

Russian Foreign Policy Towards European Union

A Path Towards Re-evaluation and Re-orientation?

Master Thesis International Relations & Diplomacy

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List of Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBR	Central Bank of Russia
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Minfin	Ministry of Finance of the Russian Federation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCR	Neo-classical realism
PRC	Pew Research Center
RT	Russia Today
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
TASS	Russia News Agency
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WB	World Bank
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

Abstract

"Where there is no law, but every man does what is right in his own eyes, there is the least of real liberty"

Henry M. Robert

This thesis analyses Russian foreign policy from March 2012 to April 2015 to determine factors that influenced its conduct. Neo-classical realism is the theory that first, lays the basis for such an elaborate examination and second, narrows the scope of analysis to variables that could have had an impact on the strategies of such foreign policies. Therefore the research question addressed in this thesis is: What were the driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy between 2012 and 2015? The analysis of Russian foreign policy can be of prime importance for regional energy security in particular, and international peace in general. This study tests the three hypotheses utilizing a method such as process tracing and relying heavily on document analysis. The findings suggest that security concerns about the preservation of the sphere of influence over Ukraine influenced to a great extent Russia's course of actions. Instead of accepting new developments, Russia pursued hard-line policies notwithstanding the fact that such strategies had a negative economic and political impact on its posture in the international arena. In a few words, I would recommend that future research should delve deeper in studying such controversial behaviour in a state's foreign policy when a state pursues hard-line policies even though it clearly understands that they are self-destructive. In addition, the evidence of this study indicates the importance of devising policies and strategies that could enhance reciprocal cooperation and prevent states from locking one another into a mutually damaging stalemate which deteriorates relations and impedes the maintenance of international peace and security.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A state's relations with its counterparts as well as non-state actors are of vital importance in the field of international relations. Mearsheimer states that every nation, especially great powers, put great emphasis on economic and military capabilities they exercise relative to each other since they are deeply concerned about security issues (2006:71). Security competition occurs since states view the international system as anarchic and as the main rational actors a states' vital task is survival (ibid.:73). An important tool in shaping strategies that can increase chances of survival in the international structure is a state's foreign policy. Bull notices that foreign policy can be viewed as "the rational pursuit of interests of the state which at least in principle at some points overlap with the interests of other states (2002:164). However, in the second decade of the 21st century the Russian Federation and the EU found themselves at odds concerning the issues affecting the core national interests of both actors.

The main purpose of this thesis is the examination of Russian foreign policy. This research analyses Russian conduct to uncover the reasons behind the cleavages that occurred between Russia and the EU. It is important to note that this thesis does not endeavour to analyze Russia's relations with particular European states as it is primarily focused on Russia's conduct per se. The central puzzle of this paper is to determine why Russia pursued the strategies of reorientation vis-a-vis Western Europe in the second decade of the 21st century despite the fact that policies chosen were on the one hand, damaging the image of the Russian political elites and on the other hand, they brought about a crisis which nearly caused the Russian economy to collapse (Pew Research Center 2014). The period of time from March 2012 to April 2015 is examined to draw a pattern of conduct and discover factors that influenced Russian foreign policy. The study of this particular time frame is essential since it was the period of volatile changes in European region ranging from the removal of the Ukrainian president posing a threat to Russian national interests, to the annexation of the Crimean peninsula viewed as a phenomenon violating the established norms and principles of Western values (Sakwa 2013: 209).

In order to examine Russian foreign policy and address issues raised, this study examines the following research question: What were the driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy between 2012 and 2015? Along with answering the research question, this paper attempts to test several hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that the greater Russian economic and military power is, the more likely she is to adopt hard-line policies. The second hypothesis is that the greater the

Russian political elite's perceptions of systemic factors to be representing threats, the more likely Russia is to adopt hard-line policies. The third and final hypothesis is that the less accountable the government is, the more likely Russia is to adopt hard-line policies. These hypotheses are based on the assumption that each one has an effect on foreign policy.

Multiple theories exist that deal with particular foreign policy strategies and some of them are indeed of great significance. Many works have been conducted into different states' foreign policies, as every state is estimated to have its own foreign policy distinct from others (Telhami 2002: 158). Nevertheless, notwithstanding a sufficient amount of literature on states' foreign policy this area still requires a thorough examination owing to both the unpredictability of the state's conduct and the complexity of factors that shape events and form a state's strategies (Hudson 1995: 221). Furthermore, diverging views of different scholars' theories make it extremely difficult to construct a more or less acceptable model which could explain a state's conduct and make necessary further exploration of an integral part of international relations, namely foreign policy (Schafer 2003: 171).

NCR constitutes a theoretical framework of this thesis to test the hypotheses and examine the research question. NCR has been chosen to examine Russian foreign policy since it examines factors at different levels. Neither classical realism nor neo-realism could have explained Russia's conduct and provide a thorough analysis of geo-political developments as they do not examine all the necessary variables. Although the distribution of power in European region would have remained relatively unchanged with the Ukraine falling into the orbit of the West, the Russian government preferred to re-evaluate its relations with the EU and eventually suspend them for the time being. The political elites' perceptions of threats in the international system as explained by neo-classical realists played a crucial if not decisive role in shaping non-cooperative Russian foreign policies. My main argument in this study is that the Russian government interpreted the overthrow of the Ukraine president as a challenge which would diminish its position in the international environment and only then pursued hard-line policies however self-destructive they might have been. Without experiencing any resistance from the domestic constituencies concerning whether to antagonize and/or even disrupt relations with the EU, Russia mobilized all available resources to accomplish its set objectives, namely the prevention of the Ukraine from dropping out of the Russia's sphere of influence.

This thesis consists of the following sections. The first part briefly states the research problem and offers an explanation of the purpose of the research. The second section provides a literature review which covers the various arguments, controversies, techniques used to analyze what

drives a state's foreign policy, findings of different scholars as well as their points of divergence. This section also touches upon the theoretical framework of this study, hypotheses tested, and a layout of the research design. More specifically, I justify case selection, provide methodology and the operationalization of variables before discussing material used. The third section presents a historical background and factors that brought about a worsening of relations and the subsequent implicit conflict between the Russian Federation and the EU. Next, I carry out an elaborate study of the findings in regard with the hypotheses in order either to adopt or to reject them. The final section of this thesis I start with concluding remarks before addressing the limitations of the current study, theoretical and practical implications.

Chapter 2

Framework of Analysis

2.1 Concept definitions

Although there are numerous factors that shape a state's foreign policy, this study is particularly interested in the generation of foreign policy derived from such indicators as economic and military power, political elites' perceptions and the government accountability to the domestic public. This section examines in depth both the definitions of these factors as well as that of foreign policy to meet this research's goals. It starts with the description of economic and military power before moving to political elites' perceptions and the government's accountability. Finally, a variety of approaches and arguments that have been conducted in the study of foreign policy are reviewed.

Individuals and groups of people pay great attention to their security. They fear that a lack of security makes them vulnerable to domination, exploitation and subjugation (Herz 1950: 157). To overcome this fear they start seeking power which in turns sets the ball rolling towards "the vicious circle of security and power accumulation"(ibid.). These complex processes of security and power accumulation have occupied a considerable number of great minds due to the complexity of factors shaping interactions among nations. Such interactions can take the form of cooperation or conflict. While the former in many cases brings mutual benefits, the latter may result in disruption of relations and lead to catastrophic outcomes. However as Wright notices "The essence of the struggle is the competition for the necessities of life that are insufficient to satisfy all" (1951: 198).

Nye (2009) emphasizes that both economic and military power have a great impact on other countries' policies. The use of economic and/or military forces to compel or please other states remains within a state's intentions (ibid.). Smith (2014) points out that while states still exercise the monopoly on military, political and ideological power, economic power is becoming a contested area. However, the significance of economic power in international affairs should not be underestimated. Whalley defines economic power as "the ability of individual countries, groups of countries, or even groups within countries to either compel or persuade other countries to act (or at least contemplate acting) as they otherwise would not by the threat or actual use of penalties and inducements of various forms" (2009: 4-5). It is also important to note that instead of using economic power to persuade or punish a rival state, self-reliant countries often rely on military solutions to problems. Maoz points out that "When states are relatively self-reliant, and

trade does not make for a major part of their national income, the cost of conflict is reduced and the temptation to resolve conflicts of interests through the use of force may be higher" (2006: 394).

Similar to economic power, military power can also be used as an instrument of coercion. House (2008) states that military power "...provides nation the capability to impose its will on another nation through the threat or use of violence. Military force also provides a state "the capability to resist another's coercive actions" (ibid.). Driel shares the previous author's opinion saying that "military power in the existing cultural environment and time span has in its widest sense, the objective to influence attitudes of political and military decision-makers" (1981: 46). However, the reliance on military power bears substantial expenditure and poses a threat to international peace and security (Jervis 1978). Moreover, a worsening of relations due to the use of military means have a negative impact on the international economy (Liff et al. 2014:52). In addition, as Jervis says that "most statesmen know that to enter a war is to set off a chain of unpredictable and uncontrollable events" (Jervis 1978:177).

To avoid a conflicting situation it is crucial that state leaders are able to interpret correctly other nations' intentions, threats in particular. Political leaders' perceptions in that case play a crucial role in whether they view other states' actions to be either benevolent or malignant. Stein defines perception as "the process of apprehending by means of the senses and recognizing and interpreting what is processed" (Stein 2013: 2). Despite the most advanced technologies the civilization has ever had to gather intelligence, the international environment still remains blurred. Countries top leaders do not have a complete picture about the genuine motivations or strategies other countries pursue. It becomes even worse when state leaders interpret other states' accumulation of economic and military power as endangering their national security (ibid). Jervis states that "Decision makers act in terms of vulnerability they feel, which can differ from the actual situation" (Jervis 1978: 174)

The main culprit to be blamed is an anarchic structure of the international system where, even though states' interests overlap, they continue rivalry (Glaser 1997: 171). This situation is created due to the absence of a supranational sovereign who could serve as an enforcer and guarantor of compliance with the established norms and international laws (Liff et al. 2014: 62). As a result, sovereign states find themselves locked into a predicament explicitly defined by the prominent scholar, Robert Jervis, as the security dilemma. It reads as follows:"many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decreases the security of others" (Jervis 1978:168). Therefore,

states can go to war when one country's increase of capabilities is understood in terms of a threat due to a lack of information and misinterpretation of its true motives (Stein 2013: 3).

However, the decision to go to war can be limited by such a factor as government accountability. Government accountability can be understood in terms of "the obligation of individuals, agencies and organisations (public, private and civil society) to submit themselves to another's oversight and scrutiny and provide information and justifications for their actions and decisions" (Chene 2015: 2). There are three types of accountability, namely horizontal, vertical and diagonal. This study is interested in vertical accountability which is "the mechanisms through which public officials are held accountable to the electorate or citizenry" (ibid.). In a situation when a state's leader's hands are not tied by their domestic constituency then it becomes much easier for them to mobilize all the available resources at short notice in order to wage war. This opportunity exacerbates the danger of misinterpretation of other states' intentions and perceiving them as threats.

One of the efficient means that may enhance the chances of influencing other states decision-making process, strategies and intentions is foreign policy. In the highly mistrustful environment of international relations foreign policy serves as an instrument of transmitting and delivering messages implying the change of other states conduct as well as their own to meet the challenges of the outside world. It is worth pointing out that "authoritarian systems have greater flexibility and capacity to respond to changes in their external environment" (Hermann 1983: 279). Furthermore, as Hall notes that in Waltz's opinion "democracies are not as good as authoritarian states at foreign policy-making" (Hall 2014: 535).

Foreign policy of a state as defined by Tayfur is "the behaviour of states mainly towards other states in the international system through their authorised agents" (1994: 113). Another definition is described by Modelski who states that foreign policy is "the system of activities evolved by communities for changing behaviour of other states and for adjusting their activities to the international environment (1962: 6). Wright agrees by emphasizing that foreign policy "results from the continuous effort of the community either to modify the external environment in order to fit its own interests or to modify its interests so as better to fit the changing world-environment" (1930: 910). Hermann shows that foreign policy consists of "the plans, goals, and actions of national governments directed at entities outside the nation (1983: 269). To summarize, foreign policy is such an activity of national governments that enables them both to influence the conduct of other states as well as to adjust their conduct in accordance with the challenges of the external environment in order to fit the international system.

