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One Man's Reaction to NATO Expansion

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One Man's Reaction to NATO Expansion

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“One Man’s Reaction to NATO Expansion”

Marie Putnam

Abstract:

President Vladimir Putin has recently been named the most powerful man in the world, a title that he has grasped as a result of his consolidation of power in the Kremlin. In this paper, multiple scholars’ opinions are taken into account to examine Putin’s role in creating the Russia that the world recognizes. Using the policy of NATO expansion and the events of the Ukraine crisis, Putin’s impact on Russian foreign policy and the extent to which his personality and personal interests have shaped Russia’s actions are analyzed. Through this study, it seems that Russia as an actor on the international stage cannot be understood without considering Putin’s role in creating what Russia is today.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction.....	1
The Role of the Individual.....	3
Chapter 2. A Power Transfer: Putin’s Rise to Power.....	7
Yeltsin and the Family.....	7
Putin’s Personality.....	12
From Yeltsin to Putin.....	16
Chapter 3. Putin in Office.....	23
Putin’s First Term in Office.....	23
Putin’s Second Term.....	28
Medvedev, Then Putin Again.....	31
Chapter 4. Russian Relations with the West.....	35
NATO and Russian Relations.....	35
Map 1. NATO Membership Over Time.....	40
The Ukraine Crisis.....	40
Map 2. Ethnic Russians in the Newly Independent States.....	42
Map 3. Rebels Make Gains During Cease-Fire.....	45
Chapter 5. Explaining Russian Foreign Policy: Differing Perspectives.....	47
Chapter 6. Discussion.....	65
Conclusion.....	74
Bibliography.....	77

Chapter 1. Introduction

From the perspective of media sources and politicians in the United States, Russia is a country that is out of control, in part because it differs from the norms of the Western World. One writer from the *New York Times* explains that policy makers in Washington D.C. understand Russia's recent foreign policy as expansionist in areas such as Ukraine and Syria, threatening the national security of the United States (Lieven 2016). Yet since the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia have tried time and again to repair their relationship and work together through already established institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and new ideas, such as the Reset Button, resetting the relationship between Russia and the United States in order to wipe out the sour history of the Cold War (Smith 2008: 5-7; Giles, et al. 2015: 8-9). Both are aware that the role they claim as superpowers comes with other responsibilities, but both countries are caught up in their historical roles as enemies and cannot seem to understand the perspective of the other country, making the formation of a real working relationship very difficult. After the events surrounding the onset of the Ukraine crisis, the relations between the West and Russia have only gotten worse. The Ukraine crisis was a conflict in 2014 caused by the Ukrainian President violating his promise to sign a trade agreement with Europe and accepting a deal with Russia instead, resulting in unrest among the Ukrainian population. The Ukrainian people were split between interests in becoming integrated with Europe, or being assimilated into Russia, with Russia and the West supporting the pro-Russian and pro-Western sides, respectively. It is hard to pinpoint what started the downward trend in the already suffering relationship, but the crisis in Ukraine did not help improve matters ("The Ukraine Crisis").

Now that the Ukraine crisis is in a frozen state, and not resolution appears in sight, the amount of literature available examining the causes and the actors involved is growing. There are a range of arguments forwarded by scholars on the situation, blaming the crisis on various actors. One group claims that the crisis is the fault of the West's actions, because the West failed to recognize that its actions would be perceived as a provocation in Russia and did not act accordingly to avoid an unnecessary confrontation (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2014). Another argument says that the United States understood where Russia was coming from, because conflict between Russia and the West seemed unavoidable due to President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation's determination for Russia to reclaim its former power (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 167-171). A third line of argument suggests that Vladimir Putin played a decisive role in triggering the Ukraine crisis. In fact, since political power in Russia is highly centralized under Putin, the president is able to exercise direct control of foreign policy (Byman and Pollack 2001: 133-143). Over the last fifteen years, despite formal presidential changes, Vladimir Putin has worked to consolidate and strengthen Russia into a power that cannot be ignored, playing a personal role in determining and implementing Russia's foreign policy. When he first entered the presidency, he watched as NATO expansion drew closer to Russian borders. When NATO prospects started to interfere with Russian interests, the Ukraine crisis was born. Putin's personal decisions and cunning personality can be seen in Russia's interests and policies, creating a connection between NATO enlargement and the Ukraine crisis (Blair 2014; Byman and Pollack 2001: 133-143; Smith 2008: 7-12).

This paper emphasizes Putin's role in Russian foreign policy, especially where the West is involved, over the last fifteen years, arguing that Russia's actions during this time period cannot be better understood without understanding Putin's individual role. Just as Putin did not

understand the West, the West did not understand Putin and the role he played as a sort of puppeteer of the inner workings of the Kremlin as well as what he represents to the Russian people. Through an analysis of Putin's reactions and decisions and their effect on Russia's positions in the world, the extent to which Putin's personality plays a role in the decisions of the Kremlin will be revealed. Following an overview of Russian politics from the collapse of the Soviet Union to Putin's election to the presidency, the paper will examine the factors behind Russia's early cooperation with Western governments and institutions, highlighting Putin's perceived enthusiasm to incorporate Western institutions and form closer ties with NATO. By understanding Putin's personality, Russia's changed outlook in relation to the West can be explained. Putin's stance was not one that the West should have foreseen, as Russia did not react negatively to earlier efforts by NATO to extend membership to some former Soviet States, and Russia had in fact been courting NATO to create closer ties to the West. Russia's resulting hostility to NATO's expansion into the Russian zone of influence was not foreordained and must be explained by looking at the personal ideology and leadership of Vladimir Putin. The main idea here is that although Russia is a large country with one of the larger populations of the world, it is really the president sitting on his throne of vertical power, who has changed and dictated Russia's role on the international stage over the last fifteen years, where his personality and experiences are clearly influential pieces in his policies and actions (Byman and Pollack 2001: 138-145; Smith 2008: 3-4, 7-8).

The Role of the Individual

Daniel L. Byman, the Research Director for RAND's Center for Middle East Public Policy, and Kenneth M. Pollack, a professor at the National Defense University, argue that political scientists have made a mistake in disregarding the role that individuals play in

international relations. They set out a general theory that emphasizes the role that individual leaders can play in shaping a country and its history, concluding that it is insufficient to explain the behavior of states by looking at their power and geostrategic interests. Byman and Pollack argue that individuals differ in their responses to situations and that these variations reflect differences in personality traits, enabling factors and interactions with others (2001: 133-143).

Maryann E. Gallagher, a professor of international affairs at the University of Georgia, and Susan H. Allen, the director of the Center for Peacemaking Practice at George Mason University, also scrutinize the first image theory by drawing connections between the personalities of individual American presidents and their foreign policy decision making. Their analysis, which can be applied to other types of world leaders, also emphasizes that different leaders will make different foreign policy decisions, depending on their underlying personality traits. More specifically, Gallagher and Allen claim that leaders who are more risk-averse will be more consistent in their foreign policy, while as risk-acceptant leaders will have in a more erratic, less predictable manner (Gallagher and Allen 2014: 1-5).

After presenting an overview of politics in Russia under Putin and his predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, this paper will investigate deteriorating relations between Russia and the West, culminating with the crisis in Ukraine that began in 2013. This paper will draw upon the theoretical approach forwarded by Byman and Pollack, agreeing that scholars should “pay attention to the goals, abilities, and idiosyncrasies of the world’s leaders” (2001: 145). It will also adopt an approach similar to that of Gallagher and Allen, examining the ways in which Putin’s personality and personal ambitions shaped Russian foreign policy. Through a focus on the role of the individual, Putin will be shown to have been a risk-averse leader while he was still consolidating power but a risk-tolerant leader once he ensured his control through stable,

centralized political institutions. Putin's foreign policy thus conforms to the predictions of Gallagher and Allen, who found that leaders are more likely to use force if they have already done so and if they possess higher scores on risk-acceptant traits such as Excitement Seeking (Gallagher and Allen 2014: 6-8, 13, 17-18).

What Follows

In order to grasp the full picture of the role of the individual discussed by Byman and Pollack in relation to Putin, it is important to first explore Putin's personal history and the history of Russia. In this paper, the two most important factors are NATO expansion and the Ukraine crisis, and Putin's relation to them. Other events relevant to the history of Russia, Putin's life before the presidency, and Putin's time as president and prime minister are recounted to provide some insight and understanding relatable to NATO's expansionist policy and the conflict in Ukraine.

In the first section, this paper examines Putin's rise from nothing, through the KGB, as he charmed the people around him, rising to new positions in the Kremlin and eventually to the side of a very influential group that operated directly behind Yeltsin. At this point, his only problem was that he had not yet captured the attention of Russian citizens and no one in the international community knew who he was. Once he overcame that, he moved swiftly into the most powerful position in Russia, the presidency.

The next section elaborates on Putin's time in office, and the major events that occurred during his first and second terms as president, as well as influence he held as prime minister. This eventually leads back to the election that brought him his third term as president. In his current term discontent over NATO expansion really took form and the Ukraine Crisis captured the attention of the world.

The third section focuses more generally on the relationship between Russia and the West and NATO expansion after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's and NATO's failed attempts at forming a continuous and beneficial relationship are discussed in the context of NATO enlargement and how that impacted Russia's policy toward NATO. This conflicted relationship brings both sides to the Ukraine crisis as they each try to pursue their own interests, to a point where Ukraine is no longer under constant scrutiny by the world because the conflict has stilled, but not stopped.

Finally this paper includes a segment about Russian foreign policy in relation to the Ukraine conflict, and the existing perspective. This section brings in scholars' opinions about the conflict and who, or what is believed to be responsible for causing it. In closing, there is a discussion about Putin's role as an individual influencing the events that led to the Ukraine crisis, and how much his personal experiences and personality played a role in shaping Russian foreign policy.

The main objective of this paper is to present Putin's role as a strong leader, influencing Russia's actions on the international stage from his position at the head of the Russian government. There have been other significant pieces that took part in shaping Russian foreign policy, but the power that Putin wields as president is arguably the most important factor in understanding Russia's actions and foreign policy decisions. The events throughout Putin's life and Russia's history as a strong, centralized, state help determine Putin's actions and reactions as he makes connections between the past and present.

Chapter 2. A Power Transfer: Putin's Rise to Power

Yeltsin and the Family

Boris Yeltsin was initially elected as president in Russia in June 1991 during a time of rejection of the communist government and support for further democratizing Russia. Even though Yeltsin had served in the Soviet Government before it collapsed, this did not damage his prospects of becoming Russia's post-soviet president, since his stint in the Soviet Government had exposed the people to him who came to associate him with more liberal-minded ideals. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, not many citizens wanted an immediate return to communism, so it was the ideal time for a more democratically-inclined government to gain the support of the people (Rutland 1998: 694-697). Not only did the average Russian choose Yeltsin over a possible communist candidate, but Yeltsin also enjoyed the support of a powerful group of wealthy individuals known as oligarchs who positioned themselves to benefit from the privatization of state companies that had begun under Mikhail Gorbachev, the last leader of the Soviet Union. These oligarchs did not want to see a return to communism because they recognized that the transition from a state-owned to a capitalist economy offered them extraordinary opportunities to accumulate even more wealth (Rutland 1998: 696-697). During his first term as president, Yeltsin had the support of the Russian people as they looked to him with hope for a new future with better conditions. As his first term drew to a close, this sentiment had changed. People were not as enamored by his liberal ideals and plans as they had been a few years earlier, and this changed feeling towards him was viewed as a problem and a threat to the people who controlled most of the nation's wealth (O'Shea; Shevtsova 2004: 67-70; Shinar 2012: 45-50).

When Yeltsin ran for reelection in 1996, his position as president was more contested because not everyone was satisfied with what his administration had done over the last four years. The oligarchs were concerned that Russia would return to communism, since the communist party was showing a strong following in the polls, so a group of seven economic oligarchs pooled resources to fund Yeltsin's reelection campaign. Of these oligarchs, called the "group of seven," Boris Berezovsky became most notable in Yeltsin's administration after he claimed his place among Yeltsin's personal friends. Since most oligarchs created their wealth toward the end of the Soviet Union, they were fashioned in a society that exchanged favors for political support using the oligarchs' extensive funds, gaining oligarchs more access to governmental affairs. This initially happened because the wealth of oligarchs was acquired through gaining control over lucrative state-owned companies, so that the state began to depend on the oligarchs for support and investments. The oligarchs learned they could lend money to the government in return for company shares, eventually taking the companies over as they gained control when the government defaulted on the loans that the oligarchs had provided to keep government businesses operational. Some oligarchs retained their wealth, even after supporting Yeltsin's reelection and then denouncing his presidency during his second term. Berezovsky remained one of the wealthier oligarchs because of his continual support of the Yeltsin administration (O'Shea; Rutland 1998: 696-697; Shevtsova 2004: 67-68; Shinar 2012: 6, 19-22, 45-50).

As a president, Yeltsin was caught between the ideals that came with his childhood and education in the Soviet Union, and his liberal interests and solutions. He appeared to favor the more democratic policies, such as freedom of the press, when given the option, even though some part of him wanted to follow his communist intuition. His fall back onto communist

practices is illustrated in his consent to economic policies that allowed for extreme concentration of wealth and encouraged corruption (Shevtsova 2004: 67-69). Anatoly Chubais, an influential member of the Yeltsin administration in the earlier half of the 1990s commented on the type of economic reforms that Yeltsin was imposing, which were promoted by oligarchical interests, saying that “[t]he fact that these would be the forces enlarging their own private property, and in the political process they would be, by definition, against communists and pro-reform – that was quite unmistakable” (Shinar 2012: 8, 30-35).

After Yeltsin’s shaky reelection, he stayed in power because of a more selective group of oligarchs, which made a point to support and publicize his presidency. To an extent the two parties had a mutually beneficial relationship. Yeltsin held onto his role and title of president, appealing to the people of Russia as the popularly elected leader of the country, at the same time that he continued to serve the interests of the main group of oligarchs that supported him. His group of supporters is sometimes translated and referred to as *the Clan*, or *the Kremlin Clan*, while in Russian media it was more commonly referred to as *the Family*. They tried to keep private lives, influencing Yeltsin behind the scenes, and not publicizing their personal affairs outside of the official roles they held in the government, but in the short period of freedom of the press granted to the Russian people under Yeltsin, most everyone was aware that they had more say in the internal workings of the government than their positions were entitled to. Without their support, their influence, and their control of the media to popularize Yeltsin, Yeltsin would have lost the public’s support for his role as president very quickly during his second term (*How Putin Came to Power*; Shevtsova 2004: 68-72; Shinar 2012: 45-50).

