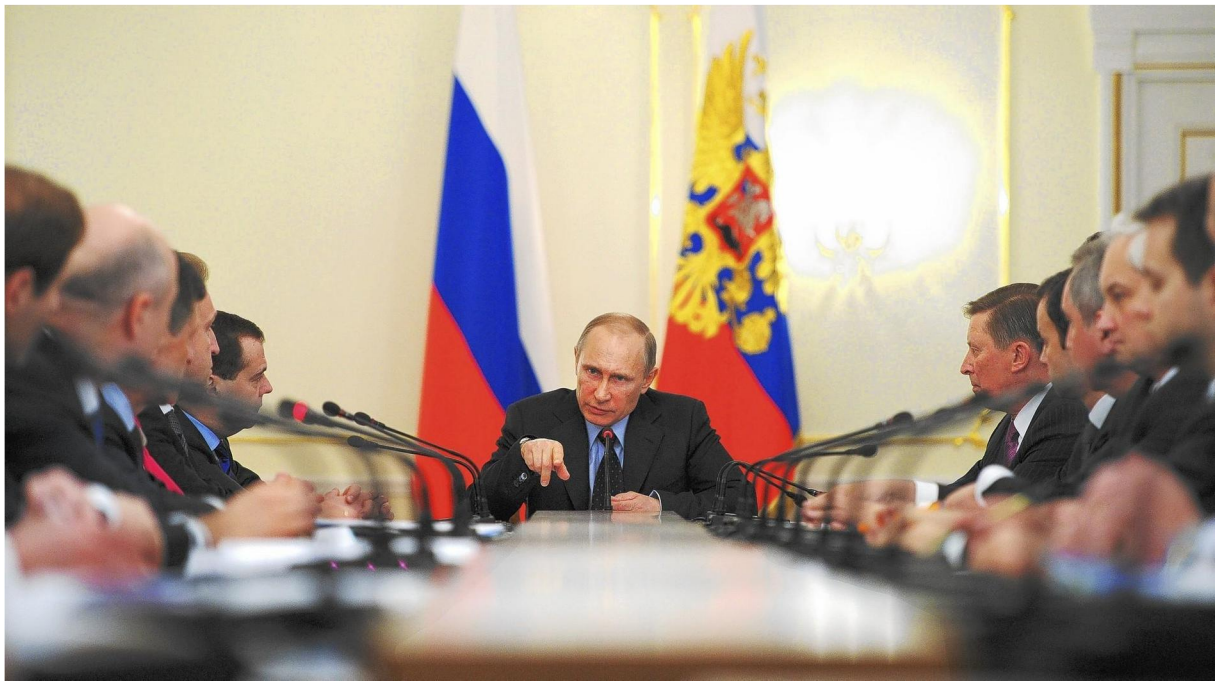
The Eastern Enigma:



(Photo: Alexei Druzhinin / RIA Novosti / Associated Press)

Deconstructing Russian Security Policy under Vladimir Putin

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Master's Thesis

Crisis and Security Management

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

Below, you will find the product of the research for my Master's thesis in the framework of *Crisis and Security Management* (CSM) at the The Hague campus of the Leiden University. The topic at hand, Russia's security policy, comes at crucial time in recent history. Consequently, I hope this thesis will provide you with both interesting and valuable analytical insights.

In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Marcel de Haas, who is specialized in this field of research, for his helpful comments, suggestions, and analysis during the course of my writing.

Abel Hendriks, June 9th
Leiden, The Netherlands.

Abstract

Recent assertive Russian military actions in Ukraine and Syria have taken Western analysts by surprise, and have constituted a serious challenge for national security policymakers. In this context, it is of crucial importance to understand why Russian security policy under Russian president Vladimir Putin has developed to this point. This thesis comprises four different units of analysis: Putin's 'formative years' (2000-2008); the Russo-Georgian War (2008); the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014-ongoing); and the military intervention in Syria (2015-ongoing). This thesis concludes that Russian military assertiveness has been shaped by experiences from all four units: in 2000-2008, Russia perceived a deteriorating geostrategic security environment but also consolidated internal stability. In 2008, Russia witnessed strategic success as it eliminated Georgian-NATO rapprochement and consolidated independence of Georgia's breakaway regions, but it also exposed operational deficiencies. This provided the background for Rusian action in Ukraine and Syria. In Ukraine, Russia saw economic and military strategic opportunities, through which to counter what it sees as the U.S.-led 'unipolarity' in international relations. In Syria, Russia's move to protect the Assad regime was again directed to safeguard economic and military interests, as well as a testing ground for its new military equipment following post-Georgian reform.

1. Introduction

In the past few years, Russian military actions have brought about a reshaping of the contemporary international security constellation. On the eastern European perimeter, Russian forces have been present in operations in support of separatist rebels on Ukrainian soil. In the Middle East, Russia has asserted itself more overtly in the form of a vigorous air campaign in support of the Syrian Ba'athist regime led by Bashar Al-Assad. The swiftness by which Crimea was incorporated into the Russian Federation, accompanied by the generally belligerent an enigmatic attitude of Vladimir Putin, have raised serious concerns about what is yet to come. Former chess champion and Putin critic Garry Kasparov was prompted by these actions to argue a rather bleak forecast for the future: W*inter Is Coming* (2015). In the same vein, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (Kendall, 2014) extrapolated the rising tensions between the West and Russia, and argued that a New Cold War is upon us.

Although one could argue that these warnings are perhaps too alarmist or exaggerated, it should be of no doubt that recent Russian assertive and aggressive military actions have surprised analysts in the West. This surprise, in turn, provides an indication that it is important to increase our understanding of the doctrinal foundations of Russian security policy and the implications these foundations have for the projection and operations of Russian armed forces in the world. Russia's influence on international security, accompanied with Vladimir Putin's enigmatic and seemingly unpredictable character, is certainly too significant to be simply ignored.

However, in order to gain this essential insight, some historical analysis is indispensible. Rarely are we treated with analysis that seeks to comprehensively integrate doctrinal ideas and historical developments. I believe this rarity poses a fundamental problem – the framework in which we seek to understand and conceptualize Russian security policy should be subject to expansion and deepening by the scientific community, to which I, in my own way, hope to make a modest contribution. In short, the interaction between Russian actions and its overall strategic doctrine requires systematic unpacking.

The problematic events that I have outlined are strongly linked with public administration and Crisis and Security Management in particular because they revolve around the Russian idea of national security in the context of the developments in international affairs. The very fundamental critical questions that we ask in the context of Crisis and Security Management

are related to Baldwin's (1997) theoretical articulations of the concept of security: security for whom, for which values, from what threats, by what means, and so on.

For practitioners in the field of crisis and security management, it is of crucial importance to grasp these Russian perspectives on security. Knowing how to interpret the Russian security priorities and capabilities is indispensable for those who endeavour to formulate effectively tailored policy responses to Russian actions. Furthermore, this understanding is especially relevant in the current societal context, in which it is increasingly demanded of the bodies of the state to not just act *ex post facto* but additionally to perform anticipatory action, so that there is institutionalized preparedness for future threats (Anderson, 2010). One possible indication for future threats surrounding Russian actions is to look at the trajectory of developments that have occurred in the recent past.

There is another crucial reason why deconstructing the Russian perspective is beneficial for Western societies, academia, and policymaking: non-Western perspectives can be underrepresented in a society and scientific community that is highly dependent on North-American and West-European strategic initiatives. To be sure, this status quo is a logical and understandable consequence of the academic's own bias and American strategic prominence as a whole. Today, the U.S. spends about ten times as much on defence compared to Russia, and that is discounting its extensive web of alliances (Military Expenditure Database, 2015). Nevertheless, a more diverse outlook can be a valuable contribution to the field - not least because Western strategists struggle to find effective answers to the recent Russian actions. This is not to say, of course, that this Russian outlook should uncritically and necessarily be taken as righteous: understanding and applauding are two separate activities.

All in all, this thesis will study a significantly long period in security policy, starting with Putin's ascension to the Russian presidency in 2000, and ending with the last published document on security policy, which is the National Security Strategy of December 31, 2015, connecting the dots between the crucial events that helped shape the Kremlin's ideas about the world. In essence, this thesis will attempt to deconstruct the current Russia by unfolding its recent past. This leads us to the formulation of the following Research Question:

1.1. Research Question

Russia's current strategy under Vladimir Putin has an assertive and offensive nature. Why has Russia's security policy developed in such a way?

1.2. Sub Questions

1. How have Putin's 'Formative years' (2000-2008) influenced security policy?
2. How has the Georgian War influenced security policy?
3. How has the Russian-Ukrainian conflict influenced security policy?
4. How has the Syrian intervention influenced security policy?

1.3. Conceptualisation

I do not intend to use a specific theoretical framework as a guiding manual; rather, the nature of this method is more inductive. The conceptual framework of this thesis concerns, foremost, a historical relationship between experiences and documentation. This documentation, however, will allude to different, often overlapping concepts: phrases such as *military strategy* or *military doctrine* may be utilized at different times, depending on the context and the unit of analysis in question. The catch-all concept I use in my research question is *security policy*. Once a policy is directed to address certain perceived threats, one may speak of a security policy, which, in this thesis, includes military threats as its most important subset.

Scholars do not always agree on the exact definitions on what may be regarded to be in the conceptual realm of a 'doctrine' or a 'strategy' (Posen, 1984: 245). Thus, it is important to further specify what is meant when these concepts are utilized. Military doctrine, then, is a subset of this security policy which relates to the Latin word *doctrina* ("thought"). Documents relating to military doctrine usually provide a theoretical framework, the accepted rationale in which the military actions of the state are justified (Sloan, 2012: 44). They form a "critical component" (Posen, 1984: 13) of national security policy which deals with the military means to respond to recognized threats and opportunities. An important purpose of doctrine is to communicate 'best practices' and 'lessons learned', which means it is heavily influenced by recent experienced military-historical events (Kiras, 2014: 241).

These events influence the degree to which the state's military doctrine fits either an aggressive, defensive, or deterrent ideal-type. This threefold typology of military doctrine is derived from Posen (1984: 14). Offensive doctrines "aim to disarm an enemy – to destroy his armed forces. Defensive doctrines aim to deny an adversary the objective that he seeks. Deterrent doctrines aim to punish an aggressor – to raise his costs without reference to reducing one's own". Doctrines rarely precisely fit these ideal-types, but often lean in a certain direction, depending on a catalogue of domestic and international variables. Recent

Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine suggest that it has recently shifted toward a more offensive ideal-type.

In essence, the concept of (military) strategy is founded upon the timeless Clausewitzian premise that war is an instrument of policy: "the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose" (Clausewitz, 1984: 87). If we accept that war is policy by other means, we accept that the decision to use military force is a political decision that seeks to augment the state's security. This, in essence, is military strategy: "the art of using military force against an intelligent foe(s) towards the attainment of policy objectives" (Lonsdale, 2014: 23). It is the ultimate instrument at the disposal of the state's high-level officials, but certainly not the only one.

'Security policy', alternatively 'national security strategy' or 'grand strategy', is the overlapping term of this thesis, because it does not exclusively relate to the military instrument. Security policy articulates how the state plans to achieve 'security' for itself, using the collective of national resources at its disposal. Since 'security' is a highly fungible, constantly redefined concept, strategic objectives therein may consist of countering perceived both internal and external threats to the state in nearly every aspect of policy, including those that are located in, for example, the environmental or possibly even the cultural realm – it is the states' general construction of threats and opportunities (Speller and Tuck, 2014: 10; Posen, 1984: 13).

One of the pioneering works in the field of historically appraising security policy is without doubt J.L. Gaddis' *Strategies of Containment* (1982), which researches the development of U.S. national security policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union during the Cold War by identifying its underlying ideas and military strategic practices. Gaddis herein defines strategy as "the process by which ends are related to means, intentions to capabilities, objectives to resources" (1982: viii). Thus, one can speak of strategy as an inherently rational process of policy, although this does not mean that the underlying end, objectives, or intentions are completely rational by themselves. P.H. Gordon (1993: xvii), in somewhat similar fashion, integrated an analysis of Charles de Gaulle's ideas on national security with the development of France's military policies and doctrines from the 1950s to the 1990s in *A Certain Idea of France*.

Like Gaddis and Gordon, this thesis aims to make sense of events that appear unpredictable, by unfolding general historical patterns and systemizing the day-to-day complexity. Much of the current analysis of Russian security policy is leaning towards an approach in which

different elements thereof are meticulously analysed in detail. Current analysis of Russian security policy often separates military policies and doctrines (e.g. Nichol, 2011) from the greater context of security policy; separates the Russian strategy in one theatre of operations from the experiences in other contexts (e.g. in case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict; Black and Johns, 2016), or separates a particular type of security document from other relevant competing documents (e.g. Ruiz Gonzalez, 2013).

This is not to discredit those who instead chose to provide detailed analysis of a single policy, document, or event in history. Analysis at both the macro- and micro-level should contribute to our understanding of security policy. Such work is absolutely necessary, yet sometimes fails to place itself into the larger historical context of national security objectives.

Through the prism of the specific Russian context and applied through its official documentation, it is possible to be more precise about the practical implications of the conceptual aims of this thesis. The Russian National Security Strategy (NSS) is the most crucial document relating to security policy, because the NSS "aims to define domestic and foreign threats and suggests measures that will guarantee the security and development of the Russian Federation'' (Dimitrakopoulou and Liaropoulos, 2010: 35). Hence, the purpose of the NSS comes close to the definition of security policy. Viewed chronologically, the NSS can provide historic insight for contemporary developments and thus will certainly form an important part of my research. Moreover, the 2015 NSS provides a convenient recent analytical end point in official security policy documents, and can point to an historical development when viewed in comparison with the earlier 2009 and 2000 NSS documents.

Russian Military Doctrine should be regarded as subsidiary to the NSS, specifically relating to the application of military force as a component of security in general. The Military Doctrine provides three different benchmarks for our scope of analysis: 2000, 2010 and 2014. For example, Blank (2011) analysed the 2010 Russian Military Doctrine, at the time mandated by President Medvedev, in great detail. Similarly, amongst others, De Haas (2015) has written extensively on the Russian Military Doctrine of 2014, in turn mandated by Putin.

Another subset of NSS is held to be the Russian Foreign Policy Concept (FPC), which itself acknowledges that it fits into the broader Russian strategic framework; thus its standing is somewhat similar to the Military Doctrine (Monaghan, 2013a: 3). The FPC has been published three times under Vladimir Putin: in 2000, at the beginning of his presidency, in 2008 – during his prime ministership and Medvedev's presidency - and in 2013. As its name

suggests, the document encapsulates "a systemic description of basic principles, priorities, goals and objectives of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation" (FPC, 2013). Through an integrated analysis of the contemporary historical trajectory of Russia's security policy framework (the NSS as an overlapping document; the Military Doctrine on the crucial military instrument; and the FPC on the policy of external threats and opportunities), it is hopefully possible to contribute to a more complete understanding of current Russian security policy.

1.4. Research Design

The central design of this master's thesis is the *Embedded Case Study*. The central case here is Russia, and the aim is to understand Russian security policy from a relationship between documents and practice. Thus, we are disseminating the Russian case into two main interacting parts in a longitudinal manner. This thesis will primarily use document analysis and policy analysis as its most important instruments of research. 'Document' here is meant in the broad sense of the word – not just the official NSS, Military Doctrine and FPC, but also official statements from high-level Russian officials, particularly from the office of president, the ministries of foreign affairs and defence, and military leadership, which, viewed integrally, can be indicative of the underlying ideas behind Russian security policy.

This document analysis will be integrated with an analysis of a chronological sequence of specific instances of implementation of Russian security policy in 2000-2016, disseminated into three different conflicts with Russian intervention: the Russo-Georgian War (2008), the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014-ongoing), and Russia's involvement in Syria (2015-ongoing). Crucially, the security developments in the years up to the 2008 Georgian War also requires our attention, because those first eight years of the 21st century have seen a significantly different Russian behaviour towards what it regards to be threats to the nation - the Georgian War is the first instance during the Putin years in which Russia went into an armed conflict outside its *de jure* borders.

One central problem of this particular embedded design in a longitudinal perspective is that is difficult to include those factors that are not within the researcher's scope of analysis (Bryman, 2008: 58). Indeed, one should recognize the inherent flaws that are accompanied with this approach. Over such a long period of time as 2000-2016, it is virtually impossible to include all variables in a single research, such as a whole range of detailed developments that

occur in the international or domestic context, developments that have been put in motion before 2000 (although I have decided to briefly elaborate on Boris Yeltsin's presidency), or developments that occur outside the framework of the national institutional apparatus – the prime focal point of this thesis.

However, the central idea of this research is to formulate an approach that can help us understand recent developments from an explicitly Russian perspective. In this framework, the triangulation of policy and document analysis, combined with a long-term perspective, will help us understand some of the generic Russian concerns and rationales that have remained prevalent over the years.

Another issue that is inherent to the existence of the case study design is the lack of *external validity*, which refers to the fact that it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to draw conclusions for that which is situated outside the domain of the particular case that constitutes the object of observation. Bryman (2008: 376) notes that external validity indeed "represents a problem" for qualitative researchers for their general tendency to employ non-generalizable research methods.