2.2. Review of Research

Much research on the study of Russian foreign policy utilizing a variety of approaches and arguments has been carried out. Their focus has mainly been on Russian foreign policy driven by such factors as the possession of abundant gas and oil reserves, gross nuclear arsenal and the permanent member seat in the UNSC with the veto power. Having analyzed Russian foreign policy, Panagiotou observes that the Russian Federation uses "its permanent membership of the Security Council as a strong foreign policy tool and as a means of promoting its national interests" (2011: 212). Other analyses indicate that an energy card has been the main driver of Russia's foreign policy, while others showed that nuclear weapons have been used by Russian political leaders as a political instrument rather than a military one.

During the study of Russian foreign policy scholars applied different methodologies. Kropatcheva (2012), for instance examines Russian foreign policy through the lens of NCR. She finds that "improved domestic capabilities together with more self-confidence and restored pride lead to a more assertive foreign policy" (ibid.: 38). She adds that despite cleavages with the West, Russian foreign policy should not be seen as anti-Western since it is interested in cooperation in many of international affairs (ibid.). She concludes her research by stating that "neoclassical realism is an expedient theoretical framework for studying Russian foreign policy" for various reasons (ibid.). First, it says that the analysis of domestic factors contributes in understanding Russia's assertive strategies. Second, the examination of the "international context of action" is necessary since Russia mirrors the conduct of the West (ibid.). Lastly, subjective factors analyzed by NCR also play an important role.

Another solution to the study of Russian foreign policy is described in Engström's work. She demonstrates that Russian foreign policy has "deep roots in Russian culture and were formulated as political concepts decades ago by relatively small radical right-wing groups" (Engström 2014: 375). She finds that although not every single policy generated in the 1990s and 2000s is supported by the Kremlin there is great correlation between the policies formulated decades ago and actions that were shaping Russia's behaviour in 2013 and 2014 (ibid.). Kubyshkin and Sergunin support Engström's argument emphasizing that the roots of contemporary Russian foreign policy should be sought in the 1990s. They carried out a study of Russian foreign policy from the 1990s till the second decade of the 21st century. Their findings suggest that Russian foreign policy has been shaped by "a unique mixture of geopolitics with the so-called civilizational approach" (Kubyshkin et al. 2012: 8). The authors state that the non-recognition of Russia as an equal partner and fictitious inclusion of her in various politico-economic and

military international institutions provoked the Russian elite to seek policies that were divergent from the West's viewpoints (ibid.).

A very interesting approach to the study of Russian foreign policy has been adopted by Mathers (Mathers 2012). In her work she analyses the speeches and other public statements of the two Russian presidents, namely Vladimir Putin and Dmitri Medvedev from 2000 to 2010. She argues that "Russia's position as a major exporter of energy at a time of high global demand and equally high prices has given Moscow new foreign-policy leverage that it has not hesitated to use" (ibid.: 495). Likewise, she asserts that "the foreign-policy discourse of Russia's political leaders has continued to make extensive use of Russia's position as a major nuclear weapons state" (ibid.). She concludes that both presidents played a nuclear weapons card "as a way of sending signals, particularly to the United States and its NATO allies but also to domestic audiences, about Russia's foreign-policy orientation" (ibid.: 495-496).

Another tool of Russian foreign policy has been examined by Varol (2013). He showed how the Russian Federation plays its energy card. He emphasized that Russian foreign policy is heavily dependent on "its energy weapon capacity" and it uses it either as a tool of hard or soft power contingent on the situation (ibid.: 20). He also highlights that "there is an increasing interdependency between the EU and Russia due to a high degree of the EU dependency on Russian energy exports and Russian dependency to the income from European routes" (ibid.: 393). Newnham (2011) carries out a similar analysis in terms of examining Russia's foreign policy through the lens of its energy resources. He notices that Russia's use of its energy leverage is two-fold. In other words, Russia's energy clout serves her either to please her allies or to exercise hard power towards anti-Russian governments (ibid.: 134). The results obtained by Newnham in his research suggest that due to an increase in gas and oil prices as a result of high-demand and their scarcity, the Russian Federation's 'petro-power' "has become an increasingly clear threat to all the states which buy Russian oil and gas" (ibid.: 142).

However, the greatest explanation and appropriateness of neoclassical realism for the analysis of foreign policy has been provided by Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro in their book *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign policy*. They say that NCR examines:

...why, how and under what conditions the internal characteristics of states- the extractive and mobilization capacity of politico-military institutions, the influence of domestic societal actors and interest groups, the degree of state autonomy from society, and the level of elite or societal cohesion- intervene between the leaders' assessment of

international threats and opportunities and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies those leaders pursue (Lobell et al. 2009: 4).

The authors also emphasize that systemic theory of international relations, such as the neorealist balance of power theory as well as the Innenpolitik theory of foreign policy, such as the liberal or democratic peace theory lack explanatory power in understanding a powerful state's foreign policy (ibid.: 2). Nor can the examination of just relative power and existential threats throw light on country's conduct (ibid.: 3). Having examined several state's foreign policies, the writers observe that they (policies) were the result of the political leaders' evaluation of external challenges, perception of them as threats and subsequent use of resources for the realization of their plans. "International imperatives filtered through the medium of state structure and affected how top officials assessed likely threats, identified viable strategies in response to those threats, and ultimately extracted and mobilized the societal resources necessary to implement and sustain those strategies" (ibid.: 3-4). They argue that what is necessary is "the analysis of unit-level variables [that] constrain or facilitate the ability of all types of states- great powers as well as lesser states - to respond to systemic imperatives" (ibid.). These assumptions are further elaborated in details in the theoretical part of this thesis.

2.3. Theory and hypotheses

In this section the key social science theories such as classical realism, neorealism and NCR are analyzed. I start with the discussion of key assumptions of realism before moving to classical realism's distinct characteristics. After I explore neorealism and its main features. Next, I carry out an examination of NCR and highlight why it has advantages over both classical realism and neorealism in the study of Russian foreign policy.

Realism has several key assumptions. First, nation-states consisting of individuals organized in groups are the most important, legitimate, rational and constitutive actors of the international system (Lindemann 2014: 33-34). Second, the international system is anarchic and conflict-driven (ibid.). Third, the central variable in realists' understanding is power (ibid.). They say that the state's prime interest is power and, consequently, they are primarily concerned about the distribution of relative power in the international politics (ibid.). Moreover, realists think that foreign policy consists of actions based on rational behaviour and "calculation of means and ends and benefits of alternative courses of action in order to maximize the benefits (Tayfur 1994: 119).

Classical realism

The roots of realism can be found in works compiled by Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli (Lindemann 2014: 33-34). Hans J. Morgenthau (1961, Edward Carr (1949) and John Herz (1951) laid the foundation for classical realism (Lindemann 2014: 33-34). Morgenthau, for instance, "emphasized the will to power as an integral part of human nature" (Lindemann 2014: 34). He states that "...whenever [humans] strive to realize their goal by means of international politics, they do so by striving for power" (Morgenthau 1948: 13). The analysis of world affairs as assumed by classical realists should be conducted by looking at domestic politics (Lindemann 2014: 34).

Neorealism

Neorealism introduced by Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) built on many assumptions of classical realism and transformed it into a theory of international politics (Lindemann 2014: 34). One of the central divisions between classical realists and neorealists is the nature of the international system. Classical realism is primarily concerned about human nature, whereas neorealism examines only the system level. According to Lindemann, "Waltz did not locate the source of conflict primarily in human nature and power-seeking individuals, but pointed to the anarchic structure of the international system to explain the recurrence of conflicts" (2014: 34). In addition, although neorealists recognize the importance of domestic variables in a state's foreign

policy, they consider states as 'black boxes' (ibid.). It is important to note that neorealists fall into two camps, namely "defensive neorealists" including Kenneth N. Waltz (1979) arguing that "states will be obliged to act to create balances of power to prevent hegemony" and "offensive neorealists" including John J. Mearsheimer (2001) who contends that "states are obliged to seek at least regional hegemony" (Brown 2011: 1076).

Neoclassical realism

The emergence of NCR "as a new theoretical framework for the analysis of foreign policy" can be explained by "the inability of neo-realism to provide an adequate explanation of foreign policy behaviour (Schweller 2003, cited in Lindemann 2014: 35). NCR is a mixture of neo-realism, which focuses primarily on the structure of the international system, and classical realism providing analysis at domestic level (Kitchen 2010: 117; Marsh 2014: 121). According to Brown, "to understand foreign policy it is necessary to take on board both the relative power of the state in question, that is to say its vulnerability to imperative generated by an anarchic international system, and domestic factors such as the perceptions of decision makers and the capacity of the state to extract and mobilize resources to pursue a given policy" (Brown 2011: 1076).

Rose was the first scholar who coined the term NCR in 1998 (Lobell 2009: 5-6; Ratti 2006: 96). Unlike neorealist theories investigating patterns of state interactions, current (NCR) research is primarily focused on individual states' conduct offering "complex causal interaction of systemic and unit-level variables" (Coetzee et al. 2012: 272-73; Rose 1998: 145). Neo-classical realists put forward the idea that states' foreign policy is subject to their relative power capabilities in the international system (Rose 1998: 146). However, they add that relative power, per se, does not determine state's foreign policy as "the distribution of capabilities...cannot in and of itself provide a comprehensive and accurate account of the foreign policy behaviour of states" (Coetzee et al. 2012: 270). It is government officials directly involved in decision-making and their perceptions of their country's relative power on the international arena that have an impact on foreign policy (Rose 1998: 147). Thus, a NCR theory on foreign policy should be examined via the analysis of systemic challenges filtered "through intervening unit-level variables such as decision-makers' perceptions and state structure" (Lobell et al. 2009: 7). In other words, it is states' relative power capabilities and political elites' perception of those capabilities in conjunction with domestic state structure that drives state's foreign policy (Rose 1998: 146). The causal logic of neoclassical realism is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Neo-classical realism causal logic of state's foreign policy behaviour

Dependent variable	External (systemic) variables	Internal (intervening) variables.
Foreign policy behaviour	The distribution of power in the international system	The subjective perceptions of decision-makers; The efficiency of a country's state apparatus; State-society relation

Foreign policy = Systemic variables + intervening variables.

Since domestic state structure can influence a state's foreign policy, neo-classical realists are right to point out that states with compatible relative power but varying strength of a country's state apparatus are bound to have different foreign policies (Rose 1998: 147). Zakaria lends support to this argument claiming that:

State power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends. (Zakaria cited in Rose 1998: 162).

Similarly, Coetzee et al. (2012:271) stress the importance of a 'state-society' relationship factor in determining states' foreign policy behaviour and their respective leaders' perceptions and subsequent exploitation of available resources. One of the most interesting approaches to the issue of state capacity to extract resources has been proposed by Taliaferro. He emphasizes that "the relative ability of the state to extract and mobilize resources from domestic society" influences 'balancing strategies' that countries will choose (2006: 464). He offers three possible models that states are likely to adopt: emulation, innovation and persistence in or escalation of strategies (ibid.: 486). The scholar notices when a government can mobilize all available resources and act without facing any form of coherent domestic public opposition, it allows the state to exert more influence abroad and pursue more aggressive foreign policies (ibid.:488).

Conversely, a weak country's apparatus, which is highly likely to affect and weaken to a great degree respective state's relative power, can prevent countries from advancing their sphere of influence (Ratti 2006: 96). As Coetzee (2012: 270) notes "relative material power provides both opportunities and constraints for state behaviour in the international realm." Overall, systemic pressures and the distribution of power in the international system determine a state's foreign policy behaviour once they have been filtered through internal elements, such as policy leaders' perceptions subject to their degree of exerting influence on their nation (Rose 1998). However, it

is the political elite, not states, who determines foreign policy (Yoo 2012: 323). Kitchen (2010: 143) shares the neo-classical realists' perspective stressing:

For neo-classical realists then, the international system is not the determining monolith... the structure of the international system as providing states with information about costs and benefits of particular courses of actions, but how that information is processed and weighed depends on the way states understand the world, their preferences, their ideas and their ethics.