The Family was made up of about four people who were responsible for funding and propagandizing Yeltsin’s election and presidency, as well as conspiring with him behind closed

doors to make sure their interests and intentions were not ignored, and that the government – namely Yeltsin - bent to their will. Yeltsin's daughter, Tatyana, was one of the members of the Family, at which time she served as an advisor to the president, exercising her power by specifically giving her input on every appointment and removal of important governmental figures ("Tatyana Yumasheva"). Valentin Yumashev, who would become Tatyana's husband, was another member of the Family, playing the role of the president's advisor for public relations in 1996, and moving to the position of the head of the Presidential Executive Board, where Tatyana was really the one responsible for his appointment there ("Valentin Yumashev"). Berezovsky, one of the aforementioned "group of seven," a well-known businessman, was a very important member of the family, as he initially gained influence with the president through his funding of the campaign, but unlike other members of the group of seven, who turned their back on Yeltsin after the reelection, Berezovsky continued to support Yeltsin after he won the reelection. Due to his loyalty, he was moved into Yeltsin's inner circle and appointed as deputy of the Security Council in 1996, then as the executive secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1998 (Shinar 2012: 21-22). The final member of the family was Roman Abramovich. His role in Yeltsin's reelection and in the government after the election in 1996 is not as widely documented, only emphasizing that he gained enough wealth and influence to make his way into Yeltsin's inner circle of advisors – the Family. In 1999 he was appointed the governor of Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, a region in the most eastern part of Russia, lacking in development and impoverished until Abramovich attempted to institute some change (*How Putin Came to Power*: O'Shea; "Abramovich").

In addition to being responsible for Yeltsin's reelection in 1996, the Family also engineered Putin's rise to power with Berezovsky feeling as though he were the *kingmaker*.

Berezovsky had known Putin since about 1991 when Berezovsky was looking to expand his business into St. Petersburg. Berezovsky offered Putin a bribe, because Putin worked for the local government in St. Petersburg at the time, but Putin refused the bribe and allowed Berezovsky to open a branch of his business in the city. Berezovsky remembered Putin because he declined the bribe, which was out of character for someone in his position, and since that time, Berezovsky would take some time visit Putin any time he was in St. Petersburg (Elder 2013).

During the 1990s – and Yeltsin’s two terms as president – Yeltsin’s health was declining rapidly. Before the 1990s, Yeltsin had suffered minor medical conditions mostly concerning his heart, but as his stress and drinking increased over his presidency, his condition worsened. He was in and out of the hospital on numerous occasions during his presidency, mostly due to heart problems, and even had heart surgery during his presidency. These hospital visits were usually downplayed or completely denied by the press and by his personal security, but they were the cause of frequent cancelations of diplomatic trips and meetings. The Family did not want Yeltsin to appear to be incapable of holding such an important political position, so they tried not to publicize the severity of his various conditions, although they could not cover up his heart surgery. They were also worried about how Yeltsin’s deteriorating condition might impact how he was viewed by other political leaders. In the few years before his resignation, which took place four months before the end of his presidency, he was often seen stumbling around and unsure in his speech, taking long pauses to answer simple questions. His unsteadiness was often attributed to his medical conditions, but one could not rule out the possibility that it was from drinking, which it frequently was (O’Shea; Shinar 2012: 54-56; “Yeltsin’s Health Record”).

Yeltsin's image was deteriorating; the image of an ill president with a drinking problem was not the kind of image of Russia that the Family wanted to present. With this in mind, the Family launched a frantic search for a replacement for Yeltsin, hoping to find someone who would continue serving the interests of the Family by preventing the Communist Party from taking over the government. (*How Putin Came to Power*; Shevtsova 2004: 67-68).

Putin's Personality

It is said that President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation has a presence such that when a person meets him, a person wants to believe in him and what he stands for. Putin has a knowledge of people that enables him to convince the person he is talking to of similar interests and goals, forming a relationship with a feigned connection. He can listen to a person's experiences and interests and turn this information back on them to make it appear that he grew up a similar way, or had similar experiences in his past to make him more relatable to the person with whom he is speaking. Putin's ability to create a sense of mutual trust was most publicly demonstrated and documented during former President George W. Bush's first meeting with Putin in 2001. Putin and Bush apparently came away from that first meeting with plans of continuing their relationship with elements of friendship added to the diplomacy – Bush inviting Putin to his ranch in Texas, and Putin inviting Bush to his dacha, located in a woodsy area next to the Black Sea (Roxburgh 2012: 30-35).

After the meeting between the two presidents, President Bush was asked if he trusted Putin, to which he responded, "He's an honest, straightforward man who loved his country. He loves his family. We share a lot of values... I wouldn't have invited him to my ranch if I didn't trust him" ("First Meeting between Bush and Putin" 2001) Bush doesn't speak Russian and Putin can only say a few phrases in English, so it is interesting that a statement with so much

conviction could be made off of the information gleaned from the translators present at the meeting. Perhaps this level of trust felt by Bush in his relationship with Putin can be attributed to a statement where Bush claimed, “I looked the man in the eye. I found him to be very straightforward and trustworthy. We had a very good dialogue. I was able to get a sense of his soul; a man deeply committed to his country and the best interests of his country” (“First Meeting between Bush and Putin” 2001; Roxburgh 2012: 35). How could a man, holding the position that President Bush held at the time, be so sure of a person, as he was of Putin, after one meeting with them that he would make a statement like this? What in Putin’s life has given him the knowledge and ability to become the man he is today, and be able to convince people to trust him after one meeting? Perhaps delving into Putin’s past will provide more information on the man Putin is today and what influences the decisions he makes in office (“First Meeting between Bush and Putin” 2001; Roxburgh 2012: 30-35; “Vladimir Putin”).

Putin was born in the Soviet Union in 1952 in the city that was known as Leningrad, before its name was returned to what it had been before Soviet time, St. Petersburg. All of Putin’s developmental years were spent in the Soviet Union, where he grew up in a very strict communist family that would not have dreamed of dabbling in contraband items, which were popular among others at the time. As a young adult, Putin began his career in the KGB, where he started in 1975. After several years in Leningrad, Putin was reassigned to East Germany. In both locations, his job was to be an expert at mingling. He was good at gaining people’s trust and rooting out those whom he deemed trustworthy. He spent time on the ground making contacts and connections for the KGB, and through the use of his German language skills and mingling ability he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonial (Roxburgh 2012: 15-20; “Vladimir Putin”).

Putin was stationed abroad in East Germany for the last years of the Soviet Union, so he was not present to witness and experience the impact that the new and final leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, had on Soviet policy, and how that, in turn, affected the people of Russia. Instead, Putin was cushioned by the communism of East Germany in his experiences and beliefs since the government of East Germany did not institute the kinds of liberal reforms that Gorbachev did, although the people had access to West German media broadcasts. Back home in the Soviet Union, Gorbachev was attempting to implement more liberal policies such as *Glasnost*, or openness, and *Perestroika*, or restructuring. *Perestroika* aimed at restructuring the political and economic systems in the Soviet Union to allow for citizens to have more of a say in their government through contested elections and to restore economic growth by freeing up parts of the economy. *Glasnost* referred to social and political reforms providing the people of the Soviet Union with more rights. Both of these policies went against the grain of the Soviet Union's traditionally communist teachings, and since Putin was abroad for both of these changes, he had lived, thus far, with the traditionally communist opinion that most anything that came from Western culture was frowned upon, and often forbidden, in the Soviet Union (Roxburgh 2012: 15-20; "Vladimir Putin").

Taking into account Putin's history in the KGB, having his life generally shielded from Western culture and turned against Western ideals, it may seem surprising that he quickly involved himself in liberal politics when he came back to Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union. His first job after returning to Russia was working as the campaign manager for his mentor and father-figure Anatoly Sobchak, a liberal candidate for governor of St. Petersburg. When Putin first found himself in Sobchak's office, there was an immediate father-son relationship that formed. Putin served Sobchak out of a deep sense of loyalty and trust, which has

helped form the circle of people Putin surrounds himself with today, always looking for that loyalty. After Sobchak won, Putin became deputy mayor under him, working for the implementation of liberal policies for the people of St. Petersburg, policies and ideals that he had been taught to turn against his whole life. In 1996, while Yeltsin was on his reelection campaign, Sobchak was running for reelection at the local level. When he was defeated, Putin picked up and went to Moscow with no real plan of what he was going to do there (Roxburgh 2012: 18-20; “Vladimir Putin”).

In 1997, Putin was appointed to his first political position in Moscow, quickly moving up in the government. Always busy and hardworking, he caught the eye of the Family. As someone who appeared to be loyal but incapable of running a country, someone who was used to taking orders because of his KGB background, he seemed to be the perfect person for the Family to use to draw the attention away from Yeltsin’s failing health (*How Putin Came to Power*; Roxburgh 2012: 19-25; “Vladimir Putin”; “Yeltsin’s Health Record”).

During Yeltsin’s presidency, as his health was declining, he made a few attempts to display a healthier version of himself to the world. Putin’s widely recognized and propagandized displays of strength – physical fitness and health – mimic Yeltsin’s creation of a healthy image. However, Putin’s strength propaganda is more than imitation because he was brought into the Moscow government due to the fact that Russians had lost faith in Yeltsin as a result of poor health and love for the bottle. In contrast, Putin never drinks in public, and it is debated whether he drinks alcoholic beverages at all, despite the strong Russian traditions surrounding them. If he does, he only does so in the privacy of his family during holidays. Putin’s determination to showcase his strength and physical fitness is an extreme demonstration of his capability to function effectively as the president. In this way, he can be sure that the Russian people have the

utmost confidence in his physical abilities to do his duties, as well as his sober, mental abilities to carry out his responsibilities. It has not gone unnoticed that this is also the image he presents to the rest of the world, perhaps initially in the hopes that he could inspire confidence in himself as the leader of the Russian Federation, after the world experienced the situation that was Yeltsin (Roxburgh 2012: iv-viii).

From Yeltsin to Putin

As Yeltsin's health declined, and he continued his detrimental drinking habits, the Family desperately sought a new Russian prime minister who could run as an incumbent in the fast approaching elections. Months went by and they seemed to have no suitable options. Yeltsin continued to make blunders in front of the media, pressuring the Family to worry more and look harder, but the circle of people in which they were looking for a new prime minister was very small, making their job more difficult. In addition to the stress of looking for a replacement, the Family, as well as other important government officials, were being investigated by the Communist Party for money laundering and bribery in what would be called the Mabetex affair. The head of the Communist Party employed Yury Skuratov, the Russian Prosecutor General, to lead the investigation, since Skuratov also had Communist Party affiliations, hoping for an outcome that would give the Communist Party more public support (*How Putin Came to Power*; Shevtsova 2004: 67-68; Tagliabue and Bohlen 1999; "Yeltsin's Health Record").

Mabetex Project Engineering was a Swiss company charged with renovating and restoring the Kremlin in Moscow. In its dealings with the Moscow government, money and gifts were given from Mabetex to government officials, especially credit cards funded through Mabetex accounts that the officials could use to cover their bills. All officials who received any money or bribes, especially President Yeltsin and his daughters, completely denied that this

affair had happened, even though there were eyewitnesses who claimed to have seen the exchange of gifts (*How Putin Came to Power*; Tagliabue and Bohlen 1999).

Initially it seemed as though the Family would have to settle for a man named Yevgeny Primakov to fill the position of prime minister. Primakov was the foreign minister of Russia at the time, and since the Duma would have to approve the candidate for prime minister, with his high-level KGB background it was thought that he could please both the Communist Party and the more reformist political groups. He was appointed prime minister of Russia in 1998, and although he may have satisfied the people and various parties that existed within Russia, news coverage outside of Russia was accompanied with an element of skepticism about someone with such a strong Soviet background becoming the Prime Minister (*How Putin Came to Power*; Peterseim).

Primakov did not like the power and influence that the Family wielded in the government. The Family's feelings towards him were equally distasteful, because, although he was more moderate than some members of the Communist Party, he still had very close ties to the Party. With his newfound position and power, Primakov tried to rein in the Family's power. He ordered a full economic report on corruption in the government, which at the time when the government was still being investigated for the Mabetex affair, dissatisfied other high level officials (*How Putin Came to Power*; Peterseim).

Skuratov was also still investigating the Mabetex affair, and with two public figures looking into the Family's affairs, the tarnish of corruption hung over the government. The Family did not like Skuratov and Primakov poking into the government's records and decided they had to do something about it. The public was suddenly facing a Skuratov scandal. A indecent video had been released to the government showcasing a man that looked very much

like Skuratov. Although it looked like Skuratov, the identity of the man in the sex tape was shrouded in uncertainty. Skuratov of course denied that it was him in the video, and when the video was shown to parliament and leaked to the public, both parties were unsure about the man's identity and if it was really Skuratov (*How Putin Came to Power*; Tagliabue and Bohlen 1999).

In 1998, during the investigation of the tape allegedly containing Skuratov, Putin held the position of the Director of the Federal Security Service (FSB). It being his job to protect the interests and the people in government, found himself in the position where he would prove his loyalty to the Family. He verified and confirmed that the person in the video was indeed Skuratov (although this is still questionable). As a result, Skuratov was removed from the Mabetex investigation as well as from his position as Prosecutor General because members of the parliament could not have someone with such a tarnished reputation holding these positions (*How Putin Came to Power*; Tagliabue and Bohlen 1999; "Vladimir Putin").

