Realism is Dead, Long Live Realism?

A Critical Review of Neoclassical Realist Theory:

The Case of Crimea

(Wuerker, 2015)

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the different forms of Realism in the field of International Relations; Classical Realism, Neorealism and Neoclassical Realism. With Neoclassical Realism being the most recent addition, researched is why and to what extent it may be more suitable to analyse Russia's FP with a focus on Crimea's annexation, compared to its predecessors.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CR – Classical Realism

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EU – European Union

EUAA – European Union Association Agreement

FP – Foreign Policy

FPE – Foreign Policy Executive

FSU – Former Soviet Union

INSOR – Institute for Contemporary Development

IR – International Relations

IVVs – Intervening Variables

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MoD – Ministry of Defense

MoF – Ministry of Finance

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NCR – Neoclassical Realism

NR – Neorealism

NSA – Non-state actors

OBOR – One Belt, One Road

OPEC - Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

UN – United Nations

US – United States

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1. Introduction

1.1. General Introduction and Research Question

In 2014, Ukraine's Crimea region was annexed by Russia. For decades, a bold power move like this was unheard of. Despite that Realist theory has been around for almost a century and has been the most influential paradigm in United States (US) foreign policy (FP), according to former US Secretary of State John Kerry and his predecessor Hillary Clinton we live in the 21st century where Realist power plays like this are a method of the past, and that Russia is acting as if it is the 19th or 20th century (Baker, 2014; Dunham, 2014; Epstein, 2014; Sakwa, 2014: 33). Indeed, the world was in disbelieve and shock when Crimea's annexation unfolded. Yet, aside from the initial disbelieve, is this reaction justified? Or is this reaction caused by a lack of understanding how Russia's FP comes to fruition?

Conscience of the fact this potentially is an underestimate, four categories explaining Russia's "near abroad assertion", and subsequently, why Russia annexed Crimea, exist: decision-maker, Russian domestic political situation, ideational influences, and geopolitical (Götz, 2017). All explanations are rooted in different strands of International Relations (IR) theory: Realism, Constructivism, and Liberalism. Realism purports the behaviour of states towards other states is guided by systemic factors (e.g., international anarchic state system) (Carr, 1942; Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Wight, 1946). Compared with systemic factors, ideational factors often play second violin. Whereas Realism is based on *Realpolitik*, Constructivism and Liberalism are based on *Innenpolitik*. They primarily focus on domestic factors (e.g., "political and economic ideology, national character, partisan politics, or socioeconomic structure", non-state actors) as source of influence on FP, and thus a state's behaviour (Rose, 1998: 148).

Basing IR theories on primarily *Realpolitik* or *Innenpolitik* assumptions, leads to a reduction of their analytical capabilities, however. States are not closed entities who do not interact with the rest of the world. Circumstances where state leaders make decisions and base their FP solely on domestic political situations, are rare (e.g., revolutions and coup d'états). As a result, *Innenpolitik* theories seldom are able to give us insight how FP comes to fruition and fully understand what happened (Ripsman, Taliaferro, Lobell, 2016: 3). International incentives have to be taken into account as well. Realism does this. Nonetheless, by focusing solely on international incentives, effectively the same mistake *Innenpolitik* approaches make, is made. As a result, the four different categories all deliver helpful explanations why Russia annexed Crimea, but because they focus on parts of the equation (i.e., the international or domestic or ideational perspective), they are not able to present conclusive explanations that hold up on their own. In addition, Realism arguably lost part of its significance in parts of the Western world; an observation echoed in the opinions of

Kerry and Clinton, Crawford (2003), Finnemore (2003), McDonald (2018: 50), Mearsheimer (2014: 78), Manners (2008: 65), Hopf (1998: 71) and Moravcsik (1992: 2, 4). It can be argued a theory does not need to explain all active processes and forces. Theories are a product of their time and focus on certain variables in order to develop a good enough understanding of international relations (Waltz, 1979: 9-13). Be that as it may, a flawed understanding of Russia's motivation to annex Crimea, leads to flawed counter-FP, which in turn leads to a deterioration of international relations. Hence, I argue, there is a need to include international, domestic and ideational perspectives in a theoretical framework.

This multi-dimensional approach is found in Neoclassical Realism (NCR), which, in contrast with Classical Realism (CR) and Neorealism (NR), incorporates systemic incentives as well as domestic and ideational factors. With this in mind, it can be argued NCR is most suited for analysing developments concerning Crimea's annexation (Becker, Cohen, Kushi, McManus, 2016: 1). I propose the following research question:

"To what extent and why can Neoclassical Realism, compared to its predecessors (Classical and Neorealism) better explain Russia's foreign policy, concerning the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region?"

1.2. Theoretical Scope

Critics argue Realism is not suited for analysing international relations (Guzzini, 2004: 535; Keohane, 2005; Krasner, 1983; Legro & Moravcsik, 1999; Vasquez, 1997). They argue Realism is flawed because its theoretical foundation entails multiple dilemmas. Due to the different iterations of Realism a paradox exists. On the one hand Realism can be seen as a very 'rich' and diverse tradition. On the other hand, the question arises whether Realism is a consistent tradition at all. Suggested is that Realism "lost all distinctiveness vis-à-vis its traditional […] alternatives" (Rathbun, 2008: 295). Realism misses a strict theoretical core. Alternatively, it is argued Realist assumptions about egoism (self-interest), and anarchy are not exclusive to Realism but are accepted by other IR strands as well, albeit with a lower level of significance attached to it.

Opposing critics, it is argued Realism is relevant (Barkin, 2010; Christensen & Snyder, 1997; Foulon, 2015; Mearsheimer, 2001; Posen, 1984; Rathbun, 2008; Rose, 1998; Snyder, 1991; Waltz, 1979; Williams, 2004, Williams, 2007). What can be said about the claim that Realism has lost its distinctiveness versus other prevailing theories, is that social sciences inherently are less distinctive than natural sciences. As such, the strict standards that apply to natural sciences do not apply to social sciences (Walt, 1997: 932). A strict hard core is unnecessary. As a result, little

ambiguity and incoherence are the best one can hope for in political sciences (Rose, 1998: 168). Whereas the one prefers a more theoretical approach, there are others who prefer a more pragmatic approach. They argue a higher level of significance is attached to analysing and clarifying important outcomes in international relations instead of focusing on conserving the theoretical "structuralist core" (Feaver, Hellmann, Schweller, Taliaferro, Wohlforth, Legro, Moravcsik, 2000: 173; Rathbun, 2008: 295). Practicality before theory. Pragmatism above academics.

These counterarguments, however, are quite odd. Schweller keeps focusing on differences instead of similarities and thus not completely counters the paradox argument. Walt makes a case for denying the need for an "uncontested hard core". Christensen and Snyder do not want to answer the question whether they are Neorealists at all (Rathbun, 2008: 295). The theoretical skirmishing between Realism and rival IR theories remains. How does Realism hold up in practice then?

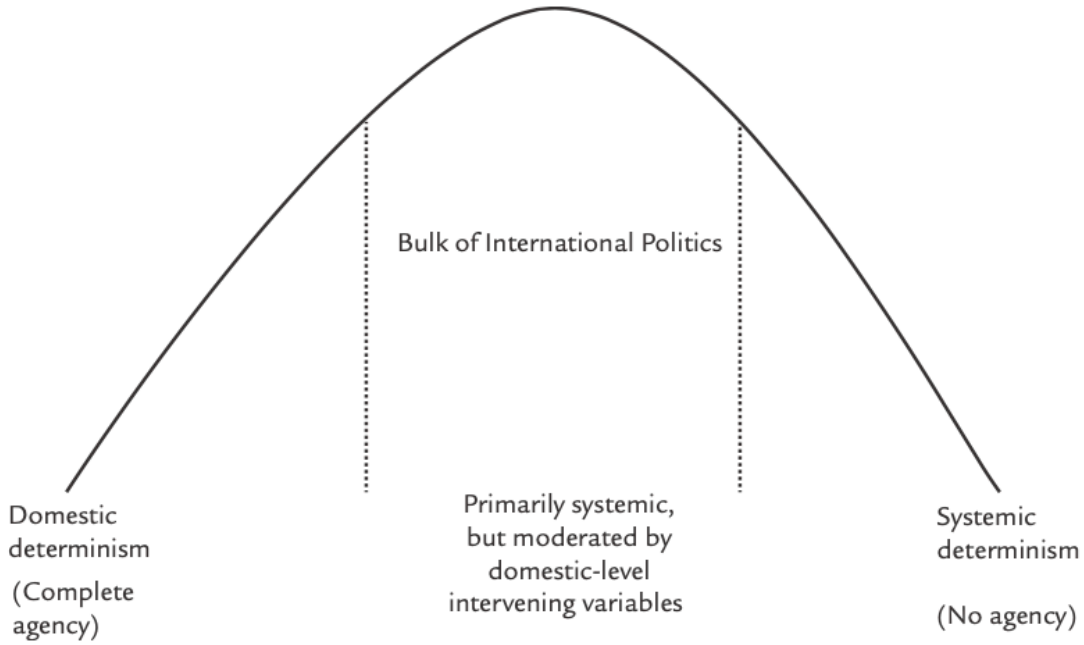
Because Russia's FP resembles power maximisation, national self-interest and regional balance of power goals, CR or NR are capable of explaining Russia's FP. At first glance this appears to be plausible. However, because CR and NR focus on international imperatives, Russian domestic developments and ideational influences that combined with international processes constituted to Russia's FP and thus led to Crimea's annexation, are not covered by CR or NR. Due to this analytical gap, CR and NR are not able to explain processes and forces leading to Crimea's annexation. Critics of Realism are right insofar that they too used that same narrow perspective of CR and NR which is not suitable for analysing contemporary cases and thus effectively make the same mistake as Classical Realists or Neorealists did. As can be seen in figure 1.1, foreign policies and international politics are seldom purely based on systemic or domestic pressures[1].

In order to clarify Russia's FP, it is necessary to try and include both ends of the spectrum displayed in figure 1.1. For this, I look to the latest evolution in the Realist realm, Neoclassical Realism (Foulon, 2015: 635-636; Rathbun, 2008: 296; Rose, 1998: 146).