Overall, NCR does not dispute the basic assumptions of classical realism and neorealism, such as the international politics to be driven by states constantly seeking power, anarchy to be the main component of the international system, and states to be the main actors striving for providing security to themselves (Lobell et al. 2009: 4). Nevertheless, NCR is preferable for the study of foreign policy as it "systematically connects structural and unit-level variables in its analysis" (Lindemann 2014: 35). Another advantage of NCR according to Lobell et al. (2009: 4) is that it presents "an imperfect 'transmission belt' between systemic incentives and constraints, on the one hand, and the actual diplomatic, military, and foreign economic policies states select on the other". The key assumptions of classical realism, neorealism and NCR are summarized in Table 1 found in Lindemann (2014: 35).

Table 1: Classical Realism, Neo-Realism, and Neoclassical Realism

Research program	Epistemology and methodology	View of the international system	View of the units	Dependent variable	Underlying causal logic
CLASSICAL REALISM	Inductive theories; philosophical reflection on nature of politics or detailed historical analysis (generally drawn from W. European history)	Somewhat important	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Power distributions or distribution of interests (revisionist vs. status quo) —• foreign policy
NEOREALISM	Deductive theories; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative and sometimes quantitative methods	Very important; inherently competitive and uncertain	Undifferentiated	International political outcomes	Relative power distributions (independent variable) —• international outcomes (dependent variable)
NEOCLASSICAL REALISM	Deductive theorizing; competitive hypothesis testing using qualitative methods	Important; implications of anarchy are variable and sometimes opaque to decision-makers	Differentiated	Foreign policies of states	Relative power distributions (independent variable) —• domestic constraints and elite perceptions (intervening variables) —♦ foreign policy (dependent variable)

Source: Taliaferro, Lobell and Ripsman 2009: 20.

The main drawbacks of NCR are in relation to the first, domestic level variables which Lindemann emphasizes "have simply been incorporated in an ad hoc manner and then used to explain away the anomalies of structural realism" (2014: 39). Second, he says that "NCR have been accused of lacking the parsimony and precision in predictive power that allow the falsification of hypotheses" (ibid.). Waltz stresses that a key limitation of NCR is a wide range of variables operationalized to analyze a state's foreign policy conduct which may transform an explanatory analysis into a descriptive one (Waltz cited in Coetzee et al. 2012: 272). Rosato indicates another drawback in the NCR theory arguing that "the prioritization of perceptions as an intervening variable lacks empirical validation" (2005: 468). His argument is supported by Rose who observes that "the link between objective material power capabilities and policymakers' subjective assessment of them remains murky" (1998: 168). He then adds that in order to understand states leaders' perceptions one should know both in theory and practice many aspects of the socio-economic and political life of the country in question (ibid: 166). However, Lobell et al. provide an argument in favour of neoclassical realism stating that "The strength of a neoclassical realist framework lies in the problem-driven approach that maintains a focus on the political in the study of international politics in order to enhance explanatory power" (Lobell et al. 2009: 298-299, cited in Lindemann 2014: 41).

The literature on NCR shows a variety of approaches scholars have applied to test its assumptions. Onea's (2012) focus of research was on US expansion in the Post-Cold War era through a neo-classical realism lens. He found that US foreign policy was mainly shaped by international interactions with other states and the US political elite perceptions of other states' conduct. Likewise, Marsh (2014) carried out research to find out what roles domestic elements and policy-makers perceptions played in launching an operation in Libya in 2011. He tested the events in question by applying NCR theory. The results obtained by Marsh in his analysis suggest that "the nature of US intervention was heavily influenced by domestic politics and elite perceptions" (2014: 131). Compared to Onea and Marsh whose unit of analysis was sovereign state foreign policy conduct, Ratti (2006: 101-102) studied non-state actor strategies, such as NATO and showed that NCR theory have a great explanatory power in explaining a state's foreign policy. He found that after the Russian Federation changed its perception over NATO it allowed its enlargement into Eastern Europe.

However, the most interesting approach to testing states' foreign policy conduct via NCR has been proposed by Choi. In his work he observes and explains weak states' interactions with powerful ones in an asymmetrical power struggle. He arrives at the conclusion that weak states do not necessarily collaborate when they are threatened by a more powerful country but instead

rely on strategies of resistance however damaging they might be (Choi 2007: 108). Finally, Yoo carries out a comparative study applying NCR to examine a "causal effect of domestic politics on states' policy behaviour" (2012: 344). In his work it was shown that despite the fact that Japan and South Korea share similar characteristics in terms of allies and threats they adopted different foreign policies owing to varying political leadership perceptions and domestic public constraints. In this literature review several applications of NCR theories have been proposed. It has been found that NCR has power in explaining state's foreign policy conduct through operationalizing such variables as countries' relative power on the world stage as well as political elite's perceptions and their ability to exert influence on domestic public. Therefore, NCR is highly likely to be able to explain Russian foreign policy since as Paul Kubicek notices "...concerns about relative power and international constraints and opportunities do better to explain actual changes in Russian policy (Kubicek 1999-2000: 567). Therefore, this thesis attempts to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The greater Russian economic and military power is, the more likely she is to adopt hard-line policies.

Hypothesis 2: The greater the Russian political elite's perceptions of systemic factors to be representing threats, the more likely Russia is to adopt hard-line policies.

Hypothesis 3: The less accountable the government is, the more likely Russia is to adopt hard-line policies.

In the next section, the justification of case selection, methodology applied, operationalization of variables necessary to test the hypotheses as well as the sources of data and data itself are described.

2.4. Research design

2.4.1. Case Selection

The research into Russian foreign policy can be of particular relevance for various reasons. Being both a major nuclear power and energy exporter, Russian foreign policy is highly likely to have a great impact on international peace and energy security (Freeman 2014). It is true that the Russian Federation has a great arsenal of nuclear forces which it can use as a tool of foreign policy in negotiations (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Russian nuclear forces 2015.

TYPE/NAME	RUSSIAN DESIGNATION	LAUNCHERS	YEAR DEPLOYED	WARHEADS X YIELD (KILOTONS)	TOTAL WARHEADS
<i>Strategic offensive weapons</i>					
ICBMs					
SS-18 M6 Satan	RS-20V	46	1988	10 x 500/800 (MIRV)	460
SS-19 M3 Stiletto	RS-18 (UR-100NUTTH)	30	1980	6 x 400 (MIRV)	180
SS-25 Sickle	RS-12M (Topol)	99	1988	1 x 800	99 ¹
SS-27 Mod. 1 (mobile)	RS-12M1 (Topol-M)	18	2006	1 x 800?	18
SS-27 Mod. 1 (silo)	RS-12M2 (Topol-M)	60	1997	1 x 800	60
SS-27 Mod. 2 (mobile)	RS-24 (Yars)	54	2010	4 x 100? (MIRV)	216
SS-27 Mod. 2 (silo)	RS-24 (Yars)	4	2014	4 x 100? (MIRV)	16
SS-27 Mod. ? (mobile)	RS-26 (Yars-M)	–	(2016)	3 x 100? (MIRV)	–
SS-27 Mod. ? (rail)	Barguzin	–	(2019)	4 x 100? (MIRV)	–
"heavy" ICBM 2 (silo)	Sarmat	–	(2020)	10 x 100? (MIRV)	–
SUBTOTAL		311			1,049
SLBMs					
SS-N-18 M1 Stingray	RSM-50	2/32	1978	3 x 50 (MIRV)	94
SS-N-23 M1	RSM-54 (Sineva)	6/96	2007	4 x 100 (MIRV) ²	384 ³
SS-N-32	RSM-56 (Bulava)	2/32	2014	6 x 100 (MIRV)	192
SUBTOTAL		10/160			672⁴
Bombers/weapons					
Bear-H6	Tu-95 MS6	29	1984	6 x AS-15A ALCMs, bombs	174
Bear-H16	Tu-95 MS16	30	1984	16 x AS-15A ALCMs, bombs	480
Blackjack	Tu-160	13	1987	12 x AS-15B ALCMs or AS-16 SRAMs, bombs	156
SUBTOTAL		72			810⁵
SUBTOTAL STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE FORCES					~2,500⁶
<i>Nonstrategic and defensive weapons</i>					
ABM/Air/Coastal defense					
S-300 (SA-10/12/20)		~1,000	1980/2007	1 x low	~340
53T6 Gazelle		68	1986	1 x 10	68 ⁷
SSC-1B Sepal		34	1973	1 x 350	~17
Land-based air					
Bombers/fighters (Tu-22M3/Su-24M/Su-34)		~430	1974/2006	ASM, bombs	~650
Ground-based⁸					
Short-range ballistic missiles (SS-21/SS-26)		~140	1981/2005	1 x ?	~140
GLCM		?	(2014)	1 x ?	?
Naval					
Submarines/surface ships/air				SLCM, ASW, SAM, DB, torpedoes	~730
SUBTOTAL NONSTRATEGIC AND DEFENSIVE FORCES					~2,000⁹
TOTAL					~4,500¹⁰

1. It is possible that (but unknown if) more of these SS-25 regiments at bases undergoing upgrade to RS-24 have been inactivated.
2. The Sineva is a modified SS-N-23 and probably carries four MIRVed warheads. US intelligence in 2006 estimated that the missile could carry up to 10 warheads but lowered the estimate to four warheads in 2009.
3. Only 256 of these warheads are deployed on four of the six Delta Vs.
4. Two or three of the 10 SSBNs are in overhaul and do not carry nuclear weapons. As a result, only 418 of the 628 warheads are deployed.
5. The bomber weapons are kept in storage, not deployed on the aircraft. We estimate that only a couple hundred weapons are present at the two bomber bases, with the remainder in central storage.
6. Only about 1,780 of these warheads are deployed on missiles and at bomber bases. The New START Treaty counts fewer deployed warheads because it does not count weapons stored at bomber bases and because some SSBNs are not fully loaded at any given time.
7. All 32 Gorgon missiles apparently have been removed from the ABM system.
8. NATO's International Military Staff briefed the North Atlantic Council in November 2009 that the Russian Zapad and Ladoga exercises in August and September 2009 included "missile launches, some of which may have simulated the use of tactical nuclear weapons" (Afterpost, 2011).
9. Numbers may not add up due to rounding. All nonstrategic warheads are in central storage. The 2,000 listed make up the estimated nominal load for nuclear-capable delivery platforms.
10. In addition to these warheads, we estimate that an additional 3,200 retired warheads are awaiting dismantlement, for a total inventory of nearly 7,500 warheads.

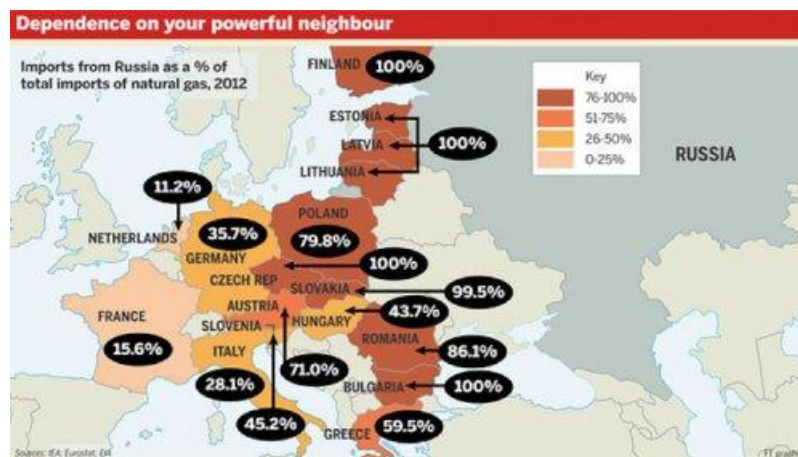
ABM: antiballistic missile
ALCM: air-launched cruise missile
AS: air-to-surface
ASM: air-to-surface missile
ASW: antisubmarine weapon
DB: depth bomb
GLCM: Ground-Launched Cruise Missile
ICBM: intercontinental ballistic missile
MIRV: multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle
SAM: surface-to-air missile
SLBM: submarine-launched ballistic missile
SLCM: sea-launched cruise missile
SRAM: short-range attack missile

Source: Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris 2015: 85.

In addition, the UNSC's veto power and its government regime enable the Russian elite to act equivocally. Although it can assist in mutually beneficial cooperation, when considered necessary, it can take advantage and be a spoiler in many pending issues with an international dimension requiring an urgent involvement and resolution (ibid.). Furthermore, the veto power of the UNSC enables Russia not to be bypassed in international affairs.