However, it has long been argued that external validity does not constitute a main goal of those who use qualitative methods. Rather, as Geertz (1973) put it, my primary motive is 'thick description': detailed, rich analysis which incorporates a high level of appreciation for contextual uniqueness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) therefore propose the parallel concept of 'transferability'. In this vision, qualitative research outcomes could provide a 'database for making judgements' about a possible transfer of research findings to other settings. However, it cannot be stressed enough that through document analysis and the analysis of its practical outcomes, I primarily aim to gather a deepening, rather than a broadening of knowledge of the field.

2. Putin's Formative Years (2000-2008)

2.1. Prologue: the Yeltsin inheritance

Qu'est ce que qu'une nation? "What is a nation?", so asks the French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan in his identically titled and globally renowned 1882 essay. A nation, he answers, is not necessarily demarcated by race, language, religion, or geographical features. No, it is fundamentally "a soul, a spiritual principle (…) a heroic past with great men and glory is the social capital upon which the national idea rests. These are the essential conditions of being a people: having common glories in the past and a will to continue them in the present; having made great things together and wishing to make them again" (Renan, 1992: 10).

What will happen, then, when this glorified past is abruptly shattered? The political-cultural shockwaves that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the implosion of the Soviet Union greatly impacted the Russian national psyche. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolved, and on the western and eastern perimeter of the Russian homeland, sovereign but fragile nation states arose. Vladimir Putin himself was personally impacted by this historical shift in the balance of international relations; as a KGB (Soviet secret service) operative stationed in Dresden in East Germany, he witnessed an armed and angry mob's march on the KGB's local headquarters. Surrounded, he did not gain the assistance of Soviet military command upon his request, and Putin was left feeling abandoned, instead resorting to a more diplomatic resolution: "It seemed to me as if the country no longer existed", he recalled, "it became clear that the Soviet Union was in a diseased condition, that of a fatal and incurable paralysis: the paralysis of power*"* (Lynch, 2011; Katusa, 2015: 59)

Russia's fall from strategic prominence in 1989 prompted Boris Yeltsin, who governed as president between 1991 and 1999, to formulate a strategy of re-emergence as a great power (*velikaya derzhava*) by presenting itself as a valuable strategic partner of Western states (Lo, 2003: 13). Especially between the dissolution of the USSR and 1994, there was a widely held belief in the creation of a common security structure, in which the division between West and East would become obsolete (Isakova, 2004). Domestically, Yeltsin promoted a generic policy of economic liberalization and privatization with the intent of increasing the competitiveness of the Russian economy under the banner of his controversial 'shock therapy' (Walker, 2003: 147). However, on both of these counts, he failed to meet the optimistic

expectations in dramatic fashion: domestically, the Russian population suffered skyrocketing prices, food shortages, rampant corruption, exorbitant inflation and other social-economic ills, causing life expectancy to drop (Huygen, 2012: 67).

In terms of foreign policy, the Yeltsin administration left among many the impression that it was ill-prepared to face NATO's expansion towards Russia's western flank. Weakened and in a domestic political-economic transition, Russia struggled to regain its status as a world power, whilst Yelstin's relatively 'Westernist' views were contested strongly by nationalist hardliners. Indeed, even Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev, who is regarded to be one of the key advocates of rapprochement with the West of the 1990s, complained that the West did not consult Russia enough when it came to important international decisions (Jackson, 2003: 51-82; Kozyrev, 1994).

Russia's newfound international position was quickly accompanied with emerging conflicts as a result of political instability in the new sovereign nations of the Former Soviet Union (FSU; particularly in Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan) and domestically in the primarily Muslim region of Chechnya. These developments prompted Yeltsin to authorize new conceptual guidelines for its security policy, leading to the publication of a Russian Foreign Policy Concept and a Military Doctrine in 1993. The Foreign Policy Concept and the Military Doctrine signified a shift away from the government's early Westernist attitude, as it provided a framework through which Russian politicians could advocate the use of force, both domestically (in Chechnya) and in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). At the same time, these documents were still relatively optimistic about peaceful engagement with NATO (Jackson, 2003: 66-67).

Yet, further dents in Russian national pride would emerge during the later course of the 1990s. The failure to consulate Russia before NATO's use of airpower in Bosnia in April 1995 caused a negative backlash in Russian politics. Indeed, for many Russians, the historical Slavic and Christian Orthodox bond with Serbia is of paramount importance – not just Serbia, but Russia's great power status was at stake (Smith, 2006: 60). NATO's Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999 caused even greater outrage: Yeltsin, nearing the end of his term and having suffered from a catalogue of health problems, called the campaign an "open aggression", adding that he was "deeply upset" (Russia Condems Nato at UN, 1999). Alexei Arbatov, a former member of the Russian State Duma, writes that Kosovo was the most

important catalyst which reversed U.S.-Russian rapprochement and surged Anti-Western sentiment in Russia (Arbatov, 2000: 1).

In the early 1990s, Moscow uneasily accepted NATO membership enlargement under the belief that future military intervention would be in the framework of the UN's multilateral decision making apparatus, in which Russia possesses veto power (Wallender, 2000: 3). Meanwhile in August 1998, Moscow found itself in a seriously weakened position when the Russian economy had stumbled into a deep financial crisis, resulting in a devaluation of the rouble and defaulting on its accumulated pile of debt. Between 1997 and 1999, the military budget fell by 50 per cent in constant prices and suffered from poor training, readiness, morale, command and control, and equipment (Arbatov, 2000: 6).

In this background, Russia's national security apparatus was in the process of being rebuilt. The centralized and hierarchical power structure of the USSR was, in terms of foreign and security policy, dominated by the Central Committee and the Politburo of the Communist Party. This constellation between state and armed forces provided for a degree of stability and predictability. The end of the Cold War created an incoherent and fragmented power structure; although the 1993 Constitution gave Yelstin ultimate authority, he failed to exercise efficient and unitary authority over it. Instead, Moscow's national security institutions became competing bureaucratic islands that where prone to bureaucratic rivalry, which contributed to Yeltsin's perceived weakness (Larrabee and Karasik, 1997: 1-3).

Russia's domestic unrest, combined with its deteriorated strategic prominence and regional security, was calling out for strong leadership from the Kremlin. Yeltsin's years had left an image of indecisiveness at best and weakness at worst. Vladimir Putin, having risen through the ranks of the Russian apparatus in the KGB and as the mayor of St. Petersburg, was appointed to replace Yeltsin, in turn popularizing the image of a 'strong man' who would re-energize Russia's quest to once more become a great power. In this sense, Putin could hardly have picked a more adequate predecessor himself to contrast himself with: in the 1999-2000 political transition to Putin, Yeltsin boasted an approval rating of approximately 8 percent (McFaul, 2000).

2.2. Putin's doctrinal consolidation (2000)

Given the widespread problems of the Yeltsin administration, Putin arrived in the Kremlin with a significant bag of expectations to help reinvigorate Russia after its series of

disappointments. The fact that such expectations were heaped on the shoulders of one man was not necessarily unreasonable: the institutional nature of the Russian Federation, in many ways reminiscent of the days of the Soviet Union, is tailor-made for a strong head of state.

Largely, this is a consequence of the Russian constitution of 1993, which was enacted following a dispute between Yeltsin and the legislature, the Congress and Supreme Soviet. Both Congress and Yeltsin proposed separate draft constitutions. When Congress hardened its stance and set out to vote for its own draft constitution and on a law making impeachment easier, Yeltsin resolved to disband the legislature and replace it with a new bicameral parliament. When Congress refused to leave the Moscow White House he used the support of the military, which used lethal force against anti-Yeltsin protesters, to ultimately gain his right. By consecutively holding the constitution up for referendum, Yeltsin circumvented legislative approval, as the majority approved (for a lack of alternative; McPherson, 1999: 157-159).

The 1993 constitution reflects the strength of the executive by granting the president the right to disband the Duma in certain disputes (Art. 84); it also grants the right to veto Duma legislation. As the guarantor of national sovereignty, the President, by constitution, holds exclusive power to approve the military doctrine (Art. 83) and he holds ultimate authority over Russian foreign policy (Art. 86). In the framework of the use of military power, the President is first and foremost the commander-in-chief of the armed forces (Art. 87; see the Constitution of the Russian Federation, 1993).

The primacy of the presidential role is further accentuated by the 1996 Law on Defence, which effectively denied most civilian-parliamentary checks and balances over national defence (Barany, 2008: 27; Betz, 2002: 483). In Russia, the armed forces thus generally enjoy a relatively small amount of civilian oversight. When Yeltsin directly relinquished power to Putin and vigorously supported him at every turn, he not only stifled competition but also established a precedent that undermined the notion of a free and fair electoral contest for president. In addition, Putin cracked down on free media from the moment he came into office (Cox, 2013: 189). Thus, Russia's president enjoys both significant control over the bodies of state and only limited vulnerability to democratic accountability mechanisms.

Russia's highest security decision-making body, the Security Council of the Russian Federation (SCRF), is further evidence of the extensive executive powers at the President's disposal. The President chairs the council and appoints all its members, whom are comprised

of the state's highest ranking officials in the field of national security (Security Council structure, 2016). Its numbers have shifted over time, but since its conception in 1996, it had always been comprised of six permanent members: the President, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of the Security Council, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Defence, and the director of the FSB. The SCRF, furthermore, is the principal supervisor of all national security documents (De Haas, 2011: 38).

Under Putin, the SCRF was greatly increased to a total of 25, due to his creation of 'Federal Districts', that were henceforth handed permanent representations in the SCRF (Vendil, 2001: 71). This institutional change led to a centralization of Russia's power structure regarding national security. Putin could now appoint his own appointed Presidential Representatives to reassert Moscow's vertical control over its territory and keep the regional governors in line. Furthermore, Putin decreased the power of the regional governors by restructuring the Upper House of the Russian Parliament (Mohsin Hashim, 2005: 26-36). In general, experts agree that the SCRF has become a much more streamlined and coherent body under Putin (Monaghan, 2013b: 1229).

One of Putin's first significant acts as President was the ratification of a revised edition of the National Security Concept (NSC) on January 10, 2000 – in subsequent publications to be dubbed the National Security Strategy (NSS). The NSC provides its readers of an intriguing reflection of the national security assessments of Russia's Moscow elite at the time. The 2000 NSC was markedly different from its 1997 predecessor, which had still offered a relatively optimistic assessment of Russia's foreign security threats, dubbing Russia's internal problems as its greatest threat to national security (De Haas, 2010: 17; Wallender, 2000: 4). Internal threats, however, remained an important pillar of the 2000 NSC: when Putin asserted presidency, he also inherited the ongoing Second Chechen War, a military operation followed by counterinsurgency with the invasion of Dagestan by the International Islamist Brigade (IIB) as *casus belli*.

Undoubtedly, preserving the unity of the Federation was of primary importance, and Russian policymakers placed heavy value on maintaining and restoring national order after a time of chaos: "economic disintegration, the social differentiation in society, and the depreciation of spiritual values promote tension in relations between regions and the center" (MFA, 2000a) – a phrase firmly rooted in the sentiment of the perceived social-economic, political and moral disorder of the 1990s.

Yet, the 2000 NSC, compared with its 1997 predecessor, was much more critical of some developments, although it remained adamant that the world was characterized by 'positive changes'. Indeed, the 2000 NSC quite clearly partly referred to NATO's 1999 Kosovo intervention when it stated the following as a major cause for concern:

"*Attempts to ignore Russia's interests when resolving major issues in international relations, including conflict situations, are capable of undermining international security and stability and of inhibiting the positive changes occurring in international relations"* (NSC, 2000).

Furthermore, the 2000 NSC quite specifically singled out NATO's eastward expansion towards Russia, along with conflicts emanating along Russia's border and in the CIS as constituting "main threats" to international security. With alarm, it lamented "a possible appearance of military bases and large troop contingents in direct proximity of Russia's borders" (NSC, 2000). The document, in essence, coupled the idea of a decline of Russia's influence in international relations to a clear increase of the size and scope of threats, in many ways of substantial military nature. As such, the document reflects a strong geopolitical understanding of national security (Mankoff, 2009: 14).

In order to turn the tide of this - in the Kremlin's eyes - rather unfortunate sequence of events, the 2000 NSC put forward a response that was, in many ways, rooted into its 1997 predecessor. Nuclear deterrence, in both documents, was valued as perhaps the most important insurance of national security. As a remnant of Soviet times, the Russian political elite remained convinced that nuclear weapons provided both military and geopolitical leverage over competing states in the framework of international security (Godzimirski, 2000: 87-89). Not only are nuclear weapons an ultimate instrument of power; a nation's possession thereof, viewed somewhat cynically, represents a certain status and acts as a permanent reminder of the glorified past.

The Military Doctrine that was approved by Putin on the 21st of April 2000 further underlines the importance of nuclear deterrence. In Russia, the Military Doctrine stands out as a document that is, compared to Western states, conceived in remarkably close relationship with the highest political-strategic level (De Haas, 2010: 3). Interestingly, there had been some subtle changes made to earlier versions, indicating a shift in perceptions: although rather ambiguous in its phrasing, the 2000 Military Doctrine stipulated that nuclear weapons were not just a means of deterring aggression; they were additionally required for "providing state military security". Crucially, the eventual doctrine deleted an earlier 1999 draft amendment,

which stated the worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons as its ultimate goal (Safranchuk, 2000).

NATO's circumvention of the UNSC prior to Operation Allied Force in Kosovo in 1999, combined with the failure of Russian attempts to bolster the capability of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the field of international security, led to a diminishing of faith in international cooperation among Russian decision makers. In the context of an already worsening direct environment, Russia therefore increased its reliance on its sovereign strategic assets (Sokov, 2002: 106). Nevertheless, the Military Doctrine is still relatively optimistic in some aspects, arguing that the threat of large-scale war has decreased. That assessment is contrasted with the notion of terrorism, which is deemed to be both an internal and external persistent threat (Safranchuk, 2000).

The Foreign Policy Concept (FPC) was approved on June 28th of 2000. It, too, was published some seven years after a 1993 predecessor mandated by Yeltsin. Like the NSC, the FPC focused heavily on military security and geopolitical priorities (Lo, 2003: 73). However, its value as an insightful document is more questionable compared to the NSC and the Military Doctrine of 2000. It is rather indiscriminate in nature, deeming just about every foreign relation of the Russian Federation to be "important" or "significant": relations with the EU, the FSU, or India and China are all given more or less equal terminology. Much of this is a testament of the fact that the FPC is, relatively, a very compromising document that is designed to favourably communicate Russia's foreign policy agenda to the world (Ivanov, 2002); Lo (2002: 69-70) also notes that the FPC is paying "lip service" and that it serves to obfuscate the widely disparaging views within Russia's national security elite by pandering to the lowest common denominator.

The 2000 FPC iterates strong emphasis on the principles of the UN Charter and the UNSC as a method for resolving international disputes. Indeed, the document rather ambitiously speaks of "forming a new world order":

"*The United Nations must remain the main centre for regulating international relations in the XXI century. The Russian Federation shall resolutely oppose attempts to belittle the role of the United Nations and its Security Council in world affairs"* (FPC, 2000).

Of course, such statements can be considered to be, more than anything, an obligate sentence which can be found in foreign policy documentation throughout most of the modern world: in

published official texts, no significant country is likely to oppose the supremacy of the United Nations. Nevertheless, the fact that the FPC speaks indignantly of "belittling" may be seen as a message to the Russian public that Russia itself will not be belittled; a means of reasserting national pride after the loss of prestige as a result of the 1999 Kosovo intervention.

The 2000 FPC, unsurprisingly, puts regional interest at the forefront, especially with regards to bi- and multilateral cooperation with the CIS-states. It does not directly argue, however, that this is to be regarded as a direct form of counter-balancing against the eastward expansion of the NATO alliance. Rather, it merely contends that it attaches national priority to "the development of cooperation in the military-political area and in the sphere of security, particularly in combating international terrorism and extremism*"* (FPC, 2000). It was terrorism, as well, that had provided the official justification for Russia's military action in Chechnya in 1999.

The 2000 FPC seems more compromising in its phrasing towards NATO than the 2000 NSC. Whereas the NSC argues that NATO constitutes a "main threat" towards Russian sovereignty, the FPC argues that Russia is open to "constructive interaction". Although those two statements are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they are nonetheless indicative of disagreements within the Russian national security elite between hawkish nationalists and more dovish Westernists. The FPC leaves the door open for cooperation, but at the same time remarks that it has a "negative attitude" towards NATO expansion, and that "NATO's present-day political and military guidelines do not coincide with security interests of the Russian Federation and occasionally directly contradict them" (FPC, 2000). In other words, the vaguely worded document could serve to support the claims for either a more confrontational or a more compromising foreign policy in Vladimir Putin's years to come.

The ambiguity of Russia's strategic documents was a reflection of real-life hesitancy. The Duma*,* on various occasions, stalled the ratification of START II, the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty[1]. The Duma's protest over NATO expansion and the Kosovo intervention had triggered a more belligerent attitude toward the U.S. in Russian politics. START II had been signed between the Bush sr. and Yeltsin administration in as early as 1993. The agreement proposed a ban on the use of the Multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle

[1] Given the President's discretionary powers over security policy, one could argue this has only limited significance. The Duma, in contrast with the Yeltsin presidency, was virtually guaranteed to agree with every major bill introduced by Putin, see Mohsin Hashim, 2005: 36 . Nevertheless, it serves to illustrate some of the crucial national security debates of the time.

