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Great Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century: The Ukrainian Example

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GREAT POWER POLITICS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:
THE UKRAINIAN EXAMPLE

BY

OKSANA BYEHA

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Great Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century: The Ukrainian Example

by

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Advisor: David Gordon

The rebirth of the Cold War threatens a potential nuclear crisis. This thesis draws attention to this danger if the ongoing US-Russian confrontation is ignored. Its main focus however is on the behavior of the Russian Federation: and how its domestic and foreign policies have contributed to this situation. The thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a short history of the Cold War and a brief preface to the first chapter. Chapter I, Russia Versus the United States, focuses on the Western-Russian differences and the policies derived from this. In Chapter II, Ukraine’s Crisis, the Western-Russian confrontation is examined in this particular arena. The Conclusion summarizes the findings and provides areas for further investigation, as well as a potential solution to Ukrainian-Russian tensions.
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Introduction

The Cold War: History

The Cold War was a time of political and military tensions between the West (the United States and Western Europe) and the East (the Soviet Union) that began shortly after World War II and lasted until 1991. The official reason why these two allies and winners of World War II confronted each other was their opposing ideologies – capitalism and multi-party democracy against communism and dictatorship. The actual reason was a more general power struggle, which went much deeper, and which did not therefore end with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The current situation in international relations suggests that a new Cold War has begun. It is the aim of this thesis to explore the ongoing West-East conflict, to explain why it exists, and to suggest a possible solution.

The rebirth of the Cold War threatens a potential nuclear crisis. This thesis draws attention to this danger if the ongoing US - Russian confrontation is ignored. However, its main focus is on the behavior of the Russian Federation, and how its domestic and foreign policies have contributed to this situation. The thesis consists of an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides a short history of the Cold War and a brief preface to the first chapter. Chapter I, Russia Versus the United States, focuses on the Western-Russian differences and the policies derived from this. In Chapter II, Ukraine’s Crisis, the Western-Russian confrontation is examined in this particular arena. The Conclusion summarizes the findings and provides areas for further investigation, as well as a potential solution to Ukrainian-Russian tensions.

The Soviet Union and the West were joined in a common struggle during World War II to fight a single enemy, Nazi Germany. Not surprisingly, cooperation between the two declined...
right after the war, when both the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) emerged as superpowers and began to struggle for the right to ‘inherit’ Europe as a sphere of influence. While the major players never faced each other in a direct military conflict, they did engage in proxy warfare in regions broadly spread around the globe. The highest point of the Cold War was the Cuban missile crisis of 1962. Fortunately, negotiations proved effective and a nuclear war was averted. Never before or after was the world so close to destruction. But the crisis did demonstrate how dangerous antagonism between superpowers can be. Cooperation and peaceful settlement of conflicts became the highest priority in international relations. The question posed here is why negotiations failed in the case of Ukraine in 2014.

Some have seen the Ukrainian conflict to be the highest point of tension between the West and Russia since 1991, when the old Soviet Union disintegrated. Edward Lucas, the author of *The New Cold War*, thinks a new Cold War started with the Georgian war in 2008. While this thesis does not necessarily accept that the Cold War recommenced that early, it does acknowledge that Russia has been behaving as though the West is its most important adversary. There do seem to be serious indications that since Russian president Vladimir Putin came to power in 1991, he has been committed to rebuilding the Russian Empire. It is unclear whether this is being done out of a desire for aggrandizement, or simply as a defensive measure.

World War II showed what the consequences of failure in international diplomacy can lead to. If a political conflict between the superpowers ever escalated to direct military conflict again, the world would be gravely threatened with nuclear war. Knowing this, why do states continue to engage in confrontations? Why do they ignore the dangers that a single ill-considered step might bring? Professor John J. Mearsheimer suggests an answer in *The Tragedy of Great*
*Power Politics.* Mearsheimer’s position serves as the theoretical basis for this thesis. It is discussed below.
Chapter I

Russia Versus the United States

Political Realism is the Answer

Mearsheimer’s basic assumption is that states are constantly seeking power because, with the absence of effective international government, the world is anarchic.¹ Since the primary goal of every state is survival, they all need sufficient strength to protect themselves from possible aggression. This is the reason why these states themselves often act aggressively. He proposes two basic theories about international relations – liberalism and political realism. Liberalism is optimistic, believing reason can help make the world a better place. In a liberal world, economic interdependence prevents states from fighting, while the existence of democracies, which tend not to go to war with each other, also helps ensure peace. The existence of international institutions further diminishes the possibility of war. The only problem is that states’ troubled internal politics might encourage international adventures.²

Political realists are pessimists. In their world, the most important force that drives states’ external politics is the search of power. “[R]ealists believe that the behavior of great powers is influenced mainly by their external environment,” and “hold that calculations about power dominate states’ thinking, with constant competition for power among themselves.”³ Realists understand that the most important goal of a state is survival. Aggression, when used for national defense, is both understandable, and pardonable. In some cases it is even justified.

After World War II the struggle for global hegemony was simplified, being between the USSR and the United States. The Cold War had begun. Although America seemed to be the

² Ibid., 15-17.
³ Ibid., 17-18.
undisputed winner after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, global domination, Mearsheimer argues, was in fact both unstable and temporary, so that the world soon was once again “condemned to perpetual great-power competition.”

George Friedman, the author of *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*, shares this opinion about US – Russian relations. He suggests the Russian question was reduced but not settled with the end of the Cold War. The writer, a geopolitical forecaster and strategist on international affairs, thinks Russia would have been irreparably weakened if it had lost more provinces. The United States missed the chance, partly because of its own fight against terrorism, while China was too mired in its own isolation to take advantage of Russia’s decline. As a result, the Russian Federation had time to regain strength as a regional hegemon. What exactly gave it the power to do so?

Mearsheimer provides an explanation. He “argue[s] that power is based on the particular material capabilities that a state possesses.” The author divides power into two elements - latent and military. Military power is based on the strength of the armed forces in comparison with other rival nations. It includes “sea power, strategic airpower, land power and nuclear weapons.” Land forces, according to Mearsheimer, are the most important. Therefore, the state possessing the strongest army has the advantage. Latent power is measured by “socioeconomic ingredients.” Wealth and human factors are needed to sustain military power. Wealth is measured by natural resources and the overall state of an economy. Human factors include the size of a population, since the more people engaged in an economy, the greater potential for

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6 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 83.
9 Ibid., 55.
creating wealth, although this is highly variable. More to the point, a state with a larger population can field a large army, which directly increases its military power. The simple conclusion: power is dependent on both a state’s wealth and the size of its population.

There are other criteria for power. Friedman mentions two. The first is geography. Whoever controls Eurasia controls the world. (Here one is reminded of the theories of Karl Haushofer.) Russia does not control all of Eurasia, but it does own the rich natural resources of Central Asia. The second is sea power. Here, the United States has been the unchallenged leader since World War II.10

If the great powers are doomed to continuous struggle, as Mearsheimer suggests, it would be natural for them to struggle for global hegemony. The destabilization of Russia would mean global hegemony for the US until next great power emerges. The United States does not need Russian natural resources, but its allies in Western Europe do. Russia does need the control of the seas, and seems to be making great strides to acquire it, as least in the Mediterranean. (Some have argued that one of the major reasons the Soviet Union lost the Cold War was because the US was able to contain it through American control of the oceans.) Although these criteria are not necessarily narrowly useful in understanding current Russian-American tensions, they do contribute to a broader understanding of the present state of the balance of power in international relations.

According to Mearsheimer’s criteria, the United States is unquestionably presently winning the struggle for power with the Russian Federation. This, however, is not the whole story. Russia is the biggest country geographically on Earth, with territory almost twice the size of the US. Although the American population is twice the size of Russia’s, 147 million is still a lot of

10 Friedman, The Next 100 Years, 24.
people. And while the Russian economy may be decrepit in comparison with America’s, Russia is an indisputable economic leader in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. The Russian military, although comparatively feeble, is also far from insignificant – and can in fact be quite menacing. Also, Russia’s military strength has been increasing. According to CNN reports, the Russian Federation has more than a quarter million soldiers, the world’s third largest number of aircraft, more tanks than anyone else, and, of course, a huge nuclear arsenal. In addition to all of this, Russia’s very considerable natural resources make it potentially rich. All these factors indicate it has all the elements necessary to be a powerful regional hegemon, a great power.

Mearsheimer explains in his book what makes a great power. To be one, a state need only have a strong enough army to threaten its adversary. The aggressor’s army does not necessarily have to be able to destroy its opponent. All it needs is to significantly weaken its competitor’s forces. It is a well-known fact Russia possesses nuclear weapons specifically created to counter the American ones. In the unlikely case of a nuclear war, Russia, with its second largest nuclear arsenal, would be the US’s strongest adversary. This alone theoretically gives the Russian Federation great power status.

While the Russian Federation aspires to be a regional hegemon, and definitely acts like one, it also has a lot to lose. Friedman emphasizes this – Russia owns an enormous amount of natural gas, which Europe needs. It is also rich in many other natural resources, but being otherwise economically weak is in a very uncertain position. In an anarchic world a nation has to be able to protect its wealth. Friedman thinks Russian aggression can in some measure be justified

14 Friedman, The Next 100 Years, 104.
because it is protecting itself. This view corresponds with Mearsheimer’s position, which holds that engaging in offensive realism is ‘prescriptive’ because it “…outlines the best way to survive in a dangerous world.”

Old memories as well as protective aggression play a role in prompting Russia’s present policies. The Russian Soviet Republic, the predecessor of the Russian Federation, had been the most important and powerful republic within the USSR. In 2005, President Vladimir Putin stated that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the “major geopolitical disaster of the century.” Russia, which still remembers its days of power and glory, is not willing to forget that. And frankly, why would it? For the last fifteen years, it has begun to again feel itself able to exercise greater strength, and in 2007 began training exercise that seemed to be designed to threaten the airspace of Western nations. This has caused a great deal of international nervousness.

In October 2016 Russian warships crossed the English Channel. This was carefully watched by the Royal Navy. CNN reported the event with a video of the Russian fleet, including destroyers and an aircraft carrier, accompanied by a menacing musical background. It was unclear where the fleet was heading. Many presumed to Syria. The fact that the Russian Federation did not find it necessary to warn the British was a big enough threat to keep the United Kingdom’s military on high alert. Their fear was to some extent exaggerated – Russia is not yet strong enough to start a major war.

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Lucas thinks it is hard to imagine Russia going to war with the US because its equipment is outdated. At the same time, he acknowledges that “…Russia is still an intimidating military power. It has one of the world’s largest armies, excellent special forces and some remarkable modern weapons.”\(^\text{19}\) In his preface to *The New Cold War*, the author calls attention to an important psychological factor: although Russia is militarily not equal with the US, it certainly has demonstrated in a very aggressive way its determination to use what it does have if needed. Russian participation in the wars in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria can therefore be viewed primarily as a psychological gambit rather than the beginning of a serious military engagement with the West. The reluctance in the West to use arms makes these intimidating Russian tactics all the more effective.

It is not in the interest of the United States to allow the formation of a hostile regional hegemon in Eurasia. Therefore, if Mearsheimer’s theories are correct, the US will have to intervene at some point. Hopefully, a major superpower military confrontation can still be avoided. Happily, as Lucas points out, “…the New Cold War is fought with cash, natural resources, diplomacy and propaganda.”\(^\text{20}\) Rather like the old one, in fact.