Take for instance Iran with its long-lasting negotiations on its nuclear programme where Russia's role is not sufficiently ascertained and it can either assist or in contrast derail the attempts of the international community regarding the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Taking into account the role Iran plays in the Middle East, it will be vital to seek Russia's support in helping to curb Iran's nuclear programme. Otherwise, the region where tensions are already at an extreme point may turn into an uncontrollable area. This in turn may make the further extraction of energy resources in the Middle East extremely difficult making the lives of heavily energy dependent countries unbearable (Blix 2012:25). Spassky lends support to this argument emphasizing that "Nuclear energy and military conflicts are incompatible because of the nature of the nuclear power plant" (2013:7). Without doubt fossil fuel possession is another powerful tool in the hands of the Russian Federation to influence states or a group of states such as the EU which is heavily dependent on energy imports and therefore she is deeply concerned about her energy security (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The EU's import of gas from Russia in 2012.



Source: The Financial Times¹

There are also challenges to international energy security since overproduction of gas and oil

¹ <http://www.financialsense.com/contributors/global-risk-insights/eu-takes-steps-toward-energy-independence-from-russia>

poses a threat to oil-exporting countries, whereas cuts in energy supplies present a real danger for energy-dependent countries. Russia can use this tool even more effectively, given the fact that problems in the Middle East may reach the point of no return.

Similarly, holding veto power (Table 2) in the UNSC allows Russia to make decisions which are politically motivated and thus she interprets international law in a way that suits her core interests (Aral 2012: 226). Moreover, by the very same token Russian foreign policy helps the world community hold accountable irresponsible international leaders when their punishment benefits Russia's strategic objectives. In contrast, Russia can fiercely oppose

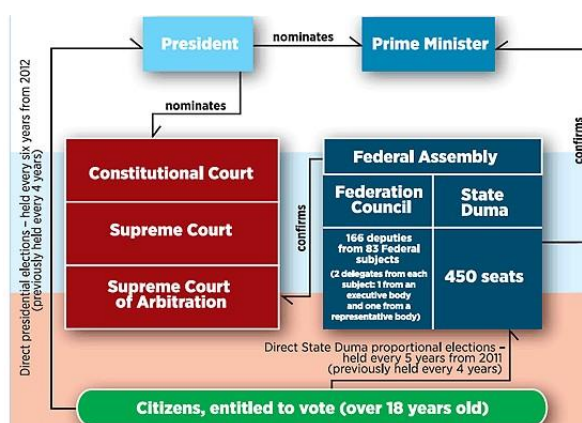
Table 2: UN Security Council 2015

Permanent Members	China	France	Russian Federation	The United Kingdom	The United States
Ten non-permanent members (Elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly with end of term date)	Angola (2016)	Chad (2015)	Chile (2015)	Jordan (2015)	Lithuania (2015)
	Malaysia (2016)	New Zealand (2016)	Nigeria (2015)	Spain (2016)	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (2016)

Source: Table based on data obtained from UN²

the international community when they attempt to sanction and punish a problematic state with a pro-Russian orientation through UNSC' resolutions, such as has been the case with Syria (Gladstone 2012). Finally, the government regime enables Russia to strike deals with states with poor human rights records, such as the Russia-China gas deal, increase cooperation and sell WMDs which may empower them in confrontation with the West (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Russian Political System.



Source: The Telegraph³

² <http://www.un.org/en/sc/members/>

³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sponsored/rbth/politics/8926401/Russias-political-system.html>.

Consequently, an elaborate analysis of Russian foreign policy may assist the world in better understanding and projecting its responses so as how to preserve international peace and energy security. It is essential to avoid worsening of relations which cause instability and disorder, and have fearful consequences for the region in particular and the world in general.

2.4.2. Methodology

The analysis of Russia's foreign policy is conducted to explore the main research question: What were the driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy between March 2012 and April 2015? The Russian Federation is the primary unit of analysis and her foreign policies are the dependent variables. This study will be qualitative and a method such as process-tracing that provides an explanation for causal relationships between independent and dependent variables will be conducted (Collier 2011: 824). A key social science theory such as NCR is the main analytical tool of this thesis. According to Lindemann (2014: 38) "Neoclassical realist studies usually employ a methodological approach consisting of case studies, historical and analytical narratives, and the identification of causal mechanisms between causes and outcomes (process tracing)."

The case study of Russian foreign policy will be conducted from March 2012 to April 2015 for answering the research question and testing the hypotheses. Tayfur (1994: 125-126) states that every country has its own distinct foreign policy due to its history and culture and the case study approach is better since it "insists on the uniqueness of the foreign policies of each state." It is clear that a key limitation of any case study is that its results may not be applied to a general pattern. However, by analyzing Russian foreign policy before and after the Ukraine crisis, this research may discover vital factors influencing Russia's policies of reorientation and re-evaluations of relations with Western Europe which might have been neglected through generalisations of states' different foreign policies (ibid.: 126). This research is particularly interested in Russia's conduct and why she pursued policies of re-evaluation of relations vis-a-vis the EU. Some sources say that the Ukraine crisis is the worst one between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War (BBC 2015). Therefore, it is highly likely that the Ukraine crisis may have had a great impact on reorientation of Russian foreign policy behaviour towards the EU.

It is important to explain why this thesis examines the period of time from 2012 to April 2015 to draw a pattern of conduct and discover what impact the political leaders' perceptions had on Russian foreign policy. The study of this particular time frame is essential since it was the period of volatile changes in European region ranging from the Russian presidential elections in 2012, the removal of the Ukrainian president in 2014 posing a threat to Russian national interests and instigating the Ukraine crisis, to the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014 viewed as a phenomenon violating international laws and endangering the established norms and principles in the EU. In addition, Tayfur (1994: 137) states:

Crises are situations where an (unanticipated) threat is directed to high priority goals of a state which in turn require action in a short time. During crisis periods decision makers are under great stress and this affects their perceptions and ability to act differently than under normal conditions. Moreover, since crises mostly become turning points either in the history of individual states or in the working international system, they occupy an important place in the study of foreign policy.

It is evident that Russia is one of the main actors having high stakes in the Ukraine crisis. Taking into account the fact that the Ukraine crisis was acknowledged to be the worst since the end of the Cold War, the study of Russian foreign policy in the period preceding the Ukraine crisis and during it may present an interesting case for an analysis.

The analysis is conducted in the following way. First, the prominent neo-classical realists' works are reviewed to determine assumptions they provide and which variables in particular should be examined. Next, hypotheses tested in this thesis are formulated based on knowledge obtained from neoclassical realists' literature. Third, literature review that defines the main concepts of this paper is carried out. Then, research carried out in the study of Russian foreign policy by various scholars is examined in order to discover factors that drove Russia's foreign policy in past as well as methodologies and approaches these scholars adopted to accomplish the research objectives. Likewise, works of different scientists which examined different states' foreign policies, including Russia's, by using neoclassical realism as a theoretical framework of their analysis are reviewed. Next, the operationalization of the dependent variables as well as the sources of data, and what data in particular is analyzed is described to answer the research question and test the hypotheses. Finally, in the concluding chapter the findings and limitations of this study obtained by applying the current research design are highlighted.

2.4.3. Operationalization

On the basis of a social science theory, namely NCR and research on various factors affecting a state's foreign policy, the following independent variables were selected to determine forces behind Russian foreign policy behaviour: Russia's economic and military power, the political elites' perceptions of systemic factors, and last but not least the government accountability determining the government capacity to mobilize available resources without facing any constraints from the general public. It is a well known fact that Russia is heavily dependent on revenues from gas and oil exports as revenues are vital for the Russian economy (Vatansever 2010: 5). Therefore, the prices on hydrocarbons may have both positive and negative impact on Russian economy in particular, and military in general; on the one hand, if the prices are high then it empowers Russia's economy; on the other hand, if prices are low then it should have a negative impact and weaken Russia's economy.

Russia's economic and military power which it might have used to influence other states' leaders are measured via GDP, hydrocarbon's prices and the defense budget, respectively. However, Treverton and Jones state that GDP "provides a limited picture [of economic] power since it does not draw an explicit picture of the state's economic composition" (2005: 5). By the same token, the defence budget may not be the best indicator of military power providing misleading conclusions. Therefore, for the sake of a robust analysis a researcher should operationalize a state's economic and military power through other indicators in order to gather more reliable data. However, it is beyond the scope of the current thesis due to the time constraints. Thus, the measurement of Russia's military and economic power is limited to GDP and the defense budget data, except data of hydrocarbon' prices.

Next, I analyze the intervening variable, namely the political elite's perceptions of systemic factors, in particular challenges and pressures interpreted by Russian leaders as threats. According to Hermann (1983: 282), "Systemic variables refer to characteristics of the entire international system and have the same value (although not necessarily the same implications) for all members of the system (e.g., the amount of conflict occurring in the world at any given time)." These perceptions are generalized as statesmen views. They are measured through an elaborate examination of Russian political leaders' public speeches and statements on Russia's foreign policy strategies which were made between March 2012 and April 2015. The period of the analysis starts in March 2012 marking the election of Vladimir Putin, the president of the Russian Federation, and his first address to the general public on March 5th 2012 (Owen 2012, The Economist 2012). The analysis ends in April 2015 marking the president's latest perception

of systemic factors as threats to Russia (The Guardian 26 April 2015). In conjunction with the speeches and statements, the examination of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on 12 February 2013 laying out "the major official Russian statements about foreign policy" is conducted (Mathers 2012: 496, MFA of Russia 2013).

However, the effect of this intervening variable can be less robust since leaders' perceptions expressed via statements and press releases can be politically motivated and therefore will not represent actual attitudes. This drawback is compensated by encompassing a period of four years. According to Mathers, "An examination of all the statements made on a particular topic over a lengthy period can, however, reveal patterns and trends that might be overlooked when focusing only on a small number of high-profile speeches. (2012: 514-515). Furthermore, neoclassical realists' assumptions state that foreign policy is generated after systemic variables have been filtered through political leaders' perceptions and consequently they may have affected the policies and strategies Russia pursued.

Another intervening variable, that is the government accountability, is generalized as public control. It is measured by analyzing datasets containing information on voice and accountability per country as well as the level of corruption. The measurement of this variable is necessary for the establishment of the Russia political leaders' accountability and extent to which they exerted influence on the domestic constituencies. As indicated in the World Bank's report about state-society synergy of accountability: "... a powerful accountability structure... holds every public official responsible for his/her actions as a public servant" (The World Bank 2004: 7). In addition, scholarly articles touching upon public support in the period in question as well as what resistance the Russian leaders experienced from the local public are reviewed. Domestic pressures present at the time of the analyzed period are examined since as proposed by Fearon (1998) and assumed by neoclassical realists they may affect a state's foreign policy.

2.4.3. Data

GDP, hydrocarbon's prices and the defense budget

The data for the qualitative measures used in this thesis is collected for the analysis of Russia's foreign policy behaviour. Economic power's proxies, GDP and hydrocarbon's prices, data in the period of 2012 and 2015 are obtained from Minfin Russia 2015 and CBR 2015. Military power's proxy, military expenditure, data is collected from SIPRI 2015.

The Russian political elite's perceptions

Data about Russian political leaders' perceptions are obtained from secondary sources, namely scholarly articles, books as well as prominent media sources, such as the BBC, CSIS, the Economist, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, the Guardian, the Stratfor, the RT, Izvestia, and Tass. In addition to secondary sources, I also examine data from primary sources. The Kremlin's official website is one such source and presents a reliable one, where official public statements of the Russian leaders relating to foreign policy issues are presented with no access restrictions. Another source to analyze official Russian government documents, such as the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013 where Russia's foreign policy's objectives are circumscribed is available on the Russian Foreign Ministry website on a free basis.