[1] Although Morgenthau (1948) incorporated the importance of ideas in his view of CR, his work, in general, is more known for representing a narrow perspective of Realism. Where the longing for power in order to survive is the only important variable and ideational factors are left out of the equation. NR, being a reductionist theory, focuses solely on the anarchic international system. Critiques aimed at CR and NR were right at the time but do not adhere to NCR. The theoretical framework contains a more detailed explanation.

Figure 1.1.

Interplay between Domestic and External Pressures on Foreign Policy



(Ripsman et al., 2016: 5)

Critiques aimed at NCR focus on the combination of the domestic and the international realm. From a Liberalist perspective it is questioned whether NCR contributes to IR theories at all (Foulon, 2015: 636). Other scholars argue NCR is "realist-inspired constructivism" (Freyberg-Inan, Harrison, James, 2009: 259). Despite these interesting arguments, due to the limited size of this thesis, I focus on differences between NCR and its Realist predecessors instead of rival schools of IR theory, such as Constructivism and Liberalism[2].

Hopefully it has become clear this thesis focuses on how NCR departs from its predecessors CR and NR. From here on out, the only perspectives that will be taken into account are those from CR, NR, NCR and how these relate to each other.

[2] For the debate to what extent NCR differs from Constructivism and Liberalism I like to refer to Foulon (2015), who sets NCR out against Moravcsik's liberal theory and Putnam's two-level game theory. Also, Kitchen's (2010) explanation why Constructivism fails to incorporate ideas in an efficient way is good for understanding the differences between NCR and Constructivism.

1.3. Goals

Leiden University Libraries Catalogue's search results function as indicator how much is published about a subject. See appendix for the catalogue's search results. Because NCR is quite young (it is first coined in 1998 by Rose), it remains a relative understudied subject (Foulon, 2015: 636; Kitchen, 2010: 118). As a result, there is room left for discussion and ambiguity surrounding what NCR exactly is. What further fuels this ambiguity is the fact that NCR does not derive from one seminal work as is the case with Waltz's (1979) Neorealism, but rather on a collection of works (Sears, 2017: 22). Ripsman et al. (2016) try to solve this by developing three types of NCR and an extensive theoretical framework. Their findings are recognized as representative of the "the post fourth great debate development often referred to as eclecticism in IR theory" (Chandra, 2017: 299). Due to its recent development, extensive use of Ripsman et al.'s theory and accompanying model barely exists. Based on this model, the results of this thesis hopefully help to expand existing knowledge about NCR.

The goal of this thesis is establishing whether NCR, compared with its predecessors, is better suited to analyse Russia's FP with a focus on Crimea's annexation. This is not only important for Russia's neighbouring countries, which in the future may endure the same fate as Crimea. It is equally important a couple more borders down the road, for the European Union (EU). From a security perspective a better understanding is needed to assess possible threats to Eastern Europe and the EU as a whole.

1.4. Research Design

1.4.1. Methodology

Because there is only one object of study this thesis has a within-case study. Following Collier's (2011) and Mahoney's (2010; 2015: 217) logic, the research method of choice would be process tracing. In line with this, a discourse analysis leading to a causal analysis would be carried out. Unfortunately, however, this is not feasible due to the limited size of this thesis. Instead, a theoretical discussion is combined with an empirical case study. The case study is analysed using the theory provided in the theoretical discussion. The dependent variable is Russia's FP. Unit-level intervening variables (IVV) are "…perception, decision making and policy implementation" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 32). Sub-unit level IVVs are Leader Images, Strategic Culture, State-Society Relations and Domestic Institutions (Ripsman et al., 2016: 59). Independent variables are the international system, the clarity of the international system, and the strategic environment of a state (Ripsman et al., 2016: 52).

1.4.2. Sources

Primary and secondary sources are used in order to convey a complete as possible image of what happened. Writings purely aimed at reporting what happened are used, as well as writings aimed at explaining what happened. This thesis does not use quantitative data and is thus qualitative in nature. As for the timeframe, the focus lies on historical events, the period leading up to the annexation and the annexation period itself.

1.4.3. Limitations

Several limitations come to mind when deploying the aforementioned research design. Due to the limited size of this thesis it is not possible to dive into another case study. This loss in diversity of case studies results in a 'narrow' answer which focuses solely on the applicability of NCR to Crimea. N=1. In light of this limitation I argue that case studies of this size and scale differ too much to be compared one-on-one with each other. It should be mentioned research on other case studies is needed in order to provide a more in-depth answer whether NCR theory is applicable to analyse contemporary case studies in general. Parts of different case studies can then be compared with each other to discover behavioural patterns of states. Since Russia and Ukraine are involved in an on-going conflict and the annexation of Crimea happened only in 2014 limitations may occur in accessing primary sources. In addition, even if those sources are available the possibility exists the used language is either Ukrainian or Russian. To counter this problem, I also focus on historical narratives and events leading up to the actual annexation and try to collect translations of documents where possible. Focusing on secondary sources comes with its own set of problems though. Since they are not factual accounts of what happened, any bias from the writing author may be included in this thesis. Also, since secondary sources often are abstracts of larger pieces of data, information important for this research may be left out. However problematic secondary sources may be, taking the language barrier and the difficulty of accessing primary sources into account, I argue secondary sources are sufficient for this thesis.

Another limitation that presents itself by the IR theories used in this thesis, is the accusation of Western centrism (Bilgin, 2010; Buzan & Hansen, 2009). This implies IR theory development has not come to fruition in the rest of the world. The opposite is true. Indeed, traditionally Western-developed theories may be biased but they do correspond with theories developed in other parts of the world as Andrei Tsygankov and Pavel Tsygankov point out in their identification of Russian strands of IR theory (2010: 677). Following their findings, I argue the use of traditional Western IR theory, such as Realism, is not problematic.

1.4.4. Structure

Chapter 2 explains nuances between the different strands of Realist IR theory. Chapter 3 analyses the case study from a CR, NR and NCR perspective. Results and recommendations are presented in chapter 4, as well as possible shortcomings which only came to light in hindsight.

2. The Realm of Realism

2.1. Classical Realism

CR forwards the notion that all politics is a struggle for power and is subject to conditions of time and place. It is human nature to long for power. Foreign policies and the nature of the system may variate over time. Relations between different communities and groups are weak and will evaporate or at least weaken when individual actors (groups, states, persons or otherwise) follow their own ambitions. The state of anarchy will prod states into power maximisation with the goal to be able to defend themselves against other states (Mearsheimer, 2001: 29). Due to weakened relations, peace mechanisms will not work and fail. Consequentially, chances a violent outbreak occurs are higher. Governments of states are given a central role in this theory. Following this line of thought results in denying other international institutions or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can also influence international relations. CR prioritizes power and material capabilities. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged ideas can indeed play a role.

According to Lebow (2016: 35) CR accentuates resemblances between international and domestic politics and stresses the importance of "ethics and community" when the goal is to establish order (on a domestic or international level). This line of thinking can be traced back to classic writers like Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli, who take human nature (i.e., the need to survive) as a base for the international system. Departing from this point of view means accepting competition for individual survival (and thus resources and/or material capabilities), is the most important characteristic of any group interaction, be it in or between tribes or on a larger scale between states. As a result, "…teleological notions of political progress" are renounced (Kitchen, 2010: 123). They can exist but are merely a product of the anarchic system states move in, and thus are always "…products of dominant nations or groups of nations (Carr, 1942: 111).

Morgenthau and Carr recognized the potential of ideas. Morgenthau had a micro-approach and did not focus on the state. According to him ideas can indeed be the origins of change, because "…when people see things in a new light, they may act in a new way" (Morgenthau, 1972: 11). What comes forward is the mechanism where a person's ethics prohibit him from undertaking or even thinking about certain means to achieve the state's goals. Therefore, it can be said that the

interaction between ideas and actions navigates and moderates between "the national interest, […] self-interest and conflict" (Kitchen, 2010: 124, 125; Lang, 2007). It thus seems Morgenthau values ideas more than others recognize him for.

Carr guided leaders to follow the more balanced rules of power because he saw how normative factors could influence a state's strategic behaviour in an unpredictive, unmanaged way (Kitchen, 2010: 124). Compared to Morgenthau he had a more macro-approach which he dubbed "the art of persuasion" (Carr, 1942: 132). Ideas can not only influence a leader (micro) but also can influence the many (macro). From a domestic point of view, he recognized the potential of ideas and the power which could be harnessed in favour of propaganda or, by that same token, education. In the past it was not worthwhile to try and influence the masses because those opinions did not matter. The elite ruled and prospered. Carr, referring to Hitler, found that the art of persuasion was not confined to the "intelligentsia", anymore (1942: 133). As for the educational field, "…no state will allow its future citizens to imbibe in its schools teaching subversive of the principles on which it is based" (Carr, 1942: 134). Therefore, in democratic and totalitarian states alike children learn to uphold, defend and abide to the characteristics of the state it receives its education in (democratic values versus the power of totalitarianism). Because these mechanisms are based on universal principles they can be translated to the international level as well. For this to succeed a certain amount of political power is necessary. An example of how this can work in practice is set in aristocratic Europe where royal families, guided by their ideas, moderated their behaviour towards war and competition (Philpott, 2001: 62). In the contemporary international system this means the concept of power is not the only component which guides the interaction between states, ideas can achieve the same results. Attached moral values can even withhold states from using force and thus decrease the amount of desirable political interests (Kitchen, 2010: 126; Morgenthau, 1939: 125, 126).

Deriving from this is the acknowledgement that ideas can be of value on both the state and the individual level. Hence, CR, despite its focus on governments, power and material capabilities, does have the theoretical space to include ideas as a source of influence. Firstly, as influence on state leaders' political judgements. Secondly, on the international level "…as product of the interactions of those judgements" (Kitchen, 2010: 126).

The question then is to what extent ideas are of significance when imbedded in the CR realm. Williams (2004, 2005) takes a hard-line approach and argues ideas are indispensable. I would not go that far and agree with Morgenthau; assigning too much value to ideas can culminate in sentimentalism (Scheuerman, 2009: 80). Suddenly, war is perceived as a battle between good and evil (e.g., Cold War). Thinking like this is not constructive and impedes negotiations between

states. It appears CR appreciates the same sort of variables which make NCR better suited for analysing contemporary developments in international relations. However, in the case of CR, following Morgenthau's thinking, these variables are less significant, and more attention is given to the concept of power. For this reason, it suffices to say that the "…political life of a nation […] is a continuous struggle for power" (Morgenthau, 1948, 18). Power is the main source of influence but not the only source of influence. Ideas play their role too, albeit a small one. It remains unclear to what extent ideational factors are of importance. Additionally, CR does not assign any significance to domestic factors.