Putin's decision to support the government and verify the video in favor of the Family's interests pleased both the Family and Yeltsin himself. To them he had shown a level of loyalty to their interests that they greatly coveted, and potential for a future position in the government, since they still were not satisfied with Primakov, especially after his investigation into the economic affairs of the government. Putin was promoted to the position of Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation in March 1999 and the Family turned its attention to removing Prime Minister Primakov from office. Primakov had high approval ratings, in part because of his investigation into the government's level of corruption, and he still was in the very public position of prime minister, so the Family could not simply get rid of him. The game of musical chairs the government was playing continued as Primakov was eventually released

from his duty and office of prime minister after only eight months of holding the position (*How Putin Came to Power*; Shevtsova 2004: 72-73; “Vladimir Putin”).

Even after being removed from the position of Russian prime minister, Primakov remained popular with the citizens of Russia, in part because of his previous investigation into the government corruption. Primakov launched a new political party, Fatherland-All Russia, to compete against Yeltsin’s Unity party in the Duma elections of 1999. This greatly worried the Family because of Primakov’s dislike of their control in government affairs, and the Family still did not have a suitable candidate that Russia could rally behind. If Fatherland-All Russia were to gain enough influence in the government, or Primakov be elected as president in the upcoming 2000 presidential elections, the Family’s influence and control in the Kremlin would be greatly reduced. Fortunately for the interests of the Family, Fatherland-All Russia lost the 1999 elections and Primakov failed in his subsequent bid for the presidency in 2000 (*How Putin Came to Power*).

With Primakov out of office and heading his own election campaign, the Family was floundering again, with no prime minister who could take Yeltsin’s position, and time running out. The Family remembered Putin’s loyalty, but wondered how someone, who held such a low position compare to the Premiership, and with such limited political experience could hold the position of prime minister. As was illustrated previously, Putin knew how to please people and make them trust him, and he seduced everyone as they talked to him, while considering him for the position of prime minister. In 1999 when Berezovsky was tasked with asking Putin to take the position of prime minister, the family and the government reportedly knew next to nothing about Putin aside from his KGB past, his loyalty, and his charm. Even Berezovsky who had known him for years, and was responsible for introducing him to the Family, did not know very

much about Putin and viewed him as someone who the Family could easily shape to their will because of his seemingly malleable and boring personality (Elder 2013). The Family thought without the political experience he would be an easy person to push around to do their bidding, or that he could serve as the face of the government while really doing nothing. When Berezovsky asked him to take the place of prime minister, he said, “You’ll keep going to work like you did before; we will just move your office. We will do all of the work for you” (*How Putin Came to Power*; “Vladimir Putin”).

Even though the Family did not really know Putin, he became the Family’s choice for the position of prime minister because they had no better and no other option. Unfortunately, just because the Family was satisfied, this did not mean the public was pleased. The general population had no idea who he was, and the election was months away, so the Family had a lot of work to do to make Putin’s name known, and have the public love him and accept him as their next leader. Fortunately with their resources and control of several media outlets, this was not an entirely impossible task (*How Putin Came to Power*).

The events of Chechnya were escalating as Putin was being considered for prime minister, but their seriousness caused Russia to need a prime minister, which gave Yeltsin the opportunity to officially appoint Putin. From there it was an uphill climb. Primakov was the popular face in the polls in the months before the election and Putin was little known. Putin supported the campaign into Chechnya, showing his strength and his love for Russia, winning the Russians over as he acted the part of the country’s hero, but he still did not have enough popularity. Veterans and soldiers liked him for his attention to them and to the conflict in Dagestan, the oblast’, or region, next to Chechnya where the conflict had spread, and many Russian troops were fighting. Putin was still far behind Primakov about eight months before the

election, with 3% in the polls, barely scratching the surface of the population and his potential for support (*How Putin Came to Power*; Peterseim; “Vladimir Putin”).

In September 1999, Russia suffered three different bombings of apartment buildings. The bombings were blamed on Chechen rebels, and the government, with Putin heading the investigation, was credited with preventing further bombings, reportedly finding more explosive material in the basement of another apartment complex. Questions were raised by the international press and Russian citizens alike whether the government had staged these bombings, or if Chechen rebels were actually responsible. Russian citizens lived in a state of fear after the bombings occurred, wondering if their home would be the next target, so no one thought to question if the Chechen rebels were the perpetrators until later. Instead Putin used the event as a way to make gains in the polls, acting as a hero to the Russian people and launching another attack into Chechnya himself. With the events of Chechnya, and Putin’s heroic campaign to find the culprits, he climbed in the polls, eventually overtaking Primakov with the elections six months away (*How Putin Came to Power*; Myers 2003).

At this point the Family had been discussing Yeltsin’s early retirement. Outside of his tightknit circle of friends and family, no one knew this was being considered. Four months before the elections, Yeltsin was asked to step down, and when he agreed, with full immunity for himself and his family, even the television broadcaster asked to record his resignation speech had no idea what he was going to do or say before he said it. The speech was broadcast on December 31, 1999, and Putin became the Acting President (*How Putin Came to Power*; O’Shea; “Vladimir Putin”).

In his four months as Acting President before the 2000 elections, Putin understood the importance of the media, having said at one point, “Reality’s what you show them. If you don’t

show them, it doesn't exist" (*How Putin Came to Power*). He used the media as a tool to document the sacrifice of Russian soldiers in Chechnya and paint the Chechens as barbarians, reintroducing propaganda. Even with the reintroduction of the well-known Soviet tool of propaganda and the reinstatement of the Soviet-Era national anthem, he continued to be completely opposed to the Communist Party and promised to continue Yeltsin's reforms (*How Putin Came to Power*).

In 2000, Putin was voted in as President of the Russian Federation, shortly after scattering and prosecuting the Family. Finding they were wrong about his pliability, some fled the country; even oligarchs who had been close friends of Putin before he was elected president in 2000 fled Russia because they feared the risk of being arrested, including Berezovsky who had quickly started criticizing the Putin administration after Putin's election. Putin quickly abandoned Yeltsin's policies and reforms, muting the free press that the country had known for the last decade. At the cost of what Americans would consider freedom, Putin brought stability and power back to Russia after the blunders of Yeltsin (*How Putin Came to Power*; Puddington and Piano 2005; Shevtsova 2004: 67-68).

Chapter 3. Putin in Office

Putin's First Term as President

Before Putin's presidency, Russia had taken part in trying to suppress a nationalist uprising in Chechnya, a Muslim region of Russia. This first Chechen War lasted from 1994 until 1996, when Russia saw that the conflict was not making any progress and decided to withdraw its forces (Rutland 1998: 696). In August 1999 Putin took over the end of Yeltsin's term and became acting president. A few months later, as part of his campaign to gain enough votes to win the election in 2000, he launched the Second Chechen war. Initially the West did not agree with the Putin government's justifications that its actions in Chechnya were aimed against terrorists that had harmed the lives of Russian civilians (Mirovaley 2014).

It is important to remember that Putin came to power at the hands of a group of wealthy oligarchs, who were running the highest rungs of the Russian government behind closed doors. After Putin was officially elected president for his first term in March 2000, he made a point, within the first year, to rid Russia of many of these oligarchs, even though some of them had been considered close friends. In doing so, the Russian government gained control of more media outlets, which it has continued to utilize to spread pro-Putin propaganda and any other message the Kremlin wants to present to the Russian people on its own terms. One of the reasons for Putin's interest in the media occurred after the Russian submarine, the *Kursk*, sank in 2000, tarnishing Putin's image and leaving him grasping for a way to regain his popularity (Giles, et. al. 2015: 1-5; Roxburgh 2012: 61, 71, 84).

Like many Russian leaders before him, Vladimir Putin started his time in office with the goal of making Russia a great power again. However, he seemed to start down the road to this objective with more of a Western approach, focusing on restoring the economy after the failed

policies of the Yeltsin Administration, to get there. His first term, therefore, started out on the road to westernizing and democratizing Russia, following the wishes that Yeltsin had expressed before he left office and spreading hope in the Western world for successful relations with this vast country (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-4).

In the beginning, Putin opted to try rebuilding the Russian state up from the chaos that Yeltsin had left behind. Putin set three main goals to focus on to start returning Russia to greatness, but in the context of Yeltsin's pro-Western ideals. First, Putin wanted to build a strong, unfragmented state, recentralizing institutions in the government that Yeltsin had partitioned out to other ruling entities. Next, he wanted to create a successful competitive market economy based on democratic standards. Yeltsin had tried to implement his own version of a capitalist economy, but it had not lasted due to the ruble's falling value in 1998, and Putin hoped that his approach would be more effective. Finally, Putin intended to integrate Russia into the community of advanced industrial nations after he had stabilized Russia and restored its prosperity (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-3; "Vladimir Putin" 2015).

A market economy and shared values were not the only democratic-leaning policies from his predecessor that Putin intended to implement or uphold. He expressed the need for political parties that had genuine support from the masses, instead of parties with parasitic government officials. Freedom of speech and freedom of the press were also important points in his first term, emphasized in his vision of Russia. However, these promises were quickly broken when the government took control of most major news stations, as Putin recognized his discomfort in having the media tarnish his image. Moving from a Russia that was used to constant propaganda and repression directly to a system with complete freedom of speech and the press did not allow the government and private corporations to find a balance in which both parties could operate.

Putin's invitation of Western officials to Moscow was just one area in which he reached out in a show of the country's newly democratic tendencies, referring to integration with Europe as an important aspect of Russian foreign policy (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-6).

Putin and President George W. Bush of the United States, at the time, seemed to form a friendly and workable relationship after their first meeting, such that on September 11, 2001, Putin was the first world leader to express sympathy and support for the United States after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Soon after, Putin made his first trip to the United States to visit Bush on his ranch in order to discuss missile defense and arms reduction policies, and although the two leaders did not come to an agreement at that time, their friendship continued (Giles, et al. 2015: 5-7; Smith 2008: 5-6).

After the declaration of the War on Terror by President Bush, the West became more understanding of Russia's actions against the Chechens. The American point of view towards terrorists had changed and hardened, allowing the West to be more accepting of Russia's attempts to control its own internal terrorists. This change and acceptance in the Western world opened a door for Putin to start discussing the renewal of relations with NATO again. Although Putin made it clear that Russia was not pursuing NATO membership at that time, NATO's secretary general and Russia decided it would be ideal for Russia to have power equal to many of the NATO members within the alliance, even allowing veto power of NATO decisions under some circumstances. This suited Russian interests because Russia has a history of choosing a more independent path in a world of groups and alliances. In addition, Putin said that Russia had the power to protect itself and did not need membership in the alliance at the time (Mirovalev 2014; Smith 2008: 5-8).

Following the positive turn Western-Russian relations had taken, in 2002 the United States and Russia signed a nuclear disarmament treaty, which required both countries to reduce the number of nuclear weapons they possessed over the following ten years. Beyond a nuclear disarmament agreement, this treaty was more symbolic for Russia and the United States, signaling a new era of relations after the Cold War. The growing trust between the two leaders spilled over into the economic side of their relationship, where Bush promised to try to lift the Jackson-Vanik agreement, which had served to restrict normal trade with the Soviet Union, but no longer seemed necessary. Following the disarmament treaty, Russia signed the 2002 NATO-Russia pact, officially renewing and strengthening the relationship between the two players (“Leaders sign major nuclear arms deal” 2002).

Russia seemed to be on a path to more pro-Western policies and actions; however, there was a new disagreement over Iran that reopened wounds of distrust between the two nations. While the U.S. viewed Iran’s growing military power as a threat, Putin insisted on supporting the Iranian government, participating in arms trades. The U.S. wanted to prevent the growth of military strength in Iran, so Russia’s growing relationship with the country caused disagreements (Winchester 2009: 6, 19-20). Not only were there new external concerns with regard to Russia, but a closer look at Russian domestic politics indicated the rise of anti-democratic movements within the government. People who had opposing opinions to Putin’s ideas and party were dying mysterious deaths or being arrested. Even more well-known people were not safe from his regime, as Anna Politkovskaya, a renowned journalist who spent much of her time writing critical reports about the government’s actions in Chechnya, learned when she was assassinated in Moscow in 2006 (Roxburgh 2012: 162-167). The Chechen rebel group had continued to be a problem, causing injury and death in several of parts of the country, which resulted in the

government tightening internal security. In order to achieve a sense of security, Putin was centralizing control over the government, bringing more institutions under his direct influence, while at the same time tying his country closer to the West through NATO and a friendship with the president of the United States (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-4; Mirovalev 2014).

Although Russia seemed to be more accepting of democratic ideals and institutions, events on Russia's border proved otherwise. In 2003 the Rose Revolution broke out in Georgia, as Georgian citizens fought to install a more democratic government in place of the Soviet leader who had been left in Georgia after the fall of the Soviet Union. The Russian government blamed the United States for the revolution believing that it had been manufactured to overthrow a pro-Russian government in order to replace it with a pro-Western one. Other parties believe the events in Georgia did not constitute a revolution, and instead were the actions of a coup intended to overthrow the incumbent government. Despite friendly encounters in the area of nuclear disarmament and NATO agreements, the United States was interfering in territory directly related to Russian interests. Due to this United States disregard of Russian interests in the Russian zone of influence, Russia did not want the United States to establish military bases in other formerly Soviet states in order to gain more direct access to the war the United States wanted to launch in Afghanistan after the events of September 11, 2001. The United States had tried to access Central Asian countries directly before, discounting the power of Moscow to set up bases after receiving mixed signals from different Russian officials. The United States continued in its pursuit for a base that would be more conveniently located, which concerned Russia ("Georgia's 'Rose Revolution'"; "How the Rose Revolution happened" 2005; "Leaders sign major nuclear arms deal" 2002; Roxburgh 2012: 35-40).

In sum, Russia and the United States were both trying to form closer relations with the each other. However, after years of conflict and being on opposites sides of the spectrum politically and economically, the states could not trust each other to follow treaty or agreement guidelines. Even during the disarmament treaty, each world leader was reluctant to destroy so much of his country's nuclear arsenal because he did not think the other member of the treaty would follow through. This rift in the formation of Russia's relationship with the West was due to it being cast across historical boundaries of memories and feelings from the Cold War, which would take more time to cross. Instead, both countries assumed the worst of the other and went behind the other's back to achieve goals in their own self-interest. A relationship that had started to show promise was falling apart before the alliance had time to be tested ("Leaders sign major nuclear arms deal" 2002).