(MIRV) on Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM). MIRV's on ICBM's are considered to provide a significant first-strike advantage in the case of nuclear escalation. When the Duma finally was ratified START II on April 14, 2000, the Communist party leader Zyuganov called the treaty a "capitulation" while his party dismissed it as "pro-American" (Black, 2004: 45).

Nevertheless, START II was ratified by comfortable margins in parliament. As a former communist party member and KGB operative, he did not espouse a sense of pro-Western weakness towards the domestic audience compared to the Yeltsin administration. Indeed, as he would come to say on the matter in May: "I have ratified START and the Non-Proliferation Treaty. This is not a sign of weakness, I am insisting as well that the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty not be amended by the Pentagon; I am testing weapons systems; I have signed the new Military Doctrine into law; and I have kept my promises about Chechnya" (Putin, 2000).

Indeed, the Kosovo intervention would become a convenient means for Putin to deflect too much Western criticism and meddling concerning human rights violations by Russian operations in Chechnya. Putin cultivated a certain idea of restoring lost pride, but he combined it with a realization that peaceful engagement with the West was a necessity. His domestic image of a strong leader provided room to manoeuver vis-à-vis the United States. In the West, Putin also earned some praise. Amongst them was the then-U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who saw him as a pragmatist with a "can-do approach" (Perlez, 2000).

Crises, however, can potentially change the course of history. The reputation of the Russian armed forces took a hit when the K-141 *Kursk* nuclear submarine, carrying 118 Russian navy personnel, sunk in the Barents Sea on the morning of August 12, 2000. Rather saliently, the SCRF had just days before decided upon substantial financial cuts for the military; Putin believed that Russia's weakened financial position meant that military spending was no longer aligned with its limited means. Additionally, following the initial success of START-II, the SCRF believed that a decline in allocations to nuclear capacity was in order (Barany, 2004: 483-484). Prime Minister Kasyanov, a staunch advocate of a more economic focus and more prudent military budgets, had just asserted office in May.

The *Kursk* tragedy meant not just the loss of 118 Russian lives; for hawkish politicians, it was further proof that Russia's military prowess was in decline. Russian crisis management in the aftermath was highly calamitous; for five days straight, the Russians refused foreign help in

the rescue operation. Partly, this was due to pride; partly, there was a fear that military secrets would be unveiled by such a foreign operation. Yet, although there had been intense domestic discussion about the tragedy (The Kursk: Prosecutors and Defenders, 2000), the damage of Putin's reputation had only been limited.

Ironically, Western analysts who criticized Russian authorities caused irritation and ultimately perhaps contributed to a resurgent support of Putin, many of whom felt that he was ultimately not personally to blame (Black, 2004: 79-80). Instead, the *Kursk* tragedy provided validation for the Putin administration's desire for military reform and modernization: in November 2000, Putin would argue in meeting within the SCRF that Russia's duplicate military structures damaged the armed forces' operational capability (Isakova, 2006: 8). Putin had also proven to be a military reformer during his skilful handling of the Second Chechen War by streamlining operational command, which earned him widespread praise in Russia. This contrasted with Russia's dismal performance during the First Chechen War in 1994-1996, which resulted in large part from a lack of coordination between military units from different branches and ministries (Kramer, 2005: 213-217). Furthermore, Putin established a clearer chain of command by subordinating the General Staff to the Defence Minister (Herspring, 2008: 21).

Putin, in the early 21st century, additionally appeared to be balancing between 'Eurasianist' and 'Westernist' mindsets. The 'Eurasianist' worldview, an ambiguous notion which can be interpreted contrastingly by Russian policymakers, generally contends that Russia's national identity and its political future are strongly linked to its geographical location at the intersection of Europe and Asia. Westernism, by contrast, is the worldview which contends that Russia should more strongly engage with the West in particular (Mankoff, 2009: 65).

In November 2000, present at a summit for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) platform and aiming to build stronger economic ties with Asia, Putin would contend that Russia always had always felt itself a Eurasian country (Schmidt, 2005: 92). At the same time, while situated in different political environments, Putin would argue, like Yeltsin, that Russia was fundamentally part of Europe (Mankoff, 2013: 277). Overriding, then, was a general practical sense that Russia had to increase economic cooperation all across the board in order to increase Russia's weight in the world, prompting Isakova to brand Russia's foreign policy as informed by "economic determinism" (2005).

2.3. "War on Terror" and colour revolutions (2001-2008)

The terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September the 11th of 2001 paradoxically brought Putin's Russia in closer relation with the United States and its Western allies. The well-documented Bush-proclaimed "War on Terror", in Russia's worldview, shared similarities with Russia's own struggles with regards to Islamic terrorism within its own borders, particularly in the context of Chechnya: in September 1999, a series of Moscow apartment bombings killing nearly 300 people had precipitated the Second Chechen War (the source of these bombings is still contested; Russian authorities quickly blamed Islamist Chechens, but a group of prominent critics assert that it was a FSB-initiated 'false flag' operation to gain support for its second large-scale invasion in less than a decade (e.g. Litvinenko, 2007)).

Speaking on the matter in Yerevan on 14 September, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov would take the opportunity to express the hope that the world would now understand Russia's what Russia is up against in Chechnya; a catalogue of Russian officials and commentators have since argued that the events in Chechnya could not be seen outside the context of the struggle against international terrorism (Russians Observe Minute of Silence, 2001).

During the 2000 U.S. election cycle, Bush had been very critical of alleged war crimes during Russian operations in Chechnya. In the aftermath of 9/11, he by and large let go of public criticism of Russia's counter-terrorism policy. Putin, in turn, did not object to the U.S. using military bases in Central Asia and provided extensive intelligence cooperation in the build-up and during the war in Afghanistan (Monaghan, 2006: 999-1000). Putin, faced with the decision whether or not side with the West, decided in September that a degree of political and military cooperation would be strategically beneficial for Russian interests (Jonson, 2004: 83-84).

Meanwhile, Putin sought to demonstrate a link between Chechen terrorism and global jihad at every available opportunity, thus effectively appropriating Bush's discourse. This mechanism become especially apparent in the aftermath of the bloody 2004 Beslan school siege, in which Putin claimed that 9 of the attackers were from the 'Arab World' – this statement, however, was never backed with empirical evidence (Shuster, 2011).

Putin's newfound partnership with the U.S. meant that Bush now referred to Russia as an "ally" in the war on terror (Edwards et al., 2006: 23). Although this makeshift alliance did not

remove the fundamental differences of opinion between the U.S. and Russia on core strategic issues, it nonetheless served to smoothen them. This is illustrated by the Bush administration's December 2001 decision to withdraw from the 1972 ABM Treaty, limiting the use of Anti-Ballistic Missile systems, caused irritation in Russia' national security elite. Whereas the Bush administration cited threats from 'rogue states' like Iran and North Korea as the reason to withdraw, Russia firmly believed the treaty to be an important means of guaranteeing international stability, and that stationing of long-range ABM systems in Poland and the Czech Republic, a project that would later be cancelled under the Obama administration, was directed against Russia (Bush Tells Congress Of Decision To Withdraw From ABM Treaty, 2001).

After all, Putin had assured the Duma during its 2000 approval of START II that the ABM Treaty would not be amended (Woolf et al., 2016). Putin referred to the move as "a mistake" (as cited by Neilan, 2001), but stopped short of a course of more serious confrontation, valuing the preservation of U.S-Russia cooperation. In areas such as the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs, or the security of global energy supply chains, Russia began to find more common ground with most Western powers as well (Edwards et al, 2006: 22-25).

The U.S.-led March 2003 Iraq invasion, however, proved to become a major source of disagreement between the U.S. and Russia. The circumvention of the UNSC prior to the invasion and the course of U.S. unilateral pre-emptive action against Saddam Hussein's (wrongfully) alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program was, for Moscow, an uncomfortable reminder of the 1999 Kosovo intervention. The Iraq War, in that sense, served to undermine a lot of Russian goodwill in the early post-9/11 era. In addition, the Kremlin considered it to be most unwise to add a new military front whilst combat operations in Afghanistan were not yet concluded. In addition, it began to fear that U.S. military presence in Central Asia would become permanent (Notte, 2016: 68).

These worries are manifested, for example, by the 'White Paper' published by the Ministry of Defence in October 2003. The exact significance of this particular document is somewhat ambiguous. Although its publication was encouraged by Putin, published by the Ministry of Defence and presented by Minister of Defence Sergei Ivanov, the document did not replace anything, and was not officially signed into law as the constitution dictates of military doctrines. It is thus not a real doctrine, nor does it bear any legal significance (Felgenhauer, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is mainly the timing of the document that is interesting: in accordance with recent developments, it contains arguably pro-Western statements supporting the "war on international terrorism". Simultaneously, it brands NATO an organization with an "offensive doctrine" that requires "drastic reorganization of the Russian military planning and principles of the development of the Armed Forces" (as cited by Felgenhauer, 2004) as a counterbalancing measure.

Yuri Baluyevski, the former first deputy Defence Minister and Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces between 2004 and 2008, in late 2003 further rallied against the notion of "the unipolar world" and the "reduced role of international institutions and agreements", as a less-than subtle reference to the War in Iraq: "There is no other choice but for the world to be multipolar, otherwise it will lose its stability*"* (Baluyevski, 2003). Buluyevski's words are indicative for a prevalent and recurring theme within Moscow's security apparatus: the political stability of the world, both in the context of Russia's near-abroad and further into the Middle East, is jeopardized by U.S. unilateral action, as this action does not take enough account of Russia's strategic interests.

During the course of late 2003, Putin noticed further developments, *ex post* known as the coloured revolutions, which he deemed to be in Russia's disadvantage. In Georgia, once part of the Soviet Union, the 'Revolution of Roses', a peaceful anti-government mass protest triggered by concern over mass election fraud, culminated into the election of pro-Western leader Mikheil Sakaashvilli in January 2004. Sakaashvilli quickly proved to be a staunch supporter of Georgian inclusion in EU and NATO structures, sent a considerable amount of forces into Afghanistan and Iraq, and, most importantly, was an advocate of the national unification of sovereign Georgian territory. In this regard, he was at odds with the self-proclaimed independent Russian satellite states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Newnham, 2015: 163).

During late 2004 and early 2005, similar events took place in Ukraine when the mass protests known as the 'Orange Revolution' prevented pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich from becoming Ukraine's third president, in favour of Viktor Yushenko. During the course of the 2004 elections, the Kremlin tried to influence the election process through various means; one of the most nefarious of which is arguably when FSB operatives attempted to assassinate Yushenko through poisoning (Kuzio, 2005: 498).

Putin interpreted the domestic political shifts in Georgia and Ukraine as international geopolitical failures that were, at least to some degree, orchestrated by American intelligence as part of a fundamentally anti-Russian strategy (Hill and Taspinar, 2006: 87). According to "senior U.S. officials" he felt betrayed, especially since it occurred so quickly after his readiness to support the U.S. military operations in Afghanistan (Rohde and Mohammed, 2014). In both cases, Russia used its gas supply, one of its main strategic assets and a remnant infrastructure from the days of the Soviet Union, as a leverage in order to force a change in the nations' respective domestic policies. For Georgia, for example, Russia's state corporation *Gazprom* increased its prices by nearly 500 per cent between 2004 and 2006 (Newnham, 2015: 164).

Further Russian concern over its traditional 'sphere of influence' was raised over the course of 2004, when seven eastern European countries joined NATO: the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Putin, unsurprisingly given all the supporting national security documentation we have seen so far, disapproved of it, and framed his opposition to it in the context of the war on terror: "this expansion did not help prevent the terrorist acts in Madrid, let's say, or help resolve the problems of Afghanistan (...) Russia's position toward the enlargement of NATO is well-known" (as cited by Mydans, 2004).

Following Kyrgyzstani parliamentary elections in 2005, another round of protests erupted at Russia's Central Asian perimeter, directed against the authoritarian and highly corrupt rule of the Akayev family and their close political associates. These protests, too, ultimately led to the downfall of the president, thus attributing some justification to the designative phrase 'Tulip Revolution'. However, compared with its Georgian and Ukrainian counterparts, the Tulip Revolution was not so much a mobilization of civil society or established political parties, but rather a makeshift coalition of opposition local elites that did not enjoy nationwide support (Radnitz, 2006: 132-133).

Despite this essential difference, the Kyrgyz revolution, too, was an important concern for Russian policymakers. Kyrgyzstan has been at the core of Russia's national security policy in the Post-Soviet era. Since October 2003, the Kyrgyz and former Soviet Kant Air Force base is

host to Russian air force units, which is described by Putin as a rapid reaction force in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization[2] (CSTO; Allison, 2008a: 194).

The CSTO obtained legal status on 7 October 2002 when its parties signed its charter; officially, CSTO was propagated for the purposes of counterterrorism, and as a partner of the West. In practice, it mainly served to bolster Russia's great powers status within the region, given the post-9/11 presence of U.S. troops and military hardware, fuelling Russian fears that it was losing its grip on Central Asia (Jonson, 2004: 94-97).

Putin, early in his presidency, also prioritized increasing economic and energy investments there, which is exemplified by a May 2003 25-year agreement with *Gazprom* on the modernization of gas pipelines and joint production of oil and gas inside Kyrgyzstan (Jonson, 2004: 104). Additionally, Kyrgyzstan was a member of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), which was established in 2000 and replaced in 2014 by the further deepening economic cooperation body known as the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

In comparison with Ukraine and Georgia, the aftermath of the 2005 Kyrgyz protests has not proven to change the fundamental calibration of its strategic partnership with Russia. After 2005, Kyrgyz presidents followed each other in relatively quick succession, especially during another round of political violence in 2010. Despite internal unrest, none of Akayev's successors really challenged Bishkek's close alliance with Russia, and the current president, Atambayev, has outspokenly favoured closer integration with Russia (Kilner, 2011).

Thus, Putin was not prompted to pursue a counterbalancing geopolitical strategy in Kyrgyzstan in particular. Nevertheless, Putin deemed Russia's national security to be at risk as a general outcome of the Colour Revolutions. Nowhere did this assessment come to light more clearly than at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, which is often regarded as a turning point in Russian assertiveness and for some represents a "breeze of Cold War" (Rolofs, 2007) that precipitated later conflicts.

At the conference, Putin remarked that "we are witnessing an almost uncontained hyper use of force - military force - in international relations, force that is plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts (…) we are seeing greater and greater disdain for the principles of international law (…) first and foremost the United States has overstepped its national borders

[2]The CSTO currently includes the 6 CIS members that enjoy the closest military cooperation with Russia: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; Uzbekistan (2006-2012) is a former member. The CSTO was preceded in 1992 by the looser Collective Security Treaty (CST).

in every way". On NATO, Putin felt that "it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the Alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust" (Putin, 2007).

In addition, Putin resumed regular strategic bomber flights in August 2007, flights that had not occurred since 1992, shortly after the Soviet Union's collapse (Attewill, 2007). The four-engine Tupolev Tu-95 long-range bombers, a symbol of the Cold War, often operate close to the periphery of NATO airspace as a strategic deterrent, and are regularly intercepted by scrambling NATO jets in an effort to probe air defences (Chance et al, 2015). In Georgia, the newly accentuated tensions between Russia and NATO would come to a climax over the course of 2008.

2.4. Conclusion

Putin's formative years had seen a subtle, yet steady development towards conflict. Putin asserted power after a tumultuous decade in Russian politics, which was characterized by socio-economic malaise, internal political fragmentation and a decrease of Russia's influence in the world. As a result, Putin attempted early on to rebuild Russia's influence by consolidating economic stability, centralizing the national security power structure and reinvigorating the military. With this background in mind, Russia was mostly occupied with internal consolidation and stuck with traditional deterrence. Security documents in 2000 point to this relatively inward focus.

Although Putin was more sceptical of rapprochement with the West than Yeltsin, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington opened a window of opportunity for increased security cooperation with the U.S. and its Western allies. However, this window gradually shut due to other concerns: the Bush administration' abrogation of the ABM Treaty, the presence of U.S. military infrastructure in Central Asia, NATO expansion in Eastern Europe, the Colour Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, and the unilateral invasion of Iraq, prior to which Russia was not consented. For Moscow, all of these developments were in some way directed against Russia. This consistently negative interpretation of international security added to an increased sense of encirclement – a trend that for Putin represented a continuation of the downward momentum of Russian might fallowing the dissolution of the USSR.

The final piece of the jigsaw was laid in 2007, when Russian strategic bomber flights were resumed and Putin laid down his harshest criticism of the U.S. and NATO thus far during the Munich Security Conference. Of course, concerns about NATO expansion and Russian influence in the CIS were always considered paramount national security priority, as evidenced by the statements of the 2000 documents. However, the way in which this manifested itself in 2007 was significantly different to 2000, and was a direct consequence of Russia's internal political-economic consolidation and an increasing dissatisfaction with the West, which laid a foundation for the subsequent military conflicts.