2.2. Neorealism

NR is developed in a bid to counter flaws of CR, which is based on human nature agency. NR differentiates between the first-, second- and third-image of international politics. The first being based on human nature, the second on the nature of states, and the third on the nature of the international system (Waltz, 2001). Solutions derived from first- and second-image approaches result in a need to alter relations between states, which indicates that the causes of war find their origins in the nature of the international system, NR's third-image. As such, NR is a third-image approach and focuses on the anarchic properties of the international system. Its main assumption is that states react to, what according to NR is the most crucial characteristic of the international system, "the distribution of material capabilities" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 16, 17). NR posits that it does not matter whether a state is democratic or autocratic, the anarchist system they are part of creates the same incentives for all of them (Dunne & Schmidt, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2016: 52). NR dismisses other possible influential factors like "…domestic politics, leadership motivations and ideological foundations" (Becker et al., 2015: 3).

Despite that NR is a reaction to the shortcomings of CR, by only focusing on what it perceives as the most important variable, it creates its own set of flaws.

2.3. Neoclassical Realism

2.3.1. NCR Critique of NR

NR's first flaw presents itself through the level of attention systemic incentives receive. From a theoretical standpoint, NCR agrees these incentives are important and lead states' behaviour. From a practical point of view, NCR acknowledges that this "systemic argument does not account for much actual behaviour" (Rose, 1998: 151). As can be seen in figure 1.1. (page 7) the bulk of international politics takes place in between external determinism (what NR forwards) and domestic determinism (*Innenpolitik* approaches). By focusing purely on systemic incentives NR

dismisses the value of domestic influences (e.g., political situation, economic circumstances, regime type, cultural differences) and forgoes the possibility states are not always in a position where they can freely collect their resources in order to counter any external incentives (Hamilton, 1987: 38). NCR dubs this the 'transmission belt' through which resources and their allocation have to be accepted by societal groups, power brokers and legislators (Rose, 1998: 147).

A second flaw is "…the [dis]ability of leaders to perceive systemic stimuli correctly" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 20). All events in the international system have to be interpreted and understood correctly by state leaders in order to make the best FP decision possible (Rose, 1998: 158; Taliaferro, 2006: 485). Every now and then events in the international system can be clear cut and are well understood. However, more often than not, this is not the case. Due to the inherently limited capacity of the human mind, humans, and thus state leaders, are bound to eventually make mistakes (Jervis, 2017; Jervis, 1988; Juneau, 2015; Kitchen, 2012: 134; Stein & Lebow, 1981). Personal bias, and incomplete, contradictory or an overload of information can strengthen this effect (Jervis, 2017: 28-31). For example, it is argued the Arab Spring has been misunderstood by the Obama administration (and other large parts in the world). Obama pledged to help states transform to democracies but according to Landis (director of the Centre of Middle East Studies for the University of Oklahoma) the population's call for help was not about democracy, but about getting rid of demagogue autocratic leaders. Then heard calls for freedom and impeachment of leaders were simultaneously heard and could be used by both the democratic West and radical Islamists who forwarded their own agenda. Consequently, misinterpreting those events led to inserting democratic aspirations. Ergo, from that point FP decisions were not based on fact-analysis but on ideology (spreading democracy) (Judis, 2017). For this reason, Neorealists are wrong in their assumption systemic incentives reign supreme in the international system, and more significance has to be attached to leader's personals beliefs and biases "through which systemic pressures must be filtered" (Rose, 1998: 157).

The third shortcoming focuses on the issue of rationality. NR's assumptions are based on the premise that states act rationally towards external incentives (Rose, 1998: 158). Even in the situation every systemic incentive is completely understood, and every option is explored, the possibility exists leaders do not pursue the option based on economic-rational thinking (lowest possible cost, maximum payoff), but on the basis of personal preference (Holsti, 1979; Rose, 1998: 158). For example, think of Trump who systematically denies global warming and at the beginning of his presidency dismantled government servers and websites containing large archives and information regarding climate change (Mehling, 2007: 4). Although climate change traditionally does not fall within the scope of NR or Realism as a whole (it is not a force that can be linked to

a particular state and does not discriminate between states), it can be argued it does. Due to climate change a new category of refugees exists. Refugees who are not able to earn a living where they live and need to search for better, milder places to do so. This can already be seen in Nigeria where herders and farmers battle for land; in 2018 1300 people died due to an eruption of violence instigated by the shortage of suitable land caused primarily by climate change (Searcey, 2018)[3]. As global warming increases, similar situations will occur more often, forming a relevant threat to the US – also in other parts of the world. Hence, the combination of an influx of refugees and denial of climate change is contradictory. Trump cannot be seen as rational, as he notoriously forwards an agenda where he opposes any surge in refugees and simultaneously denies climate change. Again, reality does not stroke with theory and despite being also a theory, I argue NCR's approach better matches reality than its predecessors.

A fourth shortcoming of NR is that threats and opportunities cannot always be distinguished from each other (Lobell, Taliaferro, Ripsman, 2012: 1-36). Only certain events on the international stage unfold themselves in an easy to understand, logical, chronical way. For example, quick power shifts. Most events on the world stage, however, do not present information as clear-cut as we would like. Due to this lack of clarity means that the range of FP options is limited to the information presented by the system. If this is the case, a range of FP options is left out of the equation and lie outside the scope of Neorealism (Ripsman et al., 2016: 21).

Deriving from this is the conclusion that a theory of IR needs to be able to include domestic and ideational sources of influence and, in contrast with CR, needs to assign the correct value to it.

2.3.2. Common Ground

Both NCR and NR forward that states' spectrum of policy choices aimed at securing themselves from any harm of other states, is determined by threats and opportunities presented by the international system. This common ground is best described as an "environment-based ontology", one that focuses on the international theatre were states interact with each other (Sterling-Folker, 1997). Despite this common ground, NCR disagrees with NR's assumption that states are able to react smoothly and rationally to the tumultuous international system they participate in. The question arises why states behave different from each other despite that they all function in the same system and are led by the same incentives (Christensen, 2020; Schweller,

[3] Alongside global warming, ethnicity and religion are also identified as sources of conflict in this case. However, those sources act as multipliers. Shortage of land due to climate change is the prime source and motivator.

1998; Wohlforth, 1993; Zakaria, 1999). To counter this problem, NCR is not only recipient to systemic variables (international incentives) but also unit-level variables (domestic intervening variables) (Rose, 1998: 152). The combination of those two is what is important and makes NCR.

2.3.3. Types of NCR

Up until recently, NCR studies primarily tried to clarify any anomalies NR could not account for (Type I) (Fordham, 2009: 253; Layne, 2006; Rose, 1998; Zakaria, 1992). Onea (2012: 142) calls this 'Orthodox' NCR. Another variant of NCR aims to explain "why a specific state undertook a particular foreign policy decision" (Type II) (Boke, 2017; Davidson, 2006; Dueck, 2008; Foulon, 2017; Kitchen, 2010; Juneau, 2015: 4; Quin, 2013; Sears, 2017; Smith, 2019: 11). This matches Onea's (2012: 142) 'Semi-orthodox' NCR. In this vein, NCR is the "the next logical step and necessary extension" of Neorealism (Rathbun, 2008: 294). Type III, however, focuses on "how the international system influences foreign policy and how foreign policy affects the international system", and is recognized as valuable theoretical framework that is able to explain international relations (Chandra, 2017; Dyson, 2010; Lin, 2019; Rosa & Foradori, 2017; Sears, 2017: 23; Smith, 2020; Steinsson, 2017). Onea (2012: 142) dubs this 'Revivalist' NCR.

Due to the limited size and scope of this thesis I will not further explain type I and II but solely focus on type III; NCR as sub-school in the realm of Realism. From here on out, when I mention 'NCR' I mean Type III NCR.

2.3.4. NCR Variables

2.3.4.1. Dependent and Independent

The dependent variables are foreign policy and international outcomes. International outcomes are able to change the systemic stimuli (see figure 2.1. on page 18) (Schweller, 2003: 164).

Due to the limited size of this thesis, I will not discuss definitions of explanatory variables such as the 'international system', 'relative material power capabilities', 'power' and 'polarity'. Ripsman et al.'s (2016: 34-46) and Boke's (2017: 20-21) findings are leading for these concepts. Something I do want to mention, is the term 'structural modifier'. Structural modifiers can influence the "effect of the system's structure – namely, its anarchic ordering principle and the relative distribution of capabilities – on the parameters of strategic interactions and the likely external behaviours of individual units" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 40). Geography and differential technological growth rates can be structural modifiers, for example (Drezner, 2019; Gilpin, 1983). These factors can influence explanatory variables. Introducing structural modifiers makes for a

broader understanding of the system structure compared to NR's understanding; it makes way for the use of unit and sub-unit level IVVs that may influence a state's FP and ultimately the system itself.

An identified shortcoming of NR is the lack of clarity in the international system. Therefore, NCR identifies clarity as a key systemic independent variable. In essence, clarity is the extent to which threats and opportunities are distinguishable from each other; whether the system presents information about the timeframe in regard to those threats and opportunities; and whether the best strategic options catch attention or not (Ripsman et al., 2009: 282-287). NCR acknowledges that clarity of signals can indeed influence a state's behaviour, as opposed to what NR forwards, that the system is always perfectly clear. The higher the clarity, the more likely it is policy options do not differ too much from each other; both on a state and sub-state level. Vice-versa, the lower the clarity, the more likely it is different policy options are pursued on a state level, as well as the sub-state level (Ripsman, 2009: 170-193). Both systemic and sub-systemic factors and unit-level IVVs can influence the amount of clarity. Even when the international system is perfectly clear (which it is according to NR), IVVs still cause uncertainty.

Another key systemic variable that is unique to NCR is "…the nature of a state's strategic environment" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 52). Environments can either be permissive or restrictive, this depends on the severity of the threat or opportunity. The more serious the threat or opportunity is, "the more restrictive the state's strategic environment is". Reversely, the less serious the threat or opportunity is, "the more permissive" an environment is (Ripsman et al. 2016: 52). Permissive and restrictive environments do not act as surrogates for the international system's clarity. They work alongside each other (see Figure 2.2. on page 20).