The government accountability, public resistance and support

The data necessary for the analysis of this variable is gathered from the WB dataset, namely The Worldwide Governance Indicators, the section evaluating voice and accountability per country in particular. According to the World Bank it "Reflects perceptions of the extent to which a country's citizens are able to participate in selecting their government, as well as freedom of expression, freedom of association, and a free media" (World Bank 2015). Another source is the Corruption Perception Indices 2012, 2013, and 2014, in which data about the level of corruption present in the Russian Federation is illustrated. Political corruption decreases the level of political accountability due to the lack of information citizens are delivered (Adsera et al. 2003: 448). I also, examine various pieces of scholarly research on Russian domestic public support and resistance towards the Russian leaders carried out between 2012 and 2015. The following section contains the findings obtained by examining the variables identified in the current part of the thesis. Next, the summarizing section presents the results of the examination before turning to the concluding section. Finally, the concluding part of the thesis analyses the findings, the main research question and the hypothesis of this study.

Chapter 3

3.1 Historical Background

This section presents a historical background which touches upon the independent variables analyzed in this thesis to answer the research question and test the hypotheses. It starts with an explanation of the documents, institutions, actors, and strategic objectives that contribute to designing Russia's foreign policy. Then it discusses the main drivers of Russia's foreign policy before and during the Ukraine crisis, such as her economic and military power, the political leaders' perceptions of threats, as well as domestic public support and opposition. Finally, the findings are discussed in the concluding section.

On March 4th2012, at the presidential elections, Vladimir Putin was elected as the next president of the Russian Federation (The Economist 05 March 2012). The centrality of Russian president's role in designing a state's foreign policy is inalienable. Article 80 and 86 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation delegates the President with the right to "determine the guidelines of the internal and foreign policies of the State [and] to govern the foreign policy of the Russian Federation."⁴ Although the Russian MFA is formally charged with creation and realization of foreign policy, its role in shaping Russia's foreign policy strategy has been diminished significantly and limited to implementing policies generated in the Kremlin (Bilyana 2014: 180).

*Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*⁵ signed by Vladimir Putin on February 12, 2013, for instance, contains the main strategies and objectives of Russia's foreign policy, namely "Guarantee the safety of the country, protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty, ensuring its standing position in the international community as one of the influential and competitive poles in today's world" (Gonzalez 2013: 3) The protection of her core interests such as securing its sphere of influence over post-Soviet space has become top priority goal for Russia as a regional power since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Leichtova 2014: 7, Hancock 2007: 94, Fetisova 2012). The ongoing Ukraine crisis, which Foreign Affairs Minister Sergei Lavrov called "artificially created", is a result of the realization of such an objective, namely maintaining influence on Ukraine in the orbit of the Russian Federation (Lakymenko 2014).

It is a well known fact that Russia is a leading exporter of oil and gas. Therefore, one of the main drivers of Russia's foreign policy is her economic power in the form of its energy leverage. In this thesis Russian economic power is measured by looking at GDP and hydrocarbon prices.

⁴ Chapter 4, Article 80 and 86, "The Constitution of the Russian Federation" available at <http://www.constitution.ru/>.

⁵ "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" available at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D.

Russia's GDP (Table 3) rose from 62218.4 billion rubles in 2012 to 66193.7 billion rubles in 2013 before falling sharply to 52392.6 billion rubles in 2014 which is tantamount to approximately 2.017 trillion USD⁶, 2.097 trillion USD, and 1.660 trillion USD, respectively.

Table 3: Gross Domestic Product Rates, 2012 - 2014

Year	2012	2013	2014
Billion Rubles	62218,4	66193,7	52392,6

Source: Table based on data provided by [Ministry of Finance of the RF](#)

Compared to GDP, there was a steady decline in oil and gas prices between 2012 and 2014. Average oil prices, for instance, decreased from 103,14 in 2012 to 100,41 a barrel in 2013 and continued falling to 94,22 in 2014 (Table 4).

Table 4: Exports of Russian Oil for 2012-2014

Year	Total (m/t)	Value million USD	Non CIS (m/t)	CIS (m/t)	Average Price of Export USD/bbl
2012	240	180929,7	211,6	28,4	103,14
2013	236.6	173669,6	208,0	28,7	100,41
2014	223.4	153887,9	199,3	24,1	94,22

Source: Table based on data provided by [Central Bank of Russia 2015](#)

Gas prices followed the same trend declining from 348.33 in 2012 to 342.99 in 2013 and by around 26 USD in the following year reaching the point of 317.00 in 2014 (Table 5)

Table 5: Exports of Russian gas for 2012-2014

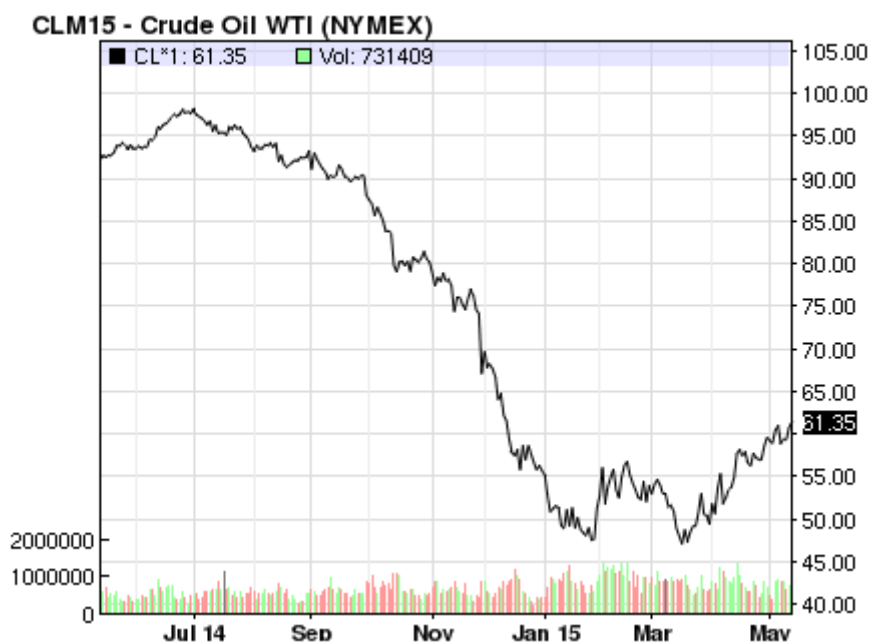
Year	Total (bcm)	Value million USD	Non CIS (bcm)	CIS (bcm)	Average Price of Export USD/1000 cm
2012	178,7	62253,3	112,7	66,0	348,33
2013	196,4	67232,3	138,0	58,4	342,29
2014	174,3	55240,3	126,2	48,0	317,00

Source: [Central Bank of Russia](#)

However, it is important to note that in the second half of the 2014 oil prices plunged to around 40 USD per barrel (Figure 5). According to Plumer (2015), on January 23, 2015 "the price of Brent crude was... down to 49\$ per barrel."

⁶World Bank available at <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/views/reports/tableview.aspx>

Figure 5: Oil prices between 2014 and 2015



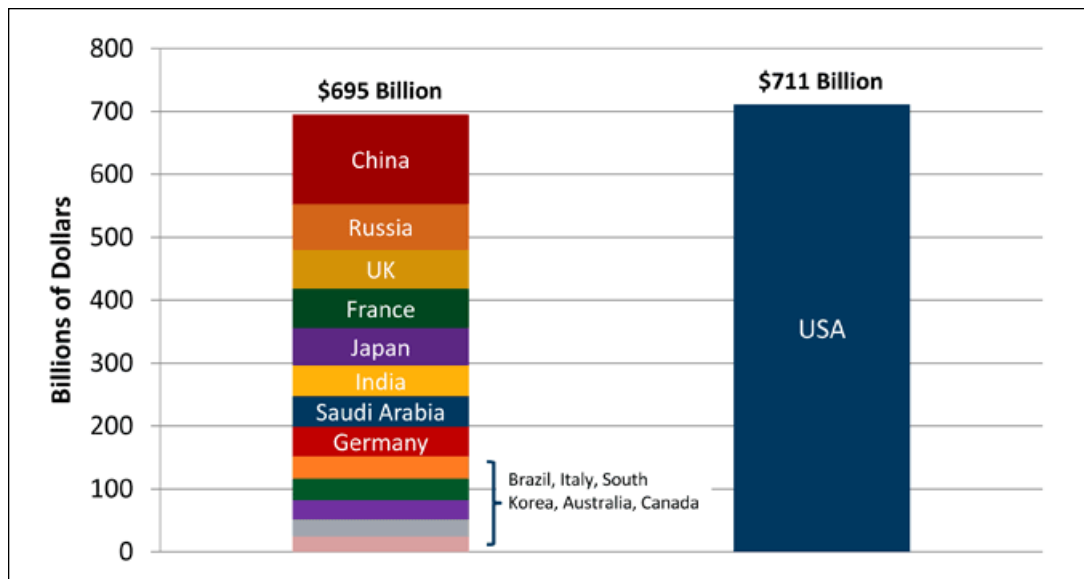
Source: [NASDAQ](#).

Being a major energy supplier allows Russia to use one of the instruments of her economic power, namely her energy card as an effective tool of its foreign policy. Many states, including members of the EU are heavily dependent on Russia's energy supplies, which she has been using as a tool of foreign policy to influence the EU's conduct. In fact, Russia in its turn is dependent on the revenues earned from such supplies (Aron 2013, Vášáryová 2015: 111). Despite such interdependence EU and Russia found themselves at odds while engaging in the Ukraine affair. While the former is a promoter of "human right and openness", the latter puts a great emphasis on her monopoly on power within her "semiauthoritarian regime in democratic clothing" (Krastev 2009, Evans 2012: 239). The clash of interests over Ukraine generated what later would be named as "the worst East-West crisis since the Cold War, after Ukraine's pro-Moscow president Viktor Yanukovich was driven from power by violent protests in Kiev" on February 22 2014. (BBC News 2015, Booth 2014).

Shortly after the coup, the Russian president mobilized Russian military forces to take an active part in the Crimean peninsula's internal affairs (Lantier 2015, Mearsheimer 2014). This was a demonstration of another driver of Russia's foreign policy that is its military power. It is measured through an analysis of her defense budget. It is worth pointing out that Russia is among the top 3 countries with the largest military expenditure (Figure 6). In addition, if Russia

is evaluated in terms of military capacity then its "status falls only slightly below that of the United States" (Hancock: 2007: 94)

Figure 6: Top ten military expenditures



Source: Plumer, Brad. "America's Staggering Defense Budget, in Charts." 2013

In 2012 Russia's military expenditure was just above 81 billion USD or 4% of its GDP while this figure in 2013 rose by more than 6 billion reaching the amount of around 88 billion USD which was 4.2% of her GDP. Although in 2014 Russia's defense budget accounted for 4.5% of its GDP, compared to 2013 it decreased in terms of USD to approximately 85 billion USD (Table 6).

Table 6: Military expenditure, in current US\$ m., 2012-2014

Year	2012	2013	2014
M/USD	81079	87831	84462
% of GDP	4.0	4.2	4.5

Source: Table based on data provided by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute ([SIPRI](http://www.sipri.org))

Taking into account Russia's military potential, it comes as no surprise that the realization of plans in securing control over the Crimea was not a difficult task. Furthermore, Russia has had a naval base in the Crimean port of Sevastopol since time immemorial and a great number of her troops were already deployed there during the Ukraine crisis which rendered this operation even more realistic (Mearsheimer 2014, Lakymenko 2014, BBC News 13 March 2015). In addition,

the Russian president confessed in a documentary film "*Crimea. The Road Back Home*,"⁷ shown in March 2015 that Russia was ready to engage in a nuclear war (Lantier 2015).

Another expression of Russia's military power culminated, first, in the provision of "advisers, arms, and diplomatic support to the Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine" and, second, in the deployment of substantial number of soldiers on the Ukraine border to send a message to a new Ukrainian government that in case of attacks on pro-Russian Eastern Ukrainians Russian President will authorize invasion (Mearsheimer 2014). Pifer emphasizes that "Russia's use of its military to seize Crimea, fuel Ukrainian separatism and invade Donbas broke the cardinal rule of the European security order: states should not use military force to take territory from neighbours" (2015: 120). In order to understand why Russia pursued such assertive policies one needs to analyze the underlying causes of the Ukraine crisis. They might have been the result of tensions that have been growing between Russia and the West over many burning issues of the international dimension. Take for example the wide disagreement about the Syrian crisis, in which Russia has opposed humanitarian intervention and used its veto power in the UNSC (the only legitimate body which can authorize the use of force to maintain international peace and security) to block resolution about invasion (Yusin 2012, Holly 2013). Russia's objection to impose sanctions on Syria came under harsh criticism and condemnation from the West (Gabbatt 2012; Al Jazeera 2012). Nevertheless, Russia was ready to bear the costs of confrontation with the West since the Russian leaders feared that it was not a question of Syrian President Bashar and his political system's survival but that of their own (Holly 2013).