The American Viewpoint - Inspired by Duty

The focus of this subchapter is the Americans’ attitude toward their own nation and its obligations to the rest of the world. Friedman has a great deal to contribute in this regard. He believes that all nations go through three stages of development: barbarism, civilization, and decadence. A barbarous state believes that its ways are better than anyone else’s. A decadent state believes nothing is better than anything else, and so nothing is worth fighting for. A

\(^{19}\) Lucas, *The New Cold War*, 245.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 13.
civilized state is the most sophisticated, being delicately balanced between these two attitudes. Friedman suggests the United States is still in the barbarian stage.21

Being a young empire, the United States took it upon itself to promote democracy in the world. It continues to do this through both humanitarian and military actions. Americans believe they are acting exclusively as a benevolent liberal power, un tarnished with any so-called “realism”, which in any effect is unworthy of a moral nation. Mearsheimer remains unconvinced. He insists that the United States, like any other great power, has to ensure its survival, and therefore, hegemony. It only promotes itself as a liberal nation because of internal political needs, since it is easier to sell an idea of fighting for the right to the American public rather than for any selfish reason.22

This practice started in the early 20th century with President Woodrow Wilson, who was convinced power politics was a disaster for the preservation of international peace, and which therefore had to be replaced with something more worthy (and dependable). In the end, this came out to be collective security. In advocating for a League of Nations, the president hoped other nations would recognize a noble American attempt to secure the world order without any selfish motive.23 This tendency to portray idealistic liberalism rhetorically as the only acceptable policy for the modern world has remained central to United States foreign policy, even as its leaders act according to notions of political realism.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949 to provide security for Western countries against the USSR. It continued to exist after the Cold War with the intention of

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21 Friedman, *The Next 100 Years*, 29.
preserving collective security and peace between the member nations. Although it participated in some of NATO’s projects, the Russian Federation did not become a member. In 1997, NATO invited Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic - former parts of the Soviet empire - to join. When confronted with the suggestion that NATO’s expansion might aggravate Russia, Bill Clinton replied that the territorial claims of the 20th century were not to be confused with the needs of the 21st, and that such an assumption could only be made by those who believe NATO remained an inherent threat to Russia, which he insisted it was not. Clinton instead advertised the expansion of NATO as a means of further lifting the Iron Curtain. Putin was not convinced.

It is interesting to note that liberal theorists, as Mearsheimer points out, do distinguish between good and bad states, with the good being liberal democracies that support capitalism. In his speech about NATO’s expansion, Clinton said that “[b]ringing in new members will help to lock in the gains of democracy in those countries, and the free market gains they are already achieving.” It is here that the theory of benevolent hegemon finds full expression, with its notion that the American nation is special because it is favors personal liberty and democratic ideas.

Seymor Martin Lipset studied this worldview in his book American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edge Sword. He believes individualism is understood and accepted on the cultural level in the US. For example, if an American is not happy at work, he is both expected and encouraged to look elsewhere, as opposed to a Japanese, who cannot quit his job easily due to societal

26 “In Clinton’s Words”.
expectations about stability. Lipset observed that in the mid-nineties 75 percent of adult Americans were proud of their citizenship. Among young Americans it was 98 percent, and while polls in 2015 suggest these feelings have declined, but is still noticeably high. Judging by this, one can argue most Americans support their country’s foreign policy. After all, they believe the United States is committed to promoting peace and democracy in the world.

The Russian Viewpoint and Putin’s Aspirations

Vladimir Putin was elected Russian president in 1999. He was re-elected for a second term, and then served as prime minister from 2008 until 2012, when he became president for a third time. During his seventeen years at power, his foreign policy has again made Russia a fearsome neighbor. Although not strong enough to destroy the United States, it has been very successful in weakening America’s position in the international community.

In October 2016, the 22nd edition of the Economist published a special report on Russia. It claimed that “Russia does not pretend to offer the world an attractive ideology or vision. Instead, its propaganda aims to discredit and erode universal liberal values by nurturing the idea that the West is just as corrupt as Russia. It wants to create a divided West that has lost faith in its ability to shape the world.” The lesson that the Economist presents is clear. It is that while the Russian Federation is not strong enough to overcome the United States, it must be constantly watched, because weak empires are dangerous. The magazine also warns about the nuclear arms Russia possesses, but reminds its readers that it is just as important to be wary of the propaganda Putin possesses.

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disseminates. Curiously, it has been the propaganda, more than anything else, which has kept him in power. The following subchapter describes the tools Vladimir Putin uses for the creation of his image and support for his policies.

The Leader. Vladimir Putin once allegedly said: “The greatest criminals in our country were those weaklings who threw power on the floor […] I would never abdicate.”

This statement is a clear representation of the image he has created for himself - above all, Putin is strong.

Fiona Hill and Clifford J. Gaddy discuss the Russian president in their book Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin. In the chapter “Survivalist”, they show how well Putin’s political persona fits into the Russian context. Russia has had a tumultuous history. It participated in wars and has been invaded many times. Nevertheless, it survived; survival seems to be in the Russian people’s blood. Following this, their president portrays himself as if, and acts as if he was a survivalist. Putin is a son of his motherland. He was born in Leningrad to World War II veterans who suffered the loss of their older son during the siege. A belief in Russia exists, Hill and Gaddy argue, that the motherland is unique because it has had to constantly struggle in a hostile world. Supposedly, so does Putin. Survival of the Russian nation is its president’s main concern – and he has worked hard on creating and prioritizing the national wealth, through budget stabilization and the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves. How can the people not follow such a caring, strong leader? Actually, in 2016, the International Feminist Journal in Politics has published an article about these very qualities.

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32 Ibid., 84.
In “Hypermasculinity as a Scenario of Power: Vladimir Putin’s Iconic Rule, 1999-2008”, Elizabeth A. Wood investigates the meaning of the president’s image. She examined the reasons why Putin is photographed diving in a submarine, flying a helicopter, riding a horse, and fishing shirtless, all painfully reminiscent of the pictures of Mussolini in the 1930s. Wood came to the following conclusions. Firstly, by portraying himself as a “tough guy” Putin is just adopting the kind of Russian politicians’ traditional image that was well established before him. Secondly, he uses his carefully crafted hypermasculinity to create his own power mystique – the one of a dominant male. It also might involve a kind of auto-hypnosis. In any event, the polls show his strategy works.

*When Language Comes in Handy.* Some writers argue the Russian language is remarkable in its specificity in expressing political concepts, and that this helps Russian politicians achieve their goals. Edward Lucas notices that the Russian president and his associates are usually called gosudarstvenniki. A ‘gosudarstvennik’ refers to a kind of statist. But in Russia it also has a very important additional meaning. A gosudarstvennik is someone who “…cares about the state’s prestige and strength; who believes it to be an expression, perhaps the highest expression, of society, culture, even of civilization.” While in the West a statist might mean a servant of the people, it Russian it denotes a patriot with a higher mission. This almost supernatural vision of a man tied so intimately to the state seems to fit Vladimir Putin very well.

His policies have a special name in Russian as well. In “The Origins of Russia’s War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European ‘Civilizational Choices’ for Ukraine”, E. Wayne

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Merry suggests the Russian Federation has never needed outside recognition of its great power status because the notion of Russia is engraved in its citizen’s mentality by the particularity of its language. Both Merry and Lucas mention the word derzhavnost. A derzhava, which can be translated as “state,” is actually much more. A derzhava, a word often used by Vladimir Putin to denote the Russian Federation, means a great power. Implicit in derzhavnost is “…a belief in the primacy and greatness of the Russian state.”

Lucas thinks that by calling itself a derzhava, the Russian Federation “…is throwing its weight around abroad, with behavior referred to as derzhavnichestvo (great-powerishness).” A politician as shrewd as Putin must certainly be aware of these stylistic nuances of the Russian language.

*The Power of Persuasion.* “Once we convince our people, the majority of the people, that our position is right and just, that it helps society, the nation and the people, we’ll have millions and millions of supporters.” The president said this in 2014 to young historians and scholars regarding the challenges of unifying Russian society after the Crimean annexation. By that time, Putin had already made up his mind about the importance of the ‘right’ version of history. Russian military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer reminds us that in Moscow, during communist times, people used to joke Russia was the country with the most unpredictable past – whoever came to power rewrote history for his convenience. Putin has simply taken this well-worn path.

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In June 2007, the Russian president chaired a “Timely Issues in Teaching Modern History and Social Science” conference. There he spoke about the wrong, ‘foreign’ approaches to history in Russian history books. Putin promised to fund ‘proper’ history writing, which would make Russian citizens, especially the young, proud of their heritage. The Russian president acknowledged there were some dark pages in Russian history, but other countries, like the United States, had a lot more to be ashamed of - Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example. (A small correction is necessary here. Although the US did use nuclear weapons against Japan, it did so to speed the end of World War II. Stalin organized mass murder and imprisonment to stay in power and to build his dystopian state. These two episodes do not bear comparison. Despite this, Putin has persevered.)

Putin’s preferences inform every page of the “Modern History of Russia:1945-2006. A Teacher’s Manual.”39 The Soviet Union is portrayed as an almost perfect society that should serve as an example for all countries – despite being non-democratic, it was a just state with happy citizens. Stalin was not a despot but a gifted leader who managed to unite territories of the former Russian empire. According to the book, the repression during his rule was a crime, but in judging Stalin one should remember he simply could not build democracy in a time of Cold War. The manual concludes that Russia had very few choices given its position in the world.

Commenting on this recent trend in the teaching of history in The New Cold War, Lucas asks how Jews would react if Hitler were portrayed like this.40 Above all, they would be deeply offended. This is the way Ukrainians feel about the misrepresentation of Stalin. Pro-Putin Russians will probably say that the Ukrainian reaction is both unfounded and unimportant. The

40 Lucas, The New Cold War, 141.
new teacher’s manual insists that the Americans started to plot against the Russian Federation, after the Russians ended the Cold War (ended and not lost!), which resulted in revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. This implies Ukrainians are overly influenced by the West, and thus cannot have a clear understanding of history. It is significant that a whole Russian generation is growing up with these ideas. Even if Putin disappeared from the political stage, which is unlikely in the near future, it will take enormous efforts and perhaps even another generation to counteract the present ideology.

More Propaganda

This subchapter demonstrates some of the most flagrant examples of Russia’s ideological war with the West. *Different Democracies* explores Putin’s domestic propaganda. *Anti-Westernism* explains how the Russian president successfully used this and what results it produced. *The Third Reich Versus the Third Rome* provides an explanation of why the Russian president, like many Russian tsars and emperors, promotes his country as the Third Rome.

*Different Democracies*. In June 2007, deputy head of the president’s office Vladislav Surkov gave a lecture “Russian Political Culture. A Utopian Viewpoint” which could be considered a masterpiece of Russian political writing. Aside from being technically accomplished and vividly descriptive, it is very persuasive in both praising and criticizing Russian ways. Surkov was at pains in describing negative traits only to later turn them into positive ones. For example, he mentions the Russian inclination to indulge in an almost romantic poetic imagination. The Russians, he acknowledges, do not recognize their own problems, but know those of others in detail – a worldview that provides only an imperfect and partial understanding. This feature of

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the Russian character is somewhat negative since it allows Russians to think of themselves as special, and be content with subjective truth. Yet it is also positive because it pushes Russians to think independently. “The whole of Russian history starting with Ivan III is a manifestation of both intellectual independence and state sovereignty.”\footnote{Ibid.} This statement might still be acceptable as patriotic sentiment. Next comes propaganda.

Surkov cites George Kennan, an American diplomat and historian, who once said that the ways nations achieve an enlightened political order are the result of the evolution of their individual national lives, and that foreign intrusion into those processes can only be harmful. This is the reason, Surkov is convinced, Russians should not let Westerners help them build democracy. “They grunt and scream because they need the kind of democracy in Russia that would make those in the West more comfortable. Well, we need a democracy that would give ourselves a better life.”\footnote{Ibid.} This argument seems the height of absurdity. Since when do different kinds of democracies exist? There is only one definition of democracy, and a political order that deviates from it is nothing of the kind. True, democracy is never perfect. Not even in the West, as Surkov points out, – and that is true. But at least western nations persevere in building democracy, as opposed to experimenting with different political systems, only to later label them democracy, a name they do not deserve. Not surprisingly, Surkov called the ‘Yeltsin years’ in the 90s weak and lunatic. It would seem that Putin agrees entirely.

Putin came to power with the unofficial slogan ‘Let’s put an end to the Yeltsin-era chaos’. Boris Yeltsin was the first president of the Russian Federation, who worked on creating better relations between the Russian Federation and the United States. This has been largely repudiated by Putin. Eduard Ponarin, a professor of sociology, elaborates on this question in “Russia’s Elite: What They Think of the United States and Why.” Ponarin argues the omnipresent anti-American sentiments in society is having, and will continue to have, a serious effect on the younger generation. This is especially true for those who grew up with anti-American slogans during the time of dramatic economic improvement. The professor points out that people who in the 1990s were pro-American had by the 2000s become anti-American. Since Putin has been at power for a long time, his legacy will take a long time to fade.