Following Thucydides, Rose (1998: 146) argues strategic options are largely dictated by a state's position in the international system and its relative material power capabilities. Although states participate in the same system and receive the same systemic signals, due to perceived unclarity (caused by systemic, sub-systemic factors and IVVs) and different strategic environments, they behave differently from each other.

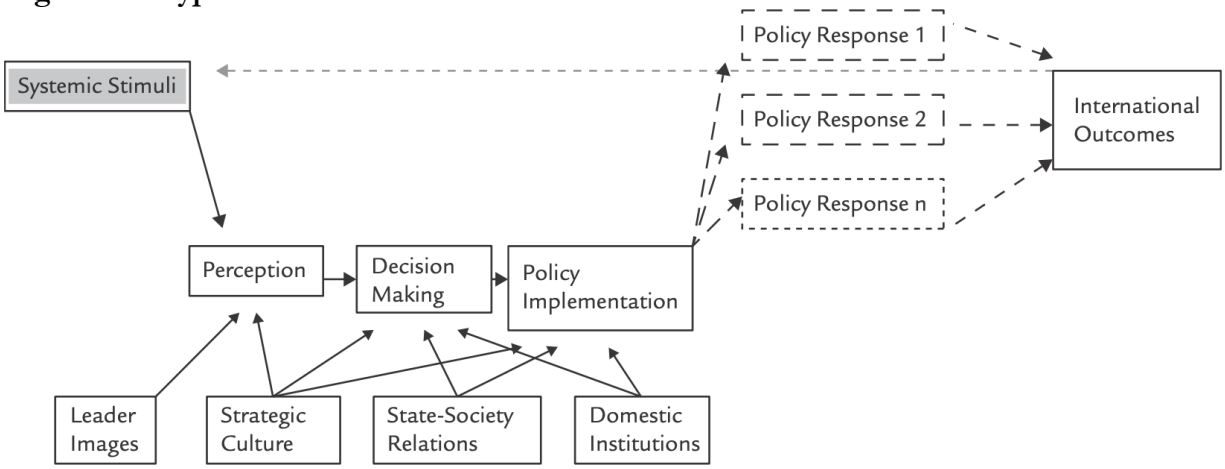
2.3.4.2. Unit- and Sub-Unit Level Intervening Variables

Active processes intervening between systemic stimuli and foreign policy options are "…perception, decision making and policy implementation" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 32); the unit-level intervening variables. Sub-unit level IVVs are grouped together in four clusters: Leader Images, Strategic Culture, State-Society Relations and Domestic Institutions (Ripsman et al., 2016:

59). These influence the unit-level IVVs. Figure 2.1. contains a schematic overview of these processes.

The first cluster addresses NR's first flaw by focusing on personal preferences and beliefs of individuals who partake in the top-level of a state – the foreign policy executive (FPE) – and how these can influence the first unit-level IVVs – perception of incoming systemic stimuli.

Figure 2.1. Type III Neoclassical Realism



Ripsman et al. (2016: 34)

Each individual has its own understanding of its surroundings. External stimuli must pass through individual cognitive filters which consists of a collection of core beliefs on which their understanding of the world is based (Brawley, 2009; Cha, 2000; Jervis, 2017; Ripsman et al., 2016: 62). Subsequently, leaders in charge will react differently to identified threats and opportunities (Byman & Pollack, 2001; Duelfer & Dyson, 2011; Shannon & Keller, 2007). Besides cognitive filters, other characteristics like personality and character can also influence a state's reaction to external stimuli (Lo, 2015: 15).

The second cluster focuses on the Strategic Culture of a state. This cluster affects perception, decision-making and policy implementation processes. It shares some similarities with the first cluster. It too entails a set of worldviews and "entrenched beliefs", only it does not zoom in on individuals but on society, and its expectations, as a whole. It can also include different organizational structures that are in place. For example, a military or bureaucratic doctrine. Both entail several interconnected "beliefs, norms and assumptions" (Ripsman et al., 2016: 67). When combined and instilled in a state's DNA, these expectations and cultures can stifle a state in its freedom to react appropriately to external stimuli (Hamilton, 1987: 35). For example, decision-making elites may find themselves trapped in a stalemate where they must choose between

following their own Strategic Culture (enrich themselves) or re-adjusting to international incentives (Kupchan, 1994: 27-29). This stalemate can result in FP that threatens the state's essential security interests. Important to note is that the Strategic Culture rather limits the amount of FP options than that it leads to more FP options (Juneau, 2015).

State-Society Relations can influence both the decision-making process and policy implementation. They have the power to alter state's strategic reactions to systemic incentives (Lobell, 2009; 85-121; Rose, 1998: 161). What matters is the way how state-decisions are greeted by society in its whole or by societal groups individually (Zakaria, 1999). Whether society agrees or disagrees with state-decisions is of significance for the survival of the state-apparatus (Zilienski, 2016). States 'underbalance' to external threats due to leaders who are influenced by domestic concerns or due to leaders who consider the risks to be politically dangerous (Schweller, 2006: 11-13). In line with the latter is the special role allotted to the elite, who only make up for a small part of a population but have a considerable amount of power (Kupchan, 1994). Higher levels of defragmentation in this group are an extra trigger for state leaders to underbalance.

The fourth and last cluster of sub-unit level IVVs contains a wide range of Domestic Institutions that compete with each other over the implementation of policy (Lo, 2015: 6). The extent that they can compete and how to, is constitutionally regulated (Levy, 1986; Posen, 1984; Snyder, 1989). Less cohesion within a state's population can result in more difficulties in the decision-making and policy implementation processes. Also, different institutional structures (e.g., two- versus multi-party system, non-democratic versus democratic) have different effects on states' capacities to respond to systemic incentives. Domestic Institutions can influence the decision-making process and policy implementation.

2.3.4.3. Relations Between Variables

Depending on the decision time, IVVs yield different degrees of influence over the dependent variable. When time is a constraint, Leader Images are expected to have the most impact on FP, because other actors are not able to make important FP decisions (Byman & Pollack, 2001). Reversely, if more time is available, the number of actors that can express their interests increases. In this case State-Society Relations and Domestic Institutions will have more effect on FP. Strategic Culture, however, can exert influence in both short- and long-term situations. Take crisis situations where state leaders are constrained by the population's opinion on the use of force, or long-term strategies and foreign policies that adhere to domestic values and cultural preferences, for example (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993).

As much as IVVs influence the dependent variable, the independent variables (systemic clarity and strategic environment) influence IVVs too. Figure 2.2. schematically shows which cluster of IVVs is likely to have significant impact in relation to the clarity of the international system and nature of the strategic environment.

Figure 2.2. Relations between Independent Variables and Intervening Variables

		Degree of Systematic Clarity	
		High	Low
Nature of Strategic Environment	Restrictive	Leader Images and Strategic Culture (possibly also Domestic Institutions and State-society relations)	Leader Images and Strategic Culture (possibly also Domestic Institutions and State-society relations)
	Permissive	Strategic Culture, Domestic Institutions, and State-society relations	Indeterminate - all four clusters could be relevant

Based on Ripsman et al. (2016: 95)

In restrictive environments it does not matter whether system clarity is high or low. There either is a threat, or there is a possibility there is a threat. Theoretically, Domestic Institutions and State-Society Relations need to give way for national interests, which decreases their influence on FP. Consequently, Leader Images and Strategic Culture are expected to be most important. Rosa and Foradori (2017: 380-381) point out two different occasions where Domestic Institutions and State-Society Relations influence FP in a restrictive environment, however. I will take this into account.

In a permissive environment with high systemic clarity, time is of less importance. Leaders are not in a position where decisions need to be made instantly. Alongside Strategic Culture, Domestic Institutions and State-Society Relations will be able to influence FP.

The combination of a permissive environment with low clarity leads to the acceptance of all clusters of IVVs as possible sources of influence on FP or grand strategy.

2.3.5. NCR Critiques and Shortcomings

Although I deem NCR a better suited candidate to analyse contemporary developments in international relations than its predecessors, it is not the supreme goose that lays golden eggs. Sadly, since we are operating in Russian territory, also no Fabergé ones.

One of the main critiques NCR has to endure is that its variables are chosen in an ad-hoc manner and thus only explain certain parts of FP (Walt, 2002: 211). To a certain degree this has been the case in type I and II NCR. A poor way of countering this critique is saying a state's FP is "…largely shaped by the perception of its leaders, the culture of its military, bureaucracy and society, the nature of its domestic resources and the ability to extract and mobilise domestic resources" (Jensen & Elman, 2018: 27). Type III NCR, however, addresses this problem by setting out which cluster of sub-IVVs most likely influences processes that intervene between systemic stimuli and FP options, relative to the clarity of the international system and the strategic environment of the state. This thesis, hopefully, shows the rationale behind these variables; how and why they are chosen, when and where they are expected to influence FP decisions and what their possible influence can be, rendering this critique invalid.

NCR is accused of being too much 'vertically' (i.e., connection between systemic stimuli and IVVs) focused, instead of 'horizontally' (i.e., strategic interaction between states and "feedback loops between state behaviour and the systemic environment") (Sears, 2017: 25). In this thesis, by concentrating on the shortcomings of NR and CR, focus primarily lies on integration of 'vertical' variables. Incorporating 'horizontal' variables would make for a more complete theoretical framework. I argue, however, that NCR, with its anarchic baseline borrowed from NR, does incorporate strategic interactions between states as possible influences on FP and international outcomes, albeit possibly not as clear-cut as Sears would like it to be. Systemic stimuli (i.e., interactions with other states and what other states do) are even prioritised over IVVs.

Also questioned is whether NCR denounces, challenges or contradicts NR (Carlsnaes, 2013: 308-309; Foulon, 2015: 637; Ripsman et al., 2009; Telhami, 2003; Wohlforth, 2008: 46). Sears (2017: 28) argues NCR is an extension of NR and should be named Neostructural Realism because NCR does not include human nature agency as CR does. However, Sears links the ideational factors of Realism only to Liberalism and Constructivism. By doing so he forgoes that CR acknowledges the value of ideational factors but is not capable of explaining the extent that they do. As showed above, NCR includes the ideational factors from CR and an anarchist baseline from NR. Therefore, I argue NCR is not an extension of NR but rather is the missing link between CR and NR (and is correctly named).

For NCR to work certain conditions have to be met. Without any form of systemic pressures one can better turn to *Innenpolitik* theories. Also, the use of state structure may prove

problematic. For this to work any knowledge about structures from other states is required (Rose, 1998: 166).