Another stumbling block between Russia and the West has been NATO's expansion in post-Soviet sphere of influence, namely Eastern Europe. Russia has expressed numerous times her concerns about NATO's policies in Eastern Europe. These concerns were outlined in a new version of *the Russian Federation Military Doctrine*⁸ which was approved by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 26 December 2014 (Engel 2014). This doctrine identifies NATO's buildup and destabilization of several regions as the main threat to Russia's national security (Burilkov 2013: 1045, Goure 2014: 70). Chapter 2, Article 12 of *the Russian Federation Military Doctrine* states that the main external threats are "NATO's expansion and its endowment with global decision-making power in violation of international law, as well as the destabilization of countries adjacent to Russia by overthrowing legitimate public authorities and the establishment of governments whose policies threaten the Russian Federation interests" (The Kremlin 26

⁷ "*Crimea. The Road Back Home*," available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t42-71RpRgI>

⁸ "The Russian Federation Military Doctrine" available at <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>

December 2014). It also says that in case of aggression against Russia it instructs armed forces to mobilize and use nuclear weapons (Engel 2014, RT News 2014).

Thus, the overthrow of Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich and the establishment of a new government with anti-Russian policies presented a threat to both Russia's interest and its national security. Moreover, the Russian political leaders' strong belief that the coup was backed by Berlin and Washington ignited a new wave of tensions between Russia and the West (Lantier 2015). Vladimir Putin at the Russian Security Council meeting held on 22 July 2014 said that "undesirable regimes... get destabilised" by applying tools such as "colour revolutions, or, in simple terms - takeovers instigated and financed outside" (The Kremlin 22 July 2014). This statement was the reiteration of what he had said on March 4 2014 "...my assessment of what happened in Kiev and in Ukraine in general. There can only be one assessment: this was an anti-constitutional takeover, an armed seizure of power" (The Kremlin 4 March 2014). Furthermore, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov expressed the opinion that Obama's remarks about the transition of power in Ukraine are "proof that from the very beginning, the United States was involved in the antigovernment coup that Obama neutrally described as a 'power transition'" (The TASS 2015; The RadioFreeEurope 2015).

As a result, not only did Russia mobilize its troops in the Crimea, but it also supported the Crimean parliament in its attempt to hold a referendum. On 16 March 2014, the Crimean population was asked whether they wanted to become part of the Russian Federation or they wanted to "return to the 1992 Constitution entitled Crimea to full sovereign powers in terms of establishing relations with other States..."⁹. Subsequently, almost 97% of the voters at the referendum voted for the first option (Blockmans 2014). As a result, Crimea seceded unilaterally, proclaimed independence and *asked*¹⁰ the Russian government if it can become part of the Russian Federation.¹¹ On 18 March 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin addressed State Duma deputies, Federation Council members, heads of Russian regions and civil society representatives in the Kremlin about Crimea becoming a subject of the Russian Federation.¹² In his speech he emphasized Russia's vision of international affairs. He said that "Key international institutions are not getting any stronger; on the contrary in many cases, they are sadly degrading. Our Western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by

⁹ International Law and Legality of Secession in Crimea, 2014: *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law (CJICL)* available at: <http://cjicl.org.uk/2014/04/20/international-law-legality-secession-crimea/>>.

¹⁰ "Ukraine Crisis: Crimean MPs Ask to Join Russia, 2014: BBC News available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26477848>>.

¹¹ International Law and Legality of Secession in Crimea, 2014: *Cambridge Journal of International and Comparative Law (CJICL)* available at: <http://cjicl.org.uk/2014/04/20/international-law-legality-secession-crimea/>>.

¹² Address by President of the Russian Federation, March 18, 2014, 15:50, The Kremlin, Moscow available at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

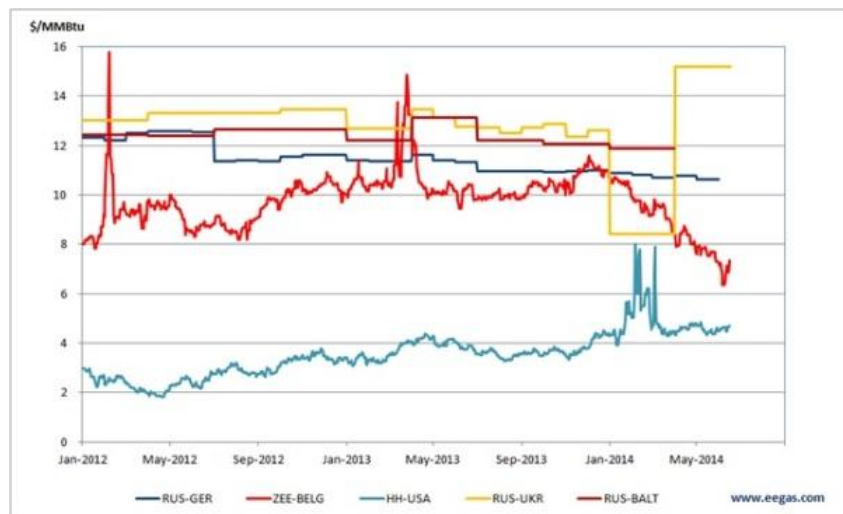
international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun" (The Kremlin 18 March 2014). He also added that the transition of Ukrainian President was "actions aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration" (ibid.). Similarly, Vladimir Putin noticed that the imposition of sanctions by the West to threaten Russia is "the infamous policy of containment, led in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries" which, in fact, takes place today as well (ibid.). However, he warned that "If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard "(ibid.). Among others he draws particular attention to Ukraine's declarations about joining NATO which would present "not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia" (ibid.). In concluding remarks he asked the Federal Assembly to consider and support the acceptance of Crimea as "this is a matter for Russia's own political decision, and any decision here can be based only on the people's will, because the people is the ultimate source of all authority"(ibid.).

The acceptance of Crimea drove a wedge between Russia and the EU setting up a trend of mutually damaging interactions. The fragile "truce" that has been established since the end of the Cold War between Russia and the West enabled the former to improve relations with the EU creating conditions for mutually beneficial cooperation. However, Russia's strategy in the Ukraine crisis put an end to collaboration and endangered the preservation of security in the European region. While the EU pursued the policies containing the promotion of the rule of law and democracy by backing up the government transition in the Ukraine, Moscow substantiated a claim that "the entire space of the former Soviet Union [is] a zone of the Kremlin's special geostrategic interest, from which outside political - and even economic- influence should be excluded" (Brzezinski 1997: 136). Crimea's annexation was interpreted by the West as illegal and a violation of international norms and principles. According to Smith and Eschenko, "German Chancellor Angela Merkel has said that the so-called referendum and the acceptance of Crimea to the Russian Federation go against international law" (Smith et al. 2014). This statement was made in the aftermath of the imposition of sanctions by the EU on March 17, 2017 which composed of "the first travel bans and asset freezes against Russian and Ukrainian officials."¹³ These sanctions can be understood as "a type of economic isolation largely unseen since the Soviet era" (Sonne et al. 2014). Russia itself was pursuing policies being far from benevolent. Before the Ukraine crisis Russia levelled accusations and expressed discontent mostly in a verbal manner, whereas as the tensions intensified between Russia and the EU the former started to rely on practical means as well.

¹³ "EU Sanctions against Russia over Ukraine Crisis." *EUROPA* available at <http://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/eu_sanctions/index_en.htm>. h27

First, the state-owned [Gazprom](#) announced in the first quarter of 2014 that it would not extend discounts on gas prices (Figure 7) supplied to Ukraine (Aleksashenko 2014). On top of that, in April 2014 Ukraine lost the 100 dollar discount due to Russia's abolishment of the agreement on the Black Sea Float and as a result " the price of gas for Ukraine in the second quarter of 2014 should have been 485 dollars per bcm based on 2009 agreement" (Aleksashenko 2014). Gazprom further pressured Ukraine whose debts had grown to 4.45 billion USD announcing in June 2014 that it would supply gas to Ukraine on a prepayment system basis only (ibid.).

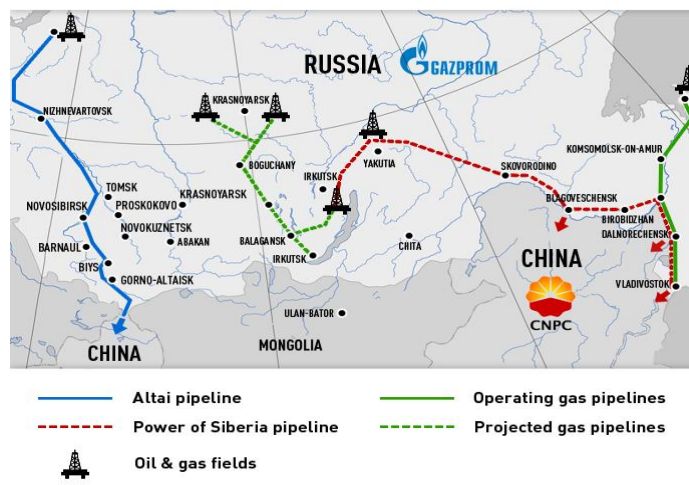
Figure 7: Price of Russian gas for Ukraine, Germany, and the Baltic States (\$/MmBTU)



Source: Aleksashenko, Sergei. "Is There a Solution?" 22 July 2014.

Second, a 400 billion USD agreement (Figure 8) between Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Company was the result of negotiations between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping in May 2014 (Jenkins 2014).

Figure 8: Russia-China Gas deal



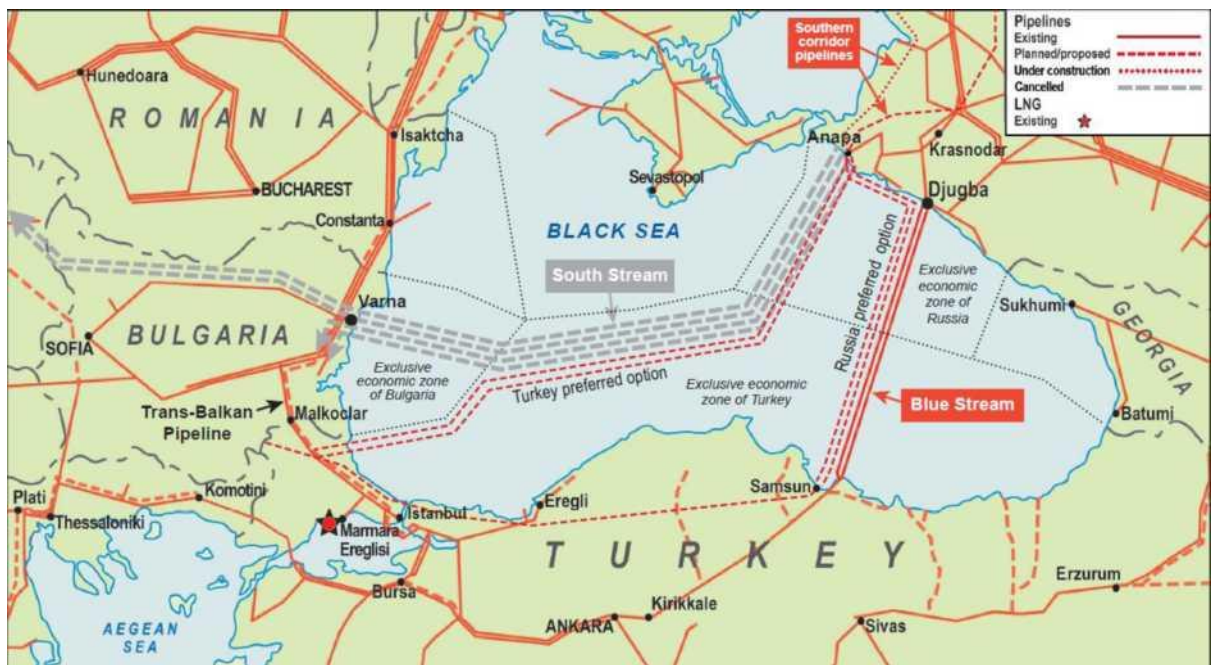
Source: [RT](#)

This deal, if implemented, on the one hand decreases Russia's dependence on revenues from exports to EU; on the other hand, it makes China the largest consumer of Russia's gas and, opens the market to energy-dependent Japan (Jenkins 2014). However, more importantly it diversifies Russia energy exports and gives her extra leverage in playing its energy card (ibid.).