Despite being published in 2007, “Anti-Westernism” is still relevant. Its author believes the Russian political elite supported Putin’s anti-Westernism because they thought it was a useful ideology. As a result, to be pro-Western is today seen to be anti-Russian. Shevtsova thinks Russia’s “ruling elite has let the genie out of the bottle and it will be very difficult to put it back again.” In the meanwhile, this creates an excellent springboard for Putin’s future ambition.

*Third Reich Versus Third Rome.* Vladimir Putin severely criticized the US politics at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007. He called the modern world “…a world of one master, one sovereign.” That sovereign was the United States, and that was not good. On 9

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46 Shevtsova, “Anti-Westernism Is the New National Idea”.
May of that year he again addressed this topic in his Victory Day’s speech. Putin talked about the perils of the contemporary world, which were no less dangerous than those that had existed before. “These new threats, just like those coming from the Third Reich, show the same contempt for human life and the same aspirations to establish an exclusive dictatorship over the world.”\textsuperscript{48} The Kremlin’s cooperative political scientist Sergei Markov hastened to explain that the president’s words, while referring to the United States and NATO, “…should be interpreted in the context of a wider, philosophical discussion about the lessons of World War II.”\textsuperscript{49}

Unfortunately for him, Putin’s referencing of Hitler’s regime had another curious effect, drawing attention to the myth of Russia as the Third Rome, a notion in which the president seems to believe.

In 2014, political analyst L. Todd Wood published “Why Putin Believes He Is Resurrecting the Third Holy Roman Empire,” in which he shed some light on Putin’s geopolitical thinking. The idea of Russia as the Third Rome is very old. It was first expressed by monk Philotheus of Pskov in 1510. “Two Romes have fallen. The third stands. And there will be no fourth. No one shall replace your Christian Tsardom”, he wrote to Vasili III.\textsuperscript{50} There were two reasons for him to say this.

The first was that Vasili III was the son of Ivan III and Sofia Paleologue, the niece of the last Byzantine emperor Constantine XI. This allowed Ivan to claim that his progeny were the Byzantine Empire’s heirs. The so-called Eastern Roman Empire was considered a ‘Second


Rome’, the successor of the ‘First Rome’ of the ancient world. The second ended when Constantinople fell to Turkish Muslim invaders in 1453. It was then that many of its Christian relics were transported to Moscow. Russia thus became the last great Orthodox Christian bastion.

In 2006, the Tenth World Council of Russian People challenged the United Nations General Assembly’s Declaration of Human Rights by issuing a “Declaration of Human Dignity and Rights”, which gave precedence to Orthodox Christian values over Western secular ones. The World Council consists of both secular and religious leaders, with its head being Patriarch Alexei. The development of western individualism, the Council argued, has led to the discarding of faith, ethics, and the sacraments, as well as some collective values, all of which it claimed are more important than human rights. Secularism has led to neo-paganism. Following Putin’s example, the Russian Orthodox thus declared an ideological war with the West. Thus, while the Catholic Church continues to struggle with the question of gay rights, the Russian president, like the Orthodox Church, continues to speak of the importance of Christian values that took millennia to form. Without them, he claims, people will lose all decency. It is not surprising that Orthodox Church leaders support the president, seeing in him an opportunity to preserve their beliefs without having to adjust them to the needs of the modern world.

Edward Lucas reminds us that one priest in a church next to the Lybyanka prison preached a sermon that all power was given by God, and therefore must be honored. Patriarch Kirill is reported to have said in 2012 that Putin’s rule was a “miracle from God.” Orthodox leaders are also prompt to remind people that “the first revolutionary was Satan” and preach that “liberalism

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will lead first to the collapse of law and then to the Apocalypse.”

Since religious leaders are supposed to embody the word of God, or at least serve as mediators between God and the people, it is no wonder that the practicing Orthodox believe this. In fact, some Russians are so sure about their country being the Third Rome that even the media gets confused between what is real and what is imagined. Thus, some Russian media reported that Putin had sat on the throne of the Byzantine emperors during his visit to Mount Athos in May 2016, while it was in fact only a seat for honored guests. What is even more surprising is that these Orthodox claims about Putin are also shared by some Russian intellectuals, as witness the tenth meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club.

The Russian president is said to be an Orthodox believer. Wood argues it is unimportant whether he in fact is or not. What is important is that he has both believers and religious leaders on his side. When going to war, the Russian tsars hoisted an icon of Archangel Michael. The Cathedral of the Archangel is only a few yards away from Putin’s residence. The icon is within his reach. It looks like the president uses it occasionally in opposition to the ‘Third Reich,’ that is, the United States.

**Where Collisions Are Real**

This subchapter unveils Russia’s practical reasons behind the ideological-diplomatic war with the United States.

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Modern Warfare: Diplomacy. In order to fight a diplomatic war without internal opposition politicians need popular support. To gain it, leaders appeal to the sentiments of the masses. In the United States - Russian case, Putin has used both the American Magnitsky Bill and the Dima Yakovlev Law.

Sergei Magnitsky was an auditor in a Moscow law firm hired as an advisor by the London-based Hermitage Capital Management (HCM), an investment fund and asset management company specializing in Russian markets. Magnitsky discovered a 230 million dollar tax fraud involving high-ranking Russian officials and members of the police. He reported his findings to the authorities and was arrested shortly thereafter as a possible accomplice. Magnitsky’s imprisonment of 11 months ended with his death in 2009. The official reason was heart failure and acute pancreatitis. His family claimed he had been severely beaten. This allegation was supported by the Russian Presidential Human Rights Council.

Bill Browder, the founder of the HCM, said he discovered the Russian tax fraud in 2005 and had continued the investigation with Magnitsky’s help. Although the full list of participants has never been made public, it contains about sixty names of very influential people engaged in this massive tax evasion. Magnitsky’s case acquired an enormous amount of publicity. It became a symbol of the struggle against Russian corruption. The United States voiced its strong disapproval by creating the Magnitsky Act, according to which the individuals on the above mentioned list had their financial assets in America frozen, and have been denied United States visas.

In response Russia issued the Dima Yakovlev Law, which prohibits American citizens from adopting Russian children. It took effect on January 1st 2013, one month after the Magnitsky Act.

was ratified. Dima Yakovlev was a Russian toddler who died of heat stroke after being left in a car for hours by his adoptive father, who was subsequently acquitted of any malicious intention. The law prevented many American families who had gone through the travail of the Russian adoption process to pick up their long awaited children. Thus many children who could have had a better future were denied the opportunity. (The law also prevented politically active non-profit organizations from receiving money from American citizens or organizations.)

Although advertised in Russia as a protective measure, many have seen the Dima Yakovlev Law as a geopolitical move. US senator John McCain has said that “to punish innocent babies and children over a political disagreement between our governments is a new low, even for Putin’s Russia.” According to UNICEF, there are about 740,000 children in Russia’s orphanages, but only 18,000 Russian families on the waiting list to adopt. American families have also been adopting children with special needs, who would not otherwise have a chance for a decent life. Of course, those children can also be taken care of by allotting more funds to orphanages and encouraging adoptions by Russians, but these policies take time, and children are in need now. Why subject them to waiting if there are families willing to take care of them? The Dima Yakovlev Law is a direct expression of the Russian government’s political outlook – derzhava is above everyone’s personal needs. No one is spared, not even children.

Reasons Behind Anti-Gay Legislation. In the current climate of individualism, democracy is considered the best political order because it provides people with the greatest variety of personal life choices. This is made possible by the separation of church and state; the freedom to worship as one wishes and freedom of speech. All these are enshrined in both the US and Russian Constitutions. But while the United States protects the rights of its citizens, things are not quite the same in Russia.

There is little evidence of the separation of the state from religion in the Russian Federation. Putin, who claims to be devout, has, by imposing the rules of his creed, made the Orthodox Church in effect the state religion.\textsuperscript{61} Although Putin does not usually openly defend his political actions in religious terms, his decisions on numerous issues do correspond to Christian beliefs. And, in return, the president has the support of the Orthodox leadership.

Freedom of speech is one of the most important elements of democracy. It certainly exists in the United States. American President Barack Obama once said “…I accept that people are going to call me awful things every day – and I will always defend their right to do so.”\textsuperscript{62} In the Russian Federation, freedom of speech remains mostly theoretical. One cannot overlook the murder of Boris Nemtsov, an outstanding opposition figure in Russian political life. Nemtsov was a tireless critic of Putin’s involvement in Ukraine.\textsuperscript{63} The famous protest in the cathedral of Christ the Savior, which resulted in the imprisonment of three participants, has also become

\textsuperscript{61} Felgenhauer, “Kremlin Rejects ‘Foreign’ Approach to Russian History”.
internationally famous. The women were found guilty of hooliganism, but their case really revolved around criticism of Vladimir Putin and the Church, as well as the promotion of the LGBTQ rights. It is on this latter point that Russian and American sensibilities, and politics, are most at odds.

In 2015, the US Supreme Court legalized gay marriage. It became illegal not to grant same-sex couples the right to marry even in states opposed to it. President Obama called this decision an American victory, explaining the nation only gets better if all its citizens receive equal treatment. This right, which was first established in Massachusetts in 2003, remains only a dream for the LGBTQ community in Russia.

In 2013, the Russian Federation adopted an anti-gay law that made it illegal to propagandize “nontraditional sexual relations among minors” by making them look attractive. For disobeying this law both Russians and foreigners are subject to fines and imprisonment. The law was justified as deriving from the “basic guarantees for the right of the child in the Russian Federation.” It resulted in an upsurge of anti-gay violence in Russia. Terrifying videos

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appeared on Russian websites. Some compared the law with what went on in the Third Reich.\(^6^8\) But it is difficult to hide the violation of human rights in the modern world. Much of the world community condemned the law, and the United States went so far as to issue a warning to gay people travelling to Russia. The 2014 Olympics being in Sochi left many concerned about the safety of gay athletes.

Putin in response promised no one’s rights would be violated, and that gay people should feel at ease at the Olympics - but should “leave children alone.”\(^6^9\) The Russian president also promised the Games would be conducted without discrimination of any kind, since Russia was a nation respectful of the individual. He only asked that Olympics participants, in their turn, should understand and respect Russian law. Putin reminded the world that Russia was a traditional country that does not approve of western policies towards homosexuals. The Russians, according to him, should not be “…expected to follow along like obedient lapdogs, doing whatever others expect,” because they have their own culture and traditions.\(^7^0\) Whatever Putin’s motives, the mixture of religion with politics, combined with the use of anti-gay tropes, is both sinister and troubling. It also did nothing to hurt his popularity in the country.

In his aforementioned 2013 speech to the International “Valdai” Club, Putin also mentioned how important it was to increase population growth after all the losses suffered in the 20\(^{th}\) century. It is no secret that the Russian population is declining at a rapid rate. It is estimated that there might be ten percent fewer Russians by 2050.\(^7^1\) Without a large population Russia cannot

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\(^7^0\) Ibid.

\(^7^1\) “The Threat from Russia”. 
maintain its great power status. This might very well be one of the reasons its president has turned to Christian values. Putin has been outspoken in declaring that “today people in almost all developed nations are no longer able to reproduce themselves… They are implementing policies that equate large families with same-sex partnerships, and belief in God with belief in Satan.”

Since same-sex couples cannot physically produce the children Russia is in such need of, its president seems to have decided Christianity is an excellent tool to encourage population growth. (One must also admit that significant population decline, even without religious considerations, is troubling.)

**Why Do Russians Support Putin? No Putin, No Russia**

This subchapter provides a glimpse into the logic of why the Russian population supports their leaders, and how the myths politicians have created about themselves have helped secure political longevity.

In the world of the internet, individualism evidenced in other countries is contagious. It is easier to support a state where an individual’s rights are respected, and choice is available, and where the government serves its people. It is much more difficult to acquiesce when it is known basic constitutional rights are considered immaterial, when one is obliged to tailor one’s own lifestyle within so-called accepted norms, and where the government cares more about power than its own citizens. So how is it possible for Russian politicians to acquire popular support?