2.4. Theoretical Expectations

All Realist strands expect Russia to expand its power over Ukraine for various geopolitical reasons (e.g., Ukraine as neighbouring country; Ukraine as sphere of influence between Russia and the West; access to Sevastopol's naval base; control over gas pipelines).

CR expects this to happen any time Russia has a chance to do so, using material capabilities and ideational tools (e.g., propaganda). Additionally, Russia's FP may be influenced by ideational factors.

NR and NCR expect this to happen, depending on the amount of international pressures. Russia will resort to hard power tools if there are more international pressures, and vice-versa, if there are fewer international pressures, Russia will resort to soft power tools.

NCR adds another layer by expecting that how Russia reacts to those international pressures is influenced by unit- and sub-unit level IVVs. In order to identify which sub-unit level IVVs are expected to be relevant, it is necessary to establish whether the strategic environment is permissive or restrictive, and whether systemic clarity is high or low. It can be argued that in the short period between November 2013 and March 2014 the threat level was high and thus the environment was restrictive. Yet, Crimea's annexation is the result of processes that started years before. Over time, involved governmental and non-governmental actors had the possibility to pursue their interests. Therefore, the strategic environment is identified as permissive. Due to the multitude of involved actors (Ukrainian population and oligarchy, Russia, the West and to a lesser extent China), who all pursue different interests, it is not likely that threats and opportunities can be distinguished from each other. As a result, systemic clarity is identified as low.

Based on figure 2.2, I expect every cluster of sub-unit level IVVs to be relevant: Leader Images, Strategic Culture, State-Society Relations and Domestic Institutions.

3. Analysis of Crimea's Case Study

3.1. CR and NR Perspectives

Purely looking at Crimea's annexation, Classical Realists and Neorealists alike could explain this as a power move through which Russia wants to portray itself as the great hegemon it once was; a classic offensive balance-of-power situation. This argument finds its origins in 2004, when Russia, due to the spark in commodity (i.e., oil and gas) prices, found itself in a stronger economic

position from where it could follow a more "independent" FP, and yield more influence over neighbouring countries (Chow, 2004; Lukyanov, 2008; Mankoff, 2007; Perovic, 2009: 1; Wilson, 2015). Increased material capabilities led the Kremlin to exert more power in its neighbourhood.

A different explanation purports Russia reacted defensively. After the asymmetrical ending of the Cold War, Russia tried to establish a Greater Europe instead of a Wider Europe but was met with resistance from the EU. Greater Europe appeals to Pan-Europeanism and is based on multipolarity. It envisions multiple centres of power, without one, universal preferential ideology. Wider Europe is a unicentral model that focuses on Brussels as the only centre of power. EU-candidates have to align with Western European standards (Sakwa, 2014: 27). Russia reacted to European Union's conditionality through which the EU decides what is and what is not European. Furthermore, after the Cold War, the world, for at least two decades, was unipolar and led by the US (Layne, 2011: 149). This contrasted the Cold War, when the world was bipolar and led by the US and the Soviet Union. The West – guided by a unipolar understanding of the world and a liberal democratic ideology – gradually spread its wings and welcomed Former Soviet Union (FSU) states in its own organisations. By establishing closer ties with FSU states, the West created a security dilemma. For Russia, the loss of the sphere of influence and control over the buffer zone between itself and its Western adversary was not acceptable. Russia reacted to US hegemonism (e.g., illegal Iraq and Afghanistan wars), and "democratism", an ideology aimed at spreading democracy (Sakwa, 2014: 31-34). In other words, Russia reacted to Western (i.e., EU, US and NATO) expansionism. As such, the West is to blame for the Ukraine crisis (De Ploeg 2017; Hahn, 2018; Sakwa, 2014; Matveeva, 2017; Mearsheimer, 2014; Shleifer & Treisman, 2011; Trenin, 2014; Tsygankov, 2010; Van Der Pijl 2018). Indeed, Putin frequently reminded the world Western expansionism threatens "core strategic interests", and, at the United Nations (UN) Munich Security Conference in 2007, he purported that "the unipolar model" is "unacceptable" in "today's world" and that "multipolarity" will be strengthened by "new centres of economic growth" (Mearsheimer, 2014: 1; Putin, 2007).

Multipolarity means that there exist multiple Great Powers who guard the systemic status quo. Russia therefore disproves any actions unilaterally undertaken by the West under the guise of "promoting stability" and establishing peace (Clinton, 1999). Consequentially, Russia denounces multilateralism. A sparse definition that is sufficient enough for the sake of this thesis is that multilateralism is "the practice of co-ordinating national policies in groups of three or more states" (Keohane, 1990: 731). How Russia favours multipolarity through multilateralism can be seen in the development of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an organisation consisting of FSUs and led by Russia; the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), an economic union developed

by Russia; and the BRICS, an association between Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Through these organisations, Russia tries to impose its own will on participating states (Wolczuk & Dragneva, 2017: 8-9).

Additionally, it was not only Putin who warned the world. When NATO bombed Yugoslavia in 1999, former president Yeltsin already warned that "…NATO, the Americans and the Germans […] should not push us toward military action. Otherwise, there will be at a minimum a European war, or maybe even a world war, which must not be permitted" (Hoffman & Harris, 1999). Admittedly, his diplomatic apparatus hastened to soften his remarks afterwards. It is argued he only made such offensive remarks to pursue certain domestic political goals (which also makes a case for the use of unit-level IVVs introduced by NCR). Although Russia was yet to recover from Soviet Union's downfall, Yeltsin and Putin made clear Russia is not afraid to defend its interests. Almost a decade later, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 over Georgian separatist areas was the first clear signal Russia abides to its words (Mearsheimer, 2014: Rice, 2018). The same is seen in Ukraine.

In November 2013, Yanukovych was on the verge of ratifying the EU Association Agreement (EUAA), which was economically restrictive towards Russia. In time, further diminishing what would be left over from Russia's sphere of influence, Ukraine would also have to align its FP and security protocols with the West. Influenced by insights how the EUAA would damage Ukraine's economy in the near future (Russia would cut off aid to Ukraine and raise gas prices) and would eventually tear down the oligarch democracy (who enjoy a significant amount of power within Ukraine), Yanukovych, in a last effort to navigate between Russian and Western geopolitical interests, opted to not sign the EUAA (De Ploeg, 2017: 45-53; Hahn, 2018: 195, 254; Matveeva, 2017: ix; Sakwa, 2014: 75). For Ukrainian civic movements this was the final straw. Mass protests erupted on the Maidan Square favouring good governance (the Euromaidan). In February 2014, it was leaked that the US was closely involved with choosing Yanukovych's successor. Suggested is that Russia perceived this as an attempt to a coup d'état (Taylor & Tharoor, 2014). Later that month, Yanukovych fled the country and protesters installed a Western orientated "people's parliament" (Hahn, 2018: 352; Sakwa, 2014: 88-89). In the wake of these events, Russia had to choose between a) do nothing and risk losing its sphere of influence and access to the Sevastopol port, which is located in Crimea, is one of Russia's few south-water ports and of great strategic importance; or b) react in order to gain a significant strategic asset.

Offensive and defensive explanations seem plausible. Both explanations have their shortcomings. First, from a practical perspective, portraying Russia as the enemy decreases possibilities for the West and Ukraine to engage with Russia in a constructive manner in order to

develop solutions for shared issues on a local, regional and international level (Perovic, 2009: 1; Sakwa, 2014: 6). This matches Morgenthau's sentimentalism. Also, this argument forgoes it was not only the West who tried to "reset" relations with Russia in 2009 (Blitz, 2009). In 2001 and 2002, Putin, during his first presidency, briefly sought to 'reset' Russia-US relations but was met with resistance by Bush's administration (Kuchins & Zevelev, 2012: 155). Additionally, blaming Russia diverts attention from "the tensions within the Ukrainian state-building project by externalizing responsibility for the country's failures" (Sakwa, 2014: 6). Think of the government's failure to "brake patterns of dependency, opacity, rent-seeking and preferential pricing" of the oligarch democracy, corruption and diverging interests that cause unrest within the Ukrainian population, for example (Sakwa, 2014: 54; Sherr, 2010). Domestic problems in Ukraine presented a window of opportunity to Russia, who made use of this moment.

Second, if Russia's FP is solely driven by material capabilities and external threats and opportunities, it is difficult to explain why Russia did not react in this aggressive manner in the late 1990s when there was an increase in US activities in the region (Götz, 2017: 241). Mentioned is how Yeltsin reacted ferociously to NATO attacks in Yugoslavia in 1999. Argued is that Russia, due to a lack of material capabilities, was not able to compete with NATO's capabilities at the time (Cooper, 2016: 130). However, in an economic and military comparison with other post-Soviet states at the end of the 1990s, Russia proved to be powerful enough to exert regional influence (Włodkowska-Bagan, 2012: 62). Thus, from an NR perspective it is difficult to explain why Russia, at the time, did not pursue more power in the region. Although CR assigns more value to material capabilities, it is capable of incorporating ideational factors as source of influence. Operating on a thin line, CR would ascribe this abnormality to Russia's advocacy for and adherence to international law (Wilson, 2014: 197). Yet, other factors like a divided political apparatus, economic fallbacks, flawed governance, and social demoralisation are arguably better in explaining Russia's modus operandi at the end of the millennium (Blank, 1998; Blum, 1998; Lo, 2015: 19-20; Makarychev, 1999; Sakwa, 2014: 28, 30). More likely is that Russia, due to aforementioned domestic constraints, was not in a position to act upon its (regional) hegemonic aspirations, and in an attempt to restrain "American power", had no other option than to adhere to international law and by doing so highlight moments when the West violated international law (Wilson, 2014: 197).