Putin's Second Term

Despite the failed attempt at creating a working relationship with the West during his first term, Putin was reelected for a second term as president of the Russian Federation in March 2004. By the end of his first term, Putin had consolidated control over a strong, centralized state, using his influence as president to bring the media, legislature, judiciary, and regional administrations under more direct control from the Kremlin. Close to his reelection, it was obvious that he was using his presidential position to consolidate power and wealth (Giles, et al. 2015: 4-7; Smith 2008: 8-11; "Vladimir Putin" 2015).

In addition to consolidating political power and influence with the control of government institutions and the media, Putin turned away from the idea of a Western-style capitalist economy, choosing to nationalize larger organizations so as to finance the Kremlin's interests. The perceived changes in the direction of Russian goals and policies, back to what appeared to

be a more Soviet-style centralized government and power, soured the West to pursuing closer relations with Russia. Russian citizens, on the other hand, largely embraced the changes in the government, as a strong, centralized government was what they had been used to for years under the rule of the Soviet Union. They embraced the potential for a stronger government and leader to bring their country back to the level they viewed as its rightful place in the world – a world power, contested only by the other strong nations. After years of botched attempts by the Russian government to incorporate democratic practices, reverting to the old ways was not viewed in a negative light (Giles, et al. 2015: 3-7; “Vladimir Putin” 2015).

Later in March, after Putin’s reelection, seven more European nations were accepted as member states of NATO – Bulgaria, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania, and Slovenia. These states had been active candidates openly seeking NATO membership. The difference with this group of states was that the impact of their joining Russia’s traditional enemy, NATO, was still a blow to Russian power. All of these states except one, Slovenia, had been members of the Warsaw Pact, and three of them had been part of the Soviet Union before its demise. The idea that these states had chosen to switch sides, to join NATO rather than seek out a new alliance with Russia, was unnerving. The Baltic States remained even more of a concern, since they had been members of the Soviet Union and now brought the borders of NATO right up against the Russian border without a buffer zone in between. Not only did this situation encroach on Russia’s sphere of influence, it aggravated concerns about Russian security (Shanker 2004; Smith 2008: 12-14).

To counter the feeling of insecurity caused by the shrinking territory of the Russian buffer zone with the Western world, Putin continued to consolidate governmental procedures and institutions. He took away elections at the regional level for governors and made the positions

accessible only by appointment from the Kremlin, ensuring that only officials with parallel interests to his own were in charge of the further reaches of Russian territory at all times. Putin also made sure to keep close tabs on states that he considered vital to Russia's place on the world stage, such as Georgia and Ukraine (Giles, et al. 2015: 3-8; Smith 2008: 8-10).

In November 2004 the Orange Revolution erupted in Ukraine after allegations of a corrupt electoral system arose during the presidential elections. Russia thought that this was perhaps another Western-backed revolution to integrate more democratic ideals in states close to Russia. Viktor Yushchenko led the revolt against the potentially rigged elections, succeeding in the call for a re-vote that would take place under more fair circumstances. He won the re-vote, becoming Ukraine's new president, but aspects of the Orange Revolution continued because people still were not happy with the actions of the new president as he tried to veto legislation that would take some of his power away. The people wanted a shift to a more democratic government, and Yushchenko's vetoes of democratically inclined policies were inhibiting that transition. In addition, Yushchenko sought economic agreements with Russia that allowed Russia more of a hold over Ukrainian affairs ("Chronology of the Orange Revolution" 2007; Smith 2008: 12-13; Steele 2005).

Although Putin denied his dislike of a pro-Western president coming to power in Ukraine, his opinion was obvious in the way he spoke of the Orange Revolution and his repeated support for the pro-Moscow candidate. What really irked Putin was not the outcome of the election so much as the Western interference in Ukraine, which resulted in an increase in the support of a more democratic government. To Putin, the Orange Revolution was a repeat scenario of the Rose Revolution that had happened earlier that year in Georgia, signaling Western attempts to spread democracy into the Russian sphere of influence. His real concern,

however, was that with the color revolutions taking place so close to Russia's border, influence from the revolutions could spread to Russia, creating a color revolution movement within Russian borders ("Chronology of the Orange Revolution" 2007; "Georgia's 'Rose Revolution'"; "How the Rose Revolution happened" 2005; Steele 2005).

After the color revolutions, Putin accused the United States ambassador to Russia of trying to spread pro-democratic ideals on the street in Russia in an attempt to stir up a new political movement. NATO enlargement and Western meddling in Russia's zone of influence were starting to irritate Putin. He could not let Russia languish at a level where it was below the status of a power that played an important role in world politics, and he could not let Russian interests continue to be ignored (Shanker 2004; Smith 2008: 1-3, 12-13).

Putin had insisted that the Russian constitution would not be ratified to allow him to take on a third consecutive term. However, despite his clear statement that he would step down from the presidency in 2007, riots broke out all over Russia before the elections showing support for the leader and asking him to take on a third consecutive term. Russia had found its Strongman, a centralizing force holding Russia together at a level recognizable on the world stage again (Steele 2005).

Medvedev, Then Putin Again

Despite calls for Putin's reelection, Dmitry Medvedev was endorsed by pro-Kremlin political parties and won the presidency in 2008 with over 70% of the vote. Stipulations alleging that the vote was unfair because of restricted access to media for other candidates were ignored by the Kremlin. Medvedev was inaugurated on May 7, 2008, and Putin became the prime minister of Russia. In the United States at the end of that year, Barack Obama was elected the new president, giving both superpowers a new face. Another shift took place in the politics

between Russia and the West in 2008 as the Bucharest Summit concluded, stating that the Ukraine and Georgia would become members of NATO in the future (“Enlargement” 2015; Steele 2005).

Although a new Russian president was voted in, Putin still played a major role behind the scenes, letting Medvedev be the face of the government, but instructing him on Russia foreign policy. In November 2008, Putin’s hold on the people and the government became apparent as the Russian Parliament passed a bill to extend the next presidential term after 2012 from four to six years, foreshadowing Putin’s return to his role as president (Giles, et al. 2015: 8-10; “Vladimir Putin” 2015).

During Medvedev’s presidency, Russia and Ukraine had disagreements over gas pipelines and gas transport to Europe. Putin, as prime minister, was the Kremlin representative to come to an agreement with Ukraine, acting from behind the scenes to smooth relations with that state. However, new presidents for both Russia and the United States in 2008 effectively created a reset button, giving Russia a new place in the world and another opportunity to pursue relations with the United States. With the event of this reset button, there was the hope that Medvedev would stray from Putin’s vision of the Russian government to try his own hand at a more democratic approach. Russian-European Union (EU) relations followed this belief with the Partnership for Modernization in 2010. Putin still had control of the government from his position as prime minister, so the intentions implied by the reset button did not come to fruition (Giles, et al. 2015: 8-9; “Vladimir Putin” 2015).

After the reset button, Medvedev made a few attempts to pull away from Putin’s grasp, such as his denunciation of the reopening of harmful plants, in a pledge to pursue a greener environment. However, Putin’s statements appear to be laced through Medvedev’s policies and

positions, initially tying Medvedev to Putin's interests. As Medvedev's presidency dragged on, the split between Putin's and Medvedev's interests became more obvious as Medvedev became more willing to speak out against Putin. Unfortunately Medvedev's courage in expressing these differences came towards the end of his presidency. In 2011, Putin was announced as the choice presidential candidate for his party, *United Russia*, and he suggested that Medvedev come back as prime minister (Giles, et al. 2015: 8-10; "Vladimir Putin" 2015).

In 2012, Vladimir Putin was elected for his third, but not consecutive, term as president. This time the term would last for six years instead of four. Medvedev, as planned, took his place at Putin's side as acting prime minister. Although Russian citizens had wanted Putin to run for a third consecutive term four years earlier, they had since changed their minds, and protesting the way the election was orchestrated in 2012. The citizens dislike the corruption in the government that resulted in a system where opponents to *United Russia* did not have a chance to win. The Kremlin had a monopoly on Russian media outlets, only broadcasting the campaigns of candidates from his own party, namely himself. Putin still had a strong hold over the government, in spite of the protests, and continued to respond to external limits imposed on his country with a new policy of his own. One example of this was Putin's ban on allowing American families to adopt Russian children, in response to the US government's negative reaction to Russian internal affairs. ("Vladimir Putin" 2015).

Putin's third term as president continued the same pattern of centralizing and gathering institutions and organizations under the Kremlin's control through 2012 and 2013. This centralization was paired with continuous barriers to opposition candidates for governmental positions, as well as the silencing of citizens who spoke out against the government. Earlier in Putin's presidency, there had been some questionable arrests and deaths, but the Putin that

appeared to the world then, and the Putin who was now in his third term, were different. Putin had been on the path to achieving his power-hungry interests earlier on, when he started to centralize power, but his original intent in consolidating the government was to make it more stable, as stated in the first of his three goals for the future of Russia at the beginning of his presidency. The Kremlin had not reached a level of corruption and dictatorial tendencies until Putin's third term ("The Ukraine Crisis").

Although Russia and the West tried to reset relations on a number of occasions since the end of the Cold War, misinterpretations on both sides and mutual mistrust from a messy history continued to push the two sides apart. It was these different perspectives from Russia and the West that created the political climate between Russia and the West that eventually resulted in the Ukraine Crisis ("The Ukraine Crisis").

Chapter 4. Russian Relations with the West

NATO and Russian Relations

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) formed in 1949 when the Cold War was escalating, as a means to contain the Soviet Union and to check Soviet power. Since its formation, NATO has continued to adopt new members into its fold. As NATO pursued the expansion of its membership with an “open door policy,” the Russian Federation and NATO sought the formation of a mutual relationship. They started to work together after the end of the Cold War and fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 when Russia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and later the Partnership for Peace Programme in 1994 under the guidance of former Russian President Boris Yeltsin (Usackas 1999). Yeltsin is remembered as a more pro-Western leader than Putin, seeing cooperation with NATO as paramount to shaping the best future for Russia, as well as intending for Russia to someday gain membership in NATO. However, when NATO made its intention of enlargement clear, Russia faced a dilemma because of the fear of isolation and insecurity that having such a large, and historically opposing, organization on Russia’s doorstep instilled in Russian citizens. Yeltsin had to make the decision either to strengthen ties with NATO or to isolate Russia further from this growing alliance (“Enlargement” 2015; “Founding Act” 1997; “NATO’s Relations with Russia” 2015; Smith 2008: 3-4).

Ultimately, Yeltsin chose to bring Russia and NATO closer together. Initially NATO offered Russia a participatory role in its Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, but for the Russian president, this was not enough. Yeltsin agreed to join PfP but also wanted closer ties ensuring an equal status, comparable to other NATO members, with the opportunity to advance Russian interests and influence in NATO. In 1997 this relationship was formalized through the formation

of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, or the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation, and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation (Smith 2008: 2-4).

One of the benefits of the Founding Act for Russia was the creation of a Permanent Joint Council (PJC) in which Russia could participate to work with NATO on matters of security. This created what seemed to be a solid foundation to further association and collaboration between the two parties. However, tensions soon emerged and the Founding Act proved to be good in theory but problematic in practice. The Founding Act was signed in Paris, France, on May 27, 1997, but each party, NATO and Russia, had other interests and intentions they wished forward, and planned on using the Founding Act to accomplish these alternative goals. On the NATO side, it was an appeasement of Russia for continued expansion in Europe and for potentially moving into what Russia considered its zone of influence, and on the Russian side, the cooperation was an opportunity to limit the buildup of military power in Europe and to influence the placement of nuclear weapons. The fact that the parties started off with alternative interests and goals, in opposition to what was strictly stated in the Act, condemned the relationship of NATO and Russia from the start, upsetting both parties (“Founding Act” 1997; Mendalson 1997; “NATO’s Relations with Russia” 2015; “Russia-NATO Relations;” Smith 2008: 3-4).

On March 12, 1999, the countries of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary joined NATO, after Yeltsin approved their membership, thus moving the borders of NATO closer to the borders of Russia (see Map 1 for a depiction of the additions of each group of states to NATO membership). Despite Yeltsin’s blessing, the temporary peace accomplished with the potential of the Founding Act was disrupted, furthering Russian citizens’ discomfort. However, it was not just the shrinking cushion between Russian borders and NATO, the strongest international alliance at the time, it was the nature of the countries accepted into NATO in 1999, and the

circumstances under which they had been accepted, that frustrated Russians. To Russians, these three countries had historically been allies, making the Russian people question why they would seek an alliance with NATO rather than with Russia. Public opinion in Russia had already started turning anti-Western and anti-NATO as western economic policies applied in the country failed and seemed to be responsible for plunging many Russians back into poverty. Having former allies side with the West and be accepted into NATO—allies who had been members of the Warsaw Pact, a pact created to counter NATO's growing power during the Cold War—did nothing to subdue the growing anti-Western sentiment in Russia, even though the circumstances were different from those that had plagued the years of the Cold War (Mendalsohn 1997; "NATO's Relations with Russia" 2015; Perlez 1999; Smith 2008: 8-11).

History is very important to Russia, and actions, decisions, and opinions are often steeped in the context of Russian history, whether or not that history is relevant to other nations. In this case, the situation was such that Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary felt the need to counter Russia's claim over their allegiance. They had never actually wanted to be Russian allies during the Cold War and wished to establish their position in the international community by joining NATO. Further, it did not occur to Russia that former Soviet Bloc countries might see Russia's initiative in extending an olive branch to NATO and forming a relationship with the West as an indication that it was okay for them to follow suit and pursue their own relations with NATO (Brovkin 2009).