Some writers have suggested the answer.

In “Russia’s Grand Choice: To Be Feared as a Superpower or Prosperous as a Nation”, Maxim Trudoliubov’s refers to Geoffrey Hosking’s book *Russia: People and Empire* to find a

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Hosking argues that for centuries Russian statesmen have been focused on creating an empire, a *derzhava*, and not on uniting its (previous) diverse populations. Thus, the concept of *derzhava* has been lodged in the Russian mentality. This is the reason Russians approve of their politicians even if the latter do not care about them. *Derzhava*, Trudoliubov explains, is *above* all personal needs. Even the president is subject to this rule – in 2015, when the economy was hurt by western sanctions, Putin cut his own salary by 10%. (What his total income and assets are remains a mystery.)

In May 2015, a non-governmental organization, Gardeners of Russia, reported that the demand for vegetable seeds had grown by fifty percent, while flower seeds did not enjoy their usual popularity. This suggests Russians had switched to survival mode in the 1990s. The director of the Gardeners, who is also a deputy, voiced his opinion in the State Duma when he said the “barometer of the number of people who are buying seeds is an indicator of the economy.” It probably is. While buying vegetable seeds, the Russian people once again showed their understanding of the national policy – the Kremlin does its job, and they have to do theirs. Meaning they have to survive. Putin himself has been proud to speak of his own family’s gardening. Apparently, the president wants to serve as an example to those Russians who have

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77 Ibid.
78 Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, 80.
returned to tilling the soil around their dachas – returning to the beliefs of his parents that every family is responsible for its own survival. This has brought the Russian president even closer to the people. It has also made propaganda for his continued rule that much more powerful.

Every political liability has been turned to Putin’s advantage. Surkov, the deputy head of the presidential administration, has explained the president’s seemingly over-long tenure in office in terms of Russian traditions. This passionate Putin supporter argued that due to the peculiarities of Russian political culture, personalities are themselves institutions in the Russian Federation. The reason political dignitaries change so seldom is because they so perfectly represent their nation’s interests. Because the Russian people trust them they do not see the need to elect anyone new. Since Putin’s policies reflect the Russian mind, and respect Russian political culture, he is naturally very popular.

At the 2014 “Valdai” International Discussion Club Viacheslav Volodin went so far as to insist there would be no Russia if it was not for Putin. It certainly seems that the president’s popularity grew after the West levied sanctions for the annexation of the Crimea, and Volodin was far from alone in believing there was no alternative for Russia given the current political situation. Volodin’s argument sounded plausible to many Russians. Having elected a president who created a crisis only because he loved Russia, the population probably believed he would get them out of it as well. After all, he is a traditional strong leader who dared to say no to the West. Unfortunately, Putin’s supporters did not notice that their leader’s politics have not been carefully thought out.

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Russia: Harsh Reality

Without a strong economy the Russian Federation cannot be a rival to the West. This subchapter explains why the Russian economy is destined to fail.

Putin is known for his strategically defensive policies toward the West. To counterbalance NATO, he focuses on military development. To challenge western economic supremacy, he has created the BRICS alliance – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, as well as a Eurasian Economic Union. He has also attempted to establish a new currency to rival the Euro.

It was in 2015, during a meeting with Kazakh and Belarussian presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and Aleksander Lukashenko, that Putin first proposed creation of a new currency union.\(^1\) Although neither Nazarbayev nor Lukashenko were enthusiastic, the Russian president was clever enough to convince some people that the plan might just succeed. Experts say it would take up to twelve years to launch such a project. Quite apart from this, the question remains whether the Russian Federation, as leader of the Eurasian Economic Union, would be able to support the creation of a new regional currency. *The Economist* is not optimistic.

Russia’s main problem, the magazine insists, is that it never entirely broke away from a planned economy. Stalin had pushed for many industrial projects without much forethought. Following the end of Communism, the new government was forced to sell these Stalinist factories to their former Soviet managers, since they were the only ones who knew how to keep the flawed and outmoded plants running. This is the reason the old elite was able to continue to

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hold on to power. The 1991 transition was peaceful because the old guard was never really dislodged. Russian citizens continue to pay the price.

During the first two terms of Putin’s presidency the economy grew by seven percent a year. However, between 2010 and 2014 this fell to three percent, despite significantly higher oil exports. As of 2016 it is in recession. The Economist’s overall conclusion is that the Russian economy does not function properly because it is not free, and that Vladimir Putin is to blame for a large part of it.

Western sanction hit Russia hard in 2014. Nevertheless, this was not the reason for its decline. The downturn started in 2012, due to the unpredictability of the government’s business regulations. Since business law was unreliable, Russian businessmen stopped investing. Vladimir Putin does not seem to understand this. Instead, he has invested in the military sector to stimulate economic growth. He also has not seriously addressed the problem of corruption, instead focusing on securing his own power by creating around him a circle of devotees who owe their careers to him.

The Economist also suggests Putin’s rule has become increasingly authoritarian. He personally oversees the FSB, the successor organization of the KGB, which purportedly has been steadily gaining in power. Sergei Korolev, one of the FSB’s most powerful members, was recently given a new task of inspecting all business and financial activities in Russia. This has led to many celebrated arrests. It is said that Putin even uses Korolev to suppress unreliable

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84 “Milk Without the Cow”.
85 Ibid.
members of the FSB. This was of course Stalin’s tactic. Like the Soviet vozd, the Russian president is always anxious to have the ‘right’ people around him, even going so far as to have members of the military serve as regional governors.

In April 2016, Vladimir Putin created a new National Guard, a unit of 25,000 special soldiers (with 400,000 reservists behind) to fight terrorism and organized crime, and maintain “social order.” Some sources have suggested the government might use it to control future elections. After all, an uprising might occur and it would be foolish of the gosudarstveniki not to be prepared, and it is not clear that regular troops would be willing to support them. The Economist reports the National Guard commandos have been trained to suppress the kind of popular demonstrations that have rocked Ukraine. At the same time, this kind of security might be excessive. Putin still retains too much popularity to have recourse to that kind of force.

Eighty-two percent of the Russian population support their president. According to The Economist, Putin has been successful with his anti-American propaganda because Russians choose to believe it. “It plays to their feelings of jealousy, resentment, and victimization,” for despite their pride, the Russian people have a feeling of failure about their country and, ultimately, themselves. Having the United States – the world’s superpower – as an adversary slightly reduces their helplessness and anger. To have such an enemy suggests they still play an important role in international affairs. It also suggests Putin might be able to continue in power for a long time. On the other hand, The Economist makes a convincing argument against Putin’s

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89 “Take Care of Russia”.

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political longevity. The Russian urban middle classes that grew up after the end of Communism do not have a place in the current economic system, which is based on the state, and not free market capitalism. The unsatisfied might yet become the core element of an uprising that no National Guard could contain.

America: Harsh Reality

This subchapter shows how Russia continues to attempt to create economic difficulties for America by both legal and illegal means.

An Unfair Game. The BRICS alliance was created to resist the powerful G7. BRICS members strive to create an economic environment independent of the US dollar, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. During his speech at the Munich Security Conference Putin complained about the US “overstep[ping] its national borders in every way” and boasted about BRICS achievements.Putin openly said that “[t]here is no reason to doubt that the economic potential of new global centers of growth will inevitably be converted into areas of political influence that will encourage multi-polarity.” Were Europe to join the group led by Russia and China, the United States would almost certainly be excluded.

The problem is that Russian economic policies within Putin’s proposed bloc might prove more constraining than western ones. The Eurasian Economic Union is a good example of this. William A. Pomeranz has discussed Russian economic aspirations in his work “Ground Zero: How a Trade Dispute Sparked the Russia-Ukraine Conflict.” In 2011, Russia created a free trade zone with no custom duties and free movement of goods between eight post-Soviet states. Although enjoying certain advantages, Russia was not satisfied with only a free trade area. The

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90 Russian Perspective, Vladimir Putin’s Legendary Speech.
91 Ibid.
Federation wanted to create a more tightly aligned bloc by means of a custom union.\(^{92}\) (This would be a very significant step. It was the 1833 German Zollverein, or customs union, that helped move the German states to unifications several decades later.)

The difference between these two kinds of agreements is reflected in how many options the nations have outside the union. A state belonging to a free trade area preserves its right to establish its own tariffs with non-members. In a custom union, there are uniform tariffs against outsiders, “meaning that each member surrenders control of its external trade policy.”\(^{93}\) In 2012, the Russian Federation succeeded in creating such a union with Kazakhstan and Belarus. In 2015, it added Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, thus becoming the head of the Eurasian Economic Union.

A Russian customs union is bad for Europe, since it depends on natural resources from the East. For example, if France decided to buy oil from Kazakhstan and not from Russia, it would still be subject to Russian tariff policy, and Russia would still benefit. Kazakhstan, or any other customs union member, would not necessarily profit from the alliance since it could lose potential customers. Pressuring other countries into a custom union might not be fair, but at least it is legal. Other American problems with Russia are the result of the latter’s lawlessness.

Lucas devoted a whole chapter of *The New Cold War* to the explanation of “Why Money is Russia’s Greatest Strength and Our Greatest Weakness”. The writer thinks the political systems of the Western world and the Russian Federation are so different that Russia has been profiting from what is in effect a “rigged game.” While Europeans rely on their political leaders

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\(^{93}\) Ibid.
to provide for the citizens’ well-being, Russians do not. Thus, the Russian people have no expectation of fair dealing. They expect to be exploited. If the government is oppressive, Russians will simply do whatever it takes to survive. In supporting policies that hurt them as individuals, they contribute to their country’s economic growth.94

Russian money is dirty because it is derived from exploitation. No nation in the West would even dream of taking advantage of its citizens the way workers are treated in Russia. Dirty money is of course condemned, at least in principle, around the world. But Lucas argues that for those who are not afraid of shady business deals and harsh working conditions, business operations in Russia is an easy and quick way to enormous profits. This makes the Federation an enticing business environment for some, while also creating jobs. This promises a brighter future for the Federation. Lucas even believes that the Russian economy, although shattered, could still one day seriously challenge the United States.95

**Palpable Danger.** Friedman’s “The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century” counts several reasons why the US was so much more powerful than the Soviet Union during the Cold War. First, America’s geographical position made it impossible to invade. Second, it could contain its adversary because it controlled the seas. Third, it had enormous economic power. An alliance with the Soviet Union could promise a nation some things, like weapons or political support, but a deal with the US meant the right to trade in its economic space. “Exclusion from that system meant impoverishment, inclusion meant wealth.”96 This is still the case, even if Russia has grown significantly more important, in part because Europe has become increasingly dependent on its natural resources.

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95 Ibid.
96 Friedman, *The Next 100 Years,* 28.
Lucas believes economics have completely changed the circumstances of the new Cold War. During the old one, no member of the Western alliance would ever think of economic deals with the Soviet bloc. Business with communist countries was vigorously condemned, and a country doing it risked isolation. In the modern world, there is no veto on trading with the Federation. “Austria […] Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Turkey and Slovakia, to name only a few, have all succumbed in recent years […] to becoming a ‘special friend’ of the Kremlin.”^97 The desire for profit has undermined these countries political vigilance.

The author of The New Cold War explains that a relationship with Russia usually starts with reliance, and ends with dependence, on Russian natural gas. During negotiations, the financial interests of influential politicians are sometimes involved, and when a deal is legalized it constrains a country’s foreign trade policies. For example, Gerhard Schroeder, a former chancellor of Germany, has subsequently been elected chairman of the Nord Stream AG, a pipeline project between Russia and Germany, with the salary of 250 000 euros. He is known as a strong Putin advocate.^98 These kinds of relationships help undermine American influence in the EU and even NATO.

What to Do

This subchapter analyses the current state of the US – Russia confrontation and suggests possible solutions to the problem.

The author of The New Cold War thinks that for the moment Russia is winning. Unless the West makes a greater effort to change the balance of power soon, it will become considerably

harder to do so later. Even if Russia’s victory is unlikely, the Federation’s mischief can still create political uncertainty and economic unpredictability. *The Economist* holds a similar opinion.