Third, on 7 August 2014 Russia took revenge and banned the imports of a wide range of food products from several countries, including the EU, for the imposition of sanctions on her (Sonne et al. 2014, Smith 2014). The representatives of the Russian Federation also announced that it might restrict EU airlines to use her airspace for flights to Asia (The Guardian Sept. 2014).

Finally, the most striking policy Russia pursued which could be indicative of a clear trend of reorientation and reevaluation of relations was the cancellation of the South Stream pipeline (Figure 9) deal on 2 December 2014 (Thorpe 2014, Stratfor 2014). Instead of supplying gas directly to southeastern European countries, namely Bulgaria, Hungary and Serbia, Russia announced it would construct a pipeline to Turkey (Aris 2014). To summarize, the general trend in Russia-EU relations irrespective of their interdependence is moving towards a worsening of relations between these legal identities creating tensions and disorder in European region which is destructive for socio-economic and political stability of the region.

Figure 9: South Stream Project



Source: Stern et al. "Does the Cancellation of South Stream Signal a Fundamental Reorientation of Russian Gas Export Policy?" 2015:7

Apart from the strategies and approaches Russia adopted, it is also important to look at political leaders' perceptions of exogenous challenges. Straight after the presidential elections of 2012, Russian President said that "political provocations aimed at only one thing: to destroy Russian statehood and usurp power" cannot be used to deceive the Russian population (The Economist 05 March 2012). Then, while speaking at the international conference on European security on 23 May 2013, Vladimir Putin urged other countries to join forces to fight global threats in the form of "increasing instability in several neighbouring regions, the growing dangers of international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and drug trafficking" (The Kremlin 23 May 2013). However, on 15 July 2014 he warned that "Any attempts to create a model of international relations where all decisions are made within a single 'pole' are ineffective, malfunction regularly, and are ultimately set to fail." (The Kremlin 15 July 2014).

Another perception of challenges was expressed on 18 December 2014, when the Russian President suggested that "attempts are clearly being made to destabilize the social and economic situation, to weaken Russia in one way or another or to strike at our weaker spots, and [the West] will continue primarily to make us more agreeable in resolving international issues (The Kremlin 18 December 2014). Nikolai Patrushev, head of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, supported Vladimir Putin's statement saying on 10 February 2015 that "The Americans are trying to draw the Russian Federation into an interstate military conflict, to achieve regime change through the events in Ukraine and to ultimately dismember our country" (Hille et al. 2015 h20). Therefore, on 16 March 2015 Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu emphasized that "New challenges and threats to military security require the armed forces to further boost their military capabilities" (Grove 2015 h20).

On 26 March 2015, Vladimir Putin reiterated his perceptions and said that "[the West is] using their entire arsenal of means for the so-called deterrence of Russia: from attempts at political isolation and economic pressure to large-scale information war and special services operations... [in order] to discredit the authorities and destabilise the internal situation in Russia" (The Kremlin 26 March 2015). However, he pointed out that "Russia will stand firm "in the West's attempt" to isolate the country politically and pressurize its economy" (Fox News 26 March 2015). Nevertheless, Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev admitted that sanctions had a significant negative impact on Russia's economy (Roth 2015). In addition, he said that despite low oil prices, "the unprecedented external political and economic pressure", such as EU sanctions, Russia's position about Crimea remains the same and Russians are ready to bear the costs (ibid.). The Russian general public's reaction to events such as the 2012 presidential elections in Russia,

Crimea's acceptance, and Western sanctions are touched upon in detail in the following paragraph.

Evans (2012: 239) indicates that the political leadership has a strong grip on institutions, namely political parties and legislative bodies which makes it difficult for the general population to express their complaints and disagreements with policies their state pursues. Indeed, the rate of Russian government accountability in 2012 was -0.98 (Table 6). It got worse in 2013 and decreased to -1.01 (Table 6) which mirrors the consolidation of semi-authoritarian regime's control of the channels through which domestic constituencies expresses their discontent (ibid).

Table 6. Russian government accountability 2012-2014

Year	2012	2013	2014
Indicator	-0.98*	-1.01	N/a

*(-2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) governance performance)

Source: Table based on data obtained from The Worldwide Governance Indicators ([WGI](#)) 2014.

Likewise, Russia performed badly from Transparency International ratings' viewpoint scoring 28 in the Corruption Perception indices and was ranked 133 relative to other countries in 2012 (Table 7). Whereas its score remained at the same level in 2013, in relation to other countries, its ranking was improved and shifted by 6 points to 127 (Table 7). However, in 2014 its perceived level of public corruption fell to 27 and therefore Russia was in 136th position among other countries (Table 7).

Table 7. Corruption Perception Indices 2012-2014

Year	2012	2013	2014
Score	28*	28	27
Rank	133**	127	136

* A country/territory's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0-100, where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and a 100 means that a country is perceived as very clean.

** A country's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries/territories included in the index.

Source: Table based on data obtained from [the Corruption Perceptions Index](#) 2012, 2013, 2014.

Despite the low level of government accountability and also scoring at the bottom of the Corruption Perception Indices, the Russian general public's reaction towards the Russian political elite's strategies, including the Ukraine crisis were primarily supportive. Although some Russians question the clarity of the 2012 presidential elections, Vladimir Putin enjoys high public support (PewResearchCenter 22 May 2012).

When Russian leaders approved the plan about Crimea becoming a subject of the Russian Federation, 94% of the population expressed their support (Minina 2014, Scherlok 2014). Volkov (2014) demonstrates that in January 2014 Putin's personal ratings rose from around 65% to 80 straight after Crimea became a part of Russia and continued growing to 88% at the end of the year. Kolonitskii (2014) suggests that what the West did overlook is the fact that even "intelligent critics of Putin support his Ukrainian policy." However, it is important to draw a distinction between the President's support and approval of military intervention and the escalation of situation in Ukraine. Sherlock (2014) notices that the majority of the Russian population is against military intervention. Bell (2014) disagrees with Sherlock stating that there is almost an equal division between Russian society whether to support the military intervention in Eastern Ukraine or not with 41% for and 43% against, respectively. Trenin (2015) emphasizes that while the Russian political elite have been enjoying stable public support since 2012 soaring to peaks in recent years, the opposition remains very weak. He states that "Opposition ... was occasionally visible in the streets, but essentially impotent, lacking broad popular support" (ibid.).

Bakunina lends support to this argument stating that even "the assassination of Boris Nemtsov, a Russian opposition politician" did not instigate the civil disobedience (Bakunina 2015, Harding 2015: 7). This as she says is due to the fact that "Like any other opposition leader in Russia, he was a scribble on the margin of current affairs" (ibid.). Moreover, she argues that "The overwhelming majority of the Russian population supports the country's president, Vladimir Putin" (ibid.). Her statement is supported by figures from a poll conducted in the first quarter of 2015 in which more than one half of the population is in favour of Russia's policies and 86% support the country's president (ibid.). The evidence of high domestic approval could be found in the most recent event held at the anniversary of Crimea's acceptance in which Russians expressed their support in the form of marching the streets of Moscow and attending a concert close to the Kremlin (Birnbaum et al. 2015). Overall, this part of the thesis provided information about, first, Russia's economic and military power, measured through GDP, hydrocarbon prices and the defense budget, respectively; second, the Russian political leaders' public statements concerning their perceptions of exogenous challenges; finally, government accountability, the assessment of the level of corruption as well as public reactions to events between 2012 and 2015 were discussed. In the following section the evaluation of the findings presented in this part is carried out.

3.2. Evaluation

In this section the evaluation of the findings illustrated in the previous chapter is carried out. Before moving to the discussion of the main drivers of Russia's foreign policies, the importance of Russian President in generating foreign policy is examined. Next, in this part of the thesis I analyze which independent variables in my opinion had a greater impact on Russia's strategies.

It is beyond dispute that a formal right to set the country's foreign policy in the Russian Federation belongs to the Russian President. It is evident from the analysis of the Constitution in which this right is specifically highlighted. Moreover, Biliana's (2014: 180) finding that the MFA has been given just administrative functions and implements policies generated in the presidential apparatus is another proof. Therefore, Vladimir Putin set the course Russia would be leading for the next 6 years after the 2012 presidential elections, namely to secure sovereignty and promote its image on the international stage as representing an authoritative and influential actor in international affairs (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2013). More importantly, to accomplish its core interests that is maintaining Russia's sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space in order to project itself as at least a regional power (Leichtova 2014: 7, Hancock 2007: 94, Fetisova 2012). Positive indicators of the economy supported this attempt. Examining hydrocarbon prices (Table 2 & 3), which account substantial revenues for Russia, it can be noticed that they remained relatively high till the end of 2014. This in turn rendered the Russian Economy, its GDP in particular, wealthier before a sharp decline at the end of 2014 (Table 4). This decline is highly likely to be explained by both EU sanctions and gas and oil prices drop. However, instead of restraining herself from deteriorating relations, it was in 2014 when she pursued the most assertive policies.

First, it stands to reason that an increase in gas prices (Figure 4) helped to generate a policy in which Russia used its economic power to increase its leverage over Ukraine and made the Ukrainian government more resilient. Russia knew very well that since Ukraine is heavily dependent on energy supplies from Russia rising gas prices would only exacerbate Ukraine's precarious situation making it more indebted and vulnerable to exogenous factors. In addition, it would make it more difficult for the EU to intervene and assist Ukraine in alleviating the predicament. Russia justified this action, namely an increase in gas prices for a country in a state of crisis as purely economically driven and lacking any political motivation (The Kremlin 4 March 2014).

Second, the acceptance of Crimea as a subject of the Russian Federation can be viewed as a hard-line policy as well. Although Russia stated that she fulfilled and respected the right of the

Crimeans to self-determination, the underlying motives of this policy is far-reaching. It is certainly true that the overthrow of pro-Russian president Viktor Janukovich and establishment of anti-Russian government backed by the West diminished Russia's sphere of influence and deprived her of the ability to exert influence on the Ukrainian government. Nevertheless, by joining the Crimean peninsula Russia, on the one hand, increased its economic power as it acquired vast amounts of offshore fossil fuel reserves beneath the Black Sea bed (Umbach 2015); on the other hand, it secured the position of her Black Sea fleet's base in Crimea and eliminated any practical chance of NATO's expansion in the Black Sea.

Third, the deal between Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Company, which Russia procrastinated about for many years, was signed when the Ukraine crisis was far from being resolved. If signed, this deal will give Russia an opportunity to diversify its energy capabilities. When asked whether "energy diplomacy has become a key factor in geopolitics" and the Russia-China gas deal represents a reorientation from the West to the East, Russian President Vladimir Putin replied that it is partly true and this policy has to do more with economic aspects rather than political due to a striking pace of the Asia-Pacific region development (The Kremlin 18 December 2014). It also sent a strong signal to the EU, which is heavily dependent on Russian gas, that Russia is turning its energy strategy eastwards and EU should started looking for new exporters if she wants to preserve its energy security. It is highly likely that Russia will gain more leverage over the EU if the latter does not find alternative sources of energy supplies. As a result, EU will have to make more concessions to please Russia's demands therefore increasing its role and potential in European region.

Fourth, the Russian embargo on EU food products in August 2014 was a clear policy of revenge for sanctions which the latter had imposed on Russia earlier that year. Although Russia justified this policy claiming that this embargo will have a positive effect on Russia's producers and the general public will also benefit from low prices, this action demonstrated Russia's unwillingness to make any concessions and readiness to pay the high prices for its hard-line policies. It also demonstrated that Russia will not change its policies in the Ukraine crisis and continue to accomplish the objectives it set such as remaining a key actor in influencing Ukrainian affairs.