On March 24, 1999, during the same month that Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary, all former members of the Warsaw Pact, joined NATO, NATO began a bombing campaign against Serb military forces in Kosovo which were engaged in a brutal offensive against Kosovar Albanians. NATO launched air strikes without authorization from the United

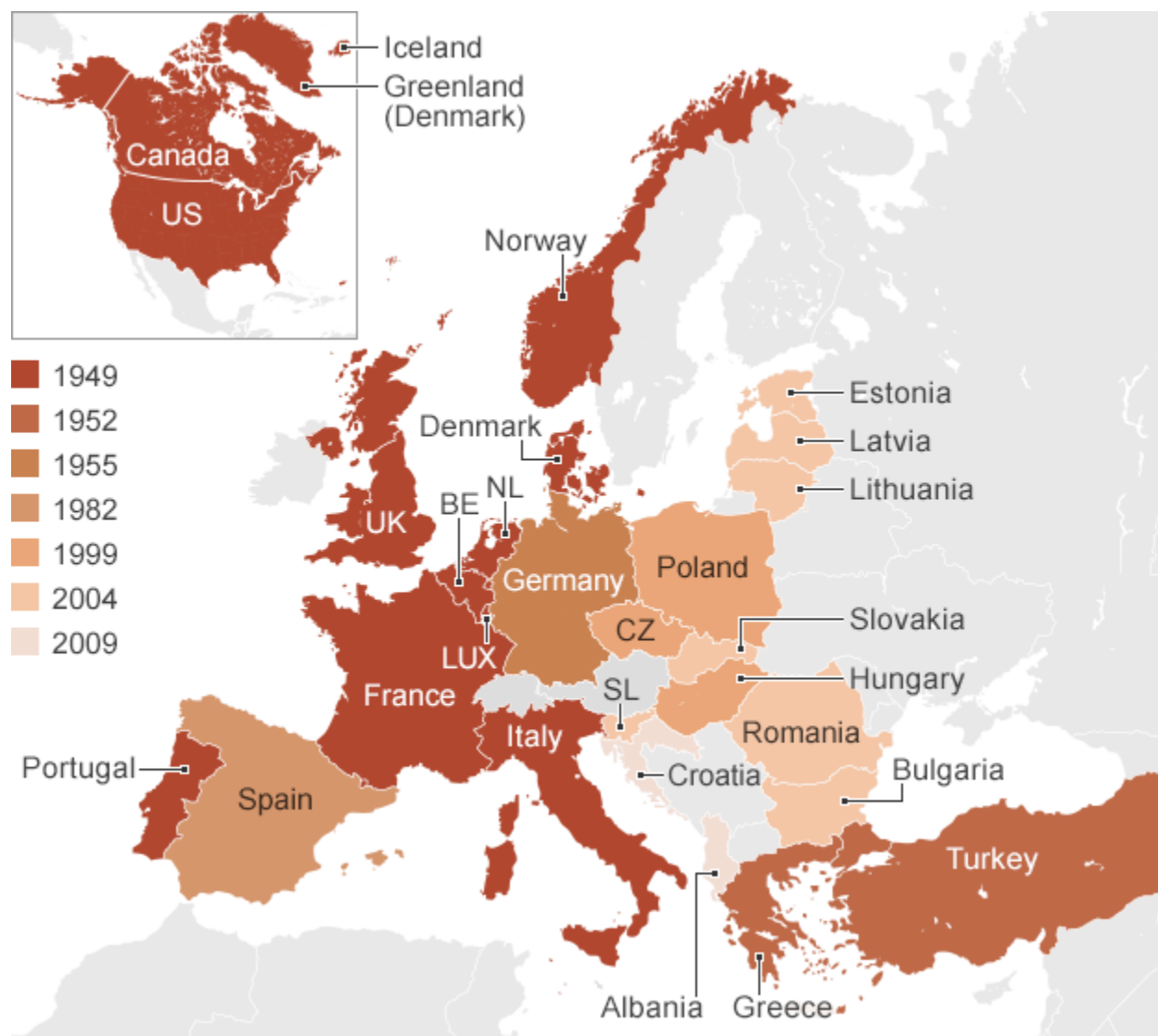
Nations Security Council (UNSC), an act viewed as violating international law. This action further exacerbated Russia-NATO relations, because Serbia was Russia's only continuous ally in Europe, and a sovereign state, making Russia label NATO's actions as "aggression." Russian citizens worried, seeing the potential development of a snowball effect. Since NATO could authorize military action against a nation without UNSC sanction, nothing was stopping Russia from being another target on NATO's list, especially since Russia still had close relations with Serbia, the country whose rights had just been violated. One aspect of the Russian people's interpretation of the situation, which they did not realize, was that their media was one-sided propaganda in favor of the Serbian regime. This media coverage, fed to them by the government, left out the reasoning behind NATO's actions for even the most educated people who would be expected to have access to alternative information networks (Brovkin 2009; "Russia-NATO Relations"; Smith 2008: 1, 4-5).

In 2000, a group of countries called the Vilnius Group, which included the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, as well as others, was created. This group of smaller countries aspired to membership in NATO under the "open door policy," which promised that every democratic nation could be considered for membership, regardless of its geographic location (Usackas 1999). At this point, the presidency in the Russian Federation had been transferred to the new strongman, Vladimir Putin. He had begun his presidency trying to renew relationships with the West and NATO after the fiascos of the Yeltsin era. Putin seemed to make a genuine effort at reaching out to the West and invited the NATO secretary-general to Moscow, as well as other major Western leaders. With Putin in place as the new Russian president, NATO expansionist policy continued, and most members of the Vilnius Group were accepted as NATO member states in 2004. This brought NATO borders and Russian borders up against each other.

Not only was there no barrier left between the borders of Russia and NATO upon the accession of the Baltic States to NATO, but this was the first case in which a former part of the Soviet Union joined NATO (Brovkin 2009; “Enlargement” 2015; Giles, et al. 2015: 2-10; Smith 2008: 8-12; “Vilnius Group” 2014).

The Russian Federation has always been touchy about foreign powers getting too close to its borders and areas of interest, since there has been a desire throughout Russian history to hold the status of a world power, along with continued pursuit of this status. Despite Putin’s efforts to recreate a working relationship with NATO, it did not escape the attention of the Russian people that the three Baltic States were the first former members of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to gain membership in NATO, and that they were located directly on the border of Russia, encroaching on the Russian zone of influence. This was perceived as a direct contestation to Russian power, even though that was not NATO’s intention. NATO’s open door policy had stated that any democratic country could be considered for membership of the organization, and the joining of the Vilnius Group was just one circumstance in which that policy was put into practice (Brovkin 2009; Usackas 1999; “Vilnius Group” 2014).

Map 1. NATO Membership over Time



Map 1. “NATO’s Eastern Europe Build-up Plans Alarm Russia” *BBC News*.

The Ukraine Crisis

In Ukraine the Orange Revolution had succeeded temporarily in placing a more pro-Western president in office. Now Viktor Yanukovich, who had run against Yushchenko years earlier, won the election and was sworn into office in 2010. Yanukovich was the choice candidate in Ukraine for Russian interests, and Putin hoped that he would repair relations between Russia and Ukraine. At the same time, there was hope from the West that he would

push for closer integration with Europe after NATO's statement of interest in in Ukraine at the Bucharest Summit of 2008 ("Chronology of the Orange Revolution" 2007; "Enlargement" 2015; "Yanukovych Sworn In" 2010).

Though the causes of the conflict predate these events, the beginning of the Ukraine crisis started in November 2013 after President Yanukovych rejected long-promised closer ties with Europe that would have been established through a trade agreement. Yanukovych's unexpected decision to back out of negotiations with the EU over an association agreement triggered protests in Kiev's Independence Square. After the police used violence to disperse the protesters, the movement grew and more Ukrainians joined to protest the government's corruption and unaccountability. Independence Square came to be called Euromaidan – Eurosquare – as a sign of the protestors' demand for pro-democratic, pro-western policies. In the face of Russia's best efforts, pro-Western citizens of Ukraine wanted to move away from Russian influence and had seen increased relations with Europe as a way to do so. The protests continued despite government efforts to disband the protestors by force. Violence escalated in January and February, reaching a peak in mid-February. With an increasing number of government troops switching sides and the Kiev police cooperating with the protest leaders, members of Yanukovich's government began fleeing the country, and in late February, Yanukovych fled his office and the country (Foreign Staff 2015; Frizell 2014; "The Ukraine Crisis;" "Russia Profile" 2015).

After the Ukrainian parliament officially removed Yanukovich as president and named an interim government, Russia denounced the new government and claimed that ethnic Russians living in Ukraine were in danger. Under the pretext of protecting ethnic Russians living in eastern Ukraine and the Crimea (see Map 2), Russia proceeded to cross the border and intervene

with unmarked military equipment to exercise control over the region and gain control of important infrastructure, such as airports. In late February, pro-Russian militants seized government buildings in Crimea and on March 1, Russian forces invaded, quickly asserting control and formally annexing the territory on March 18 (“The Ukraine Crisis and NATO-Russia Relations”).

Map 2. Ethnic Russians in the Newly Independent States



Map 2. “Ethnic Russians in the Newly Independent States.” *University of Texas Library.*

In much the same way that the events of Kosovo had been portrayed from a single perspective in the Russian media, the conflict of the Ukraine crisis followed a similar pattern.

Only the pro-Russian side to the story was allowed on the Kremlin-run news stations. For most

Russian citizens, this shaped a negative opinion of Western decisions and actions concerning Ukraine. The role of Russian forces was namely to cut off the Crimean Peninsula from the rest of Ukraine, as over half of the population in Crimea speaks Russian, and enough of it is ethnic Russian to support Russia's occupation. Russia's excuse was that it did not want a repeat of the unrest and protests that had covered Kiev during *Euromaidan* (Blair, Oliphant, and Walters 2014; Foreign Staff 2015; Frizell 2014; "Russia Profile" 2015).

Obama had warned Putin earlier that any military intervention in Ukraine would have serious consequences. The United States and Russia, along with other countries, are signatories of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, according to which Ukraine agreed to give up its Soviet-era nuclear weapons and the other signatory countries promised to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine as an independent state. Any escalation of the situation in Ukraine beyond Russia playing the part of a nonviolent, occupying force would be in violation of the Budapest Memorandum (Blair, Oliphant, and Walters 2014; Foreign Staff 2015; "Russia Profile" 2015).

After the Russian occupation of Crimea, Russian news sources reported that the majority of the population had voted for Crimea to become part of Russia. A few days later, this request was signed into law in Moscow, annexing Crimea. Following Crimea's legal annexation by Moscow, the ethnically Russian regions of Luhansk and Donetsk claimed to be sovereign states of the "People's Republic," with the intention that they would one day be integrated into the Russian Federation. Even as Ukraine was splintering, a new president, Petro Poroshenko, was elected and quickly signed the trade deal with the European Union that had caused the initial protests (Blair 2014; Foreign Staff 2015; "Russia Profile" 2015).

The situation in Ukraine continued to deteriorate, as Malaysian Airline flight MH17 was shot down over Ukraine by pro-Russian rebels on July 17, 2014, using what was arguably Russian military equipment. This disaster led to sanctions against Russia by the West, sending the Russian economy into a state of decline. With the sanctions in place, a peace deal was brokered in Minsk, Belarus. However, this was to no avail, and the conflict in Ukraine continued between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists. Through January 2015, attempts at peace talks failed to take hold, and the fighting between pro-Russian and pro-European groups continued despite having a ceasefire agreement in place (Foreign Staff 2015; “Russia Profile” 2015).

Map 3. Rebels Make Gains During Cease-Fire

Separatist-controlled area: Sept. 30 Sept. 5, Start of ceasefire



Map 3. "Rebels Make Gains during Cease-fire." *Washington Post*.

Whereas Putin offered pro-Russian separatists direct military assistance, Poroshenko faced the conflict in Ukraine with little physical assistance beyond verbal support from the West. Many peace talks and ceasefire agreements took place during the Ukraine conflict, but the only

ceasefire that would be effective was between Putin and Poroshenko, which would include Poroshenko granting Donetsk and Luhansk (pictured in Map 3), in eastern Ukraine, the status of independent states. As Ukraine left the spotlight, Russia exercised one last attempt at control of the region, freezing the conflict in a perpetual state of tension and not moving in any direction, similar to what it had done in Georgia after the Rose Revolution (Blair 2014; Kalb 2015; “The Ukraine Crisis”).

Although Putin has power over Ukraine and can influence it economically and politically, Russia’s intervention in Ukraine took a toll on the Russian economy and internal affairs. During the Ukraine Crisis, the ruble dropped from a level of about 30 rubles to the dollar in June 2014, reaching its lowest near the end of the year at about 80 rubles to the dollar before stabilizing at around 65 rubles to the dollar (Kolyandr 2015) Despite Russia’s worsening economy, Putin has managed to hold onto his power thanks to his successful consolidation of power over the past 14 years. Now the world has turned away from Ukraine to focus on other conflicts and problems, and Putin remains as Russia’s president until the next elections, which are scheduled to take place in 2018 when he may run for a fourth term (Kalb 2015).

Chapter 5. Explaining Russian Foreign Policy: Differing Perspectives

Introduction

Many scholars and politicians from the United States look upon the Russian Federation as an area of the world that falls outside of common expectations for a modern state. Over the years, the United States and Russia have tried time and again to repair their relationship and work together both on matters of mutual concern. Both are aware that the role they claim as superpowers comes with other responsibilities, but neither country can seem to look past its own interests and history to understand the other country long enough for them to start the foundations of a real working relationship. Many of the conflicts that drag the two nations down result from misinterpretations of each other's interests. Some scholars argue that the crisis in Ukraine resulted from U.S. policymakers' failure to understand Russian strategic interests. Others insist that the United States clearly understood Russian interests, maintaining that an intervention was needed because Russia acted aggressively in Ukraine and caused the conflict. Scholars who specialize in the study of Russian politics and Russia's foreign policy offer a third approach, bringing the focus to the individual at the head of the Russian government, that is, Vladimir Putin. According to this approach, Russian behavior cannot be properly explained without analyzing how Putin's personality and personal goals distinctively shaped his government's response. Although there are many differing opinions on who should take responsibility for the turmoil in Ukraine, without factoring in Putin's role, information on Russian interests and intentions remain lacking.

Russia's Strategic Interests Misunderstood

Some scholars argue that heightened tensions between the United States and Russia stem from American leaders' failure to recognize and understand Russia's strategic interests.

According to John Mearsheimer, a prominent realist who is professor of political science at the University of Chicago, for example, Russia's decision to invade Crimea and intervene in Ukraine is a product of Russia's understandable desire to protect the Russian sphere of influence (Mearsheimer 2014). Suggestions that NATO would extend far into Eastern Europe, even courting Ukraine as a potential member, represented an unacceptable threat to Russia's zone of influence, which is made up the states that comprised the former Soviet Union, as well as those that had been members of the Warsaw Pact. According to this line of reasoning, Russia was especially concerned with NATO expansion into countries lying directly on Russian borders, since this threatened to eliminate the physical and social buffer between Russia and the West (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 175-178).