3. The Russo-Georgian War (2008)

3.1. Readying for war

The Roots of the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, like many of the conflicts surrounding the FSU, can be traced back in large part to the dissolution of the USSR. The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, a region dominated by ethnic Russians, declared independence from Tbilisi in as early as 20 September 1990, before Georgian independence in 1991. When the USSR dissolved, South Ossetia was *de jure* sovereign Georgian, but *de facto* had never been effectively governed by Georgia. Abkhazia, similarly, had retained its own distinctive national culture. Unlike South Ossetia, it already enjoyed the status of an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR, and its leadership at that time complained at times about "Georganisation" of the Abkhaz people. Abkhazia, too, sought to take advantage of the new regional balance of power (Francis, 2010: 68-69).

However, many ethnic Georgians in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the other newly-formed autonomous region further in Georgia's west, contested this new political situation. Tbilisi, under the leadership of Ziyad Gamsakhurdia, attempted to assert territorial control by launching a campaign of national unification, stripping South Ossetia of its autonomy and introducing a state of emergency (German, 2016: 157). In 1991-1992, an armed conflict broke out between Tbilisi and South Ossetia over the control of the territory; in the process, South Ossetia gained substantial logistical support for independence from within Russia (Allison, 2008b: 1146).

In June 1992, Russia brokered a peace in South Ossetia in framework the 'Sochi agreement'. Its most important provisions included a Joint Peacekeeping Force that was comprised of three battalions: Georgian, Russian, and South Ossetian. Furthermore, the agreement led to the establishment of the Joint Control Commission, a negotiating body in which the three parties plus North Ossetia, a Russian federal subject adjacent to South Ossetia, gained equal representation (German, 2016: 157).

The 1992-1993 War over Abkhazia, in turn, was formally resolved by the Moscow Agreement, which provided for a CIS peacekeeping force and, contrary to South Ossetia, the establishment of the UN observer mission (UNOMIG) to monitor the ceasefire (German, 2006: 7). Despite formal international monitoring, however, the peacekeepers consisted of either Russian forces only, or contained a very high proportion of them; Russia had rejected

calls for a more international peacekeeping presence for fear of losing its special influence (Oldberg, 2010: 16).

The Sochi and Moscow agreements effectively kept the peace until 2008, although they also consolidated a status quo in which the war was never truly resolved: Georgia never acquiesced to South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence, and simultaneously never managed to govern the territories, thus freezing the conflict and essentially establishing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as Russia-backed quasi-states.

However, the 2004 Revolution of Roses changed this precarious balance. Newly elected President Mikheil Saakashvili never made a secret of his plans for Georgian reunification. Indeed, according to leaked U.S. diplomatic cables dated August 14, 2008, Russian officials repeatedly warned for years that Saakashvili would attempt to unify the country by using force. Moreover, they expressed frustration at U.S. willingness to arm and train Georgian forces in what it considers to be its political backyard (WikiLeaks, 2008).

Russia, furthermore, felt threatened in particular by the unfolding events of 2008. In January, Georgia held a non-binding referendum in which 72,5 per cent voted in favour of integration with NATO (Savkova, 2008: 6). In February, Kosovo declared independence from Serbia – a move that was applauded by most of the West. Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov, shortly before this wave of recognition, warned that Kosovo's unilateral declaration would "open a pandora's box" (Russia: Ivanov Takes Conciliatory Tone At Munich Conference, 2008) and set a precedent for other aspiring independent states.

On April 3 at the NATO summit in Bucharest, further Russian anxiety surrounding military encroachment towards its borders were raised when the heads of state and government officially declared that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members of NATO" and agreed that "both countries have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations" (Bucharest Summit Declaration, 2008). At that summit, Putin called possible expansion a "direct threat" and compared Kosovo's independence with that of Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Karabakh, saying that "this policy puts us in a complicated position in the post-Soviet space" (Putin, 2008).

The Georgian perspective under Saakashvili was that Russia was slowly moving towards "de facto absorption" (Allison, 2008: 1147) of South Ossetia and Abkhazia through a spectrum of methods that increased their dependency on Russia. During Putin's presidency, Russia had

steadily built up its presence of security personnel in support of the regional administration, and distributed Russian passports on a large scale to its residents. One other principal source of Georgian grievance was that its forces were not allowed to monitor the border between Russia and South Ossetia, which it believed to be a location of widespread smuggling practices (German, 2006: 12).

On April 16 2008, Putin established, through presidential decree, "special relationships" with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and opened a representative office of the Russian Foreign Minstry in South Ossetia's capital Tshkinvali, thus *de facto* recognizing independence (Russian Federation: Legal Aspects of War in Georgia, 2008: 2-3).

Shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in August, both Moscow and Tbilisi conducted large-scale military rehearsals near the South Ossetian Border. In July 16, the yearly Russian *Kavkaz* exercise constituted more than 6,000 troops. Either through coincidence or deliberation, the Georgian joint exercise *Immediate Response 2008* in conjunction with a sizeable segment of U.S. Special Forces had just started a few days earlier (Ellison, 2011: 352-353). Nevertheless, the size and proximity of the *Kavkaz-2008* exercise to South Ossetia would later prove a useful accessory of swift military deployment in Georgia, as its participants rehearsed the scenario of taking control of Abkhazia and South Ossetia through counterattacking tactics (Vendil and Westerlund, 2009: 400-401).

As pre-war escalation was initiated from both sides, it is still contested who is principally to blame for the war. Although Russia was quite clearly complicit in general force posturing, the timing and the manner of the outbreak on the eve of August 7 itself appears to be not premeditated at the highest military strategic level. President Medvedev, who had just traded his position of Prime Minister with Putin for the 2008-2012 presidency, had departed for his Volga resort. Putin was attending the Beijing Olympics, and is said to have been enraged at hearing the news. Defence minister Serdyukov, too, was on vacation (Baev, 2008; Ellison, 2011: 356-357; Vendil and Westerlund, 2009: 406).

The crux of the confusion centred on Saakasvilli's order to attack Russian positions in Tskhinvali. The Kremlin asserts that the attack was unprovoked, whereas intercepted communications by Georgian intelligence assert that elements of the Russian 58th Army moved through the Roki Tunnel, the only direct road connection between South Ossetia and Russia, prior to the Georgian attack, thus making the case for self-defence (Chivers, 2008). Additionally, Sakaashvilli received reports of renewed and intensified Ossetian shelling of

Georgian villages, which had already been occurring. Believing an invasion was coming, Saakashvili ordered to return fire (Asmus, 2010 36). Thus, Georgia and Russia clumsily stumbled into a war that neither appeared to have preordained.

3.2. Aftermath: strategic consequences

Within a couple of days, Russia was able to mass by conservative Russian estimates 10,000 troops into South Ossetia and another 9,000 in Abkhazia, where it opened a second front in order to stretch Georgian defences and gain an extra foothold (Baranov, 2009; other estimates put the grand total at 25,000-40,000, see Cohen and Hamilton, 2011: 11). The Georgian army, tiny compared to its neighbour, never stood a chance against this numerical disadvantage. After five days of fighting, French President Sarkozy brokered a ceasefire that ended the war reasonably swiftly. Contrary to the messy and prolonged counterinsurgency methods of the Second Chechen War, Russia had been able to fight and win a war relatively quickly, which served to reinvigorate nationalist fervour and domestic support for the Kremlin.

Fundamental coercive mechanisms of the Russo-Georgian War
• **Denial** of direct Georgian military victory in South Ossetia and, more broadly, its desire to increase political control over the Russian-backed enclaves. • **Second-order coercion**: forcing NATO to stop expanding military infrastructure and membership through military engagement with a possible future member. *(Theoretical basis: Byman and Waxman, 2002: 48-86)*

On the operational level, Russia succeeded in forcing Georgian military withdrawal from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and gained a stronger foothold in these regions. In addition, it formally recognized their respective independences. Beforehand, Russia had set the long-term strategic goals of preventing Georgia from joining NATO. Considered more broadly, Russia had wanted to communicate for a long time that it would not tolerate further encirclement of NATO forces in Russia's 'sphere of interest' in general. The Russo-Georgian War had effectively deterred NATO from further rapprochement with Georgia, and in that sense, Putin was able to claim victory (Cohen and Hamilton, 2011: 1; Ellison, 2011: 346-347).

The Georgian War, by itself, did not change the fundamental paradigms of Russian security policy. Nevertheless, the "Medvedev Doctrine" that was outlined by the president shortly after the Five-Day War, did communicate a somewhat more assertive military defence of

Russian interests in its near-abroad. Medvedev (as cited and translated by Friedman, 2008) stipulated five familiar, yet somewhat more ambitiously stated principles of foreign policy:

I: "The primacy of the fundamental principles of international law", an obscure rhetorical statement that can be found in most national doctrines, although in this case, it is clearly linked with Russia's valuation of the UNSC as an intervention mechanism as opposed to NATO;

II: "The world should be multipolar", a reaffirmation of earlier statements made by Russian officials on the undesirability of a U.S./NATO-led system of international security and military intervention;

III: "Russia does not want confrontation with any other country", implicating Russian innocence and Georgian aggression. Overall a rather meaningless statement, since very few countries are likely to openly state that they *want* confrontation;

IV: "Protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, *wherever they may be*", a clear rationale for military intervention in Georgia. This carried significant implications as a precedent for other Russian-dominated regions that surround Russia's territorial demarcation on the western and southern flanks (considering Russia had distributed passports to Georgian residents and thus 'created' new citizens to protect, it had effectively helped create a *casus belli* for itself);

V: "There are regions in which Russia has *privileged interests*, these regions are home to countries with which we share special historical relations", a statement that was not necessarily new (see Chapter II of the 2000 NSC, for example), but in combination with (IV) is the most crucial of the five as effectively the most ambitious and far-reaching principle guiding future security policy in the FSU.

Remarkably, however, the notion of 'regions with privileged interests' and Russia's armed confrontation with Georgia directly contradicted a rather curiously dovish and generally antirealist sentiment that one gets while analysing Medvedev's approved Foreign Policy Concept of July 12, 2008 in detail. The 2008 FPC does contain the usual list of Russia's concerns surrounding unipolarity, the primacy of the UNSC, NATO infrastructure, the stability of the CIS, and the protection of compatriots abroad. However, in contrast with the 2000 FPC approved by Putin, the 2008 version did not even mention Russia as a "great power" but mentions that the "new Russia" is "one of the centres". The document appears to

be throwing Cold-War confrontationist doctrine away in the "end of the ideological era", and insists that;

"Traditional cumbersome military and political alliances can no longer provide for counteracting the whole range of modern challenges and threats which are transnational in their nature. Bloc approaches to international problems are being replaced by a network diplomacy based on flexible forms of participation in international structures for the search of joint solutions to common tasks" (FPC, 2008).

It is hard to dissect the source of this confusing difference between concept and the reality of Russia's actions prior and during the war with Georgia. One explanation for this the contrast between Putin and Medvedev's documents stems from their respective professional backgrounds. In that regard, Putin's KGB/FSB history as an insider of the Moscow security apparatus and his acquiescence to its security concerns differs significantly from Medvedev's more academic background as a professor of law at the Saint Petersburg State University before politics (see Mankoff, 2009: 14).

Medvedev saw the Russo-Georgian War as an opportunity to strengthen his case for an alternative European security architecture to NATO: "otherwise there will be no guarantees that some other Saakashvili could blow his top and do something like what happened in August" (Medvedev, 2008), he noted in September (congruent with 'II' of the Medvedev Doctrine). Compared to Putin's 2007 diatribe at the Munich Security Conference, Medvedev should generally be seen as someone with a more compromising stance towards Europe and the U.S. (Tsygankov, 2014: 31).

As the Russian analyst Lukyanov (2012) notes, Medvedev was much more liberal in tone, placing greater rhetorical emphasis on consolidating Russian democracy, civil society, liberal economic reform, multilateralism, and international law, and speaks with respect of U.S. President Obama, who helped him engineer Russia's longstanding desire to join the World Trade Organization (WTO; Medevev, 2012). Putin, instead is more of a realist who looks at threats in the international arena. Consequently, the 2008 FSC might be seen as a manifestation hereof. Nevertheless, Medvedev – after all, a highly trusted person to be personally picked by Putin to swap seats with him between 2008 and 2012 - never challenged the underlying premises of Russia's security policy in the FSU, as the Medvedev Doctrine epitomizes. The net effect of the difference between Medvedev and Putin is one in the

margins of Russian security policy, not in its essence; perhaps that would have prevented the Russo-Georgian War.

3.3. Aftermath: operational deficiencies

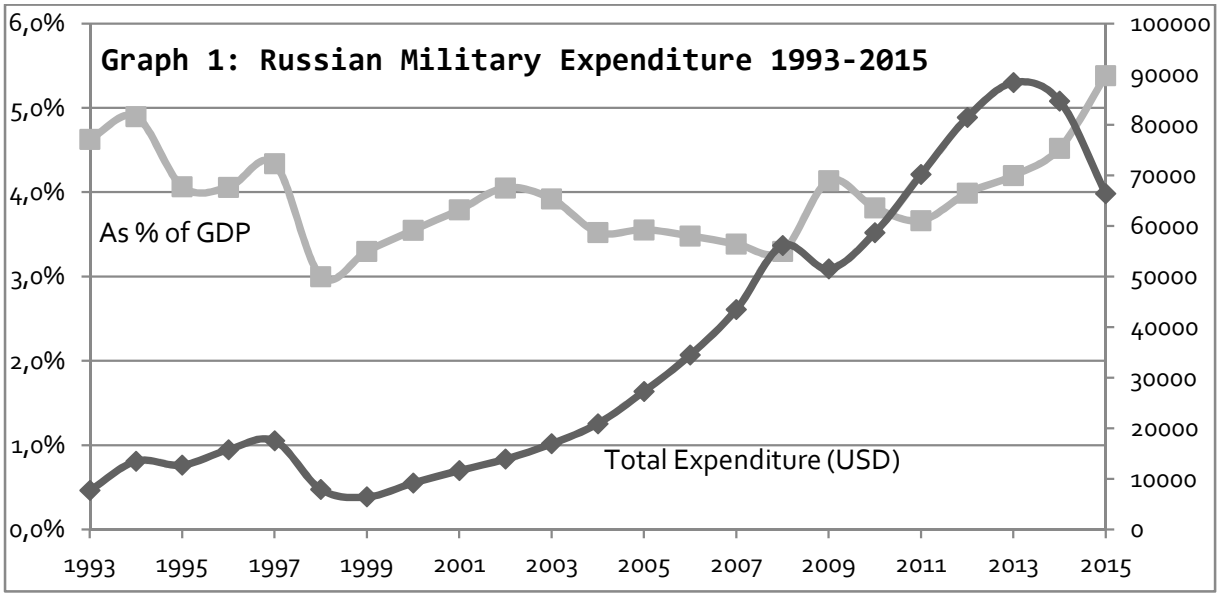
Despite longer-term operational and strategic victory, the Russo-Georgian War also exposed some serious deficiencies during the tactical operations of the Russian armed forces. Although the scenario of war in Georgia had been meticulously prepared for in advance, much of the equipment used by the Russian military proved to be outdated and/or ill-maintained. Russian forces still mainly used Soviet-era manoeuvres, in contrast with Georgia, which benefitted from superior training and equipment as a result of its rapprochement with the U.S. and other Western allies (Cohen and Hamilton, 2011: 28, 33).

The U.S. armed forces had demonstrated as early as the 1990-1991 Gulf War a revolutionary capability to employ C_4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computer, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) technology. C_4ISR, when used in a 'networked' approach of all the branches of the armed forces, is crucial means for flexible and integrated deployment and utilization of the armed forces (e.g. Shimko, 2010). Network-centric warfare constituted the 'unipolar moment' for U.S. military strategy during the time of the USSR's demise.

Russian combat operations in Georgia revealed that its military capability was still behind in that particular field of innovation: tactical communication methods where outdated; inter-service communication at times non-existent; air force intelligence failed to identify Georgian air defence systems; Precision-guided munitions (PGM) for the air force and artillery were in short supply, and UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), capable of designating PGM targets, appear not to have been operational either. Experts have asserted that with better C_4ISR, friendly and civilian casualties could have been much lower (Renz, 2014: 64; Vendil and Westerlund, 2010: 407-412).

After the war, the operational deficiencies of the military did not go unnoticed. The Kremlin, in the previous eight years, had already invested in its defence capacity through alleviating budgets and improving training methods, which had yielded significant results compared to the meagre financial terms and frequent cutbacks of the Yeltsin years. Furthermore, under the stewardship of Defence minister Ivanov (2001-2007), the Russian Ministry of Defence streamlined the process of military acquisition and procurement by cutting down the

responsible governing bodies from a grand total of 52 to just 1. Nevertheless, the Russian military still suffered from, most of all, endemic corruption and misuse and theft of government funds (Herspring, 2008: 21-22).



Russian combined military expenditure 1993-2015 indicates a steady rise of the military budget up to the Georgian War. However, expenditure as a percentage of GDP has remained between 3 and 4 percent. Figures in US million $ (Source: Military Expenditure Database, 2015).