Third, by arguing that the West made the first geopolitical move through the promotion of democracy in Ukraine and EU/NATO expansionism, Russian (military) involvement in Ukraine prior to the 2014 crisis is downplayed (Carothers, 2006; Kuzio, 2018; Matveeva, 2017: 272; Sakwa, 2014: 153; Solonenko, 2009). In the 2004 presidential elections, Yanukovych

prematurely self-proclaimed to be the winner which resulted in nationwide protests (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018: 187). Also known as the Orange Revolution or Orange Maidan. At the re-elections, the opposition won. With Yuschenko declared president, the US hastened to "emphasize US support for Ukraine's NATO and Euro-Atlantic aspirations" (Ukraine: Yuschenko discusses energy, Russia, defence reform, domestic politics, 2006). On the one hand, in line with Orangists and Western states, scholars view this as example of the 'power of the people' (Åslund & McFall, 2006; Kuzio, 2013; Wilson, 2005). On the other hand, Lane (2008: 528) and Narochnitskaya (quoted in Lane, 2008: 528) argue that the exploitation of mass media in order "to create public opinion to force political change" does not constitute as "the voice of the people", and that the Orange Maidan actually was a manifestation of rival oligarch groups who sought to force each other out (Sakwa, 2014: 54). Therefore, the question is asked whether the Orange Maidan is a "people's revolution" or an oligarch "revolutionary coup" (Lane, 2008). By focusing on the West or the Ukrainian oligarchy, Russia's involvement is neglected. During the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections, Putin publicly endorsed Yanukovych, and supplied "political technologists" and "financial assistance" (Dyczok, 2005: 248; Kuzio, 2018: 532). Russia wanted Yanukovych to stay in power. Therefore, the 'revolution or coupe?' question also applies to Russia. Moreover, although difficult to measure its impact, the Kremlin used its soft power through Russian news outlets, social media and books (Bohomolov & Lytvynenko, 2012; Ćwiek-Karpowicz, 2013). In 2009, Russia thwarted Ukraine's attempt to establish a gas trade deal with Turkmenistan by cutting gas supplies to the EU and Ukraine (Kramer, 2009). In 2010, Russia passed the compatriot law, aimed at people who, through "historic", "cultural" or "spiritual" ties, identify themselves as Russian and who's interests "always" will be defended "using political, diplomatic and legal means" (Putin, 2014; Sakwa, 2014: 106). And from 2005 till 2013, Russian intelligence forces supplied military style training to pro-Russian groups located in Ukraine (Shekhovtsov, 2016). Furthermore, although the 2014 revolution is dubbed the 'Euromaidan', protests were not solely aimed at joining the EU. The Euromaidan was also a conjunction of anti-corruption, anti-Russia, anti-EU and oligarch interests (Matveeva, 2017: 37; Sakwa, 2014: 90, 94). Taking this into account, a likely explanation is that Russia did not react to US involvement with meddling in Yanukovych's successor as Sakwa (2014: 87) insinuates, but rather that the Euromaidan and the newly installed government that leaned towards the West, sabotaged Putin's plans "for Yanukovych to be re-elected in January 2015 followed by Ukraine joining the Eurasian Economic Union" (Kuzio, 2018: 533; Sestanovich, 2014: 172). The West and Russia are both keen on pursuing geopolitical interests in Ukraine. Blaming one or the other is a simplification of reality, denies other influences and is probably the result of personal bias from scholars and governments. Conscious of the fact this

potentially is an obsolete observation: in a geopolitical dance, Russia and the West are both reactor and instigator.

Fourth, it is an understatement to say that anti-Western sentiments existed prior to the asymmetrical ending of the Cold War. However, they existed also before the beginning of the Cold War. Take Eurasianism, a century old Russian political movement that rejects Western moral "superiority", for example (Tolz, 2015: 34). Although Shekhovtsov (2009: 708) finds no direct evidence the Kremlin pursues the Eurasianist "doctrine", he acknowledges these influences work more subtly and manifest themselves in society through, for example, higher education. For this reason, the influence of the Cold War in an explanation of Russia's FP is overestimated. I argue Russia's contemporary "neo-revisionism" also originates from longstanding "Russian nationalistic attitudes" (Kuzio, 2018: 532). In contrast with NR, and although it remains vague how, CR is able to include Eurasianism as ideational factor in an attempt to explain Russia's FP.

Fifth, from the East a terracotta (trade) army is approaching. Because the Sino-Russo shared border is around 4300 km long, from a geographic perspective China's role vis-à-vis Russia needs to be considered as well (Norling, 2007: 33). China surpassed Russia in terms of material capabilities and economics (Farchy, 2015; Norling, 2007: 42); supports Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan in developing their natural resource industries (Energy Policy Group, 2017); and, through its One Belt, One, Road (OBOR) initiative, invested around US$ 126 billion in FSU states (Lambert, 2019; Standish, 2019; Zheng, 2019). This decreases Russia's monopoly on natural resources. Closer to Russia, China planned to invest around US$ 10 billion dollars to transform Crimea's Sevastopol port to a deep-water port (Hornby, 2013). These are only several examples how China tries to bridge the Central Asian gap between the West and the East. If China succeeds, Russia's sphere of influence in FSU states and position on the world stage decreases. This does not mean Russia does not collaborate with China. On the contrary, recognizing China's growth, in order to mitigate economic and geopolitical risks, Russo-Sino collaborations are increasing (Lo, 2015: 27). Although at this moment, Russia does not consider China as the enemy, China does threaten Russia's interests and therefore has to be incorporated when explaining why Russia annexed Crimea.

To summarize, CR and NR can only partially explain how Russian FP comes to fruition. Blaming the West neglects Russian involvement in Ukraine throughout the 2000s and Oriental expansionism. This can be included in a CR or NR explanation. Whereas NR cannot account for Russia's FP in the 90s, CR would ascribe this to Russia's adherence to international law. More likely however, is that Russia had no other option than to adhere to international law due to domestic constraints; a factor included in neither CR nor NR. They also are not able to account

for already existing anti-Western sentiments prior to the Cold War. Additionally, and although this is not necessarily linked to any theoretical explanation, blaming Russia impedes negotiations between states and diverts attention from and externalizes responsibility for Ukraine's failing institutions and internal problems.

CR and NR, being theories that deliberately decrease the number of factors that can influence a state's FP, do not have the theoretical scope to address and include mentioned shortcomings. However, in order to establish a better understanding which processes led to Crimea's annexation; these factors need to be included. I argue CR and NR lack analytical depth in explaining Russia's FP and are not constructive for future engagement with Russia or, vice-versa, for Russia to engage with the West.

3.2. NCR Perspective

3.2.1. Structural Modifiers

Characteristic for Russia is its geography. It encompasses around 11% of the world's landmass, is rich in natural resources and is home to a plethora of different nationalities, religions and civilizational traditions.

Natural resources are, on an ideational level, perceived as crucial for Russia's great power identity and, equally important, on a realist level, as power instrument for geopolitics. They are pivotal to Russia's economic growth; are used to display Russia as global energy supplier; and, through resource diplomacy and economics as power projections, are used to further bolster influence over other states. Already mentioned is how Russia cut gas supplies to the EU and Ukraine in 2009. The potential power of resources remains fragile, however. Russia's economy depends on a minimum price of $45 per barrel of crude oil (Movchan, 2020). Further price reduction endangers Russia's domestic and economic stability. To withstand the price drop of oil in 2008 from $129 to $38 per barrel, Russia spent 33% of its reserves to save its economy (Lo, 2016: 27). This process is further exacerbated by developments in the US shale industry and, more recently, an on-going conflict with the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Lo, 2016: 85; Watts, 2020; Makortoff, 2020).

Russia uses its civilizational fluidity (European-ness and Asian-ness identities) in an ad-hoc manner to engage with different parts of the world. This fluid identity thinking has its origins in the 18th century when "both ends" of the Western and Asian identity spectrums were embraced by "Russian philosophers, poets and painters" (Maiorova, 2015: 13). Originating in the 19th century, Eurasianism articulates this differently and forwards a separate identity that exists in the midst of the Western and Asian identities and rejects Western moral superiority. This matches

Huntington's (2000: 25) Clash of Civilizations, which acknowledges the existence of civilizational poles that will not integrate with each other. This breaks with the Western conception of moral universalism as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Lo, 2016: 43, 63; United Nations, n.d.). As such, Russia has a normative multipolar understanding of the world. Although there is no direct evidence the Kremlin follows this doctrine, it manifests itself in various ways through, for example, higher education and (strategic) culture.

Geographical and societal factors lead the Russian population and their leaders to believe they are "more unique" than other states (Lo, 2015: 16, 17; Maiorova, 2015: 16). How this 'uniqueness' manifests itself in practice is discussed under Strategic Culture. On a side note, despite that Russia continues to forward its Great Power-esque portrait of the past as contemporary "…geopolitical balancer between the US and China, and economic and civilizational bridge across Eurasia", its actual footprint in the world remains small – aside from its natural resources and weapons stashes (Lo, 2016: xxi).

3.2.2. Leader Images

The basic argument is that Russia's FP is influenced by the FPE's personal perceptions and predilections. Therefore, it seems logical to start with an analysis of Putin's personality traits. Analysing Putin's life, Hill & Gaddy (2015) propose his persona consists of and is formed by multiple identity types. He is a proponent of "Russian exceptionalism", pursues a "strong state", will not think twice about using violence and views international politics as a "zero-sum" game (quoted in Götz, 2017: 230). Suggested is that Putin believes a blanket of "chaotic darkness" will fall over Russia, if he does not defend Russia against the spread of Western values (Galeotti & Bowen, 2014; Putin, 2013). In this sense it can be argued that Putin's personality traits (i.e., the combination of an exceptional Russian identity and all-or-nothing attitude) led to Russia's involvement in Ukraine (Hill, 2014; Lynch, 2011; Roxenburgh, 2011). Linking Russia's FP primarily to Putin's personality traits appears problematic. Sure, as FPE leader Putin enjoys more power than most others and his thinking is, among others, rooted in Russian exceptionalism. But as Barkanov (2014) points out, Russia incorporates "elements of authoritarianism and pluralism" and "elite competition, elections and public opinion […] matter more than the conventional wisdom holds". As such, Putin does not operate independently from domestic influences (Gunitsky & Tsygankov, 2018: 385; Oliker, Crane, Schwartz, Yusupov, 2009: 9-42). Additionally, and although this is rather a speculative argument, from a historical point of view chances are high that former presidential candidates would have followed similar assertive policies (Götz, 2017: 231-232). In the first half of the 1990s, Russia did pursue such policies. It intervened in Georgia

and Moldova and hesitated to retreat its military in the Baltic states (MacFarlane, 1993: 3). The same can be argued for the rest of the FPE. They do not operate independently from domestic influences and combative policies existed long before now. For these reasons, it is problematic to link Russia's FP primarily to Putin's personality traits or the rest of the FPE. Based on above information it is not clear to what extent Leader Images influenced Russia's FP concerning Crimea's annexation.