Mearsheimer expresses his belief that the West is responsible for the protests in Ukraine that triggered Russian military occupation and control in 2014. He says that Russia was acting as any great power would have acted. Russia tolerated the expansion of NATO every few years getting closer and closer to the Russian border, but the West continued to push forward. In 2008, when NATO declared its intention to one day include Georgia and Ukraine as member states, this was too much and too close for Russia to endure without some kind of reaction to protect interests. From this resulted the protests leading to Russian intervention in Ukraine. Looking back at Russia's history, Mearsheimer explains that many Russian interests come from historical relations, which gives Russia a zone of influence over former Soviet satellite states. It is therefore not surprising, he argues, that the West's continued expansion of NATO into the Russian zone of influence, right up to the border, provoked Russia to feel the need to defend its interests. Initially the Baltic States had been given permission to join NATO by Putin, but Ukraine, historically Russia's breadbasket, and Georgia, have had longstanding and closer ties to

Russia. To Russia, NATO interest in Ukraine was a path to a long-term strategy of moving Ukraine out of the Russian sphere of influence. In order to forge a relationship with the West, Putin thought that he had already been generous in putting many Russian interests on hold by allowing satellite states to move away from the Russian sphere, tying themselves to NATO. These states joining NATO was already a sacrifice to Russia, because the expectation was that countries, which had historical ties to Russia, would again seek to ally themselves with Russia, rather than NATO (Mearsheimer, “The West’s Fault,” 2015).

Although Ukraine is a sovereign independent state, Russia and Ukraine have always been connected through politics, economics, geography, and history. Geographically, Russia’s interest in Ukraine is also important to understanding Russia’s unrelenting focus on the country’s affairs. Mearsheimer elaborates on this, explaining that “[g]reat powers react harshly when distant rivals project military power into their neighborhood, much less attempt to make a country on their border an ally... today no American leader would ever tolerate Canada or Mexico joining a military alliance headed by another great power” (Mearsheimer, “Don’t Arm Ukraine,” 2015). According to Mearsheimer, the West failed to consider how it would act if it were in a similar situation and overlooked the possibility that its actions might destabilize Ukraine and anger Russia (Mearsheimer, “Don’t Arm Ukraine,” 2015).

Mearsheimer uses Ukraine’s historical and geographical ties with Russia to argue that Putin’s reaction to NATO expansion and interest in Ukraine could and should have been anticipated. Putin perceived the situation, especially after the agreements made between Ukraine and the European Union, as the West encroaching on Russia’s longstanding relationship with Ukraine. This made relations between Russia and the West even more difficult, and misunderstandings greater as communications decreased. As a result, “Crimea [became] a

casualty of the West's attempt to march NATO and the European Union up to Russia's doorstep..." (Mearsheimer, "Don't Arm Ukraine," 2015).

Stephen M. Walt, a professor of international relations at Harvard University, draws a parallel between Russia's reaction to the Ukraine crisis and America's response under former U.S. President Reagan to suspected Soviet intervention in Nicaragua in the 1980s. Just as the United States objected to communist intervention in one of its traditional allies, especially one that was on its doorstep, Putin was uncomfortable with the West moving into a strategic state on Russia's border. Walt says that the real problem in Ukraine stemmed from the fact that the United States and the West failed to put themselves in Russia's position, even though the United States had been there before (Walt, "What Putin Learned," 2015; Walt, "Arming Ukraine," 2015).

Because of the differing points of view and interests from the United States and Russia concerning Ukraine, Walt stresses that the situation of NATO expansion brushing Russian borders has turned back relations between Russia and the West. This deteriorating relationship especially concerns Russia and the United States, since the United States spearheads most Western international activities, and has been the primary advocate in promoting Western ideals in Ukraine through the US ambassador to Ukraine, as well as countering Russia's military intervention. At the height of the conflict, Walt warned against supporting increased U.S. military and economic support to the pro-Western side of the conflict, due to the fact that Ukraine was already in the Russian zone of influence, the United States would have instigated similar actions if the roles were reversed, and an increased presence of Western support would have only accelerated the deterioration of the situation (Walt, "What Putin Learned," 2015; Walt, "Arming Ukraine," 2015).

Andreas Bock, a professor at Akkon University of Applied Science Berlin, Ingo Henneberg, a research associate at the University of Feiburg in the department of political science, and Friedrich Plank, a professor of political science at the University of Mainz, delve deeper into the Russian perspective of the conflict in Ukraine, using Walt's balance of threat theory as a guideline for their account. From this point of view, Moscow saw NATO expansion as a threat as it tried to incorporate Eastern European states into its alliance, especially in combination with defensive measures taken by NATO member states in the form of missile buildups. This brings the argument back to Mearsheimer's belief, that, "it is the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them" (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2015). Even though the United States and the West do not see NATO expansion as a threat, it is not their response to a situation they created, which matters (Bock, Henneberg, and Plank 2014: 101-104).

In 2009, after the poorly timed statement that Ukraine and Georgia would one day become NATO members, further NATO expansion was still planned into other areas of Russian interest, continuing to pose a threat to Russia. Putin did try to postpone NATO expansion, seeing the move up to the Russian border as a move to keep Russia restricted because it had differing political perspectives than its Western neighbors. Putin especially did not understand the interest in Ukraine, a country in which he thought it was common knowledge that it had a large Russian population, and had tried to make it clear to the West that any intent to try to change Ukraine's allegiance to the European side would have consequences. As Russia watched the West steadily expand NATO, Russia grew increasingly worried and the West's interest in bringing Ukraine into some kind of formal association was too much. According to Bock, Henneberg, and Plank,

the Ukraine crisis arose due to Russia's need to balance out the threat of the West (2014: 105-109).

Stephen Cohen is a professor of Russian studies and politics at New York University and Princeton University who explored the West's treatment of Russia and the Ukraine crisis specifically through the media. He has found that widely read news sources seem to distort the image of Russia in 2014 and 2015, not giving readers a complete and reliable account of events. He claims that often the articles in sources such as the *New York Times* or in the *Washington Post* do not follow the same general guidelines for journalism that is expected, having multiple people corroborate the story being presented. In some cases people who are not known for any experience in writing about Eastern Europe or on Russia, are making statements about that region of the world, which readers will believe because of the news source it comes from. By failing to provide an objective picture, Cohen says that the crisis in Ukraine was presented as fully the fault of Russia, while the West was portrayed as having little or nothing to do with the conflict that arose in 2014 (Cohen 2014).

Cohen's analysis of biased coverage of the Ukraine crisis coincides with Mearsheimer's and Walt's in that he blames the United States and its Western allies, while trying to understand where Putin's actions are coming from. Cohen says that Russia and Putin are more negatively portrayed than they should be, always being presented as the enemy. He makes a point that many news sources reported Ukraine as more pro-Western than it actually was, offering a scenario in which the whole of Ukraine wanted to integrate further into Europe, when in fact Ukraine is a deeply divided country, with people from many walks of life, supporting various political movements. Cohen cites a number of occasions in which the Russia helped or supported the United States, for example by collaborating to make the world safer against a Middle Eastern

enemy or offering valuable information. The United States is reported to have repaid Putin for Russia's help in these situations by creating a negative foreign policy towards Russia (Cohen 2014).

In this situation, Russia was acting in accordance with Mearsheimer's and Walt's realist view of the conflict. Russia was protecting its interests in Ukraine, because Ukraine as an ally to Russia, bolsters Russia's place in the world economically and politically. The West, not acting in a rational manor, headed by the United States, was trying to spread its Western ideals over more of the world to have more compliant and agreeable nations against the perceived problem of Russia. Had the West been acting as a rational actor in Mearsheimer's and Walt's opinions, it would have taken into account Russian interests and refrained from encroaching on Russian strategic interests. Failure to follow this path of logic explains Mearsheimer's declaration of Western guilt for the Ukraine crisis. Since Russia had a stake in Ukraine long before NATO expansion and the Western bloc formed during the emergence of the Cold War, it is Russia's interests and intentions that are the primary concern in the arrival of the Ukraine conflict (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2015).

Although these scholars' arguments provide one perspective through which the events of Ukraine in 2014 can be understood, their arguments do not offer the full picture. For this, Putin's role in the conflict needs to be taken into account. Putin's personal history and his consolidation of control over the Russian government provide insight into his iron-fisted determination to protect his own interests by defending Russian interests in Ukraine. His strong, undaunted personality is reflected in the way in which he directed Russian intervention in Ukraine, proceeding regardless of economic and diplomatic costs, including increased sanctions from the West. Putin's motivation to keep Russia in a strong position is important to his continued success

as president, as the foundation of his support among Russia's citizens rests in their faith in his ability to lead (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2015; Walt, "Arming Ukraine," 2015).

Geopolitical or Strategic Factors

Michael McFaul, the former United States Ambassador to Russia from 2012-2014, and a professor of Political Science at Stanford University, says the realist argument of Mearsheimer and other like-minded individuals fails to explain why Russia waited so long to invade Ukraine, since it had so many years after the fall of the Soviet Union to do so. In McFaul's narrative, the Ukraine crisis is not the fault of the West's misunderstanding of Russia's strategic interests, but rather the fault of Russian leaders, especially Putin, who stirred up foreign policy crises in order to shore up his position as president. In order to acquire support for his third term in office, McFaul notes that Putin continues to portray the United States as an enemy to Russia, so that Russia will have an enemy to fight. This enemy distracted the public eye from Putin's corrupt reelection in 2012, giving the people something else to focus on. Access to social networks had allowed Putin's fraudulent campaign to be discussed and exposed, before Putin removed access to most of them in Russia. He used the United States as a scapegoat, using Kremlin-controlled media outlets to accuse the United States of causing pro-Western unrest within Russia (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 167-171).

The reason McFaul believes the Ukraine crisis is Putin's fault and has nothing to do with the West and NATO expansion is because of Russia's differing responses to such expansion. McFaul argues that the attitude of the United States towards Russia did not change; Russia's attitude changed. Instead of NATO expansion as the cause of the crisis, he insists that the crisis arose because of Putin's concern over protests against his own reelection. If Russia were really responding to concerns about threats to its national interest, then it would not have adopted a

policy that further exacerbated anti-Russian sentiment in Ukraine; Instead of bringing Ukraine back into the folds of Russian interest, McFaul says Putin's policies have pushed Ukrainians further away, causing a stronger wave of pro-Western sentiment to engulf the country. In pushing Ukraine away, Russia has succeeded in supporting NATO and weakening the position of his own country in international politics (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 170-171).

Clifford G. Gaddy, an economist who specializes in Russia, and Fiona Hill, a senior fellow in the foreign policy program at the Brookings Institution, hold similar views on the situation in Ukraine to those of McFaul. Hill and Gaddy focus on Putin's position on Ukraine in their understanding of the causes that led to the Ukraine crisis. They write that, "Putin made it very clear in 2008 that Ukraine was of vital interest to Russia. He emphasized that the mere prospect of any kind of formal relationship between Ukraine and NATO would be considered a direct threat to Russia." (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 360) It is therefore accepted that the United States and the West knew what would happen if they showed too much interest in Ukraine's integration into the West. Yet, earlier, the two authors expressed a sentiment of disbelief among government officials in the United States that Russia would actually view the United States, or Western affairs, as a threat. Because of this misperception on the part of the United States, the country continued to pursue personal interests to further the status of the state in the international community, in the regions around Russia, thinking that its intentions would have no major ramifications, while Putin grew more frustrated with the interference after having made Russia's interest in these areas clear (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 305). To the United States, Russia had integrated well into the modern world of international politics in 1999 when both the West and Russia strove to create a working relationship (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 261).

The Ukraine crisis, however, cannot be attributed to blunders made by the United States. Hill and Gaddy describe a situation of mixed messages coming from the Kremlin, where initially the Putin administration seemed to accept NATO expansion, even giving their (not very forthcoming) blessing to NATO for members of the Vilnius Group to be incorporated into the alliance. As the years went on, and Putin stabilized Russia through centralizing power to make a stronger state, mentioned that Russia had to stay out of the spotlight until it became stronger. In such a weak state politically and economically, the state could not effectively defend its interests. He was taking back the blessing for the Vilnius Group to join NATO years later, referring to the situation as a loss of land that was important to Russian interests, since the Baltic States had traditionally been in the Russian sphere of influence. Beyond that, Putin remembered that when the Soviet Union fell, the West wasted no time in invading what he considered to be Russia's cultural and political sphere (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 260-263).

Even though Russia appeared to become assimilated into international politics without much complaint, the feeling in Russia was that the West had repeatedly pushed Russia's boundaries and infringed on its position of geographical comfort, continuously causing new problems for Russia. To Putin, the color revolutions that had taken place in various countries were a scheme drawn up by the United States. Especially with reference to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, a country which has historically been viewed as a natural extension of Russia, Putin claimed that the color revolutions were dry runs for a plot to create a revolution in Russia. In addition, the Orange Revolution in 2004, and later the Ukraine conflict that occurred ten years later, were seen as an attempts to remove Ukraine from the Russian sphere of influence. This was unacceptable, as Ukraine is connected to Russia through the Kievan Rus', an area originally located on Ukrainian territory where both states began. To Putin, this meant Russian

and Ukrainian people were the same because they shared a history and culture. Ukraine's natural state was therefore thought to be as a part of Russia, so Russia's goal was reunification with its "lost province" (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 4, 261, 305-307, 361-363)

Hill and Gaddy indicate that Putin tended to look at situations and determine them through a personal prism that filtered events into warped versions of what was actually taking place. He did this with the revolt in Ukraine, not understanding how the creation of such circumstances could take place without the encouragement and help from the West. Therefore, he decided that the crisis was caused by the West in yet another way. (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 260). Therefore it is understandable, argue Hill and Gaddy, that the United States did not always make the right decision with relation to Russia, because the state was not looking through the same prism as Putin. This made political decisions concerning Russia difficult for the United States because Russian intentions did not correspond with Putin's formal policy declarations. Because of this, the government of the United States acted in the way it did because it took into account perceptions about Russia that had been creating through observations and taking into account the statements made by the Russian president (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 260-263).