Anatoly Serdyukov, an economist and former head of the tax ministry, had been appointed in 2007 to further increase the military's efficiency and make it a credible modern force, and had made the tackling of government waste a top priority. In addition, Serdyokov's reforms, announced in late 2008, envisaged a variety of technological and organisational features, most prominently (Renz, 2014: 61-62; Herspring, 2008: 30; Felgenhauer, 2008; Tskypin, 2010):

(I) The procurement of advanced, high-tech equipment;

(II) A shift away from conscript to professional personnel;

(III) Tactical innovations that would replace the mass mobilization doctrine of the Soviet Union with smaller and flexible rapid reaction forces;

(IV) Streamlining command and control (*inter alia* by replacing the four-level command structure (military district-army-division-regiment to a three-level military structure (military district-operational command-brigade));

(V) Applying changes, including a downsizing of the vast officer corps with thousands of layoffs, in order to improve the general cost-effectiveness of the organizational structure of the armed forces.

Despite these grand ambitions, applying radical reform would soon prove to meet stiff resistance from inside the ranks of the armed forces, a fundamentally conservative institution. Serdyokov's plans clashed with the Chief of the General Staff, Baluyevsky, who publicly criticized Serdyovkov by protesting against the costly plans to move the navy headquarters from Moscow to the historic site of the old Imperial Navy in St. Petersburg. The Deputy Chair of the Duma Defence Committee, Barinov, although stressing the importance of a network-centric approach, complained severely about the diminished size and traditions of the officer corps as a result of reforms (McDermott, 2011). Prominent military scholar Gareev pleaded the Kremlin to retain the doctrines of conscript personnel and mass mobilization as fundamental principles of national security. In short, there has been a general unwillingness to support all aspects of the far-fetching structural reforms within elements of the military leadership and national security apparatus (McDermott, 2013; De Haas, 2011: 32).

Gradually, many initiated reforms were blocked, although there has been an overriding agreement on the need to improve C_4ISR capability and modernize equipment in general. Russia's widespread shortcomings could not be solved overnight, given the fact that they were founded in decades of innovative stagnation. The expensive high-tech equipment requirements of C_4ISR were a constraining factor as well. Even though budgets have risen steadily in the 21st century, as a percentage of GDP, spending actually went down until 2008 (see Graph 1). Meanwhile, Russia suffered from the 2007-2008 financial crisis, which alleviated poverty and decreased revenue. As a result, spending suffered a brief dip (De Haas, 2011: 33).

3.4. Aftermath: doctrinal reconfiguration

Following the Medvedev Doctrine and the initiation of military reform of 2008, the Kremlin moved to further articulate the doctrinal developments in its security policy. On May 12, 2009, Medvedev signed the 'National Security Strategy to 2020' in law, replacing the 2000 NSC. Whereas the 2000 NSC is a more descriptive list of threats, the 2009 NSS is more "aspirational", because it includes more policy goals and ambitions (Giles, 2009: 3).

The document has a strong economic focus, and notes with applause that the "decline in the quality of life of Russian citizens" (NSS, 2009) during the end of the 20th century has been stopped, that Russian economic competitiveness in the global sphere has increased, and that social harmony within Russia has improved. It also stresses the interconnectedness between the NSS and the 2009 Concept for Long-term Socio-Economic Development as a crucial

means of guaranteeing national security. Overall, the document exuberates more confidence than the 2000 NSC, and pragmatically assesses that Russia's future strategic aspirations require a more solid economic foundation (Dimitrakopoulou and Liaropoulos, 2010: 36; Schröder, 2009: 6)

In the wake of President Obama's 2008 election in the United States, there appears to be additionally some optimism about a the future of U.S-Russia relations, albeit in very ambivalently defined terms, promising that Russia will strive towards building an "equitable and valuable strategic partnership (...) on the basis of shared interests" and that Russia is interested in building good relations with NATO (NSS, 2009). These statements have prompted some analysts to proclaim that the 2009 NSS is essentially a document with a "conciliatory character" (Zysk, 2009) that was directed by the Medvedev administration as a signalling tool in order to "reset" relations after recent confrontations (Tichý, 2014: 539).

However, the 2009 NSS, in many ways, rehashes the traditional conservative threat assessments. NATO military infrastructure near Russia's borders, as well as its building of a missile defence system in Europe, remains one of the primary threats. Nuclear and conventional military deterrence remain a cornerstone of official strategy. The 2009 NSS also builds on the Medvedev Doctrine and the Georgian War in the sense that it wants a "more effective defence of the rights and lawful interests of Russian citizens abroad" (NSS, 2009). This additionally is very similar to the 2000 NSC, which proclaimed "protecting the lawful rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad, particularly with the use of political, economic and other measures" as a foreign policy goal. Thus, the document integrates military experiences, previous documentation, and recent international developments.

In addition, various analysts (Blank, 2012; Giles, 2009: 7) have noted that the 2009 NSS contains a strong culturally conservative element. The 2009 NSS views the support of national culture as a form of strategy, and aims to improve national security by "reinforcing the spiritual unity of the multiethnic population" and "creating a system of spiritual and patriotic education for Russian citizens" (NSS, 2009). Remarkably, *spiritual* and *patriotic* are almost constructed as though they refer to the same concept. Payne (2010: 4), among others, has argued that Russian foreign policy and the Russian orthodox church have grown increasingly symbiotic under Vladimir Putin, and that the idea that the strengthening of the position of the Russian orthodox church abroad will pay dividends for the Russian national security as a whole.

The 2009 NSS also further addresses the necessity of military modernization, but only in very general terms. These reforms are articulated in somewhat more detail in the 2010 Military Doctrine, approved by Medvedev on February 5. The 2010 Military Doctrine was published in the wake of recently improved relations with the West: on June 27th on the Greek island of Corfu, the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) had agreed to resume political consultations at the highest level following suspension thereof in the wake of the Georgian War. On September 17th, the Obama administration announced its decision to scrap Bush's long-range ABM plans in Poland and the Czech Republic, instead opting for smaller interceptors aboard ships in an attempt to ease Russia's longstanding concerns. Medvedev responded in a typically measured way, saying that he "appreciated the reasonable approach" (as cited by Baker, 2009).

The Military Doctrine, however, at first sight, does not appear to take special attention to this improved relationship. The Military Doctrine (2010: 8) remains fundamentally preoccupied with the "protection of its citizens located beyond the borders" and opposed to any NATO military infrastructure, eastward expansion, and the deployment of missile defence systems. One subtle difference with the previous military doctrine is that NATO is now classified as a military *danger* and not a military *threat.* Although not exactly a congratulating adjective for a supposedly strategic partner, it might be construed as a way to placate Western observers: the document defines danger as "capable in certain conditions of leading to the emergence of a military threat" as opposed to the concept of threat as a situation which is characterized by a "real possibility of the outbreak of a military conflict between opposing sides and by a high degree of readiness (...) to utilize military force' (Miltary Doctrine, 2010: 2). Thus, the former could lead to the latter.

The 2010 doctrine can also be seen to be heightening the threshold of nuclear deterrence somewhat, in response to the Obama-Medvedev 'reset'. In 2000, the use of nuclear weapons was considered to be justified in situations involving large-scale aggression or nuclear weapons, thus in situations "critical for the national security of the Russian Federation and its allies" (Sokov, 1999). The 2010 Doctrine states that nuclear weapons can be used in retaliation to nuclear attacks, or attacks with other types of weapons of mass destruction against Russia or its allies, but will only be conducted in the case of a conventional attack "when the very existence of the state is under threat" (Military Doctrine, 2010). However, the principle of nuclear deterrence itself has not been questioned.

Nevertheless, the doctrine does not stand out as particularly innovative, and is more noticeable for its continuity of existing ideas than anything else. The doctrine is mostly silent on the issue of the recent military reform. Although it does generically stress the importance of working in the framework of concepts such as 'innovation', 'development', 'effectiveness', it goes into little detail and avoids the more controversial aspects of reform. Moreover, the document repeatedly refers to "mobilization", a word that Serdyokov had sought to phase out of Russian military lexicon. As such, there appears to be little added value in the publication of the document compared to its predecessors, and the fundamental ideas of the Russian national security and military elite, when taking the document in isolation, appear not to have changed greatly.

3.5. Conclusion

The Georgian War was both a consequence and a changer of Russian security policy. It was a consequence, since Georgia, as a FSU state with Russian-backed autonomous regions, had always been a country which garnished special Russian attention. The conflict emanated from a situation in which Russia distinguished a set of strategically disadvantageous international developments, as outlined in 1.4. Saakashvilli's ascent to power in Georgia, who sought to unify the country and to become a member of NATO, was always going to be seen as a threat to Russian national security – it fitted the Russian narrative of encirclement. As a result, Russia in the years prior to the Russo-Georgian War firmly boosted military spending and posturing, contributing to the outbreak of the war.

It was a changer in two crucial senses. Firstly, the successful denial of Georgian military victory over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the effective dissuasion of future Georgian NATO membership served to bolster the confidence in an assertive military strategy - under the deceptive guise of protecting Russian nationals and Russian speakers. Secondly, the Russo-Georgian War increased the Kremlin's awareness over the widespread military operational deficiencies that had plagued the Russian units in Georgia.

The Medvedev Doctrine was not innovative in its underlying premises compared to the earlier published NSC or the Military Doctrine. However, the 2009 NSS slightly more conciliatory in tone compared to Putin's documents. The 2008 FSC, in addition, is an odd exception to the tensions of 2008, and indicates that Medvedev's presidency (2008-2012) actually was a marginally constraining factor regarding the offensiveness of Russian military strategy compared to Putin. In this regard he was helped with the U.S. Obama presidency following

the 2008 elections, as the new president was prepared to reason with Russia over core issues such as missile defence, allowing Medvedev to strike a more conciliatory tone. Yet, this 'reset' in relations would not last, in large part because of the success of the war, and in part because many of the Russian perceived threats to national security were still existent.

The Georgian War's long-term security policy outcomes; success or failure?

SUCCESFUL IMPLICATIONS

- Increased control over Russia-backed enclaves
- Established a credible threat to use force to back up doctrinal principles, in particular 'protecting Russian civilians' and 'defending sphere of interests'
- Challenged the much-maligned 'unipolarity' in international relations
- Georgian NATO-membership off the table (Medvedev, three years later, effectively argued himself this had been the overriding successful achievement, see Dyomkin, 2011)

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS

- Increased anxiety in the FSU over increased Russian assertiveness, further legitimizing NATO's continuing existence as a guarantor of security.
- Russia's recognition of an independent Abkhazia and South Ossetia did not gain international support, thus served to politically isolate Russia
- Russia's official argument of strengthening UNSC mechanisms had been rendered obsolete, since it had unilaterally used force on sovereign Georgian territory
- Exposed serious deficiencies in operations of the armed forces, thus decreasing the potential coercive effects of future threats of force

4. The Russia-Ukraine Conflict (2014-ongoing)

4.1. Readying for war

Ukraine's future was tied to Georgia's. After all, the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit that infuriated Putin outlined a NATO commitment, albeit ambivalently defined, to add both countries to its alliance over time. Ukraine, like Georgia, had been a Russian national security priority. Ukraine, like Georgia, had been a divided country: Yushchenko, the leader of the Orange Revolution, had his main electoral base of power in Ukraine's western and central areas between Lviv and Kiev. In contrast, his main opponent, the Russian-oriented Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions, would find most of his support among situated in the eastern, disproportionally ethnic Russian regions around Donetsk, Luhansk and the Crimean peninsula, the latter of which *Oblasts* enjoyed special autonomous status, and has been the host of the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol.

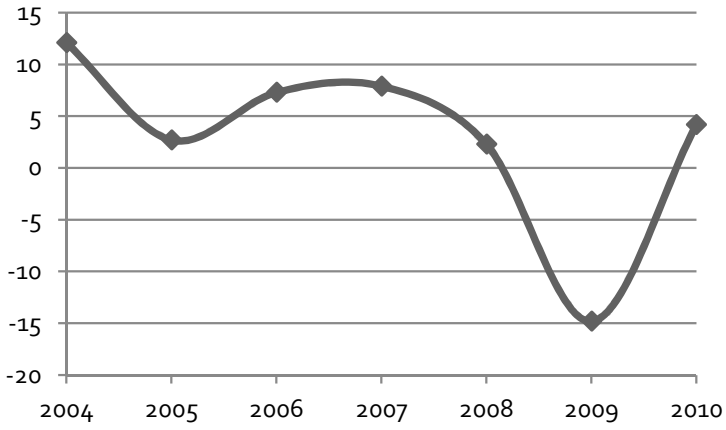
Eastern Ukrainians mostly held a distinctively negative view of the Orange Revolution, and a disproportionate amount of them very quickly believed that it had been the result of a nefarious conspiracy of sorts. When polled in 2005, 64 per cent of Yanukovich voters somewhat or completely agreed with the proposition that purpose of the Orange Revolution was to create "chaos" in the country, as opposed to 9 per cent of Yushchenko voters. 43 per cent of Yanukovich voters also believed that "outside forces" were responsible for the protests, as opposed to 14 per cent of Yuschenko voters (Buerkle et al, 2005: 18-19).

Yushchenko's 2004-2005 Orange Revolution, heralded in the West as a democratic triumph and as the potential beginning of a new and modern Ukraine, had initially been the major driving force behind Ukraine's rapprochement with the West. In the wake of the presidential elections, the European Parliament resolved to build closer political-economic relations with Ukraine in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and to offer a pathway to eventual membership, provided that Ukraine would continue to develop towards improving democratic accountability and free market mechanisms (European Parliament resolution, 2005). In January 2008, Ukraine officially declared readiness to join the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) in a joint letter to Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer by President Yuschenko, Prime Minister Tymoschuk and Parliament Chairman Yatsenyuk (Sushko, 2008: 3).

To make matters worse for Russia, in December 2008, the U.S. and Ukraine signed the Charter on Strategic Partnership, which *inter alia* stated a shared agreement "to gain agreement on a structured plan to increase interoperability and coordination of capabilities between NATO and Ukraine, including via enhanced training and equipment for Ukrainian armed forces" (US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, 2008). This agreement will have felt as a bitter pill to swallow for Russian strategists, who undoubtedly would have hoped that the Russo-Georgian War had dissuaded the United States and NATO from seeking further expansion into the FSU.

Yet, over time, Yushchenko's popularity faded. The primary reason for this phenomenon was economic: firstly, Ukraine had been dealt with the fierce blow of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis. In November 2008, national industrial output fell at a whopping 28.6 per cent, the fastest pace in the whole of Europe (Ukraine's November industrial output falls 28.6 per cent, 2008). In 2009, GDP fell 15 percent, indicating serious macroeconomic vulnerabilities (see graph). Following these developments, Ukraine ultimately had to be bailed out by the EU and the IMF.

Graph 2: Ukrainian GDP Growth in %, 2004-2010



Source: GDP Growth, World Bank (2016)

One important factor in Ukraine's economic vulnerability was and is Russia's gas exports to Ukraine. One analyst describes Ukraine as in a situation of "absolute dependency" (Bilgin, 2009: 4485) on Russian gas: in 2008, Russian gas constituted 79 per cent of total imports. Although in relative terms, Belarus, the Baltic States and Georgia are more dependent, in absolute terms, Ukraine imports the largest amount, given the consumption needs of its relatively large domestic population and its function as the key transit country for the rest of Europe.

Ukraine has had a longstanding conflict with Russia over gas prices; in January 2006 and January 2009, disputes arose over the amount of money that *Gazprom* charged the Ukrainian government. In that regard, *Gazprom*, given its symbiotic relationship with the Kremlin, has faced accusations that it was using increased pricing and at its most extreme the shutting off of its natural gas supply as a political weapon by which to punish the Ukrainian pivot towards the West (Pirani et al., 2009: 31). Even though Ukraine may have been partly to blame for failing to pay the right amount, the fact that Russia was prepared to take extraordinary measures in order to prove a point only serve to highlight the risks of the high Ukrainian - and in general, European - gas dependency on Russia. This dependency goes both ways, but it remains one of the crucial non-military strategic leverages over the near-abroad at the disposal of the Kremlin.

The presidential elections of 2010, in the context of these developments, replaced Yushchenko with Yanukovich, who planned to pursue a policy of non-alignment. His early decision and the parliament's agreement to stop NATO-Ukraine rapprochement was not necessarily controversial: in 2010, according to polling by *Pew Research,* only 28 percent of Ukrainians favoured NATO membership, whilst an overwhelming majority (93 percent) held positive attitudes towards Russia (Sprehe, 2010).

The crux of the controversy surrounded relations with the EU, a widely more popular proposition. Yanukovich, although certainly more pro-Russian than his predecessor, repeatedly had promised to build better political-economic relations with the EU. In 2012, this culminated into negotiations for an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA). Western complaints regarding the detention of ex-prime minister Vitoria Tymoshenko halted negotiations, but in 2013, the plan appeared to be moving ahead.

In November 2013, Yanukovich's decision to suddenly abrogate signing the AA led to the mass protests that are now known as *Euromaidan.* The Ukrainian government would later admit that it had delayed following intense pressure from Moscow; Putin called the deal a "big threat" to the Russian economy, and wanted to integrate Ukraine into the Eurasian Customs Union (EACU) together with Belarus and Kazakhstan (Ukraine-EU trade deal 'big threat' to Russia's economy, 2013). Putin's decision to promise Kiev's government substantive loans in return of turning down the AA led to Yanukovich's sudden change of heart, angering Ukrainians (Freedman, 2014: 12).