3.2.3. Strategic Culture

Using Constructivist concepts, Chafetz (1996), Hopf (2002, 2005, 2006) and Kuchins and Zevelev (2012) argue three different Russian identity discourses, that influence Russia's Strategic Culture and subsequently Russia's FP, exist: Centrist, Conservative and Liberal. Each discourse affects Russia's FP differently. Although NCR does not have the theoretical space to include these 'identity discourse' analyses and operates in more shallow waters, it agrees with the basic premises of those explanations; that Russia's Strategic Culture and national identity is based on geographic, societal and historical factors (Liñán, 2010; Liu & László, 2007: 92; Wilson, 2014: 187). Indeed, Russia is no different than other states. Explained are the geographic and societal factors. Considering the limited size of this thesis, I deem it not necessary to extensively discuss the roots of modern-day Russia and how centuries of different events culminated in the contemporary Strategic Culture of today's Russia. If interested, I would like to refer to the works of Clodfelter (2017), Hopf (2002, 2005, 2006), Malinova (2014) and Plokhy (2006).

Seen in this light it can be argued that Ukraine's rapprochement towards the West endangered Russia's Strategic Culture. It discredits the Russian nationalist myth of an uninterrupted "Russkii mir", or "Russian world", made up of everybody who speaks Russian (Wilson, 2014: 187). In other words, Russia is defending its identity. This line of thinking is further strengthened by Crimea's contested and controversial history. From 1764 to 1917, together with other Ukrainian regions, it was part of Novorossiya; a distinct region in the then ruling Russian Empire (Sakwa, 2014: 9). More recently in 1954, under the Soviet umbrella, Crimea was 'given' to the Ukrainian Republic by the Russian Republic. Whether this transfer was legal or illegal remains subject to debate. According to Butkevych (1996: 50-51) the transfer fitted within the legal framework that was in place at the time. In the case it was illegal, however, Russia, as the continuer state of the Soviet Union, could technically claim Crimea in 1991. From this perspective, Crimea's annexation is merely a correction of a historical anomaly. Ultimately, this did not happen. Existing borders were respected and designated as inviolable (Sakwa, 2014: 68, 101). Still, Putin believes that "Russians and Ukrainian are one people…one nation" and the Russian population believes

the narrative of a defamed Russia and supports the Crimean annexation (AP News, 2019; Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018: 159-162; Pew Research Center, 2012). What can be seen, is that history functions "as the source of […] fears and humiliation; as the basis for national pride and assertiveness; and as instrument of legitimisation" (Lo, 2015: 18). In other words, Russia's Strategic Culture prods the Russian population and their leaders towards more combative policies. Strategic Culture is not the prime motivator but exacerbates Russian reactions against international imperatives.

3.2.4. State-Society Relations

Characteristic for the state-society nexus is how state-decisions are greeted by society in its whole or by individual societal groups. Research shows that in the beginning of the 90s Russian interest groups were "fragmented" and "poorly organized" (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018: 156). The impact of identified links between politics and financials was insignificant (Zink, 2019). At the end of the 90s, various industry tycoons formed industrial-financial groups through which their (political) power increased (The Economist, 1998). Around 2000, they controlled approximately 25% of Russia's economy. This power was used, for example, to denounce Yeltsin's decisions through media outlets or to guide how Russia should deal with states that Gazprom (which had a monopoly on natural gas in Russia) was already in contact with (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018: 156). When Putin came in position, he decreased the political influence of the oligarchy (Gel'man: 2008). To set an example, the owner of Yukos (former largest Russian oil company), Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who stood up against Putin, was arrested and his company was usurped by the state company Rosneft (Åslund, 2010: 55; Kuchins & Zevelev, 2012: 155). Political influence from the oligarchy waned. What rests is their economic influence. Putin still regularly meets with different heads of industries to discuss international expansion (Bukkvoll, 2003: 233). To argue Russia annexed Crimea to enable its oligarchs to expand their businesses is problematic. Surely, they can expand without the need to annex Crimea, as they so often do in other places. It is thus unlikely that the oligarchy influenced any decision-making or implementation processes concerning Crimea's annexation.

Two other explanations focus on regime survival from a state-society perspective. First, by developing external problems, the Kremlin tries to divert attention from internal failures (e.g., weak economy) and tries to weaken the opposition (Götz, 2017: 233; Shevtsosa, 2008, 2009, 2010). For example, during his first presidency from 2000 to 2004, Putin tried to isolate FP from domestic politics but when anti-Putin protests broke out in 2011 and 2012, he resorted to scapegoating the US as cause for Russia's domestic unrest (Lo, 2015: 15, 24). According to this view the US is

"raging against the dying of the light" and in a bid to "not go gentle into that good night" is trying to uphold its position as unipolar actor in the world (Lo, 2016: 45; Thomas, 2014: 128). This also taps into Russia's vision of a multipolar world. The combination of a 'crumbling West' (weakened economic and moral leadership) and degrading sources of legitimacy in its own backyard (e.g., "political control, economic growth, and broad public support") led Russia to entwine domestic and foreign policy (Lo, 2016: 24-26).

According to independent surveys conducted by Smyth (2014) however, the decrease in support for Putin was not as bad as it seemed. Although there were anti-Putin protests, the majority of the population still supported Putin (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2018: 125). Or at least, being aware of the dangers of protesting, said that they supported Putin. There was no real danger for the survival of Putin's regime. Also, for regimes to stay in power, long term economic stability is arguably more important than short impulses of populational support through "response to high-level conflicts" (Götz, 2017: 235; Treisman, 2011, 2014). In this sense, it is counterproductive for Russia to annex Crimea; a move that undeniably leads to some sort of repercussions from the international community. Indeed, not long thereafter the West imposed trade sanctions that severely affected Russia's economy, and were specifically aimed at 'elites and oligarchs' (Gould-Davies, 2020: 13; Wang, 2015: 4). This undermines the argument that Russia needed to divert attention from a weak economy or that Crimea's annexation is caused by public opinion or elite consensus. Although they both can influence Russia's FP, I find no evidence this is true for Crimea.

The second explanation refers to the authoritarian and pluralist elements Russia's state system. With these in mind it can be argued Russia tries to mitigate its fear of "democratic contagion" and "Western liberal influences" (Götz, 2017: 233; Lo, 2016: 91). If Ukraine succeeds in establishing a working democracy and embraces Western values, this could spread to Russia. For this reason, the Colour Revolutions in Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005), the Arab Spring (2010-2012) and 2011 anti-Putin protests are perceived as dangerous for the survival of Russia's regime (Ambrosio, 2007; Finkel & Brudny, 2012: 1-2; Robertson, 2009). This does not mean Russia does not collaborate with democracies or only collaborates with authoritarian regimes. Götz (2017: 235) highlights Russian involvement in the ousting of Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian leader in 2009, for example. Despite that Kyrgyzstan received US$300 million bribe money from Russia to exclude the US from a Kyrgyzstan airbase, it did not exclude the US and thus thwarted Russia's agenda (Collins, 2011: 156). Sure, this conflict fits in a larger puzzle where interests of the US and Russia clash. But what can be seen on a smaller, more regional scale is that Russia wants pro-Russian regimes in place. The same is seen in Georgia. Needless to say, relations were particular sour after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. After the 2012

Georgian presidential elections relations improved, due to the new government that took a less harsh position against Russia (Silaev & Sushentsov, 2014: 70). In this same period, the independent US organisation Freedom House found that Georgia became more democratic (Puddington, 2013: 21). It therefore seems more likely that Russia favours pro-Russian regimes in its neighbourhood, regardless of what their regime type is.

In short, it does not seem that the Russian oligarchy or population influenced decision-making or implementation processes with regards to Crimea's annexation. It is furthermore unlikely that Russia wanted to divert attention from internal failures or is anti-Western per se. More so, albeit perhaps out of necessity, Russia is able to collaborate with the West. Against terrorism, for example (Tsygankov, 2012: 250). It can be argued Russia fears democratic contagion. Thus, only little evidence is found that State-Society Relations prodded Russia's FP to annex Crimea.

3.2.5. Domestic Institutions

Although it is widely acknowledged the Kremlin and Putin play a key role in Russia's foreign affairs, it is suggested "bureaucratic structures", domestic "interest groups" and "informal coalitions" can potentially influence the decision-making and implementation processes and limit Putin's power (Kaczmarski (2014: 384; Kononenko & Moshes, 2011; Ledeneva, 2013). Despite that Putin and the rest of the FPE are tasked with developing FP, the expertise of bureaucratic structures, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Defense (MoD) or Ministry of Finance (MoF) is needed to implement that FP (Lo, 2015: 6). By providing a "reality check" on the FPE's preferences, they can change the implementation (Beach & Pedersen, 2012).

Kuchins and Zevelev (2012: 149) identify several domestic interest groups: Pro-Western Liberals, not represented in governmental bodies; Great Power Balancers, represented in the "executive government branch" and parliamentary parties; and Nationalists, represented in parliamentary parties. Pro-Western Liberals form a minority and voice their interests through think tanks (e.g., Carnegie Moscow Center, the Institute for Contemporary Development (INSOR)), NGOs, and the political opposition. At present, their views are dismissed by the ruling regime. Subsequently, they have little to no impact on FP (Laruelle, 2009). Even more so, NGOs must abide to the 2012 "foreign agent law" which posits NGOs need to either refrain from politics or decline foreign funding (Freedom House, n.d.). As a result, the number of active NGOs in Russia sharply declined (Svetova, 2018). Although Nationalists are represented in the parliament, they primarily shape "the tone and tactics", instead of the "basic directions", of FP (Donaldson &

Nadkarni, 2018: 153; Pravda, 1996). It can be said that any oppositional and Nationalist voices were not able to exert influence concerning Crimea's annexation.

An example of informal coalitions are the *siloviki*, a group of politicians whose main similarity is that they share related perceptions and interests rather than only a background in "security and military services", as Kaczmarski (2014: 384), Donaldson and Nadkarni (2018: 134) argue (Bremmer & Charap, 2007: 86). Being politicians operating in the Kremlin, with strong ties to (military) industries, they occupy a powerful position. Despite that Putin centralized power, it is suggested the *siloviki* guided Putin to follow a more anti-Western approach during Putin's second term as president (Bremmer & Charap, 2007: 83). As such, they can influence Russia's FP.