Putin’s reign, unlike Stalin’s, is not checked by any Politburo. Although he has family ties with those who remember World War II, the president himself has never experienced the destruction created by war. Some fear a threatening move by the West might tempt him to use nuclear weapons, of which Russia has many. Obama thought that since Russia’s economy was in recession it did not pose a tangible threat, but he was wrong. With Putin as its leader, Russia is even more dangerous than the USSR, in part because his politics are based not on what he can realistically do, but on what he is audacious enough to try.99

It has been suggested by some that Russia recently went so far as to hack the American presidential election. This gave Putin greater perceived importance. As he said, concerning “the use of Russia and its president in the US presidential campaign, reflects, I hope, the growing influence and significance of Russia.”100 Were America to decide to retaliate, Russia would probably be unable to withstand sanctions and remain economically, or even politically, intact. But Putin knows the US is unlikely to take aggressive action. In Western thinking, “[s]uccess is not measured by breakthroughs and ceasefires […] but by lowering the chances of a Russian blunder.”101 ‘Blunder’ is a euphemism for nuclear war. Knowing its deterrent capabilities, Putin

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is always anxious to display his new missiles. The Economist’s suggestion is to keep Russia in check diplomatically until it collapses under the weight of its own contradictions. Since this is how the previous Cold War ended, such an outcome would be very well received in the West.

Lucas argues there are three reasons NATO won the Cold War. First, the western alliance could outspend the Soviet bloc. Second, historically, planned economies and one-party states, being so inefficient, have proven to be short-lived. Third, the West possessed a ‘secret weapon’ the Soviet Union did not have: democracy. “Highlighting the contrast between the prosperity and freedom of the ‘capitalist camp’ and the backwardness and repression in the ‘socialist camp’ dissolved the totalitarian glue that held the Soviet empire together.” All three preconditions for Western victory are still present. “Things that could ensure a prosperous Russia, such as the rule of law, free media, democracy and open competition, pose an existential threat to Mr. Putin’s rotten state.” Based on The Economist’s findings, Russia could fail again, but it won’t happen soon. In the meanwhile, Putin continues to create havoc everywhere he can. In Europe, states such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have been victimized by the president’s expansionist policies. The Baltic States and Poland are nervously waiting their turn. These states cannot wait for the Russian demise. Currently, Ukraine’s situation is the most acute.

103 Lucas, The New Cold War, 170.
104 “The Threat from Russia”.
Chapter II
Ukraine’s Crisis

Preface

On March 18th 2014 the Russian Federation violated international law protecting the territorial integrity of sovereign states by annexing the Ukrainian peninsula of the Crimea. The international community voiced its disapproval. This did nothing to stop Russia from creating an even worse crisis in Eastern Ukraine. There, Putin supported the separatist movement. With Russian involvement, the conflict escalated to war. In July 2014, a Malaysian airplane traveling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur crashed over eastern Ukraine. It was hit by a Russian-manufactured missile; 283 passengers and 15 crew members died.105 This was the moment when the West finally reacted to Russian aggression by imposing sanctions that had severe effects on the already ailing Russian economy. Nevertheless, Putin did not stop. To keep the support of his impoverished citizens, he successfully generated even more propaganda.106 107 Recent polls state Putin has an 82 percent approval rate from his population.108 This means many Russians support the fratricidal war in Ukraine. It is useful to take a close look at the origins of the problem to understand how the Russian president was able to present the conflict to his people in a favorable light.

108 “Take Care of Russia”.
The Way to the Abyss

This subchapter describes the events that took place at the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis.

The immediate cause of the conflict was the country’s economic foreign policy. The EU offered Ukraine a trade agreement, which, although far from membership, might have become a first step for integration into Europe. Russia offered a similar option. Demonstrations against Ukrainian foreign policy, which were to grow into civil upheaval, started on November 21, 2013 when incumbent president Victor Yanukovych rejected the EU’s offer in favor of Russia. On the night of November 30th a violent attempt was made to end the protest, resulting in thousands of unhappy people congregating in the Maidan (Independence Square in Kyiv) to show their contempt for the government and support of the protesters who were demanding the resignation of the president and his legislature. This was the start of revolution. On February 20 riot police fired on the activists.\(^{109}\) In the aftermath, over a hundred peaceful protesters, later styled the ‘Heavenly Hundred,’ were killed.\(^{110}\) On February 22 Yanuckovych fled Ukraine.

Before dawn on February 27 armed men in green military uniforms “stormed the Crimean parliament building and the nearby headquarters of the regional government.”\(^{111}\) That same day, the “men in green” spread all over the peninsula. Although without insignia, they resembled the Russian military. When asked, Vladimir Putin replied that Russia had nothing to do with the

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unidentified forces and assumed they were local self-defense groups.\textsuperscript{112} The Russian president emphasized that this was to be expected given the fact that Russian speaking people (over 60\% of the Crimean population) did not feel safe in a country where the democratically elected pro-Russian president was ousted. On March 16 a referendum was held with almost 98\% of the population voting for unification with Russia. Two days later the Crimea was annexed by the Russian Federation, which no longer denied its military presence in the peninsula. Putin received thunderous applause in the Duma during and after his speech on the annexation.\textsuperscript{113} Although under the disapproving eye of the international community, the representatives of the Russian people acquiesced in their leader’s action.

After the annexation a new and greater problem emerged – separatist movements in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine. Rebels demanded autonomous status for both. With shelling, the digging of trenches, and the use of World War II tanks inside towns and villages, the situation resembled an outright war. It continues to do so. Ukraine did not realize what a threat this was to its territorial integrity and lost control over it. The self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics had been born. Loss of territory and civil unrest had a detrimental effect on the Ukrainian currency (the hryvnia), which suffered massive inflation. The disastrous Ukrainian economic decline was disheartening, but the real issue, more pressing than the impoverishment of the population, was the high price the country paid – the outbreak of civil war. In order to understand the basic reasons for the conflict, it is useful to examine the pretexts used to justify it.


\textsuperscript{113} Euronews, \textit{Video of Putin’s Complete Speech on Crimea} (YouTube, 2014), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ayu3EcdbI0Q.
EU versus EEU

This subchapter clarifies how European Union – Russian competition over spheres of influence affected Ukraine.

Having separated from Russia in 1991, Ukraine failed to establish strong governmental institutions. Corruption reached astonishing levels, significantly depressing the population’s well-being. With the borders open, and Ukrainians able to travel, they could see their situation was hardly different than that of Russia, but very different from conditions in the West. Naturally, a strong pro-Western sentiment among Ukrainians grew up. In his work “The Origins of Russia’s War in Ukraine: The Clash of Russian and European ‘Civilization Choices’ for Ukraine,” E. Wayne Merry says that “[e]xcept for a minority, the political revolt on the Maidan was not fundamentally anti-Russian, but anti-regime and anti-elite.” This argument rings true.

Merry uses the notion of suzerainty to explain Ukraine’s position in the region. A suzerain relationship between two states denotes a situation in which one state, the patron, significantly limits the other state’s external sovereignty. The client state might have extensive freedom in internal affairs, but little choice concerning foreign policies, which are determined by its patron’s needs. In return, a client state receives special benefits, which usually include protection and subsidies. Ukraine and Russia have had a suzerain relationship for a very long time. Although enjoying below market prices for natural gas, Ukraine decided to look for even more advantageous deals in the West. This was the source of the trouble. In 2013, the EU offered Ukraine a trade agreement. Seen as a possibility of future membership in the democratic union of

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114 Merry, “The Origins of Russia’s War in Ukraine,” 39.
115 Ibid., 30-31.
independent states, it would have allowed the country to shed its client status. Unfortunately, Russia had entirely different plans.\textsuperscript{116, 117}

As mentioned previously, Ukraine was a party to the trade agreement between the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In 2012, the Russian Federation created a custom union which Ukraine had previously been able to avoid. This did not prevent Russia from planning to incorporate it in the wider Eurasian organization. Since Ukraine was the second most important Republic of the old Soviet Union, Russia felt almost obligated to retain suzerainty over it, both for reasons of pride and security. It therefore offered Ukraine a considerably better deal than the one proposed by the EU. This situation is described very well by William E. Pomeranz in “Ground Zero: How a Trade Dispute Sparked the Russia-Ukraine Crisis”. Pomeranz argues president Yanuckovych, although by no means an honest man, accepted the Russian offer, not because he tried to please his patron state, but because the Ukrainian economy needed an immediate bailout, which the EU did not seem willing or able to provide.\textsuperscript{118} Little did Yanukovych know what was to follow.

Merry argues that although it is more discrete, the EU also acts like a great power. Eager to expand its model of shared sovereignty, it offered a seemingly enticing deal to a state that did not meet the high economic requirements for membership. This means that the trade agreement offered to Ukraine might soon have proven to be nothing more than the beginning of another patron-client relationship. This would have led to “overlapping suzerainties, an unstable and

\textsuperscript{118} Pomeranz, “Ground Zero,” 62.
dangerous mixture.”119 Merry thinks that both the Russian Federation and the EU are therefore to blame for the conflict in Ukraine, since both were expansionist. The EU failed to recognize that Russia would not let its policy of *derzhavnost* be defeated in its client state.120 In the end, however, Russia bears more responsibility, since it was the Federation that invaded and annexed the Crimea, and is still backing up separatists in Eastern Ukraine.

Why Fight? Geography

In this subchapter, the importance of Ukraine’s geographic position to Russia will be examined. *Borders* shows Ukraine is vital to Russia as a buffer zone. The *Black Sea Fleet* illustrates the value of Crimea militarily, while *Pipelines* clarify the importance of transport to the Russian economy.

*Borders.* Ukraine is important to both the European Union and the Russian Federation as a sphere of influence. The question begins with geography. Ukraine is the biggest country in Europe. It borders Russia to the east. In fact, it is only 200 miles away from Volgograd, and 1600 miles away from oil-rich Kazakhstan. Russia, which has been invaded several times in the previous century, cannot be too cautious.

George Friedman has warned that it is dangerous for a state to be rich in natural resources and weak militarily, like Russia. This idea is certainly not new. Stalin was one of the first to voice it. In his speech on industrialization in 1931, Stalin expressed his concerns about possible invasion: “Such is the law of the exploiters – to beat the backward and the weak. […] We are fifty to a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this gap in ten years.

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119 Merry, “The Origins of Russia’s War in Ukraine,” 38.
120 Ibid., 37.
Either we do it, or we shall go under.”¹²¹ Stalin was right – eleven years later the Nazis reached Stalingrad. These days, Russia is wealthy but once again is in some ways seriously weak. Only now its disadvantage is of a different kind.

Stalin could worry about industry because he ruled an intact Soviet empire. With its disintegration, Russia became more geographically exposed to invasion. It had survived previous attacks because it had had buffer states such as Ukraine and Belarus to weaken the enemy before the decisive battles were fought. Russia needs Ukraine because it is still an excellent buffer in case of Western aggression. It might be argued that the West needs Ukraine for the same reason.

If Ukraine fell to Russia, the countries in greatest danger would then be the Baltic states. They used to be a part of the USSR, and are considered a target for Putin’s derzhavnost. Although they seem secure as a part of NATO, they will only be defended if the United States, its most powerful member, resolves to go to war. The most vital question of the moment is what would happen if America decides the Baltics are not worth the danger. Poland has similar worries.

Were Ukraine to fall into Russian hands, Poland would be in effect on the front line. The Poles have already experienced betrayal in World War II. Naturally, they are afraid to lose their own buffer between Russia and themselves. (This kind of thinking is not new. Josef Pilsudski’s invasion of Ukraine in 1920 was predicated in part on the creation of an independent state that could serve as a buffer between the newly reborn Polish state, and the equally new Communist regime in the East.) George Friedman has pointed out that “[t]he U.S. has a single core policy in Eurasia – to prevent any power from dominating it or part of it.”¹²² To avoid a possible general

¹²² Friedman, The Next 100 Years, 115.
war, the United States might keep the Russians busy with the Poles and the Balts. Then again, there might be a completely different outcome.