Russia's involvement in Ukraine indicates that the notion of a sphere of interests is not just perceived as a military strategic space, but additionally a notion of a region in which Russia has substantial economic ambitions. In fact, the EU can hardly be seen as constituting a military threat – that decision-making process is still reserved for the political echelons of national capitals as well as in the framework of NATO. Vladimir Putin, apparently, sees the two as interlinked: Western expansion of economic cooperation is now, like military cooperation, to be seen as a threat, because it inhibits a Russia-led economic strategy. Moreover, increased cooperation with the EU may be feared to lead to more cooperation with NATO in the future, given that it essentially is perceived to be a shift away from Russia. This rationale is a testament of growing assertiveness and increasing pertinence of 'bloc' thinking, reminiscent of the Cold War.

The Foreign Policy Concept of 12 February 2013, although once again generally a vague bureaucratic document, provided a hint for the upcoming Russian uncompromising stance on Ukraine. The FPC notices a shift of power from West to East, and cites new Russian ambitions for the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (ECU), which is "designed to serve as an effective link between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region" (FPC, 2013). The document also singles out Ukraine as a "priority partner" for integration within the CIS.

However, like the 2008 FPC, the 2013 FPC is markedly more liberal than the NSS and Military Doctrine and somewhat detached from the events that follow, as it believes that "the bloc approach to addressing international issues is gradually replaced" (FPC, 2013; in contrast, the 2010 Military Doctrine refers to NATO as a "bloc"). Overall, the FPC provides some interesting subtle changes, and also specifically notes, contrary to earlier versions, the importance of the status of Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (for an overview, see Ruiz Gonzalez, 2013: 17).

Euromaidan, in short, crushed Putin's economic ambitions in Ukraine as set out by the FPC. Although the protest were widely supported in the country's western parts, the eastern parts, which generally preferred close association with Russia, grew increasingly disenfranchised with Kiev's new government following the ousting of Yanukovich. This disenfranchisement had a strong cultural element: the European flags and the pro-democratic nature of the protests clashed, in many aspects, with the 'Eastern Slavic' identity that is prevalent in Eastern Ukraine: a paternalist construct of identity which, like in the Orange Revolution,

tends become overly nationalist and reactionary in the face of rapid social change (Kuzio, 2010: 10).

4.2. Annexation of Crimea

This combination of economic and cultural reasons provided some crucial reasons for Russian military intervention; an intervention which was however not announced. First reports of military force surfaced around late February 2014, after Yanukovich had fled Ukraine for Russia. The ensuing chaotic and disjointed state of Ukraine would provide an ideal window of opportunity for Moscow to strike (Galeotti, 2016: 284). Although not admitted at the time, Putin would later reveal to Russian state television that he had ordered the deployment of Russian Special Forces, marines and paratroopers "under the guise of reinforcing our military facilities in Crimea" (Birnbaum, 2015). These forces would become known as 'the little green men', and did not bear the official insignia of Russian military. Their presence had been subject to a treaty with Ukraine which allowed a maximum of 20,000 troops in the framework of supporting Russia's existing military infrastructure there; therefore – initially - the extra deployment did not violate international agreements.

These military-equipped little green men were ordered to capture some of the peninsula's strategic locations on February 27. During the day, "at least a few dozen" of these men stormed and captured the Crimean parliament, the Crimean Council (Shuster, 2014). These swift actions led to a Crimean declaration of independence, which proceeded to a 'referendum' on joining Russia. Of course, the outcome and judicial basis of this referendum (with no independent monitoring to supervise practices) were completely illegitimate as it violated Ukraine's territorial sovereignty, and was thus met with near-universal condemnation at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA Resolution 68/262, 2014). Nevertheless, the referendum initiated Crimea's accession into the Russian Federation, thus completing successful annexation through military force; the first instance of successful annexation in Europe since the Second World War (Hille et al., 2014).

In what has now become Putin's favourite historical analogy, Putin compared the Crimean situation with Kosovo in his post-annexation Kremlin address, saying that "the Kosovo precedent was "exactly what Crimea is doing now" (Putin, 2014a), implying that Crimea's population was under a serious threat of humanitarian catastrophe, even though no such threat was present. In this frame, Putin cited a Ukrainian draft law on promoting the Ukrainian

language as opposed to the Russian as an "infringement on the rights of ethnic minorities" (Putin, 2014a). Thus, the rationales in both the Russo-Georgian War and for military intervention in Ukraine are in some ways similar; both are coated in the moral duty to protect Russians and Russian-speakers. Yet, only later would Putin come to admit intervention; in the 2014 address, he insists on the label "local self-defence units" (Putin, 2014a), suggesting that the annexation had been the result of a voluntary, locally orchestrated process.

The 2014 address is further remarkable, because it uses the historical relationship with Crimea as a justification for annexation: "Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride", elaborating on the "graves of Russian soldiers" and the Crimea's connection with the Russian Orthodox Church (Putin, 2014a). This spiritual-cultural-historical nexus as a foundational principle of security policy strongly relates back to what we have seen in the 2009 NSS, and can form a justification for an even more militarized foreign policy, with regards other European states that harbour historical relations with Russian culture. Menkiszak, for example (2014: 1-2), has argued that the defending and spreading of Russian culture and civilization has become an important means by which Putin seeks to solidify Russia's relations with the FSU in general.

Another crucial element of Putin's discourse is the deeply felt notion of the U.S. as the chief instigator of instability. Certainly, this was also the case during the Colour Revolutions, but in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, it was very much also a notion that interlocks with the need to defend Russian civilization from all kinds of barbarism: "*Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes* and *anti-Semites* executed this coup", and "our western partners crossed the line" (Putin, 2014a). Such statements point in the direction of growing belligerence in the execution of security policy.

Despite all the heated official discourse about protecting civilians and civilization itself, it should be of no doubt that Crimea's strategic location has been a very convenient factor in Putin's decision to intervene. Ever since Russia has consolidated control over Crimea, it has proceeded with its rapid militarization. Whereas Russia previously leased its Sevastopol headquarters from Ukraine, Russia has now been able to use the freed funds to finance a large influx of new troops, equipment, ships, and facilities. According to Vice Admiral Alexander Vitko in September 2014, the commander of the Black Sea fleet, Russia will construct a second naval base near Novorossiysk, and he will have command over 80 more warships by 2020 in the context of Russia's military modernization (Soldatkin, 2014).

In turn, the Ukrainian navy is deprived of its most important ports and the bulk of its naval assets (it lost 57 of its military ships to Russia, see Goșu and Manea, 2015: 10) and is not in any financial state to rebuild soon. Wilk (2014) stresses that this, in combination with the lack of naval modernization on the part of Romania and Bulgaria, will give Russia a comparative advantage over NATO forces in the balance of naval forces the Black Sea in the near future.

In order to further integrate the Crimean economy with Russia, Putin has also ordered the construction of the Kerch Strait Bridge, popularly known as "Putin's bridge", a multi-billion dollar project which symbolizes Russia's ambitions in Crimea. The peninsula currently can only be directly supplied by Russia via air or sea transport. The ambition is to complete the bridge by 2018 and would provide one step further in a way of exploiting Crimean strategic potential (Osborn, 2016). Both Russia's economic and military objectives in Crimea are evidence of that Crimea's annexation is the result of a cold-hearted calculative approach, rather than the moralistic language that is uttered by Putin and his associates.

Interestingly, Russia achieved these objectives in Crimea without any bloodshed. Compared to Georgia, it looks, at least in the short term, like a staggering operational success, since the strategic gains have been much higher whilst the losses in manpower have been lower. The general way in which Russia has achieved this objective is through what in the West has become labelled as 'hybrid warfare'. Although the novelty and analytical utility of the concept is contested, hybrid warfare essentially denotes a combination of different types of previously defined types of warfare, such as "conventional, irregular, political or information" (Kofman and Rojansky, 2015). Other scholars have proposed the terms "full-spectrum warfare" or "non-linear warfare" (Galeotti, 2016: 287), but they essentially give different names to the same notion; namely, that Russia has intervened using a combination of non-traditional methods that can be useful when the use of brute force is inconvenient, unlikely to succeed, or impossible.

In Crimea, Russia has succeeded by using a shrewd combination of mobilizing and arming local militias and creating a basis for additional popular support for Moscow and discontent with Kiev. This has occurred through the quasi-legitimacy of the referendum, but additionally with a barrage of Moscow-backed media propaganda which denied Russian intervention and depicted Kiev as the new Nazi-Germany, which some have argued to be deserving of the term "information warfare" (Snegovaya, 2015). This sowing of mistrust, fear, and discontent, in turn, 'invited' a large-scale military invasion following the referendum that was impossible

for Ukraine to resist. Putin thus combined irregular methods with the traditional strategic asset of military superiority. Afterwards, he even stated that he was prepared to put Russia's nuclear weapons on high alert "in the worst possible turn of events" (as cited by MacFarquhar, 2015).

4.3. War in Eastern Ukraine

In Eastern Ukraine, Putin's security policy has seen a similar of hybrid methods, although unlike in Crimea, Russia has not proceeded to annexation. The origins of Russian military involvement are found in the violent clashes in and between *Euromaidan* and Anti-*Euromaidan* protesters, which swept through Eastern Ukraine in the aftermath of Yanukovich's flight from office in late February 2014.

One of the most likely explanations for the differences in approach between Eastern Ukraine and Crimea is the population itself: surveys show that Russia's popularity is vastly greater among Crimean residents than those living in Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, Eastern Ukrainians are less likely to believe the implications of the pro-Russian discourse; one example is the concept of *Novorossiya* ("New Russia"), which one survey shows is taken to mean "desire for independence" by most Crimean respondents, whereas those in South- and Eastern Ukraine are more likely to see it as "Russian political technology" (O'Loughlin and Toal, 2015). Putin has designated *Novorossiya* to be Eastern and Southern Oblasts of "Kharkov, Lugansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa" (Putin, 2014b), based on Russia's 'historical relationship' with these regions. Furthermore, Crimea had already enjoyed, since the dissolution of the USSR, the status as an Autonomous Republic within Ukraine; the Eastern and Southern Oblasts have not. Most likely, annexation of these territories would have led to an even greater confrontation between Russia and the West.

Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the case that Russia has intervened extensively into Eastern Ukraine, predominantly in the adjacent Donetsk and Luhansk regions. As in Crimea, Russian officials have ostensibly denied that this was the case. However, there is a wealth of research available, based on open-source intelligence (OSINT), which points to the contrary. Czuperski et al.'s *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2015), for example, has extensively tracked the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine and located their positions and movements by tracking the pictures they posted of themselves online. They also tracked Russian military hardware

that has been used against Ukrainian forces (sometimes under the guise of being a "humanitarian convoy") and shelling of Ukrainian positions from Russian territory.

The opposition politician Boris Nemtsov's (assassinated near the Kremlin on February 27, 2015) posthumous report *Putin. War* (2015: 17-23, 33-37) details eyewitness accounts of Russian servicemen, who stated that Russian special forces and paratroopers were ordered to disguise themselves as volunteers, and that the most important military operations have been led by Russian generals. It also details how families of Russian soldiers killed in action received compensation from the state and had to sign non-disclosure agreements. Bellingcat, a collective of investigative journalists, have tracked the cross-border movement of the infamous Russian-supplied BUK Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) system that was used to shoot down Malaysia Airlines MH17 at the hands of the Russia-backed separatists (Bellingcat, 2015).

Unlike in Georgia, the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DPR & LPR) did not get an official Russian recognition of independence. However, their armed forces, a loose coalition of different allied militias, have been aided and abetted by Russian operations, The exact extent of this relationship is difficult to independently establish, in part because of the lack of transparency on the part of Kremlin and because of the problem of disentangling real volunteers from Russia from those who are sent on the Kremlin's orders (Jackson, 2014).

Undoubtedly, Russian involvement has been a major factor in the continuation of the conflict there, which has seen back-and-forth offensives and counter-offensives between April 2014 until the immediate aftermath of Minsk-II, the ceasefire agreement that was signed between Ukraine and the separatists on February 12, 2015. During the initial stages of the ceasefire, pro-Russian forces used the opportunity to capture the strategic town of Debaltseve in Donetsk, which connects Donetsk with Luhansk via a rail hub and highway crossing (Luhn and Grytsenko, 2015). After that, no major territorial changes have occurred, thus more or less 'freezing' the conflict. Since there has been no fundamental peace agreement, the situation continues to be tense and the war officially still remains ongoing.

Despite heavy Russian engagement in hostilities, it is unlikely that Russia's intent is to perpetuate conflict near its border; such a continued commitment would drain more resources and draw negative international attention, without (or perhaps marginally) gaining more influence. Minsk-II, although solidifying the separatist's position through the capture of

Debalteve, also was Putin's signal to the separatists that this was as far as he would let them go (for the time being).

As Freedman (2015: 28) notes: "it would serve neither Ukraine nor Russia if Donetsk and Luhansk fell into disrepair and disarray, adrift in some separatist limbo". Russia's preference is for the implementation of all aspects the Minsk-II political resolution, which entails a high degree of independence for Donbass in a Ukrainian federative system, so that it can maintain its influence without the costly affair of continued involvement, or even annexation of the war-torn and divided regions. Such a renewed adventure would come at the cost of increased international confrontation at a time where Putin cannot afford it (Blank, 2016).

4.4. Aftermath: increased tensions

The Russia-Ukraine conflict, so far, has had a mixed bag of results for Russia and Putin's presidency. Some, in admiration, have dubbed Putin a brilliant strategist: "Putin's escalation [following the most recent Ukrainian counteroffensive] largely nullified Ukraine's previous gains and sent a message about Moscow's resolve" (Menon, 2016) one analyst argues. Indeed, at first sight, Putin's decisions do make sense, and are congruent with the fundamental Russian security policy, that, as we have seen, has been persistent since 2000: protect Russia's sphere of interests (economically, politically, and culturally). Putin appears to have strong-armed NATO by 'sending a message' that he will not be trifled with. His hawkish attitude has certainly gained him domestic popularity as well. At the start of 2012, Putin's popularity had fallen to 63 percent. Following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, his approval rating soared to nearly 90 percent (Vladimir Putin's unshakeable popularity, 2016).

For all that good news, Putin may have seriously underestimated the implications of his actions for the longer term. Russia's recent military assertiveness is, for a large part, founded upon Russia's economic resurgence in the early 21st century. In the second half of 2014, the rouble collapsed and deficits soared, leading to the stagnation and decline of the Russian economy. One reason was the record-low oil prices, on which the Russian economy is extremely dependent. Another was the imposed regime of US and EU economic sanctions.

By imposing asset freezes and travel bans, these sanctions make it more difficult for targeted Russian companies in the financial, energy and arms sector to access Western markets. Facing a still ongoing crisis, military expenditure had to be cut for 2015 (see graph 1). Still, one could make the case that the impact of these sanctions as been very limited when compared to

the impact of the falling oil prices, as Gros and Mustilli (2015) have done, and that Putin will simply pivot to the east. Certainly, Putin posed as unimpressed in the face of sanctions, arguing that they would have a "boomerang effect" for the sending countries (Putin Says Economic Sanctions Have 'Boomerang Effect', 2014).

The more imminent concern for Putin is NATO's increased presence in Eastern Europe. At the September 2014 Wales Summit, NATO members resolved to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a rapid reaction force comprising of around 5,000 (in the framework of the already existing NATO Response Force (NRF), all together comprising a total of 30,000 troops) that can respond to "challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory" (Wales Summit Declaration, 2014). Of course, it was clear to everyone involved that this was a direct response to Russia's actions in Ukraine and the increased anxiety among NATO members, particularly the Baltic States and Poland.

In February 2016, the Pentagon additionally bolstered the 'European Reassurance Initiative' (ERI), which was initiated in June 2014, by quadrupling the total expenditure from 789 million US$ in the 2016 fiscal year to 3,4 billion US$ in the 2017 fiscal year (Samp and Cancian, 2016). The ERI will further increase investment in the very fields that Russian doctrine despises, by boosting U.S. military presence in terms of troops, hardware and equipment in the framework of NATO in Eastern Europe. The program will also build 'partner capacity', which comes in addition to the decision made by Central- and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia) to increase military expenditure by an average of 19,9 % for 2016 compared to 2015 (Maronne et al., 2016: 9). Hence, Russia has singlehandedly reversed a decades-long process of steadily decreasing Europe military spending and U.S. presence in Europe.

Whereas there had been 10 years between the previous two Military Doctrines, Putin was prompted to approve a new doctrine as early as December 2014, in the heat of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation and as a reaction to the NATO Wales Summit Declaration (Oliker, 2015). Despite the new levels of tensions, most of the articles of the 2014 Doctrine are very akin to the previous doctrines. Unsurprisingly, the build-up and expansion of NATO military capability and infrastructure continues to top the list of military concerns. Like the 2010 doctrine, Russia defines NATO as a "military risk" that could potentially lead to a "military threat" (Military Doctrine, 2010, 2014; although the 2010 English translation speaks of "military danger", both are translations of the same phrase, *voennaya opasnost*).

