. Their goal is not to bring back the Soviet Union, but rather to have the level of influence that they had as the Soviet Union. The difference here is substantial and vitally important for Western leaders to understand.

CONCLUSION

Russia is a complex country that has demonstrated an innate ability to influence international events and challenge international order on a large and at times frightening scale. Russia's willingness to take aggressive actions and escalate situations relating to their neighbors has created a perspective of Russia as a country that always seems to be trying to outmaneuver and overpower its neighbors. Recent history does not do much to disprove this concept. Regardless of intentions or goals there is no denying that Russia is willing to violate international norms and mores to achieve strategic aims. This does not mean that we currently teeter on the brink of war, regardless of characterizations that suggest otherwise. In fact, those characterizations might be purposeful, attempting to frighten the other side away from the brink and toward diplomatic resolution. Brinkmanship is not a good way to handle diplomacy, but when examining Russian actions it is also not entirely unreasonable from their perspective.

It is also important to note that the current situations involving Russia are extremely fluid. Between the completion of the first and second drafts of chapter six of this document – a two day period – Palmyra had fallen to Assad's forces with the support of Russian troops who had been "withdrawn" weeks earlier, and reports were coming out regarding increased cargo shipments and naval presence in the Mediterranean near Syria. The current situations in Eastern Europe and the Middle East could play out in many different ways. It is possible, though unlikely, that larger wars could break out in the near future. It is more likely that the status quo will be maintained but that Eastern European stability will continue to deteriorate. A truce could be reached in eastern Ukraine, or fighting could experience another increase as the weather warms in the region. At this point there are no reliable indications in the press

regarding how this will ultimately play out. Scholars and experts can and will try and understand what the implications are of daily developments, policy makers and military leaders will continue to seek out information that can guide their own policy and strategies in the most effective way. Only time will tell what happens next, and hopefully it will not be anything like a repeat of the not-so-distant past.

What we can say with confidence is that Russians have long been and will long be Russians, and they will act in ways driven by deep context, strategic culture, and their view of other states and players in the world, and particularly in their near abroad. If policymakers and intelligence analysts, among others, hold to these fundamental aspects of what it means to be Russian, and how these dynamics drive Russian behavior, the United States and other western countries will have a much higher likelihood of keeping Russia in check. Only by offering the olive branch from a position of strength built on understanding, strategic patience, and firmness can the United States and its allies not only check Russian aggression and expansionism, but also begin to build a great level of mutual understanding and fair dealing. This outcome would benefit all countries and peoples with any kind of stake in the current difficulties.

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BIOGRAPHY

Ashley Nicole Tanner is a mid-level professional, Masters candidate, and veteran of the U.S. Navy. She served five years on active duty as a Navy analyst and enrolled at Angelo State University upon completion of her enlistment. She was awarded an Associate of Science in Crimnology and Criminal Justice from Chaminade University of Honolulu in May 2012. She received her Bachelor of Security Studies in Intelligence, Security Studies, and Analysis with a minor in Cultural Competency and Security Studies, and a certificate in European Area Studies, in May 2014. She graduated summa cum laude and as a College of Arts and Sciences distinguished graduate. She is currently a Master of Security Studies with a concentration in Intelligence, Security Studies, and Analysis. She is currently a member of Tau Sigma national honor society, SALUTE national honor society (for veterans), and Phi Kappa Phi national honor society.

During her academic studies at Angelo State University she worked as a research assistant for Dr. William Taylor's forthcoming book *In the Service of Democracy: American Military Manpower from World War II to the Present*, which is to be published through the University Press of Kansas. In the final semester of her undergraduate studies and the first semester of her graduate studies she served as a co-executive editor for the inaugural and second edition of the Angelo State University Center for Security Studies online Journal of Homeland and National Security Perspectives. She also published a paper in the first edition titled "Examining the Need for a Cyber Intelligence Discipline."

Ashley lives with her husband and dog in San Angelo, TX where she is employed as a Department of the Army civilian employee. She enjoys spending time with her family, reading, watching sports, and spending time outdoors.