The US might simply protect the members of NATO as promised. Germany, which Atlantic Europe considers its own buffer zone, might in turn see imminent danger in Russian aggression towards the Baltic states and Poland. Since the independence of those states represents an integral part of Germany’s security, it might respond with a counterstrike.\textsuperscript{123} This of course is only speculation. Outside these concerns about the future effect of Russian dominance over Ukraine, there are two other immediate and related questions - Russian military presence in the Black Sea and Ukrainian pipelines.

\textit{Black Sea Fleet}. With the collapse of the USSR in 1991, its entire Black Sea Fleet operating in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Mediterranean found its bases in Ukrainian territory. Ukraine hoped to divide these ships equally with the Russian Federation, but under economic and political pressure it was only able to get 18.3\%. According to the 1997 Partition Treaty, Russia was also allowed to lease the port of Sevastopol. It could in addition keep up to 25,000 troops in Crimea, as well as a considerable amount of artillery, 132 armored vehicles and 22 military planes (until 2017). For the right to use the Crimea, as well as Ukrainian territorial waters and radio frequencies, Russia promised to forgive $97.75 million of Ukraine’s annual gas debt.\textsuperscript{124}

In 2010, new negotiations were begun between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents Medvedev and Yanukovych about the extension of the lease until 2042. Yanukovych’s predecessor, the pro-western Yushchenko, had not concealed his intention to refuse renewal.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 102.
None of the pro-western Ukrainian politicians disagreed with him. When Ukraine ousted its pro-Russian president, it became obvious a pro-western one would be appointed in his place. Russian chances of extending the lease were suddenly dramatically diminished. The Black Sea Fleet would have had to move to the eastern area of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. This would have been a major inconvenience and tremendously expensive, since the outdated but still capable fleet depends on its base in Sevastopol for even the most basic maintenance. It was therefore in the interest of the Russian Federation to take whatever measures necessary to keep its fleet where it was located and retain Sevastopol as long as possible. It was to preserve its power in the Black Sea that the Russian Federation annexed the whole Ukrainian owned Crimean peninsula.

At the moment, the Russian Fleet is no threat to the naval forces of Great Britain, or even Italy. Nevertheless, it is intimidating for Western Europe to know that although obsolete, it is stronger than that of the other Black Sea countries combined. Even more troubling is the pronouncement of Vice Admiral Alexander Vitko that “Russia will increase its Black Sea Fleet to more than 80 new warships by 2020.”

Pipelines. With Putin’s accession to power, the Russian Federation switched its primary focus from industry to the export of natural resources. The sale of natural gas became the country’s most lucrative business. Just as Europe relies on Russian oil and natural gas, the Russian economy depends on European markets. Since the bulk of Russia’s resources are in Siberia and Central Asia, transport is of vital importance. Significantly, three very important pipelines go through Ukraine.

Margarita Mercedes Balmaceda has studied the issues surrounding them in “Gas, Oil, and the Linkages between Domestic and Foreign Policies: The Case of Ukraine.”

The two most vital gas pipelines are Union (Soyuz) and Brotherhood (Bratstva). Union transports natural gas from the Urals, and Brotherhood from Siberia. The southern branch of the oil pipeline Friendship (Druzhba) also crosses Ukraine, which since independence has been trying to increase its advantage by renegotiating transportation fees. Balmaceda mentions the 1993 Ukrainian-Russian agreement according to which “…oil was delivered to Ukraine at world market prices, but the fees paid to Ukraine for transit were based (only) … on bilateral agreements.”

Ukraine, feeling exploited, became aggressive. In 1996, it closed Druzhba’s oil flow to Europe. This soon got results. Despite governmental proscription, some Russian firms agreed to pay higher rates, and the entire Russian Federation also eventually agreed. Unfortunately, Europeans came away with a very vivid impression of not only Russian, but also Ukrainian, unreliability. This was to be repeated a decade later.

In the winter of 2006 the Russian Federation stopped the flow of natural gas to Ukraine as a result of disagreements about pricing and transit payments. Ukraine, having no other choice, took the gas meant for Western Europe. All this happened a year after Ukraine’s Orange Revolution, and was understood by the world as Russian retaliation – Ukraine’s patron was punishing its client for electing a pro-Western president. Unfortunately, Europe suffered as well. Now that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is more serious than ever before, Europe knows it might again see disrupted delivery. Although Ukraine signed the European Energy

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127 Ibid., 268.
Charter which guarantees uninterrupted fuel flow, Europe knows the country will ignore it if seriously pressed, as Ukraine had already done this in the past. “That [disruption in gas delivery] was not wholly Russia’s fault; but its credibility in Western Europe as a reliable partner was badly dented.”129 For Europe, it would be much better to have Ukraine as a strong independent country that could better deal with its unpredictable neighbor alone.

Why Fight? Ukraine’s Wealth: Soil, Oil and People

This subchapter explores the possible exploitation of Ukrainian wealth and its relevance to both the EU and the Russian Federation.

Notwithstanding its weak economy and military, Ukraine has important resources, which, if handled wisely, could make the country prosperous. They could also greatly enhance Russia. First and foremost is the legendary Ukrainian soil. Twenty-five percent of the world’s richest black soil is in Ukrainian territory.130 Stalin had considered this vital for the very existence of the Soviet Union. Hitler, during the German occupation, had even considered transporting much of it to Germany.

Although never properly developed during Soviet times, Ukrainian agriculture today has tremendous potential. “Of Ukraine’s total land area of 60 million hectares, roughly 42 million is classified as agricultural land, which includes cultivated land […] gardens, orchards, vineyards, permanent meadows and pastures.”131 In 2013-2014, Ukraine was, according to a United States Department of Agriculture report, the world’s third largest grain exporter.132 Russian control of this resource might even allow it to influence the world’s wheat market, even to the point of

129 Lucas, The New Cold War, 217.
131 Ibid.
dictating grain prices. With the help of Chinese investments (China has been interested in Ukrainian black soil for some time) Russia could create what might resemble a grain OPEC. Naturally, this would be highly detrimental to the EU, as well as to Ukraine itself, since its Russian patron could hardly be expected to consider its client’s real interests. It would be just like the situation in oil.

Considerable oil deposits have been found in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov, all in close proximity to the Crimean Peninsula. This has the potential of making Ukraine self-sufficient in energy. In fact, Balmaceda points out that although Russia had known about this, it had chosen to ignore it since it was more profitable to exploit deposits in Siberia and Central Asia. Such titans as Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron started negotiations with Ukraine about its Black Sea oil. This did not please Russia, which had become used to manipulating an energy dependent Ukraine. Had Europe succeeded in these negotiations, it would have made a significant contribution to creating a stronger buffer zone against Russia. It was not to be. Putin intervened. His interest in Ukraine was far more pressing than Europe’s.

To remain a great power, Russia needs people. As there are about 45 million Ukrainians, their annexation to Russia would add considerably to the Federation’s population. The European interest in the Ukrainian people is rather different. Although Ukraine cannot be incorporated into the European Union due to its weak economy, it still represents a valuable resource, as its population represents a large cheap labor pool within Europe. Ukraine could build a modern economy much faster if Europe was its patron. And even if the EU chose not to exploit Ukraine’s population, soils, or natural resources, the country could still prove a lucrative market for European industry. Russia’s needs were more pressing. For a state with a declining population,

133 Balmaceda, “Gas, Oil, and the Linkages Between Domestic and Foreign Policies”, 258.
every person, both as a worker and a consumer, is a valuable asset. Because of all of these assets, Putin was ready to act in his usual audacious way. Ukraine would not be allowed to slip away. For him the hour of decision had arrived. It was in this spirit that the annexation of the Crimea was launched.

Why Was the Crimean Referendum Illegal?

This subchapter focuses on Russia’s illegal actions in the Crimea.

International law grants all peoples the right of self-determination, which is the right “to choose its own political status and to determine its own form of economic, cultural and social development.” At the same time, international law does not provide the right to break away from one country and join another, as the Arbitration Commission of the Conference on Yugoslavia headed by Robert Badinter had declared in 1991. In other words, a people have the right of self-determination, but the decision to separate has to be agreed to by the entire population of the country in which the territory in question is situated. Lawyer Iryna Nazarova clarified the legal issues of the Crimean referendum in “Crimea as Property. Ukraine’s Prospects in Courts.” She insists the only legal way for Crimea to break away from Ukraine and join Russia would have been by following the procedures of secession between Russia and Ukraine. A secession demands mutual agreement. In the case of the Crimea, Russian troops occupied a part of Ukrainian territory and then held a referendum, after which the Russian government declared it a part of the Federation.

According to international law, a referendum on whether to separate from the original country can only occur if:

1) the people belong to a colonial empire;

2) they are being subjugated and exploited by the country to which it is attached;

3) and are deprived of any possibility of realizing their right of self-determination in the country in which they find themselves.

The same line of thought can be found in the Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law. The article “International Law and the Legality of Secession in the Crimea” demonstrated the Crimean secession was not legal because first, the Crimea has never been a Ukrainian colony, being instead an autonomous republic. Second, there was no evidence that its population has been subjected to repression by Ukraine. On the contrary, with its own constitution, legislative and executive bodies it could have negotiated a further extension of its sovereignty. Third, according to article 73 of the Ukrainian constitution, “alterations to the territory of Ukraine shall be resolved exclusively by an All-Ukrainian referendum.”

Fourth, the population of the Crimea is of mixed origin. Stalin’s deportation of the Tatars, the constant arrival of new settlers because of economic development since 1954, combined with the return of the Tatars after 1989, all worked to create a very heterogeneous population, and not a separate people. Since so many had arrived relatively recently, there had been no time for them to evolve into a clearly separate national group.

The Crimean referendum was a flagrant disregard of international law because

1) the peninsula was full of Russian troops, which, since it had an intimidating effect, worked against any genuinely democratic referendum;

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2) the main Ukrainian news channels, Channel 5 and 1+1, were silenced; 

3) no international observers were allowed to supervise the procedures, which meant that the results could not be verified; and 

4) many Crimean Tatars complained about being prevented from voting by the Russians. 

The Tatars, whose deportation by Stalin remained a vivid memory, had repeated their loyalty to Ukraine numerous times. Knowing this, Russia tried to eliminate this potential voting bloc. Radio Svoboda reported numerous cases of intimidation. One 48-year-old citizen in Bahchysarai, the politico-cultural Tatar center, said she saw Russian-speaking people photographing Tatar houses and threatening the locals. One Tatar family reported Russian-speakers marking Tatar households with crosses on their fences. During the notorious referendum in Bilgorod district journalists working for ATP, the Crimean Tatar channel, were not allowed to film. The channel was later removed from the Crimea altogether, although it remains active in Ukraine. Vladimir Putin sent his troops into Crimea under the pretense of saving Russian-speaking people from an overenthusiastic nationalistic Ukrainian population. In fact, it now appears the Tatars, a large Crimean minority, might need protection from the Russians. The bias against them has been palpable. However, the Crimea has not been the only victim of Russian aggression. Eastern Ukraine has been under attack for almost three years.

Unrest in Eastern Ukraine

This subchapter examines Russian involvement in the unrest in Eastern Ukraine.

Victor Yanukovych won the presidential elections in 2010 primarily with the support of Russian speakers in the east and south. After Yanukovych’s ouster, these easterners started to hold demonstrations against the pro-Westerners. To them, the revolution in Kyiv was a coup. It

137 “[Crimean Tartars Are Being Intimidated], Крымских Татар Намагаються Залякати” (Crimea: NV, 2014), http://newsvideo.su/video/163759.
is hard to tell whether or not these demonstrations reflected the view of the majority in the eastern region; however, what is important is that they took place and became an important element in the Crimean crisis. After the annexation of the peninsula, a new and greater problem emerged – a separatist movement in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The rebels demanded autonomous status for both. Ukraine did not realize what a threat this was to its territorial integrity and lost control over it. It soon led to the unilateral proclamation of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.