John M. Owen IV, a professor of politics at the University of Virginia, and his coauthor, William Inboden, an associate professor at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas, Austin, disagree with the perspective forwarded by the realist school of thought. Instead, Owen and Inboden say that while understanding where Russia is coming from in terms of its interest in Ukraine is important, it is not the only factor playing a role.

Policymakers in the United States need understand what Russia and Putin want. Putin publicly conducts his foreign policy using an approach that comes with the expectation that people will accept what he says at face value, especially since he portrays the image of the calm, logical,

former KGB agent. Since his citizens do not have access to differing perspectives offered in the news, they are more inclined to believe in what he says, and support his goal to make Ukraine part of Russia (Owen and Inboden 2014).

Just as the idea of the ties to Ukraine through the Kievan Rus' was presented by Hill and Gaddy, Owen and Inboden also discuss the 18th century idea of *Novorossiia*, claiming that Ukraine, especially the parts that are majority ethnic Russian, belong to Russia. Putin uses threats in his foreign policy to achieve his goals. He may have felt threatened by NATO expansion, but Owen and Inboden look at the other borders of Russia and wonder where the logic in focusing on the more stable Western front. They see instability and radicalism growing along Russia's borders in the east, and south especially. Perhaps the reason is because of Putin's goal to have Russia be considered a great power throughout the world, and any leeway given to the West in terms of Russian interests surrenders Russian power to its traditional enemy, the United States (Owen and Inboden 2014).

The reason that the Ukraine crisis took place, according to Owen and Inboden, is because of the historical U.S. role as the opponent to Russia. It is written that war is conducted in order to forcefully convince the party that lost to do as the victor would like. Just as McFaul felt that Russia needed a constant enemy for Putin to stay in power, Owen and Inboden help to expound upon the conflicts such as the Orange Revolution in Georgia, and the conflict in Ukraine, creating a scenario in which they were created for the purpose of a sense of stability in office. Putin uses these conflicts to create an enemy outside of Russia so that his internal political conduct is not as widely scrutinized and criticized, which keeps his approval ratings high (Owen and Inboden 2014).

To many outside observers in the West, Putin's foreign policy looks very similar to a sort of imperialism, creating an empire under Russia's rule, but one that he feels rightfully belongs to Russia. To Putin, however, Russia's assertive foreign policy does not have tones of imperialism. Putin sees himself as the protector of a unique Russian civilization, feeling that he has a responsibility to Russians at home and abroad. His role as protector extends beyond ethnic Russians, encompassing speakers of the Russian language, and followers of Russian culture, which spreads the scope of Russian interests to the borders of the former Soviet Union. His primary focus, however, are areas that are ethnically Russian, which helps to explain the particular emphasis on specific regions of Ukraine (Owen and Inboden 2014).

Hill and Gaddy strive to paint a more complete picture of Putin by trying to take into account what thought processes he ponders in his decision making processes. McFaul incorporates some of Putin's ideals into his understanding of Russia's foreign policy and reaction to the protests in Ukraine. Owen and Inboden say that "Putin's preferred trap [is] of identifying his personal rule with the nation of Russia," adding to this portrait by relaying the causes of the crisis through a government run by one man (Owen and Inboden 2014). Although history and geographical location are alluded to in their importance in considering Putin's foreign policy motivations, more of the attention of these writers goes to the ideals that created such a situation. One reason why so many people have trouble pinpointing what Russia will do next is because Russian foreign policy is no longer just dictated by the country's national interests; Putin's personal interests are laced through the country's actions as well. In addition, he tends to adapt his behavior according to a given circumstance; for Bush, he was a friend, for Russia, a leader and a father. In this way he has created different versions of himself that he can apply to shifting

situations, causing problems for foreign powers to identify which version of himself he will do when dealing with a given situation (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 4-5, 260-264).

A Western Perspective

Stephan Sestanovich, the former United States ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1997 until 2001 and currently a professor of international affairs at Columbia University, points out that John Mearsheimer's interpretation of the relationship between Ukraine and Russia was very different back in 1993. Sestanovich cites Mearsheimer's earlier work in which he argued that, "Russia had dominated an unwilling and angry Ukraine for more than two centuries, and has attempted to crush Ukraine's sense of self-identity" (quoted in McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 171). Sestanovich agrees that Russian aggression towards Ukraine is not new, and therefore, not a result of NATO expansion into Russia's sphere of influence.

Sestanovich also argues that not all member states of NATO supported the idea of incorporating Ukraine so it was clear that this was not a policy that the West would actually pursue. Had NATO's interest in Ukraine been pursued, the various political groups in Ukraine would have splintered in much the same way they did during the rise of the Ukraine conflict. This outcome is verified through the events that did lead to the Ukraine conflict, that is, Yanukovich's decision not to sign the trade deal with Europe leading to the *Euromaidan* protests and the split in political interests that followed (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 171-175).

Sestanovich goes on to describe Putin as more of an impulsive decision maker than a realist. This is emphasized when Sestanovich says, "time and again, many of us failed to gauge Vladimir Putin's motivations," describing a situation in which analysts could not predict what Putin wanted and thus how he would behave (Sestanovich 2015: 1). When Putin claimed that the fall of Yanukovich was a coup, he was disregarding his previous instructions to the Ukrainian

president to respond to the protesters with force. It was Yanukovich's use of force, following Putin's instructions, which effectively removed Yanukovich's Ukrainian basis of support, causing his downfall. Instead, Putin turned to the West to find an actor responsible for the demise of the pro-Russian president's support in Ukraine. Sestanovich praises the expansion of NATO in helping to contain and limit the severity of the Ukraine conflict. If the United States had not helped to stabilize Europe, the crisis in Ukraine could have had more serious repercussions. Instead NATO provided a sense of security, but also guidelines, to European nations, instituting recommendations for their actions that would serve to protect and limit them (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 171-175).

In an article appropriately named *Putin's Empire of the Mind*, Mark Galeotti, a professor of global affairs at New York University, and Andrew S. Bowen, a columnist for the *Interpreter* and Russian language translator, describe the difference between Putin in 1999 when he first became president, and the Putin that now resides in the Kremlin in his third term. To Galeotti and Bowen, these are two very different Putins. In his early years, Putin was seen as a rather pro-Western leader, more open to free speech and opposing views. He has always wanted to protect his country's interests against the West if he feels that they are in danger, but looking back on situations in which Russia did intervene, Putin's methods were always carefully chosen, minimizing possible damages. Even if Putin was looking to protect Russian interests, he always seemed to be willing to try to work with the West and form a relationship (Galeotti and Bowen 2014).

Today, the Putin that is in office is the Putin who led Russia into the Ukraine crisis, whom Sestanovich deems impulsive. Galeotti and Bowen agree, describing Putin as more of an autocrat than the rational world leader he once was, creating a story of descent into the person

who has increasingly isolated Russia from the rest of the world. His increased the need for loyalty and patriotism among citizens. Although Putin had vacationed with his own family in Europe on various occasions, he began to consider well-traveled oligarchs who spent their money abroad as traitors to the Russian culture and economy. Rather than listening to other points of view provided oligarchs who had seen more of the world, Putin chose to surround himself with like-minded individuals so that his opinions will not be contested, creates a Russia where he does not want Western interference. Putin references the events of the Soviet Union more often, saying that its fall left “the Russian nation... one of the biggest, if not *the* biggest, ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders.” Because of this division, he sees his role as the protector and the person in charge of reunification of Russians, getting involved in Ukraine to bring the ethnic Russians home (Galeotti and Bowen 2014).

Individuals in International Politics

As previously mentioned, Owen and Inboden said that one of Putin’s favorite ruses to get other countries or people to do his bidding was by creating a situation in which people associated Putin and the Russian government as the same entity. Although Owen and Inboden warn against falling into this trap, there is a general tendency to refer to “Putin” and the “Russian government” as if they are interchangeable (Owen and Inboden 2014). This tendency to conflate Russia and Putin points to the critical role that Putin plays in determining Russia’s foreign policy and shaping international politics. As discussed in the introduction, it is critical to focus specifically on Putin and his particular personality traits in order to understand why the Ukraine crisis unfolded the way it did.

Putin, risk-averse in his early years when he believed Russia was not strong enough to fight for its interests, has grown to be more risk-tolerant as an individual capable of taking his

country to war. This transformation maps onto the distinction that Byman and Pollack draw between “status quo” and “revisionist” states. Whereas status quo states are content with the state of international affairs and work to reassure other states of their benign intentions, revisionist states want to challenge the status quo and may use aggression to do so (2001: 114). For Byman and Pollack, variations in state intentions are strongly influenced by variations in individual personalities and this can be seen in Putin’s shift from a cautious to a riskier, more aggressive foreign policy (2001: 113-115).

McFaul wondered why it took so long for Russia to protest NATO expansion and the reason can be explained through Putin’s interests in consolidating both personal power and ultimately Russian power (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 167). When Putin adopted the presidency in 1999, he took charge of a nation that was in about the same state of health as its former leader, Yeltsin. As noted previously, Putin explicitly stated that Russia would have to stay under the radar while it was too weak to pursue its own interests. Because of this, Putin took his time nurturing Russia back to economic and military health so that it could play the role in the world that he saw for it. After centralizing power and establishing political and economic stability, Putin was ready to act in a more revisionist manner in Ukraine. He saw that Ukraine was unstable and divided and the large number of ethnic Russians provided a propitious opportunity to justify Russian intervention (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 261-263).

As was shown in Byman and Pollack’s investigation into the variance of personality through the use of the first image, Putin initially appeared to be a risk-averse leader when Russia needed to be stabilized. In this situation, Putin focused his energy at home, rebuilding with a set of more stabilized and centralized institutions. His foreign policy was reliably agreeable and eager to please. In line with their hypothesis that leaders’ influence grows as they concentrate

more power in their hands, Putin's ability to push Russian policy toward a more risk-tolerant position increased as he successfully consolidated personal power and popularity. His foreign policy throughout the beginning of his presidency parallels the findings in Gallagher and Allen's study, whereby a leader is more likely to use force and more often if they have already done so, and they possess higher scores on risk-acceptant traits (Gallagher and Allen 2014: 6, 8, 13, 17-18).

Putin was also pulled into various conflicts in the Middle East at different stages of his presidency. Since he had already experienced the risk of conflict, it was not much of a change for him to transition from conflicts at home or in the Middle East, to conflicts in the near abroad, in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine, to protect Russian interests. Although individuals can have variance in their personalities and decisions, risk-acceptant individuals with an *Excitement Seeking* personality trait become consistent in their foreign policy, as they usually choose to employ force to solve their problems. In Putin's case, it is difficult to determine if he is *Excitement Seeking*, because the data consistently relates only to United States presidents, but by examining his escalating pattern for the preference of the use of force, perhaps the trait is becoming more pronounced in his personality. The reason and excuse for this is of course that he has Russia's best interests in mind, and is trying to advance them through the means available to him, which is dependably the use of force. By the time *Euromaidan* began in Ukraine, a military intervention to support the pro-Russian separatists was the next logical step to Putin (Gallagher and Allen 2014: 8, 13-18).

Chapter 6. Discussion

“In April, 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest, Putin reportedly told President George W. Bush quite bluntly when Bush tried to discuss Ukraine with him: ‘You don’t understand, George, Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us’” (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 360). This is not Russia’s perception of Ukraine; this is Putin’s creation of what he thinks Russia’s relationship with Ukraine should be. This quote exemplifies the impact of the individual role that Putin plays in Russian politics (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 360-363).

Although many of the authors with their differing perspectives brought realistic aspects of the story of how and why the Ukraine crisis came about, their accounts are lacking. There is a need to explore the situation beyond the actions of a nation in its entirety, and examine the role that the individual has on a country’s foreign policy and actions. In this case, that individual is Putin. Mearsheimer may be right that the West provoked a response out of Russia that created the Ukraine crisis, but was Russia’s inevitable, as Mearsheimer claims, or was it shaped by Putin’s particular approach to the crisis? (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 175-178).

Putin has not physically held the position of president the whole time over the last fifteen years, but even so, he has managed to create a vertical throne of power, consolidating and strengthening the actors in the Kremlin beneath him. Even when he was out of the presidency from 2008-2012, his personality could be seen impacting Russian foreign policy, as the pattern did not deviate much from what it had been. It was not until Medvedev figured out how to be more assertive in his own opinions so that Putin’s presence in foreign policy became less apparent, although, with his position as prime minister, it never did disappear. Putin, even in his

premiership, often overshadowed Medvedev, as in the event of the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 when Putin appeared on television to give a statement instead of the acting president. Even as Medvedev's presidency was coming to a close and he stated that he might run against Putin in the next election, this was almost unthinkable because it was so obvious in their public appearances that Putin was in charge (Applebaum 2011). Rather than having his foreign policy reflect the opinions of others, Putin has created a vertical of power by consolidating state institutions, which creates the perfect outlet for his own personality and interests to play a role in Russian foreign policy. With this vertical of power, Putin can forward his interests for Russia in a way that his personal agenda can clearly be seen impacting Russian foreign policy (Giles, et al. 2015: 3-7; Smith 2008: 7-8).

Variations in Russia's foreign policy show that a leader's personality does in fact matter. In Byman and Pollack's paper, they comment in their introduction that one reason the role of the individual has often been neglected in the study of international relations, even though individuals are constantly used as focal points in the study of history. But, as is the case with Russia and Putin, sometimes a country's foreign policy cannot be properly understood if the role of the individual is ignored. The nuances in foreign policy, to many political scientists, can be attributed to geographical location, history, and the greater roles of institutions over the individual. These factors are thought to overshadow any direct impact an individual can have on a country's actions, and even if political scientists do believe that an individual can play an important role, they argue that the study of the individual does not create the generalized statements that are often sought after and studied in international relations because of their ability to be applied to a broader spectrum of situations (Byman and Pollack 2001: 107-109).