One striking novelty, however, is the special emphasis that is put on Russian opposition to the "global strike concept", which relates to the U.S.-initiated military project Prompt Global Strike (PGS). PGS's completion would allow the U.S. to conduct long-range conventional precision-guided strikes anywhere across the globe in less than one hour. The PGS program worries Russian security analysts for various reasons; first, because such an exclusive advantage undermines the Russian-promoted notion of multipolarity in international security; second, because it may be difficult to discern PGS conventional missiles with those that are fitted with nuclear warheads; and third, because it may be difficult to establish whether long-range PGS missiles are headed for targets inside Russia, thus undermining Russian strategic deterrence (Grossman, 2009).

Furthermore, the document (ironically) notices that regional conflicts remain unsolved and that "there is a continuing tendency towards their resolution with the use of force, including in regions bordering the Russian Federation" (Military Doctrine, 2014). In contrast to earlier editions, the Doctrine now specifically singles out its ambitions in the Arctic in the framework of the Development Strategy of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation. The willingness to use military force for safeguarding Russia's interests in the Arctic is rooted in Russia's awareness of the potential economic gains that will follow the future release of large quantities of oil and gas as a result of climate change; over the past years, the Kremlin has steadily increased its military presence in the Arctic (De Haas, 2015: 3)

These ambitions are juxtaposed with a sense of near-paranoia over "subversive operations of special services and organizations of foreign states" (Military Doctrine, 2014), a new addition which is likely to be related to Moscow's claims about a foreign backed anti-Russian 'coup' in Ukraine. Putin, in the wake of Russia's own 'hybrid warfare' operations in Ukraine, appears to be worried that his geopolitical opponents may do the same to Russia's population: "subversive information activities against the population, especially young citizens of the State, aimed at undermining historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions related to the defence of the Motherland" (Military Doctrine, 2014) are considered one of the main internal *military* risks. This statement hints how fearful the Russian national security elite is of mass anti-government protests amounting to a form of 'Russian Maidan' (Klein, 2015: 2).

As Golts (2015) notes, it is not made clear by the doctrine which institution is supposed to counter this undermining of "historical, spiritual and patriotic traditions"; the notion that this unpatriotic behaviour is a military risk appears to suggest that the Ministry of Defence, the

FSB, or the SCRF have some role to play in developing counter-strategies. The document also does not specify what these 'traditions' are supposed to entail, and who defines them. If anything, the new military doctrine looks like a blueprint for both internal and external militarization; a proposition that unfortunately leaves only limited room for compromise and cooperation with Western and/or democratic forces. This state of affairs, in turn, would not be helped with the conflicting strategic perceptions between Russia and the West during the course of the ongoing civil war in Syria.

4.5. Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine resulted both from an expansive Russian interpretation of 'sphere of interests'. It was not a surprise that Russia views Ukraine as central to its foreign security policy – that much is congruent with the previous articulation of security policy in both documents and discourse. However, the fact that Russia was prepared to use military force as a result over the 'threat' of increased Ukrainian political-economic integration with the EU is highly noteworthy. This interpretation contrasts significantly with the case of the Russo-Georgian War, although both interventions were highly cloaked in the argument of protecting Russian nationals. The means of the intervention are also fundamentally different, as Russia has denied military presence in Ukraine on many occasions.

The official, highly cultural-historical discourse by which the intervention in Ukraine is justified should be largely dismissed as a distraction of the real reasons for intervention. A cultural-historical relationship by itself does not provide a sufficient and satisfactory reason for Russia's military intervention, aside from the fact that such argumentation sets a very dangerous precedent for future Russian action. The Russian-speakers and nationals in Eastern Ukraine were not under any serious threat, thus did not require any protecting. Russia has invoked this reason for what was in fact primarily a means of expanding its regional influence and thereby bolstering national security. For Russia, the annexation of Crimea yields important military strategic value in terms of the projection of its naval forces and provides economic opportunities. As such, Moscow engages in traditional counterbalancing behaviour.

The geospatial 'successes' of the Russia-Ukraine conflict have been highly consequential for Russian security policy. The 2014 Military Doctrine especially encapsulates the sense of a resurgent Russia which is more assertive and outward looking. In the long term, Russia has nevertheless increased threats for itself. Due to Russia's intervention in Ukraine, NATO has

increased presence and readiness in Eastern Europe, and Russia's economy has become more volatile. At the same time, Russia is looking more inward, towards possible 'subversive operations' by foreign states. In short, Russia has become more aware of what it sees as both internal and external threats, which it views as interlocked issues.

The Ukrainian War's long-term security policy outcomes; success or failure?

SUCCESFUL IMPLICATIONS

- *De facto* added new territory through annexation of Crimea without meaningful resistance on the ground
- Strategic control over the Black Sea has been solidified through the permanent acquisition and militarization of the Sevastopol naval port
- Increased political, military, and economic influence in Eastern Ukraine
- Successfully establishing credible threat to use force to protect interests in FSU
- Given divisions, future NATO membership for Ukraine has become highly unlikely

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS

- Hostile relations with central government in Kiev
- More instability in Eastern Ukraine, chance of costly protracted conflict in neighbouring region
- Legitimized NATO's existence by aggressively using unilateral force and 'land grabbing' of sovereign Ukrainian territory
- Increased NATO military infrastructure and preparedness in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Baltic states and Poland, thus effectively creating new threats for Russia
- Long-term economic damage through EU/US sanctions, increased economic isolation

5. Military intervention in Syria (2015-ongoing)

5.1. Readying for war

Russia and Ba'athist Syria have enjoyed warm bilateral relations going back to the Cold War. Under the presidency of Hafez al-Assad, Bashar's father, Syria had agreed to host a Soviet naval military base from 1971 onwards. Although very small in size, the base, located in Tartus, is the Russian Navy's only post-Soviet base located adjacent to the Mediterranean and the only naval base outside of the FSU in general and thus represents both significant symbolic and strategic value (Kramer, 2012).

During the 1970s, Syria emerged as the USSR's main ally in the Middle East. Among the Arab states, Syria's Ba'athist leadership, which combined elements of Marxism and a cult of personality, was considered to be ideologically most aligned with the USSR. In fact, Syria's new regime was the only out of the three Ba'athist-led states (Syria, Egypt, Iraq) that tolerated operations of the Communist Party (McInerney, 1992: 277). Over time, Ba'athist Syria and Russia have found themselves united in opposition to what they perceive to be U.S. hegemony in the Middle East, and that alliance has manifested itself on various occasions in the prelude to the Syrian civil war.

Syria-Russia cooperation had cooled somewhat in the fallout of the breakup of the USSR over the resolution of a considerable amount of outstanding debt to Russia. In addition, Syria estranged itself from the longstanding policy of pro-Russian alignment by joining the U.S.-led coalition against Iraq in 1990-1991 (Siddiqui, 2016: 11). In 2000, Bashar inherited his father's power and the 21st century would, although with considerable delay, see a reinvigorated Moscow-Damascus axis. With the problems of Chechen separatism and terrorism looming in the wake of the USSR's dissolution, the security of Russia's southern flank and the fight against Islamic terrorism have made maintaining strong relations with the states in the Muslim-dominated world one of Russia's strategic priorities. This necessity, combined with Putin's strong sense of U.S. encirclement of Russia, helped push Russia towards stronger ties with Syria (Kreutz, 2010: 5).

2005 was the breakthrough year, as Russia decided to sell advanced *Strelets* air defence systems to Syria - a vehicle-mounted short-range system fitted with SAM-missiles - amounting to some US $100 million, despite complaints from Washington and Tel Aviv (Katz, 2007: 53-54). However, Moscow was not insensitive to Israel's objections in particular

(Damascus, under Bashar, has enjoyed a history of close strategic relations with anti-Israeli Shi'ite militant movement Hezbollah[3] in Lebanon, and has supplied heavy arms to the group, including a 220 mm rocket in 2002 (Schiff, 2002). Valuing its relations with Israel, Russia had opted for the *Strelets* instead of the more advanced longer-range alternatives that Syria desired (Cohen, 2007).

In 2005, Russia wrote off 73 per cent of the longstanding Soviet-era debt of US$ 13,4 billion, and allowed the rest to be paid off in very favourable terms (Abdullaev, 2005). A month after the Georgian War of 2008, Russia began accelerating its renovation and expansion of the Tartus port in order to make it available for larger ships and a more sizeable general deployment of military assets (Valenta, 2016: 6). Between 2007 and 2011, Russian arms sales to Syria increased greatly by some 600 per cent – by far, Russia remains the largest seller (Suchkov, 2015).

Moreover, Moscow has gained a significant energy foothold in Syria in the prelude to the civil war, as the *Gazprom* subsidiary *Stroytransgaz* has built the largest Russian gas project in Syria since the USSR in 2009 – a gas processing plant near the currently shattered western Syrian city of Homs. The company has also gained lucrative contracts in the framework of the construction of the Arab Gas Pipeline, which exports Egyptian natural gas to Jordan, Israel, Syria and Lebanon, and by exploiting various gas fields located in northern and central Syria (Another Stage of Stroytrangaz Syrian Project Completed, 2012; Stroytransgaz Continues to Build Gas Plant in Syria, 2012).

Putin, valuing stability over anything else, was upset by the revolutionary events of what has become known as the 'Arab Spring'. For Putin, the Arab Spring was the North African and Middle Eastern version of the Colour Revolutions: a geopolitical threat to Russian interests. An important factor in Putin's consideration was that Russia had enjoyed very close relations with the toppled regimes of Libya and Egypt. Putin strongly objected to the NATO intervention in Libya starting March 2011, calling it a "crusade" and noted "when the so-called civilized community, with all its might, pounces on a small country, and ruins infrastructure that has been built over generations (...) I do not like it" (as city by Barry, 2011). Remarkably, the Libyan intervention showcased a rare instance of open disagreement

[3] Hezbollah ("Party of God"), over the last decades, has consolidated its power to such an extent that it often is seen as more powerful than the Lebanese army, in large part due to extensive Iranian funding. In 2006, it singlehandedly dragged Lebanon into a war with Israel over the abduction of two Israeli soldiers. Hezbollah's relatively disciplined and experienced ground troops have been a crucial factor in training, advising and supporting of regime forces and operations in the current civil war (Sullivan, 2014: 4).

with Medvedev, who called Putin's remarks "unacceptable" (as cited by Barry, 2011). This would suggest that Putin, contrary to Medvedev, might have used his veto power against the UNSC resolution that installed a no-fly zone and later culminated into a Paris and London-led anti-Qaddafi aerial campaign in support for the rebels.

During Assad's crackdown on anti-government protests in Syria in the early stages of its internal unrest of spring 2011 and in the following years, Russia has, along with China, blocked UNSC resolutions that condemned Assad's excessive use of force, let alone supported the calls that demanded his resignation (UNSC/10403, 2011). In the wake of the Libyan intervention in 2011 (and the preceding intervention in Iraq in 2003), a possible U.S. intervention there played on Putin's mind: "any actions in order to destroy the legitimate government will create a situation which you can witness now in the other countries of the region or in other regions, for instance in Libya" (as cited by Mills, 2015). UN-imposed sanctions were also unacceptable and systematically blocked by Russia, because those would preclude an arms embargo, thus inhibiting further Russian arms sales to Syria – a necessity for the survival of the Assad regime (Charbonneau, 2011).

Thus, Russia's firm support for Syria in the past years is not just rooted in its vested strategic and economic interests in Syria itself. Crucially, it is the principled opposition to the NATO-led instances of regime change, which, according to Putin, have undermined international peace and stability, which cannot function without multipolarity. Putin believes that Western concerns for the humanitarian situation in Syria are, to a large extent, geopolitically driven. This consideration is rather similar to Russia's response to *Euromaidan,* where it believed that Western praise for a democratic grass roots movement was instigated by foreign powers as a means to expand Western power and hurt Russia's (Charap, 2013: 36-37).

Given this Russian-Syrian alliance, it was very clear from the outset that Russia's priority was the survival of the Syrian government. That desire put him at odds with the U.S. and other Western powers, because they very quickly demanded Assad's resignation and a political transition. Washington, to the dislike of Moscow, steadily began covertly arming, funding and training anti-government rebels in the so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA, Schmitt, 2012). Whereas the FSA is often seen in the West as relatively pro-secular and pro-democratic, Moscow condemns the FSA as an organization that is predominantly comprised of extremists and Islamists (Allison, 2013: 800).

Crucially, Moscow had saved Assad over the question of its use of chemical weapons. Infamously, the Obama administration had drawn a 'red line' in the summer of 2012, in the event that Assad would use chemical weapons. When evidence surfaced that Assad had indeed used sarin gas on civilians in Ghouta in August 2013 on a large scale, the Pentagon readied to strike, heaving already been ordered to map a list of possible targets. Yet, Obama worried that he was walking into his predecessor's trap, the one he had always set out to avoid: military overextension in the Middle East with no viable long-term endgame (Goldberg, 2016).

Russia was aware of Obama's calculus, and used it to its advantage. Moscow reacted positively to John Kerry's suggestion that Syria's chemical weapons stockpile could be simply placed under international supervision and destroyed afterwards. The deal, brokered by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, proved to be a shrewd diplomatic move: it effectively eliminated the need for U.S. military intervention and ensured Assad's survival for the time being (DeYoung, 2013). In the process, it served to bolster's Russia's reputation as both a friend of the Syrian government and, for the rest of the world, as a reliable strategic partner that could be counted on the in the fight against chemical weapons. U.S. officials afterwards have repeated their mantra that Assad's "days are numbered" (Allam, 2015), but the possibility of using direct military force to achieve this end had disappeared.

5.2. Russia's military involvement

As the war in Syria raged on, the threat of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; also commonly referred to as IS or ISIL) became more pertinent. As the terrorist organization conquered large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, the civil war in Syria very quickly gained a significant dimension of terrorism as opposed to a war between an oppressive sectarian government on one side and various groups of rebels on the other. That dimension, in a way, served the interests of the Assad regime, which had maintained that it was simply fighting terrorism from the start. Moscow adopted this discourse too, and it has claimed throughout that Assad's government, as the legitimate government of Syria, is rightfully defending its territorial sovereignty against terrorists (Mills, 2015).

Yet, in the earlier stages of the war, both Assad and ISIS had been mainly fighting the other rebels in Syria, which had led to a relative strengthening of the government's position in early 2014, given its superior firepower, air power, and tactics. Over 2014-2015, ISIS began capturing more regime positions, and committed large-scale massacres against regime forces.

ISIS also found successes in Iraq, which forced Iraqi Shia militias, who had been fighting to defend Damascus, to redeploy in order to defend Baghdad's positions. Hence, the regime found itself in a more seriously weakened state by mid-2015 (The Military Balance, 2016: 311-312).

These developments did not go unnoticed in Moscow, which was determined to safeguard Assad's future. In 2015, Russia increased its footprint in Syria by building a military airfield, Khmeimim airbase, adjacent to Latakia's Basser al-Assad international airport in northwestern Syria. Khmeimim airbase would serve as an important military hub for Russian air operations above Syria. Having an airbase in Syria and coordinating directly with the Syrian government, Russian forces were now able to strike targets at a much higher frequency and efficiency than the jets of Western counterparts, which are mostly stationed in airfields located in Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and the Gulf. In addition, the Russian Caspian Sea flotilla has supported combat operations by firing *Kalibr* long-range land-attack cruise missiles (LLACM), which are capable of hitting targets at a radius of about 3,000 km (the result of post-2008 modernization of weapons procurement, see Office of Naval Intelligence, 2015: 34-35).

In September 2015, Putin framed the start of Russia's military campaign in Syria as an anti-terrorism operation that ultimately will prevent attacks on Russian soil, ironically much akin to the Bush Doctrine that precipitated the Iraq War of 2003: "the only true way to combat international terrorism is through pre-emption, and fighting and destroying insurgents in territories that are already occupied, instead of waiting for them to come to our house", Putin told Russian government officials in a meeting with the SCRF (as cited by Kolesnikov, 2015).

Before the UN General Assembly, Putin also reserved some special praise for the Kurdish *peshmerga,* by stating that "Assad's government forces and the Kurdish militia are the only ones fighting terrorism in Syria" (Putin, 2015). The implication of these statements could be taken to mean that the Russian military operations were mainly anti-ISIS. In the Western world, the conception of "terrorism" in Syria is usually reserved for ISIS and Al-Qaeda affiliates, most prominently Jabhat al-Nusra (JN).

Putin, however, never did claim that his airstrikes were solely directed against ISIS and JN - as some media outlets repeatedly have claimed - but consistently has used the ambivalent "terrorism" label to justify military action in Syria. For Putin, most of the groups who oppose

Assad or the Kurdish militia can rightfully be considered terrorists. This distinction is important to make, because it has been at the very basis of Moscow's strategy in Syria: statistical analysis of the Russian campaign between September 30 and October 20 of 2015 by the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War confirms that most of the Russian airstrikes have been initiated to aid Assad's operations against rebel-held territories surrounding Idlib, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, as opposed to against ISIS or JN-held territory (Casagrande, 2015).