To sum up, Domestic Institutions in the form of bureaucratic structures, interest groups and informal coalitions are able to influence Russia's conduct in the world. Yet, examining Crimea's annexation, mentioned potential influences are extraneous. Explained is how Putin decreased the oligarch's influence after his ascension. "Key political institutions" endured the same fate (Kaczmarski, 2014: 392). Therefore, I agree with Trenin and Lo (2005) that the innerworkings of the Kremlin remain non-transparent. Lo (2015: 4-5) explains this with the help of the "real" and the "virtual". The real being the figuratively underground; a place where "big decisions are made" in secret. The virtual is that what is presented to the outside world (e.g., published documents and statements). It was in the 'real' realm where a handful of actors met in a secret meeting and decided Russia should annex Crimea (The Guardian, 2015; World Politics Review, 2015). Due to the secrecy involved Domestic Institutions did not influence Russia's FP concerning Crimea's annexation. This does not come as a surprise. It can be assumed most states prefer that level of secrecy when it decides to carry out such a mission.

3.2.6. Summary

To recap, arguing Putin's personal traits and authoritarian tendencies lead to Russia's assertive FP is problematic. Sure, centralizing power is partially driven by a desire to solidify his position. He is, however, not isolated from other domestic influences and it is likely other presidents would have pursued a similar assertive path. I agree with Götz (2019: 111) that Putin's authoritarian tendencies rather enabled the Kremlin to pursue the assertive policies seen today and facilitated Russia's re-emergence as a Great Power. Furthermore, any personal preferences are more likely to derive from geographical, societal and historical factors; all part of Strategic Culture.

Strategic culture gives shape to the Russian identity. It prods the Russian population and their leaders to defend their identity and guides them towards more combative policies. Keep in mind that IVVs interfere between systemic imperatives and the FP that is developed in reaction

to those imperatives. As such, Strategic Culture is not the prime motivator but exacerbates Russian reactions against systemic incentives. It not only influences the perception, decision-making and implementation processes, but Leader Images as well. The interaction with Leader Images can work both ways. Leaders need to adhere to the dominant Strategic Culture and when their position is solidified, they can gradually alter the dominant Strategic Culture through exploiting higher education, think tanks and control over the media. In other words, through propaganda. This leads to a chicken-egg dilemma. Which one came first? Or better articulated, which one is more significant? In Russia's case, ideas that are woven into its assertive Strategic Culture existed prior to Putin's ascension. Also, likely is that Russia would have followed a similar path under the wings of other presidents. Hence, Strategic Culture's current impact is bigger than Leader Images' is.

From a state-society perspective it is possible the Kremlin fears democratic contagion and therefore wanted to halt Ukraine's pivot the West. No evidence is found that the Russian oligarchy or population influenced, or halted decision-making or implementation processes related to Crimea's annexation. Also unlikely is that the Kremlin wanted to divert attention from internal failures or is anti-Western per se.

Domestic Institutions in the form of bureaucratic structures, interest groups and informal coalitions can influence Russia's FP. The decision to annex Crimea, however, was made in a secret meeting. No evidence is found Domestic Institutions affected decision-making or implementation processes.

NCR can explain parts of Russian FP where CR or NR cannot account for (i.e., FP in the 90s, existence of anti-Western sentiments prior to Cold War). Applied to the case of Crimea, Leader Images or Domestic Institutions did not influence Russia's FP. State-Society Relations affected Russia's FP only little (fear of democratic contagion). Strategic Culture prodded Russia in pursuing more combative FP. Although systemic incentives prevail in this analysis, by applying NCR, a better understanding of the sources of Russia's FP is established. I would not go as far to ascribe Russia's activities primarily to ideational factors embedded in its Strategic Culture, but they exacerbated Russia's reaction to identified systemic incentives. How both the internal and external worlds from Russia and Ukraine collide makes for the perfect storm in which this could happen. Ultimately, the decision to annex Crimea was the culmination of Western expansionism, which decreased Russia's sphere of influence, made it unclear how Ukraine would function in the CIS or EEU, and meant Ukraine eventually had to align its FP with the West; the possible loss of strategic gas pipelines due to Chinese expansionism; Russia's normative multipolar understanding of the world; Western moral interventionism and democratism; Russia's Strategic Culture, which led to the ethnicization of Russia's FP; the ousting of Yanukovych, caused by Ukraine's internal divisions,

which presented Russia with a window of opportunity; and, ultimately, the possible loss of access to the Sevastopol port.

4. Conclusion

4.1. General Conclusion

This thesis focused on establishing whether NCR, in comparison with CR and NR, is better suited to analyse Russia's FP with a focus on the annexation of Crimea. From a theoretical vantage point is discussed how CR acknowledges the value ideational factors can have, but that it remains unclear to what extent they are of importance. On top of this, CR neglects domestic factors. Discussed is how NR dismisses the value of domestic influences by focusing on systemic incentives; overestimates leaders' abilities to perceive systemic incentives correctly; misjudges state's rationality; and is not able to distinguish between threats and opportunities. As such, NR is not able to include either domestic or ideational influences. Admittedly, being reductionist theories, CR and NR purposely limit the number of variables that can influence a state's FP. Shown, however, is that the majority of International Politics takes place between purely domestic and external pressures. In contrast with CR and NR, NCR, by introducing unit- and sub-unit-level IVVs that influence a state's reaction to international pressures, is able to incorporate domestic and ideational factors as sources of influence that can affect a state's FP and is thus theoretically better equipped to analyse International Politics.

Hypothesized is 1) that CR expects Russia to always pursue a combative FP and that its FP can be influenced by ideational factors; 2) that NR expects Russia to pursue a combative FP, depending on the amount of international pressures there are. More international pressures lead to the use of hard power tools, and vice-versa, less international pressures lead to the use of soft power tools. And 3) that NCR expects the same as NR, albeit with the added nuance that Russia's reaction to international pressures is influenced by unit- and sub-unit-level IVVs. Empirical research shows Russia had the capabilities to pursue a (regional) combative FP at the end of the 90s but did not do so. This can be explained by adherence to international law. More likely, however, is that Russia, due to domestic constraints, was not in a position to act on its (regional) hegemonic aspirations. Therefore, the first hypothesis is only partially accepted. Russia exploited its soft power through news outlets, social media and books in less turbulent times and, although it did pursue a combative FP during the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 due to the 2004 increase in commodity prices, Russia did not resort to the use of hard power instruments at the end of the 90s when there was an increase of US activities in the region. Therefore, the second hypothesis is also rejected, or, at a maximum, is only partially accepted. CR and NR can thus only partially

explain why Russia does what it does. NCR addresses identified shortcomings. The case study showcases how sub-unit level IVVs intervene between systemic stimuli and Russian FP. As such, the third hypothesis is accepted.

Returning to the research question: "To what extent and why can Neoclassical Realism, compared to its predecessors (Classical and Neorealism) better explain Russia's foreign policy, concerning the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region?". The answer to the question to what extent NCR is capable of better explaining Russia's FP, is simple. NCR can explain more. It is, unfortunately, not possible to translate this answer to a quantifiable scale from 1 to 10. As to pertain to the 'why' question, I found CR to have greater analytical capabilities than NR due to the incorporation of ideational factors. CR does not, however, have the theoretical tools to conduct the research carried out in this thesis in a structured way. Because NCR has the theoretical tools and space to incorporate ideational and domestic factors as sources of influence, I argue NCR is able to better explain Russia's FP compared with its predecessors CR and NR. Though, in regard to the case study of Crimea in particular, it must be said that most of the IVV clusters introduced by NCR did not influence the decision whether or not Russia should annex Crimea. This thesis shows that NCR can account for the encountered theoretical and empirical shortcomings of CR and NR and thus proves to be a valuable addition to the Realist tradition. This thesis has hopefully contributed to NCR literature by researching how Ripsman et. al.'s (2016) NCR Type III theoretical framework holds up in practice and generated deeper insights what Russia's FP motives are.

4.2. Shortcomings and Recommendations

By no means is this a complete account of what happened in Russia or Ukraine. Not explained in this case study is which Ukrainian internal divisions led to the Euromaidan, for example. Sakwa (2014: 15, 23) and Matveeva (2018) suggest this problem is caused by an ideological clash between monists, who forward "integrated nationalism"; pluralists, who envision a nationalist inclusive Ukrainian state; the Ukrainian oligarchy; and clashing geopolitical interests between Russia and the West. Opposing Sakwa and Matveeva, Kuzio (2018: 542) ascribes this problem to Russian interference in Ukraine. Due to the combination of domestic, ideational and international interests, NCR may prove a useful theory to analyse this case study.

In hindsight, still problematic is the use of variables. Yes, NCR Type III explains the workings of the different unit- and sub-unit-level IVVs better than Type I and II. However, limiting which IVV-clusters are expected to be relevant in relation to the strategic environment and systemic clarity, appears to be an illusion. No significant restriction exists if in three out of

four combinations of independent variables all IVV-clusters are expected to be relevant. Moreover, there seems to be no limitation on the number of variables you can incorporate within one sub-unit level IVV cluster. Practically, this makes it difficult to decide where to stop which variables to include in an analysis. Theoretically, this weakens my argument that NCR does not pick which variables should be used in an ad-hoc manner. Despite this flaw, I adhere to my conclusion that NCR, in comparison with its predecessors, is able to better explain Russia's FP, albeit no shocking insights were found concerning Crimea's annexation. For now, I thus, unwillingly, appear to be part of the 'pragmatic' camp. Future research should focus on limiting the number of possible variables within individual IVV clusters.

Additionally, NCR is not able to analyse sub-unit-level IVVs as in-depth as other IR strands can. Take Constructivism's insights about identity discourses, for example. With this in mind, it would be interesting to research how NCR compares to Constructivism. Is it necessary to combine different schools of thought as Barkin (2010) posits in his 'Realist Constructivism'? Or is it better to use two distinct theories in order to analyse international relations?

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6. Appendix

Database: Leiden Universities Libraries Catalogue

Boolean Search Term	**Number of Results**
international relations AND classical realism	73.822
(international relations AND neorealism) OR (international relations AND structural realism)	88.722
international relations AND liberalism	153.295
international relations AND constructivism	47.397
international relations AND neoclassical realism	9.444
International relations AND (classical realism OR neorealism OR structural realism OR liberalism OR constructivism OR neoclassical realism)	273.862