Even those who are more accepting of the individual's role in shaping politics shy away from studying the effect of an individual in a country because the cases where studying an individual is relevant, appear with very particular cases, and indeed, they are. The particular situations that include individuals relevant to the shaping of their country's politics only occur with strong leaders who have usually centralized the power of the state to be within their control. This is the case with Putin and Russia's foreign policy. No matter how many times authors bring up the proximity of Russia to Ukraine and their historical ties through the Kievan Rus', these connections would not determine foreign policy if they were not important to Putin (Byman and Pollack 2001: 107-109).

Putin's personality can be seen in the role that Russia has played on the world stage, because Putin made the connection between NATO enlargement and its potential impact on Ukraine. Fearing that Russia's interest in Ukraine would be contested, he stepped in before the West could penetrate further into the Russian zone of influence (Bock, Henneberg, and Plank 2014: 8). Putin made this connection because of his history growing up in the Soviet Union and serving as a KGB agent. He has been heard saying a few times that the fall of the Soviet Union was one of the worst events in history because it divided the Russian people (Galeotti and Bowen 2014).

Many Russians are sentimental about the Soviet Union, especially if they were younger when they lived through it. People often remember childhood fondly, wishing that they could go back to the way life was then, and for many of them, their childhood memories were created in the Soviet Union. During Putin's childhood years and early adult life, Ukraine had been part of the Soviet Union, part of his homeland. For Putin, this sentimentality over his time in the Soviet Union is not different, except that after climbing the KGB ladder to a more esteemed position

before the fall of the Soviet Union, Putin watched from East Germany as Gorbachev appeared to destroy Russia from the inside with his Western-style policies of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*'. The fall of the Soviet Union removed Ukraine from Russia, splintering the country. This series of events nurtured a seed of distaste for Western culture, ideas, and politics, which had already been planted through the propaganda of the Soviet Union (Roxburgh 2012: 15-20, 270-273).

In Byman and Pollack's first hypothesis about the impact of individuals on the intentions of the state, they say that "a leader can greatly magnify the extent of the state's revisionist intentions" (Byman and Pollack 2001: 134). This relates to Putin and his experiences during the collapse of the Soviet Union, because even if not all Russians feel that Ukrainian territory should naturally be a part of Russia, there are those who do want to go back to the time when it was. Putin magnifies this through his statements about the Kievan Rus', and more specifically, *Novorossiia*, which brings the countries together as one. The theme of *Novorossiia* has been more prominent in Putin's speeches and actions, such as during his intervention in Ukraine, and prophesized in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. With the Kremlin's control of the media, that sentiment is gaining strength in Russia as barrages of propaganda are continuously thrown at the people. Byman and Pollack finish their statement in this hypothesis by saying that although other factors, such as culture and domestic politics, are still very relevant to shaping a state's intentions, an individual leader can work beyond these factors to pursue actions according to their own particular interest and ideology, perhaps using these factors to do so. Putin has used the strategic position of Russia in this way, creating an enemy to create a stronger sense of culture within Russia. With the focus on the enemy, he can divert attention from domestic criticism and rally support (Byman and Pollack 2001: 134).

In part, Putin looks to NATO as one of the factors that caused the collapse of the Soviet Union, viewing the Western policy of containment as already encroaching on the Soviet sphere of influence, effectively collapsing it. From this breakdown, he tracked Russia's traditional enemy, NATO, as it first expanded into the Russian sphere of influence, including states that used to be part of the Warsaw Pact into its membership. Then NATO continued to expand into former Soviet States and up to the border of Russia, with the inclusion of the Baltic States. As Putin was courting the West, and NATO sought the approval of Russia for continued expansion, Putin wondered why NATO felt the need to keep spreading its borders. The Soviet Union had fallen, so there was no need to build up this alliance. He viewed the buildup as a direct threat to Russia, because he could not think of another reason NATO would insist on courting new members. NATO had been created for the purpose of installing a defense system against the Soviet Union and for the prevention of further Soviet expansion, especially into Europe, so from Putin's point of view, NATO expansion had to be directly linked to Russia (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-10; Smith 2008: 8-12).

Now that NATO has gotten too close for Putin's comfort, the enemy that Putin had initially concocted in demonizing the United States was replaced with a general anti-Western sentiment, but the enemy was closer to home, feeding more strongly into Putin's need for a scapegoat. As Byman and Pollack argue, individuals become more important during times of great change since they generally have more flexibility to act as citizens are more likely to accept the need for quick action by a strong leader (Byman and Pollack 2001: 142-143). It can be said that Putin built up power at different stages of his presidency, where events or conflicts that needed a leader occurred, such as when he first came to office using Chechnya to increase his popularity. Putin started centralizing his power in the Kremlin during his first terms, but there

have been events periodically throughout his presidency that have allowed him to further the consolidation process at various stages. NATO expansion to the edge of Russian borders was just one such circumstance, where the people no longer felt secure, except under the leadership of their strong, calm, and rational president. The Ukraine crisis was a more extreme event that allowed further consolidation and the possibility of integrating the pursuit of other Russian interests into the chaos (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-10; “The Ukraine Crisis and NATO-Russia Relations”).

Indeed, Putin did initially try to have Russia form a relationship with the United States and NATO to bolster Russia’s position in the world, and Putin did this even through a growing dislike of the West that had come about initially from working as a KGB agent in the Soviet Union. Putin cared more for the betterment of his country, militarily, economically, and in this case politically, so he sacrificed his own beliefs and comforts to give Russia a chance with the West. Unfortunately, here, the United States and Russia’s long standing distrust for the other, especially after the experiences of the Cold War, continued to manifest during periods of perceived cooperation between the traditional rivals. The manner in which Putin chose to deal with domestic issues was often criticized by the West as too harsh, especially in relation to the Chechen Wars, and Putin did not like the West interfering in something that he viewed as a strictly domestic matter. The United States might promise Russia something, but with ulterior motives, creating a situation where Putin felt he could not trust the United States, just as the United States was never ready to trust the leader of Russia with the history of the Cold War hanging between them (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-10; Roxburgh 2012: 4-28).

As distrust between the West and Russia grew again, Putin warned against trying to pull Ukraine or other important countries on Russia’s borders into NATO, but the West did not take

his warning seriously. Instead, they directly aggravated him by making a statement calling for Georgia and Ukraine to become future members of NATO. It did not matter to Putin that these countries were not ready to join NATO, or that not everyone in the alliance was on board with the idea. Putin saw Western interests and intention towards these two countries on Russia's borders as one step too far beyond the line that Putin could accept in what he believed was the slow removal of Russian power, backing Russia into a corner where Russia would be alone, with no allies. Because of Putin's understanding of the situation based off of his knowledge and interest in Russian history, as well as his own history and experience, he chose to take action in Georgia and Ukraine to protect Russia's sphere of influence (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 260-263, 305-307, 358-368).

Byman and Pollack also hypothesize that "individuals can be an important component of a state's diplomatic influence and power" (Byman and Pollack 2001: 134). Therefore, it is important to look at the Putin's political and diplomatic skills, because with his government following his rule, Russia can only be as skillful in politics as he is. So, when Putin saw the threat to Ukraine – and to Russian interests – he used that power to choose to intervene rather than to try to come to an agreement with Western powers over the situation. Thus, he appears more as a man of action than one thinks carefully and seeks consensus before acting. Throughout 2014 and some of 2015, peace talks were attempted on multiple occasions to try to come to some consensus about a ceasefire agreement to contain the violence. Each time, the agreements seemed to be broken and the violence continued. This left the image of Putin in connection with Russia and Russian troops, of a man who did not honor his agreements, insofar as it is assumed that Putin and the Russian army were operating on the same page, although the situation in Ukraine was too complex to stop at one man's word. If the Army went against Putin's intentions,

it would be very hard to separate, because Putin has created a state in which he and the state are combined (Byman and Pollack 2001: 134-135).

Based on his experience in Georgia, Putin chose to act forcefully in Ukraine when the *Euromaidan* protests started. As in the Rose Revolution, Putin assumed that the West was trying to sway Ukraine to its side by inciting pro-democracy protests against the incumbent government. At this point Putin had already used force at multiple times to protect Russia's zone of influence against Western infringement, so it was logical for him to move into the situation with military force, because that is what seemed to have worked (Frizell 2014; "Georgia's 'Rose Revolution'").

This situation brings into account Gallagher and Allen's discussion of leaders and their tendency to use force. Since Putin had already intervened in Georgia during the color revolution, as well as in other parts of the world, it was a tool he was willing to turn to again. In Gallagher and Allen's analysis of leaders' personality traits, they discuss four traits and how they might impact the decision making process of a state leader. Based on their analysis, Putin might be seen as having the traits of Openness to Action, or Excitement Seeker, which is described as seeking out risks for the adventure. Looking at Putin's personality and the reasons behind his decisions, that is, for carving out a better place for Russia in the world, it is not logical to say that his foreign policy has been the result of his adventurousness as described in the Excitement Seeker trait. His actions also cannot be explained by a desire to experience something different. This brings into account the role the Deliberation trait played in Putin's decisions, which takes into account how long and thoroughly he considered his options before deciding on what he thought the best plan of action would be. Perhaps because he continued to use force as a political tool, his Deliberation trait was lowered so that he chose to act rather quickly under the circumstances.

Gallagher and Allen also hypothesize a decrease in the use of the Deliberation trait in a leaders personality will increase the use of force abroad, if there is less questioning done before moving to action (Gallagher and Allen 2014: 8-9, 13-16).

Through this understanding and experience of living through certain events in his earlier life when no one knew him, and in his role in the Kremlin, Putin has managed to give a picture of his life story through the connection he made between these events and how he reacted to them. Just because Putin believed that NATO expansion was a threat to Russia does not mean that NATO's actual intention was to threaten Russia. However, NATO's true intention does not matter because Putin's ideas about the world created the scene that Russia acted on. Putin did not keep Russia's interests in Ukraine and Georgia a secret, and therefore felt provoked by the West's attention to the countries, and even though Western interests weren't going to be pursued Putin saw the West as guilty of overstepping warning guidelines, which he had alluded to on a few occasions. Maybe the West did unintentionally provoke Putin into the creation of the Ukraine crisis, as Mearsheimer claims, but the West did not see the connection, and even if it had, that does not mean that the United States should tiptoe around Russia's wishes because Putin might misinterpret Western actions or intentions and retaliate against an unintentional threat. As is depicted through the causes and the events of the Ukraine crisis, great powers tend to pursue foreign policy objectives for the betterment of their state's position in the world. This is common of any powerful state, and to limit one in this arena at the expense of another might serve Putin's personal interests and sense of security, but is ultimately illogical (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2014).

In *Putin's Empire State of Mind*, Galeotti and Bowen argue that the Putin today is not the same man who was Russia's president between 1999 and 2008 (Galeotti and Bowen 2014).

However, looking at the information and analysis provided through Putin's personality and Byman and Pollack's many hypotheses, is this really the case? If Russia was remaining unobtrusive during Putin's initial years as president, because Putin saw that the state was weak, it seems that Putin has become more active within the state and abroad because Russia is stronger, rather than changing. Putin's history and experiences have shaped his personality and shaped the state over which he presides today, creating a government specialized to his personality. He has gone with the ebb and flow of Russia's power and politics, and he has both used popular support to back up an aggressive foreign policy and has used the specter of foreign threats to justify the use of military force and rally domestic support. He has created the Western enemy to keep his popular support at a high, so that he can pursue the state's interests as well as his own. Any direction from which Putin's Russia is analyzed today needs to take into account Putin's personality and experiences, as he uses them in his foreign policy to decide the best course of action for the state (Hill and Gaddy 2015: 258-263).

It can be argued that the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault for provoking Putin, as Mearsheimer, Walt, and Cohen claim, or it can be said that Putin acted aggressively by intervening in Ukraine, as Sestanovich claims. Either way, Putin's personality has played a big role in shaping the events (Cohen 2014; McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014: 171-175; Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2014; Walt, "Arming Ukraine," 2015).

Conclusion

President Vladimir Putin has made major changes in the Russian government since he took over the presidency from Yeltsin in 1999. Over the last fifteen years of Putin's Russia, the President's personality can be seen affecting domestic and foreign policy decisions. Throughout the course of Putin's reaction to NATO expansion into the Russian sphere of influence, the crisis

in Ukraine eventually arose. From the perspective of officials in U.S. government, Putin is usually considered fully responsible for the Ukraine crisis, but a variety of perspectives are offered by different scholars in their examination of the events leading up to it. Some have said that the West needs to take responsibility for the Ukraine crisis because Western governments did not take into account how NATO expansion might look like from the Russian perspective, even if it was not intended to be a threat. Others think that Russia's decision to invade was a clear demonstration of Russia's aggressive intentions because NATO was obviously not trying to expand in order to corner Russia (Giles, et al. 2015: 2-10; Smith 2008: 3-4, 7-8).

Putin has gathered so much control over the Russian state, both in the areas of politics and business, that Western media often refers to Putin and Russia almost interchangeably. This has created a powerful political tool for Putin, making it easier for him to pursue the interests that he thinks Russia should have, such as the reintegration of Ukraine. With the perpetual enemy Putin has made the West out to be, he continues to have high support for his centralized actions, as he portrays himself combating a threat to Russia, and protecting the Russian people (Owen and Inboden 2014).

Now Ukraine is divided and in a state of frozen conflict. In this state it remains out of the West's reach, and a puppet to Russia. Looking back and analyzing the events that led to this point through international relations theories, it seems apparent that one of the major factors in the creation of the conflict in Ukraine was Putin's personality. Formed out of a childhood in the Soviet Union and having his world crash before him at the hands of a leader who was trying to reform the Soviet Union with more pro-Western policies, it is no wonder that Putin has become progressively less enthralled by what the West had to offer. Although these policies were for the purpose of preserving the Soviet Union and maintaining control of the Communist Party, their

outcome greatly impacted how Putin viewed certain ideas coming from the West. His loyalty and devotion to Russia create a situation in which he wants to bring Ukraine, the original location of the Kievan Rus', back into the folds of Russia, so that the Russian people can be one again. He cannot see why the West has an interest in the regions around Russia except to exacerbate the stressed relationship between the United States and Russia, so he only saw his intervention in Ukraine as a way to protect Russian interests (Mearsheimer, "The West's Fault," 2014; Roxburgh 2012: 94-96, 226-229).

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