The rebels turned out to be a highly skilled military force with better arms than those used by the Ukrainian army. It is impossible to imagine that the rebellion could have occurred without Russia’s help. Yet although the use of Russian military equipment and personnel has been proven by both prisoners and Reuters photographers, Putin has continued to deny that his country had anything to do with any political unrest.\(^\text{138}\) Since then, the rebels have grown bolder in demanding more and more territory. Although they have not said they wish to become a part of Russia, their strategic advancement suggests the Federation is interested in their success, since this would ensure its land route to the Crimea. Vladimir Putin has justified these changes in Ukraine saying Russian speakers are being oppressed and are only looking for justice. While denying any military support for the rebels, he has insisted that he could not deny humanitarian help to Russians in Eastern Ukraine.\(^\text{139}\)

The larger question remains: why did Putin act both unilaterally and so precipitously? In *Roots of Russia’s War in Ukraine* Elizabeth A. Wood suggests two answers. First, the Russian

\(^{138}\) Ruptly TV, *LIVE: “Direct Line” with President Vladimir Putin* (YouTube, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enfLkVsIzQs.

president thought the eastern population would support him because of its pro-Russian disposition, thus resulting in a peaceful, Crimea-like outcome. Second, Putin might have wanted to create a situation that would have kept Ukraine out of NATO. Countries with unresolved border conflicts are ineligible for membership. Whatever Putin’s reasons, the only thing that all of Ukraine, and indeed all of Europe, wants is peace.

How Is All This Possible?

In this subchapter the historic basis for the current conflict is investigated.

Ukrainian civil unrest is born out of an historic linguistic division of Ukraine. While the west and the center speak Ukrainian, the east and the south are predominantly Russian. Eastern Ukraine had belonged for centuries to Russia, which had made great efforts to assimilate its subjects into its empire. Western Ukraine had it easier before the First World War under the culturally accommodating Austro-Hungarian Empire. Ironically, the attempts of interwar Poland to repress indigenous culture in the western most parts of Ukraine had an equally important effect in encouraging the development of a strong and defiant sense of national identity.

Yurii Sheveliov has produced an important analysis of the situation of the Ukrainian language in the first part of the twentieth century. A language, he notes, is a very important element in national self-determination. If its language is forgotten, a nation might amalgamate with others. Tsar Alexander II, who placed extensive prohibitions on the use of Ukrainian in 1876, knew this very well. In contrast, Stalin initially implemented a policy of Ukrainianization, which gave the language broad rights. It is suspected this policy was created not to encourage nationalist feelings, but only to calm the masses and appease some pro-Ukrainian members of

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the intelligentsia. Ukrainian, although promoted *de jure*, was however never as prestigious as Russian. Sheveliov shows that even though Ukrainian was strongly discouraged, suppressed and even prohibited in much of public life in Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia, it still enjoyed some marginal existence. Conditions were much worse in the Soviet Union, where in the 1930s Ukrainian language advocates were arrested as criminals. Ukrainianization had originally been celebrated in order to pacify farmers, but after the artificially created famine organized by Stalin during the winter of 1932-33 in which several million villagers died, this need disappeared. In his book, Sheveliov clearly demonstrates that it was the Soviet regime that was the most cruel to, and oppressive of, the Ukrainian language, which led to its almost total abandonment.

Less obvious, but equally important as the language division, is the memory of Stalin’s demographic policies in Ukraine. First of all, there was the Holodomor, the above-mentioned famine. Ukraine was brought to its knees as a nation. Secondly, Stalin moved many different peoples around within the Soviet Union. He deported the Crimean Tartars in 1944 because of their alleged cooperation with the Nazis, while relocating more than 140,000 Ukrainians in 1947 within territories newly acquired from Poland as a way of liquidating Polish partisan operations there. He replaced local Ukrainian political elites with his own Russian supporters, while at the same time building large industrial coal-mining centers in Eastern Ukraine to which both Ukrainians and Russians flocked. Stalin’s policies thus drastically altered the demographic composition of Ukraine. This would later contribute to the division of the national territory.

Tatiana Zhurzhenko explores this situation in “The Myth of Two Ukraines.” She notes the emergence of a new myth with the independence of the country in 1991 – the myth of the two Ukraines, something that had not existed before, but which was exacerbated by the geographical division into eastern and western parts created by the Dnieper River. “Like other
myths, it is not just an invention, but rather a reconstruction of the political and cultural realities of Ukraine, based on a certain vision of history, on opinion polls and elections results, on Western theoretical constructs, cultural stereotypes and ideological prejudices.”

After World War I, Western Ukraine had struggled for self-determination and even managed to proclaim its sovereignty, if only for a very short time. It was very soon subsumed into an increasingly intolerant Polish state. It was only when Poland was shifted to the west after 1945 that the “two Ukraines” were at last reunified, although the western part continued to show considerable resistance to the Soviet regime. This was in part due to a defiant Polish minority that now found itself in the Soviet Union, but also to fiercely anti-Communist Ukrainians.

Zhurzhenko then goes on to discuss how different experiences in World War II also helped create divisions between east and west, for while the east fought against the Nazis on the Soviet side, the west was at war with both the Nazis and the Soviets. Also, there was a severe Soviet terror in the west after the country was reunited. Western Ukrainians continue to see this as “ethnocide” against the most nationally self-conscious part of the country.

With the end of the Cold War, the main question Ukrainians had to ask was no longer “who are we,” but rather “where do we belong” and “with whom shall we go.” It was difficult for a people to separate from a nation to which they had belonged, if only as a national minority, for centuries. The memories of the USSR continue to echo in Eastern Ukraine, as witness support for local oligarchs. This is not because people in the east are especially happy with their current economic situation, but rather because many of the wealthiest and most powerful people come from the east. It is after all easier to become an oligarch in an industrial area. And when

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142 Ibid.
eastern Ukrainians voted for them, they are not endorsing the state of the economy, but for “one of theirs,” for someone who was at least symbolically a neighbor, and who might be expected to understand their grievances. The public knew that only those who controlled local industry could provide better wages, benefits and conditions. When these expectations were not met, easterners blamed Kyiv, and the supposedly mad nationalists there who did not let eastern industry work properly.

The votes in the east in turn aggravated western Ukrainians, who remembered the old Soviet ruling elite also came from Eastern Ukraine. A president elected with eastern support was looked on by western Ukrainians as a perpetual threat to democracy. Eastern Ukrainians wanted democracy, too, but were infuriated when Western Ukraine tried to break away from Russia, its Orthodox church, and align itself with Western countries. Due to their history, Eastern Ukrainians have more historic connections with the Russian Federation than any other part of the old Soviet Union. While all these facts explain the current divisions in Ukrainian society, Zhurzhenko is also quick to remind readers that the East voted “yes” in 1991 for Ukrainian independence. This suggests that Eastern Ukrainians were loyal to the Ukrainian state and its government, but simply did not want to accept the anti-Russian sentiments so deeply embedded in the western part of the country. For many of them, membership of the EU would have been a desecration of centuries-long traditions. That is why Putin’s propaganda worked so powerfully among both Russian citizens and all those Ukrainians with pro-Russian sentiments. Sometimes Putin has created myths, but at other times has simply built on existing sentiment, as in the case of Sevastopol.
The Myth of Sevastopol in Russian National Consciousness

This subchapter illustrates the importance of Russian national sentiment as well as Putin’s propagandistic prowess.

On the ruins of our superpower

There is a major paradox of history:

Sevastopol - the city of Russian glory

Is …outside Russian territory. (A. Nikolaev)

It seemed of little importance when in 1954 the Crimean Peninsula was transferred to the Ukrainian SSR, since it was a largely symbolic change within one unified country. But with the proclamation of independence in 1991, Ukraine also declared itself the successor of the Ukrainian SSR and therefore inheritor of all its territory. This created a considerable amount of dissatisfaction about Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in Russia, but at the time the latter could do nothing to establish its legal rights to those territories. With time, Russian frustration only increased.

Serhii Plokhy discusses the importance of the Crimea’s biggest city in “The City of Glory: Sevastopol in Russian Historical Mythology”. Plokhy draws from Anthony D. Smith’s work on the theory of the origins of nationality. Before the 19th century religion was for the uneducated much more important than any notion of nationality. This started to change when the memory of battles and battlefields began to play an important role in the process of the so-called “territorialization of national memory.” Russian myths about Sevastopol, far from being remarkable, are simply another example of this phenomenon.

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During the Crimean War (1853-1856), when the Russian Empire fought against the Ottoman Empire, Britain, and France, the outdated Russian fleet had to retreat all the way to Sevastopol. The siege of the city lasted an entire year and resulted in thousands of deaths among the invaders, causing much humiliation. Even though Sevastopol finally surrendered, the valor of its citizens, as well as of the Russian soldiers and officers, was perpetuated in the national consciousness of the Russian people. There is even a Sevastopol museum in St. Petersburg, and Leo Tolstoy’s “Sevastopol Sketches” has long been required reading in Russian high schools.\(^{144}\)

During World War II soldiers were honored with medals named after admirals who had distinguished themselves during the siege. The modern myth of Sevastopol includes “nostalgia for lost empire, confusion over the issue of Russian nationality (and whether it includes Ukrainians and Byelorussians), and growing anti-Western sentiments among the contemporary Russian elites.”\(^{145}\) Vladimir Putin played upon all of these feelings in his speech about the Crimea.

While addressing the parliament in March 2014 the Russian president mentioned the Crimean War and the siege of Sevastopol. If Ukraine really fulfilled its intentions and joined NATO, he said, Sevastopol would end up in the hands of Great Britain, France and other westerners - something that Russia could never allow to happen. Interestingly, Plokhy considers the myth of Sevastopol an entirely new element in Russian self-awareness, since it is not only about a battlefield and a mythic past, but also a declaration about Russia’s current willingness to fight for its former imperial possessions. (At the time of the Crimean War, the peninsular had belonged to Russia for only 70 years, having been conquered by Prince Potemkin, Catherine the Great’s most famous lover.) Before its re-annexation in 2014 it had been a part of Ukraine for 60

\(^{144}\) Ibid., 377.

\(^{145}\) Ibid., 383.
years. The very fact that the Russian government was willing to allow its population to suffer economic sanctions as a result of its acquisition demonstrates how much the Federation is committed to fighting for those territories it believes are vital for its security, and indeed its survival.

Maxim Trudoliubov, the author of “Russia’s Grand Choice: To Be Fearful as a Superpower or Prosperous as a Nation” has additional thoughts about the importance of political myths. Trudoliubov, who was born in Russia and spent most of his adulthood there, notes that the myth of Sevastopol has become much stronger in recent years. Although always present in Russian consciousness, it never held as much importance for ordinary Russians as it does now. The writer thinks “[t]he Russian people universally supported the annexation not because of Crimea itself, but because […] [i]t was a moment when derzhava completely eclipsed more modest ideas about the nation in the Russian mind.”146 This observation neatly explains why all the hard propagandistic work Putin has been doing paid off in Russia. And also why it backfired in Ukraine.

Boomerang

This subchapter demonstrates the negative effect of Putin’s policies toward Ukraine on the Russian economy.

Andrew Wilson’s Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West insists the protests within Ukraine, when closely examined, prove to be mostly anti-regime, or anti-Soviet.147 The writer notes that although Ukraine seceded from the USSR peacefully, it has had to until recently endure Russian suzerainty. The 2014 protests were simply the revolution that should have taken

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146 Trudolyubov, “Russia’s Grand Choice,” 86.
place in 1991. It was only then that many statues of Lenin finally came down. Even the Ukrainian government, although mostly pro-Russian, was carried away by the anti-Soviet tide of the time.

In 2015, a decision was made to ban Soviet as well as Nazi symbols in Ukraine. The law decreed that “symbols of those who tortured Ukraine will no longer be used, and offenders will be held to account.” Naturally, this was not welcomed in the Kremlin, where Putin was continually excoriating the West for trying to misinterpret Russia’s past. His population, as well as pro-Russian Ukrainians, believed him. Also, the new law was disliked by some veterans. Although they were allowed to keep their medals, they were saddened to see many old street names changed. The rest of the country was satisfied with the decision. Thus, no matter how hard the Russian president tried, and how great his achievements elsewhere, he remained unable to carry the day in Ukraine.