The explanation for this is relatively straightforward: we have discerned that Russia's priority is regime survival as a means of safeguarding its long-term interests in Syria (this means first and foremost the preservation of the government structure, not necessarily the person of Assad himself). First, the non-ISIS/JN fighters pose a greater threat to the legitimacy of the Assad regime, because they undermine Damascus' and Moscow's notion that they are only fighting terrorists. Secondly, the so-called "moderate rebels" pose a greater military strategic threat to the regime's main assets in its heartland of Western Syria (directly east of Lebanon and adjacent to the Mediterranean further northwards), because ISIS and JN generally are located further to the east (see Casagrande, 2015).

Anonymous Russian and Western officials have confirmed that there have been a small number of Russian Special Forces active in Syria as part of the overall military strategy. These forces, at least in part, have been pulled out of Ukraine and redeployed to work in close collaboration in Syrian government, and could improve the accuracy of airstrikes by drawing fire (Grove, 2015).

Putin announced on March 14, 2016, that Russia would begin withdrawing "the main part of our military group" (Putin orders start of military withdrawal, 2016). Afterwards, Russian bombardments have continued, albeit at a slower pace and with lower intensity. Currently, it is unclear when or if the Russian air force will leave Syria altogether. Officially, the air base will remain operational to observe future ceasefire agreements. Strategically, it gives Russia an invaluable influence over the eventual details of the (hopefully coming) peaceful political constellation for a post-war Syria.

5.3. Aftermath: improved capabilities

As to be expected, Russian state-controlled media were quick to boast about the successes of Russian campaign in Syria. Putin hailed the Russian operations as a humanitarian success and

argued that "the effective work of our military allowed the peace process to begin (…) Syrian government troops and patriotic forces have changed the situation in the fight with international terrorism and have ceased the initiative" (Putin, 2016).

It is certainly true that Syrian government forces have benefitted from Russia's added airpower. Aided by Iranian ground troops and the Russian Air Force, the Syrian government has made considerably accelerated gains compared to the beginning of the campaign (Casagrande et al, 2016: 9). These gains might be a successful way to force the opposition to the negotiating table, although that has consistently maintained the departure of Assad as a precondition for peace; a measure the government has not been willing to accept.

The relatively sudden and decisive introduction of modern Russian *Sukhoi*-type jets combined with the sporadic use of its LLACM's raised eyebrows in the West: for the first time in the post-Soviet era, Russia has used its military force outside of the FSU, and in quite an astute manner. Gressel (2015: 1), somewhat in admiration, calls Russia's operations "the culmination of a systematic military reform that has been insufficiently appreciated by the European Union and the US".

In the mere space of three weeks, Russian forces were able to set up an airbase from scratch outside the FSU. The Russian Ministry of Defence, contrary to its continuing public deception over Ukraine, has publicly distributed targeting videos of its airstrikes, priding itself over Russia's high-tech capabilities. Moscow, in addition, has used drones to assess damages. Essentially, as Myers and Schmitt (2015) argue, Russia has used Syria as a "proving ground" to demonstrate to the world (and to its domestic audiences) that it is a resurgent power whose view of the world is to be reckoned with. In many ways, this is a far cry from tactically calamitous operations in Georgia.

Notwithstanding these successes, one should analyse these developments with a careful dose of nuance. Even though Russian military capabilities have seriously improved, its bombing campaign has demonstrated some weaknesses. The bulk of the Russian strikes have not been separate high-precision strikes as conducted by the U.S.-led anti-ISIS campaign above Syria. Instead, the majority of Russian strikes have been conducted with so-called "dumb bombs" in the framework of traditional Soviet-style operations in Close Air Support (CAS) for troops on the ground, thus indicating that Russia's high-tech capabilities remain limited. U.S. officials also have alleged that a number of LLACMs did not reach targets in Syria but instead land in Iran (Slawson, 2015). Nevertheless, Syria is the first instance that Russia has effectively used

modern precision-guided equipment, and means that it has made significant progress (Bodner, 2015).

These "dumb bombs" are likely to have caused excessive civilian casualties; in March, human rights organizations have put the death toll for Russian strikes to around 2,000 (Graham-Harrison, 2016). Some organizations allege that civilian targets, such as hospitals, schools, or industry, have actually constituted a deliberate part of the Russian strategy in order to break the morale of the opposition forces. Amnesty International, for example, believes that the Russian Air force has deliberately targeted hospitals as a means of breaking a vital lifeline for civilians in rebel-occupied territories, thus forcing them to flee (Amnesty International, 2016). Overall, the intent of Russian strategy is difficult to independently establish in the context of a complex civil war, and Russian official outlets are unlikely to tell the whole truth, since throughout they have ambivalently maintained that it was only striking "terrorists".

Russia's non-discriminatory approach with regards to anti-Assad forces may serve to exacerbate the civil war. By presenting the civil war as a simplistic dialectic between legitimate government and terrorists, the bombing campaign may undermine the government's willingness to compromise into a political transition with its more moderate opponents. This is not necessarily in Russia's interest, because it then may be dragged into a costly, heavily sectarian conflict for a longer time than it was set out to be. What Russia needs is a political resolution that safeguards its future interests in Syria; that does not necessarily rule out a compromise with opposition. On the other hand, Moscow will argue that its strategy will coerce the opposition to the negotiating table and eventually force it into a situation it would not have accepted without the Russian air cover.

At the moment of writing, it is still too early to say what the longer-term consequences are of the Russian intervention for the Syrian peace process – a process that has continued to fail to take conclusive shape many times in Geneva, as the conflict rages on in its sixth year. It is however without doubt that the Russian intervention has bolstered the government's relative strength. At this point, it looks likely that the regime will survive, although Assad's personal rule is still in the balance. Moreover, it has shown that Russian modern military capabilities have improved in the wake of the Georgian war, thus cementing both domestic and international prestige. For Russia, these combined developments will for now certainly be categorized as victory.

5.4. Russian National Security Strategy and implications for the near future

Russia's latest security document, the NSS, was published in the midst of the Russian intervention in Syria on December 31, 2015. The timing of the publication is intriguing, both in the context of the Syrian and Ukrainian interventions and with regards to the fact that Russia's 2009 NSS was supposed to cover the time period up until 2020. In essence, the document encapsulates Russia's perspective on the world very well; although it states very little new information, it is particularly the timing and the phrasing of the document that tells us something about current Russian security policy. For example, the NSS notes with a sense of accomplishment in the wake of its interventions that Russia "has demonstrated the ability to safeguard sovereignty, and state and territorial integrity and the right to protect compatriots abroad" (NSS, 2016: 3).

The NSS, as in some of the previous documents we have analysed, demonstrates a substantial appreciation of culture and 'spirituality' as a way of guaranteeing national security. The NSS espouses a certain longing for the past, and the idea that the greatness of the past is now found in present and future policy: "*Traditional* Russian spiritual and moral values are being *revived* (NSS, 2015: 3). Although unspecifically defined, the NSS also notes that "the secret services' potential" (NSS, 2016:3) is being increasingly used – possibly a subtle reference to the use of covert special ops in Eastern Ukraine and Syria.

Unlike some previous documents which noted a decline of the role of force in international relations, the NSS now reverses that assessment: " the role of force as a factor in international relations is not declining (…) the principles of equal and indivisible security are not being observed in the Euro-Atlantic, Eurasian and Asia-Pacific regions. Militarization and arm-race processes are developing in regions adjacent to Russia" (NSS, 2015: 4). These phrases clearly indicate that the Kremlin is hyper-aware of the risk of re-escalation and the increased presence and readiness of NATO-structures in close proximity to Russia and its 'sphere of interests'. Whereas previous documents downgraded NATO from 'threat' to 'danger', NATO is now once again "creating a threat to national security" by improving and expanding its activities (NSS, 2015: 4).

In short, the NSS indicates two distinctly Russian perceptions; (I) Russia has successfully reasserted itself in international relations through its recent interventions, modernization of

defence capabilities and a reinvigorated patriotic cultural self-awareness, and is thus on the right track to become a great power again; (II) other states (in particular in the framework of NATO) are reacting to this re-emergence in an uncalled for manner by increasing their potential to threaten Russian national security.

Potentially, the combination of these two general perceptions is an enormous driver towards even more extensive use of military force. After all, the Kremlin now appears to believe that it is threatened more than before, whilst it also has more capabilities (including in the field of special services) to respond than before. That constellation, in principle, is likely to lead towards more confrontation between Russia and its surrounding environment in the near future.

The one major factor that inhibits a world of ever increasing confrontation is economic development; as Russia's use of force has grown, so has its military budget. In a stagnating economy following economic sanctions and general social-economic struggle, it has become more difficult to sustain Russian doctrinal ambitions. As a percentage of GDP, the military budget has grown from 3,7 per cent of GDP in 2011 to 5,4 per cent of GDP in 2015, whilst total expenditure has actually decreased in the last couple of years (see graph 1). In such a climate, it will become an increasingly harder sell to the Russian electorate to add an ever increasing amount of funds to the military, not matter how much state propaganda is utilized to argue the case.

Indeed, the NSS does admit that sustaining "peaceful and dynamic socioeconomic development" is the number one priority of a strategic national defence (NSS, 2015: 7). That may also be one of the reasons why Putin did announce to pull back the bulk of Russia's presence in Syria: he is only able to maintain a military intervention for a limited amount of time, before the costs to the Russian national budget become exorbitantly high. Contrast this with the force posture of the U.S.: despite two very lengthy military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the recent past and a continued high-tech anti-ISIS campaign over Syria and Iraq, the U.S. strategic primacy has never truly become under pressure, because of the strong macroeconomic foundations of U.S. military strategy.

Perhaps, then, the perception of a 'new Cold War' is overblown. Undeniably, there has been an increase of Russian force posture in the FSU and a first intervention outside of the FSU during the ongoing campaign in Syria. Nevertheless, one of the USSR's main strengths was its vast economic capabilities, which allowed it to sustain its massive military might. The

lack thereof ultimately led to its dissolution and the implosion of Soviet security forces. Putin's Russia, although wanting to build on the past, is not quite at the level to implicate anything close to a new bipolar world. If anything, one could argue that Russia's belligerence will serve do more long-term harm than good, because of the political-economic implications of its actions.

Regardless, this is not how the Kremlin is likely to see it after its success in Syria. It has more or less achieved the strategic goals it set out from the start: it has served to preserve the regime by giving it a tactical advantage over anti-government forces. Thus, Russia has showed to the world that it is willing to flex its muscles outside of the FSU in order to get things done. Viewed from this more narrow military strategic perspective, in accordance with the general principles of its security policy, one may proclaim victory. However, short-term victory is not always long-term victory, and those who recall former U.S. president Bush's "Mission Accomplished" banner on board the *USS Abraham Lincoln* will likely agree with that sentiment.

5.5. Conclusion

The Russian intervention in Syria has its own distinct logic; it has come after four years into a raging civil war, which has made hundreds of thousands of casualties. The official explanation of counter-terrorism through which to view Russian action has some validity, as Moscow remains concerned over Islamist terrorist spill over in the Caucasus. However, that explanation does not provide a convincing way to explain either the timing of the intervention or the extensive interpretation of 'terrorism'.

As is often the case in in military strategy, there are many factors that have contributed to Russian action in Syria. Russia has longstanding economic and military interests in Syria, and would like to see those interests safeguarded. Thus, Russia strategic objective has not been anti-terrorism *en soi*, but rather the preservation of the Syrian government, of which anti-terrorism is a constituent part. In this framework, it has proceeded to extensively militarily cooperate with the Assad government and to attack a wide range of Assad's armed opposition, mostly through rather indiscriminate aerial bombardments.

Nevertheless, Russian involvement in Syria has in some ways been a consequence of earlier experiences in Georgia and Ukraine: in Georgia, Russian security experts were confronted by the grave deficiencies of the Russian Army, and were prompted to promote a program of

modernization. The fruits of this program can be seen through the rapid deployment of some of the most sophisticated military means so far, and proves that Putin has made a priority of catching of with the advanced nature of the U.S. military. This fits Putin's overriding quest to make Russia a great and respected world power again. This quest in that sense is additionally similar to the Russia-Ukraine conflict; it signals that Russia is able to be involved on multiple fronts.

The Syrian intervention's long-term security policy outcomes; success or failure?

SUCCESFUL IMPLICATIONS

- Bombing campaign has (most likely) ensured regime survival by adding air superiority, thus safeguarding Russia's long-term interests in Syria
- Russia's interests, given its presence in Syria, cannot be ignored in a future political resolution of the conflict
- Bombing campaign has earned praise for its efficient and high-tech execution – Russia one step closer to a fully modernized collective of armed forces?
- Russian combat operations, like in Ukraine, have been an effective way of 'sending a message' to the world that Russia is prepared to use force to defend its interests

NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS

- Some argue that Russia's bombing is still too imprecise and has caused excessive civilian casualties
- Anti-ISIS campaign brings an attached risk of increased terrorist attacks against Russian civilians, as the tragedy of the downed Metrojet flight 9268, crashing in the Egyptian Sinai desert, has shown
- Non-discriminatory approach between ISIS and other opposition groups may further entrench (highly sectarian) hatred and exacerbate conflict
- Non-discriminatory approach may also *de facto* have aided ISIS in their battle against weaker anti-government groups

6. Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, I have strived to unfold the way in which Russia's contemporary historical and military experiences have shaped the parameters of its current security policy. Interestingly, it has become apparent over this longitudinal research that most of Russia's concerns have remained relatively constant over fifteen years (and arguably beyond that into the 1990s as well). Russia's security documents consistently indicate a number of factors; that terrorism and NATO expansion are primary concerns, that Russia reserves the right to protect compatriots abroad, that it is mainly preoccupied with its interests in the FSU, and that its interests can only be effectively heeded in a multipolar system of international security. This paradigm has not been challenged, including in the four-year intermezzo of Medvedev's slightly more moderate presidency (2008-2012).

Nevertheless, this research has shown a certain development towards a more assertive and aggressive Russian strategy. During the first year of his presidency, Putin was in the process of restructuring the Russian national security policy after Yeltsin had left behind a weakened military, a politically fragmented political system, economic turmoil and a declined international influence; in particular NATO's Kosovo intervention in 1999 was seen as a national humiliation. As Putin rebuilt, it gradually allowed him to look abroad more ambitiously. Despite a brief period of post-9/11 rapprochement with the U.S., he became disillusioned with NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, the U.S. invasion in Iraq and the Colour Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine. This triggered a more assertive approach to the FSU.

The Georgian War was largely a consequence of a combination of the constant Russian security concerns, the perceived disadvantageous international developments, and Russia's growing economic and military strength. The strategic success of this war reinforced Putin's belief in the use of military force, and simultaneously increased his awareness of the military's operational deficiencies, prompting accelerated reforms.

These developments set the background for what this thesis' Research Question identifies as an 'aggressive and assertive strategy'. A newly reinvigorated Russia feared that Ukraine would become part of the EU economic bloc and would more broadly be absorbed into a U.S.-led 'sphere of influence', as opposed to Russia's. The geopolitical focus of Russia's security policy was hence extended to go beyond the traditional realm of military alliance.

Putin invoked the same official justification for intervention as the Georgian war – the protection of ethnic Russians and 'compatriots' – but this was a deceptive ploy to mask the fact that both the Georgian and Ukrainian interventions were a strategy directed against what Putin perceives as the constant U.S. and NATO-led efforts to undermine the 'multipolar' world. This has remained a consistent factor of Russian security policy discourse: the sugar coating of a bloc approach of international security into humanitarian and defensive doctrinal language.

Russian assertiveness in Syria also becomes clearer when viewed in the light of this background. The anti-government protests in Syria, like in Ukraine, were seen as an undesirable, to an extent backed by American intelligence, and hurtful to Russia's strategic interests in the Middle Eastern country that has enjoyed the closest alliance with Russia. Hence, the Syrian intervention of 2015 shares similarities with the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. Russia's strategy to attack a plethora of Assad's opposition proves that Russia's main objective is the survival of the Syrian government. During operations, Russia showcased new capabilities that without the experience of the Russo-Georgian War would not have gained the same momentum.

There is a fundamental paradox in Russia's security policy: in many ways, it has communicated that it feels that Russia is increasingly threatened by both state and non-state actors. That sentiment justifies aggressive and assertive military action. At the same time, whilst Russia rhetorically communicates these actions as *defensive* or even *humanitarian,* other states (particularly those that have a history of conflict with Russia or the Soviet Union) will see them as *offensive* and *cynical.* In turn, these states are prone to instigate new defensive measures of their own, including increased military spending within NATO-structures. This security dilemma-mechanism alleviates the chance of international military escalation, although Russia is also constrained as a result of its volatile economy.

This security dilemma means that while looked from a point of view of the Russian construction of threats and opportunities in the past fifteen years, the military assertiveness makes sense for Moscow's policymakers. However, over time, Russia under Putin may have reinforced the very threats it perceives to be existent. Thus, while Putin may be a cunning tactician, his victories in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria may eventually be Pyrrhic[4] in nature.

[4] King Pyrrhus of Epirus is said to have proclaimed "if we are victorious in one more battle against the Romans, we shall be utterly ruined" (Plutarch, 1920: 21.9) after his side had been inflicted enormous damage.

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