Finally, the decision that has the potential of changing dynamics of energy security in the EU was Russia's cancellation of the South Stream gas project (Stratfor 2014). On the one hand, it was relief for the EU as Russia would have exerted more influence on South Eastern members of the EU by offering tempting deals which could have weakened EU's bargaining power in different negotiations (Aris 2014). On the other hand, the abandonment of this project

empowered Turkey by making it a crucial player in energy supply and having leverage in the provision of the EU's energy security (Stratfor 2014). This policy stemmed from existing tensions between the EU and Russia, and its adoption demonstrated to the former one more time that Russia still remains a crucial energy supplier and it shapes energy security of the region in a way that most appeases its core national interests.

It is beyond dispute that the acceptance of Crimea benefited Russia in terms of obtaining hydrocarbon reserves but it would be wrong to neglect its military power's projection as one of the driving forces behind such policy. Russia constantly funded its defense budget and not surprisingly is the third top state with highest defense budget which allows her to pursue hard-line policies. The thousands of soldiers that were deployed in the period of the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis were decisive and contributed to a great extent to the realization of Russia's objectives. Securing the positions of Russia's fleet in the Black Sea and the elimination of any future prospects of Crimea becoming a NATO troop base, consolidated Russia's security in its Southern borders. Furthermore, it is a well known fact that the Black Sea gives access to the Mediterranean Sea and further to the Atlantic Ocean. Losing the Crimean peninsula would have weakened Russia national security both regionally and internationally. Having said that, warnings to use nuclear weapons in the wake of Crimea's takeover if Russian armed forces attacked seems realistic taking into account Russia's high stakes in the Ukraine crisis.

National security concerns can be one of the reasons if not the main one why Russia adopted such hard-line policies. The political leaders' perceptions of external challenges may throw light and make the picture more transparent. Vladimir Putin on the very next day after the 2012 presidential elections made a statement that the number one external challenge Russia should fight is the desire of outside actors to divide Russia and seize power. His statement at the international conference on European security on 23 May 2013 can be interpreted as an attempt to offer Western partners to team up in order to fight the burning issues of the contemporary international environment. However, Russia changed its rhetoric in 2014. President Putin's speech on 18 March 2018 can be viewed as an indicator of changing perceptions. He noticed that the West did not respect international institutions and made attempts to destabilise countries adjacent to Russia. He also said that the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovich was against Russia which is an indicator of the Russian political leaders' perception that the West makes constant effort to change the regime in the Russian Federation itself. This argument was publicly expressed by Nikolai Patrushev, head of the Security Council of the Russian Federation on 10 February 2015.

Furthermore, he emphasized that NATO's expansion in Eastern Europe is interpreted by Russia as a threat to its national security. Bock et al. lend support to this argument stating that "Moscow perceives Western political and military expansion (i.e. the admission of East European states in the EU and especially into NATO), as well as defence measures taken by NATO allies (i.e., missile defence), as clear, immediate, and vital threats to Russia's national security" (2015: 102). However, Bilyana puts forward the idea that by condemning NATO's expansion in Eastern European countries Russia wanted to "project influence and power abroad" as well as "its own standing power on the world stage and its ability to control domestic and regional events" (2014: 327). Overall, the hard-line policies Russia pursued to change the situation in its favour may be the result of the changing political elite's perceptions of external challenges which could have a negative impact on Russia's national security and its political leadership. Russian leaders perceived that attempts made by the West in recent years implied the weakening of Russia both militarily and economically in order to diminish its capabilities and potential on the global stage as well as deprive the semi-authoritarian regime of its monopoly on power and subsequently overthrow it.

Despite all external hurdles, Russia managed to withstand these attempts and secured its position at least regionally. In order to accomplish this the Russian government was able to extract and mobilise all the resources assumed by neoclassical realists to be indispensable for the realization of policies. The general public could have been an obstacle but as it is evident from the findings discussed in the previous section quite the polar opposite was true. Not only did the Russian population welcome the acceptance of the Crimean peninsula, but it also enhanced its faith in the Russian President as the protector of their interests and the guarantor of maintaining Russian integrity and sovereignty. Moreover, Russians have always seen Crimea as unjustly taken from them and do not accept the West's condemnation. They view Western sanctions as unfair and an attempt to deprive them of the relative affluence lives they have been experiencing since Putin's coming to power (Trenin 2015).

It is interesting to note that while the government accountability was getting lower and Russia scored nearly at the bottom in the Corruption Perception indices, the general public has become more supportive of their country's course of actions. The very fact that the assassination of the opposition leader in February 2015 did not cause any civil unrest can mean that there are not any real forces domestically that could counter and disagree with the current political regime's decisions and policies (Gil 2015: 102). To summarize, the general public is in favour of its state's policies and is continuing to support the regime however brutal in the West's opinion it might be.

Furthermore, the lack of any sort of opposition allows the Russian political leaders to hold a strong grip on internal affairs and exploit all the resources at their disposal.

Chapter 4

Final Remarks

4.1. Conclusion

In this thesis I carried out a study in Russia's foreign policy between March 2012 and April 2015. This period covers volatile changes in the European region including the worst crisis between Russia and the West since the end of the Cold War. Given Europe's history of destructive past conflicts and Russia's status as a nuclear superpower who feels increasingly encircled by Western expansion, it is perhaps unsurprising that many authors feel that the current stand-off between the EU and Russia is a cause of deep concern. My unit of analysis in this period was Russia and I studied its conduct per se rather than the analysis of its relations with the EU. I examined whether policies generated in this period, during the Ukraine crisis in particular, led to a reorientation and reevaluation of relations between Russia and the EU. It is widely accepted that strategies adopted by the Russian leadership were detrimental both to Russia's image on the international arena as well as its economy. A key social science theory, namely NCR, laid the basis for such an examination as an effective tool for the analysis of different levels. It also was an invaluable instrument for first, identifying variables to be operationalized and, second, examining the driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy. In addition, NCR assisted in the formulation and answering of the main research question as well as testing the hypotheses.

In my opinion, security concerns were one of the driving forces behind Russia's foreign policy between 2012 and 2015. Ukraine presents a post-Soviet space and it is specifically formulated in *the Russian Federation Military Doctrine*¹⁴ that the preservation of the sphere of influence over the former Soviet Union members is a core interest of the Russian Federation. Russia interpreted the loss of Ukraine as endangering its national security and weakening its power both regionally and internationally. Thus, the first hypothesis that greater economic and military power urges Russia to pursue more assertive policies can be partly supported. It is certainly true that Russia utilized its economic power in terms of its energy card but being one of the major military powers plays a greater role in pursuing hard-line policies. Jankowaski stresses that "The military remains a key pillar of Russia's foreign policy" (2015: 26).

The second hypothesis that the Russian political elite perceives the interference of other countries into its sphere of influence as a threat to her national security and therefore pursues hard-line policies can be supported. The Russian political leadership carefully filtered systemic

¹⁴" The Russian Federation Military Doctrine" available at <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>

factors in the form of challenges created by Western counterparts and claimed that the backup of the coup in Ukraine, which Russian leaders view as their sphere of influence, represent a real and not an illusory threat to Russia's national security. Therefore, they are ready to pursue policies however assertive and self-destructive they might seem even to the extent of the use of nuclear weapons.

The third hypothesis that the Russian low government accountability allows her to exert great influence on its general public and therefore pursue hard-line policies cannot be either supported or rejected. In the case of the Ukraine crisis the domestic constituency supported the actions of its government and therefore it is difficult to determine whether public support or government control of public played a decisive role in pursuing hard-line policies.

Overall, it is clear that Russia and the EU are on a collision course. It can be said that the Russia-China gas deal, the cancellation of the South Stream gas project, to name but a few paves a way towards a reevaluation and reorientation of Russo-EU relations. With Russia increasingly aligning itself with Asian countries rather than the EU, it is highly likely that conflict in the European region intensifies. Russia's extra leverage in its energy diplomacy due to the probable absence of dependence on the revenues from exports to the EU, is bound to make it a more influential actor in that region by forcing the energy-dependent EU to make compromises and meeting Russia's core interests requirements. Nevertheless, it is still too early to draw a firm conclusion since the Ukraine crisis is still ongoing at time of writing this thesis making it nearly impossible to predict whether Russia will do a U-turn from the East to the West given its damaged relations with the EU will improve.

4.2. Limitations

This thesis has several limitations. A key limitation of this thesis is that the examination of Russian foreign policy has been carried out during the Ukraine crisis in process. Since the crisis is still ongoing it would be more beneficial to analyze Russian foreign policy when the crisis has ended. Furthermore, studying a phenomenon which already occurred may provide a researcher with an opportunity to acquire more reliable data as they will examine course of actions Russia already adopted. Therefore, it is possible that the conclusions drawn in this thesis may be misleading and factors identified were not necessarily the determinants of Russia's conduct.

The second limitation is the political elite's perceptions. For the researcher, it is extremely difficult to fully grasp the full scope of perceptions which influence the decisions of the political elite. Perhaps at best, we can only have a partial understanding of such perceptions as a result of the fact that we do not have full access to every form of discussion that goes on at the highest levels of government. The problem is compounded when we consider that public statements made by officials often aim at disguising their true motivations in order to accomplish their plans and strategies while at the same time gaining public support. However, this effort to disguise the full picture does not change the fact that a state's foreign policy is generated by political leaders interpreting the challenges of a contemporary environment which has a basis in the real world in which there is both conflict and cooperation. In other words, at the heart of political decision-making there are individuals who create policies based on individual evaluations of structures and processes.

So although the researcher could not possibly have a complete understanding of the political elite's perceptions, he was aware of the assumptions within NCR theory that foreign policy is heavily influenced by intervening variables such as the perceptions of political elites. For example, Russia still wants to be viewed as an important player in the international environment capable of controlling events at the domestic, regional and international level. This can explain why she is so fiercely determined to control its sphere of influence while expressing to be concerned about security issues. This may be exacerbated by the fact Russia is still suffering from the break-up of the Soviet Union and its leaders can be perceived to be experiencing a form of post-imperial syndrome in which there is a feeling of hurt and humiliation for the loss of respect and might of their country (Samokysh 2014).

However, the researcher is aware of that fact that interpreting such perceptions is difficult and can present ambiguous results. Thus, when conducting research in future it is vital to study this variable more extensively in order to correctly identify the factors that have a direct impact on it.

This in turn will allow to gather more reliable data and avoid misinterpretation of findings which could lead to misleading conclusions. Last but not least, is attributed to the measurement of Russia's economic power and its role in forming different strategies. The operationalization of GDP is not sufficient in explaining Russia's use of its economic power. Similarly, hydrocarbon prices just indicated the overall trend of the energy markets. The measurement of other indicators is necessary to determine how Russia uses its economic power in generating its foreign policy. Energy diplomacy, for instance, measured via gas and oil contracts entered into, seems a better indicator of Russia's use of its economic power in its foreign policy behaviour and therefore should be analyzed more thoroughly.

4.3. Implications

There are several theoretical and practical implications that can be inferred from this thesis however complex the study of a state's foreign policy might be. From a theoretical perspective, this study underpinned some of the NCR theory's assumptions especially in regard with political leader's perceptions of external challenges that a state generates foreign policy once systemic factors have been filtered via the decision-makers' perceptions. On the contrary, I was not able to prove NCR's assumptions concerning the mobilisation and extraction of resources due to the fact that the general public was not against chosen strategies. Therefore, the theory may benefit if neoclassical realists elaborate more on circumstances in which a semi-authoritarian regime's policies are not upheld by the local constituency. Likewise, scholars could narrow down the variables which are operationalized contingent to country. The resource extraction might be easier in a country whose government is less constrained by the general public. On the other hand, advanced institutions might support the political leader in solving this obstacle by having better control of the public's needs.

Practical implications can be as follows. It is necessary to avoid the assistance of the government transition when a more stronger neighbour's interests are concerned. On the one hand, it instigates a crisis draining in the general public which bears the highest costs of the conflict in the form of worsening relations between compatriots and nations. On the other hand, it poses a threat to international peace and security which is indispensable in times of acute international problems such as international terrorism which no nation can solve on its own. In order to avoid such crises it is necessary to mitigate national security concerns by inviting parties affected to the table where they will be able to express their opinion and offer their solutions to existing problems.

Overall, NCR theory throws light in the study of Russian foreign policy and assists researchers in informing Russian political debates and policies since its assumptions lay the basis for a framework in which the examination is conducted at multiple levels and intervening variables, namely political leader's perceptions and ability to extract local resources play a decisive role in formulation a state' foreign policy.

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