Putin’s failure to win the understanding, if not the affection, of most Ukrainians is not his only problem. As Pomeranz explains, Ukraine has had a deleterious effect on the Russian economy. Ukraine had been the Federation’s most important trading partner within the CIS. It is no longer. That relationship has been broken. In the international arena, Russia has gone from being “a welcome trading partner to an international outcast”, with the usual effects of higher prices and inflation. Finally, the Ukrainian crisis has put Putin’s plans for an EEU into disarray, as neither Belarus nor Kazakhstan has responded to his call for a boycott of Western and Ukrainian goods. Russian retaliation against the Kazakhs has driven relations with that client state almost to rupture. More generally, Pomeranz thinks this proved to the world that the EEU

149 Pomeranz, “Ground Zero,” 64.
will never eclipse the EU because of the impossibility of fair cooperation between Russia and its partners. Vladimir Putin is entirely to blame for this.

The Basis for Western Intervention

This subchapter provides a brief consideration of Putin’s expansionist tactics and explains why military intervention against Russia might be considered a just war.

Putin’s Tactics. Vladimir Putin used the same method in both Ukraine and Georgia for creating conflicts. In both countries, he started by distributing Russian passports. Back at 2008, Taras Kuzio tried to draw public attention to this in “Russian Passports as Moscow’s Geopolitical Tool”. There, he stated that Ukraine “did not have any control over Russia giving out passports to Ukrainian citizens.”150 Indeed, the Russian consulate in Simferopol even gave out passports to Black Sea sailors and their families under the pretext that they had the right to vote in Russian elections.151 Given that Russian passports often prove more useful than Ukrainian ones, and that 64% of the peninsula’s population considers itself ethnically Russian, it was not surprising that many Crimeans applied for them. The outcome of this policy is well-known.

Georgia’s war has painful similarities with the Ukrainian conflict. Because the Russian Federation had interests in Georgia, which did not hide its pro-Western orientation, it backed the separatist aspirations of two Georgian regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As a consequence, the two broke from Georgia, although until now they have not gained full recognition by the international community. With their stagnant economies, it might seem that no benefit had been

gained after a high price had been paid, but this is only partially correct. By recognizing the independence of the two republics, Russia achieved territorial access to Turkey and Iran. What is even more important, by taking “control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia it kept Georgia out of NATO.” A similar situation is taking place in Ukraine. Just as Kuzio warned in 2008, having Russian citizens on Ukrainian territory would give Putin a reason to ‘protect’ them. Europe continues to look upon this ‘protectionist’ policy with fear.

The Baltic States, like other members of the Soviet Union, were subjected to Stalin’s population policies. There is a large ethnic Russian community in all three of them. Will Putin decide to ‘protect’ it at some point? That would be very possible, since Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia would make a very convenient buffer zone. The United States president-elect Donald Trump has suggested he might disregard NATO’s promise to defend the Baltic states. Does this give Putin a free hand to reach out for these small countries? After all, it is not only about what he can theoretically do. It is more about what he will dare to do. Conflict is unlikely to escalate to this level, but immediate western action, if it does, might be both advisable but also problematical.

_A Just War._ After the collapse of the USSR independent Ukraine retained its nuclear weapons, which, at the time, by itself represented the world’s third largest nuclear arsenal. Ukraine inherited 176 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launchers, 1240 nuclear

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warheads, and more than 3000 tactical nuclear weapons. Under intense economic and political pressure from the international community that was inspired by an urgent desire for non-proliferation, Ukraine’s only viable option in breaking away from Russia was to relinquish its nuclear capability and align itself with the Western countries. Many members of the Ukrainian government feared the consequences of this seemingly unilateral surrender and voted against it, but the decision was made. On December 5th 1994 Ukraine irrevocably gave up its weapons by signing the Budapest Memorandum. The USA and the United Kingdom as well as the Russian Federation became the guarantors of, among other things, Ukrainian territorial integrity.

Twenty years later, the international community was shaken by the Crimean crisis. Back in 1994 the fact that Russia, Ukraine’s most feared and unsteady neighbor, had promised to respect Ukraine had made the Memorandum very enticing. Not unexpectedly, Russia eventually broke its promise. Annexing Crimea, Putin announced that the interim Ukrainian government was illegal. This, according to him, absolved the Russian Federation of any promises made in the past. Now that both the Ukrainian president and the government have been democratically elected, Putin cannot use the same tactic. Nevertheless, the Russian president continues to intervene in Ukrainian affairs. His actions are criminal since he supports the rebels.

Other than voicing dissent and proposing economic sanctions, the US and Great Britain have done little to prevent Putin’s takeover of Crimea and his advance into Eastern Ukraine. The United States had considered arming Ukraine, but it has not happened. The Budapest promises remain ignored. Both Ukrainian politicians and civilians look back on the Memorandum as a deceit practiced on the weak by the strong. Ukraine felt safe relinquishing its weapons because it

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had counted on Western promises to guarantee its integrity. Now, many Ukrainians think the nuclear arsenal would have deterred Russia.\textsuperscript{156} Even though Ukraine is not economically important for the West, its shaky political situation undermines Western power and dependability in the eyes of the international community.

Given the current Ukrainian crisis, it seems less likely that the West will be able to persuade Iran not to acquire nuclear weapons. This situation undermines the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which in turn further impairs the world’s perception of Western strength. To regain its prestige and prevent Russian encroachment on the Baltic, the West might have to help Ukraine regain control over its lost territories. Moreover, Ukraine must be protected by the United States so that the Russian-Ukrainian example of illegal usurpation and violence does not produce similar behavior elsewhere. After all, the United States still presents itself as a liberal hegemon which guards the peace in the world.

Victim

This subchapter illustrates Ukraine’s victimization by a usurping Russia and the negligent West.

E. Wayne Merry believes Ukraine is simply a victim of the US – Russian power struggle.\textsuperscript{157} Both acted according to their own selfish interests. It was the right of Ukrainians to participate in a coup against their democratically elected president. They would have been responsible for creating political unrest in their own country. But the US and Russian intervention turned Ukraine into an arena of conflict between two mutually suspicious powerful nations.

\textsuperscript{156}Matthews, “Ukraine’s Broken Nuclear Promises”.
\textsuperscript{157}Merry, “Origins of Russia’s War in Ukraine”.
The United States overlooked the pro-Russian Ukrainians’ attitude toward the West and underestimated Ukraine’s importance to Putin’s state. Promoting American ideas of democracy, the US’s Secretary of State Jane Nuland and Ambassador Geoffrey Pyatt took part in the demonstrations on the Maidan. Although the protesters were happy to see Western support, it was not an appropriate political decision. Foreign leaders or their representatives should not be among protesters who seek to overthrow a government. The US presence at the Maidan infuriated Putin. At the 2014 Brussel’s summit, he asked Western leaders how they would react if he sent his staff to support anti-EU demonstrations in Greece.\textsuperscript{158} Granted, Putin’s own actions in Ukraine exceeded by far any Western involvement, but when considering the immediate causes of Ukraine’s crisis, the United States is not without blame.

Putin wants to rebuild the Russian Empire. The ousting of a pro-Russian president during the Ukrainian revolution became a red flag to the Russian authorities. With its proximity to Russia, Ukraine could potentially have had a “bad” influence on its eastern neighbor. Putin tolerated Western support of the Orange revolution in 2004, but thought it too dangerous to ignore the more recent protests as well. He responded by annexing the Crimea, which was of both strategic and nationalistic importance for the Russian nation. It remains a question whether he will try to annex Eastern Ukraine as well. It is possible, but not certain.

As already mentioned, the myth of Sevastopol symbolizes Russian willingness to fight for its imperial possessions. One of these is Eastern Ukraine. Russia might try to annex its former territory. However, there are lots of elderly people in the east. It is hard to imagine the Russian Federation accepting the burden of paying all those pensions. Villages, towns, and cities have been destroyed and need to be rebuilt, which will require even more money. Will Russia take it

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 39-40.
all on? Probably not, since its economy cannot afford it. What is more likely is that Eastern Ukraine will share the fate of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It could then serve as a land route to Crimea, although it would probably have to wait a long time to be incorporated into the Russian Federation in order to gain any benefits from it. As for Russia itself, it might very well gain the grudging respect of the international community for the forceful way it dealt with its neighbors, in defiance of much of the world. There is good reason to believe this is exactly the kind of reaction that would most appeal to Putin. His image as a strong nationalist hero who defied all opposing forces and emerged from the conflict victorious would be greatly enhanced. As for Ukraine, it is in great danger of becoming a permanent victim of the power struggle between the Russian Federation and the United States.
Conclusion

According to John J. Mearsheimer, whose book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* provides the theoretical basis for this thesis, all states compete for power in order to survive. This present work demonstrates the unique ways in which the Russian Federation chose to struggle for power against the United States and the European Union, and how this competition has so severely affected Ukraine.

After the Cold War, the United States emerged as the most powerful state in the world. This status is at present being challenged by the Russian Federation, which has since recovered from the collapse of the older Soviet state, and which now claims its rights as a regional hegemon. Many consider this current state of affairs to be a new Cold War. Like the old one, competing ideologies continue to fan hostilities. The Americans continue to believe in a Wilsonian vision of their nation as a benign liberal hegemon with the duty to guard peace and promote democracy in the world. The Russians support Vladimir Putin’s belief in Russia as the Third Rome, with a duty to protect a traditional Christian way of life. Combined with this is a ruthless pursuit of *realpolitik* aiming at the reacquisition of some of Russia’s lost territories, and also, more broadly, a highly pragmatic, completely unsentimental reordering of the map to insure Russia’s survival. In the name of survival, all is permitted. As the Communist playwright Berchtold Brecht once observed, “First comes eating, then comes morality.” The diplomatic and economic wars that are presently being fought between the competitors are based on these differences.

Due to its poor economy, the Russian Federation is unable to seriously threaten the United States. Nevertheless, it is dangerous because it has the ability to damage its opponent. In some ways, the new Cold War is similar to the old one because it is being fought for spheres of
influence, and thus occasionally through the use of proxies. And yet it is also very different. There is today an obvious lack of unity among the Western states directed against the Russian Federation. Many EU members have made agreements with Russia that benefit them financially, while at the same time limit their influence in world affairs. The ultimate European goal, like that of the US, is to outwait Putin. This however creates a general spirit of passivity. He knows this. It is an attitude that only encourages him to act more aggressively.

Ukraine became a victim of Russian usurpation because of Western negligence. The Russian Federation, the main culprit in Ukraine’s case, took advantage of the country’s past to create even deeper division among its citizens and use it to its advantage. The West failed to recognize the danger and allowed the conflict to become a civil war. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, and is presently supporting rebels in Eastern Ukraine. It has many methods, both geopolitical and purely economic, to destabilize Ukraine. Despite its promises, the West is in no hurry to help. Even Putin’s continuing claim that he is only defending Russian minorities in neighboring states, painfully reminiscent of Hitler’s tactics against Czechoslovakia and Poland, has not shaken the democracies from their lethargy. And so the crisis continues to grow, for it might very well be that the Russian Federation, seeking to rebuild the Russian Empire, will try to annex other newly independent states. As some of these are now members of NATO, which the US is obligated to defend, the danger might become very great.

Although Ukraine’s economy has been shattered and will take years to rebuild, this has not been the worst effect of Russian interference. That has been the many lives lost and the distress caused to the entire civilian population. World War II demonstrated to humanity the importance of international dialogue and the terrible crimes that occur when that fails. Nevertheless, the world order has not changed.
While Russia and the West may be acting in their self-interest when viewed through the lens of Mersheimer's argument, the sad truth is that according to that dynamic they are doomed to continue this struggle endlessly until one fails or other more powerful states takes their place. Even worse, the international struggle might devolve into even more anarchic conditions, a war of all against all. The only restraint on nations remains international law and the public use of the language of morality and moderation, since these have the ability to sway public opinion, and without domestic support neither Western nor Russian governments can continue their struggle. This kind of “soft power” might yet restrain Russia's expansionist tendencies. Its more energetic use might seriously erode Putin's domestic support. This will have the additional benefit of normalizing thinking about international relations along more pacific and cooperative lines, rather than normalizing the notion that power can be used by sovereign states with impunity.
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